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in Contemporary
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Popular Cultural Conceptions of War since World War II

Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet

This book is dedicated to my radiant daughter Johana, who just turned eighteen and never ceases to amaze me with her talent and wry wit, and to my beautiful son Mathias, whose passing at the age of nineteen three years ago changed everything and who lives in my heart forever.

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Introduction

Popular Culture, War, and Post–WWII America

Americans now live in a war culture. Since World War II, the United States has become the most powerful and extensive military empire the world has known, with bases and personnel stationed all over the globe.[1] It has also become a society whose "economy, its geography, its customs, its fashions, its forms of entertainment, and even its values, have been shaped by military institutions," according to cultural anthropologist Roberto Gonzales.[2] Whether we realize it or not, nearly every facet of our daily lives is permeated by what Nick Turse, echoing Eisenhower's famous farewell speech, calls a vast "military-corporate complex."[3] This includes the products we buy for our home, the games we play, and the films we watch. In short, according to many scholars and observers, American culture has become deeply militarized.[4]

Moreover, war itself has become both chronic and banalized. The historian Mary Dudziak recently pointed out that it is more accurate to think of war in America as a constant background activity than as a periodical event, considering that the United States has been engaged in a continuous series of small-scale military conflicts in the last century in addition to two world wars and two major proxy wars.[5] Her portrait of permanent war echoes Hardt and Negri's claim in *Multitudes* that war under late capitalism has become "a general condition: there may be a cessation of hostilities at times and in certain places, but lethal violence is present as a constant potentiality, ready always and everywhere to erupt."[6] This trend seems to hold even as conventional warfare is being replaced by a heavy reliance on drones and irregular warfare—such as special forces used for covert operations—so that war is ongoing but largely invisible.[7]

War is also ubiquitous in the entertainment industry, with Hollywood and the new gaming empire playing a particularly important role in war promotion, rehearsal, and commemoration, though in fact the synergistic

relationship between the military and the film industry dates as far back as the Spanish-American War.[8] When Theodore Roosevelt took his volunteer regiment of Rough Riders to Cuba in 1898, he took several Vitograph cameramen with him, and the film they released, which was staged after the battle, titled *Fighting with Our Boys in Cuba*, was a huge hit with the American public.[9] Since then war has remained a staple of the Hollywood movie and other forms of commercial art including television programs, series, comic books, and video games. War lends itself well as content for an exciting cultural product, but only if it is edited for moral clarity, heroic identification, and satisfying closure. Not surprisingly, after more than a century of selective and sanitized depictions of war in cinema and other commercial artforms, it is commonplace in the United States to believe that war is inevitable, inherent to human nature, an effective rite of passage, a reliable test of mettle, and sometimes even a thrilling adventure. Not even seventy years of real military stalemates, defeats and intractable quagmires have been able to undermine the myth of war as it is peddled in Hollywood and beyond.

One of the aims of this book is to show how these ideas and attitudes about war have been shaped by several narrative formulas that play a key role in American popular culture, and especially in Hollywood cinema. The two most important of these storytelling formulas are *melodrama* and *adventure,* and we will be looking also at *horror*. Sometimes known as "genres," they are actually broad cultural formulas for organizing stories and choreographing audience reception. Both are familiar as terms to most people, often associated with nineteenth-century literature or low-brow culture (stories either for women or for children, respectively), yet as storytelling paradigms they are just as popular and powerful as ever. We tend to recognize the operations of genre only when they don't quite work on us: for instance, nineteenth-century melodrama is obvious to us because it seems clunky and heavy-handed, such as the lachrymose death of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)*,* which now strikes most readers as corny and overdone. When a narrative structure is functioning the way it is meant to, however, as it does in much contemporary cultural production, it is difficult to perceive because we are immersed in the narrative and not noticing what Edgar Allan Poe called "the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene-shifting—the step-ladders and demon-traps—the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which . . . constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*."[10] In other words, most of the time we simply do not see the structures and devices that render a story interesting, effective, and/or realistic. The purpose of this study is to show how these two powerful narrative forms—melodrama and adventure—have shaped many of the most important stories about war that we have told ourselves in the decades since World War II. In addition, it will show how the third aesthetic mode of horror, which is inherently anti-war and can demystify and sabotage the positive

(i.e., war-promoting) impact of adventure and melodrama, has instead been increasingly used together with and in the service of the first two genres.

I begin with one of the most ambiguous but enduring and influential images to emerge from the last world war: Joseph Rosenthal's famous photo of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima. The impact of this one image cannot be overstated, and yet its meaning is as unstable as the sands on that remote archipelago. Locating one major fount of its power in the dramatic (and *melodramatic*[11]) situation which it symbolized, namely, the unexpected and prolonged slaughter of thousands of Marines, I trace its principal incarnations from the original photo to the subsequent John Wayne movie, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), the Marine Corps Monument, the provocative Tony Curtis film about flag-raiser Ira Hayes, *The Outsider* (1961), and finally the controversial Edward Kienholz installation, *The Portable War Memorial* (1968).[12] In following the various iterations of this image in postwar decades, I can show both the power and the malleability of melodrama. For a more recent example of war melodrama, I examine the book and film versions of John Bradley's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2000).[13] To explain the genre of adventure as it applies to war, I focus on the book and film versions of Robin Moore's *The Green Berets* (1965) as well as Michael Herr's book *Dispatches* (1977) and the Dutch documentary made with Herr's help in 2001, *First Kill.*[14] I also look at the successful Clint Eastwood film, *American Sniper* (2014), which—as of 2020, when this manuscript goes to press—holds the record for the highest-grossing war film of all time.[15] Finally, to demonstrate the critical potential of horror, I turn to the book and film versions of Gustav Hasford's *The Short-Timers* (1979; made into *Full Metal Jacket* by Stanley Kubrick in 1987), and its little-known sequel, *The Phantom Blooper* (1990).[16] These texts allow me to lay bare the mechanisms by which war is normalized and made appealing, but also the occasional use of these genres to challenge dominant values and perceptions of war. Close readings of the written and visual language of the various texts allow me to tease out their richness and complexity, the ways in which they transcend their main narrative structures and permit different readers to find a range of meanings and experiences as they encounter them. This play of possible reading experiences, however, does not significantly lessen the impact of their main generic strategies, nor does it attenuate the cumulative danger that such ultimately pro-war cultural products pose to our society and future.

TIMEFRAME AND TERMINOLOGY

I start with World War II because this is when the militarization of American society began in earnest and the "soft power" of the entertainment industry

started to be applied in the service of the military to a degree never seen before.[17] The Allied victory left the United States with a vastly expanded federal government and global military presence.[18] While the latter shrank in the immediate postwar years from its vast World War II network, the Cold War ensured its continuing existence and growth in subsequent decades. In fact, the cult of the infantryman—the figure around which American militarism would be organized for the next half century—begins with the production of Hollywood films in support of the war effort as of 1943, with films like *Bataan* and *Guadalcanal Diary*.[19] In recent decades, other military services, such as the Special Forces ("Green Berets") in the 1960s, Navy pilots in the "Top Gun" era of the 1980s, and in the last decade Navy SEALS, have captured the public imagination. The soldier-hero, however, whether Marine, "grunt," or Special Forces agent, is never simply an individual like any other; instead, the soldier is always a representative American, his military body a synecdoche of the American national body. As Hermann Kappelhoff puts it in a recent study, "The Hollywood war film . . . is oriented to a form of collectivity that can be understood as an affective basis of the political," and the individual soldier is always the "face" of that collectivity.[20] This is why combat narratives are never simply stories of particular experiences and events—they always carry larger national and ideological significance—especially when soldiers are shown to suffer and die.

Thus, an even more specific aim of this book is to confront an issue that is at the core of war discourse, but rarely its explicit focus—namely, death in combat. The status of death in discussions of war is basically that of an open secret—both obvious and occulted, too apparent to need recalling and yet rarely examined in full. Combat death is a subject freighted with many centuries, even millennia, of cultural and symbolic baggage—heir to both classical and modern traditions of heroic martyrdom. It is also, arguably, a uniquely modern concept, in its current form at least, arising with the nation state and the citizen-soldier, and developing with nineteenth-century romantic nationalism which attributed great generative powers to "the fallen."[21]

This book is particularly concerned with the power and passion circulating around the idea of military death.[22] I will be arguing that combat death is a highly charged and emotionally ambivalent concept, far more so than literature and film scholars are able to account for with their conventional tools. For one thing, it has the potential to fuel convincing denunciations of militarism, since death is generally considered in our scientific and secular culture as a misfortune to be avoided at all costs. Bodily injury and death are thus important features of *anti-war* rhetoric and narrative. More often, however, combat death is represented as an event of great generative and even redemptive power. The religious undertones of the term "redemptive" here are no accident. The language of combat death generally tilts toward a religious

register, starting with the word most frequently used to describe such deaths: sacrifice. Derived from the Latin *sacer* (holy, sacred) and *facio* (do, make), the word sacrifice means "to make sacred."

When applied to the death of a soldier in combat, sacrifice implies that death has an agency of some kind, that is, it makes something sacred. But what does it act upon? The first and the most obvious answer is: the cause served by his death, namely, the nation and the community/collectivity for which it stands. This is what Abraham Lincoln invokes in "The Gettysburg Address" when he says that Union soldiers gave their lives so that their "nation might live" and this is also the tacit but unmistakable point of placing a national flag on the soldier's coffin at military funerals, then folding it and giving it to the soldier's family in exchange, as it were, for his or her life. As Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle explain this custom in their sociological examination of modern national sacrifice, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation* (1999), the soldier's body and the flag for which he or she died become symbolically fused in death.[23] In this mysterious transaction, the flag—as embodied symbol of the nation—acquires the emotional charge of the soldier's death, while the dead soldier is ritually integrated into the timeless and transcendent sphere in which the nation allegedly exists (according to nationalist rhetoric, which is suffused with the mystical language of transcendental concepts like "always" and "forever").[24] Thus, another answer to the question of "what becomes sacred?" is: *the dead soldier him- or herself.*[25] This of course adds greatly to the enchantment and allure of the idea of self-sacrifice, especially when narrated with the added embellishments of melodrama, which mediates between sacred and secular forms of redemption. In a class-bound capitalist society where social mobility is highly restricted and few experiences offer any satisfying sense of authenticity and larger meaning, the prospect of being seen as a warrior—or revered as a fallen hero—possesses as much fascination as it did in any earlier warrior society.

Before going any further, a few words about my own lexical and conceptual toolbox. Many of the terms I use come from contemporary sociology, anthropology, and religious studies, and they are not necessarily transparent to humanities scholars and students nor to lay readers. I have turned to concepts such as "emotional charge" and "ritual" because I have found they offer purchase on problems that otherwise remain difficult to address in film and literature scholarship and even Cultural Studies, such as the intensely affective relationship between nationalism and combat narratives, the ritualistic status and emotional power of the flag in visual media, and the dense rhetorical and ideological operations around combat death in texts of all kinds.

For similar reasons, I have found the terms "enchantment" and "disenchantment" particularly useful. The latter term, of course, comes from

Max Weber's thesis about the "rationalization and intellectualization" of the modern world, which can be taken to mean the loss of sacredness and of a sense of a "supra-personal realm" as capitalism, bureaucracy and science have gained ascendance.[26] This is the backdrop against which modern longings for transcendence and moral meaning—from Romanticism, to nineteenth-century spiritualism and to twentieth-century fascism—have been understood.[27]

Weber also wrote the most eloquent account I have found of what I call the "enchantment" of combat death: "war does something to the warrior which, in its concrete meaning, is unique: it makes him experience a consecrated meaning of death which is characteristic only of death in war."[28] This sentence is interesting not only for its affirmation of combat death as a religious experience—"consecrated" and unique—but in the repetition of the word "meaning" where Weber attempts to describe the way combat death resists the disenchantment characteristic of the rest of modernity. In defiance of the moral and existential void that humanity faces in the wake of religion's declining influence on modern culture, death in battle offers the enviable conviction, according to Weber, that the soldier is "dying 'for' something." In fact, the "problem of the 'meaning' of death does not even occur to him."[29] Weber wrote this in 1915, at the beginning of World War I and at the height of the era that George Mosse sees as defined by the "myth of the war experience."[30] Although Weber's confident claim that combat death is both meaningful and consecrated can be linked to his German nationalism, his description of it here offers a good account of the mystique of military martyrdom as it continues to exert its seductive aura in American popular culture. That aura and the narratives that help reanimate it anew for each successive generation since World War II to the present are one of the main concerns of this book.

Sarah Cole has recently revived the terms "enchantment" and "disenchantment" in her incisive study of violence in high modernist texts, demonstrating the long literary tradition of each of these categories.[31] Cole calls them respective "theories of violence," each serving as locus for a "potent political imaginary, including feminist and antimilitarism stances" for disenchantment and "nationalist ideals and a language of elevated militarism" for the rhetoric of enchantment.[32] Each also "helped to structure the literary output of the modernist years," in Cole's account, and I will extend this argument to demonstrate that they help structure the representation of war violence more generally.[33] Cole's descriptions of each term are particularly forceful and concise. "To enchant," she proposes, "is to imbue the violent experience with symbolic and cultural potency." To disenchant, she continues, "is to refuse that structure, to insist on the bare, forked existence of the violated being, bereft of symbol."[34]

In concrete terms, the rhetoric of disenchantment focuses on the "violated body," while the rhetoric of enchantment "relies primarily on metaphors of growth and germination; [and] it steers as clear of the violated body as it can."[35] The first claim will sound familiar to anyone who has come across the idea that war is a form of renewal or rejuvenation for a society; it can easily be recognized, for instance, in Richard Slotkin's influential thesis that one of America's founding myths is that of "regeneration through violence."[36] The second claim—that enchantment always steers clear of the violated body—no longer holds, in my view. Since the rehabilitation of World War II in the wake of Vietnam War films and their unprecedented violence, enchantment actually often uses the spectacle of injured and suffering bodies as a basis for its emotional and rhetorical force.[37] One only needs to think of Spielberg's ultra-violent but ultimately patriotic and hagiographic *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) to see how graphic depictions of injury can be folded into and ideologically neutralized by an ultimately pro-war narrative (as when the film settles into a familiar mix of adventure and melodrama after the horrific opening scenes).[38]

Another interpretive framework that I have borrowed from sociology and political science is the work on Civil Religion that has emerged in recent years.[39] The most important of these studies is Marvin and Ingle's *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*, which focuses on blood sacrifice—generally death in war—as the primary national ritual of collective cohesion. Arguing that a willingness to die for one's group is the most important condition for a group's survival, Marvin and Ingle explain how collective victimization works to powerfully secure a group's sense of identity and loyalty. In order to examine this phenomenon, Marvin and Ingle use the notion of "Civil Religion" but repurpose it from being primarily based on text and discourse, as it was in Robert Bellah's influential essay on the subject in 1968, to being grounded in anthropological and sociological concepts such as ritual, the sacred and the profane, and totem power.[40] Applying these terms to American history and society, Marvin and Ingle develop a tool with considerable traction for understanding the role of the flag, the relative impact of wars such as World War II or the Vietnam War on national cohesion, and the status of military service and death in American culture.

Finally, the main argument of this book is that three major narrative modes have shaped the representation of war death in American culture since 1945: melodrama, adventure, and horror (focusing, respectively, on dying, killing, and witnessing death). These three terms do not by any means exhaust the rhetorical and aesthetic modes in which combat death can be narrated but they do represent three of the most important and common ways in which it is done. It is essential to understand how these three modes operate because the generic and formulaic aspects of war narrative tend to be grossly

underestimated. Instead, war narratives and films are usually discussed exclusively in terms of realism and verisimilitude. Every war film and war memoir boasts of its fidelity to the truth, its ability to plunge readers into the midst of war and to recreate "what it was really like," and ever since *Saving Private Ryan* we have had the somewhat gruesome convention of spraying the camera lens with blood to suggest that the viewer, who tacitly identifies with the camera, is really in the thick of the battle.[41]

In short, the basic premise of the war film is to pretend to approximate war itself for the viewer while providing a safe and aestheticized version of it, complete with music, editing, and narrative closure. As James Jones's character Bell in *The Thin Red Line* muses bitterly: "In a movie or a novel they would dramatize and build to the climax of the attack. When the attack came in the film or novel, it would be satisfying. It would decide something. It would have a semblance of meaning." Instead, as Jones tries to establish that *The Thin Red Line* is more "realistic" than films and other war novels, Bell observes that "here there was no semblance of meaning . . . nothing had been decided, no one had learned anything. But most important of all, nothing had ended."[42] And yet, the novel does end, after several ferocious battles, with the main characters more experienced—"blooded"—and being taken away from Guadalcanal, veterans all, having been tested in battle and survived. Jones may have thought he was writing an anti-war-novel novel, and he denounces war films as falsely coherent, but ultimately his own concern with realism is fully conventional for the war novel and part of its perverse appeal. The touches of horror he includes do not necessarily discourage readers from imagining themselves as one of the surviving protagonists. To put it another way, in the words of the veteran-filmmaker Samuel Fuller, there is really "no way you can portray war realistically, not in a movie or a book." To give readers and spectators an idea of what combat is really like, Fuller suggested in his memoir, you'd have to booby-trap the pages or "shoot at them [viewers] every so often from either side of the screen."[43]

Instead of knowing the terror and danger of real war, war movie audiences tend to forget that their watching experience is not even remotely like war. Emotions are stirred up—suspense, excitement, horror, grief, relief—and they seem real enough in their safe virtual way. In the 1960s, many young men—like Ron Kovic, author of *Born on the Fourth of July*—enlisted in the military believing the war in Vietnam would be like the World War II movies they had seen.[44] As Michael Herr wrote ruefully in his memoir, *Dispatches*: "I keep thinking about all the kids who got wiped out by seventeen years of war movies before coming to Vietnam to get wiped out for good."[45] In the face of the tremendous cultural power of war stories and film, this book means to pry the war genre out of the death-grip of the realism illusion. I hope that after finishing it, when the reader watches a war film, instead of comparing it to

some imagined idea of what war must be "really like" (almost always based on other films or media representations), he or she will be able to recognize and resist its main rhetorical moves of seduction and glamorization. War fantasy has become a cultural addiction and the only way to find a cure is to become a critical viewer instead of an immersed spectator lost in the magic of righteous violence. The United States, and every other war-dependent nation, must break the spell of war's fascination, because the world now needs us to face other dangers together: climate change, rising oceans, precarious populations, water shortages, industrial pollution, and epidemics. Understanding how the pleasures of watching war on screen are rhetorically manufactured can perhaps help wean us off the real wars currently being waged and prevent the future conflicts being plotted by right-wing war hawks and industrial arms manufacturers.

GENRE OR MODE?

A word about the terms "genre" and "mode." Both are used here to describe the broad narrative patterns that organize war stories and I often use them interchangeably. However, a few clarifications are in order. "Genre" is the narrower term and is best adapted to designating specific groups of texts that share a historical and cultural context. For instance, the crime novel of the early twentieth century, focusing on corrupt urban spaces, can be called a genre. The patterns that concern this book are broader and more transmedial and transhistorical than mere genres. They are more accurately called modes, operating across fiction and nonfiction, enduring and evolving over centuries, and serving as narrative structure or foundation for a wide variety of texts. The term "mode" has become associated with melodrama mostly through the work of film scholar Linda Williams, whose study *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, traced the cultural work of melodrama through a range of cultural texts and performances from the antebellum stage to O.J. Simpson's trial. Both "mode" and the more narrow term "genre" are useful concepts for mediating between individual texts of films, groups of similar texts or films, and larger sociopolitical or socio-epistemological issues. They are useful above all because they help us understand what texts and films *do,* both in terms of cultural work and affective cues.[46]

   Although this book looks at a wide range of war-related material from the last sixty years, much of my study is focused on film and popular culture. This is because commercial films have been particularly instrumental in shaping the highly militaristic culture that America has become. According to Andrew Martin, "Popular culture in the United States is where war comes

from and where it is made possible—even desirable—and it is where it ends up, as the lived experience of war is fed back to us in displaced forms and narratives."[47] This has been true since the early days of the American Republic, when the Revolutionary War was filtered through the popular stage in productions such as *The Contrast* (1787, written by Royall Tyler), and it has become even more important since the invention of cinema.[48] As Eric Fattor has documented in *American Empire and the Arsenal of Entertainment*, spectacle and popular narrative have been instrumental in the securing of popular support for imperial dominance on the world stage both abroad and at home, first in England in the nineteenth century and then in the United States in the twentieth.[49] This deployment of "soft power" (see note 17) has been done through various forms of popular entertainment, including songs, world fairs, posters, television, and, most effectively of all, commercial cinema.

Fattor's work brings to mind Frederic Jameson's influential theory in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) that popular genres mask and imaginatively resolve social contradictions. For Jameson, the work of much popular culture is to offer emotionally compelling narratives that confer meaning, coherence, and closure in compensatory ways to real problems present in the social system. Thus, the relationship of cultural artifacts to social reality is two-sided in that they both engage with it and distort it. As a result, the cultural text can be read as both a symptom and a denial of social contradictions.[50] In the case of war narratives, the contradiction at the heart of the genre is the fact that war death in a modern secular society can never be anything except tragic at best, a meaningless waste at worst. As one scholar observes, there is a "fundamental antagonism" between "liberal political society" and military service, which requires that the individual sacrifice their interests and even their life to the community.[51] Moreover, since the end of World War II, America's wars have mostly been unsuccessful attempts at shoring up its ideological or commercial interests. None have been truly defensive or necessary and so the many lives lost in pursuing them can arguably be regarded as having been lost in vain (though it is all but taboo to say so). Even many of the military deaths of WWII were not strictly speaking "necessary," though of course this type of morbid calculation is always fraught with retrospective bias. The effect of almost all forms of popular culture in relation to war is to camouflage these facts with either the moral occult of melodrama or the compensatory pleasures of adventure.

Nevertheless, because of the contradictions on which they are based, and because of the polysemic nature of narrative, language, and culture itself, cultural artifacts are never entirely coherent and seamless and the work of fantasy is never entirely successful and complete. There are always resistances, detectable silences, ambiguities, and counter-narratives available in a text, as I will demonstrate. Paradoxically, these moments of complexity are often

the sources of a text's greatest power, because they create complications and dilemmas that are the essence of art as a critical cultural practice as opposed to mere entertainment. Nevertheless, the main impact of much of these texts will be seen to work in the direction of bolstering dominant political tendencies and more generally, the re-enchantment of war. The point of this book is to examine how they do that and what are the rhetorical means by which war can be disenchanted.

"Emotion" and "affect" are key terms in this study. Although the recent turn to Affect Theory has sought to establish important distinctions between subjective *emotion* and more depersonalized and social *affect*, the cultural objects examined in this book tend to undermine such clear separations. The whole point of popular genres and popular culture is to negotiate between the individual and the mass audience, channeling individuals into larger social and ideological formations which are shaped and rendered attractive largely through carefully choreographed emotional experiences.[52] This is the cultural work of melodrama, which produces sympathy, identification and thrills, as well as of adventure, which produces pleasure, suspense, and excitement around violent action, and finally, of the horror mode, which produces shock and unease around the spectacle of violated bodies. Often, all three can co-exist within the same cultural object but each pull in a different direction and my goal in this book is to help readers and viewers to disentangle them in order to gain critical perspective and leverage on these powerful cultural narratives.

Thus, I am interested both in subjective emotions and the structures of feeling (to borrow Raymond Williams' influential term[53]) that provide frameworks for these emotions. Brian Massumi's recent work on affect focuses on the potential affordances of media experiences, and is particularly attentive to the lack of fixity in the way media positions us affectively—in other words, to the unpredictable and indeterminate aspects of this influence. Massumi observes something that is crucial to my focus here: media events channel individual subjectivities, "snapping us to attention together, and correlating out diversity" even as "we each are taken into the event from a different angle."[54] In other words, popular culture and media products have a powerfully synchronizing effect, which is why "soft power" can be considered a form of social control, even though any analysis of a text's dominant mode or structuring logic does not exhaust the possibilities of its reception and effect on individual subjects. These, as well as any potential meanings generated by the text, can fall outside and even work against the framework that organizes the text and its rhetorical thrust. Nevertheless, melodrama, adventure, and horror are all "body genres," in Linda Williams' influential term, meaning they are forms which work first and foremost on the body and emotions, eliciting and choreographing feelings of pity, fear, excitement,

relief, sorrow, pleasure, and so on, which occur in our bodies as much or even more than in our cognitive apprehension of the story (though admittedly cognitive scientists would probably argue such a distinction between mind and body is misleading).[55] It is impossible to entirely disentangle the social, textual, public, and private dimensions of these effects and it is not important to my project to do so. Instead, what matters is how narrative mode works as a complex interface between the social and the subjective, the ideological and the individual, and how cultural objects invite and shape shared emotional experiences.

MELODRAMA, ADVENTURE, HORROR

Of the three forms that I will examine, melodrama has been the most extensively researched. Since the 1970s, a large body of scholarship has developed and completely changed the way this term is used in the humanities. Once a fairly loose term signaling disapproval, it has become (thanks to scholars like Peter Brooks, Jane Tompkins, Linda Williams, Christine Gledhill, Thomas Elsaesser, and Ben Singer[56]) a subject of considerable academic interest and respect. Brooks' early study, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, and Jane Tompkins's work on sentimental novels of the nineteenth century, in *Sensational Designs*, helped to destigmatize melodrama and uncover the important cultural work it performs.[57] Linda Williams has influentially argued that melodrama is the dominant form of American popular culture and a perpetually modernizing form.[58] Williams describes melodrama as a narrative form whose purpose is to organize "sympathy for the sufferings of the virtuous." In other words, creating sympathy, pity, and/or sympathetic identification with a virtuous victim is the main mechanism of melodrama as a narrative device. A "key function" of this identification with a victim is to "orchestrate the moral legibility crucial to the mode."[59] Following the earlier conclusions of Peter Brooks, Williams sees moral legibility as one of the main objectives of melodrama, offering audiences the satisfaction of discerning virtue and villainy from the moral ambiguities that characterize secular modernity. In short, gradually recognizing the moral identity of the protagonists is a crucial aspect of the pleasures of melodrama.

Most U.S. war films are predominantly melodramatic in their depiction of soldiers as victims, often young, often scared, always vulnerable. Melodrama thrives in the naturally Manichean conditions that combat conventionally creates, at least when it is narrated, with a clear enemy and a clear sense of empathy for "our" soldiers. Although moral ambiguity is often present in real war situations, melodrama in popular narrative orchestrates moral legibility and works hand in hand with the ideology of sacrifice to position protagonists as

innocent and virtuous victims. Melodrama seeks to find meaning and agency in suffering, especially in death, and, therefore, lends itself well to the logic of military self-sacrifice, which also attributes great power and agency to soldiers' deaths. This is why melodrama, like military ideology, tends to render sacrificial death highly attractive despite the accent on suffering. Melodrama works to fold this suffering and death into a larger narrative that offers both sense and value to experiences that normally are considered either tragic or terrible. Like military ideology, melodrama promises to attribute recognition, appreciation, and importance to the individual's death. As a result, melodrama functions as an *enchanting* mode, lending potency and value to the trope of military death.

The other highly enchanting mode of narrative war is adventure. This is a form that arguably dates back to the earliest accounts of heroes and legendary warriors, but that has assumed a more specific role in modernity. These are stories that focus on excitement, overcoming danger, and the pleasures of violence wielded successfully against natural or human antagonists. The core of this mode is a fantasy of victory over death, both in terms of warding off one's own death but also in taking the life of other, hostile, and dangerous beings. The adventure hero discovers his own taste or talent for lethal violence, whether it comes reluctantly or enthusiastically, and is transformed by it. Many adventure narratives are also coming of age stories, or some variation on the rite of passage.

In fact, the classical narrative of military experience is an adventure story describing a boy becoming a man. This is the case in stories as different as the semi-ironic novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), the earnest biographical film *To Hell and Back* (1955), and the disillusioned Vietnam War movie *Platoon* (1986).[60] The adventure narrative does not shy away from the violence and sufferings of combat, but it focuses on the emotions of excitement and intensity rather than pathos and sympathy. At the end, the protagonist is depicted as somehow transformed for the better, more complete, having achieved manhood, and, even more importantly, recognition of his manhood. Adventure is as close to a universal human narrative as one can find (one can think of Joseph Campbell and his work on "the hero's journey"[61]), focusing on risk, exploration of the unknown, and growth and triumph, and it is not inherently a reactionary form. Nevertheless, adventure became in the nineteenth century the principal genre of colonial exploration and conquest, the background for tales of white male encounters with irredeemable and savage Others. Since then adventure has remained the most potent argument for military experience for generations of young men who enlist in order to test their mettle in exotic war zones portrayed as frontiers between civilization and savagery, and it has become the most common mode structuring military-themed video games and Hollywood war films.

Finally, the third form that will be explored in this book is what I call horror. If melodrama is about dying and adventure is about killing, horror is about witnessing the violence and violation of the body that happens in war. Horror is closely linked to irony and is inherently a demystifying, disenchanting mode of representation. It focuses on the disillusionment of adventurous and noble/melodramatic depictions of war when the reality of bodily injury is finally witnessed. Sometimes called "Battlefield Gothic," the horror mode is concerned with the human body reduced to its thing-like, meat-like, fleshy, and fragile aspect.[62] War horror focuses on torn limbs, punctured skin envelopes, and the inside of the body being exposed to the horrified gaze of the witness. In terms of narrative and theme, it focuses on the gap between official or idealized versions of war, and the messy reality of what soldiers find themselves living.

Although inherently disenchanting, war horror can be harnessed into adventure or melodrama by being used only for moments, or as texture, on an aesthetic level, instead of being allowed to control the larger arc of the narrative. The most notable example of such a case in recent memory is *Saving Private Ryan,* where the horror is contained within a few key segments and ultimately used in the service of generating melodramatic pathos. The larger narrative of *Saving Private Ryan* is a combination of melodrama (the pathos-producing and high-impact death of Captain Miller) and adventure (the coming-of-age of Ryan and other key characters). Yet the film is often remembered for its sensational use of horror during the initial Normandy landing scene, pushing the envelope as far as any film had up to then, allowing the main character and audience to witness horrifying injury and madness-inducing scenes only to then gradually be enfolded back into a larger narrative of good soldiers outsmarting deceptive and evil enemies. *Saving Private Ryan* works hard to counteract the anti-war potential of that first scene, and much of the power of the film comes from the tension between the opening scene and the rest of the narrative.

In recent decades, it has become nearly impossible for a war film to forego some use of war horror to establish its credibility as realistic, and many follow the example of *Saving Private Ryan* in their heavy-handed use of the other two genres to counter-balance their horror moments. One striking exception was the recent *Dunkirk* (2017), which pulled back from this trend, opting for a PG-13 version of World War II which almost entirely eschewed horror in favor of melodrama and adventure.[63] Though hailed as realistic and fact-based, *Dunkirk* is essentially a throwback to the propagandistic form of war films popularized during WWII, celebrating grit, stoicism, and quiet defiance in the face of danger. While all these qualities are important and valuable in themselves, when they are packaged into a war story with little acknowledgment of the horrors of war, the result is a glorifying depiction

that sets the stage for young men to keep enlisting and thirsting for combat. A slightly different criticism may be made of Sam Mendes' *1917* (2019).[64] While Mendes does not shy away from horror, and while there are plenty of maimed and dead bodies on screen, the final structure of the film also resolves into an adventure story in which the surviving protagonist accomplishes his mission (at least partly, since he arrives slightly late) and can know that he has done his part bravely and well. For all the gore and horror and absurdity depicted in the film, there is enough noble purpose, heroic accomplishment and peer recognition to make many young men want to be the exhausted hero at the end. Thus, *1917* simply updates the formula (a brutal but enticing mix of horror and adventure, with a dash of melodrama when another important character dies) perfected by *Saving Private Ryan.*

WRITING ABOUT WAR

My own fascination with this topic comes from having personally experienced the collective madness that occurred in the United States around the first Gulf War in 1991. As a graduate student at the University of California, Irvine, which serves an area that includes the El Toro military base and is located not far from Camp Pendleton, I was teaching undergraduate students who often had family members in the military or even deployed in the Gulf. During class discussions, they would insist that any criticism or question of the war was tantamount to wishing harm on their loved ones. Only full support of the war could protect them. The tortured logic by which the desire to keep military personnel out of harm's way caused them injury while supporting their military engagement in a foreign war could keep them safe was perplexing to say the least. Yet, my students were not the only ones to be persuaded by what appeared to me as magical thinking, double-speak and denial.[65] The entire country, or at least the entire commercial media, seemed similarly affected.

A decade later, when I read war correspondent Chris Hedges' argument that war is like a drug or an "enticing elixir" because "it gives us resolve, a cause," I recognized the symptoms that had gripped the country in 1991: a collective war intoxication.[66] In his experiences as a journalist covering wars in several countries, Hedges had seen how war affects people and societies, and specifically the way magical thinking and "mythic reality" take over, producing simplistic and absolute truths: the enemy is evil, "we must vanquish darkness . . . It is imperative and inevitable for civilization, for the free world, that good triumph." According to Hedges, the myth of war is that it has been thrust upon us, that we are forced to make war in order to protect ourselves and the world, and that a more just world will be the result. And "the myth

of war sells and legitimates the drug of war," Hedges writes.[67] His rhetoric is dramatic but corresponds to what I saw happen with my own eyes in 1991 and again in 2003. The rapidity with which the American public can be mobilized to war was terrifying. Michael Billig addresses this issue in his study of what he calls "banal nationalism," or the invisible but ubiquitous nature of contemporary nationalism in the United States, all the more potent for seeming natural and unremarkable. Despite their seeming latency, Billig observes, the forces of nationalism and war can be awakened "without lengthy campaigns of political preparation."[68] This is because they are constantly rehearsed and recharged with symbolic and emotional force in our entertainment industry and have been since the end of World War II.

In writing a critical study of the representations of war and militarism, I do not mean to criticize individuals who are members of the military. On the contrary, I would like to help keep them safe by dismantling some of the magical thinking and denial that accumulates around war. Many people in the United States enlist out of a heartfelt desire to participate in a greater good and to feel part of a larger community—longings that have little outlet in our highly individualistic and consumption-oriented society. Many people who have found a sense of purpose and community, even family, in the military feel far removed from the values of civilian society, while many civilians continue to see servicemen and women in highly ambivalent terms. For instance, stereotypes of soldiers as naïve or brainwashed—and of veterans as damaged and dangerous—abound in popular culture alongside images of them as heroic or admirable. This ambivalence stretches back through American war literature as far as the American Revolution and is probably a universal feature of the role of the warrior as someone defined by his (and now, her) relationship to death, as both killer and willing sacrifice (or potentially dupe). This study examines how this ambivalence is created and channeled in the texts that have shaped American war culture.

Finally, a word about war itself. As I said at the beginning, many people believe war is natural and inevitable, a part of the human condition, like self-awareness. Even people who hate war and want to prevent it think this. At the beginning of *Slaughterhouse Five*, his brilliant and devastating World War II novel, veteran author Kurt Vonnegut reports a friend asking him, "Why don't you write an anti-*glacier* book instead?" He comments on this: "What he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they as easy to stop as glaciers. I believe that, too."[69] I do not. Hobbes' famous notion of the war of all against all in a "state of nature" is a metaphor that has been taken far too seriously.[70] If one stops and looks around one's own life, we notice that violence is relatively rare and occurs for specific reasons. Sociological studies based on empirical research corroborate this fact. Most people avoid conflict and avoid violence whenever possible. As Sinisa Malešević writes,

"violence is neither a result of innate aggressiveness nor of externally induced 'social ills' but is something that requires intensive social action."[71] In other words, violence is not a natural behavior of solitary individuals but deeply embedded in social processes.

Furthermore, the claim that all societies engage in warfare is patently untrue. The anthropologist Douglas Fry has done comparative research on hundreds of societies across the globe and found "over seventy nonwarring cultures."[72] I myself now live in Switzerland, a country that has not engaged in war for over two hundred years (actually, more like four hundred if you count only foreign wars). Evolutionary psychology has also recently mustered increasing evidence that human evolution is highly dependent on reciprocal trust, altruism, and cooperation, rather than competition, domination, and exploitation, as advocates of the man-as-warrior ethos would have it.[73]

In fact, many sociologists and researchers have concluded that warfare is not so much a natural or primitive human trait as it is a product of relatively recent development developments in human social evolution—especially the accumulation of wealth and the sharp division of society according to gender difference. Malešević goes further and suggests that it is "modernity that requires and provides a really elaborate and full justification of violent action."[74] Other scholars have echoed this theory.[75] Certainly the wars of the twentieth century offer evidence of a tight correlation between the most modern states and a capacity for the most vicious and extensive violence.

In the United States, which has been at war almost continuously since its foundation (if we include its genocidal conflicts with Native Americans—and why wouldn't we?—and its many covert military actions and occupations in the last century), war really seems to be a permanent condition even if the public is not always aware of it. Causes of U.S. wars are a complex configuration of factors, including geopolitical policy, economic interests, pressure from what Nick Turse calls the "military-corporate complex," the twin national ideologies of exceptionalism and expansionism (i.e., the need for constant growth), the myth of the war experience (in its various guises), gender dynamics and the instability of the category of masculinity (which seeks affirmation through trials), and the ever-problematic politics of race (in both the ordinary sense of the word, referring to people "of color," and in the Foucaultian sense of the word, as part of the modern biopolitical organization of the world).[76] In addition, we should remember—as was discussed earlier—the fact that American popular culture has been selling war as exciting and meaningful for over a century. Veterans return from wars and some try to demystify and disenchant it by denouncing the lies of popular culture, but the war and entertainment industries keep casting their spell. I can do nothing about many of the interests and reasons that keep the United States waging

war, but this book can potentially help readers decode some of the narrative forms through which this black magic is worked.

Chapter 1 focuses on melodrama and the cultural politics of dying for one's country. The national icon at the heart of the chapter is the photograph by Joe Rosenthal, of Marines (and a Navy corpsman) planting a flag on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima, in 1945. By carefully unpacking both the image and its reception context, I argue that its enduring iconic power is grounded in the circumstances of its production and original reception, the most important feature of which is the background of *mass death* against which the image was taken and transmitted. After discussing the battle itself and recent revelations about its causes and lack of clear purpose, I take a close look at *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), the highly melodramatic film that commemorated that battle more effectively for American audiences, and which elevated John Wayne to military hero status by associating him with it. I also discuss the Marine Memorial version of the flag-raising image, which transformed the photo into a massive sculpture that now stands in Arlington Cemetery.

Chapter 2 continues with a focus on the Iwo Jima photograph but examines two demystifying and disenchanting adaptations of this influential image: Delbert Mann's *The Outsider* (1961) and Edward Kienholz's *Portable War Memorial* 1968). Both works—one a film and the other a multimedia installation—take the flag-raising as a point of departure for a subversive and critical look at American culture. I call this chapter "Melodrama Queered" because the film is explicitly (as explicitly as was possible in 1961) about same-sex love, while the installation is about questioning normative American values in the Vietnam era and finding them dangerously inadequate to the task of keeping the country viable as a society. Both use melodrama to choreograph the emotional impact of their artwork, and both put the flag-raising in the service of an interrogation of mainstream values that I would call either literally or figuratively *queer*.

Chapter 3 examines the status and cultural trajectory of the Rosenthal photo at the turn of the twenty-first century. It focuses mainly on James Bradley's memoir, *Flags of Our Fathers* (2000), and the eponymous Clint Eastwood film version of it released in 2006. I show in this chapter how the photo participates in the larger re-vitalization of World War II in American culture following the dampening effects of the Vietnam War. As the "Vietnam Syndrome" was supposedly put to rest by the war in the Persian Gulf in 1991, the Hollywood war machine sprang into action in the 1990s and 2000s, reviving the myth of the "Good War" and redemptive violence. All three chapters focusing on the Iwo Jima image also explore issues of masculinity in relation to melodrama.

Chapter 4 shifts to adventure and the aesthetic pleasures of killing for one's country. The cultural text at the heart of the chapter is Robin Moore's book,

The Green Berets (1965), and the song, film, and subgenre of paramilitary pulp fiction that it inspired. Like melodrama, adventure is a major cultural mode, larger than the term "genre" accurately describes, and encompasses a wide variety of fictional and nonfictional writing. The basic plot of the adventure mode is the journey of a man to a frontier where he encounters death and, more to the point, learns how to kill. Adventure, which often overlaps with coming-of-age narratives, is nearly always focused on male protagonists and is interwoven with racialist and colonial tropes, situations, and assumptions. Like melodrama, adventure is inherently an enchanting mode. If the former enchants by rendering death sacred and meaningful, the latter enchants by linking killing to pleasure and masculinity.

Chapter 5 also focuses on adventure, tracing its continuing influence on texts such as Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) and the highly successful recent film directed by Clint Eastwood, *American Sniper* (2014). This chapter shows how texts that purport to be critical or realistic can also be fully organized and informed by the conventions of the adventure genre. I discuss Herr's acclaimed Vietnam War memoir *Dispatches* because it has often been read as a highly original, critical, and even postmodern account of Herr's experiences in Vietnam in the late 1960s, but no critic has ever zeroed in on the main subject matter of Herr's writing, namely, the fact that war is experienced by many soldiers in terms of pleasure. Herr's treatment of this issue is deeply ambivalent, because he finds himself both fascinated and repelled by what he discovers in Vietnam, especially about himself. This part of the chapter ends with a look at a 2001 documentary featuring Michael Herr which tackles this issue head-on, interviewing several veterans who describe the pleasure they felt when they killed. The second part of this chapter examines another recent film which is heavily influenced by the adventure mode even though it is based upon the biography of former Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle. *American Sniper* actualizes the war adventure form for the twenty-first century, adding elements of melodrama and horror to its hagiographic tale of a hero who is transformed by his talent for killing.

The sixth chapter turns to the horror mode, which is concerned specifically with the witnessing of death. Unlike the other two, horror is in principle a disenchanting mode, but it can still be bent into the service of enchantment and glorification of war. The text at the heart of this chapter is Gustav Hasford's *The Short-Timers* (1979), the novel that was adapted by Stanley Kubrick and Michael Herr into the film *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). I show how the horror mode is instrumental in conveying Hasford's scathing critique of how the military trains Marines since World War II, of how the war was being prosecuted in Vietnam, and of American military culture in general. Hasford's novel is the darkest, fiercest, and most compassionate work of art to emerge

from the Vietnam War, and its use of horror is inseparable from its message about what went wrong in Vietnam and in the United States in general.

The final chapter examines Kubrick's adaptation of *The Short-Timers* in what remains one of the most popular and influential films of the Vietnam War, *Full Metal Jacket,* and argues that Kubrick betrayed the novel's values and intent by twisting the story into an adventure format. In fact, like many Hollywood films and iterations of popular culture in general, the film draws on all three principal rhetorical modes in order to touch as many emotional and ideological registers as possible in an attempt to appeal to a broad spectrum of viewers. The film includes elements both of horror and of melodrama but its overarching narrative structure is pure adventure, featuring a hero traveling to a dangerous borderland on the edge of civilization and discovering his talent for killing. By adding sex scenes and an appealing rock soundtrack, Kubrick transformed the story into a postmodern and ironic, and thereby all the more attractive, rite-of-passage narrative. Hasford responded to this travesty of his work by writing a sequel to his earlier novel, titled *The Phantom Blooper.* The chapter closes with a detailed look at this second book, which follows the protagonist Joker from the base camp at Khe Sanh (where *Short-Timers* had ended) to a Vietnamese village and back to Alabama, focusing once again on the use of horror to convey Hasford's now more mature political and moral dissection of American militarism.

NOTES

1. Catherine Lutz, *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 5.

2. Roberto J. Gonzalez, *Militarizing Culture: Essays on the Warfare State* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2010), 21.

3. Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2008), 16–18.

4. Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 723–735: see also Patrick Deer, "Mapping Contemporary American War Culture," *College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies* 43.1 (2016): 48–90.

5. Mary Dudziak, *Wartime: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

6. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negro, *Multitudes: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 4.

7. See Jeremy Scahill, *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), and Jon Simons and John Louis Lucaites, *In/Visible War: The Culture of War in Twenty-First Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2017).

8. See David L. Robb, *Operation Hollywood: How the Pentagon Shapes and Censors the Movies* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004); Roger Stalh,

Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 2010); James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Complex,* 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2001, 2009); Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007); Patricia Keeton and Peter Scheckner, *American War Cinema and Media Since Vietnam: Politics, Ideology and Class* (New York: Palgrave, 2013); Robert Sirvent and Danny Haiphong, *American Exceptionalism and American Innocence: A People's History of Fake News—From the Revolutionary War to the War on Terror* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2019), 212–213.

9. Eric M. Fattor, *American Empire and the Arsenal of Entertainment: Soft Power and Cultural Weaponization* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 62. Also released that year was a short film for nickelodeon theaters that Stacy Peebles identifies as "the first war movie," J. Stuart Blackton's *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* (Vitagraph Company of America, 1898), which showed only a flag of Spain being taken down and replaced by an American Flag. Cited in Stacy Peebles, "Lenses into War: Digital Vérité in Iraq War Films," in *The Philosophy of War Films*, ed. David LaRocca (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 133.

10. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition (1846)," in *Essays and Reviews,* ed. G. R. Thompson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 14.

11. By using the word "melodramatic" I do not intend to imply these deaths were not tragic and important. I am simply pointing out that they lend themselves easily to be narrated in terms of the melodramatic mode of redemption and pity for a victim-hero, as Linda Williams defines it in "Melodrama Revised," *Refiguring American Film Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 66. The term "melodrama" often has a pejorative connotation but it does not imply for me any less weight and dignity of the suffering and deaths of these men. I do, however, question, for historical and factual reasons, the narrative that has crystalized around the invasion of Iwo Jima purporting that these deaths saved many more airmen and seamen from certain death than were sacrificed there (as I will explain in the first chapter). I also hesitate, for the reasons explained in this chapter, to automatically reach for the words "meaningful," "valuable" and "sacrifice," to describe these deaths, because I believe they comfortably inscribe them in a narrative of useful martyrdom that glosses over the real tragedy of these lost lives and facilitates future losses and future complacency.

12. *Sands of Iwo Jima*, directed by Alan Dwan (1949; Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1998), DVD; *The Outsider,* directed by Delbert Mann (1962; Universal City: Universal Studios, 2012), DVD; Edward Kienholz, *The Portable War Memorial*, 1968, mixed media installation, 114" x 384" x 96", Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

13. James Bradley with Ron Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000); *Flags of Our Fathers,* directed by Clint Eastwood (2006; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2007), DVD.

14. Robin Moore, *The Green Berets: The Amazing Story of the U.S. Army's Elite Special Forces Unit,* foreword by Major General Thomas R. Csrnko (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2007); Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977, London: Picador, 1978); *First Kill,* directed by Coco Schrijber (2001; Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016).

15. "The Highest Grossing War Movies of All Time," Craig Donofrio, *WorkandMoney.com* (April 8, 2018), accessed July 19, 2020, https://www.workandm oney.com/s/highest-grossing-war-movies-d0c142c1cf3942dd; *American Sniper*, dir. Clint Eastwood (2014; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2015), DVD.

16. Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers* (Toronto and New York: Bantam Books, 1979); Gustav Hasford, *The Phantom Blooper* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990); and *Full Metal Jacket,* dir. Stanley Kubrick (1987; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2001), DVD.

17. The term "soft power" comes from international relations scholar Joseph Nye and refers to "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments." See *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x. Eric Fattor's study *American Empire and the Arsenal of Entertainment* examines how media technology became a "central component" of the American Empire after WWII, 5. Carl Boggs also traces the origins of what he calls the American "Warfare State" to World War II and its immediate aftermath in *Origins of the Warfare State: World War II and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 3. Finally, Joseph Darda identifies the 1947 National Security Act as the beginning of the shift from a paradigm of war to a paradigm of "security" which actually *de facto* meant a form of permanent war. See *Empire of Defense: Race and the Cultural Politics of Permanent War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 9. All these scholars regard WWII as a crucial turning point in the militarization of American culture.

18. James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6.

19. *Bataan,* directed by Tay Garnett (1943; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2000), DVD; *Guadalcanal Diary*, directed by Lewis Seiler (1943; Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2002), DVD.

20. Hermann Kappelhoff, *Front Lines of Community: Hollywood Between War and Democracy,* trans. Daniel Hendrickson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 7.

21. George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), 25. 75.

22. Even Benedict Anderson, in his influential study of the modern nation state, *Imagined Communities*, readily admitted that he could not account for the passions generated by the communities imagined by modern national subjects and in particular he could not explain why people would be willing to die for them. See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 129.

23. Carolyn Marvin is a professor at the Annenberg School of Communication and had been involved with flag desecration issues prior to writing this book, and David W. Ingle is a practicing psychologist. Their approach is based on both Emile Durkheim and René Girard and yet highly original and paradigm-changing in the field of Civil Religion research, shifting the focus away from discourse and instead locating the power of Civil Religion practices in the body. Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

24. One should note in this context that the flag is more than just an abstract symbol; the 1923 Flag Code, for example, explicitly describes it as representing "a living country" and, therefore, "itself considered a living thing." Quoted from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History: https://amhistory.si.edu/stars pangledbanner/flag-rules-and-rituals.aspx. Marvin and Ingle insist on this difference from other—*textual*—national symbols, like the Declaration of Independence. See Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice*, 41–54.

25. Paul W. Kahn theorizes this slightly differently, but with the same result. He argues that the death of the soldier makes visible the fact that sovereignty (and, therefore, the sacred) has shifted in the modern nation state from the king to the citizen, at least in its ritualistic performance, if not in general practice (the average citizen hardly has the power of a king, but is nevertheless available for the generalized sacrificial violence that accompanies sovereignty). He concludes that the site of sacrifice has moved from the scaffold to the battlefield, echoing Marvin and Ingle, and that the modern nation state is "far more violent than its political predecessors." See Paul W. Kahn, *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror and Sovereignty* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 34–36.

26. Weber, Max, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), 155.

27. For a recent argument about fascism and modernism as twin reactions to the disenchantment of the world, see Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), especially pp. 74–80. See also Laura Wittman, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

28. Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions," *From Max Weber*, 335.

29. Weber, "Religious Rejections," 335.

30. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers,* 25.

31. Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 39–43.

32. Cole, *At the Violet Hour,* 39–43.

33. Cole, *At the Violet Hour,* 39.

34. Cole, *At the Violet Hour,* 43.

35. Cole, *At the Violet Hour,* 53, 43.

36. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 3–24.

37. This is where Cole and I part ways, largely because she focuses on modernist literature and I look at post–WWII literature and visual media, and also because my extensive experience with genre studies has led me to understand the importance of these major narrative patterns in understanding popular culture and visual rhetoric while modernism and its scholarship tends to steer clear of genre questions.

38. *Saving Private Ryan,* dir. Steven Spielberg (1998; Glendale: Dreamworks, 1999).

39. See Peter Gardella, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014); Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion and Politics* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); and Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice.*

40. Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *The Robert Bellah Reader,* eds. Robert N. Bellah and Steven N. Tipton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

41. The use of this device is paradoxical, since spraying the camera with blood could potentially remind viewers that the image is filmed and, therefore, artificial; however, film realism is never a matter of rational logic, but rather of suggestion and emotional effect.

42. James Jones, *The Thin Red Line* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1962), 237.

43. Samuel Fuller, Christa Lang Fuller and Jerome Henry Rudes, *A Third Face: My Tale of Writing, Fighting and Filmmaking* (New York: Applause Theater and Cinema Books, 2002), 123.

44. Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (Pocket Books, New York, 1976).

45. Herr, *Dispatches,* 169.

46. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001). The term "form" has also recently been revived by Caroline Levine but her approach to the issue is too formalist and ahistorical for my purposes, though I have found useful her use of the term "affordance" ("potential uses or actions latent in material or design"). See Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 6.

47. Andrew Martin, "Popular Culture and Narratives of Insecurity," in *Rethinking Global Security: Media, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror,"* eds. Andrew Martin and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2006), 108.

48. Royall Tyler, *The Contrast* (1787; Feedback Theater Books: 1996).

49. Fattor, *American Empire,* 5–8.

50. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 110.

51. Kappelhoff, *Front Lines*, vii.

52. For an excellent overview of social science research into emotions in the media and popular culture, see Kaarina Nikunen, "Media, Emotions and Affect," in *Media and Society*, ed. James Curran and David Hesmondhalgh, 323–340, 6th edition (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

53. "Structure of feeling" is admittedly an ambiguous term that has been used in different ways by different critics, and even Williams himself suggests that "experience" would be a better word than "feelings" almost as soon as he introduces the concept, but I use it here to evoke the general notion of socially produced, conditioned and channeled emotions that are not merely personal and private, but take part in larger social contexts and structures. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

54. Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 114–115.

55. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (Summer, 1991): 2–13.

56. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 15; Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Williams, "Melodrama Revised,"; Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film,* ed. Christine Gledhill, 42–69 (London: British Film Institute, 1987); Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film,* ed. Christine Gledhill, 34–35 (London: British Film Institute, 1987); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

57. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 15; Tompkins, *Sensational Designs.*

58. Williams, *Playing the Race Card,* 17.

59. Williams, *Playing the Race Card,* 12, 29.

60. Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage. The Works of Stephen Crane* Vol. II, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1975); *To Hell and Back,* directed by Jesse Hibbs (1955; Universal City: Universal Pictures, 2004), DVD; *Platoon*, dir. Oliver Stone (1987: Warner Home Video, 2000).

61. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949).

62. The term "Battlefield Gothic" is used by Samuel Hynes in *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to a Modern War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 26.

63. *Dunkirk*, dir. Christopher Nolan (2017; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2017), DVD.

64. *1917,* Sam Mendes (2019; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2020), DVD.

65. The magical thinking that surrounded the deployment of U.S. troops does not even begin to touch upon the wholescale denial that accompanied the killing of Iraqi troops, including the total indifference to the lives of conscripted young Iraqi men who were slaughtered from the air as they retreated from Kuwait along what came to be known as "The Highway of Death." The mainstream media refused to show images of this devastating carnage and even PBS would not air former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark's documentary video about it. I had to go to a public screening at a local high school auditorium in order to see it, and I left the room profoundly shaken. This was the beginning of my lifelong horror of war and disaffection with the way it is sanitized and repackaged for general consumption. The video has never been released as far as I know, but Clark went on to write a book about what he witnessed in Iraq. Gen. Ramsey Clark, *The Fire This Time: U.S. War Crimes in the Gulf* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1994).

66. Chris Hedges, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 3.

67. Hedges, *War is a Force,* 22, 25.

68. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 1995), 7.

69. Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (New York: Dell, 1991), 3. Sadly, we seem to be on course for getting rid of glaciers but not war.

70. Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan" (1651), in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, eds. William Molesworth, vol. 3 (London: John Bohn, 1839).

71. Siniša Malešević, *The Sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 3.

72. Douglas P. Fry, *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 17.

73. See Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (London: Penguin, 1996) and Douglas P. Fry, *War, Peace and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

74. Malešević, *Sociology,* 9.

75. See Mikkel Thorup, *An Intellectual History of Terror: War, Violence and the State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Jeffrey Alexander, *The Dark Side of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

76. Nick Turse, *The Complex,* 16; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997).

Chapter 1

Melodrama, Dying, and the Sacred

The Cult of Iwo Jima

This first chapter is about melodrama in relation to Iwo Jima: the battle, the famous photo by Joe Rosenthal, the John Wayne film based on it, and the convergence of military and media interests that created an image of such emotional and moral force that it has often been called *sacred*. I will also talk about the Marine Memorial and—in the following two chapters—two other films made about the flag-raising on Mount Suribachi, namely, *The Outsider* (1962) and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006).[1] It is generally agreed that the photo taken by Joseph Rosenthal of the second flag-raising on February 23, 1945, is one of the most important images of WWII, and one of the best known and best loved photos in American history.

What is less well known is the complicated backstory of the battle, specifically the fact that it may have been a far costlier and more ambiguous victory than has been long believed. This chapter also probes into the mechanisms by which the news photo snapped by AP photographer Joseph Rosenthal became a national icon, notably how its symbolic power was increased by the massive collective rituals of the 7th War Bond Tour and by the Alan Dwan film, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), which transformed John Wayne into a national icon thanks to its combination of melodrama and what scholars call "flag magic."[2] Moreover, I will argue that the emotional power and cultural impact of this photo cannot be understood without the help of concepts traditionally linked to the study of religion, such as ritual and the sacred, as well as the narrative mode known as *melodrama*.

MELODRAMA, MILITARISM, AND NATIONALISM

Melodrama is the most important genre term relevant to the war narratives and films produced in the post–WWII era in the United States. Adventure is a close second, and has arguably gained ascendency in recent decades, especially if we count war video games, but melodrama is still the main *topos* for narrating combat death of American soldiers and, therefore, indispensable for any story about war and its costs. This is a term that has had great impact on American literature and film scholarship, but is still generally misunderstood by many scholars and the general population, being associated with highly manipulative and old-fashioned works, often assumed to be aimed exclusively at female audiences. In American Studies, nineteenth-century sentimental literature—which is what melodrama still evokes for many people—itself underwent an important re-evaluation in the 1980s when feminists like Jane Tompkins began to take seriously the social impact and "cultural work" of sentimental novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).[3] No longer viewed as sentimental pap for weak-minded women and children, melodrama began to be regarded as a complex ideological and aesthetic paradigm for negotiating women's agency and countercultural values in a society controlled by men and capital.

In the related field of comparative literature, Peter Brooks' study of melodrama in Balzac and Henry James, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), also contributed to the rehabilitation of the term. In a move against the critical consensus that saw melodrama as a trivial and debased commercial form, Brooks located the origins of melodrama in the moment in European history that marked "the final liquidation of the traditional Sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch), the shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of the organic and hierarchically cohesive society, and the invalidation of the literary forms—tragedy, comedy of manners—that depended on such a society."[4] In other words, melodrama emerged as a response to a world where the traditional moral and epistemological blueprints had been thrown into question and served as a kind of aesthetic working-through of these losses. Against the backdrop of the uncertainties and ambiguities of modernity, melodrama rehearses narratives of moral disambiguation, the recognition of virtue and villainy, and the pleasures of a moral mapping of the world (even if plots do not always end happily). In short, Brooks claimed, melodrama became "the principle mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post sacred era."[5] To put it into the Weberian terms discussed in the introduction, melodrama emerged as an aesthetic form in reaction to and compensation for the disenchantment of the world.

Although many nineteenth-century texts that we associate with melodrama invoked an explicitly or implicitly religious framework, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), melodrama is not by any means inherently religious. In fact, while melodrama represents an "urge toward resacralization," Brooks argued, it also represents "the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms."[6] Instead of a traditional religious framework, melodrama assumed and endeavored to demonstrate the existence of a "moral occult," by which he meant "the domain of spiritual forces and imperatives that is not clearly visible within reality," but which guarantee that human actions and decisions are not occurring in a moral void.[7] In a word, the moral occult is the larger *meaning* or sense of things that demands to be recognized, and which dwells on a plane—whether it is seen as spiritual or moral—that transcends the brute physical reality of "naked, forked" existence. I have lingered on Brooks' theory of melodrama because it raises the question of the disenchantment of the world and posits a longing for re-enchantment.[8]

Using Brooks' ideas as point of departure, Linda Williams has argued the structural core of melodrama is the organization of "sympathy for the sufferings of the virtuous."[9] (12). Thus, melodrama as a narrative schema needs a "victim whose visible suffering transmutes into proof of virtue." And the "key function" of this "victimization is to orchestrate the moral legibility crucial to the mode."[10] Like Brooks, Williams sees moral legibility as one of the main functions of melodrama, offering audiences the pleasure of discerning virtue and villainy from the moral ambiguities that characterize secular modernity. Williams has also suggested that melodrama is "the best, and most accurate, description of the serious narrative and iconic work performed by popular American mass culture."[11] Seeing it as a *mode* that informs a range of specific genres and cultural forms, Williams proposes that melodrama is a perpetually modernizing form that "typifies popular American narrative."[12] Once the staple of nineteenth-century popular drama, melodrama is the formal blueprint that now organizes "*mutatis mutandis,* most mainstream Hollywood movies."[13]

Williams identifies five key features of melodrama: first, it "begins, and wants to end, in a space of innocence," usually a home or domestic space of some kind;[14] second, it "focuses on victim-heroes and the recognition of their virtue" and their suffering; third, it uses realism to appear modern and to further its agenda of stirring passion and action; fourth, it presents characters who "embody primary psychic roles, organized in Manichean conflicts between good and evil."[15] These roles include family positions such as father, mother, child, or social types such as the greedy business man or the fallen woman. In other words, melodrama is less invested in individual interiority

and uniqueness than, say, the modernist novel, and prefers characters that are easy to identify with and whose moral character is relatively easy to recognize.

The fifth key feature identified by Williams, and one especially interesting for our purpose, is the "dialectic of pathos and action—a give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time.'"[16] Events in the narrative can take on a temporality of loss and irreversible bad fortune, or dramatic rescues or resolutions. Often there is at least one of each in a typical melodrama plot. This aspect of melodrama is important because it allows us to connect the sentimental dimensions of the form that we are familiar with to the action-centered narratives such as war stories that also often borrow heavily from this mode. In fact, many or most action films are structured like melodramas, with the hero undergoing suffering at the hands of evil-doers (the *pathos*) that leads to the *action* that occupies most of the film. The hero's suffering is important not only to establish his basic virtue but also to justify the violence that follows as righteous and legitimate. This is the conservative and violence-focused end of the melodrama spectrum, and includes, for example, all the *Rambo* films, most Chuck Norris and Steven Segal movies, and virtually any American movie in which we are asked to accept spectacular displays of violence as righteous and necessary.

Many left-wing social problem films are also structured as melodramas, with the suffering of the victim-hero not leading to violence but to action or agency of another kind. For example, the AIDS drama *Philadelphia* (1993) is a melodrama in which the hero's (Tom Hanks) suffering as victim of discrimination and also debilitating disease contributes to proving his virtue and right to belong in the body politic.[17] The allegorical aspects of the film are hard to miss, given the historically charged location of the film—Philadelphia—and the use of an African American (Denzel Washington) as the white protagonist's double and foil. As African Americans once were, victims of AIDS are unfairly excluded from full citizenship, the film implies. The protagonist's death leads to the conversion of the initially homophobic black lawyer to a more open-minded understanding of love and relationships, especially of gay relationships. Although neither Brooks nor Williams addresses this issue, I would argue that this type of conversion is one of the most important effects of a virtuous victim's death in a melodramatic framework. In fact, as a recurring narrative convention, it is one of the principle ways by which that death is saved from meaninglessness and shown to have an agency and power—in the sense that Brooks described as a "moral occult."

Melodrama often seems to be religious in nature because this topos—that of the salvational power of the hero's suffering and death—recalls the foundational story of Christianity, that is, Christ's suffering and redemptive death on the cross.[18] Yet, though modeled and perhaps dependent on this original

story of self-sacrifice, melodrama is not overtly Christian or religious even if it seems to be because of its insistence on invisible or non-material connections between actions, events and their effects. For instance, in the film *Titanic*, the mechanism by which Jack's death converts Rose to a more full and active life, one fueled essentially by his values and his energy, can be seen as purely psychological—he *inspires* her. But on the level of narrative his death is also thereby somehow redeemed—it was not *in vain* because it made her live a fuller and better life. This more modest and seemingly secular sense of redemption is the heart of melodrama's immense power and presence in American popular culture. In fact, I would add this feature to Williams' five: melodrama often involves a death which is redeemed by having some sort of agency, such as converting other characters to the deceased's values, or by making something important happen.

This chapter aims to show that melodrama lends itself particularly well to the narration of combat death because it shares with militarism an intense desire that death be meaningful and potent. I believe that it is no coincidence that melodrama emerged as a cultural formation at exactly the same time as the modern nation-state and its romantic doctrines of nationalism and organicism (the idea that the nation is like a living organism).[19] Like melodrama, the nation has also often been considered by scholars as a reaction to the loss of religious coherence in Europe, that is, as a secular substitute for religion.[20] The factors contributing to the origin of the nation-state as the dominant political unit of collective life are certainly more complex than this simple equation, yet it is undeniable that nation-states have taken over at least one of the defining principles of pre-modern religion—*the right to organize killing and dying*—and with it, the ability to mobilize intense passions and emotions around the notion of sacrifice. Melodrama is the aesthetic and narrative technique through which these passions are channeled into nationalism, military service, and an intense affective investment in the nation-state.

The organization of death is of course not what is uppermost in the minds of people filled with patriotic or nationalist fervor; they are more likely to be thinking of the positive things that nations promise, such as the kinship that national belonging implies, including freedom and equality and the overcoming of class, regional and traditional differences between citizens. Nationalism has inspired great hopes and strong feelings because of its potential to level and unite people into a purposeful group in which each individual has certain rights and responsibilities. Yet, underneath its utopian potential, the nation has also been a powerful organizer of in-group and out-group feelings, orchestrating a sense of belonging among some at the expense of others who are cast as outsiders because of birth, race, religion, or other features.[21]

Most importantly for this study, when scholars speak of national identity and a feeling of belonging, they inevitably find themselves speaking of the

fact that nations inspire their members to be willing to die for them. This is the perplexing fact that Benedict Anderson evokes at the beginning and end of his influential study of national belonging, *Imagined Communities*, which he opens with this question: "what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices?"[22] Anderson concludes the original edition of his book by conceding that his theory cannot truly account for the intensity of feeling that these products of human imagination and social reality generate. He writes: "it is doubtful whether either social change or transformed consciousness [the topic of his book], in themselves, do much to explain the *attachment* that people feel for the inventions of their imaginations—or, to return to a question raised at the beginning of this text—why people are ready to die for these inventions" (italics in original).[23] In other words, why people are ready to lay down their lives for these social constructs is a question that Anderson admits he cannot account for.

In looking for an answer to this question, scholars such as Anthony D. Smith have taken Anderson to task for over-emphasizing the "imagined" aspects of modern nations too seriously and overlooking, according to Smith, the deep ethnic roots of most modern nations. It is only these roots, Smith claims, that can explain the "explosive power and tenacity" of the nation form.[24] Yet the argument that nations have deep ethnic roots (a claim moreover contested by other historians) does not in itself explain why anyone should be willing to die for them more than for nations "invented" two hundred years ago, such as the United States and Haiti, or even more recently, as many current states were. After all, the younger and more recent states can often claim even more idealistic political projects than the old ethnic nations, national projects that could ostensibly command greater investment and be worth greater sacrifices to defend than the old historical formations. Ernest Renan, the French philologist whose lecture "What Is a Nation?," delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882, is regarded as a key text of nineteenth century nationalist theory, dismissed the need for "ethnographic" principles as a basis for a modern nation.[25] Instead, he argued, a nation is "a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices one has made in the past and that one is prepared to make in the future."[26] "It presupposes a past," Renan observed, but implied that this past could be the product of much selective memory or even wholesale invention. It is not the true history of a people or region that matters, in his view, but "the desire to live together."[27] Hence, he is best remembered for his oft-quoted description of the nation as a "daily plebescite."[28]

At the heart of this desire is the somewhat mystical definition of the nation as "a soul, a spiritual principle."[29] No other definition of the modern nation has been as frequently cited and discussed as this one. Though anachronistic and obviously Romantic, it touches a nerve with later theorists of the nation

because it succinctly articulates the way in which nations seem to represent energies and emotions that transcend their legal and political framework. Renan's other most quoted sentence offers an answer as to why this is so: "the sacrifices one has made in the past and that one is prepared to make in the future." In linking the nation as a spiritual principle to the notion of sacrifice, Renan reveals the core mechanism by which nations become sites of the sacred in a secular world.

Addressing the question of self-sacrifice in warfare, Ernst Kantorowicz wrote an essay just after World War II in which he traced the origins of the idea of fallen soldiers as consecrated martyrs back to the early modern period, when the fatherland (*patrie)* as a *corpus morale et politicum* came to be identified with the *corpus mysticum* of Christ.[30] However, most scholars agree that it is really with the modern nation-state that the notion of fallen soldiers as martyrs became dominant because it is with the new concept of nation as sovereign, following the Treaty of Westphalia, that modern armies transformed from mercenary forces of hired foreigners to "standing state armies made up of citizens."[31] For the first time, soldiers were no longer a small elite but rather representatives of their nation; in short, soldiering and citizenship became strongly associated, especially in nations like France, Prussia, and the United States.[32]

By the early nineteenth century, vast bureaucratic armies with masses of volunteers or conscripts of *national citizens* (at least in theory), became the norm. According to George Mosse, a new understanding of military death emerged with the rise of modern national consciousness. In France, for example, "patriotic death was described in analogy to Christian ideals, as an armed martyrdom" and in Germany, "death in was became the fulfilment of life."[33] In Revolutionary America, according to Sarah Purcell, martyrdom also became an important way of making sense of the war.[34] As Boston poet put it, "With Blood they seal their Cause, [and] Die to save their Country's Laws" (quoted in Purcell[35]).

At the same time as national martyrdom was developing as a potent ideology in the young nation-states, new political theories of the nation (such as Hegel's), stressing the promise of freedom and horizontal equality among citizens, were rooted in a conceptualization of the nation as organic form, as a kind of mystical body. According to Pheng Cheah, it is this "alleged organic power of origination" (in fact, self-origination), as linked to the metaphors of "nativity" and birth, that guaranteed the nation's existence as transcendent principle through which individual soldiers who have sacrificed themselves in its name could hope for "a life beyond finite, merely biological life."[36]

In effect, the mystical nature of the nation was linked to the power attributed to the soldier's death. As George Mosse puts it, "the soldier was part of an unending chain of being that reached beyond death" that was underwritten

by the transcendence of the nation itself.[37] We can see this logic at work in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, which connects the death of soldiers on the battlefield to the "rebirth" of the nation and its founding principles: they "gave their lives" so that "that nation could live." In this image, rhetorically linking combat death with national rebirth, we have the very motor of the re-enchanting mode of representing death in war. It is often closely associated with fascism, and Kantorowicz cites a banner hung on the façade on a cathedral in Milan in 1937—"*Chi muore per Italia non muore*" ("Whoever dies for Italy does not die")—as an example. [38]

Nevertheless, we can observe this logic wherever soldiers are praised for their sacrifice, across the political spectrum. We see this logic operating in all military funerals, including in the contemporary United States, where military funerals are a regular occurrence. For example, in the 2011 documentary *To Hell and Back*, a Marine chaplain giving a funeral service to thirteen men asserts that these "fallen heroes will always stand together, always and forever," invoking the eternal timeline of the nation and rhetorically placing the dead soldiers in that sphere.[39] This emphatic—literally redundant—invocation of immortality and a transcendent temporality ("always and forever") is not merely a discursive convention. It cuts to the heart of what the Civil Religion promises soldiers in return for their lives: an afterlife as real and meaningful as any conventional religion can offer.

SELF-SACRIFICE, CIVIL RELIGION, AND NATIONAL RITUAL

Many scholars have noticed the importance of self-sacrifice in contemporary American culture, and several books have recently appeared on the subject, including Jon Pahl's *Empire of Sacrifice* (2010), Kelly Denton-Borhaug's *U.S. War-culture, Sacrifice and Salvation* (2011), and Claire Sisco King's *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma and the Cinema* (2012).[40] Another study, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation* (1999), written by Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, draws heavily on sociology and anthropology to probe the connections between military service, self-sacrifice, national belonging, and the media. Marvin and Ingle combine Emile Durkheim's notion of the totem and Réné Girard's theory of sacrificial violence in order to theorize the modern nation, and specifically the United States, in relation to warfare as a collective ritual of regeneration. Echoing Ernest Renan, the authors define the nation as "the shared memory of blood sacrifice, periodically renewed."[41] Just as sacrificial violence lies at the origin of the nation, an idea shared by many historians and theorist of nationalism, so the continued viability of the community must be periodically renewed through national ritual. Although

their book also examines elections as instances of totem creation rituals which function to unify the nation, the greater part of the book focuses on the darker ritual of unification through "totem sacrifice"—one which is performed through "*bodily* sacrifice" of group members, of which war is the "most powerful enactment."[42]

An original and provocative aspect of Marvin and Ingle's thesis is their claim that the real purpose of war is not to defeat the enemy and kill adversaries, but as a ritual to kill the designated victims who have consented to their sacrifice, namely, soldiers. As Réné Girard noted in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), "in some societies whole categories of human beings are systematically reserved for sacrificial purposes in order to protect other categories."[43] According to Marvin and Ingle, in the United States, and other modern nations, the military is this priestly class of designated victims, who have been selected, trained, and prepared for their death. Every serviceman and woman who takes the Soldier's Oath knows that this is the real meaning of their commitment, namely, that they have consented to give up their life if ordered to do so. The Soldier's Oath does not directly speak of death, and this is one of many strategic silences that surround the taboo subject of blood sacrifice, but it does include a promise to obey the President of the United States. The president is the locus of the nation's power to kill and this potential is concentrated at any given time in the person of whoever holds that office.

As recently as 2002, Robert Bellah, the sociologist most closely associated with the idea of an American Civil Religion, wrote that the "archaic substratum" linking church and state, god and king, has "never completely disappeared": "even the American president is at some level the lineal descendent of these archaic divine kings."[44] In the United States, the president—as the representative of the sovereignty of the people—chooses military targets, including for assassinations, authorizes the use of deadly force, and can give or withhold pardons from death-row inmates. As head of the armed forces, the president is tacitly at the source of any order that commands an enlisted man or woman to put themselves in harm's way.

The idea of "ritual" is central to this conception of the nation and its renewal, and so a few words about the term are in order since it is crucial to my argument about melodrama. Recent scholarship has not only revived this term but posited it as foundational to human culture and evolution in general. According to Terence Deacon in *The Symbolic Species* (1997), a ritual was probably the activity which helped pre-linguistic hominids to begin to communicate symbolically as opposed to simply indexically.[45] This is fairly speculative, of course, but many other scholars have pointed to the importance and ubiquity of ritual in contemporary society. The scholar who serves as intellectual link between theories of the origins of human social life and the modern world is Emile Durkheim, who proposed that ritual is

the source of both social interaction and religion, insofar as collective rituals generated the "collective effervescence" that lies at the heart of our experience and emotions liked to the sacred.[46] More recent scholars have taken up the implications of Durkheim's work and developed it to suggest that ritual plays a central role in society and culture.[47] As Roy Rappaport puts it, a ritual is "humanity's basic social act" and the foundation of all religious practice and socialization.[48]

Randall Collins, a prominent sociologist whose work builds on both Durkheim and Erving Goffman, proposes that social life is made up of "interaction rituals" which involve three basic conditions: at least two people physically assembled, who focus their attention on the same action or object and are aware of the other maintaining his focus on it, and who share a common mood or emotion.[49] Their interaction can leave them charged or depleted of "emotional energy," depending on what happens between them, but if successful, an interaction ritual will create feelings of solidarity, confidence, energy, morality or a sense of rightness, and shared symbols (words, gestures, or icons) that "members feel are associated with them collectively; these are Durkheim's 'sacred objects.'"[50] Language is itself "the product of a pervasive natural ritual" in the sense that "the rudimentary act of speaking involves the ingredients" required for ritual, namely, "group assembly, mutual focus, common sentiment." As a result, according to Collins, "words are collective representations, loaded with moral significance."[51] In short, interaction rituals are the way that social symbols—including linguistic signs—are made significant, and the way that sacred objects are made sacred. In turn, emotions or sentiments can be activated or prolonged by emotionally charged symbols.[52]

With Collins' work we have the means to understand the emotional power of social symbols such as flags, national monuments, the pledge of allegiance, national narratives, specific words (e.g., freedom) and, if we extrapolate these processes to a macro level, the enduring existence of nations themselves. One of the interesting points to emerge from ritual theory about social symbols is that while they are emotionally and morally charged they remain strategically ambiguous as to their actual meaning or content. This is a point underscored by Catherine Bell, a religious studies scholar, who suggests in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* that "most symbolic action—even the basic symbols of a community's ritual life—can be unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways." In fact, "overdetermination or ambiguity of much religious symbolism may be integral to its efficacy."[53] In other words, it is not the precise semantic meaning or content that matters in many sacred or religiously charged symbols; in fact, symbols may be more effective when they allow people to project whatever meaning they want on them. Instead it is mainly their emotional power that counts.

MELODRAMA AND CINEMATIC RITUAL

Where is melodrama in all this? I would propose that war films can function like social or even religious rituals, both drawing on the emotional energy of certain symbols, images or narratives, and recharging them in turn. Some sociologists have shied away from attributing such a function to events that seem essentially passive, such as "concerts, operas, plays, or movies seen in theaters."[54] Robert Bellah casts doubt on whether such events solicit enough participation on the part of spectators to be called ritual events in the "full sense of the word."[55] I would argue that they can and do function as rituals, at least in a partial sense. My reasons are twofold: first, many rituals do not need participants to be actors in the ritual—often, being a witness, such as at an inauguration or a funeral is enough. Second, movies are not simply passive watching experiences. They are complexly choreographed emotional events. This is particularly true for genre films, such as war, action, melodrama, or thriller, where audiences know the formulas and choose them specifically for the emotional experience they will offer. Within the parameters of the genre, there will always be room for surprises and departures from familiar conventions, especially since every film is usually some sort of hybrid. Nevertheless, for better or for worse, most people choose a film knowing what to expect in terms of the emotions they expect to feel. Thus, genre films are potent combinations of affect and narrative, and while we know films are fictions (and this certainly does weaken their ideological impact compared to the news media, e.g.), certain kinds of film—such as combat movies, especially those purporting to be about real events or real wars—generate powerful emotional and rhetorical effects, especially when they reinforce (or challenge, as they sometimes do) familiar schemas, national myths, and tropes. Thus, like religious rituals, genre films can help make sense of the world—they offer a *nomos* or a frame through which to interpret real as well as fictional events.

In addition to making sense of the world through narrative devices and stimulating emotion through spectacle, film melodrama has the added dimension of music which helps orchestrate what spectators feel. Music was also essential to classical melodrama, as the name suggests. Peter Brooks' work can help us begin to understand why this is so through the great emphasis he places on the visual sign or gesture as opposed to the word. Observing in a chapter called "The Text of Muteness" that the victim-hero of melodrama is often unable to express their suffering verbally, and that language is often simply inadequate to the pain that is at stake, Brooks discusses the importance of gesture, visible signs, and other nonverbal forms of communication. He thus describes music as conferring an "additional legibility" into the melodramatic performance in its early stage iterations, though he does not linger on this issue since the main focus of his study are nineteenth-century novels.[56]

With film, however, music assumes once more an extraordinarily important place in melodrama, not only by helping viewers to understand the narrative (what Brooks implies by "legibility") but also by cuing them as to exactly what they should *feel*. Music is a very precise and powerful choreographer of synchronized feeling—and synchronization is essential to the work of ritual.[57] In melodrama, music heightens the likelihood that viewers will feel similar emotions at the same moments. This is because music not only awakens but it also articulates and channels feelings in a very precise way, based on its tones and harmonics. Music is a finely calibrated conduit of feeling. In this way, music creates a sense of connection to other spectators—obviously in the movie theatre—*even* if they have watched the film independently of each other.

Keeping Together in Time (1995), William McNeil's fascinating study of the importance of synchronized and rhythmic muscular movements, such as in drill, dancing or singing together, can be helpful in understanding the implications here. Synchronized physical activities like this seem to produce highly pleasurable states of consciousness that induce feelings of connection to others, to a melting of barriers between self and other and self and environment, even to feelings of transcendence or connection to a higher plane—in a word, *religious* feelings.[58] McNeill calls this "keeping together in time." By creating conditions in which spectators *feel together in narrative*, melodrama offers a secularized version of this essentially religious experience of connection. In other words, spectators may be separated by time, but they are synchronized and brought together *in time* by the temporality of the narrative: they are invited to feel the same things at the same moments in the temporal unfolding of the narrative.[59]

Together, these concepts (melodrama, ritual, self-sacrifice, Civil Religion) can help us understand the power and impact of the Rosenthal photo as well as the film that consolidated that emotional energy and symbolic charge around the figure of John Wayne, *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949). Wayne would, as a result of his association with Iwo Jima, become the face of military heroism in the post–WWII era. But first, let us look at the Battle of Iwo Jima itself and the photo that immortalized it.

MELODRAMA AND THE RAISING
OF THE FLAG ON IWO JIMA

Few artifacts of American war culture have had the impact and influence of the Joseph Rosenthal photograph of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima. No other photo that emerged from WWII came anywhere near the symbolic importance of this image of six men planting an American flag in what appears

to be a devastated battlefield. This image is so important because it brings together the notions of collective effort, collective victimization, the pathos of mass death, and the ritualistic aspects of warfare (e.g., planting a flag and establishing a new border). It is also precisely because it is associated with such great losses that it has been able to function as a central icon of national regeneration and collective identity. Before speaking about the photo in more detail, I would like to examine for a moment the invasion and huge loss of life that produced this iconic image, because this collective victimization is often hidden behind the photo even as it is signified by it, and yet the impact of the image is largely due to the loss that preceded and accompanied its reception.

THE BATTLE

I want to begin by talking about the Battle for Iwo Jima, known as Operation Detachment, not simply for the sake of historical context, but because it is crucial to understanding how myth took hold of the mass death that occurred during this operation and converted it into the emotional currency of morale and patriotism from the start. At the core of the myth of Iwo Jima is the claim that it saved more lives than it cost. This is a claim that has recently been debunked by the historian Robert S. Burrell in an article in the *Journal of Military History* in 2004 and a book-length monograph titled *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (2006).[60] It is a claim that has had great staying power. It is cited on most military and historical websites and references to the Battle of Iwo Jima. James Bradley repeats it in his book, *The Flags of Our Fathers,* in this way: "The American victory unquestionably hastened the end of the war. In the ensuing months, about 2,400 distressed B-29 bombers, carrying 27,000 crewmen, would make emergency lifesaving landings on the island."[61] Unfortunately, the most accurate word here is "unquestionably," which sums up the way in which this claim has been received and reproduced in the decades following the war.

The myth that the Iwo Jima battle "saved" 27,000 lives has been easy to maintain because the aversion to contemplating its alternative has been too awful and socially risky for anyone to attempt. The alternative would include the unbearable possibility that these many deaths were not absolutely necessary, and possibly even pointless. This is the one idea that military history, national myth, and popular culture all converge in considering unacceptable, impossible and anathema to American values and good commercial sense. In a nation united in reverence for the sacrifices of the "greatest generation," no one wants to hear that "America's most heroic battle," as Bradley calls it, and the single bloodiest operation in Marine Corps history, was a tragic mistake that took the lives of thousands for no good reason. Nevertheless, that is the

implication that emerges from Burrell's research into the planning and history of the operation, though he himself refuses to explicitly acknowledge it. In a rebuttal to a critical review of his initial article in *The Journal of Military History,* Burrell ends with an emphatic statement that "no Marine died on Iwo Jima in vain!"[62] Yet his own facts show otherwise.

The Battle of Iwo Jima lasted from February 19 to March 26, 1945, and took the lives of 6,821 Marines, plus another 21,865 wounded or mentally incapacitated, for a total of 28,696 casualties.[63] Most of the Japanese forces on the island died defending it, estimated around 18,5000 men, for a total of over 25,000 men *killed* in the space of a month. These figures do not compare to the statistics of World War I, but they are impressive by World War II standards for a single battle. In comparison, one could cite D-Day in Normandy, which lasted only a day and incurred around 10,000 casualties, of which 4,440 were killed in action (plus another 4,000–9,000 German casualties). While the Normandy invasion established American military presence in occupied France, the objectives and meaning of the seizure of Iwo Jima were far less clear.

This is where Burrell's work sheds important light on the planning before the invasion and the justifications offered after the fact. One of the conclusions that Burrell is led to in his research is that the landing on Iwo Jima was the result of inter-service rivalry and self-interest more than strategic necessity. At the time, the war in the Pacific was being prosecuted by the Navy and the Army separately and in competition with each other for resources rather than collaboratively. This was the result of the traditional independence of these services, which the creation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1942 was meant to help coordinate. However, rivalry, redundancy, and inefficiency continued, and the decision to seize Iwo Jima was made largely in order to promote the fortunes of the Army Air Force, which sought to become an independent service in its own right and wished to demonstrate the value of its new B-29 Superfortress aircraft for this purpose. Although the Navy agreed to organize the landing, the Marine Corps itself—which did the large part of the fighting—was not consulted. A military commission had already dismissed the value of Iwo Jima in 1943 and high-ranking members of the military continued to have doubts about the value and cost-effectiveness of the taking of the island in the months before the landing.[64] Un-coordinated operations also resulted in a much shorter time of preparatory bombardment of the island, a fact that was widely recognized as directly related to higher expected casualties among ground forces (something that Eastwood's film *Flags of Our Fathers* acknowledges).

Most importantly, military command under-estimated the defenses on the island, and an operation that was expected to last two or three days turned into thirty-three days of deadly fighting, despite the fact that "by December

1944, it was becoming quite apparent that seizing Sulfur Island would prove difficult."[65] Among the evidence of the miscalculations involved in these preparations, Burrell cites the fact that the three divisions that landed were earmarked for another operation on Okinawa in March, something that turned out to be impossible after 30 percent of Marines landing on the island died or were wounded.[66] Most of these (over 90 percent) never returned to action.[67] Yet, planners had expected the occupation of the island to last no more than four days.[68] Such errors give a glimpse into the story of poor intelligence, strategic uncertainty, and military incompetence that is hidden behind the heroic narrative of courage, endurance, and extraordinary sacrifice that is always the focus of cultural memories of Iwo Jima.

One of Burrell's research methods was to survey the explanations given for the invasion before and after the battle, which revealed that they were completely different. The main stated objective for the invasion before the landing was to provide fighter support for the B-29 Superfortress, a plane that could fly 3,000 miles but which had been found to be more effective when accompanied by fighter planes. However, since these smaller planes, such as the P-51 "Mustang," had much shorter flight ranges, the idea was that they would escort the B-29s from Iwo Jima. The problem with this objective was that it turned out that the distance was still too far for P-51s to cover safely, and that only 100 P-51s could be stationed on the island while 1000 B-29s were used regularly to make long-range sorties over mainland Japan. Ultimately, this rationale fell apart as *almost no fighter escorts were ever launched* from the island.

Another weakness with this particular justification for the invasion of Iwo Jima, which some people suspected would be costly once it became clear that Japanese General Kuribayashi had been preparing for it since June 1944, is that there were other islands in the Bonin chain and nearby that would have served just as well or even better as airfields (e.g., Truk or Chichi Jima, which had a port) and were not as well reinforced. In other words, had fighter escort turned out to be a viable reason for taking the island, there still could have been less deadly alternatives to seizing Iwo Jima, which photo reconnaissance images from October 1944 had revealed to be heavily fortified.

After the battle and its stupendous casualties, up to nine other justifications were produced, each of which was flawed in one way or another, as Burrell demonstrates.[69] However, the justification that ultimately stuck and came to be known as the "emergency landing theory" was published by *Impact,* an Army Air Force journal that titled its last issue "Air Victory over Japan," attributing Japan's surrender to air operations conducted by . . . not surprisingly, *itself.* In this issue, it ran an article about Iwo Jima in which it stated that "from 4 March, when the first crippled B-29 landed there, to the end of the war, 2,251 Superfortresses landed at Iwo. A large number of these would

have been lost if Iwo had not been available. Each of the B-29s carried eleven crewmen, a total of 24,761 men. It cost, 4,800 dead, 15,800 wounded, and 400 missing to take the island . . . but every man who served with the 20th Air Force . . . is eternally grateful" (quoted in Burrell[70]). This is how the idea that over 20,000 lives had been saved by the availability of Iwo Jima, a number that would climb to "27,000" in the years to follow.

The weakness of these statistics begins to show when one considers that the quote implies that *all* 2,251 landings it cites were emergency landings. In fact, most B-29 landings on the island were for refueling and very few were strictly necessarily (especially since the B-29s had four engines and could fly on only two, making emergency landings relatively rare). An even more glaring flaw in the theory is revealed when one considers that the entire fleet of B-29s in the Pacific never numbered more than 1,000, which means that every single one of the Superfortresses, plus every single one of its replacements, would have had to crash in the absence of Iwo Jima as a stop in order for this statistic to make any sense. During the entire war, only 2,148 B-29 crewmen lost their lives, so the theory claims somewhat implausibly that "*eleven times* the number of airmen actually lost in combat were saved simply by offering an alternative landing field between Saipan and Tokyo."[71] In short, the theory that is most often cited up to this day as justifying the high casualties on Iwo Jima is patently absurd.

Even a cursory scrutiny of these numbers would reveal their inflated and improbable nature, so how did this myth endure for so long? I would propose that, in addition to a natural aversion to admitting costly mistakes that any military organization would have, the photograph that made the Battle of Iwo Jima famous and inspiring made questions about the value of the operation nearly impossible. In fact, as Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle argue, the large bloodletting during this battle made it highly effective and successful as a ritual of national cohesion and meaning. Doubts about its strategic value in the Pacific theatre of operations became irrelevant as its capacity to inspire feelings of national unity, purpose, and pride became apparent. The fact that the service that took the island was the Marine Corps, made up entirely of volunteers, made the ritual magic of their deaths—as willing sacrifices—that much more potent.[72] The symbol that focused, amplified, and redistributed these affects nationally was the photograph of the flag-raising published on Sunday, February 25, in newspapers across the country.

THE PHOTOGRAPH

Many books have been written about the Rosenthal photograph, which in fact many writers insist on calling "The Photograph" (e.g. James Bradley). The

Figure 1.1   U.S. Marines of the 28th Regiment, 5th Division, Raise the American flag Atop Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Japan, on February 23, 1945. Probably the Single Most Famous Image to Emerge from World War II. (Keystone/AP Photo by Joe Rosenthal.)

AQ: Please provide in-text citations for figures 1.1 to 1.3 and 1.6

story of its reception is highly dramatic and full of poignant ironies, including the huge impact it had on the lives of the three surviving flag-raisers.[73] The photograph was taken on Friday, February 23, 1945, four days into the invasion, and initially Joseph Rosenthal, the AP photographer who took it, had no reason to suspect it would become one of the most iconic images of American history. The Suribachi volcano was an early target for capture because it was riddled with caves and hide-outs from which Japanese defenders could shoot at American Marines below to great tactical advantage. A first group of flag-raisers, who hiked the mountain in the morning and placed a small flag on the summit, had indeed encountered some resistance on its way. This flag-raising had been remarked by Marines below with great emotion and joy—it was very successful as a morale booster. In fact, according to Albee and Freeman, some Marines wept openly at the sight of it.[74] Rosenthal arrived a couple hours later with a team bringing a larger replacement flag but apparently this exchange of flags occasioned no emotion whatsoever, so Rosenthal could not know what excitement his photograph would arouse back in the United States. In fact, for many days he did not know which photograph he took that

day had been printed, and assumed it was the one he took after the flag was hoisted up, in which smiling flag-raisers posed for the camera.

On the day of the flag-raising (Friday), newspapers reported that a flag had been placed on Suribachi, but the photo would only be published on Sunday morning. In the meantime, the American public had been reading all week about a wholly unexpected and extremely deadly operation whose grim statistics were sickening a country that was weary of four long years of war. James Bradley places a great emphasis in his account of the photo's history on the fact that the photo arrived after five days of "unthinkable casualties" had filled "each mornings' headlines."[75] It was in fact the first battle of the war in which news was instantly relayed to the United States, all the previous battles having taken up to a week to be reported. Thus, the timing of the appearance of the photograph, as well as its simultaneous publication on the front page of newspapers across the country, in the large and important Sunday morning edition, had something to do with its impact on the country. Although the battle would rage on for another three weeks, the photo offered an image of victory—a flag planted on enemy soil, on the highest point on the island—that was all the more powerful for coming after days of some of the worst news of the entire war.

Its appearance in the front and center position of newspapers across the land gave it authority, and its simultaneous appearance fed powerfully into the production of what Benedict Anderson has called the "imaginative community" of the nation, created precisely by such print media and mass communication technology as news photos and newspapers. If print media can create a sense of imaginative community by printing the same things in geographically distant locations, they also create a sense of national community through the shared ritual of simultaneous reception. The Sunday morning paper is a kind of American national ritual (or at least it was in the 1940s), linking the private and the public sphere through an act of individual participation in a collective act of reading. The ritual of opening and carefully reading the Sunday paper—possible because of it being a work-free day for most—would be repeated in homes all over the country. In terms of sociologist Randall Collins' theory of emotional energy, the fact that the entire nation's attention was riveted on the unfolding battle of Iwo Jima, in almost real time, gave this battle an unprecedented ritual power. Emotional energy comes from shared attention on the same object, and here was an entire country watching and waiting for the outcome of the invasion, over the course of several days.[76]

The ritual aspects of the reception of Rosenthal's photo would be further heightened by the press' job of instructing its public on how to receive the image, appropriate to its priest-like function in a democratic and text-based society. One of the ways in which the press constructed and signaled the

sacred status of the photograph was by referring to the flag in the religious-sounding lexicon of "Old Glory," a popular nickname that has existed since the Civil War.[77] Another was to compare it to other sacred or iconic images, such as Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (*Times-Union* of Rochester, New York), Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware,* or Archibald Willard's *The Spirit of '76*, which was actually superimposed on the upper right-hand corner of the photo in one instance, leading to 48,000 requests for reprints.[78] The press also invented wholesale accounts of fierce resistance and battles raging on the way up to the top of the volcano, stressing the perils and dramatizing the dangers surrounding the flag-raising. As Bradley puts it, the press "replaced reportage with romanticism," just the first of many ways the image would make Americans attribute larger than life status to the photo.[79] One of the most quoted reactions to the photograph comes from within the priesthood of the press—the fact that it is reported in almost all accounts of the photo's history creates a powerfully circular and self-validating feedback loop about its cult-like status. According to these accounts, when AP photo editor John Bodkin in Guam saw the photo, he said, "Here's one for all time," signaling through his evocation of what Kenneth Burke calls "aevum" time, which is a kind of perpetuity that exists between the eternal and human history, the fact that even normally hard-nosed news producers were recognizing its sacred status.[80]

Let's have a look at the range of reasons for why it had this impact. To begin with, the photo certainly possesses considerable intrinsic merit though most scholars point to a convergence of factors rather than to any one element. In "Icons on Iwo," Lance Bertelson lists three reasons why the photo was so popular. First of all, it resonated with previous models of heroism and sacrifice, including Jacque Louis David's *The Oath of the Horatii* and Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (85). He also quotes Paul Fussell's discussion of the photo as a perfect emblem of the myth of the New Deal: "powerful and simple communal purpose" (quoted in Bertelson[81]). This is offered as yet another example of how the photo resonated with existing cultural models. A second reason is the way the photo works as both a simple symbol (freezing a complex event into a single image) and a point of departure for multiple allegorical interpretations, thus an elegant hybrid of the simple and the complex (89). And a third reason is its convergence of the latest military and media technology—the island's alleged occupation in the service of B-29s, and the use of "radio-photo" technology to rapidly send images from Guam to the United States for publication.[82]

My own explanation of the photo's power also proposes a convergence of three factors: first of all, like the Gettysburg Address, the image offers a tableau of rebirth and reconstruction against the backdrop of mass death that

remains invisible but that the initial viewer would necessarily have in mind. The planting of a flag is a positive image of generation, territory-claimed, society reformed after a moment of chaos and death. As Hariman and Lucaites point out, the upward movement of the planting of the flag recalls communal barn-raisings and is more domestic than military; it is a "ritual act of citizenship," not a scene of war.[83] Marvin and Ingle compare it to a "tree of life," which the "sacrificial band of brothers" is planting in an act of "totem rebirth from sacrifice."[84] It is a strikingly nonmartial news photo from a battlefield, emphasizing collaborative work over fighting, but the shadow of death is not far away. The large amount of ragged debris on the ground hints at the fighting that occurred at this place recently and which may still be occurring just outside the frame, as indeed it was. Thus the fact of mass death, which is really the context and occasion for this flag-raising, is both eclipsed and suggested by the image.

Second, like other scholars, I believe the depiction of group effort is important in the photo, the fact that it represents an idealized image of society itself as a unified group. The six men are coordinating their efforts, as if they were marching in time, their bodies displaying a synchronicity and collaboration of movement that is both dynamic and symmetrical. The fact that they are not posed (despite the doubts that arose around this question[85]), but unaware of the camera, physically straining in effort (due to the fact that the pipe was not a flagpole but a heavy industrial pipe) makes their bodies a powerful display of patriotic performance and affect. Regardless of what they were actually feeling or thinking, their bodies' performative aspect gives the photo the ritual power of visual proof of their patriotism and willingness as sacrifices to the national cause. This is linked to the way the media plays an important role as transmitters and authenticators of national ritual and explains why the suspicion that the photo was posed raised such a great controversy. It is essential for a successful ritual, secular or sacred, that it be in *earnest* even as it is performative, and un-self-consciousness is a greater form of earnestness than self-conscious posing for a camera.

Finally, the third and in my view the most important element in the picture, the *sine qua non* of its iconic and sacred status, is the presence of the flag about to unfurl. In representing the flag, the photo combines not only a social ritual of collective effort but the most potent symbol of that collectivity, a modern equivalent of the clan's totem, in Durkheim's terms. It is at this point that I should point out that when I refer to the photo's sacredness or religious power, I am not evoking any kind of supernatural or divine cosmology, but using religion in the Durkheimian sense, which is to say, referring to its emotional dimension. Religion is the sentiment that individuals have for the group and before the group's collective power. These are powerful sentiments that transcend anything an individual might feel about strictly individual matters.

They are so powerful that they can seem to be linked to supernatural forces, but they are merely linked to supra-individual forces.

The flag is one of the most important symbols of national and collective identity, and for Marvin and Ingle, it is the single most important one, qualitatively different from any other, because it is linked to the body as opposed to being text-based. In fact, at the "level of ritual gesture," they content, the flag actually *is* "a body." Not just any body, it is a "special body sanctified by sacrifice." It metonymically represents all the bodies of a given community, but has the "status of an emblem or escutcheon that represents the body and is magically invested with its powers and vulnerabilities."[86] Arnaldo Testi, Italian professor of U.S. history, concurs and describes the flag as a "bloodthirsty totem" which "legitimizes the killing of the enemy, but . . . also demands and receives the blood of its followers and ultimately symbolizes it."[87]

If the language of magic, totemism and sanctified bodies seems exaggerated, one might consider that the U.S. Flag Code, which became public law in 1942, and is still in force, setting out the advisory rules and regulations pertaining to its treatment and use, asserts that the flag "represents a living country and is *itself considered a living thing*" (my emphasis).[88] Thus, when I say "flag magic," I refer to the emotional energy that the flag as embodied and vital symbol (or totem) of the nation contains, arouses and channels. According to anthropologists, it is the nature of totem magic to be contagious as well as dangerous. The totem will be perceived as being able to harm or protect, and its power will be regarded as contagious and transmissible to other objects, though with a dilution of its power through transmission, depending on the medium.

With such a theory of flag meaning and flag magic in hand, we can look again at the photo of the flag-raising and its strange powers. First of all, it is interesting to note that raising a flag on Mount Suribachi was seen as a crucial act to perform on the fourth day of fighting, before the hill was even fully secure. According to Bradley's distinctly enchanting account of the event, replete with magic and mysticism, the original team of flag-raisers was sent to the summit with instructions to plant the flag *if* they made it to the top, not *when*.[89] Again, like newspapers accounts, the temptation to underscore the dangers of the mission are impossible to resist. That being said, Suribachi was far from secure, and the original flag-raisers did encounter a desperate Japanese soldier who charged them with a broken sword (broken apparently to spoil it as souvenir material) just after they planted the original small flag.

The fact that they were sent to plant a flag at all under the tense conditions still reigning on the fourth day in this area testifies to the great symbolic value such a gesture was considered to have. That a Japanese soldier would charge them with a broken sword, a suicidal act of honor if ever there was

one, reinforces the importance this act held for both sides. As mentioned before, the reaction of Marines to the planting of the flag was both jubilation and tears of joy.[90] In his war memoir, Lieutenant Holland M. General Smith describes the effect on "all our forces ashore and afloat" as "electrifying," a highly kinetic word that signifies the intense energy of a socially symbolic act. Smith also describes the moment as the "proudest in his life" and claims that "no American could view this symbol of heroism and suffering without a lump in his throat" (quoted in Albee and Freeman[91]).

Given the intrinsic ritual power of the flag-raising in the wake of four days of deadly battle, it is not surprising that the photograph that awed the nation two days later would be a photograph of the flag. Controversy arose later when it became known that the Rosenthal photo was not of the original flag-raising but of a second one. The authenticity and status of the photo as national ritual was put in question by the possibility that the flag-raising was a stunt instead of an authentic news photo. Eventually this confusion was cleared up and the sincerity of the performers established, allowing the photo to keep its place as sacred national icon. In fact, the first flag was seen as having acquired such totem power from the emotional effect it had on Marines and seamen on and around Iwo Jima that two top military commanders wanted to have it as a souvenir: Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, and Lieutenant Colonel Chandler Johnson, who ended up being the one who sent the larger replacement flag and secured the first for himself.[92]

Marvin and Ingle's work sheds light on two more aspects of the photo's power, both its darker and its lighter, more popular, aspect. The darker element refers to the potency that is ascribed to the borders of a nation, the place where the sacrificing military class is sent in order to "touch death" and in principle to die.[93] Marvin and Ingle explain that "borders are thresholds of contagious magic separating zones of purity and impurity, order and chaos . . . Touching both what the group is and isn't, borders are perilous zones of transformation, shifting and unstable." "Transformative violence," they assert, "creates definitive borders."[94] Iwo Jima was the ultimate border for America in 1945. On the dividing line between American civilization and what was perceived as Japanese savagery and subhumanity, Iwo Jima was a dangerous place symbolically as well as literally. The name itself translated into "Sulfur Island," evoking a kind of demonic space of pollution and death. Every account of the landing that I have read emphasizes the treacherously soft and unstable sand made of volcanic ash.[95] It is no coincidence that the film referring to the flag-raising would end up called "*Sands* of Iwo Jima" (my emphasis). In fact, it began with this title, as the producer Edward Grainger got the idea from a headline and decided to write a narrative film to go with it.[96] It so happened that most contemporary news accounts and later narratives of the invasion all dwelled on the sand as soft, black, and lethal, unsuitable for gaining a foothold, digging a foxhole, or giving enough

traction to amphibious vehicles to attain the beach. In light of this terrifying instability, the flag-raising signified more than the capture of high ground on the island—it signified the establishment of a definite and solid border, a ritual event of the highest order, especially when achieved at the cost of blood sacrifice. Again, contemporary accounts tend to highlight the fact that the sands of Iwo Jima were now soaked with American blood, an image of tremendous rhetorical and nationalist power, implying the transformation of the island into American territory.[97]

The lighter aspect of the flag-raising and specifically its photograph pertains to the fact that there is a popular side to flags and flag-waving. According to Marvin and Ingle, flag-waving is the sign of borders in transition and flags waved by members of the civilian population perform an important function during these moments.[98] Flags are waved when soldiers are leaving the community, transforming them into outsiders, and flags are waved to welcome them home and purify them, ritually cleansing them of death. Popular flags are very different from the official totemic flags used in ceremonies (made in the United States only by special traditional, often family-owned businesses), which are not "waved" so much as reverentially and ritualistically displayed. While totemic flags are characterized by the distance and strict protocol in their handling, popular flags (such as those used as banners and decorations) are characterized by intimacy and closeness, with people seeking in fact to touch them and have direct bodily contact with them. They place them as lapels on their chest, over the heart, and they put them on clothing or on objects they can have at home.

Rosenthal's photograph seemed to have functioned something like a hybrid of both, or as a conduit between the two kinds of flags. Although it depicted a totemic flag and evoked the aura of death, it was itself an object of mass reproduction, printed by the media, and then reproduced and sold by newspapers to hundreds of thousands of buyers, recontextualizing it as a popular rather than totemic icon. People cut it out of newspapers and framed it. The power of the flag was still there, but it represented the popular and positive magic of protection and good luck, rather than the deadly force of totemic magic.

The need to own a copy of the photo can be compared to the revival of the mystical body during World War I, as represented by the Unknown Soldier monument, a ritual object that was also characterized by people's need to touch and physically approach it.[99] Similarly, the anonymity of the soldiers in the photo could be compared to the anonymity of the Unknown Soldier as modern national relic and symbol, an anonymity that made him all the more powerfully emblematic of any and all sacrificed and, therefore, sacred soldier's bodies. Of course, the three surviving soldiers from Iwo Jima did not remain anonymous for long, as we were reminded by Clint Eastwood's film, *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006).

In fact, the way that John Bradley, Rene Gagnon, and Ira Hayes were pulled off Iwo Jima to participate in the 7th War Bond tour was itself an instance of the American public wanting to be physically close to the photograph and the men in it. They were endlessly feted and photographed and made to recreate the flag-raising in a number of hugely popular public events that Peter Gardella calls "a series of revival meetings in American civil religion."[100] The first event was a fifty-five-foot replica of the scene in Rosenthal's photo erected in the heart of commercial and popular America, Times Square in New York City.[101] A few days before the real tour began, however, a recreation was staged on Capitol Hill, using the real second flag and performed to the sound of the National Anthem.[102] One could imagine that this ceremony represented a transition from the very serious and sacred space of the war to the carnivalesque and profane space of Times Square and the many stadiums and public arenas where the rallies would be held. In a capitalist society like

Figure 1.2   Postage Stamp Honoring Joe Rosenthal's Photograph Depicting Six Marines Raise the Flag of the United States on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima, 1945. This Stamp Aroused Considerable Controversy because It Was Going to Lead to the Licking the Back of an Image That Many People Found Sacred. (Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images.)

America, the photo proved to have the greatest power of all: that of raising unprecedented amounts of money. The bond drive had set itself a goal of $14 billion, higher than any previous bond drive, and in two months it had raised nearly double, an unheard-of $26 billion.[103]

An example of how the photograph occupied an imperfectly defined space between the totemic and the popular was the controversy that arose about the hugely successful stamp version that would be sold from 1945 to 1948. As soon as such a plan was made public concerns were raised that it would violate flag taboos in some way, especially in the prospect of people licking the stamp and running them through cancelling machines. The National Flag Code committee declared the Iwo Jima stamp an affront to American civil law. "Heaven forbid the placing of the Iwo picture on any U.S. stamp," wrote the chairman of the committee to the President, invoking the highest religious authority to protect its terrestrial emblem. The idea of the flag being "licked behind its back" constituted a pollution (and sounded deviant in all kinds of ways): "the very contamination the Huns and Japs set their hearts upon doing," implying that licking the stamp would undermine the very social order that the flag represented.[104] However, more liberal views prevailed and the stamps sold a record three million examples on the first day of sales. Apparently, people appreciated the opportunity to lick the stamps, symbolically ingesting their flag magic, or at least to own them, so much so that more than 137 million stamps were sold before they went out of circulation.

THE JOHN WAYNE FILM

We saw from the preceding paragraphs that Rosenthal's photograph became a powerful cultural icon that had elements of the sacred—located mainly in the flag it included—but was also very popular and seemingly accessible. After having been used to sell war bonds and commemorative stamps, as well as many other objects, including plates, posters, cushions, key rings, coffee mugs, belt buckles, and wrist watches, it had effectively entered the realm of popular culture.[105] However, nothing really exists in American until a movie version of it has been made, so it was not very long before Hollywood decided to spin its own kind of magic around the film in the hopes that its money-generating powers would rub off. As mentioned before, the producer Edmund Grainger at Republic Studies got the title from a newspaper article and wrote a forty-page story about a tough drill instructor and the men he leads onto Tarawa and finally Iwo Jima.[106]

Like the bond rallies, the film's purpose was also to sell something to the American public—this time, it was the Marines themselves. As the Marine Corps was the only service to emerge from the war without a memorable

high-caliber film in its name, its high command worried that its days were numbered in the re-organization and reduction of military resources after the war. The joint venture between the small Republic Studios and the Marine Corps produced a film that turned out to be extremely profitable for both. Although the Marines gave the studio their full cooperation, they also allowed the studio a fair amount of freedom regarding the script.

The result is a film that permits itself to sound some downbeat notes from time to time in the service of realism while making sure that the frame narrative is unmistakably pro-Marine (more so than pro-war itself). A tone of resigned fatalism, typical of the films of the end of WWII, prevails in this film more than explicit glorification of warfare, but the end result was a film that became the single most powerful recruiting vehicle of all time. Lawrence H. Suid reports Marine recruiters telling him in the mid-1990s that enlistment went up whenever the film was revived, and cites director Delbert Mann asking Marine recruits working as extras on the film *The Outsider* (1962) at Camp Pendleton why they enlisted and being told by nearly half that it was because of John Wayne war films they had seen.[107]

Similarly, Garry Wills cites a midshipman at the Navy Academy in Annapolis telling him that he plays the film almost every Sunday to a roomful of classmates and gets choked up every time.[108] Men as divergent in their politics as Newt Gingrich and Ron Kovic have called it the "formative film" of their life.[109] In a featurette accompanying the DVD version of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), Steven Spielberg cites *Sands of Iwo Jima* as a key influence on his childhood image of World War II.[110] Film critics have also credited the film with tremendous impact, regenerating the war film genre after it had sputtered out in the years after the war and bringing a new realism to the war movie.[111]

It is often its realism (including its use of newsreel and documentary footage) that is invoked to explain the film's enduring emotional impact, along with John Wayne's charisma.[112] I will suggest, however, that the film's realism—or appearance of realism—is only half the story; its reliance on the pathos of melodrama is the other half. Furthermore, I will argue that John Wayne did not make the film successful but rather that it was the film that made his career by associating a moderately successful actor known mostly for his work in westerns with the powerful magic of the flag-raising in combination with the emotional power of what I call *paternal melodrama*, a narrative using melodramatic devices to probe and plumb the pain of strained father-son relationships in the postwar era.

In short, despite its inclusion of irony and the darker sides of war, or maybe *because* of its acknowledgement of these aspects, *Sands of Iwo Jima* is one of the most re-enchanting war films ever made. Its grimness only adds to its seeming realism, while its realism is entirely in the service of its

Figure 1.3 *Sands of Iwo Jima*, **Poster, with John Wayne and Adele Nara, 1949.** This is the Film That Launched John Wayne's Career as Marine Hero even though He Never Did Any Military Service. (Photo by LMPC via Getty Images.)

melodramatic narrative of suffering and misrecognition finally rewarded. This formula, itself already quite powerful, is married in the film to another potent cultural topos—that of military self-sacrifice. The result was a film that both saved the Marine Corps and catapulted Wayne to a superstardom unparalleled in Hollywood history.[113]

It is one of the many ironies of Hollywood myth-making that the man who came to represent the heroism of World War II combat, at least in the eyes of the generation who grew up in the 1950s (and who were born after that war was over), never served in the armed forces. In an interview on the DVD edition of *Sands of Iwo Jima*, Wayne's son Michael claims that Wayne tried to enlist in the war but was refused on the grounds of his age and number of dependents.[114] This fabrication is a symptom of how embarrassing Wayne's non-participation in the war became in light of his legendary militarism. According to biographer Garry Wills, Wayne actively avoided enlistment in order to pursue his acting career, fearing that an interruption would permanently derail it.[115] He had worked small parts throughout the 1930s and was on the verge of a break when America joined the war in 1941. Moreover,

many actors older than Wayne (who was only thirty-four in 1941) enlisted, as did men with more children.[116] Wayne also told reporters over the years that Republic Studios would sue him if he broke contract, something that no studio did or would consider doing during that period of heady patriotism. In fact, records show that Wayne had his studio ask for a series of deferments, a fact that strained his relations with his mentor John Ford and other men of his generation who enlisted.[117] By the time Wayne's pro-Vietnam War film, *The Green Berets*, was made in 1968, a generation of soldiers had grown up never knowing that John Wayne's enthusiasm for violent solutions was not based on any personal experience of risk.[118] If there is one stock device of Vietnam literature, it's the demystification of the John Wayne myth. Yet there is no greater testimony to the enduring influence of the myth than the fact that this moment of demystification is repeated over and over again, seemingly to no effect.

Many film critics and scholars have tried to explain the John Wayne phenomenon, that is, his improbable and lasting influence over the cultural imagination during the entire Cold War era and beyond.[119] The issue is generally posed in semiotic terms: what does John Wayne signify? The answer is often located in his association with stoicism and toughness. The positive side of the Wayne persona represents courage and self-sacrifice, while the dark side represents a preference for violence over other solutions. Wayne's appeal is also obviously linked to his screen embodiment of a masculinity that was perceived in the postwar period as an antidote to the emasculation men feared from consumer society, white-collar work, and domineering mothers.[120]

I want to propose that beyond what he "means," Wayne's appeal is also intensely emotional, the product of melodramatic devices such as silent suffering, his association with the Iwo Jima flag-raising, and rooted in his compelling portrayal of problematic father-figures. Garry Wills dates the emergence of this paternal dimension of the Wayne persona to the inter-generational drama *Red River* (1948), made one year before *Sands of Iwo Jima*.[121] At forty-two years, Wayne plays a man of sixty. His character spends half the film determined to kill his adoptive son, now a grown man (Montgomery Clift), during a difficult cattle drive. The climax has him relenting at the last minute and acknowledging his paternal love for the boy. In spite of this happy ending, the "John Wayne" that Howard Hawks invented in this film was remembered for his "indomitable will" and mature and powerful masculinity.[122] More to the point, the John Wayne that Hawks invented was first and foremost a paternal figure.[123] In fact, according to Michael Anderegg in *Inventing Vietnam* (1991), the role that John Wayne came to represent most forcefully is that of "America's father."[124]

This paternal dimension of Wayne's image is something that genuinely distinguished him from other heroes associated with the war, especially Audie Murphy, who was Wayne's only real rival for WWII cinema glory.

Murphy may have been the real war hero, a combat veteran who held off 200 Germans single-handedly and then came home and played himself in a movie about his exploits, but his great charm lay in his boyish face and youthful demeanor. Murphy's drama in *To Hell and Back*, the book (1949) and the movie (1955), is to lose his buddies, not his sons or subordinates.[125] In the film, for example, he assumes leadership roles very reluctantly and is never a father-figure to his fellow soldiers. In contrast, Wayne was playing fatherly and authoritative roles from very early on. Gary Wills argues that Wayne's big body and the grace with which he controlled it helped give him an authoritative manner.[126] One could also argue that it was Wayne's measured way of speaking that lent him an air of paternal authority. Whatever the reason, he was playing fatherly figures long before he was old enough to plausibly be a father to grown men (as early as the 1942 war drama *Flying Tigers* and the 1944 *The Flying Seabees*[127]).

These paternal dynamics are made very explicit in *Sands of Iwo Jima* from the start. We learn early on that Sgt. John M. Stryker (John Wayne) is the absent father of a ten-year-old boy who never writes him and whose mother had left Stryker five years earlier. This is the trauma that has turned him into what we might now call a high-functioning alcoholic. Wayne mourns this loss (or rather, fails to mourn it) by drinking himself into a stupor at every mail-call when a letter from the boy does not arrive. In this way, Stryker's biological fatherhood is fore-grounded as the main psychological issue of his character, a point that is driven home in the scene that shows him being "cured" of his grief (and alcoholism) by a prostitute who happens to have the same name as his wife. Having accompanied her home, he discovers a baby in the adjoining room. When he begins to mix powdered food for the infant, the scene establishes that Stryker "knows about babies." The woman (played by Julie Bishop), who represents all the women left behind by the war to fend for themselves, tells Stryker that "there are a lot tougher ways to make a living than going to war," alluding to her own condition as prostitute and single mother. This insight apparently cures Wayne of self-pity and he leaves Mary's apartment a new man after throwing a billfold with his pay into the baby's crib. Having realized that absent fathers (such as himself) can drive women to prostitution, Wayne is "cured" of his alcoholism and prompted to write the letter to his son that his men discover when he is shot at the end. I will return to this letter in a moment.

Second, and most importantly, Stryker is a father-figure to his men. He occupies what Linda Williams calls the "primary psychic role" of the symbolic father to his squad in general, and to two men in particular, both of whom are his agonists from the start: Thomas (a former boxing rival, played by Forrest Tucker) and Pete Conway (John Agar), the son of Stryker's own recently deceased (and much loved, by Stryker at least) commanding officer. The drama of the film will revolve around these primary relationships, and

specifically the way that Wayne is a hard and even brutal father who represents both violence and the law (or more precisely, violence in the service of maintaining the law). As his name suggests, he does not hesitate to strike his men (knocking one out during training, and beating up another as a punishment for neglect of his duties). As Conway bitterly describes him, Stryker is a "hard product of a hard school." The higher purpose for which he is so hard on his recruits is in order to train them. In the film, he is fully fused with his role as drill instructor and as representative to the point of caricature of the Marine Corps ethos. At one point, Thomas suggests that Stryker probably has the Marine Corps Manual "tattooed on his chest," implying a total merging of the man and the institution, an image that is reinforced by the superposition of Wayne's face on the training exercises in an early scene—making visually clear that Stryker *is* the face of the Marine Corps.

The paternal dynamics are further heightened by the fact that Stryker tries to put Conway in the role of his own son, out of affection for Conway's dead father who was his own mentor. Conway is resentful of Stryker's authoritarianism and sees it as a product of his own father's overly strict teachings; thus, while Stryker technically is a brother figure to Conway, both of them tacitly agree to see their relationship as a father-son dynamic. The ensuing friction between Conway and Stryker fuels the drama throughout the film, painfully stoked by Conway's sense of having disappointed his father, and Stryker's own pain at having failed his biological son. In short, just like maternal melodrama (a genre that has been much written about in film criticism), which is all about the painful loss of a child or a mother, the paternal melodrama in *Sands of Iwo Jima* revolves around painful loss and mutual misunderstanding between fathers and sons, both biological and symbolic.

Many scholars from different disciplines have documented the strained relationship between fathers and sons of the postwar generation.[128] Susan Faludi points out that the men who fought World War II often found themselves unsatisfied in the postwar economy, performing white-collar work divested of true civic value or laboring at blue-collar jobs that they did not wish to pass on to their sons.[129] The result was a constant low-grade frustration and resentment at their loss of cultural status and meaningful work. Moreover, this generation, which had come of age during the Depression and wartime, often carried ideas about the socialization of boys that privileged instilling toughness at any cost. It is important also to remember that the late 1940s and 1950s were characterized by a pervasive cultural anxiety about American men becoming "soft" and a dread that boys were being coddled by their mothers.[130] Parents worried that their sons might turn out to be "sissies" or even homosexual. The conventional wisdom was that fathers needed to make their sons into men and one way to do this was by disciplining and shaming them into becoming tougher.[131]

The result of all these factors was the silence and occasional brutality of an entire generation of men who grew up during the war and afterward, and who were unwilling or unable to give the engaged affection their children needed.[132] Although emotionally remote fathers in our highly sex-segregated society were not new (though the Depression and war may have exaggerated such tendencies), there were new expectations for this postwar generation, as the character Conway suggests. In a telling scene, after learning that Conway's wife has had a baby, Stryker tells him "just wait until he's 10 and doesn't write—you'll be mad enough to put welts on him," and Conway vehemently rejects Stryker's prediction by saying, "no, I won't, because he won't need to write, because I'll be where he is . . . and I won't insist that he be tough, but I'll try to make him intelligent, and I won't make him read the Marine Corps Manual—instead I'll get him a set of Shakespeare . . . In short, I'll make sure he's cultivated . . . and a gentleman." In *Fatherhood in America*, Robert Griswold documents the way experts and the media extolled the importance of non-authoritarian fathering in the 1950s, whereas Susan Faludi's research for *Stiffed* suggests how little difference this advice made in real families, where fathers continued to be emotionally distant and/or overtly critical of their baby-boomer sons.[133] Perhaps it is the fact that this gap between the ideal and the real was so starkly visible for the first time that made their relationship with their fathers so intensely disappointing to many men who grew up in the postwar period. In this context, Garry Wills suggests, the appeal of Wayne's persona must be understood in terms of the way it justifies and humanizes the stern or absent father into a loving and proud parent who simply does not know how to express what he really feels. "If the Army toughens men only to make them survive," Wills reasons, then, according to this logic, "to be affectless is to show the highest affection."[134]

The film probes this painful relationship and finally redeems and justifies Stryker's brutal parenting style by revealing that he loves his men and only wants to protect them. Although he is a strict and severe teacher, he turns out to be so because he *cares*. He insists that his strictness regarding military discipline is necessary in order to save their lives during combat and the film proves him right in several key scenes (one when Thomas' long coffee break causes two men to be injured or killed, another when Stryker saves a distracted Conway's life during training). Stryker's emotional attachment to his men is dramatically demonstrated during one particularly wrenching scene that comes halfway through the film, after he and his men have landed on Tarawa and are dug into trenches for the night. Not wanting to betray their under-manned position to the Japanese, Stryker refuses to leave the trench to save a wounded soldier who calls his name all night long.[135] He also forbids, at gunpoint, Conway from going to save him. The scene is given further

Figure 1.4   Stryker (John Wayne) as He Listens to One of His Injured Men Calling for Help Just Outside His Trench. Conway (John Agar) Has Just Accused Stryker of Not Being "Human" but the Audience is Shown That Stryker Is Deeply Upset, with What Seems to be a Tear on His Check, Making this a Classic Scene of Melodramatic Misrecognition and Inviting Pity for the Suffering Hero. Screenshot by Author. *Sands of Iwo Jima*, 1949.

pathos by the fact that the wounded soldier is Stryker's only real friend, Charlie Bass (James Brown).

Conway angrily accuses Stryker of not being "human," but the film strategically uses this scene to prove just the contrary. What Conway cannot see, but the film audience is shown in close-up, is Stryker's anguished face, as he listens to the man's pleas, glistening with tears as well as sweat (see Figure 1.4). His eyes are hidden by the shadow of his helmet, but a triangular wet spot just under his left eye reveals what his expression generally suggests: he's in agony. Drawing on one of the oldest devices of melodrama, that of virtue being recognized by its suffering, the film makes sure that audiences know not only that Stryker is human, but that he is *good* (because he has strong feelings underneath the hard and stoic exterior). The scene is drawn out and extremely effective in a classically melodramatic way because we see Stryker's pain while realizing that no one else can, reinforcing our identification and sympathy with him. We also saw Stryker receive the command to not give away their position under any circumstances in an earlier scene and so have another reason to recognize the rightness of Stryker's decision while no one else in the world of the film does.

Stryker's methods are further vindicated by the film as Bass survives the night and is back in service a few weeks later, apparently with no memory of the long night when he called for help. Although Stryker's men all come to accept his strictness as necessary and right (and the two men who most

resisted his paternal authority, Conway and Thomas, become his greatest admirers at the end), the film positions the audience to know and sympathize with Stryker much earlier than the other characters in the film by revealing his feelings (and hence, vulnerability) in this key scene. Revealing their virtue through suffering is, as mentioned before, the principal device by which melodrama channels sympathy to its victim-heroes. This sympathy is amplified by the fact that the other characters in the world of the melodrama fail to recognize the hero's virtue. In fact, they will often completely *misrecognize* the moral nature of the main character, initially regarding him as vicious or villainous instead. This is Stryker's situation throughout most of the film, as most of his men reject and resent him. When the prostitute Mary tells him he is a "good man," joining the audience's position of privileged insight into Stryker's character, he replies, "you could get odds on that in the Marine Corps," referring to his bad reputation among his men.

The emotional choreography of the film comes to a climax in a final scene of public recognition of Stryker's true nature. Linda Williams writes of eighteenth-century stage melodrama that the "melodramatic denouement is typically some version of . . . public or private recognition of virtue prolonged in a frozen tableau."[136] If the key scene of misrecognition in *Sands of Iwo Jima* is the scene of high pathos when Conway questions Stryker's humanity on Tarawa, the key scene of *recognition* is the long drawn–out reading of Stryker's letter to his son by his men which reveals his humanity once and for all after he is shot by a sniper on the summit of Suribachi. Stryker's death is unexpected and ironic—occurring after the battle, as he lights up a cigarette—and has struck many critics as particularly disturbing for seeming so accidental. Yet it is the last of a series of deaths of familiar characters, and thus in keeping with combat film convention, which always saves the most important death for last. Nevertheless, it does call for ideological and emotional containment—and this is where the work of melodrama and pathos comes in. This scene—a modern film version of the frozen tableau—literally stops the action for nearly ten minutes, as Thomas, the first of Stryker's rebellious sons to have reconciled with him, reads the letter aloud (see Figure 1.5):

Dear Son,

I guess none of my letters have reached you, but I thought I'd better try again because I have the feeling this may be the last time I can write you. For a long time, I've wanted to tell you many things . . . Never hurt [your mother] or anyone as I did. Always do what your heart tells you is right. Maybe someone will write you someday and tell you about me. I want you to be like me in some ways, but not like me in others because when you grow older and get to know more about me, you'll see that I've been a failure in many ways. This isn't what I wanted. Things just turned out that way. If there was only more time, I'd.

AQ: Please note that leading and ending ellipses in a quote were deleted per style. Please confirm whether this is OK.

Figure 1.5   One of Stryker's Symbolic Sons, Thomas (Forrest Tucker), Reading His Unfinished Letter to His Biological Son, Just after Stryker is Shot by a Sniper. The Film's Action Stops for Several Long Minutes of Pure Pathos in a Classic Melodramatic Tableau. Screenshot by Author. *Sands of Iwo Jima,* 1949.

The letter stops abruptly just as Wayne begins to imagine what he might do if "there was only more time." The melodramatic device of the "too late" temporality evoked by the end of the letter effectively creates a piercing sense of injustice at Stryker's loss (of life and of time).

Even more important to the emotional impact of the scene is that fact that Stryker admits that he has failed in his personal life. This admission, coming from the arrogant and self-righteous Stryker, is a moving self-insight that fully redeems and humanizes him. If he had been only tough, he probably would not have been able to excite the intense emotions in audiences that he did. It is the combination of an authoritarian and emotionally stunted exterior with evidence of a more vulnerable and deeply feeling interior that makes Wayne such a seductive male icon and specifically father-figure, as Garry Wills has argued. Stryker's endorsement of always doing "what your heart tells you in right" as well as his vocabulary of "hurt" and "feeling" are an explicit admission of a kind of conversion—from military values to the domestic and affective values of melodrama. The result is intensely emotional and the film lingers on this pathos, milking it for every drop of melodramatic power through a series of close-ups of the stricken faces of the men listening to the letter.

Just as the film opens the wound of the fractured father-son bond and pours the balm of cinematic wish-fulfilment on it in the form of Stryker's moving letter, the film also hastens to redeem Stryker's apparently pointless and unglorious death in other ways. The conventions of melodrama are deployed

in order to give Stryker's death a redemptive agency: the power to make his men rededicate themselves to the cause of the Marines and the war. If Stryker was secretly converted to the wisdom of the heart, his death seals the conversion of his symbolic son Conway to Stryker's own military values. At the beginning of the film, Conway had announced that he had joined the Marines strictly out of family tradition but that he remained a civilian at heart.

The letter-writing scene reveals that Conway has now come to fully identify with Stryker. This is indicated first of all by his taking the unfinished letter and saying that *he* will finish it, as if he can now speak in Stryker's own voice. Second, to prove that Stryker's spirit and voice have passed to him in dying, Conway mobilizes the remaining men with Stryker's signature expression: "Saddle up!" The mantle of Stryker's military values has successfully passed from symbolic father to symbolic son, and Conway exhorts his men "let's get back in the war!" In this way, the troubled father-son dynamics staged by the film overlap neatly with the melodramatic imperative to recognize misrecognized virtue and to redeem what seems like a senseless death by giving it the agency to convert and move other characters to finish the mission of the fallen hero.

Finally, the most important and powerful cultural and emotional work of the film is done at this moment by linking the melodramatic plot with the military history frame. Into the void created by Stryker's shockingly sudden disappearance from the narrative, the film interjects the symbolically freighted image of Rosenthal's photo (signifying the Marines, the military in general, and above all, American victory). Just after the letter has been read, the soldiers look up and see (from an implausible angle made to reproduce the photo rather than their position on the hill) the flag being raised at exactly the moment and angle recognizable in the Pulitzer-Prize winning photo. A drum-roll is heard on the sound-track, suggesting that the diegetic space of the film's narrative is ceding to the extra-diegetic and symbolic space of myth. The men's faces—now full of pride instead of sorrow—are again shown in close-up. The Marine Hymn begins to play softly in the background, gathering volume as it gradually takes over the sound-track.

The unabashed artifice of the scene (the impossible angle, the drum-roll, and the Marine Corps hymn) reveals its compensatory and ideological function. Like religion, ideology does not rely on verisimilitude so much as emotional effectiveness. Stryker's death is redeemed from absurdity and pointlessness by being inserted into the quasi-religious symbolic order represented by the national flag. Through it, the soldiers, who had begun to make cynical remarks as they landed on Iwo Jima, are filled with a new determination to fight and finish the war. The image of the flag-raising comes at precisely the moment when the soldiers are the most grief-stricken and visually channels this open-ended grief into a concrete solution: continuing the war.

The power of this scene is a result of the merging one of the most emotion-ally charged issues in postwar family life (father-son conflict) with one of the most powerful images of military victory to emerge from WWII.

Although I have stressed the artifice of this last scene, it should be noted that the overall intention is quite the contrary—it is to suggest documentary-style realism. This is a strategy pursued by the film from the beginning with the constant interweaving of newsreel footage. There are extensive scenes of documentary footage from Tarawa, of navy transport vessels, warship and fighter jets. The landing on Iwo Jima is interspersed with long scenes of footage that would have been familiar to many viewers from the 1945 docu-mentary, *To the Shores of Iwo Jima*.[137] Not only are many scenes taken from this short film, but elements of the voice-off narration are recycled into the dialogue of characters as they arrive on the island.[138] Newsreel footage is even woven into the fictional narrative of the film after the Iwo Jima landing, such as when a character leads a tank (which we see on newsreel-quality footage) back to Stryker's position in order to burn out a Japanese machine gun posi-tion. The transition is almost seamless and visible only from the grainier stock of the newsreel images. The most important use of realism, however, is in the film's hiring of the three surviving flag raisers (Bradley, Gagnon, and Hayes) as well as an officer from the first flag-raising (Lt. Harold Schrier) and using them to recreate the flag raising with the real (second) flag. Schrier, playing himself, gives Stryker the flag, who then calls over the real men who raised it and orders them to find a flagpole and put it up.

This seemingly faithful recreation of the original flag raising serves several purposes at once. First of all, it is meant to give the film added authority and marketing power, on the assumption that it tells some kind of truth of the Iwo Jima battle. This kind of realism is a standard marketing tactic of all war films. Second, realism is an essential element of melodrama, as Linda Williams has argued. Most people associate melodrama with nineteenth-century texts whose rhetorical devices are so out-of-date that they are clearly visible as melodramatic devices. But contemporary melodrama, when it is successful, is rarely recognized as melodrama and so its devices remain invis-ible. In fact, melodrama requires realism in order to work at all, because part of its work of organizing sympathy for a virtuous victim is to break down barriers between characters and spectators through its moments of pathos and heightened feeling. When melodrama works correctly, spectators are too much *in* the story to realize that the narrative is as artificial as any other fictional narrative.

The fact that realism serves *Sands of Iwo Jima's* melodramatic purpose at this precise moment is clear from the many memoir accounts of this scene by Vietnam veterans, such as Ron Kovic, who describes weeping at this scene: "And then they showed the men raising the flag on Iwo Jima with the

marines' hymn still playing, and Castiglia and I cried in our seats . . . I loved the song so much, and every time I heard it I would think of John Wayne and the brave men who raised the flag . . . I would think of them and cry."[139] One of the interesting things about Kovic's memory of the film is the way the music, the historical flag-raising, and John Wayne the actor become fused into a single highly emotional event.

The irony of this apparent realism—reinforced by the use of the real flag-raisers—is that in fact the film depicts a highly romanticized version of the flag-raising, the kind that journalists were inventing in the days following the flag-raising in 1945. First it depicts the journey up the volcano as a constant battle facing fierce resistance all the way. Three other squad members die on this last push to the top of the summit. Second, it combines the first and second flag-raising, implying there was only one and that is the one on the Rosenthal photo. In short, to quote a line from a later Wayne film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "when the legend becomes fact, print the legend!"—and *Sands of Iwo Jima* clearly opted for the legend rather than the facts.[140] This too is a characteristic feature of melodrama, which Williams describes as possessing a utopian dimension. In the tension between how life is, and how it should be, melodrama will always privilege a moment of utopian wish-fulfilment, and that is exactly what this final scene of letter reading and flag raising performs, the emotional energy of each magnifying the effect of the other.

The self-conscious and clearly flagged use of documentary footage serves one other purpose as well, intended or not, which is that of heightening the film's *ritual effectiveness*. To the extent that the Iwo Jima flag-raising had been recreated so often in American public culture by this time that it was literally a national ritual as well as symbolically one in the sense I described it in the previous section, the flag-raising recreation had itself become a sacred icon of national self-affirmation. As many contemporary anthropologists and sociologists agree, the news media have a legitimating function linked to their alleged objectivity which makes them effective transmitters of civil and secular rituals. The clearly marked realism of the flag-raising—real flag, real flag-raisers—would thus heighten its ritual power. The film's connecting of this scene to Stryker's death would heighten it further by revealing a glimpse of something that remains absolutely tacit in the photo itself—its context of mass death. The film brings death back into the frame, as it were, though clean and neat. Stryker's body is not a violated and wounded body provoking horror—instead, his wound is small and almost bloodless. The horror comes from his lack of movement, his lack of vitality, which the film visually and metonymically presents as transferred to the American flag.

Stryker's physical connection to the flag is made explicit in the film by the fact that he touches it just before dying. Marvin and Ingle argue in their

analysis of the film that it is *because* he touches the totem that he must die. They also point out that Stryker signals his status as perfect and willing sacrifice in the moments before his death by stating that he never felt better in his life. His men confirm his willingness to die by saying, "Well, if he had to get it, that's the way he'd want it," "it" being the unmentionable secret of death at the hands of the group.[141] Even if we do not accept the logic of this argument in its entirety (and I am not insisting that we must in order to account for the emotional and ideological work of the film), it is clear that the film forges a connection among John Wayne, the flag, and self-sacrificial death. The unprecedented merging of Wayne's public persona with the character of Stryker testifies to the strange alchemy of this scene. As film historian Lawrence H. Suid puts it, "Wayne *became* Stryker."[142] When Wayne cast his footprints outside Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood a few months later the cement was supposedly mixed with "black sand from Iwo Jima."[143]

The fact that he dies so poignantly here but returns in film after film gives a new dimension to the military conceit of regeneration through sacrifice. The role that Wayne played in this film would be repeated in many films in the years that followed.[144] In fact, Wayne played roles modeled on his Stryker character so often that some of the Vietnam veterans who describe being inspired by Wayne's part in *Sands of Iwo Jima* forgot that his character dies in that film. For example, in *A Rumor of War* (1977), Philip Caputo imagines himself coming back from war "like John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima* . . . a sun-tanned warrior with medals on my chest."[145] Not only does Wayne not come back, but the black and white format of the film makes it hard to imagine Wayne with a suntan. The fact that Caputo misremembers it as a film of Technicolor victory is symptomatic of how *Sands of Iwo Jima* was often marketed in terms of what Thomas Doherty describes as "all upbeat glorification."[146]

Nonetheless, the film does have its somber moments and the last image of the film is certainly one of them: the soldiers walk away from the camera into a fog which envelops them completely. This ambiguous image is a fitting ending to this ambivalent film, which consistently underscores the horrors and cynical causes of war ("That's war, boy, tradin' real estate for men") while celebrating the endurance of the Marines who fought it. The film can afford to stage moments of grim anti-war realism because it was made in 1949 and could rely on the larger narrative of victory in which viewers would understand it. Ironically, by acknowledging the objections to war and the objections to Stryker, the film succeeds in containing them and effectively disarming them. As mentioned earlier, the film became the most effective propaganda tool the Marines ever made and immortalized the man killed off by the film itself.

Figure 1.6   U.S. Marine Corps Memorial Statue, by Felix W. de Weldon. This Was the Scene during the Dedication on November 10, 1954. The Bronze Behemoth is Located near Arlington Cemetery and Inscribed with a Caption Saying That It Was "Inspired By The Immortal Photograph Taken By Joseph J. Rosenthal." (Bettman Collection, Getty Images.)

CODA: THE MARINE MEMORIAL

I began this chapter by presenting Robert Burrell's claim that inter-service rivalry was largely responsible for the debacle that the landing on Iwo Jima actually was, and so it is fitting that we come back to inter-service politics now. Although the photo of the flag-raising was initially received as an image of generic military heroism, the Marine Corps was anxious to make sure that it received full credit for it. As we have seen, *Sands of Iwo Jima* was made explicitly to promote the Marine Corps, and the large bronze statue that was created from the photo by Felix de Weldon sealed that identification. Although some people mistakenly call it the "Iwo Jima Memorial," the bronze behemoth at Arlington Cemetery is actually titled the "Marine Corps

Memorial" and lists major Marine Corps battles rather than the names of the Iwo Jima flag-raisers or photographer. According to legend, de Weldon began to sketch out his plans for a sculpture version of the flag-raising as soon as he saw the photo the very first time. A small first version of the sculpture was presented to Harry Truman in June 1945.[147] Nine years later, in 1954, the hundred-ton statue would be dedicated in the presence of the three remaining flag-raisers and the President of the United States, now Ike Eisenhower.

The statue may seem like a natural extension of the popular logic of the bond tours and commemorative stamps, but I would argue that it actually distances the image from the public rather than bringing it closer. The statue is larger than life, transforming the men into titans, each one thirty-two-feet high, and located in the totemic sacred space of Arlington Cemetery. Weighted down with state and institutional meaning, the statue is one of the few places in the United States where the American flag flies twenty-four hours a day, by an order from President Kennedy in 1961. All of these facts work against the melodramatic appeal of the original image, which showed men struggling in a ruined wasteland, and which portrayed them as virtuous victims rather than victorious giants. Melodrama operates through empathy and identification; in contrast, the huge sculpture places the figures on a pedestal, out of reach of ordinary identification and sympathy.

De Weldon's design also significantly changed the composition of the bodies, no longer horizontal so much as pyramid-shaped, pointing upward. In 1998, when the Air Force Memorial was looking for a location and a site near the Marine Memorial was proposed, J. Carter Brown, chairman of the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts, caused a minor scandal by calling the De Weldon sculpture "kitsch" and comparing it to "a great piece of Ivory Soap carved."[148] The sting of the insult was no doubt greater as Ivory Soap is associated with women, and so the remark appeared to attack the manhood of the Marine Corps as well as its taste. However, Carter's remark reveals something that cannot be denied, namely, that while the exaggerated grandeur of the sculpture does overtly invite ceremonial reverence, exaggerated reverence of this kind easily turns into ridicule. The sacrificed bodies are no longer made of flesh and blood, or sublime light and shadow, but of cold stiff metal. The result is an ambivalent monument that seems to be able to galvanize disenchantment and ridicule as easily as patriotism. Nevertheless, even when parodied, the image of the flag-raisers continues to signify a collective ethos that has been lost—the parody is never intended at the flag-raising itself but rather at the distance between its original context and some fallen present. In short, parodies of the flag-raising are inevitably jeremiads, as I will show in the next chapter.

To conclude, we have seen in this chapter how military death is transformed through ritual, melodramatic and the media into a national form of

the sacred. At Iwo Jima, mass death became the crucible which forged the sacred aura of the photograph that had been produced initially mainly as a morale booster. Just as the Rosenthal photograph became an emotionally charged symbol of the battle, Iwo Jima became a synecdoche for the entire war, an enormously costly collective effort that finally paid off in victory, a collective blood-letting sacrifice and ritual that has never been repeated or fully replaced in American history since 1945. Those ritual forces, linked to the fraught issue of masculinity and father-son relationships, as channeled and contained through melodrama, helped catapult John Wayne to stardom and iconicity and have enshrined the Iwo Jima flag-raising in the pantheon of American Civil Religion. The next two chapters follow the career of this nationally sacred image, through revisionist and parodic iterations and back.

NOTES

1. *The Outsider,* directed by Delbert Mann (1962; Universal City: Universal Studios, 2012), DVD; *Flags of Our Fathers,* directed by Clint Eastwood (2006; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2007), DVD.

2. For a definition of "flag magic," see Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation,* 9–40.

3. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

4. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination,* 15.

5. Ibid., 15.

6. Ibid., 16.

7. Ibid., 21.

8. Matthew Buckley has recently argued that Brooks' claims about melodrama emerging from the French Revolution are inaccurate, and that melodrama may have appeared at the same time (the 1790s roughly) but that this does not mean its *origins* lie in those events. He suggests that elements of stagecraft and drama writing that converged in melodrama had already existed across Europe for decades and were the result of many forces, including issues of commerce, technology, industry and the "spectacular arts." In other words, melodrama did not suddenly emerge from specific events but was the result of long-term changes and refinements in theatrical performances. Buckley also questions the notion, advanced by Brooks, that melodrama somehow replaced the "traditional Sacred" and offered a moral blueprint to audiences. Instead, Buckley claims that although morality is important in melodrama, its distinctive and defining feature is creating and channeling strong emotion. None of these historical claims fully undermines the significance of Brooks' overall theory of how melodrama works; they merely suggest that melodrama developed over the duration of the eighteenth century and that strong emotion was inseparable from the dynamics of moral disambiguation that are central to melodramatic narratives. See Matthew Buckley, "Unbinding Melodrama," *Melodrama Unbound: Across History,*

Media, and National Cultures, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 17–29.

9. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.

10. Williams, *Playing,* 29.

11. Ibid., 12.

12. Ibid., 17.

13. Linda Williams, "World and Time: Serial Television Melodrama in America," in *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 172.

14. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 65.

15. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 66, 67, 77.

16. Ibid., 30.

17. *Philadelphia,* directed by Jonathan Demme (1993: Culver City: Sony Pictures, 2002), DVD.

18. For an interesting discussion of the Christ story in relation to modern melodrama, see Richard Allen, "The Passion of Christ and the Melodramatic Imagination," in *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media and National Cultures*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 31–48.

19. See Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003).

20. Scholars that propose some variation of this thesis include George Mosse in *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism* (Hanover & London: Brandeis UP, 1993); Anthony W. Marx in *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Emilio Gentile in *Politics as Religion,* trans. George Staunton (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006).

21. Marx, *Faith in Nation*, 21.

22. Anderson, *Imagined*, 16.

23. Anderson, *Imagined,* 129.

24. Anthony D. Smith, "The Origins of Nations," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 125.

25. Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 48.

26. Renan, "What is a Nation?" 52.

27. Ibid.

28. Renan, "What is a Nation?" 53.

29. Ibid., 52.

30. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori in Medieval Political Thought," *The American Historical Review* 56.3 (April 1951), 487.

31. Peter W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry,* updated edition (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2003), 29.

32. See Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester

University Press, 2004); John Horne, *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gregory T. Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution: Pennsylvanians in Arms and the Forging of Early American Identity* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004); Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*; Kahn, *Sacred Violence,* 34–36.

33. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation*, 17.

34. Sarah Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 21.

35. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood,* 20.

36. Cheah, *Spectral Nationality,* 2.

37. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation,* 17.

38. Kantorowicz, "Pro Patria Mori," 324.

39. *Hell and Back Again,* directed by Danfung Dennis (2011; New York: Docurama, 2012), DVD.

40. Pahl Jon, *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Kelly Denton-Borhaug, *U.S. War-culture, Sacrifice and Salvation* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011); Claire Sisco King, *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2012).

41. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 4.

42. Ibid.*,* 250, 5.

43. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 10.

44. Robert Bellah, "God and King," in *The Robert Bellah Reader*, eds. Robert N. Bellah and Steven N. Tipton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 359.

45. Terence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997), 402–403.

46. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* tran. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1915, 1965), 247–250.

47. See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 2001); Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP), 2.

48. Roy A. Rappaport, *Religion and Ritual in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 107.

49. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains,* 48.

50. Ibid., 49.

51. Ibid.*,* 54.

52. Ibid.*,* 37.

53. Bell, *Ritual Theor*y, 183, 184.

54. Robert Bellah, "Durkheim and Ritual," in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim,* eds. Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 172.

55. Bellah, "Durkheim and Ritual," 172.

56. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination,* 48.

57. See recent research on the emotional effects of music, such as Nidhya Logesharan and Joydeep Battacharia, "Crossmodal Transfer of Emotion by Music," *Neuroscience Letters* 455 (2009): 129–133.

58. William H. McNeil, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1995), 1–11.

59. Todd Decker makes what seems on the surface a similar argument about the music of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*, arguing that "Music—in waltz (not march or swing) time—builds a sentimental bridge between old veterans . . . the young actors playing them, and the audience in living rooms." However, it turns out he means something slightly different, namely, that the musical score is the main connecting feature between the various episodes of the series and that the elegiac mood creates a commemorative emotionalism that is more conducive to empathy than the usual marches associated with militarism and earlier war films. By suggesting that these films promote a "reflection on the human cost of war" through their "gentle and reflective score," Decker grossly under-estimates the allure of such melodramatic musical accompaniment even as he observes, paradoxically, that the effect is to evoke a "lyrical, restrained, even beautiful masculinity." For me, in these clearly enchanting terms, all the elements are present for yet another recruitment film. See Todd Decker, "A Waltz with and for the Greatest Generation," in *American Militarism on the Small Screed,* eds. Anna Froula and Stacy Takacs (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 94–95, 106–107.

60. Burrell, Robert S., "Breaking the Cycle of Iwo Jima Mythology: A Strategic Study of Operation Detachment," *The Journal of Military History* 68 (October 2004): 1143–1186; Robert S. Burrell, *The Ghosts of Iwo Jima* (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 2006).

61. Bradley, *Flags,* 377. For examples of military websites using this statistic, see the Anderson Air Force Base page: https://www.andersen.af.mil/News/Article-Display /Article/415598/remembering-iwo-jima-and-its-importance-to-strategic-airpower/. Countless history books also use this figure, such as Sharon La Boda, *International Dictionary of Historic Places: Asia and Oceania,* eds. Paul E. Schellinger and Robert M. Salkin (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 382, which explicitly argues that the invasion of Iwo Jima "saved more American lives than it took" on the basis of this number.

62. Burrell, "Breaking the Cycle," 809.

63. Burrell, *Ghosts,* 83.

64. Burrell, "Breaking the Cycle," 1161.

65. Burrell, *Ghosts*, 4.

66. Burrell, "Breaking the Cycle," 1159.

67. Ibid., 89.

68. Ibid., 64.

69. Ibid., 96.

70. Ibid., 106.

71. Ibid., 107.

72. In the theory of war as collective self-sacrifice which functions as regenerative national ritual, it is important that soldiers appear as *willing* sacrifices, "giving"

their lives for the cause of the nation, according to Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 89–90.

73. These were Ira Hayes, Rene Gagnon and John Bradley, though in 2016 John Bradley's son discovered that his father had participated in the earlier flag-raising, not the photographed one. The Marines later confirmed that it was not Bradley but a Harold Schultz in the Rosenthal photo. Nevertheless, for seventy years it was believed to be Bradley and all the films made about the flag-raising assume it was him. In 2019, the Marines confirmed that Pfc. Rene Gagnon was not in the picture either, but Cpl. Harold "Pie" Keller. Corky Siemaszko, "Warrior in iconic flag-raising photo was misidentified, Marine Corps acknowledges," *NBC News* (Oct. 17, 2019), accessed July 18, 2020, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/warrior-iconic-iwo-jima-flag-raising-photo-was-misidentified-marines-n1064766.

74. Parker Bishop Albee, Jr. and Keller Cushing Freeman, *Shadow of Suribachi: Raising the Flags of Iwo Jima* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 41.

75. Bradley, *Flags,* 334.

76. In comparison, one could look at the news reports of the Normandy Invasion, which was over far sooner, and which initial reports described as taking place with "extremely little loss" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/june/6/newsid_3499000/3499352.stm).

77. The story tells of a Salem, Massachusetts-based brigantine captain giving his personal flag this nickname in the decades preceding the war, but the flag only becomes famous, and the nickname popular, during the Civil War, when the flag, which had been hidden by a Union sympathizer, is hoisted in Nashville in 1862. Arnaldo Testi, *Capture the Flag: The Stars and Stripes in American History* (New York and London: New York UP, 2010), 28.

78. Lance Bertelsen, "Icons on Iwo," *Journal of Popular Culture* 22.4 (Spring 1989), 88.

79. Bradley, *Flags,* 341.

80. Ibid., 327. The "aevum" time is discussed in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford, 1966, 2000), 73.

81. Bertelsen, "Icons on Iwo," 85.

82. Bertelsen, "Icons on Iwo," 93. A more recent account of the photo's iconic status, by Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, also offers a three-part reason, arguing that the photo "provides a coordinated visual transcription of three powerful discourses in American political history: egalitarianism, nationalism, and civic republicanism." "The successful overlay of these codes in a single image," they explain, "along with additional dynamics of visual appeal, foster strong emotional identification with the image as well as a history of referential slippage and strategic maneuver." This explanation completely elides the context of mass death, in my view, and fails to account for the true source of the photo's powerful affect. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 95.

83. Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed,* 100.

84. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 169.

85. When it was discovered that there had been two flag-raisings and that the second one had occurred mainly in order to raise a larger flag, the spontaneity and therefore the authenticity of the second flag-raising was put in question. The controversy was further fueled by Rosenthal's positive answer to a question about the photograph being posed, because at the time he hadn't seen the published version and believed it was another photograph. The entire controversy is treated in depth in Albee and Freeman, pp. 69–94.

86. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 42, 42, 43.

87. Testi, *Capture the Flag*, 6.

88. U.S. Code, "Respect for Flag," Title 4, Section 8, item j; accessed July 3, 2020. https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title4-section 8&num=0&edition=prelim.

89. Bradley, *Flags*, 307.

90. Albee and Freeman, *Shadow of Suribachi*, 41.

91. Albee and Freeman, *Shadow of Suribachi*, 40.

92. Ibid.*,* 47.

93. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 98–107.

94. Ibid., 100.

95. Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991), 32; Burrell, *Ghosts,* 61; Bradley, *Flags,* 236.

96. Lawrence Suid, *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 118.

97. In fact, it would remain under US control for the next 23 years, until 1968, a full generation later.

98. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 224.

99. Wittman, *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier,* 15.

100. Gardella, *American Civil Religion,* 270.

101. Albee and Freeman, *Shadow of Suribachi,* 108.

102. Ibid.*,* 109.

103. Gardella, *American Civil Religion,* 270.

104. Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima*, 92.

105. Ibid.*,* 214.

106. Suid, *Guts and Glory,* 118.

107. Ibid., 131, 123.

108. Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 149–150.

109. Newt Gingrich's enthusiasm for the film is mentioned by Wills *John Wayne's America*, 149, while Ron Kovic describes his adulation for Wayne's role in *Sands of Iwo Jima* in *Born on the Fourth of July* (Pocket Books, New York, 1976), 55.

110. *Saving Private Ryan,* dir. Stephen Spielberg (1998; Glendale: Dreamworks, 1999).

111. Thomas Schatz, "World War II and the 'War Film,'" in *Refiguring American Film Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 91.

112. See Lawrence H. Suid's discussion of the film-makers' efforts to make the film appear as "realistic" as possible, including the use of newsreel footage and

scripting the actual words used by field telephone operators on Tarawa. Suid, *Guts and Glory,* 121–122. "Charisma" is itself an interesting term, which originally meant possessing superhuman gifts which allowed the bearer to communicate with the gods and be a kind of conduit between the human and divine world. Weber broadened the term to refer to strictly terrestrial gifts of social influence and domination, but in a Durkheimian frame the ability to sway large groups of people would in effect be linked to the dynamics of the sacred and divine.

113. This is the dramatic rescue narrative Leonard Maltin presents on the featurette, "The Making of *Sands of Iwo Jima*," accompanying the 2000 DVD version made by Republic Entertainment. Military historian Lawrence H. Suid offers a more circumspect version of this story but essentially confirms it in *Guts and Glory,* 118.

114. Leonard Maltin (host), "The Making of *Sands of Iwo Jima*" (2000), featurette included on Artisan Entertainment DVD release of *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), dir. Allan Dwan (Republic Pictures).

115. Wills, *John Wayne's America,* 107–109.

116. According to Wills, Clark Gable was 41 when he entered the service, Tyrone Power 40, Henry Fonda and Robert Montgomery 37. Wills, *John Wayne's America,* 107.

117. Wills, *John Wayne's America,* 107.

118. *The Green Berets,* directed by John Wayne, Ray Kellogg and Mervyn LeRoy (1968; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2007), DVD.

119. Garry Wills begins his biography of Wayne by citing polls that show Wayne becoming increasingly popular during the 1990s. When pollsters asked Americans who was their favorite star in 1993, Wayne came in second. He was second again in 1994, but in 1995, a full sixteen years after his death, he topped the list. Wills, *John Wayne's America*, 11.

120. See Larry A. Van Meter, *John Wayne and Ideology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), for an analysis of Wayne's position as "*ubermensch* of American cinema" in the wake of "the trauma of war," 18–19. For a thorough discussion of 1950s anxieties about masculinity, see Kyle Cuordileone's excellent study, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

121. Wills, *John Wayne's America*, 156. *Red River*, directed by Howard Hawks (1948; Beverly Hills: MGM, 2006), DVD.

122. Wills, *John Wayne's America*, 139.

123. Lawrence Suid quotes a Hollywood screenwriter's description of a typical John Wayne admirer as a person who believes "that force is a great solver of problems . . . in America and believes in it simplistically . . . He enjoys the father image." Suid, *Guts and Glory,* 133.

124. Michael Anderegg, "Introduction," in *Inventing Vietnam*, ed. Michael Anderegg (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 30.

125. Audie Murphy, *To Hell and Back* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1949, 2002); *To Hell and Back,* directed by Jesse Hibbs (1955; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2004).

126. Wills, *John Wayne's America*, 18–23.

127. *Flying Tigers,* directed by David Miller (1942; Universal City: Universal Pictures Video, 2006), DVD.; *Flying Seabees*, directed by Edward Ludwig (1944; Chicago: Olive Films, 2013), DVD.

128. For example, a 1959 study noted that fathers were often absent from home, and that "fathers in general seemed to be perceived as punishing or controlling agents." Ruth E. Hartley, "Sex-Role Pressure in the Socialization of the Male Child, *Psychological Reports* (1959), reprinted in *Men and Masculinity*, eds. Joseph H. Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Inglewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), 8.

129. Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1999), 27–40. David Savran also argues that "bureaucratized at work and autocratic at home, both working- and middle-class men were often restive and disillusioned" in the postwar era. David Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 8.

130. Kyle Cuordileone discusses the "momism" panic and other symptoms of the fears about declining masculinity in the 1950s in *Manhood and American Political Culture*, 97–166. Elaine Tyler May also describes the pervasive fear of boys turning into "sissies" that characterized postwar parenting in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 146–149.

131. Clinical psychologist Terrence Real describes the physical and psychological violence that accompanies the standard socialization of boys in America in *I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression* (New York: Fireside, 1997).

132. For an account of the many families who faced their troubled veterans in silence in the years after the war, see Thomas Childers, *Soldier From the War Returning: The Greatest Generation's Troubled Homecoming from World War II* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009).

133. Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 208–210.

134. Wills, *John Wayne's America,* 157.

135. One of the ironies of this scene is that by refusing the violate instructions in order to save the wounded soldier, Stryker refuses to do what would become known in Vietnam lore "a John Wayne," that is, a suicidal act of courage in order to save a fellow soldier. However, Stryker does a "John Wayne" earlier in the film, when he charges up a bunker hill to kill the Japanese inside after watching three men die trying. This scene is, in fact, sometimes confused in viewers' memories with the taking of Mt. Suribachi, where Wayne does nothing exceptionally heroic.

136. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 52.

137. *To the Shores of Iwo Jima,* edited by Rex Steele (1945; U.S. government Office of War Information and the USMC), YouTube video, 19:07, posted by World War II/Color Films, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cp-AndrEHow

138. For example, John Wayne's character says "they're shooting right down our throats" from Suribachi, an expression used by the narrator of the documentary. Another example is picked up on by Elizabeth Bronfen in her study of Hollywood war films, when a character says "If this were a blanket, I'd pull it over my head," a

clear reference to the documentary narrator's line: "We wanted to pull the beach over our heads like a blanket." Quoted in Elizabeth Bronfen, *Specters of War: Hollywood's Engagement with Military Conflict* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 139.

139. Kovic, *Sands of Iwo Jima,* 55.

140. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* directed by John Ford (1962; Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2001), DVD.

141. One could object and say that Stryker dies at the hands of a Japanese sniper, not the group at all. But this is to ignore the larger chain of causality, by which the group—represented by the US government—has ordered Stryker and all the men there to Iwo Jima. Moreover, the mission to plant a flag on top of the island was not an operation of military necessity but of symbolism, that is, it was a chosen task for the purpose of raising morale. Stryker's death in the film also serves the purpose of raising morale by creating a martyr for the cause of the unity of the group.

142. Suid, *Guts and Glory,* 124.

143. Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima,* 138.

144. For example, in *Rio Grande* (1950), *Operation Pacific* (1951), *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), *The Longest Day* (1962).

145. Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1977, 1996), 6.

146. Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 274.

147. Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima,* 91.

148. "J. Carter Brown," Academic, accessed July 4, 2020. https://enacademic.com /dic.nsf/enwiki/3027110

Chapter 2

Melodrama Queered

The Outsider *(1961) and* The Portable War Memorial *(1968)*

If *Sands of Iwo Jima* forged affective links between John Wayne, noble sacrifice, and the Marine Corps in the American public's mind forever, another film featuring the flag-raising took a rather different approach: using melodrama to explore issues of race, same-sex love, and social alienation. Not surprisingly, *The Outsider* (1961, dir. Delbert Mann) did poorly at the box office and quickly disappeared from public memory.[1] Yet no less a Hollywood star than Tony Curtis starred in it, playing Ira Hayes, the Marine from the Akimel O'odham (formerly known as Pima) tribe who became infamous for his troubled postwar life and tragic death from drink and exposure a mere three months after the unveiling of the Marine Memorial. Dying so soon after this well-publicized event made Hayes into the symbol of the gap between the larger-than-life myth of the flag-raising signified by the monument and the real social and personal troubles experienced by the men depicted in it.

A gap between official accounts of American values and the brutally chaotic war unfolding in Vietnam was also coming into focus in the latter years of the 1960s, and Edward Kienholz's *The Portable War Memorial* captured the new sense of bitter irony that had enveloped national icons and institutions.[2] The installation, which placed the flag-raisers on the margins of a hot-dog stand and a tombstone for dead nations, seemed iconoclastic and scandalous, but its goal was not to mock the flag-raising so much as to chastise the nation for failing to live up to its ideals, in the honored tradition of the American jeremiad (the genre of sermon that laments the state of society and calls the congregation to a renewed dedication to God[3]). Kienholz's work showed that these ideals had been displaced by a consumer society of fast-food and suburban comfort (represented by the hot-dog stand and the lawn furniture), putting the nation at risk of no longer being able to cohere at all (suggested by the tombstone listing former nations).

Melodrama is still present, insofar as the flag-raisers are still victims, only now they are victims of their own society's betrayal of its (and their) wartime values, such as collective effort and self-sacrifice. The way the flag-raising is de-centered and rendered ironic can be seen as an example of melodrama being used in a subversive way, that is, figuratively queered. Delbert Mann's film also queers the melodrama of Hayes' tragic life, by raising the question of same-sex love in a nearly explicit way (as explicit as was possible in the early 1960s). Both texts—the film and the installation—keep elements of the original pathos of the Iwo Jima story, but modify and repackage the original meaning of the flag-raising to focus on more contemporary social issues which were emerging in the 1960s: minority rights, gender and the anti-war movement.

QUEERING MILITARY MALE
BONDING IN *THE OUTSIDER*

A year before *The Outsider* was released, Hayes had already been played by Lee Marvin in an hour-long TV drama directed by John Frankenheimer in 1960, "The American," a drama that emphasized Hayes' inability to accept the crass commercialism of the bond drives and the bad faith of the rally pro-moters, including the Marine Corps.[4] Most importantly, Marvin played Hayes as unable to stand being feted as a hero when all he had done—as he saw it—was to help raise a flag, which he insisted was not even the first and more important flag. In short, "The American" (which came out just after the quiz show scandals of 1959) depicted the photograph as a "phony" and showed Hayes sinking into alcoholism as a result of his disgust with the hypocrisy and mendacity of American society. It was a message the American public seemed eager to hear, especially as it was open (for the first time) to hearing the Marine Corps itself criticized, in the wake of the 1956 deaths of recruits during boot camp.[5]

The Outsider took Hayes' alienation even further by locating it more specifically in sexuality. Tony Curtis plays Hayes as discretely queer, in keeping with the many gender-ambiguous roles he played in this period (such as Josephine in *Some Like It Hot* and Antoninus in *Spartacus*).[6] If John Wayne represented tough father figures in the 1940s, Tony Curtis was Hollywood's face for sexual ambiguity in the early 1960s for those who were attuned to such issues (though Curtis himself was ostentatiously married to Janet Leigh—the perfect alibi to allow him to perform such parts sympa-thetically). In *The Outsider,* Hayes' personal trauma is not due to alienation from American society, or disgust with its hypocrisy (though these are also factors in the story), but grief over the loss of his best friend, a tall blond

Marine named Jim Sorensen (played by James Franciscus). Although military camaraderie is offered as the explicit frame through which to read this relationship, the film signals in a range of ways that the feelings of both men are more intense and deep than mere friendship.[7] There is no overt sexuality, of course, though there are the usual mid-century forms of sublimation and overt disavowal (such as gay jokes, alcoholism and physical fighting[8]), but a number of literary and visual references situate the film squarely in the tradition of American queer culture. In doing so, the film raises issues about the male body in the intensely homosocial environments of the military and combat that are more tacit or comic in earlier films like *Sands of Iwo Jima*, but that are still there.

Melodrama plays a crucial role in this film, because it works to render Hayes understandable and sympathetic, a victim-hero. Ira Hayes was the most inscrutable of the Iwo Jima flag-raisers, refusing interviews and media attention, behaving boorishly and drunkenly in public, appearing sullen and
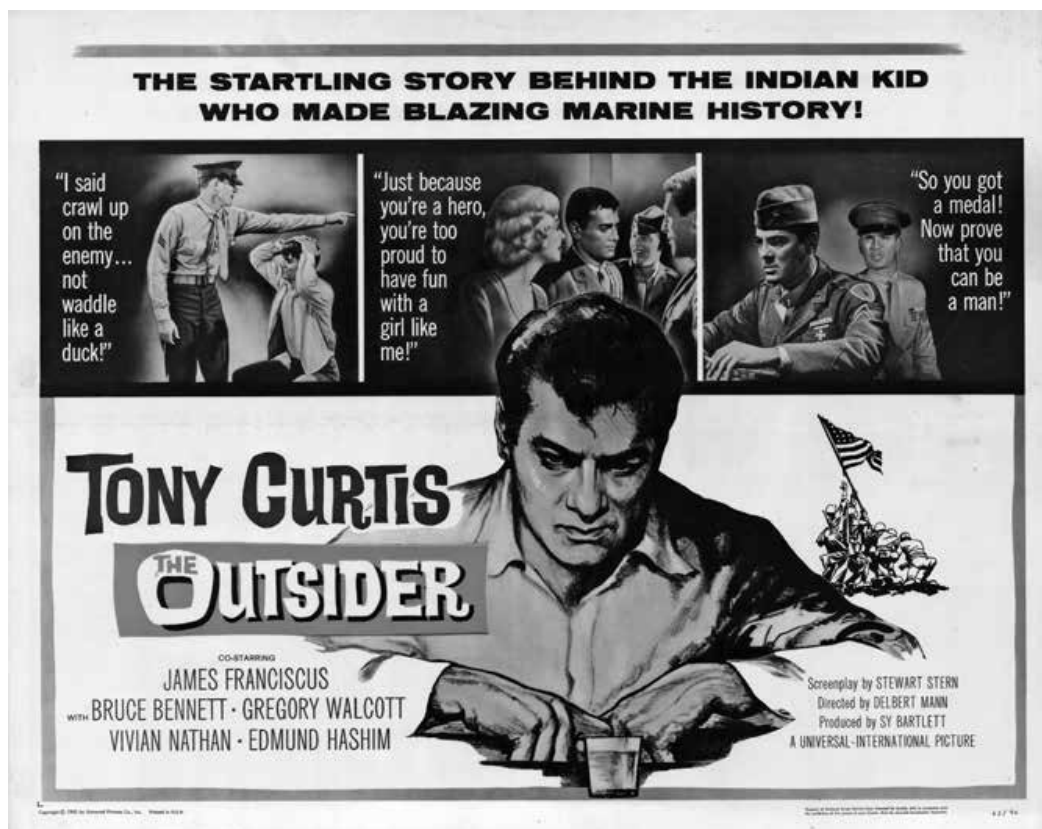

Figure 2.1   Poster for *The Outsider* (1962), about Ira Hayes, the Akimel O'odham (formerly Pima) Marine in the Rosenthal Photo, Starring Tony Curtis, Who Plays the Character as a Man Grieving for Another Man. The Gender Anxieties Are Clearly Evident in This Poster, with Hayes' Disinterest in Women and the Injunction to "be a man." (Permission Granted by NBC Universal.)

ungrateful for his celebrity. The film focuses on telling the story behind this problematic public image, and the story it tells is the quintessential melodrama of misrecognition and suffering. Hayes is portrayed as a marginal figure, an "outsider," in at least two ways: first of all, as a Native American, and more poignantly still, as queer, as a man who loves and mourns another man. The film uses the classical melodramatic device of portraying Hayes's suffering and true self being misrecognized by the other characters in the world of the film, misinterpreted as rudeness and inscrutable Indian aggressiveness, while the audience is given a privileged insight into his pain, which is presented as the cause of his seemingly anti-social behavior. This allows the audience to identify with Hayes and performs the important melodramatic task of humanizing Hayes and making him an object of sympathy.

The film's politics are quite ambivalent, especially with regard to war and militarism. In terms of the question of "enchantment" and "disenchantment," the film is a complex hybrid of both discourses: it is demystifying about combat (the invasion of Iwo Jima is hellish and Sorensen's death is totally pointless) but reverential to the Marines and to military service. The film in fact opens with a dedication to the Marine Corps and asserts that Hayes' "proudest moments" were spent in the Marines.[9] The film also begins with his enlistment, a decision that meets with disapproval from some of the tribal elders, who see the war as a "white man's war." Hayes insists that "the war is for everybody" and hopes to show the white world that a "Pima Indian can be a gung-ho Marine." In short, his enlistment is an explicit bid for inclusion in the American body politic, not just on an individual level but for his "people," his tribe. The film thus evokes—and later corroborates—the military's claims about itself as a democratic and egalitarian institution where every American is treated equally. Although Hayes experiences some teasing, he is shown to be permitted to advance and succeed according to his abilities and is not held back by race. While he remains alone and friendless throughout boot-camp, this seems to be due more to his intense shyness and inability to talk than to overt racism. He is an "outsider" from the start and it is not clear exactly why; after all, his friend Jay Morago (played by Edmund Hashim), also a Marine and from the same tribe, seems to be getting along fine. The signs all point to a difference that is less obvious than race—a difference that was a kind of obsession in American culture at this time, that is, queerness.[10]

Hayes is portrayed as undefinably different from the other soldiers in boot camp from the start. He struggles at first with the physical training (much like Leonard in *Full Metal Jacket*), unable to climb the wall on the obstacle course or swim, and is assigned a buddy, Sorensen, to help him learn. However, through determination and effort, he quickly catches up to the other recruits, so this is not the reason for his continuing isolation. It is only on the evening of his graduation from boot camp, when he goes into San Diego alone (the

other men having left without him), that we start to see the nature of the problem. As mentioned before, this isolation is partly due to his unwillingness to drink, linked to being a Native American ("don't you know it's illegal to sell a drink to an Indian?," he asks Sorensen at one point), but this issue functions as a catachresis or camouflage for a more significant difference from the other men, that is, his lack of a rough and aggressive masculinity (alcohol being strongly linked to normative manhood in America since at least the nineteenth century). In other words, normative masculinity is clearly at stake from quite early on in the film.

We see his utter indifference to the women sitting at the table with his buddies, and to all the women he encounters in the city. Sorensen too is ignoring the women at the table, listening to the music, "lost" in the song, which is "Where are you?" being performed by an African American singer, and which becomes "their" song after this. He jumps up with delight when he sees Hayes and insists on buying him a drink, which Hayes will not accept (fearful of its effect on him). After pretending to go to the bathroom and leaving the bar instead, Hayes is found again by Sorensen and his buddies much later in the evening, sitting alone on a bench. They surround him and force the bottle to his mouth and make him drink in a scene that resembles a gang rape. Hayes and Sorensen then fight in the street until both are spent, still holding on to each other. After a long exchange of intense looks, Sorensen apologizes and so does Hayes, and still in each other's arms, Sorensen tells the other men to go on ahead, that Hayes will take him home, and they walk away together.

The queer dynamics of these scenes are apparent to anyone familiar with the codes of this period, which required same-sex desire to be channeled into violence on screen, as Vito Russo documents in *The Celluloid Closet,* though the tender ending to this brawl is relatively daring. Hayes takes Sorensen to the beach, letting him sleep off his alcohol on the beach, while he guards over him all night, thus protecting him from getting into trouble at the camp. The fact that something serious has blossomed between them is acknowledged by each telling the other it's the first time they've had a friend of another race, but homosexuality is explicitly disavowed (while being tacitly acknowledged) by Sorensen's joke, "If you're going to kiss me, banjo-butt, I can tell you you're not my type." The two men are inseparable from this moment on, and when Hayes writes of his landing on Iwo Jima, he says that it feels like there's only "me and Sorensen." We see them sleeping together in a foxhole, with Sorensen's arm around Hayes, and Hayes' letter home speaks of sleeping "closer than you ever did before" with someone else and "breathing in time" with the other person during the night (see Figure 2.2). The intimacy described here is of course plausible for men in war—though it *also* sounds like the intimacy of love—and it is this ambiguity that allows these scenes to exist in the film at all.

Figure 2.2   Ira Hayes (Tony Curtis) and Jim Sorensen (James Franciscus) Sleeping in a Foxhole Together on Iwo Jima, with Sorensen's Arm around Hayes in an Embrace That Could be Read as Expressing either the Brotherhood of War or an Even Deeper Love (the Film Discretely Suggests the Latter). Screenshot by Author. *The Outsider*, 1962.

Yet the film constantly signals that the relationship can be read in a queer way as well. For example, when they land on Iwo Jima, they find a crab on the beach—and they take a moment to play with it, adopting it like a pet, talking to it and making a little foxhole for it. This moment, which has no plot value whatsoever, is full of meaning in queer literary culture as well as in melodrama. For the former, it recalls Hart Crane's poem, *Voyages* (1926), which contains a section about kids "frisking" on a beach with sea urchins while the cruel bottom of the sea (death) awaits them. Crane was one of the most famous and most tragic of gay poets in the twentieth century, and it is plausible that the film nods in his direction with this scene.[11] Playing with small animals is also a key device in melodrama to signal the innocence and, therefore, virtue of the victim-heroes, and the scene also serves this purpose as well, reminding us that the men on Iwo were only boys and that the two protagonists are innocent and, therefore, virtuous (an important point for the film to endeavor to prove in a story about same-sex love).

More to the point, regarding Hayes' queerness, the film figures his specific distress during and after the bond rallies in terms of what Eve Sedgwick has called the "epistemology of the closet." In short, he is tormented by being forced to "pretend I'm something I'm not." On one level, this is Hayes'

rejection of the label "hero" that he feels he does not deserve. But on another level, the problematic of inauthenticity and pretense explicitly attributed to the term "hero" works as a stand-in for another form of pretense and inauthenticity, which is that of being secretly queer in a heteronormative and homophobic society. Sedgwick has described the closet the "defining structure of gay oppression," an epistemology that has "given an overarching consistency to gay culture and identity throughout this century," and the rhetoric of the closet is precisely how Hayes' failure to perform as expected in society is figured in the film.[12] When trying to explain himself to his friend the bartender in Washington DC, Hayes says, "I feel like such a phony. I feel like I stole something and no one's caught me yet." The bartender, a worldly giver of queer wisdom and an advocate of what Sedgwick calls a universalizing logic of queerness (attributing the potential for transgressive desire to everyone), tells him, "So welcome to the human race! Look, we all stole something but I ain't asking you and you ain't asking me." The scene is all the more poignant and queer given the fact that the bartender is wearing a woman's silk kimono that is identified as Hayes' gift to him. Again, jokes are used to disavow the queer implications of the gift ("next time you give me a present give me the dame that goes with it") even as he happily wears it while working at his bar.

Melodramatic devices are used in the film to signal the film's queer content in other ways as well. For example, after Sorensen is killed and Hayes is in a bar to make a phone call, the song that Sorensen loved, "Where are You?" (performed by Frank Sinatra) comes on the juke box and makes Hayes break down.[13] The song is about romantic love and loss and longing, with the lyrics "Where are you, where have you gone without me? . . . Where's my heart? Where is the dream we started . . . When I gave you my love . . . Was it all in vain? . . . I can't believe we're parted . . . Must I go on pretending?" Not only is the song Sorensen's favorite, but it also speaks directly to Hayes' longing and own feeling of loss ("where have you gone?") and closeted alienation ("must I go on pretending?"). Hayes had been drinking a Coke at the bar but when he hears the song it makes him take his first deliberate drink, after which he never really stops drinking.

The melodramatic dimension of this plot device is that the audience is given to know why Hayes drinks—out of grief for Sorensen. No one else in the film knows this, so Hayes's suffering (and hence virtue, in the logic of melodrama) is constantly misrecognized as vice, that is, as mere lack of self-control. He is regarded as a disgrace to his tribe and to the Marines, but the audience is positioned to understand why he shows up drunk to one bond rally after another, and why he cannot stop drinking after the war. The symptoms Hayes displays could also be read as PTSD, but in the context of the film, they are linked exclusively to the loss of Sorensen and not to any

other trauma on Iwo Jima or in combat. This is obvious from the way he addresses a bond rally handler as "Sorensen" by accident once, by the way he sarcastically (and drunkenly) asks "who needs a buddy when I got fourteen gold watches?" at one of the rallies, and by the way he laughs hysterically when a former drill instructor asks him about Sorenson after the war. This behavior seems incomprehensible to the people around Hayes, and he is, therefore, misrecognized in the classic melodramatic way, unable to speak his feelings and exonerate himself (as Brooks described in *The Melodramatic Imagination*[14]), while the film audience can understand and identify with his suffering because we know that Sorensen is always on his mind.

The film uses a variety of expressionistic techniques to make this suffering more palpable and to invite the audience to feel with Hayes. For example, when Sorensen is killed upon standing up to respond to an order to return to headquarters for an urgent message, Hayes arrives alone and learns that the "urgent message" is merely that they will be sent home to raise money on the bond tour. His horror at the senselessness of Sorensen's death—indirectly caused by the photograph which he and Sorensen had helped plant a few weeks earlier—is rendered by distorted sound (the voices fading out, and band music fading in) while the screen fades into a blur.[15] In this way, the audience is made to see and hear the subjective effects of trauma and grief on Hayes and to link his subsequent drinking and moodiness to Sorensen's death and not to innate weakness for alcohol, as other characters do.

Hayes' reaction at the earlier moment of Sorensen's death also makes his mental distress visible and obvious. Curtis is very good in this film at conveying information through his body, just like actors of the early melodramatic stage and film, and his stricken and unnatural posture when he realizes Sorensen has been shot conveys a wealth of feeling but also the disjointedness of someone's entire world falling apart. He does not weep at all—instead he assumes a position of frozen horror that speaks volumes about his inability to grasp and process the fact that his best friend has been killed. This inability to understand and to know the traumatic event—and, therefore, process and assimilate it—is precisely the core of trauma and PTSD as it has been defined by Cathy Caruth, among others, that is, an utter rending of the individual's ability to mentally grasp his own experience.[16] This breakdown of Hayes' world is what his body language tells us, and what his drinking signifies, only no one can decipher the meaning except the film spectator.

As mentioned earlier, the film mixes elements of enchantment and disenchantment. Although war is presented in a distinctly disenchanting way, military service and national belonging are treated in a relatively positive (enchanting) manner. Similarly, the original flag-raising on Suribachi is disenchanted and demystified (it happens quickly, occurs halfway through the film, it has no special meaning to the men, and the flag they raise is shown

to be replacing an earlier flag), while the dedication ceremony for the Marine Memorial is given pride of place in the film on both a plot level and a ritual plane. It comes near the end and signifies a turning point for Hayes. The dedication is represented through real news footage, especially of important historical figures like Eisenhower and Nixon (present and future presidents, and hence totem leaders, in Marvin and Ingle's terms), establishing the scene's historical truthfulness and, therefore, ritual viability, interspersed with film footage of the actors. The sight of Sorensen in bronze clearly moves Hayes, and the camera shows him staring at the statue in fascination and shows close-ups of a face of one of the flag-raisers to indicate what he is looking at (De Weldon made each face into a realistic portrait).[17]

The dedication speech by Eisenhower also deeply moves him, as it is a speech that directly addresses the question of self-sacrifice and heroism. While Hayes has been tortured by the feeling that he was not a hero and that only the dead should be called heroes, the speaker argues that everyone who is "willing" is a hero. The speech lends itself very well to the kind of analysis Marvin and Ingle offer because it is clearly about the willingness to die while never naming it so directly. After this speech, Hayes no longer feels guilty because he realizes that he too had been willing, and, therefore, that he is not a fraud (at least as far as heroism goes; he is still unable to tell anyone of his grief for Sorensen). He describes his experience at the ceremony to a friend later in explicitly religious terms: he says it was a "miracle" and that he had the impression of hearing God saying "everything is okay now." We also see him still at the statue later that night after everyone has gone, on his knees, praying and weeping, addressing Sorensen or possibly the whole group (the second-person address of "you" leaves the actual addressee unclear) promising to turn his life around and stop drinking. In short, we see a conversion of sorts, much like Conway's conversion after Wayne's death in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. But Hayes' conversion does not stick, because heroism is not the only or real source of his anguish and self-imposed isolation. His queerness and his grief for Sorensen are not cured by the dedication ceremony and will continue to plague him until his untimely death. If the film had ended there, it probably would have succeeded much better at the box office.

Instead, the film's ending is much bleaker and thoroughly disenchanting. Even people who like the film and admire Curtis' performance have trouble with the ending (based on my survey of fan reviews on the IMDB website). Hayes is shown going home to the Pima reservation after the dedication ceremony and trying to be nominated for tribe council. His failure to be elected is depicted as the immediate reason for his getting drunk after the elections and dying from exposure, yet anyone who has watched the film from the beginning will see this motive as an alibi. The final scene, during which Hayes dies, is meant to ironically recall the flag-raising but in a bitter and critical way: in

his drunkenness he climbs to the top of a rocky hill and ends up falling and passing out. Instead of a flagpole there is a cactus. Instead of a group working together, Hayes is alone asking God, "What happened to me?" Instead of being a willing sacrifice, Hayes says "I wanna go home" just before passing out. The meaning of this dark ending seems inexplicably cynical if we do not take the issue of queer alienation into account. The explicit ideological framing of the whole last part of the film is in terms of group belonging, with Hayes having decided that he belongs with his tribe and wants to help it. His election to the council would be a sign of the forgiveness of his people as well as their acceptance of him. Their failure to nominate him seems to mean that he is destined to be an "outsider" everywhere and forever.

However, things are more complicated than they appear. While the tribe does seem initially willing to forgive the past, Hayes' behavior continues to signal some deeper difference from everyone else. Not only does he refuse to directly campaign for the position, oddly denying that he is interested in it (perhaps from a lifetime of having to publicly deny other desires?), but even his attempts to make himself useful to the community as he campaigns indirectly reveal that he is deeply out of step with it. For instance, when he tries to be helpful by fixing things for neighbors, he does so in the middle of the night and refuses to stop hammering even when told that a woman nearby might lose her baby if she doesn't sleep. His utter indifference to the rhythms of ordinary people is figured here in explicitly gendered terms, showing Hayes unmoved by and even hostile to the procreative life of his neighbors. The fact that Sorensen is still his main source of pain is obvious from the way he calls out to him as soon as he gets to the hilltop where he will die. In short, the film makes clear that it is Hayes' queerness and not some other difference that makes him a perpetual outsider—alienated both from mainstream America and from his own tribe. This is the moment in queer history that Vito Russo identifies in *The Celluloid Closet* as characterized by a relentless logic of extermination of homosexuals in Hollywood films.[18] Queer characters could be portrayed discretely, even sympathetically, but they had to die. This is what happens to other queer characters around the same time: Fife in *Then Red Line* (1964), to Martha in *The Children's Hour* (1961), and to Sebastian in *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959), and it helps to frame Hayes's death as well.[19]

The last shot we have of Hayes is his frozen hand sticking out of the rocks, from which the film cuts to his hand on the Marine Memorial—grasping for but not quite catching the flagpole. The fact that the film ends visually with a focus on Hayes' hands can be read, like the playfulness on the beach of Iwo Jima, as yet another an allusion to a queer literary tradition. One of Hart Crane's most overtly queer poems is called "Episode of Hands" (written in 1920), about a factory owner's son bandaging a man's hurt hand and the two

men smiling at each other.[20] (Crane, *Poems* 141). According to critics, Crane borrowed the trope of the hands from Sherwood Anderson's short story, "The Hands" (1919), also a relatively frank treatment of the fate of a queer man (sexually ambiguous and, therefore, perceived as socially dangerous) at the beginning of the century. Yingling calls this story "one of the most visible statements on American attitudes toward homosexuality before the twenties."[21] Anderson himself would have probably taken the conceit of the hands from Walt Whitman, whose queerest poems about "adhesive" love (men loving men) often center on hand holding.[22]

Finally, the ending of *The Outsider* is not only bleak and disturbing—it is also exquisitely melodramatic. Alone on the mountain, exposed to the elements, Hayes seems to exemplify the virtuous victim, hounded to death by social convention and rigid boundaries of normal male behavior and feeling. For those who were prepared to see the queer subtext of the film, Hayes' problem was that he could not find a place for himself in a society where his love for Sorensen did not have a name, or at least not one that anyone as shy and sensitive and longing for inclusion as Hayes could ever claim. Assuming the social consequences of claiming a queer identity in the early 1960s, when it was seen as both criminal and insane, was not for the faint of heart. The film suggests that Hayes himself may never even have fully known what ailed him besides grief and a painful sense of being misrecognized and forced to perform a role that did not feel right.

Whether Hayes' queerness is understood as conscious or unconscious, the result is a portrait of failure, a paradigm that Jack Halberstam claims as a specifically "queer aesthetic."[23] Developing a logic embraced by Lee Edelman in *No Future* (2005) and much earlier by Quentin Crisp in *A Naked Civil Servant* (1968), Halberstam proposes that queerness and homosexuality have long been associated with loss and the impossibility of love and a general rejection/inability to conform to heteronormative standards of success in life.[24] Instead of denying this connection, Halberstam proposes that we accept that "failure must be located within that range of political affects we call *queer*" and that we transform it into an opportunity to imagine "alternatives to hegemonic systems."[25] *The Outsider* clearly belongs to an earlier generation of queer culture, in which the bid for sympathy and acceptance had to be made covertly and cloaked in melodramatic pathos. Failure was inevitable and tragic, pointing indirectly to a need to make society more inclusive.

There is a long and robust tradition of melodramatic narratives whose cultural work involves redeeming (often with their lives) marginal characters who represent persons who are not fully accepted by society. An early American iteration of this tradition is *Charlotte Temple* (1791) by Susanna Rowson, about a young English girl who gets duped into eloping with a soldier who makes her into his mistress and abandons her. This novel makes a

compelling case for treating the "fallen woman" with pity and understanding instead of contempt and scorn. The most famous instance of socially inclusive melodrama is Harriet Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which made the redemptive death of Uncle Tom into the cornerstone of the novel. At a time when many people saw slaves as comic or subhuman, Stowe gave her protagonist dignity and humanity by portraying him as a virtuous victim who is murdered by his cruel slave-master. A recent use of melodrama to bring a socially controversial character into the fold of social acceptance and sympathy is *Philadelphia* (1993), with Tom Hanks playing a lawyer with AIDS. He too must die at the end for the redemption to work fully. Another recent example is *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which brought queer melodrama into the twenty-first century.

Looking at *The Outsider* in the context of these antecedents, it is easy to see how the film participates in a cultural tradition of generating sympathy for socially marginalized subjects. The melodramatic work of the film begins before Hayes even sets off for the military, with a pointed exchange by members of Hayes' family about the Pima River having been diverted by government authority, depriving the tribe of their main source of irrigation. Thus the film positions Hayes and his tribe as victims of American exploitation and genocidal chicanery from the start. The intolerance for gender difference and same-sex love is then added on top of the murderous indifference to Native American lives.

Finally, *The Outsider* examines an issue that haunts many war films: the queerness of the military itself. This is a complicated matter, especially since military masculinity is based on an explicit disavowal and exclusion of anything feminine or queer. The military body, as a representative body of the nation, is supposed to be fit, clean and heterosexual. Yet the reality of military life is far more complex. According to Aaron Belkin, military masculinity is actually based on a "structuring contradiction," or rather, a set of binary opposites, part of which are embraced and the other which are disavowed while also being forcibly embodied: "masculine/feminine, strong/weak, dominant/subordinate, victor/victim, civilized/barbaric, clean/dirty, straight/queer, legible/illegible, stoic/emotional."[26] In other words, while male recruits are told that they must be masculine, their identity as soldiers (I use the word here in a generic sense to refer to all military personnel) is based on a systematic undermining of conventional masculine identity. This begins in boot camp, where they are often addressed as women (a rhetoric of either humiliation or in-group play that can re-emerge at any time even after graduation). In a more positive sense, soldiers are forced to embrace femininity because of the way they must at times take care of one another and one another's bodies. These situations may demand gentleness, compassion, empathy and tenderness, especially when a soldier is injured or frightened. While they are socialized

to be strong and aggressive, they must also be blindly obedient, perfectly subordinate and submissive to hierarchical superiors.[27] They are supposed to be clean and honorable in every sense, but combat inevitably forces them to become dirty (in more ways than one), Belkin argues.

Similarly, while often explicitly homophobic, the U.S. military as a homosocial institution has had a very complicated relationship to homosexuality. For instance, military traditions and informal rituals are routinely based on an obsessive evocation and degradation of both femininity and homosexuality. *The Outsider* explores some of these customs and suggests that the military is an institution where gender is explicitly troubled, in both positive and negative ways. We have scenes in the film of the drill instructor referring to recruits as "girls" and addressing men in the shower as "strip queens." The first time he speaks to Hayes he asks: "What are you grinning at? Are you in love with me?" Later, when the drill instructor tells Sorensen to teach Hayes to swim he calls Sorensen "Esther Williams" and refers to both men as "she." Even years later when Hayes runs into this man in a bar, the drill instructor first addresses him as "girl" in an affectionate evocation of their time together in boot camp. The film is quite ambivalent about this kind of behavior. The drill instructor is shown to not be a particularly good friend to Hayes, getting him drunk and leaving him in the street to be arrested. Yet Hayes himself seems to have appreciated his time in boot camp, where he did successfully pass the course, and he clearly likes his drill instructor. In fact, ironically, it is only in the Marines that he is able to find happiness, first by being accepted in the Marine "tribe," and secondly by finding love in the guise of a buddy. Thus, the film seems to acknowledge, as Belkin suggests, that men in the military are sometimes allowed (and sometimes forced) to be less stereotypically masculine than in civilian life. For instance, when they sleep together in a foxhole, keeping each other warm, they are allowed an intimacy that would be impossible in mainstream American culture.[28]

Thus, ultimately, the film charts a complex course that has both enchanting and disenchanting elements, as far as the military is concerned. The prospect of closeness with other men is displayed in a potentially attractive way—even without the homosocial dynamic turning into something more tender between two men—and shown as unique to military service. The Marines as a whole are portrayed sympathetically, as a tough but equal-opportunity institution, and the reverence with which the Marine Memorial dedication ceremony is treated makes this clear. On the other hand, homosexuality was outside social and legal norms at the time and its connection to the military body would have been deeply offensive for many people. This is why the film had to be so discreet and ended up being so "muddy" and full of "innuendo" that it made no sense at all to some spectators and reviewers.[29]

The issue of alcoholism, which the film aligns with Hayes' grief, complicates matters further. On the one hand, it is a visible symptom of his internal suffering and thus potentially has redeeming melodramatic effects. In other words, by making Hayes' suffering explicitly visible, his alcoholism helps to portray him as a victim worthy of viewers' sympathy. On the other hand, unlike Stryker in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, who sets out to get drunk deliberately on mail-call day, and who quits when he wants to, Hayes seems to have no control over his drinking. He wants to stop but cannot. The prospect of a military body that is out of control, unable to curb its appetite for drink, resonates unpleasantly with stereotypes of the time about the queer body as riddled by vice and uncontrolled appetites. The result tends to be disturbing and disenchanting (i.e., irrecuperable for any cause, whether it be the military or homosexual civil rights). As a result, the film "bombed," as Marling and Wetenhall describe it.[30]

A contemporary review in the *New York Times* helps explain this commercial failure, and indirectly reveals that the queer subtext is at least partly responsible. The reviewer (A.H. Weiler) praises the film's "rare, honest, documentary-like treatment" of Hayes' life, and praises Curtis' performance as "genuinely restrained and surprisingly effective," but complains that the film is weakened by "foggy psychological innuendo."[31] Specifically, Weiler complains that "one cannot fully hold with the idea that the sincere friendship offered by his best friend, an ill-fated Marine buddy, would so color his life as to leave a permanent trauma on his conscience and lead him to alcoholism and ultimate death." And yet, as I have argued, that is precisely what the film wants to show, and the reviewer's reluctance to allow it confirms my contention that the relationship is meant to be seen as more than mere friendship between fellow soldiers. If one is not prepared to see the film "queerly," then it does seem like a bit of a stretch that Hayes would be so bereaved and permanently scarred by Sorensen's death. The fact that the reviewer catches a whiff of the film's queerness but is not prepared to accept it and approve is clear from the reviewer's vocabulary of "ambiguity." For instance, he refers to the idea that Sorensen's death leads to Hayes's alcoholism and death as a "shadowy and unexplained implication." The word "shadowy" is recognizable as a term that was often used in the 1950s to refer to anything queer, as was the word "strange," which the reviewer uses for the film as a whole ("a strange, if not unique saga"). Even the first quote, that of "foggy psychological innuendo," seems to have a queer subtext in its disapproval, insofar as in the 1950s queerness was the main secret that would inspire both fogginess (with its suggestion of confusion) and the salacious indirection associated with innuendo.

The Outsider represented an instance of the queering of a national icon, both in its implicit content (the story of Hayes' love for his buddy) and its

Figure 2.3   Edward Kienholz, *The Portable War Memorial*, 1968. Mixed Media Installation, 114″ × 384″ × 96″. Museum Ludwig, Cologne. (Copyright: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, Marion Mennicken.)

subversive de-centering of the flag-raising narrative from military victory to the pathos of Native American victimization and crushing grief/PTSD. Melodrama plays a crucial role in this film by creating pity and pathos around the character of Hayes, rendering him more understandable, available for empathy, and generally more appealing than he was in real life. In the tradition of socially progressive melodrama, his suffering is used to awaken awareness of two important social issues—the plight of contemporary Native Americans, living on despoiled reservations, their traditional waterways and livelihoods stolen by whites—and the plight of a man who happens to love another man in America at mid-century.

THE OTHER STATUE

Another work of art that significantly queered—that is, subversively de-centered and repurposed—the image of the flag-raising on Suribachi is Edward Kienholz's *Portable War Memorial* (1968), a mixed media installation that shows four anonymous soldiers planting the flag on a lawn table. Generally, Kienholz's installation has been taken as a parody of Rosenthal's photograph and the Marine Memorial. However, I would argue that Kienholz's

installation is not a parody at all, but a jeremiad that uses the flag-raising as a symbol for the values that have been lost in American culture (as Kienholz saw it) in 1968. In this respect, the *Portable War Memorial* was created in the same spirit as that which prompted Robert Bellah to write the essay, "American Civil Religion," also in 1968, which set off a decade-long debate about Civil Religion in America. In that essay, Bellah's main objective was to recall "the nation to ethical principles that transcend it [and] in terms of which it should be judged."[32] In short, Bellah's essay too belongs to the uniquely American genre of the jeremiad, or "a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal," in Sacvan Bercovitch's definition.[33] As Bercovitch explains, the European jeremiad was merely a "lament over the ways of the world," but in America it "entailed a fusion of secular and sacred history" and its purpose was to direct Americans "toward the fulfilment of their destiny" as a chosen people.[34] In Bellah this religious dimension is strangely prominent and explicit (strange for an essay that became a touchstone in the field of sociology) and he concludes it by attributing to American Civil Religion the task of being "concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all nations."[35] In Kienholz, the religious element (or Civil Religion element) is mostly tacit, and the piece was widely attacked as blasphemous and anti-American, but the rhetorical purpose of calling a people back to its original sacred values is no less at stake in this work than in Bellah's.

For both Bellah and Kienholz, the historical context that motivated their work (and sense of moral crisis) in these pieces was the Vietnam War, which had reached an occupation level of half a million US ground troops in 1968. After the January Tet Offensive and Walter Cronkite's February broadcast suggesting the war had become a "stalemate," anti-war feeling was at an all-time high in the United States. Many people felt that America had failed its moral foundations by engaging in a mendacious and aggressive colonial war, and this is certainly the undercurrent of Bellah's tone in his essay. Kienholz goes much further, as Ruth Lipschitz argues in "Re-presenting America: Edward Kienholz's *Portable War Memorial,* Vietnam and Cold War Politics," because he does not consider Vietnam merely as a falling away from a higher standard but of a piece with a larger trend of militarism since the end of World War II.[36] The installation references the Hiroshima bombings and suggests that war has become as banal as consumer culture, having become "portable" and mass-produced rather than unique and necessary. In this indirect way, Kienholz alludes to Korea and possibly to other third world countries where the United States has intervened militarily in the twentieth century (e.g., Philippines, Haiti, Nicaragua, Mexico, Honduras).

The most radical element of the installation is the "chalkboard tombstone," which contains, in Kienholz's own words, "some 475 chalk-written

names of independent countries that have existed here on earth but are no longer."[37] The names include Akkad, Slavonia, Transcaucasian Republic, and the Uzbec Republic. The point of the chalkboard tombstone is powerfully subversive because it reminds viewers that countries are not natural and eternal entities but geopolitical formations that can come and *go*. If they are not permanent in any way, but merely ephemeral political arrangements, then nationals cannot guarantee that they will honor and remember their martyrs forever, as they always promise they will. In other words, by attacking the reified and given status of nations, Kienholz's installation puts the self-evident value of national self-sacrifice into question. Of course, even if nations are mere human arrangements for collective living, they might still be worth dying for, but that is not how the rhetoric of national self-sacrifice typically frames military death. Instead, nations are considered sacred and eternal and soldiers' deaths are regarded as contributing to that vitality while themselves earning an everlasting place in the nation's memory. If the nation no longer existed, those deaths would have to be regarded as having been in vain. This is finally Kienholz's main point and its intention is to make the question of self-sacrifice a more critically and lucidly debated one instead of a blindly followed example.

The emotional power of the idea of the ephemerality of nations is further thrust home through the installation's use of music. A recording of Kate Smith's famous rendition of Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" was played on a loop during the viewing hours of the exhibit. This recording, which catapulted Kate Smith to stardom in 1939, was played constantly just before and during the Second World War, especially on radio marathons for war bonds and other money-raising events.[38] The song was a smash success but did often strike some listeners as cloying and sentimental. Woody Guthrie famously wrote "This Land is My Land" as a kind of rebuttal to the song, his version being originally titled, "God Blessed This Land for Me." So, in 1968, the song definitely had a kitsch and heavy-handed connotation that suited Kienholz's satirical purpose well. The most important detail about the way he used this recording is that it was played on a tape recorder "mounted inside the garbage can" on the far left of the installation. The garbage can is turned upside down and has stumpy legs, a sort of head, and lace frill which together evoked the person of Kate Smith. However, the fact that the song is playing from inside the garbage can is a sly and mischievous joke on several levels, including the suggestion that the song, considered by some as the unofficial anthem of the United States, is itself garbage. More poignantly, the placing of the recording in the garbage can reinforces the idea that nations and their anthems are perishable, temporary, and can find themselves in the dustbin of history.

Kienholz's installation also suggests that in a nation which fights for the spread of American consumer culture (symbolized here by the hotdog stand

and the soft drink dispenser) rather than human and civil rights, war is no longer a collective ritual (such as WWII) but an aggressive colonial endeavor leading to a meaningless waste of life. Soldiers, depicted by Kienholz as faceless and anonymous, are as disposable as the Coca Cola being drunk by the two figures at the hotdog stand, and their sacrifices no longer have any ritual power to unify and regenerate. This point is apparent from the layer of black dust and dirt covering the whole installation, as if American itself was a historical ruin, frozen in time and space by some nuclear holocaust (like a modern Pompei), a graveyard for relics such as the flag-raising tableau and the suburban lawn chairs. The implication once more is that America could become another name on a chalkboard tombstone. Not surprisingly, this bleak and bitter artwork stirred considerable outrage as well as admiration. In a public letter to *Art Forum*, fellow artist Robert Witz accused Kienholz of "insulting our country, and, what is worse, insulting those men who died so he can perform his merry pranks undisturbed," implying that WWII was fought mainly to preserve freedom of speech in America and not to defeat fascism abroad.[39]

Kienholz's answer is interesting and reveals how he is using the flag-raising to signify an ideal rather than to demystify it in itself: "I love it [this country]" but "our moral/ethical posture is not so shining that we should weight other cultures with it," suggesting that the US should not forcibly impose its way of life and economy on nations such as Vietnam. He finishes by making explicit what the piece is implying, namely that death in war is tragic and pointless, not regenerative and sacred: "I truly regret those men—all men who have died in the futility of war because in their deaths I must comprehend our future."[40] With the words "futility of war" Kienholz utters the name of the disenchantment that had settled over the Vietnam War. Again, Marvin and Ingle's work provides useful tools for understanding why the Vietnam conflict was so divisive rather than unifying like WWII. If war is a ritual of blood sacrifice, there are conditions that must be fulfilled. These include willing self-sacrifice, a clear beginning and ending, and a maximum involvement of the population back home.[41] With soldiers themselves protesting the war and their involvement (thus, not signaling their willingness to die as good victims of sacrifice should), with the contested beginnings of the war, a lack of a formal declaration of war, and most Americans going about their business oblivious to the fighting in Vietnam (unlike the collective attention focused on battles like Iwo Jima in WWII), the Vietnam War was a failed ritual in many respects. Kienholz's installation was just one of many responses that called America back to its real values and threatened God's wrath (here in the form of nuclear annihilation) for its falling away from those values.[42]

The 1960s represented a radical rethinking of American culture and values. The existence of people who loved differently than the norm of the

hetero-nuclear family had come into view after WWII in a new way and was beginning to find sympathetic ears in Hollywood. *The Outsider* was a daring film which used melodrama to repurpose the story of the flag-raising in order to subtly garner sympathy for a story of love and loss that could not be told explicitly as such, hence the film tells it as a story of military trauma but with so many winks and so much pathos that it perplexed the viewers who could not recognize and accept its queer subtext.

Similarly, Edward Kienholz uses the flag-raising as a point of departure for an installation that recontextualizes it and changes its meaning—from victory to a loss of values, and from collective effort and self-sacrifice to irrelevant disposability in a culture of consumption and suburban obliviousness to the war happening in Vietnam. In fact, the war in Vietnam would become the most important moment of military disenchantment and demystification in the history of the United States, with the exception possibly of the immediate post–WWI period. As a result of the trauma of the Vietnam War, the imagery of American militarism, including the iconic Iwo Jima photograph, waned for a generation. The 1970s and 1980s were a relatively subdued period, as far as American jingoism was concerned, though the Reagan years did see a gradual return of the American appetite for war. With the Gulf War in 1990, as we know, George H. W. Bush attempted to cure the nation of the "Vietnam Syndrome," by which he meant the judicious caution and scepticism regarding foreign military interventions that had ensued after Vietnam. In the next chapter, I show how the military dream machine, aided by the culture industry in Hollywood, revved up its engines once more, this time laying the Vietnam syndrome to rest by reviving the glory days of WWII with heady patriotic melodrama. The revival of the Rosenthal photograph is part and parcel of this general reactivation of melodramatic militarism through WWII nostalgia.

NOTES

1. Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima*, 187.

2. Edward Kienholz, *The Portable War Memorial*, 1968, mixed media installation, 114″ × 384″ ×96″, Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

3. See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

4. "The American," directed by John Frankenheimer (1960, Sunday Showcase, NBC, Season 1, episode 28, 60 minutes), TV drama.

5. Six recruits drowned when a Parris Island drill instructor took his men on an unauthorized night march and forced them to cross a creek under unsafe conditions. The ensuing court-martial "put the spotlight on Marine methods and whole cult of manliness," according to Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima,* 174.

6. I mostly use the term "queer" rather than "homosexual" because the latter is too rigid and over-determined a term, even for the 1960s. The now-outdated term "homosexual" refers to a type of person, essentially a stereotype, while "queer" is a critical concept that is intended to put the whole system of sexual labels and categories into question. It is a word that takes same-sex love and desire as a point of departure but does not presume to know exactly what those feelings and experiences are, and certainly does not assume they are the same for everyone (as the term "the homosexual" did at this time). Moreover, "homosexuality" usually implies conscious sexual desire whereas human experience of love and desire is neither necessarily conscious nor exclusively sexual. Curtis plays Hayes's queerness in a subtle and nuanced way, allowing for the possibility that conscious sexual desire never enters the picture. *Some Like It Hot,* directed by Billy Wilder (1959; New York: Criterion Collection, 2018), DVD; *Spartacus*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1960; Universal City: Universal Home Pictures Entertainment, 2018), DVD.

7. Naturally, only some audience members were prepared to understand this relationship this way. To those who were not, or not prepared to understand it publicly, the relationship with Sorenson suffered from a "lack of motivational 'clarity'" or from a "disproportionate stress" or (in a brilliant example of 1960s jargon for homosexuality) "foggy psychological innuendo" (from a review in *The New York Times,* Feb. 8, 1962, quoted in Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima,* 182). All these criticisms, citing the ambiguity, fogginess, and imbalance of the relationship as motivation in the narrative, both acknowledge and deny the queerness of the relationship.

8. See Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies,* revised edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 109–110.

9. This is certainly because the Marines were persuaded to cooperate with the film's producers and allowed the studio access to Camp Pendleton. After the Parris Island drowning of 1956, the Marines were both wary of more bad publicity but eager for some good press. The film bends over backward to present boot camp as tough but fair, and ultimately the best moment of Hayes' life.

10. The film is based on William Bradford Huie's book, *The Hero of Iwo Jima and Other Stories* (New York: Signet Books, 1959)*,* which portrays Hayes as extremely shy as a child and young man, unable to talk to anyone and especially avoiding girls. Huie's book does not suggest, however, that Hayes was queer. This angle is unique to the film.

11. Thomas Yingling writes that the poem "Voyages" terms itself the "'secret oar and petals of all love' because homosexual love is in some sense the open secret of modern sexuality," and that Crane's depiction of it in the poem has a distinctly utopian dimension to it, which this scene in *The Outsider* also possesses (imagining the two soldiers finding a moment to play with and protect a tiny crab in the midst of the death around them). Thomas E. Yingling, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text: New Thresholds, New Anatomies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 104.

12. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 71, 68.

13. "Where Are You?" was a 1937 song composed by Jimmy McHugh, with lyrics by Harold Anderson, and performed by many different artists during the 1940s

and 1950s. An African American woman is singing it at the San Diego bar where Sorensen and Hayes first listen to it together, but the version that sets off his drinking binge later in the film is notably sung by a male voice (Frank Sinatra). "Where Are You?," performed by Frank Sinatra (Track 1 on the album *Where Are You?*; Hollywood: Capitol Records, 1957), vinyl.

14. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination,* 56–80.

15. The film breaks with historical verisimilitude here by making Sorensen one of the flag-raisers when in fact none of the six were named Sorensen.

16. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Cornell University, 1996), 5.

17. Sorensen is not the name of a real flag-raiser and this character is not based on any one particular figure.

18. Russo, *Celluloid Closet,* 108.

19. *The Thin Red Line*, directed by Andrew Marton (1964; New York: Criterion Collection, 2010), Blu-Ray; *The Children's Hour*, directed by William Wyler (1961; New York: Kino Lorber, 2014), DVD; *Suddenly Last Summer*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz (1959; Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2000), DVD.

20. Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1966), 141.

21. Yingling, *Hart Crane,* 111.

22. For example, "Whoever you are holding me now in hand," "Of the terrible question of appearances," "You bards of ages hence!," and "One fitting glimpse, caught through an interstice," from the "Calamus" poems of the later editions (1860 onward) of *Leaves of Grass.* Walt Whitman, "Calamus," *Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 268–287.

23. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2011), 96.

24. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Quentin Crisp, *The Naked Civil Servant* (New York: New American Library, 1968).

25. Halberstam, *Queer Art,* 89.

26. Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire 1898-2001* (London: Hurst and Company, 2012), 4.

27. Carol Burke calls this paradox a standing "technical problem" that drill instructors must overcome, that is, the seeming contradiction between instilling "perfect subordination" and the need to "convince recruits" that this discipline has "made them men." Carol Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 45.

28. In *Sands of Iwo Jima*, there is also a strong queer undercurrent. One critic has suggested that Charlie Bass, Stryker's best friend, is shown to be in love with him, from the way he follows him around, and from the intense way Stryker suffers when hearing the wounded Bass call his name. Robert Eberwein, *Armed Forces: Masculinity and Sexuality in the American War Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2007), 61. This reading is possible but there is a far more obvious queer character, and that is the comic character named (not surprisingly) Regazzi (played by Wally Cassell), which sounds like *ragazzi* or "boys" in Italian. He is allowed to admire

men's bodies explicitly and overtly by being given the alibi that he wants to be a Hollywood film star manager after the war. He says at one point to Thomas, "If I was a girl I'd marry you." Cassell had also played a discretely queer character in *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945), the soldier who won't leave his dead captain's side at the end of the film, stroking his hand tenderly in grief. The Conway/Stryker relationship also has some of the earmarks of a queer attraction that passes through violence before becoming overt love (Conway and Stryker give each other some dazzling smiles in the last part of the film), but the familial framing of this relationship as father-son deflects attention away from and naturalizes the way the two men are clearly fascinated by one another. *The Story of G.I. Joe*, directed by William Wellman (1945; Los Angeles: Image Entertainment, 2000), DVD.

29. Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima,* 182.

30. Ibid.*,* 187.

31. A. H. Weiler, "'The Outsider' Opens with Curtis in Starring Role," *The New York Times* (8 February 1962), accessed July 4, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/1962/02/08/archives/the-outsider-opens-with-tony-curtis-in-the-starring-role.html.

32. Bellah, "American Civil Religion," 225.

33. Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad,* xi.

34. Ibid., 7–9.

35. Bellah, "American Civil Religion," 245.

36. Ruth Lipschitz, "Re-presenting America: Edward Kienholz's *Portable War Memorial,* Vietnam and Cold War Politics," *De Arte* 65 (April 2002), 30–31.

37. Edward Kienholz, letter published in Artforum (1969), reprinted on Tra Magazine website*,* "The Portable War Memorial, 1968," accessed July 4, 2020. http://archivioditra.altervista.org/ING/arch_KIEN_memoria.html.

38. Nancy Coleman, "The Rich and Complicated History of 'God Bless America,'" *New York Times* (July 3, 2019), accessed July 4, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/03/arts/music/kate-smith-god-bless-america.html.

39. Quoted in Lipschitz, "Re-presenting America," 37.

40. Quoted in Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima,* 204.

41. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 87–93.

42. Along similar lines, Bellah went on to write a book-length study of American history and society, titled *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975).

Chapter 3

Melodramatizing Iwo Jima in the Twenty-First Century

James Bradley's and Clint Eastwood's Flags of Our Fathers

Although by the end of the twentieth century Rosenthal's photograph was over fifty years old and had been subjected to endless parodies and recontextualizations, it was now revived and revitalized for the new century and new millennium. Between 1991 and 2000, three books about the Iwo Jima photograph came out: Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall's *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (1991), Parker Bishop Albee, Jr. and Keller Cushing Freeman's *Shadow of Suribachi: Raising the Flags on Iwo Jima* (1995), and James Bradley's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2000).[1] All three returned compulsively to the original site of the flag-raising and all of them concluded their set of accompanying photographs with a photo of Suribachi or its summit taken at a reunion event. All three also self-consciously positioned themselves in relation to the myths and misconceptions about the photograph and purported to tell "the true story" for the first time or "at last." In fact, the words "the true story" appear on the back covers of all three books.

Even after half a century, the authenticity of the photograph continues to matter (and doubts about it need to be regularly laid to rest) because of its status as a sacred icon in American Civil Religion. The first two books are ostensibly scholarly, though they are both clearly intended for a wider and even popular audience, while the third is a memoir that became a best-seller and then the basis for a major film by Clint Eastwood, *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). All four of these cultural products set themselves the task, whether consciously or not, of reviving the mythic and magical status of the photograph and the battle it represents. Together, they are part of a larger revival of WWII memory and narrative in the wake of the demystifying effects of the Vietnam War. The WWII nostalgia industry was launched by Stephen

Ambrose with his hagiographic *Band of Brothers* (1992) and then turbo-charged by Stephen Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), who went on to produce a 10-part TV series for HBO based on Ambrose's book. Although the two scholarly books about Rosenthal's photograph use melodrama sparingly, the Bradley book and the films about WWII, including *Flags of Our Fathers,* all rely heavily on it in their accounts of the Iwo Jima story.

The first of the books is *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (1991) by Karal Ann Marling (a professor of Art History and American Studies) and John Wetenhall (Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Birmingham Museum of Art). The book was published by Harvard University Press but reads more like a popular work than a scholarly one. It relies heavily on narrative devices and accessible prose to present its very thorough—though not always strictly accurate—story of the photo's long afterlife. It begins with a detailed account of the 1954 Marine Memorial dedication ceremony and ends with a reunion between American and Japanese Iwo Jima veterans in 1985. The book presents itself as shedding light on some of the "ironies and misconceptions that proliferated around the Iwo Jima flag-raisings" but remains resolutely respectful of the event and the photograph, as the final chapter titled "D + 40: A Gathering of Heroes" suggests with its use of the word "heroes." The book ends with a well-composed photograph of a Fifth Marine Division cemetery on Iwo Jima with Mount Suribachi in the background and an American flag in the dead center of the photograph. With *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero*, the cultural work of re-enchantment—to whatever extent the image even needed it, which was not much—had begun.

The next book, *Shadow of Suribachi: Raising the Flags on Iwo Jima* (1995) by Parker Bishop Albee, Jr. and Keller Cushing Freeman, two historians, presents itself as a definitive setting-straight of the record, and accuses its predecessor of being guilty of contributing to the mystifications. Published only four years after Marling and Wetenhall's study, its title may have been referring to the shadow of the other book as well as of Suribachi. In order to distinguish their work, which covers much of the same ground, Albee and Freeman attack the earlier study for sloppy scholarship and for excessively debunking the photograph. If the first charge is occasionally true (as they prove), the second is much less so, as I suggested. *Shadow of Suribachi* is also more detailed and meticulously documented (as befitting a work by historians) but pays no attention to the photograph's cultural impact. The study jumps from the 1946 investigation into one of the dead flag-raisers who had been misidentified to January 1994. Mischievously borrowing from their predecessor's work, which had ended with a chapter titled "D-Day + 40," Albee and Freeman's last chapter is "D-Day + 50 Years" and in it they take Marling and Wetenhall apart. They not only attack their "innumerable errors of fact" but they accuse

them of peddling conspiracy theories and "antiheroic . . . distortions."[2] They present their own work as more balanced insofar as it identifies two forms of myth that surrounded the photo: sentimental and heroic on the one hand, and cynical and antiheroic on the other. They claim to chart a more scholarly and objective middle course in between the two kinds of myth, and they claim to show the "reality of how a significant battle was won" (though the battle is not the focus of their book) as well as the "fact that Joe Rosenthal photographed an authentic moment in the American experience."[3]

The emphasis on "reality" and "facts" and the "authentic" is expected from scholars trained in historiography but also functions to rehabilitate the ritual magic of the flag-raising, as do the final two photographs of the book, of Joseph Rosenthal visiting Iwo Jima in 1946. In one photo, he kneels on one knee next to the gravesite, adorned with a cross and two flags, of one of the dead flag-raisers (Henry Hansen, from the first flag-raising). In the second photo, Rosenthal stands next to a giant American flag at the flag-raising monument on the summit of Suribachi. The last words of the book are from a letter Rosenthal wrote to the family of the flag-raiser, Henry Hanson, in 1946, in which he speaks of "reverence for our heroes" and his "salute to the patriots who have made great sacrifices."[4]

Ending with these images and words from Rosenthal performs multiple functions for the book. First, it underscores the main difference between the two studies: the first, whose authors had never contacted Rosenthal, and the present one, which places interviews with Rosenthal among its most important sources. Second, by presenting Rosenthal amidst crosses and flags it visually signals his authority, and, by implication, that of the book. Finally, it grounds the photo in historical truth (the real photographer visiting the real site of the battle and photo) while re-infusing that truth with symbolic and ritual power by displaying two of the most potent symbols of American national culture: the Christian cross and the American flag. In short, the re-enchantment of the image continued with this study despite (or rather, *because* of) the fact that it was written as a meticulously researched work "by highly competent scholars" and setting "the record straight" (according to the back cover).

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS: THE BOOK

The most famous of these three books is James D. Bradley's highly re-enchanting best-seller from 2000, *Flags of our Fathers* (co-written with Ron Powers). Written by the son of John Bradley, who for many decades had been believed to be one of the flag-raisers in the Rosenthal photo, the book is unabashedly in awe of the men who fought on Iwo Jima and uses religious language to describe the photo and its site from the first pages.[5] It

is also very concerned with refurbishing the image of the war generation as *fathers*, as the title *Flags of our Fathers* already suggests by linking the sacred national totem to the word "fathers." In this respect, it is a kind of rewriting of the family dynamics structuring *Sands of Iwo Jima*, erasing the absent father with a present one and replacing conflict with filial devotion. Yet traces of the earlier problems remain: the father is characterized above all by his silence about his war experience (to the extent that his family did not know about his Navy Cross until his death). The son also has a streak of rebelliousness, studying Japanese culture as a young man and claiming once at a Thanksgiving dinner that Japan was a victim of American aggression, a claim that the older son now recalls with embarrassment and further awe for the father's patience in the face of such "baloney."[6]The father's forbearance is all the more extraordinary as his son reveals that a buddy of the father had been tortured for three days before being killed by the Japanese on Iwo Jima, a revelation that is also offered as a partial explanation for the father's unwillingness to speak of the war at all. In this way the violated body, a pre-requisite for credibility in contemporary war narratives, is briefly displayed before being re-buried in a final series of moving exchanges between father and son in the last pages of the book (the main part of the book ends with the father's words, there is a letter from James to his father and an acknowl-edgments section that also addresses his father as "Dad" directly). In other words, despite its focus on the Rosenthal photo, the book is every bit as much about fathers as it is about flags.

The most striking thing about the book as a story of the flag-raising photo is how unabashedly re-enchanting it is. It seems determined to re-endow the photograph with sacred vitality and agency, transforming into a holy relic of American Civil Religion. Bradley's story picks up where the other two books left off—with a journey to Suribachi itself, which he calls a "pilgrimage"—and calls the site of the site "sacred ground" and a "holy land," terms he attributes to Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles Krulak (as highest-ranking officer of the Marine Corps, Krulak is a powerful totem figure and therefore an important authority).[7] The language in which he describes his visit to the summit in 1998 is the language of magic and the sacred: he feels "alive" and invigorated, sensing "strong emotion in the air" and imagining the how "exhilarating" it must have been to raise the flag, he describes weeping himself and seeing the tears of the "highest rank-ing enlisted man in the Corps," Sergeant Major Lewis Lee (Krulak, as totem father, is not reported as weeping). The ceremony on the summit consists of several speeches and the scattering of photographs of the flag-raisers off the mountainside. In this gesture, photographs have taken the place of ashes made from real bodies (what one normally "scatters" on such occasions) signaling their sacralization. Bradley's speech is about the mystery of his

father's lifelong silence about the war, a rhetorical move that both reinforces the mystical tone of the proceedings (with the term "mystery") and creates narrative suspense for the answers the book purports to offer about the silence not only of this one father but essentially of all the fathers of that generation.

The sacralizing tendency of the book is also prominent in the section where Bradley describes the effects of the photograph when it first appeared. Like a sacred relic, "a radiant image of victory burned its way around the curve of the earth."[8] With the terms "radiant" and "burned" Bradley initiates a highly kinetic but also luminous vocabulary for the photo. He describes people as "fascinated" and "transfixed" by it.[9] He reports the mother of Charles Sweeney, who would later drop the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, framing the image, and hanging it on the dining room wall next to "Jesus and FDR," an anecdote that deftly fuses the mass death of the atom bomb with the mass death on Iwo and links it to the two most important totem figures in American culture, God and the President. Nothing could be more sacralizing that this potent brew of civil religion and megadeath. Bradley's prose is equally reverential. "A current of exaltation," he writes, "gathered its own momentum in the nation. This current was borne of The Photograph."[10] The language is mystical, attributing agency, power and even life to the image, with the terms "borne" and "nation" which recall the first lines of the Gettysburg Address. Capitalizing the word "Photograph" throughout the book, Bradley describes it as "illuminating the air around it" and releasing "pulses of hope and pride and often tears."[11]

In a 2006 afterword (timed to coincide with the release of the Clint Eastwood film based on his book), Bradley once more attributes extraordinary magical power to the photograph by saying that his book itself is merely a tribute to it and not what he thought it was: "A few years ago I thought I wrote a book. Now I understand that I served The Photograph."[12] He describes John Wayne as also serving "The Photograph" when he made *Sands of Iwo Jima* and points out that Wayne's plaque at the Chinese Theater is black because it is made from the black sands of Iwo Jima, a visible reminder of Wayne's fame being owed mainly to that picture and to his association with death (another meaning of the blackness of the cement). Using the highly kinetic and electric metaphors that Bradley always prefers for describing the influence of the image, he finishes the book by placing the photograph in the *aevum* time that I mentioned earlier, the temporality of secular eternity, a time that can only exist in rhetoric and ideology because it is based on a physical impossibility, that of bridging perpetuity and history: "The power of The Photograph flows through past, present, and future."[13]

In this way, Bradley helps us understand how Civil Religion works. Ever since the nation-state took over from organized religion the power to organize killing and dying, the modern nation has functioned as a form of the divine.

The fact that it is not explicitly recognized as such—in discourse—is part and parcel of its sacred status, even while the practices and observances of state ceremony tacitly reveal its power. That power, as Marvin and Ingle argue, stems in large part from the channeling of collective death and periodical blood rituals such as war. The two most important and effective blood rituals of American history, besides the Revolution itself, are the Civil War and WWII. These have such great power because they touched nearly everyone in the country, killing a significant portion of the male population, and their endings were clear and decisive, creating a shared sense of cohesion around the deaths that had been offered in the name of the nation. No war since WWII has been able to unite the nation in quite the same way, according to Marvin and Ingle's account, because no war since then has been able to reunite the conditions for a successful ritual.[14] As the last major blood sacrifice of the United States, WWII continues to generate enormous emotional and civil religious power.

The Rosenthal photograph has captured and channeled this power particularly well for the reasons explained in chapter 1, namely, its association with an extremely costly battle, its idealized depiction of collective effort (representing the national community itself), and its portrayal of unmistakable willingness (the planting of the flag being a gesture of complete loyalty and submission to the sacred nation). As the result of these and other factors (including its intense media dissemination, its association with the father-figure John Wayne, and its enshrining in the national military cemetery at Arlington), the flag-raising at Iwo Jima has few rivals in the pantheon of American sacred relics, holy objects or images that signify the core of what Americans believe is sacred about their nation. The great merit of Bradley's book is how revealing and eloquent it is about this phenomenon, even while his own work contributes to recharge the photograph with more symbolic and cultural capital. By channeling a new generation of readers' attention to the image, *Flags of Our Fathers* creates even more emotional energy—in Randall Collins' term—around it.

Melodrama is also crucial to the book's work of re-enchantment and emotional regeneration. It opens and closes with an image of Bradley himself weeping, first at the ceremony on Suribachi, then later at his father's bedside as he is dying, and once more in the last words of the 2006 afterword, which are "Dad, see you this summer when the family visits your grave. I'll cry again when we sing those two songs you loved."[15] One might notice that the weeping is organized through music (songs) as well as death in these lines, an interesting detail for a melodramatic reading, given how important music has been to the history of melodrama.

Beyond its historical details and personal narratives, the book is structured mainly around the affective work of empathy. Bradley begins and ends with his father's letters and words, trying to understand what he must have felt and

thought behind his silence. Bradley also puts himself in the shoes of the other five flag-raisers and tries to recreate their experience in his sections on each one. In the spirit of healing and connection that is grounded in a melodramatic ethos, Bradley even empathizes with the Japanese on Iwo Jima and wonders in the first chapter "What must it have been like to crouch in that blockhouse and watch the American armada materialize off-shore?" And then adopting a kind of god-like balance of empathy that the book invites the reader to also assume, Bradley immediately switches back to the attacker, "What must it have been like for an American boy to advance toward him?" [16]

In addition to the narrative choice of foregrounding empathy, the language itself is very much rooted in melodrama. We can notice that Marines are called "boys," stressing their innocence and youth, activating sympathy for them by the fact that they are children facing death. Melodrama tends to organize its characters in terms of what Williams calls "primary psychic roles," the most elemental and powerful of these are family roles. Bradley's book reconfigures the fighting men of World War II into these primary and highly emotional roles. This is evident from the title itself ("Fathers"), and he ends the book (the last chapter of the 2000 edition) by describing the six flag-raisers not as soldiers or heroes but as "boys of common virtue," using the expression inscribed on the Marine Memorial ("Uncommon valor was a common virtue") and then "Brothers and sons. Friends and neighbors. And fathers."[17]

A final "acknowledgments" section revises these roles once more by addressing all Iwo Jima veterans this time as "you ordinary guys" and "you heroes of Iwo Jima."[18] The "ordinary guy" is an important ideological figure in American culture, an everyman with whom anyone can identify, and crucial to the proper functioning of melodrama, which requires protagonists easily accessible to empathy. By making all the "ordinary guys" who served on Iwo Jima into "heroes" Bradley also performs the fusion of melodrama and militarism that has worked so well since WWII. As was discussed in the section of *The Outsider,* just by being "willing" (tacitly, at least, to die), each soldier has fulfilled his required role in the national ritual of self-sacrifice and is therefore a hero. In melodramatic terms, the second person address of the dead ("you ordinary guys") is also a powerful invocation of the "moral occult," or that secular sacred realm of forces and connections that transcend the material plane and allow the dead to still have presence and agency, at least figuratively. Bradley's address of the dead bestows on his book itself the status of incantation or prayer to the dead in the service of Civil Religion while simultaneously rendering these dead as ordinary, familiar, family members: the virtuous ("heroes") victims (because they're dead) of melodrama.

Another melodramatic touch to Bradley's book is his dedication of it to "all the mothers who sent their boys to war," again identifying historical

actors by their familial roles of mother and child/boy. The dedication itself invokes great pathos when we contemplate how many of these mothers actually *lost* their "boys" in the war. The dedication page also includes a quotation from a Japanese production supervisor who worked on *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Eastwood's Japanese film about the battle), Yoshikuni Taki, who writes, "Mothers should negotiate between nations. The mothers of the fighting would agree: Stop this killing now. Stop it now." In short, the book is framed in terms of family roles on this dedication page, beginning with a nod to mothers but then shifting in the main body of the book to focus far more on fathers.

This brings me to my last point about the book, which is its unabashed worship of John Bradley as father and of his entire generation as father-figures. Coming at nearly the same time as Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* (1998) and Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), *Flags of Our Fathers* is part of a wave of works by Baby Boomer men paying homage to their fathers.[19] The impetus is the fact that it is a dying generation, with more survivors of the war passing away each year as their numbers dwindle. Brokaw begins his book by describing his conversations with the elderly men who came to the 1984 ceremonies at Normandy and realizing that they were the fathers of his friends and himself that he grew up around never realizing what extraordinary feats they had accomplished when he was a mere toddler (Brokaw was born in 1940). Spielberg also always talks of his veteran father when explaining his great fascination with World War II.[20]

Bradley makes the death of his own father the turning point that sets him on his course to research the flag-raising. The father's passing is narrated with great feeling in the last chapter, "Common Virtue," which is devoted entirely to Bradley's relationship with him. This relationship is described as deeply nurturing, empowering and close despite the fact that the father never spoke of his wartime memories. The death of John Bradley is narrated like a "beautiful death" of the nineteenth century.[21] A beloved patriarch passes away peacefully, surrounded by his large and loving family at his bedside, all of whom "touched and kissed him" just before he drew his last breath. His awareness and acceptance of his death, key elements in the "beautiful death," are confirmed by the nurse, a death expert, who tells Bradley that his father "waited for you" to die, implying that he died when he was ready and willing to go.[22] It was upon sorting through his father's affairs after his funeral that Bradley comes upon a box of documents and objects pertaining to the war that he learns that his father had earned a Navy Cross, and had described the flag-raising in a letter home as the "happiest moment" of his life.[23] As befitting the melodramatic framework shaping the entire narrative, Bradley describes weeping "openly" as he read this letter, the emotion of the discovery of his father's own emotion (superlative happiness) setting off the

search to learn why his father had never spoken of this part of his life. "What happened . . . to cause his silence?" Bradley asks himself, and announces that he spent the next four years looking for answers.[24]

This silence is similar to the silence of John Wayne's character that *Sands of Iwo Jima* had made into its narrative core, but Bradley's intention, like Brokaw's and Spielberg's, is to heal the pain of this absence with his own imaginative reconstruction, through some historical research and a lot of empathetic self-projection, of what these fathers, real and symbolic, had experienced. The tone of all these works is the respectful curiosity of adult children toward their parents' lives mixed with admiration and gratitude for their sacrifices in wartime. The fact that the protagonists are frail and elderly makes them all the more perfect objects of sympathy on top of the danger and hardship they are described as enduring when they were young.

The desire to recognize the virtue and heroism of this generation dovetails neatly with the work of melodrama, which is to organize sympathy and the recognition of virtue, and the result is a powerful re-enchantment of war through the production of gratitude and a general nostalgia for the World War II era. Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* makes this very explicit with the gold-toned scenes of life back at home interspersed among the combat sequences. Ironically, all three authors—Bradley, Brokaw, and Spielberg as director—are anxious to prove that they are aware of the horrors of war. This is measured in terms of a realism of injury that had become more graphic after a generation of Vietnam War films (such as *Hamburger Hill, Platoon*, and *84C MoPic*) showed physical injury in ways that were unheard of for John Wayne's generation. Thus, just as Spielberg opens his film with a long segment of the most dense and gory violence in the history of war cinema (with decapitations, guts spilling out, limbs scattered about, and blood splattering the camera lens), so does Bradley acknowledge with the story of "Iggy" and other moments that the war was unendurably difficult, painful, destructive, and scarring for those who survived it at all. Yet despite these acknowledgments that "war is hell" (and maybe *because* war is seen as the ultimate challenge), the powerful sacralizing mechanisms of the rest of the narrative—in Bradley's book just as in Spielberg's film—work hard to overcome and successfully contain the anomie that is the potential result of the extreme violence.

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS: THE MOVIE

Clint Eastwood's 2006 film *Flags of Our Fathers* is based on James Bradley's book and thus makes John Bradley the main focus of both the frame narrative and the embedded narrative. The film is complex in terms

of its temporal structure, moving back and forth between the present, in which Bradley Jr. interviews a series of men who knew his father, and many moments of the past, including the war, the bond rallies, after the war, the dedication, and the deaths of Hayes, Gagnon, and Bradley. As in all war films, deaths multiply and become more important in the last part of the film, where we have a series of flag-raisers dying in war and then after the war, with Bradley's death, the dramaturgical climax of the narrative. The main theme of the film is heroism, which the film purports to deconstruct, as did Bradley's book, while simultaneously rehabilitating it. Well-received as a realistic portrait of war, *Flags of Our Father* is a re-enchanting film that only seems unsentimental when compared to the excesses of Spielberg and only seems unglamorous when compared to the war porn typically produced by Hollywood. It tries to set the record straight in some ways, and clearly has both *Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Outsider* in mind as predecessors which must be overwritten and revised, but it perpetuates many longstanding myths and seems to flirt with the idea that believing in myths is more important than knowing the truth.

First of all, Eastwood's film is not the least bit interested in demystifying The Photograph. If anything, the film sets out to recharge and revive the power of the photo for a generation that needs reminding. In fact, the explicit argument of the film is that Rosenthal's photo won the war. This is apparent already from the poster, which shows the flag-raising but against a stormy sky which has been enhanced to look more dramatic, as if some cosmic struggle was taking place, and the caption "A single shot can end the war." The pun on gunshot and camera shot takes a moment to disentangle, and the work of the film is to prove that it was indeed the single shot that took this photo that turned the war around at a moment when public weariness and cynicism were threatening to lose the war for America. In an interview with an elderly Joe Rosenthal (Ned Eisenberg), Bradley is told that America was bankrupt and people were tired of the war and there was a real danger of negotiating a peace with Japan instead of pushing toward victory. According to the film version of Rosenthal, it was the appearance of the photo on February 25, 1945, that gave the country the hope and energy to prosecute the war to the end. Rosenthal uses the photo of the South Vietnamese chief of police executing a Viet Cong suspect on the street as a comparison with the Vietnam War.[25] That was the image that lost the war for America in Vietnam, he says, and "we just hung around pretending it wasn't."

In this way, the film gives news photos tremendous agency, greater than actual battles and victories, and by locating that power in public affect—also known as "morale," the power of collective emotion and attitude—the film revitalizes and remystifies the photograph. What is interesting is how self-consciously the film does this and how willing it is to concede that what

is needed to rally public opinion is myth and symbol rather than any kind of truth. Thus, the photo is presented as having been so powerful precisely *because* it gave a false and premature picture of victory. The film suggests that the country was falling apart and could not have borne another month of battle on Iwo Jima. The photo, misleading as it was, saved the nation.

The film attributes yet another kind of power to the photo—that of camouflaging the unbearable truth of war. The Joe Rosenthal character—initially heard as a voice-off during the early scenes of the film—says that the "cruelty of what we see and do in war is unbelievable" and that "somehow we've got to make some sense of it." "Cruelty" plays the role here of a society-undermining truth, something that is "unbelievable" because to believe it would be to be unable to live among men. It must therefore be hidden. And "some sense" must be given to war. The logic here comes very close to the argument of Marvin and Ingle, which is that the truth of war that cannot be borne is the fact that the group asks its own members to die. This is the taboo core of the totem myth. It is "unbelievable" in the sense that believing it would destroy the efficacy of the ritual of war and would thereby destroy society itself. The film shows a glimpse of this truth when it shows a man falling overboard and the other men realizing that he will not be rescued (because none of the transport ships hurrying to Iwo will stop for him). The fact that they spend several days at Iwo Jima shelling the island before they land makes it all the more cruel that none of the ships would take an hour or even a few minutes to stop and throw the man a lifeboat or rope.

This frank acknowledgment that at least this one particular casualty dies indirectly at the hands of his own group is a nod in the direction of a recognition that all the men on that armada who will die in the coming weeks will be dying in some sense at the hands of their own group (because the decision to seize Iwo Jima originates in the command structure of the military, and so is man-made and fallible). It is the United States that commands these men to take the island. It is thus their own group that sends them to their deaths. The fact that this decision was made for bad reasons, pride and rivalry, unwillingness to change a decision in the face of new intelligence, profane and ugly human fallibilities, are all parts of the story that the film cannot show.

Burrell's article had already appeared in *The Journal of Military History* in 2004 but Eastwood ignores it. He makes some concession to historical facts by showing that the island was not shelled for ten days as it should have been but only for three because Navy gunboats were anxious to get to Japan to bask in the glory of the "grand finale," but he takes care to maintain the fiction that the costly battle "saved a lot of lives." In fact, whole-heartedly endorsing the emergency landing theory, which had only emerged in the months after the battle, Eastwood shows a burning and distressed Superfortress landing on Iwo Jima the day that Bradley is evacuated for his injury. An aging survivor

from the battle who knew Bradley Sr., conspicuously missing both arms, tells Bradley Jr. that this was the "first of thousands to land" in Iwo in the coming week, implying that all of these thousands would be on fire and about to crash. He says "that island saves a lot of lives" and repeats "a lot of lives" just to make sure the point is heard, since the entire structure of myth around the necessity of taking Iwo Jima depends on it.

Without the emergency landing theory, without the thousands of lives saved to justify the thousands of lives lost, the battle of Iwo Jima not only seems pointless, but murderously ill-conceived. If the justification that was officially given (first fighter escort to bomb Japan and then emergency landings to save U.S. lives) were exposed as false, then the possibility that they had died for nothing comes into view. This is a disenchanting prospect that no Hollywood film that hopes to recoup its investment could ever admit (as *The Outsider* proved). Eastwood's film chases away this toxic idea, evoked tacitly by its other demystifying moves—such as the acknowledgment that one of the flag-raisers was killed by friendly fire, that Gagnon was not particularly brave and had been assigned to be a runner to keep him away from the front, and a number of others—by making sure the emergency landing theory remains intact and by attributing to the photo the power and agency of having helped win the war with Japan.

Like *Sands of Iwo Jima*, which it tries unsuccessfully to displace as *the* film about the flag-raising, *Flags of Our Fathers* uses the narrative devices and structure of melodrama extensively. First of all, the music plays an important role in cuing audience sympathy and emotion. Clint Eastwood and his son Kyle Eastwood collaborated on the score, mirroring the harmonious father-son dynamics displayed in the film, with Eastwood Sr. composing the title piece, "Flags of Our Fathers," and his son performing and/or arranging several tracks. "Flags of Our Fathers" is not a military-themed piece, nor is it a swelling orchestra composition. Its tone is elegiac and subdued, respectful and almost personal, featuring only a piano in one version, and a guitar in another, with some violins in the background. Less dramatic than Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* in *Platoon* and less military-themed than the soundtrack of *Saving Private Ryan* (which features a lot of mournful brass against the backdrop of gentle drum rolls) and also less choral and religious than the "requiem" in *Band of Brothers*,[26] Eastwood's soundtrack sounds contemplative rather than sentimental. Yet the tone remains that of an elegy, a genre that is essentially a melancholy homage to the dead, recognizing their virtue and mourning their passing.

The embedded narrative, told in sequential segments, is the quintessentially melodramatic story of the flag-raisers who lost their lives on Iwo Jima: Mike Strank, Franklin Sousley, and Harlan Block, and Henry "Hank" Hansen from the first flag-raising. These all die within a few film minutes

of each other towards the end of the film, all noble and stoic deaths. They say brave things like, "I'm okay, Ira," or "I'll be fine," or in one case, "They killed me, Doc" (Hansen). Strank (played by Barry Pepper), as the sergeant, is given a few extra moments of film-time as his men gather around him in a scene recalling *Sands of Iwo Jima*, but Eastwood does not bother with letters or sentimental gimmicks here (he saves the sentiment for the frame narrative).

The most important death is that of Bradley's buddy, Iggy (Jamie Bell), who is abducted and tortured by the Japanese for three days. Bradley (Ryan Philippe) goes into the cave to see his body after he is found but the film does not show it to us, tastefully shying away from what is thereby figured as too terrible to display. The camera stays focused on Bradley's face and the film shows us that he has nightmares about Iggy for the rest of his life, thereby presenting him to the audience as a sufferer worthy of our sympathy (especially since he will not speak of his memories and thus suffers in silence as melodramatic victim-heroes must). However, the film makes sure that the audience recognizes Bradley's virtue as well as his suffering by showing us his recurrent nightmares, the fact that he calls for Iggy when he suffers a stroke, that he helps others even after being wounded, and that he is the only one that Ira Hayes confides in when he suffers his post-traumatic guilt and grief. The film tries hard to make Bradley into a kind of Wayne figure, both brave and stoic, a man of few words but great courage, at one point saving the life of a wounded soldier while stabbing a Japanese attacker to death, taking and saving lives like a god, all the while saying nothing about what he thinks and feels.

In fact, *Flags* seems to be trying to outdo *Sands* by explicitly making father-son relations center stage again but this time showing them to be loving and healed. This is the main work of the frame narrative, which shows Bradley Jr. (played by Tom McCarthy) interviewing people who knew his father—one of whom reassures him that "your father was a good man"—and shows his father having a stroke, lying in the hospital and finally passing away. Just before he dies, John Bradley tells his son that he is sorry that he "wasn't a better father—and talked to you more," literally recreating the scene from *Sands of Iwo Jima*, but *in the nick of time* instead of *too late* (these being the two main pathos-generating temporalities specific to melodramatic narrative). Seemingly moments before he dies, Bradley is able to tell his son that he cared even though he was silent, and the son is able to tell him that he "was the best father a man could have" and hug him. The word "man" here is significant, and points to the specifically masculine crisis that seems to be behind all these cinematic declarations of love. Everything that is not explicitly said by Wayne to his son before his death is said in *Flags*, as if to overwrite and heal the missed opportunities of that earlier film.

**Figure 3.1   Bradley Jr. (Tom McCarthy) Sharing a Final Moment of Connection with His
Veteran Father (John Grizzard), Reprieving the "Beautiful Death" Described in Bradley's
Book.** Screenshot by Author, from *Flags of Our Fathers*, 2006.

Yet the film ends with an acknowledgment that there is an element of pure
fantasy and wish-fulfilment in its ending. It does so by having Bradley tell
his son an anecdote of the war—the one and only one—just before dying. He
tells him that he prefers to remember Iggy from the time they went swimming
on Iwo Jima. The movie ends with this scene of Marines in their underwear
playing in the surf on a sunny day. The scene does important rhetorical and
symbolic work in the film on a number of layers. For one thing, on the level of
melodrama, it represents a moment of "innocence taking pleasure in itself,"
and proves the innocence and therefore virtue of the men who fought on Iwo
Jima. If the film begins by evoking the "unbelievable cruelty" that war reveals
in man, it ends by exorcising that fact with a selected memory of childlike
play. Of course, this aspect of human nature does not cancel out the other,
but the film chooses to end with it, opting finally for remembering the more
pleasant things over the more terrible ones. It also reminds us that the men
who died on Iwo Jima were little more than boys, children who had been
snatched from the prime of their youth to fight and die thousands of miles
from home, and this is a theme that recurs in most recent WWII films which
inevitably borrow from melodrama to position the "greatest generation" as
objects of our sympathy as well as admiration when we contemplate their
hardships and suffering.

The last scene also seems to both evoke and exorcise the themes of the
other Iwo Jima film, *The Outsider*. This earlier film haunts *Flags of Our
Fathers* in several ways, intentional or not. First of all, there are scenes

from the earlier film that are reprieved in *Flags*. For example, a scene in *The Outsider* where a woman eats a replica of the flag-raising made from vanilla ice cream, on which she has poured chocolate syrup, shows Hayes looking disgusted and repulsed both by her and the dessert. *Flags of Our Fathers* has a similar scene but this time someone pours strawberry syrup on the ice cream, making it look drenched in blood. Hayes's character is also handled in such a way that he seems to be a victim of racism, hypocrisy and insensitivity, but all traces of same-sex love have been carefully excised from Eastwood's version of the story. Hayes does not mourn any one buddy in particular and starts to drink after realizing that the bond tour organizers are not interested in the truth of who is in the photo but only in raising money. The story of grief for a buddy is transposed to Bradley's loss of Iggy and resolutely heterosexualized by the fact that Bradley has married and raised a family. Iggy's death may have been Bradley's secret lifelong trauma but the film is determined to kill any hint of suggestion that there was anything queer about their attachment. It was Iggy's prolonged torture, not any ambiguous or unusual feelings, that haunted Bradley. The last scene, with Bradley remembering Iggy playing in the water, is also comically careful to avoid any homoerotic possibilities. The men are all improbably wearing their underwear and Bradley keeps his pants on as he runs in the water to join them. The camera also pulls back immediately to film them from a respectful distance, from what seems to be the top of Suribachi. This way no semi-nude bodies are offered to the spectator and the men splashing in the water look even more like children.

From the perspective of Civil Religion, the scene underscores the innocence and, therefore, ritual perfection of the sacrifices about to be made in the world of the film (sacrifices *already* made in our world and timeline). In this scene, they are happy, which translates into the willingness and acceptance of death that is required for a successful blood sacrifice. They are also literally clean and symbolically free of any taint of sexuality. The fact that their deaths are just over the horizon (for a good third of them anyway) is suggested not only by the camera being placed ominously on Mount Suribachi (like the guns we saw aiming at the beach earlier with POV shots from inside the gun emplacements), the site of the sacred ritual known to all, but also by the way the camera pulls up from their innocent play to the armada just off shore before pulling even further up to the sky. The effect is to remind the viewer that the war is still going on and many of these boys "frisking" on the beach (to evoke Crane's poem) will soon die. The effect is also to connect their innocence to the war effort—here represented like a mighty machine, a sublime armada—and finally to a hope or hint of divine sanction as the camera pulls up to the heavens. Surely, the ending seems to suggest, God must be looking favorably upon an endeavor that is both so powerful and so innocent.

AQ: Perhaps "offshore"?

The re-enchanting work of the film continues during the credit sequence, as real photographs taken by Joseph Rosenthal and others are shown. Eastwood's theme music plays mournfully and quietly in the background as a series of thirty or more photos appear. These begin with rather neutral images of the island, of the bond rallies, and flag-raisers but the series gets darker and darker as the sequence focuses increasingly on the landing and shows tanks and gunships, ragged and tired looking men, wounded men, men in foxholes, and finally dead men, men floating in the surf, lying contorted in the sand, one dead man still holding the leash of a living dog, shots of Rosenthal on Suribachi, and other shots of the flag-raising. After the credits there is a short video sequence of the flag-raising memorial monument on top of Suribachi in what must be the present, and finally the last image is the famous photo itself which slowly fades out with the last notes of music. This last sequence of the film thus recharges the film with ritual magic by displaying all the real news photos, and invoking a serious and subdued mourning mood through the music. By anchoring itself in the historical truth, accompanied by Eastwood's score, the film tries to combine its melodramatic devices with the weight of historical realism the way *Sands of Iwo Jima* did so successfully.

What the film seems to want most is to recharge the photograph with emotional energy and symbolic charge and use that energy toward the ongoing resurrection of World War II in the service of re-enchanting war more generally. World War II has become the war of choice for Hollywood producers nowadays, whether it's for feel-good nostalgic drama (*The Monuments Men*), or war-porn about the terrible things that men do in war for an ultimately good cause (*Fury*).[27] World War II has far outpaced Vietnam as subject matter, and is also leaving the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the dust as far as commercially successful products are concerned. Some of the films about the recent wars have tried to be critical and thoughtful and so have earned a reputation as a "toxic" genre.[28] The only box office gold at the moment is World War II, though the Civil War comes close in ritual power and occasionally experiences a revival, the most recent being during the Obama presidency, such as *Gettysburg* (2011), *Lincoln* (2012), *Copperhead* (2013), and *Free State of Jones* (2016).[29]

As I have tried to show in this chapter, melodrama and militarism continue to function well together as discourses in the twenty-first century because both are invested in the notion of meaningful death, a key framing and justifying strategy for the ongoing loss of American lives in various foreign theaters of war and occupation. This is why most films that re-enchant war, by lending it an air of noble necessity and great redemptive power, use the conventions and structures of melodrama, especially those which channel audience sympathy toward a virtuous victim and lead to recognizing the moral meanings of characters and events that may initially seem murky or ambiguous. However,

as I will show in the next chapter, melodrama is not the only genre that works to re-enchant war. An equally important and ubiquitous mode that consistently and effectively revitalizes war is the narrative form called "adventure."

NOTES

1. Marling and Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima*; Albee, Jr. and Freeman, *Shadow of Suribachi*; James Bradley with Powers, *Flags of Our Fathers*.

2. Albee and Freeman, *Shadow of Suribachi*, 143, 146.

3. Ibid., 152.

4. Ibid., 155.

5. In 2016, James Bradley Jr. revealed that his father was *not* in the Rosenthal photograph after all, and had participated in the first, unphotographed, flag-raising. (https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/04/us/iwo-jima-marines-bradley.html).

6. Bradley, *Flags,* 524.

7. Ibid., 8, 19.

8. Ibid., 334.

9. Ibid., 335.

10. Ibid., 402.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 537.

13. Ibid.

14. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation*, 87.

15. Bradley, *Flags,* 538.

16. Ibid.*,* 12.

17. Ibid., 534.

18. Ibid.*,* 540.

19. Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 2005).

20. See, for example, Steven Spielberg, "I grew up with stories about war," *Independent,* accessed July 5, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/steven-spielberg-i-grew-up-with-stories-about-war-6287679.html.

21. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death,* trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 409–474.

22. Bradley, *Flags,* 526–27.

23. Ibid., 6.

24. Ibid., 6–7.

25. "Saigon Execution," photo by Eddie Adams (Associated Press, 1968).

26. Todd Decker has written an interesting analysis of the music for *Band of Brothers,* but his characterization of the main theme as a "waltz" is based on technical features that a non-expert listener such as myself would not necessarily notice. Decker, "A Waltz with and for the Greatest Generation," 93.

27. *The Monuments Men,* directed by George Clooney (2014; Culver City: Columbia Pictures, 2014), DVD. *Fury,* directed by David Ayer (2014; Culver City: Sony Home Pictures, 2015), DVD.

28. See Martin Barker, *A "Toxic Genre": The Iraq War Films* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

29. World War I films such as Sam Mendes' *1917* occasionally do well at the box office but the First World War is much more of a British sacred rite than a U.S. one. The recent Civil War films include *Gettysburg,* directed by Adrian Moat (2011; Santa Monica: Lionsgate, 2011), DVD; *Lincoln,* directed by Steven Spielberg (2012; Burbank: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD; *Copperhead,* directed by Ronald F. Maxwell (2013; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2014), DVD; and *Free State of Jones,* directed by Gary Ross (2016; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2016), DVD.

Chapter 4

Adventure, Killing, and the Pleasures of War

Robin Moore's The Green Berets *(1965)*

This chapter is about another re-enchanting and revitalizing genre, but one that works very differently from melodrama. Instead of pathos and loss, adventure is about pleasure and action. Instead of virtuous victims, adventure features victorious survivors. As a general story paradigm, adventure honors the importance of journeying outside of one's comfort zone and being transformed by challenges, encounters with the unknown and learning valuable lessons. There is good reason why Joseph Campbell's work on the "hero's journey," a permutation of the adventure narrative, has become so popular among therapists, writers, and many other people.[1] It is a deeply resonant trope for discovery and regenerative change in human life.

When applied to the theme of war, however, the adventure mode becomes a justification for violence and death by presenting killing as regenerative and vital. War adventure will often overlap and interact with the mechanisms of melodrama, but instead of organizing pity for meaningful deaths, it offers the vicarious pleasure of satisfying kills. And instead of a "moral occult," adventure thrives on wish-fulfilment fantasy. Not only does the protagonist not die, but he escapes death so often and so closely that he seems immortal. As John Cawelti says, "the basic moral fantasy implicit in this type of story is that of victory over death"—but *only for the hero*.[2] Friends and allies can die, and often do, but it is the death of evil and irredeemable enemies that is necessary and satisfying. Although there are many types of adventure (it is a remarkably capacious mode, and has become a staple of Hollywood writing through Christopher Vogler's screenwriting guidebook *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*), the war adventure narrative is currently among the most popular and commercially viable.[3] This is a mode that can be traced back to the earliest warrior sagas, but has become particularly important with modernity and its colonial wars. An even more recent permutation of this

mode—and the one that concerns us here—is the paramilitary war adventure popularized during the Vietnam era by Robin Moore.

Few books have had the cultural influence of Moore's *The Green Berets* (1965), a text that is not only heir to nearly three centuries of Anglo-American adventure story-telling but stands as the fountainhead of a contemporary literary culture of paramilitary adventure that includes the popular Mack Bolan series (over 600 novels since 1969 to the present, created by Don Pendleton and continued by dozens of ghost-writers, about a former Special Forces sniper known as "The Executioner"), the Rambo franchise (also about a former Green Beret), and hundreds of military memoirs Philip Beidler calls "Viet Pulp."[4] These latter narratives, typically purporting to be autobiographical and true and often including photographs and glossaries, are generally accounts of special operations units rather than conventional infantry, thus forming part of a larger cultural fascination with special operations, covert missions and paramilitary culture that William Gibson has traced back to 1975, when a retired Army Special Forces colonel named Robert Brown founded the *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, just before the fall of Saigon.[5] Emerging at the exact moment that a "dangerous void" was being created by "the American failure in Vietnam," *Soldier of Fortune* magazine appealed to a wide readership of civilian men with its images of masculinity defined through professional militarism and unconventional warfare. Since then, paramilitary culture in fiction, nonfiction, film and on the internet has become a huge business in the United States, with adventure as its principle narrative mode.

However, the roots of contemporary paramilitary culture go back even further and deeper than *Soldier of Fortune*. As the name implies, the magazine celebrates the professional warrior, essentially a mercenary, once called an "adventurer." In fact, the full version of the magazine's title is *Soldier of Fortune: The Journal of Professional Adventurers*. The professional but unconventional warrior is a figure that has a long and rich history in American popular media, oscillating between more cynical and more idealistic poles.[6] Sometimes he fights only for personal profit, sometimes for principles or to aid people who need help. Often he fights for the sheer pleasure of fighting or simply out of loyalty to other men of his kind. This is a type that emerged in American cinema after World War II, with films such as *Fort Apache* (1948), in which John Wayne plays Kirby York, a captain in the U.S. Cavalry who is both a regular soldier and a frontier Indian fighter. The cultural antecedents of Wayne's Kirby York reach back even further and include figures such as James Fenimore Cooper's Hawkeye, another white man defined by his incorporation of Native American features, and the "hunter, trapper and Indian-fighter" Daniel Boone.[7] In *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin traces the prehistory of the Special Forces adventurer to the Western, Frederick

Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis, and to the earliest American sources of the "regeneration through violence" myth that he identifies as the cornerstone of American culture.[8]

Robin Moore's novel incorporates many elements of these American precursors as well as the nineteenth-century British adventure genre and weaves them into a fictionalized war memoir that helped popularize the Vietnam War in its early phase. The blurring between fact and fiction that characterizes this work is typical of the genre of war adventure, which generally seeks credibility in either claiming to be an account of personal experience or being based on real events. Thus, the conventions of adventure as a mode are to be found equally present in novels and fiction films, in journalism, documentary or other nonfiction forms. Moore's novel was published in 1965, but re-released in a new edition in 1999, and again in 2007, suggesting that the adventure genre has gained new purchase in the twentieth-century. In addition to discussing the novel, I will briefly examine the popular song that Moore helped Barry Sadler write in 1966, "The Ballad of the Green Berets," and finally, the film John Wayne made based on Moore's book in 1968. If Moore's novel is pure adventure, the song and film shift the material into the realm of melodrama, focusing on virtuous victims in equal or greater measure than on victorious warriors.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE WAR ADVENTURE STORY

Adventure is a form of narrative that dates back to the earliest tales of heroes and includes the chivalric romances of the Middle Ages and early modern period. John Cawelti calls adventure the "simplest and perhaps the oldest and widest in appeal of all story types."[9] A key text in the formation of the modern adventure mode, according to Martin Green, who also calls it "historically speaking the most important of our literary forms," is Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*.[10] This novel established certain elements that would become essential to the modern adventure tale, including an encounter with a racially-marked other, survival in a dangerous environment, and a deep concern with masculinity. According to Martin Green, "adventure has . . . been the liturgy—the series of cultic texts—of masculinism."[11] Colonialism and empire are regarded by critics as key contexts for the modern adventure story, providing a moral and national purpose to the narratives of exploration, hardship, violence and conquest of nature and/or naturally inferior beings.[12]

The adventure tale flourished in the nineteenth century and especially in the decades leading up to the First World War. In British fiction, adventure tales were written in both more literary and more juvenile forms by

writers including Sir Walter Scott, Captain Marryat, R.M. Ballantyne, Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, John Buchan, and Joseph Conrad (who also combined adventure with horror and irony and pushed the form in a more literary direction). In the United States, adventure fiction can be said to begin with Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntley* (1799) and developed in both more popular and more literary strains by writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, and Jack London, though many of these authors also included elements of ironic critique of adventure conventions in their work.

A number of scholars have suggested that the war adventure genre did not survive the disenchantments of World War I and trench warfare, but this is simply not true.[13] Instead, the war adventure mode changed locations for a while: from the European front to the more exotic Middle East. As Graham Dawson demonstrates, for example, the myth of Lawrence of Arabia began to circulate before the war was even over, and this story was constructed largely out of the conventional elements of the adventure mode (European Everyman goes to exotic frontier, discovers his talent for violence, returns home a hero). The American journalist and promoter of the Lawrence legend, Lowell Thomas, used both the magazine form and a mixed-media presentation of slides and film to magnify and sensationalize Lawrence's adventures.[14] The 1962 widescreen epic film based on this material (directed by David Lean and starring Peter O'Toole) testifies to its survival well beyond WWII.

In American literature, war adventure became muted and ironic after the First World War but did not completely quit the battlefield. Writers such as Hemingway and William Faulkner have often been considered as ironic critics of traditional adventure forms, but irony does not cancel out adventure as a mode. Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), for example, can be read as a modernist version of the adventure narrative, with the frame structure following Nick from his first encounter with death in "Indian Camp" to his postwar fishing trip which ends with Nick coolly "whacking" a trout against a log in order to kill it.[15] Despite the ironies and the frank acknowledgment of the horrors of war, the frame narrative is nevertheless structured by a coming of age story-arc. The fact that Nick's adult manhood has been achieved through traumatizing experiences of violence is left tacit in the text but can be inferred from the inter-chapter vignettes of war horror. The whole point of male rites of passage is that they are regarded as a necessary form of injury. Pain, suffering, and transformation through the endurance of some form of trauma—either literally or symbolically—are key ingredients of many initiation rituals and serve to demonstrate that manhood has been achieved through resilience and survival. Although adventure is often associated with literature for boys and young adults, precisely because it so often features

coming-of-age stories, it is not limited to juvenile readers. As the previous example suggests, adult and canonical literature can have elements of adventure to varying degrees and in various forms.

As is often the case with genre criticism, scholars who have written about the modern adventure genre have focused on different features: some focus more on the imperial and geographically remote aspects of adventure,[16] others on core themes such as risk and danger,[17] or encounters with death.[18] In a recent work on British adventure fiction, Joseph Kestner identifies four key features of the adventure genre: voyaging, mapping, invading and "loving" (evoking the frequent theme of sexual adventure or romance that appears in the adventure mode).[19] Opting for a more general definition, Cawelti describes the "central fantasy" of the adventure story as that of the "hero—individual or group—overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission."[20] Northrop Frye identified adventure even more broadly, as a kind of romance concerned with a quest.[21]

As one can see, the definitions range from very general to more historically specific, locating adventure in relation to colonial ventures. One common feature is that almost all studies of adventure fiction focus exclusively on British literature. Although American literature of the nineteenth century was also heavily influenced by this mode, American scholars throughout the twentieth century have tended to scrupulously avoid British-tinged nomenclature such as "adventure" in order to emphasize American uniqueness and preferred the vaguer but allegedly more American "romance."[22] As a result, few comparative studies of British and American adventure writing have been undertaken, largely to the detriment of understanding the larger history and tradition from which American adventure is drawn.

In the context of war narrative, Graham Dawson's 1994 study of British nonfiction adventure narratives, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, is particularly helpful. Dawson focuses specifically on the life stories and popular legends of figures such as British general Henry Havelock and British Army officer T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), showing how both masculinity and nationalism are central concerns of the military adventure mode. In the American context, which Dawson does not explore, equivalent figures would be Daniel Boone, Davy Crocket, Buffalo Bill, and Teddy Roosevelt, and in the twentieth century, Alvin York and Audie Murphy. These are all real men whose life stories became popular narratives of boys' adventure fantasy. All were known for their military or hunting prowess—that is, their ability to kill. It is interesting to observe how fact and fiction blur easily in the adventure mode, often becoming indistinguishable from fantasy. Northrop Frye described the romance as the closest literary genre to the "wish-fulfilment dream" and the

war adventure story—whether cast as fiction or fact—tends to share this affinity with enhanced reality.[23] Thus, although men like Daniel Boone and Teddy Roosevelt were historically real, exaggerated and partly fictionalized narratives of their lives made them larger-than-life figures and national icons. All the texts that I examine in this chapter also happen to be technically non-fiction or fictionalizations of real events.

In short, an ambiguity between fact and fiction is characteristic of the war adventure mode. For instance, Robin Moore begins his book with the words: "*The Green Berets* is a book of truth," yet the very next sentence describes his subject matter as the "almost unknown marvelous undercover work of our Special Forces in Vietnam," with the word "marvelous" resonating in more than one sense, as it refers not only to his enormous approbation of these activities but their often fantastic or implausible nature.[24] Creating still more ambiguity, the first edition bore a yellow band on the cover that said: "Fiction Stranger Than Fact?" Moore claims the "fiction" label was imposed on the book by the Pentagon and intended to discredit the book, which revealed operations that Moore claimed were true but embarrassing to military officials. Ultimately, the fact that Moore had trained and operated in the field briefly with Special Forces teams gave his book, no matter how sensationally written and no matter how it was labeled, an aura of journalistic truth that convinced many readers. Moore reinforces this impression in the 2007 edition of his book with a foreword by a "Major General Thomas R. Csrnko," who endorses Moore's insider status.[25] The way that *The Green Berets* presents itself as historical truth while at the same time shamelessly employing a variety of conventions traceable back to the nineteenth-century adventure tales for boys is typical for war adventure.

In the section that follows, I would like to sketch out a portrait of the war adventure mode that readers will be able to recognize across a range of traditional and contemporary texts. However, I would like to stress that "adventure" is more like a family of narratives and effects than a homogeneous category. My intention here is not to create a classification, but to trace the salient features and outlines of a form that appears across genres and media, and which shares certain affects and effects. One of the most important of these shared features is that of creating an attractive portrait of military and combat experience. Thus, recruitment and support for the military, or for specific branches of the military, have often been overt or tacit objectives of many adventure-inflected war narratives. There are exceptions, of course, but the general tendency of war adventure is to enchant war and combat by presenting it as an authentic and emotionally intense experience, no matter how brutal or horrific it may seem. (In many cases, in fact, especially in recent films, the depiction of the horrors of war serves merely as further evidence of the heroes' toughness, as I will explain in the final chapters.)

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS OF WAR ADVENTURE

Among the main features of modern war adventure are an affective matrix of pleasure and danger, a liminal setting, an encounter with a racially marked Other, and usually (but not always) a coming of age or at least a recognition by other men of the protagonist's manhood.[26] Other features which can be present include sex and romance and/or intense male bonding. Adventure also tends to rely on essentialist notions of gender and race, something akin to the use of types or primary roles in melodrama but used to establish insurmountable differences between characters rather than break them down through shared emotion (as melodrama does). And just as nineteenth-century adventure was often intended to have a didactic function, so much contemporary war adventure has a propaganda or recruitment purpose.

The first and most important feature of the adventure mode is its high emotional impact. The kinds of emotions described and created by adventure narratives are all strongly positive: excitement, pleasure, satisfaction, joy, thrills. The hero will almost always survive, often miraculously, and will relish his achievements, which often involve killing or at least hunting (that is, killing animals) in order to survive. In an 1894 essay, Arthur Conan Doyle described his childhood pleasure in reading adventure stories such as Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*:

> I do not think life has any joys to offer so complete, so soul-filling, as that which comes upon the imaginative lad whose spare time is limited, but who is able to snuggle down into a corner with his book, knowing that the next hour is all his own . . . It was all more real than the reality. Since those days I have in very truth both shot bears and harpooned whales, but the performance was flat compared to the first time that I did it with Mr Ballantyne . . . at my elbow.[27]

We can begin by noting that the language of "complete" and "soul-filling" "joys" is a language of enchantment and almost religious intensity. The fictional adventures are "more real than reality," and the vicarious pleasures of the shooting and harpooning of bears and whales are more vivid and compelling than the real experience. We could also note that although the story is mainly about sailing and discovery, the experiences that Doyle singles out for mention are those of killing. Although there can be different kinds of adventures, it seems that killing is the "adventure" that matters most. In the adventure narrative, killing is almost always necessary, morally justified and, to varying degrees, often pleasurable, even for the youngest protagonists.

The pleasure of killing is a recurrent theme in adventure but not always explicit. Instead, the pleasurable dimension of killing is often disguised in the intense emotions and almost religious feelings of awe and self-forgetting

Figure 4.1 *The Coral Island* (1858) by Robert Michael Ballantyne (1825–1894).
Original Caption Reads: "With one blow of his staff Jack felled the man with the club."
(Jack, Girl, Tribal Chief). Illustration by Graham Munro. Adventure Fiction Often Included
Scenes of Young White Heroes (Here Jack Is Eighteen) Fighting and Vanquishing Native
People or Wild Animals in the Course of Their Travels. (Photo by Culture Club/Getty
Images.)

that the act of killing awakens in the character. For example, *Red Badge of
Courage,* a war novel that uses horror devices at times but is primarily a rite
of passage adventure tale, waxes lyrical about the battle rage that grips its
young hero Henry Fleming on several occasions in the latter part of the book.
At these moments, he is outside himself, in a kind of rapture, and thereby
discovers in himself an ability to fight even in great danger. The narrator
describes his state as a "mad enthusiasm," a "frenzy," a "delirium," "wild
battle madness," "full of intent hate" but possessed of a "temporary but sub-
lime absence of selfishness."[28] When it subsides, the trance-like war fever

leaves Fleming amazed and elated with his own accomplishments, and the novel never undercuts these episodes with irony as it had Fleming's initial enthusiasm for war early in the novel. While his vain thirst for war is subjected to authorial irony and satire, his experience of combat and its salutary effects on his character are treated with utter seriousness.

The intensity of emotion that danger and killing awakens in war adventure heroes is even greater in film representations, where the spectacle of combat takes on a life of its own. In many respects, combat films are basically action films, and so the action sequences are the emotional highlights of the narrative. These are the moments of danger but also of movement and decisive action, and focus on the hero or heroes engaged in structured violence against an enemy attempting to harm them. Because of our inevitable sympathy for the hero, and because of the camera's point of view, which usually films heroes from up close and enemies from a distance, the death of these latter figures can only be a relief or even cause for jubilation. The 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia*, which features Lawrence leading the Arab Revolt against the Turks, offers many examples of the joys of screen violence, especially earlier on, when Lawrence is blowing up train-tracks and attacking trains against the beautiful desert landscape.[29] The film also offers a critique of the traditional pleasures of adventure violence and shows Lawrence getting lost in the bloodshed, grinning madly as he attacks a Turkish convoy, ordering his men to take no prisoners, and reveling in the carnage. The film is unusual, however, in its combination of visual pleasure and retroactive critique and unease with that pleasure. Most war films are not so self-aware about their own sadism as *Lawrence of Arabia*, which actually has Lawrence wishing to go home at one moment because he is disturbed by the fact that he "enjoyed" killing the first two men who die at his hands.

Anthony Swofford's account of watching films like *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket* with other recruits at Camp Pendleton in his memoir *Jarhead* (2003) offers a particularly frank and revealing description of the pleasures of watching war violence on screen. According to Swofford, the recruits are "excited by them, because the magic brutality of the films celebrates the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills. Fight, rape, pillage, burn. Filmic images of death and carnage are pornography for the military man; with film you are stroking his cock, ticking his balls with the pink feather of history, getting him ready for his real First Fuck."[30] Scenes of death are like pornography, Swofford says, uttering the open secret at the heart of the adventure genre. Watching killing is fun, and it is not just a movie—this vicarious pleasure prepares the fighting man for "his real First Fuck," that is, combat and the chance to kill. Although Swofford's point is that even anti-war films are exciting for soldiers, in actuality neither *Apocalypse Now* nor *Full Metal Jacket* is really an anti-war film: both are hybrids of horror

and adventure in which the latter gets both the upper hand and the last word (as I will show in the last chapter). The scene from *Apocalypse Now* where the attacking U.S. airborne cavalry plays Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries," for example, has become an iconic and much-reproduced example of war enthusiasm, but the more incisive point of Swofford's passage is that war films are always experienced as *celebrations of fighting* even if they may seem critical of a particular war. In this way they serve the affective goals of the adventure genre, which are always pleasure and excitement, regardless of their supposed "politics."

Historically, however, the white hero of modern war adventure[31] is not supposed to take conscious and sadistic pleasure in killing, though the physical sensations which killing awakens tend to be more positive than negative. The hero is generally supposed to be a moral agent, as in chivalric tales or nineteenth-century stories for boys, which were explicitly didactic. In most adventure stories, the heroes often follow a code of some kind, which renders their violence understandable and justifiable. In the American Western film, the hero was not always much different than the enemies he faced, but he would usually be on the side of "justice" (though often merely retributive justice) if not on the side of the law. Moreover, he would be a man of "honor," a key term in adventure narratives dating back to the chivalrous values that informed late nineteenth-century American fiction (which saw a resurgence of chivalry as a cultural value) and even earlier to the original matrix of tales about knights before that.

Even if the hero does not take overt pleasure in his killing, he is often not disturbed by it either. In these cases, the audience is invited to vicariously feel the pleasure he does not display. For example, in Audie Murphy's *To Hell and Back* (1955), a film based on the real Murphy's war experiences and starring Murphy himself, he is portrayed as earnest and serious during his exploits (not grinning like Lawrence in *Lawrence of Arabia*), but the audience is invited to admire and take taking pleasure in the way he expertly mows down row after row of German soldiers with a machine gun (in a recreation of one of his famous war feats).[32] In this way, the film offers a satisfying spectacle of killing that is never troubled by excessive gore or individualization of enemy soldiers. All die quickly and easily, making the massacre a morally untroubling incident in Murphy's war adventures.

Another important point in Swofford's passage above is the comparison of violence with sex. This is a recurrent theme in war adventure fiction through it too is usually tacit and metaphorical, a way of sneaking pleasure back into killing without overtly calling it sadism. For example, in Kirk Munroe's novel *Forward, March!* (1899), an adventure novel of the Spanish-American war written for adolescent boys, the hero's first encounter with combat is described in sexualized language: with "every drop of his blood at fighting

heat," he sat "erect" in his saddle, and fired back "until every shot in his magazine was exhausted."[33] The language of heat, tumescence and sexual release structures this episode, metaphorically implying the pleasure that cannot be explicitly named for fear of tainting the innocence of the young protagonist. At the other extreme from this sublimated description are the rough penetrations of violent pulp fiction for men that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. As William Gibson observes, "most were written like hard-core pornography, except that inch-by-inch descriptions of penises entering vaginas were replaced by equally graphic portrayals of bullets, grenade fragments and knives shredding flesh."[34] This is a way of representing the pleasures of violence while simultaneously also justifying it as normal and instinctual, like sex, that is, something that society may frown on but that people who are honest with themselves will recognize as natural and inevitable.

The pleasures of war adventure also often include actual and overt sex and/or romance. The hero will encounter attractive women, often prostitutes, or if he is being portrayed in a more chivalric way, as a bearer of righteous violence, will have a wife or girlfriend. *The Green Berets* for instance is full of references to sex with prostitutes and local Vietnamese or indigenous women, portrayed as a perk of military life.[35] In fact, in one story the American Special Forces themselves plan to set up a brothel, and in two stories they force their local female agents to prostitute themselves. There are also several instances of love relationships between American soldiers and native Montagnard women, the local indigenous population, including a fifteen-year-old girl. If the heroes of melodrama tend to remain chaste and asexual as part of their ordeal of suffering, the heroes of adventure will usually experience romance and sex as part of the pleasures of the warrior life. However, this is not an indispensable feature, since many war narratives feature no women characters at all.

Besides combat, killing and sex, there is one other major source of pleasure in the war adventure mode: the companionship of other men. Again, there are exceptions, namely adventure narratives that focus on a lone protagonist, but the satisfactions of male bonding and homosocial relationships are a major theme in most. These friendships can be very intense and are especially strong when they cross racial or national lines, which is often the case in both American and British imperial fiction. We can think of Lawrence and Sharif Ali (as well as Lawrence's two doting teenaged Arab servants) in the film *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), which one critic described as "British cinema's first 'queer epic.'"[36] Famous American examples include Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook in Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales and Huckleberry Finn and Jim in Mark Twain's novel.[37]

The trope of brotherhood, and specifically, of comrades in arms as a "band of brothers," is thus very common in war adventure narratives. It is

a conceit that dates back (at least) to Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599)*,* when the young Prince Hal rallies his troops before the Battle of Agincourt with a speech about the bonds of "fellowship" that their common willingness to die together has forged. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers," Hal says, rhetorically sealing a chain of connections between their small number, their pleasure at fighting together, and their symbolic brotherhood.[38] The fourth term crucial to this equation is mentioned in the next line: "manhood." Hal says that men who were not there with them will envy them and hold their "manhood cheap" for having missed the perilous battle. This speech is the cultural matrix in the English language for the fusion of values that informs the mystique of the notion of "brothers in arms." The language of kinship is particularly revealing as a form of enchantment, implying the extraordinary bonds that resemble or even surpass the force of biological kinship.

When real veterans speak of the appeals of war they frequently evoke the intensity of bonds between fellow warriors as one of the main attractions of the experience. Jesse Glenn Gray, in an influential post–WWII study of fighting men called *The Warriors* (1958), identifies "comradeship" as one of the three "enduring appeals of war": "the delight in seeing, the delight in comradeship, and the delight in destruction."[39] Gray observes that comradeship is a bond that is initially forged from common purpose and common experience of hardship and danger, and that often eventually eclipses any other motives for fighting. During combat, Gray argues, echoing countless other scholars and writers, men will lay down their lives to protect each other rather than for country or any other abstract reason or ideal. "Many veterans who are honest with themselves will admit," Gray insists, "that the experience of communal effort in battle . . . has been the high point of their lives."[40] Using expressions such as "joyous," "ecstatic," and "drunk with the power that union with our fellows brings," Gray eloquently describes the enchanting emotions that make comradeship in arms an experience that veterans cherish and even miss for the rest of their lives after becoming civilians.

Similarly, in an often-quoted essay titled "Why Men Love War" (1984), Vietnam veteran and writer William Broyles, Jr. also speaks of comradeship as an enchanted, transcendent, and incommensurably intense experience:

> The enduring emotion of war, when everything else has faded, is comradeship. A comrade in war is a man you can trust with anything, because you trust him with your life . . . Despite its extreme right-wing image, war is the only utopian experience most of us ever have. Individual possessions and advantages count for nothing: the group is everything. What you have is shared with your friends. It isn't a particularly selective process, but a love that needs no reasons, that transcends race and personality and education – all those things that would make a difference in peace. It is, simply, brotherly love.[41]

The relationships between men that Broyles describes are intense and idealized: love relationships of absolute trust and absolute equality. They are a distillation of the kinship that shared national identity is supposed to produce—dissolving barriers of race and class and background—but which it rarely does. The description is so saturated with exaltation that the bonds he calls "brotherly love" seem nothing less than sacred, like the "brotherly love" of early Christianity. The intensity of these bonds helps Broyle explain why "most men who have been to war would have to admit, if they are honest, that somewhere inside themselves they loved it too, loved it as much as anything that has happened to them before or since."

Since brotherhood is one of the main pleasures of combat, war adventure will often make these moments of closeness and playfulness a key concern. In *Red Badge of Courage* we observe the close friendship that develops between Fleming and Wilson, especially when Wilson takes care of Fleming, applying cool cloths "with a tender woman's hand" while Fleming looks at him "with grateful eyes."[42] Or one can think of the beginning of *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943), with its famous scene of topless Marines sunning themselves intertwined on a navy ship deck as they amiably shoot the breeze. In Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1984), one of the most memorable scenes occurs when Chris (Charlie Sheen), the protagonist, is accepted into the pot-smoker's tent, where racial barriers are relaxed and black and white servicemen smoke and drink and dance together. The combination of shared drug taking and companionship makes these moments not only pleasurable but almost utopian, the parties representing a kind of egalitarian oasis in the midst of battle and the racial and personal conflicts tearing the platoon apart.

The male bonding convention in adventure fiction is often so strong that it sometimes seems to flirt with homoeroticism, as is apparent from the examples above. It is in fact a liminal experience where simplistic social categories of heterosexual and homosexual identity lose their meaning in the intensity of the feelings that men can feel for each other under combat conditions. Since these are experiences of danger a heightened awareness of each other's bodies and their fragility as well as their strength and beauty can emerge. It makes no sense to try to cordon off homoeroticism from homosociality in every instance, but it also makes no sense to say that this love is always tinged with sexuality. One could say that it is "queer" in the sense that it is nonnormative and outside the normal conventions of male friendship but this does not necessarily mean that sexual desire is a factor. What there is for certain is an attraction and attachment that transcends social norms and that is intensely pleasurable. Again, *Platoon* is a good example because the interactions between men in the "heads'" (pot-smokers) tent are permeated with homoerotic suggestion while remaining overtly straight. When Elias (Willem Defoe) offers Chris a hit of marijuana, he does so by passing it

though the barrel of a rifle from his mouth to Chris' in a scene that visually evokes fellatio. We also see the men dancing together in couples to the sound of Smokey Robinson. Yet I would insist that these moments of homosociality and even homoeroticism are more about affection than sexual desire, in Stone's film at least. What real servicemen feel in real wars is another matter entirely, and I have no doubt that desire, lust and love are all part of those experiences for many. However, narratives of explicitly gay love on the front lines remain relatively rare and the film *The Outsider* (which attempts to do so tacitly) has been mostly forgotten (as has the first adaptation of *The Thin Red Line* in 1964, which allowed far more glimpses of homoeroticism than the one of 1998[43]).

If pleasure and excitement are the main affective mechanisms of adventure, the narrative framework usually involves some sort of danger or ordeal but ends in success and victory. The main hero or protagonist almost always survives. If he does not, it is because he chooses somehow not to, or he dies as the natural order of things (he is too old for his profession as adventurer, or he has simply "met his fate" in the line of duty). Unlike melodrama, there is no great pathos generated by this death, no sense that it cut off great possibilities or that it has any special agency or effect on other characters. In James Salter's *The Hunters* (1956), one of the few memorable novels of the Korean War and one of the rare adventure stories that ends with the hero's death, the main character (a fighter pilot) knows from the beginning of the narrative that he is getting too old to be a truly great ace and so there is a sense of stoicism and inevitability about his disappearance. Dying in combat is in fact his final tribute to the pleasures of flying a fighter jet, an elite warrior role that has defined his life and its value. His death is not narrated in a melodramatic way, as a tragedy, a life cut off too soon, but rather as a fitting and inevitable end to his chosen path.

Most of the time, however, the protagonist succeeds at whatever his quest or mission was, even against tremendous odds. The greater the odds, in fact, the greater the thrill of success. The quintessential combat situation of the adventure genre presents the hero as outnumbered or outgunned. Skill and marksmanship are particularly important in adventure, as is intelligence and courage. Adventure heroes tend to outsmart or out-deceive their adversaries, and prove their mental and moral (and often, racial) superiority in doing so. They also tend to act without fear, almost recklessly so, and this fearlessness gives them a seemingly superhuman edge in dangerous situations. For all these reasons, special operations and covert missions rather than conventional warfare have become the favored niche of war adventure narratives since WWII but especially since *The Green Berets*.

The war adventure narrative is often a coming of age story, a rite of passage, for boys.[44] Historically, adventure is a boy's genre and the frame

narrative will depict the hero, if he himself is a boy or young man, entering into manhood through his ordeals. This was explicitly the purpose of many nineteenth-century adventure novels, which aimed to socialize and instruct boys as they entertained them. As Martin Green puts it, "As everyone *knows,* adventure was and is the *rite de passage* from white boyhood into white manhood."[45] Green's emphasis on race reminds us that adventure was first and foremost a literature of colonial conquest, what some scholars call "imperial romance," and in which race plays a fundamental role.[46] Being a man and being white are inextricably fused values as well as essential categories; non-white characters can be manly and can be good friends to the protagonist but they are usually flat secondary characters who do not change or come of age. The great drama of the adventure narrative is always the white hero's transformation or experience through encounters with death and with nonwhite people who often represent death.

The rite of passage is also one of the most common paradigms for war narratives in which the protagonist survives. As Samuel Hynes writes in *The Soldier's Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*:

> Most war stories begin with a nobody-in-particular young man, who lives through the experience of war, to emerge in the end defined by what has happened to him. Out of that nobody, war has forged a Self. Nobody, however young, returns from war still a boy, and in that sense, at least, war does make men.[47]

The passage is an interesting mixture of affirmation and disavowal of the trope of war as rite of passage, but ultimately it concedes that any boy who survives the experience is necessarily a man with a "Self." The capitalization of the "Self" is itself quite ambivalent and strange, and can suggest either that the veteran has learned important things about himself or that he is assumed by society to have learned such things.

One of the most important examples of war as rite of passage in American literature is, once more, Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Despite having been read as ironic by many critics, the novel ultimately affirms Fleming's coming of age when the narrator says at the end that Fleming feels a "quiet manhood, nonassertive but sturdy and of strong blood." Not only has Fleming survived and acquitted himself honorably on the battlefield at last, but he feels transformed and mature, and the narrator reports these feelings and changes as un-ironic facts: "He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man." Even if this line could be read as indirect discourse and, therefore, expressing only Fleming's subjective opinion of himself, the next line is clearly written in objective third-person narration: "And so it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood

and wrath his soul changed."[48] Fleming smiles and is happy at the end as he puts the war behind him and "turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies . . . and eternal peace."[49] The war may not be over but Fleming "had rid himself of the red sickness of battle" and is an utterly transformed being, confident in his manhood and more mature in his reflections, which is why the novel is ultimately a coming-of-age war adventure story.

Any narrative that implies that the end result of combat is "manhood" is necessarily engaged in the enchantment of combat, and this is true for *Red Badge of Courage* as well as for countless other war narratives of the twentieth century. For example, in 1984, three films were released that all portrayed teenagers coming of age through combat and war: *Platoon*, *Red Dawn* and *Top Gun*.[50] All three films engaged in the cultural work of rehabilitating war in the wake of the loss of Vietnam by showing it as an effective testing ground for young men. Each film ends with the militarized teens transformed into men with a "Self" (as Hynes' puts it)—no longer questing, no longer reckless and naïve—men who have been tested and blooded and found capable of killing with the proper balance of ferocity and self-discipline (in other words, killing only those who deserve it). In *Platoon*, Chris' coming of age is catalyzed both by his holding back from killing the mentally disabled Vietnamese man and his climactic killing of Barnes. In *Red Dawn*, the teenaged rebels kill not only the Russian and Cuban invaders by the dozen but they calmly execute the traitor in their midst. And in *Top Gun,* Maverick overcomes both his immaturity and his guilt over his partner's death by shooting down several MIGs with former rival "Iceman," the successful teamwork proving both his lethal skill and his newfound self-discipline. In all these films, the young male heroes are understood to have successfully attained manhood thanks to their mastery of controlled killing.[51]

If not all war adventure stories follow this pattern, that is because there are at least two different kinds: with ordinary heroes and more gifted heroes. Coming of age stories will feature ordinary heroes, but there are also stories about men who are already extremely talented at violence. Their skills need not be literally superhuman, but they give them such an edge over ordinary men that they are for all intents and purposes superhuman (e.g., Rambo or the Punisher). This type of hero obviously does not come of age, but can be sometimes transformed in some other way by his adventure. Or else, he can simply function as a locus of admiration and enjoyment for spectators and readers, with the outcome of the mission or plot as the main satisfaction instead of a personal transformation.

The setting for war adventure has traditionally been away from the home or the metropolitan center, requiring a journey to a border area, where civilization gives way to savagery. This is a liminal zone where ordinary social

rules do not apply, permitting the hero to behave in ways that would not be possible at home. As Martin Green puts it, "adventure is the name for experience beyond the law, or on the very frontier of civilization."[52] Although adventure stories dating back to classical literature also involved traveling to faraway lands, in the modern era the adventure narrative became closely aligned with the literature of imperial exploration and conquest—what Americans and Europeans literally considered a frontier of "civilization." For Englishmen, the colonies were the ideal locations for the kind of situations that adventure literature thrives on: danger and hardship, encounters with wild animals and native populations, both friendly and savage, intense male competition and camaraderie. For Americans in the nineteenth century, the West was an exotic locale where civilization brushed up against savagery and great adventures of male prowess, rivalry and redemption could be sought and performed. As of the Spanish-American War in 1898, neo-colonial wars in the Caribbean and abroad also figured as opportunities for adventure and violence (see Figure 4.2).

Much of the action of war adventure literature is intended to demonstrate the hero's masculinity. As Green argues: adventure has been the "liturgy . . . of masculinism" and the borders of European civilization has been the ideal place for the European male to prove that he is more civilized than any other race or people while becoming as much like then as is possible.[53] For British literature, Africa, India and Asia were the locations for these colonial encounters, and the single most influential and important writer of British imperial adventure fiction was Rudyard Kipling. In the United States, the Western frontier served as the imaginative location for much adventure fiction, especially starting at the end of the nineteenth century with Owen Wister's *The Virginian* and continuing with the Hollywood Western.[54] Although not every Western movie is an adventure, most are. As Richard Slotkin argues in *Gunfighter Nation*, the Myth of the Frontier played an important role in American culture and politics in the post–WWII decades, and even had an important influence on how Americans viewed their presence in Vietnam.[55]

Marvin and Ingle describe the border area of a nation as a charged zone where soldiers journey to refresh and reassert the limits of the nation with their blood.[56] In their anthropological reading of the national border, it is a space of death and soldiers go there in principle in order to die or to touch death. Adventure fiction also sees the border as a dangerous place marked by death. However, since adventure is rooted in wish-fulfilment fantasy, the whole point of the journey is for the protagonist to overcome death and to return to his home transformed by death into a more potent manhood. Thus, in the adventure mode the frontier is a place of violent release, fun, and regeneration for young men. It goes without saying that this is a conservative and

Figure 4.2   Recruitment Poster for the United States Marine Corps, ca. 1900, by James Montgomery Flagg (1877–1960), an American Artist and Illustrator. The Modern Convergence of Militarism, Colonialism, Domination of Nature, and Pleasure Is Explicitly Articulated in This Image Promising That the Marine Corps Will Deliver "Travel" and "Adventure" to Recruits. (Photo by Buyenlarge/Getty Images.)

problematic view that is deeply imbricated with a colonial history of racism and imperialism. The famous remarks about Africa that John Wayne made to an interviewer in 1972 are structured by the political world-view of the adventure genre:

> "Your generation's frontier should have been Tanganyika," he [Wayne] contends, recalling the African country—independent Tanzania now—where he made *Hatari*. "It's a land with eight million blacks and it could hold 60 million people . . . It could have been a new frontier for any American or English or French kid with a little gumption! Another Israel! But the *do-gooders* had to give it back to the Indians! Meanwhile your son and my son are given numbers back here and live in apartment buildings on top of each other".[57]

We can begin by noticing the racism of his casual distinction between "people" and "blacks," and the reference to "American or English or French kid" clearly invokes a longstanding tradition of colonial conquest, made only more explicit by reference to Africans as "Indians." The masculinist concern with patrilineal descent—"your son and my son"—is also typical of the adventure genre, as is the vision of the frontier as the antidote to the constraints and frustrations of civilization ("apartment buildings on top of each other"). The whole quote is so disturbing that one almost misses the shocking point Wayne makes in the penultimate line, namely, that Tanzanian independence (achieved while the film was being made) was a mistake. The British should have resisted the demands of "*do-gooders*" (original emphasis), according to Wayne, and kept their colony as a playground for their young men.

It should be noted that *Hatari!* (1962) was a safari adventure film with a lounge music soundtrack and a trailer that insisted on the "fun," "thrills," and "excitement" promised by the story, which focused on European wild animal catchers.[58] The basic colonial adventure premise of Europeans taking what they want—in this case animals for European zoos—and having a lot of fun doing it is the main point of the film. The trailer informs us that "hatari" means "danger" in Swahili, this signaling that the frontier is a wild and dangerous place, but the catchy soundtrack makes it clear that the danger is merely part of the fun.

Among the most troubling aspects of the modern adventure genre is its racialism. In classical adventure, there was an encounter with some kind of Other, but ever since the discovery of the New World that Other has been cast as in racial terms. Often, the racially marked Other is almost a different species, scarcely belonging to humankind. In his positive valence, the racial Other is childlike and innocent; on the more negative pole, he is cruel and savage, even sadistic. Or, as Rudyard Kipling put it in the poem "White Man's Burden," the native is "half-Devil and half-child."[59] There will occasionally appear a racial Other who is either sufficiently Westernized or exceptionally noble (along "noble savage" lines) to become an ally or even close friend to the white protagonist. In American literature, this racial Other has usually been Native American or African American. These characters are both doubles and foils for the hero—in their better versions, they prove that the white hero can successfully learn traits and skills associated with the Other, thus becoming like him while still remaining essentially different and superior, and in their darker versions, they provide a sharp contrast with the hero, proving his humanity and civility, that is, his natural superiority.

To help us think about this kind of racism, let us turn to Michel Foucault. In *Society Must Be Defended* (1997), Foucault developed his now highly influential theory of biopolitics, a new kind of power that is distinctly different from traditional sovereignty, and comes to supplement it rather than completely supplant it. In this biopolitical order, the notion of "race" plays

a significant new role, especially in justifying killing and war.[60] According to Foucault, racial others are regarded as not only less human but as a threat to humanity itself, therefore, justifying the suspension of normal laws of war when dealing with them.[61] This is what we see in colonial wars, and also in the contemporary war on terror. The argument is always a variation on the following: the Other is so savage and cruel that normal rules of human conduct do not apply; in fact, we must become like the Other in order to combat him. Thus, the Indian fighter must fight like the Indian, and the counterinsurgency professional must be as ruthless as the jihadist.

Most importantly, what is striking in the war adventure genre is how easily and in what great numbers foreign and indigenous enemies can be killed without the slightest twinge of conscience. This is a feature that was publicly discussed only when it emerged in action films of the 1970s and 1980s and then became incorporated into first-person shooter games, which are basically interactive adventure narratives, and which sealed the identification between the protagonist and the player through the one key gaming experience of killing. However, the logic of massacre that is built into the first-person shooter dates back to colonial warfare and the concept of the savage enemy. As Mikkel Thorup explains, the frontier is a space of extra-judicial violence where the "rules of civilized warfare regulating inter-European armed conflict do not apply beyond the colonial or racial line."[62] The two paradigmatic forms of violence at the frontier are vigilantism and colonial warfare. Beginning with the genocide of the indigenous people of the New World and continuing with the colonial wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the "colonial consensus is always that only brutal and massive use of force has any effect upon savages," Thorup argues. As evidence he cites California governor John Bigler, who wrote in the 1850s of Native Americans that:

> [T]he acts of these Savages are sometimes signalized by a ferocity worthy of cannibals . . . they seem to cherish an instinctive hatred toward the white race, and this is a principle of their nature, which neither time nor vicissitude can impair . . . The character and conduct of these Indians means that Whites and Indians cannot live in close proximity in peace.[63]

As Thorup observes, the thrust of this argument about the incorrigible viciousness of the Native American is "a clear license to massacre."[64] Since the racial Other is essentially defined by hatred and savagery, and cannot be changed, the only logical solution is eradication. This leads Thorup to conclude, "*guilt-free massacre is what is licensed whenever a territory, situation or people are viewed and described as being beyond the line*" (italics in original[65]). "Guilt-free massacre" is also what Foucault means when he describes

racism as justifying genocide in the biopolitical interest of maintaining life for the dominant population.[66]

The logic of guilt-free massacre is linked to another key feature of the genre, its profound essentialism. In adventure, people are divided into crude racial, ethnic and gender categories and share essential traits with all the members of their category. The first and foremost category division is white versus racially-marked Other. After that, the categories can vary depending on the century and decade, but the colonial categories of Black, Asian, Arab, native, African and Indian seem to have had the longest shelf life. As we saw from the quotation by the California governor, Native Americans are seen as full of hatred and nothing can alter this fact, neither time nor experience. Similarly, every ethnicity and nationality have their distinctive and stereo-typical characteristics, just as men and women are fundamentally different and opposed. The 1962 *Lawrence of Arabia* offers a particularly striking illustration of this essentialism when Lawrence pinches his white skin and tells Ali, "Look, Ali, that's me. What color is it? There's nothing I can do about it . . . This [pointing to his skin] is the stuff that decides what [a man] wants." In doing so, he refutes his own earlier philosophy that "nothing is written" and his own role as leader of the Arab Revolt. Instead, he succumbs to the implacable logic of the adventure mode, namely, that a white man must always return to his own "people" because he is defined and determined by his racial identity. If melodrama is organized according to "primary psychic roles" then the characters of adventure are typed according to ethnic, racial, national and gender categories.

Finally, there is the fact that much adventure literature and film, even though it seems like escapist fantasy, is actually didactic or propagandistic in purpose. A strong tradition of adventure fiction is juvenile literature for boys, meant to instruct and entertain at the same time. War adventure is often explicitly intended to serve as recruitment material or propaganda. This is naturally connected to the fact that it represents military service, including combat, as not only survivable but transformative in a positive sense. In the 1890s, jingoes supporting the Spanish-American war often explicitly described combat as a character-building opportunity for American boys.[67] Military recruitment material continues to rely on this basic premise. A Marine Corps recruiting poster from the 1960s promised that "THE MARINE CORPS BUILDS MEN: BODY, MIND, SPIRIT" (see Figure 6.3 in chapter 6). The adventure narrative lends support to this proposition by framing war adventure as a kind of rite of passage or ultimate test.

Let us turn now to one of the most influential American war adventure texts of the twentieth century, *The Green Berets* (1965) by Robin Moore. This work stands at the junction between an older Indian War legacy and a specifically twentieth-century fascination with the irregular soldier. Published

exactly twenty years after the end of WWII, *The Green Berets* was an attempt to revalorize, re-glamorize, and re-enchant combat for a new generation. Immensely successful, the book stands as a link in the chain between nineteenth-century frontier writing and cult figures such as Daniel Boone and a Vietnam War era rise in paramilitary culture and obsession with unconventional warfare in the United States that is still going strong.

SPECIAL FORCES AND ROBIN MOORE'S *THE GREEN BERETS* (1965)

The U.S. Army Special Forces were founded in 1952 and formalized in 1954. Their original purpose was to train insurgents in the case of Soviet occupation of Western Europe, but they became most famous for their work in Southeast Asia. The 1958 book *The Ugly American*, by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, promoting the use of Special Forces in Vietnam in order to succeed where the French had failed, had a huge impact on public debate and later on Kennedy Administration policies, according to John Hellman.[68] The book not only advocated deployment of unconventional war professionals, but also suggested that they would need to abandon conventional rules of decency and humanity as outlined by the Geneva Convention. Instead, echoing nineteenth-century tales of Indian fighting, but attributing the origin of their ideas to Mao, the "new rule book" of the Special Forces would be inspired by their enemy's own supposed savagery. The story "The Iron of War" shows the conversion of a French Major to "Mao's tactics" when two of his scouts are captured and mutilated by the Viet Minh. One returns with an eye dangling down his cheek and the other with his vocal cords cut out. This spectacle of cruelty, definitive proof of "Communist'" inhumanity, permits the French officer to understand what his American advisor, "Tex" Wolcheck, has been telling him all along: the Vietnamese, like American Indians in the Western, are inherently cruel and can only be fought with methods of comparable barbarity and cunning.

In the early 1960s, a series of articles in magazines such as *Life* and *Newsweek* ran feature stories on the Green Berets, celebrating their skills, tactical flexibility and cultural sensitivity. As John Hellman has described, the media treatment of the Green Beret depicted him as a "contemporary reincarnation of the Western hero," a "saint with a gun," a perfect blend of "savagery and civilization."[69] John Kennedy took a special interest in the Special Forces and helped re-establish their distinctive green berets, which had been banned for several years. When Kennedy died, a Special Forces beret was placed on his grave, sealing in Marvin and Ingle's terms a special link with totem power and securing the institutional longevity of the group. Both John Hellman and

Richard Slotkin have discussed Kennedy's attraction to the Green Berets in mythic terms, as an attempt to regenerate American society by a strategic revitalization of the Myth of the Frontier, with the Green Berets playing the role of symbolic frontiersmen.[70] What is left out of their accounts of the mythic dimensions of the attraction to unconventional warfare in Vietnam is the extent to which it also resonated within a long tradition of transatlantic adventure fiction.

For instance, one important context for Moore's novel that neither Hellman nor Slotkin discuss because their focus is exclusively American is the story of "Lawrence of Arabia," to which I have been referring throughout this chapter. The "Blond Bedouin" legend emerged in 1919 when American journalist Lowell Thomas exhibited his mythopoetic "travelogue" account of Lawrence (using slides and film) in London, and then published a narrative version of it in *The Strand Magazine* a year later under the title "The Uncrowned King of Arabia." The fascination with Lawrence was then vigorously revived in 1962 when David Lean and Robert Bolt, famous for their film *Bridge On the River Kwai* (1957), released *Lawrence of Arabia*, a 224-minute Technicolor epic starring Peter O'Toole.[71] Graham Dawson describes Lawrence as a specifically twentieth-century development in the British colonial adventure narrative, where a complex form of identification with the racial Other becomes dominant, as can be seen from Lawrence's dress and immersion in Bedouin culture.[72]

Dawson also sees Lawrence at the forefront of an important development in adventure fiction: "The guerrilla, the commando, the Special Operations Forces, the secret agents, spies and saboteurs 'behind enemy lines' or in the margins of the conflict: these become the characteristic soldier heroes of the twentieth century."[73] The background for this development includes the decline of British imperial control and the emergence of a perception of the colonial periphery as occupied territory (occupied by adversaries of some kind), transforming the task of the Western hero from overt domination to tacit superiority and help to the indigenous population (such as the Bedouins) to rise up against their colonial masters (such as the Turks). The compensatory fantasy at play here is that the white hero is not one of the colonial oppressors but a liberator. As Lawrence says in the 1962 epic: "these people want their freedom and I'm going to give it to them."

In the United States, this fantasy of selfless white assistance to noble but childlike indigenous people against a more brutal and repressive Oriental enemy was soon adapted by Robin Moore to the public relations needs of the Special Forces. Moore's book *The Green Berets* was published in 1965 and quickly became a bestseller, selling nearly 100,000 copies that first year.[74] According to Robin Moore in a 1982 interview, the book caused so many enlistments that the Selective Service was able to suspend draft calls during

the first months of 1965.[75] Whether or not this is true, the fact that Moore intended the book to help recruitment is apparent from his preface to the expanded 1999 edition, where he claims that many men have told him that they enlisted because of his book and his reaction is "then I have not lived in vain."[76] He also claimed in that same interview that he was first urged to write the book by the Kennedys to promote the Special Forces.[77]

Like Thomas' account of Lawrence, Moore's book is presented as a work of journalism. He spends most of the first chapter, titled "Badge of Courage," explaining how he went through Special Forces training at the age of thirty-seven to be allowed to accompany Green Berets on operations in Vietnam. Moore explains his decision to market the book as fiction as a question of protecting the identities and careers of men he worked with, due to the highly unconventional nature of many of their activities. In fact, most of the operations he describes are either illegal or counter to the U.S. Army's official ground rules. The result is a sensationalist kind of New Journalism, blending fact and fiction and including Moore himself as an actor in several of the stories. Yet, although it was marketed as fiction, Moore insists that the book is true: "you will find in these pages many things that you will find hard to believe. Believe them. They happened this way."[78]

As stated before, this blending of fact and fiction is typical of war adventure, because *war* narratives always need to present themselves as rooted in historical truth. Thus, realism and verisimilitude are the currencies in which war adventure traffics. For example, many such accounts include maps and glossaries. The ostensible purpose is to assist the reader in navigating the place names, acronyms and terminology of the account, but one of the rhetorical functions of this convention is also to establish the seriousness and credibility of the book as an insider's account. Moore's first chapter is no different—it ends with a glossary explaining terms such as "KIA" (killed in action) and "LZ" (landing zone).

The rest of the book consists of chapters that each focus on a different Special Forces character and operation. For example, the first, "Green Beret—All the Way," focuses on the Finnish Steve (originally Sven) Kornie, a "blue-eyed Nordic giant" who had once fought with the German Army on the Eastern Front, and who now operates a Special Forces Camp in South Vietnam near the Cambodian border (*The Green Berets* 24).[79] The story includes Kornie circumventing international law by hiring Cambodian bandits to attack VC guerrillas and includes a graphic torture scene that takes over two pages to narrate (44–46). The last story also involves breaking U.S. rules by entering North Vietnam (which the United States officially denied it did; this was one of the issues that upset the Pentagon most about Moore's book) and kidnapping an area commander in a raid and extracting him with

a gadget called SkyHook. (In fact, these two stories become the basis for the two main plot lines of the film version.) The book is episodic and has no particular organization or sequence, consisting of a series of chapters on a different Special Forces character and a representative mission. As a result, there is no real dramaturgical movement from beginning to end, except in the frame narrative: the original edition begins with Moore receiving Special Forces training and ends with his receiving an honorary Green Beret as a gift. In this loose way, then, the novel is structured as a rite of passage story for Moore himself.[80]

The most important way in which *The Green Berets* can be read as an adventure narrative is in its treatment of combat death. Unlike melodrama, death is not given any special place or agency in the narrative—in fact, the death of Special Forces personnel is largely played down. Enemy deaths, in contrast, are abundant. We can see this already in the title of the first chapter, "Badge of Courage," which is a reference to Kennedy's description of the green beret in a speech about the Special Forces, but which also inevitably recalls the title of Stephen Crane's novel. The telling revision is the omission of the word "red." The "badge of courage" is no longer a war wound but a beret signifying membership to an elite class of warriors.

The denial of death in the book relies on a variety of mechanisms, including euphemism, jokes and the promise of immortality within the institution. In the first chapter, "A Green Beret—All the Way," for example, the danger of death is a constant theme as Moore travels to a local SF headquarters in South Vietnam that "looks exactly like a fort out of the Old West."[81] The camp has been attacked twice in the last year and taken causalities both times, so Moore is warned not to go. His answer is typical adventure genre bravado: "No sweat, I don't want to get myself greased any more than you do."[82] Besides "getting greased," the terms for dying in this chapter include "cashing in" and getting "zapped."[83] One Green Beret disappears during an attack and we presume he is dead, but the narrative only notes that he is "missing" and passes quickly to another matter and a joke.[84] The second chapter, "The Immortal Sergeant Hanks," is also about death insofar as it is about the death and immortalization of Sergeant Hanks, as the title suggests. The chapter begins with Moore being warned of the dangers of is field work once more only to turn the warning around on his interlocutor, Captain Pickins:

"You think I'm going to cash in now? When I had an A team last year, maybe I could have got it. But now I only go out enough to draw combat pay."
"Which is enough to buy the six-by-two farm," I commented.
"I ought to send you to Muc Tan. They're pretty secure there. Least I wouldn't be worried about you getting greased."[85]

As we can see, every reference to death is couched in a jingoistic idiom: "cashing in," getting "it," "buying a six-by-two farm," getting "greased." Sergeant Ed Hanks is part of a replacement crew arriving at the headquarters, and he notices that all the barracks are named after men he knew who were killed in action. He asks to have "the shit house" named after him if "they grease me on this tour," explaining that it would be like being "immortal" because of "all those guys coming through here thinking of me for a few minutes each day" as they use the latrine.[86] Predictably, Hanks dies and the chapter ends with Moore telling the grinning Captain Pickins how he had "a touch of dysentery and spent some time in the enlisted men's latrine," where he saw Hank's wish come true: "You can't miss it. A big sign freshly painted is right out there in front of it, big as life. It reads 'Hanks' Latrine.'"[87] The anecdote functions like something of a joke, and has the narrative structure of a happy ending: Hank gets his wish. The fact that he dies is rhetorically compensated by the scatological humor surrounding his particular wish and the fact that many men will now in fact think of him daily.

Other than Hanks, no Special Forces protagonists or important characters in the book die. Instead they all accomplish their respective missions and escape death and injury. The one exception to this rule is not a warrior but a medical evacuation helicopter pilot, Mr. Pomfret (who seems to be loosely modelled on the character played by Mickey Rooney in *Bridges at Toko-Ri*), reputed to be the best and most daring evacuation pilot in the U.S. Army Aviation fleet. In the story Mr. Pomfret is wounded and himself needs evacuation at the end. Although he ends up permanently paralyzed, the story contextualizes this fact with two qualifying circumstances that make it seem less serious: one, Pomfret was going home anyway after two consecutive tours, and two, he had just finished training a perfect replacement. In fact, the story is really a *rite de passage* story about the successful transmission of highly specialized skills: from Pomfret to a lieutenant named Nichols, who is the pilot who comes to rescue Pomfret himself. The ending ends on a jaunty note, like most of the stories: even though he is permanently paralyzed from the neck down, Pomfret is happy because he has been allowed into the honorific elite: "'Hey, how about that?' he said, pleased. 'They made me into an honorary green beret.'"[88] The only reason the absurdity of this ending does not stand out in the book is that most of its depictions of human psychology and motivation are equally improbable, as if written for an adolescent public who would consider being made a green beret an honor despite facing lifelong paralysis at the age of thirty-something.

If almost no Americans die in *The Green Berets*, many Vietnamese do. Some of these are Vietnamese allies, the so-called friendlies, but most are Communist VC or North Vietnamese fighters. The proportions are always incredibly skewed, as is conventional in the adventure genre. For example,

in a firefight in the first chapter, no Americans are wounded, only a "few" friendlies are lost, but there are "60 dead VC lying out there."[89] The numbers are always high and the enemy fighters are always anonymous. Frequently the dead VC are mutilated by the Montagnard allies of the Americans, who do not stop them from cutting off ears and fingers. One grisly episode has an American Special Forces demolition expert himself using the corpses of North Vietnamese guards as material to tamp down the TNT on a bridge. The man clearly takes pleasure in his gruesome improvisation: "A twisted grin spread across his face as he estimated there must be more than one thousand pounds of bodies for each hundred pounds of TNT."[90] This too is made into a joke at the end as the demolition expert hears that there are "rumors that the bridge guard company deserted to a man" and says nothing, whereas he knows well, as does the reader, that the bridge guards did not desert but were blown completely to pieces when the TNT exploded.[91]

An even more grisly episode involves the death of a Frenchman who is aiding the Communist guerrillas, a man who is the exact counterpart to the American role for the South Vietnamese. In fact, the narrative is set up as a kind of contest between two very similar men who happen to find themselves on opposite sides of the war: the German-born Major Fritz Scharne, who had once been a member of the Hitler Youth, a natural warrior and now a "Special Forces legend," and the French Henri Huyot, a wealthy plantation owner who is also an advisor to the VC known as "the cowboy."[92] A former paratrooper, Huyot turns out to share Scharne's passion for unconventional warfare and contempt for the orthodoxies of military thinking. When the two meet by chance at a Saison tennis club, they end up enjoying a conversation that surprises Scharne but leaves him no less determined to kill Huyot the first chance he gets: "Scharne was genuinely impressed. Here he was hearing his own words come back at him from the man whose death he planned to contrive."[93] According to the backstory, Huyot executed an American Special Forces agent on a recent mission, and for this he must be punished. However, John Hellman suggests that the real crime Huyot is guilty of in Moore's mind is race betrayal, by siding with the Vietnamese against his own white race in the Special Forces.[94] The fact that the Green Berets hero of the story is a former Nazi lends some weight to the theory.[95]

Be that as it may, and I will discuss the racial dynamics of the book in a moment, the fact is that Huyot is not just killed, he is *destroyed*. At the end of the chapter, Scharne fires a grenade launcher at him, landing a round just in front of Huyot as he flees. The narrator dwells on his wounds at some length: "His handsome face had been torn badly by shrapnel, his nose lying on his cheek. Blood burbled from ugly rents in his bare chest. Wounds in his arms, groin, and legs bled profusely." The description is strangely framed in racial terms, supporting Hellman's theory: Huyot is "barely identifiable now

as a Caucasian except for his great size." Scharne stares down at him "impassively" until he dies and says with satisfaction, "He knew who it was got him."[96] Killing the Frenchman is like a personal contest between two duelists and the Special Forces officer wants to be sure that his adversary knows who defeated him on the field of combat. Again, as in the other chapters, the ending is upbeat: "Scharne turned from the broken corpse. 'I can thank the frog for one thing. At last I have something favorable to report to the visiting brass'"—namely, that the current graduating class of Vietnamese Rangers is better than he thought.[97] Not only is the enemy defeated and torn apart, he is reduced to a belittling national epithet, a "frog."

The contest between Scharne and Huyot illustrates something that is present throughout the book, and which appears often in the adventure genre, namely, the underlying conceit of war as an exciting contest or game, a kind of duel between elite warriors. This helps us to understand the pleasure that most of the players in the book take in their work as well as the frequency with which they resort to deceit or ruses in order to win. Outsmarting the enemy is part of the fun, though killing the enemy is the real satisfaction. Hellman's analysis of the book includes a number of critical comments about its "unashamed fascination with violence" and its "love of male prowess." He also sees the book as allowing the Green Beret's "aggressive tendencies" to be freed from "institutional restraints" and to be "joyously free to operate without the personal restraints of compassion and empathy that were the balancing other half of the New Frontier and its desires image for the Special Forces."[98] Hellman locates these tendencies in "Moore's psyche," but in fact they are intrinsic to the adventure genre that Moore has chosen as his generic paradigm. The pleasure in violence and combat is part of the genre, but it is true that Moore's book displays these pleasures in a particularly candid and troubling way, considering that he is claiming to be writing true accounts of what he observed.

One of Moore's principal strategies is to represent each of his Special Forces protagonists not only as a kind of hero, a warrior with superior skills and talents, but to describe them as loving their job. For example, the first story, about the Finn named Kornie, consistently describes him in terms of warm and positive affects: he shouts "lustily," he waves "cheerfully," he laughs "hugely," he nods "happily," he shouts "gleefully," he gives "hearty" slaps and "thumps" Moore on the back—in short, he is an "inexhaustible tower of energy."[99] These relentlessly joyful adverbs cannot help but lend an attractive and enchanting charisma to Kornie, who is in fact simply a professional soldier: "Special Forces was his life; fighting, especially unorthodox warfare, was what he lived for . . . and not the least of his assets, he was unmarried and had no attachments to anyone or anything in the world beyond Special Forces."[100] Similarly, the Frenchman Huyot is described as having

a "greater passion" for "killing American advisors" than for his beautiful fiancé.[101] Moore can say this explicitly with some disapproval because Huyot is fighting for the other side, but actually the story reveals that Huyot is no different from Scharne or any other Special Forces member in the book. They all have a great "passion" for their work and the language used for describing their feelings during combat is a lexicon of exuberance, delight, glee and satisfaction. They are always grinning, smiling and winking at each other. Every type of character is reported to feel satisfied when the enemy is killed. Even a gentle Cao-Dai priest is attributed a look of "satisfaction" in his eyes when some VC guerrillas are killed in a booby-trapped pagoda.[102] The one feature that links all the characters across rank and racial difference is pleasure in killing.

However, the greatest sadism and blood-thirstiness is attributed to the Vietnamese, including the ARVN, the Communists (Moore makes no significant distinction between South Vietnamese guerrillas and the North Vietnamese regulars) and the Montagnard. As part and parcel of the essentialism of the adventure genre, different racial groups are represented stereotypically. The stereotype that Moore applies throughout his book is that of the cruel Oriental whose sadism far outstrips that of the professional warriors. Early in the first story, "Green Beret—All the Way," a Sergeant Bergholtz returns from a successful raid on a VC position that has been conducted with hired Cambodian bandits:

> Bergholtz, grinning from ear to ear, was waiting for us. "How goes, Bergholtz?" Kornie called, striding toward his big sergeant. "We greased the shit out of them, sir," Bergholtz cried gleefully. "These Cambodes never had so much fun in their lives." The little dark men in tiger-striped suits bounced around happily, chattering to each other and displaying bloody ears, proof of the operation's success.[103]

The passage includes the usual slang term for killing, "greasing," here strengthened by the scatological profanity, "greased the shit out of them," and describes the sergeant as "gleeful" and "grinning." The Cambodians are represented as little more than children or monkeys, "bouncing around happily" and "chattering," showing off mutilated body parts as part of their post-combat exultation.

One story about Asian bloodlust involves an American Special Forces ranger, Bernard Arklin, living among the Meo (also known as Hmong) people in Laos to train them (illegally, of course) to fight off both VC and the Laotian Communist group Pathet Lao. These tribesmen, "of different ethnic origins from the torpid Laotians . . . would fight bravely for their mountain homes."[104] We can notice the casual ethnic essentialism: Laotians are "torpid"

but the ethnically different tribesmen can fight "bravely." In fact, more than brave, they are positively eager for blood, and the American ranger finds that "the entire concept of not attacking first was beyond the realistic Meos' comprehension."[105] Instead, their "bloodlust" is so strong and "inflamed by the profusion of new weapons" that Arklin has to "permit more frequent animal sacrifices and drinking parties" to hold it "in check."[106] Again, we can notice not only the native's natural desire to kill is so strong that it must be sated with killing animals as a form of restraint, but that they naturally defer to the white man as a kind of moral leader so that it is to him to "permit" the sacrifices and parties.

An even more disturbing propensity for violence among the Asian characters is a taste for torture. In the first story there is a long scene of a South Vietnamese NCO named Ngoc torturing a VC suspect by driving a bayonet into his thumb-joint. Moore describes a natural aversion to the man by mentioning that he wiped his hand on his pants after shaking Ngoc's, but he is eager to appear untroubled by what he has witnessed after the session. When asked what he thought of the "interrogation procedure," Moore answers stoically, "It's always grim . . . But I've been around some damned crude sessions, Ngoc is more refined than most."[107] We are left wondering where he acquired such extensive knowledge of torture, but are presumably reassured that this session was relatively "refined." Later a polygraph machine is brought to the camp and Ngoc is reported as insisting that VC should be tortured even if the machine is more accurate in extracting information. In fact, by identifying VC infiltrators in their ranks, the polygraph machine will identify who deserves to be tortured. One of the Americans explains to his colleagues, "Now we get the Oriental mind at work . . . If we stay here for twenty years we won't change them, and God save us from getting like them."[108] We can see the essentialism of the depiction of unalterable Asian cruelty, as well as the anxiety about its corrupting influence on the more civilized Americans.

In fact, in the adventure mode the racial Other is often characterized by his cruelty, sadism and brutality. The fact that Moore presents the South Vietnamese, our allies in the country, as incorrigible sadists was not one of the features of the book that made the Pentagon uncomfortable, but it should have been. This character feature is reinforced later in the book in a chapter about Vietnamese racism against its native indigenous population of Montagnard. When fourteen children in a native village are gravely injured in an attack, the Americans need to order a medical evacuation for "14 VC POW's" instead of identifying them as Montagnard children because they know that the ARVN are eager to torture VC prisoners but will refuse to give medical treatment to natives. Sure enough, when the helicopters with the children land, the Vietnamese officers looking forward to a good torture session

approach them with "anticipatory smirks" on their faces and are outraged to find "a bunch of dirty mois [a derogatory term for Montagnard] children" instead.[109] The point of this chapter is not only that our Vietnamese allies are vicious and cruel but that they are hopelessly prejudiced against their own native population, whereas the Americans are represented as champions of the human and civil rights of the natives. In accordance to the logic of British colonial fiction, where the population that the white man is trying to help does not really deserve it, *The Green Berets* presents the war in Vietnam in its early stages as good fun for its professional warriors but as basically misguided and possibly doomed by the unworthiness of the Vietnamese as a race. As Moore explained more explicitly in the 1999 version, his book was not a pro-Vietnam War work so much as a pro-Special Forces work.[110] This is one of the reasons it turned out so tricky to make it into a film that would be accepted by the Pentagon.

Another reason that the book made the Pentagon uneasy was that it presented Vietnam as an adolescent boy's sex fantasy. Many of the stories feature amorous relations with local women or prostitutes. One story involves a Special Forces man being "forced" to take a fifteen-year-old tribal wife in order to live among the Meo ("Home to Nanette"). Another story begins with Special Forces agents who are being replaced getting shots for sexually transmitted diseases and calling their departure a "pussy cut-off date."[111] Almost without exception, every single description of a female character involves a description of her breasts, usually along the lines of comments such as these: "their swelling breasts strained for release from the open wraparound bodices" and "her breasts protruded from the shawl she wore around her shoulders."[112] Two stories involve turning Vietnamese women into prostitute-spies ("Two Birds With One Stone" and "Hit 'Em Where They Live") and one ends with a Special Forces captain delightedly planning to open a "whorehouse" to pay for a school where a female agent works.[113] One of the stories features a long description of a gibbon raping a hen for the entertainment of the South Vietnamese soldiers and another one mentions a South Vietnamese officer giving photographs of himself engaged in sex with local prostitutes to his men as gifts.[114] Moore went on to co-author a famous book with a call girl in the 1970s, *The Happy Hooker* (1971), which was a landmark text of sex-positive writing at the time, and elements of that appreciation for sex appear in the book, but also quite a lot of gratuitous salaciousness, which again, are typical for the adventure mode, which favors any positive physical sensation and experience.

A feature of the adventure mode which is fairly muted in *The Green Berets* is the coming of age or rite of passage. As mentioned earlier, this exists in one chapter only, "The Immodest Mr. Pomfret," where Pomfret is successfully replaced by his acolyte Nichols. One could also see Moore the narrator's

own rebirth as an honorary Green Berets, a process that involves first training and then field experience, and finally receiving an honorary beret in the final chapter of the first edition, as a kind of rite of passage. But on the whole, this dimension is absent, and the chapter about Moore's honorary headgear is dropped from the 1999 and 2007 editions. Instead of young protagonists undergoing a rite of passage in the crucible of war, we are offered portraits of a handful of experienced war professionals, all colorful and larger than life. We are invited to admire their skill and their style—a military version of *sprezzatura* or nonchalance and ease with which they accomplish their work. Male bonding is also present but not foregrounded. Certainly they prefer the company of men most of the time but there are no special friendships among these killers—most work alone or in command of a chain of subordinates. Moore's attitude to them is a collegial admiration; he never raises an eyebrow about any of the activities he describes, regardless of how illegal or unethical by some standards.

In contrast, a fairly common feature of adventure-oriented war stories that the book *does* include is a conversion to the importance and necessity of violence. This is usually a sub-plot involving a character who is skeptical about the use of violence or about some aspect of the rough creed shared by the tougher characters. Eventually, thanks to an encounter with the cruelty and evil of the enemy, the sceptic is converted to the necessity of being tough and ultra-violent himself. In Moore's book, this scenario is the main point of the first chapter, "Green Beret-All the Way," in which a disapproving Army Lieutenant Colonel who begins by thinking the Special Forces are "too damned independent and unorthodox" comes around at the end, promising to aid Special Forces captain Kornie by inventing "plausible deviations from the truth when necessary" to cover up his activities.[115] The story is placed at the strategically beginning as a kind of model of how the book would like to persuade potentially disapproving readers to be at least as indulgent as the skeptical colonel.

To sum up, the book was excellent promotional material for the Special Forces—as far as young men were concerned, who enlisted in droves—thanks to its blend of familiar adventure motifs and the credibility that came from Moore's insider status as well as the Pentagon's disapproval of the book, which seemed to confirm its veracity. Although the Vietnam War itself came across as highly problematic, not least of all because of the bloodthirstiness of the "Oriental" population, including our allies, warfare as a profession comes across as an exciting game of wits and will—a game in which our side rarely loses. There are only two American deaths in the novel: Hanks, who is killed in an ambush organized by a corrupt South Vietnamese officer (hence proving the greed and lack of honor of the Vietnamese), and a wounded Green Beret who has been executed by the Frenchman Huyot before the story

begins. It is little wonder that the book promoted enlistment—it promised war as an excellent adventure and little chance of death. As Hellman writes, *The Green Berets* offered "Southeast Asia as an alluring landscape of primitive satisfactions, a dark frontier where the psyche may contemplate eternally having a communist to kill and a native woman to lose oneself in."[116] This is classic fantasy for boys, and while it worked well in 1965, it turned out to be difficult to adapt into film by 1968. Instead, in the wake of the Tet Offensive, the dire prediction by Walter Cronkite that the war was unwinnable, and with mounting casualties lending the anti-war movement momentum and urgency, John Wayne and his son Michael, along with the script-writer and director, converted the film version into melodrama while keeping a few key elements of adventure. The frame narrative, unlike the novel, is structured around pathos for a series of increasingly important American deaths. First, however, we need to look at the song that Moore co-wrote with Barry Sadler, a former Special Forces combat medic, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" (1966), because this song already anticipates the transformation of the Green Berets material into melodrama.

THE SONG

Barry Sadler was a twenty-three-year-old Special Forces soldier who had started to write "The Ballad of the Green Berets" before he even shipped out to Vietnam in 1964. A year later he was injured and sent permanently home, but in the meantime he had sent a demo tape of himself singing the song to a music publisher who liked it enough to put him under contract. By the time he was back in the United States, Moore's book was a bestseller and the music publisher, who knew Moore, thought the song could help sell the book and arranged to have handsome and clean-cut young soldier photographed for the cover. Robin Moore met Sadler and ended up writing a third stanza for the song and buying him a new guitar. After Sadler finalized the lyrics, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" was released in 1966, becoming a surprise hit and reaching the top of Billboard's Hot 100 Pop Music Chart for five weeks, as well as Number One on Billboard's Easy Listening Chart and Number Two on Billboard's Country Music Chart.[117]

The song reprieves the theme of the Green Beret as an ideal combination of modernity and frontiersman, describing him as both a paratrooper, a "fighting soldier from the sky," and a man "trained to live off nature's land" like an Indian. What constitutes an interesting departure from Moore's novel is the emphasis on martyrdom that is foregrounded in this song—perhaps precisely because it is a song and thus naturally closer to *melo*drama—and which appears already in the second line: "fearless men who jump and die." The

fearlessness is typical of characters in adventure but the reference to dying is not, and what this does is to bring melodrama—and the hero as *victim*—into the frame. The rest of the song continues in a mainly adventure-oriented mode, describing the Green Berets as "men" (manhood being a central concern of adventure), as "America's best" (a fantasy of the elite honorific warrior, also typical of adventure), as in the top 3 percent of recruits (surely a bit of hyperbole), as warriors "trained to combat hand-to-hand" (a more natural and, therefore, authentic and enchanted mode of combat than artillery), and as plain-spoken men ("men who mean just what they say"), an important feature of traditional American notions of authentic masculinity.

The song ends in melodrama, however, with the last stanza: "Back at home a young wife waits/Her Green Beret has met his fate." "Fate," as Paul Fussell reminds us, is not only a pretty euphemism, but is the correct "equivalent" for the word "death" in the "essentially feudal language" of pre–WWI "male-romances."[118] "Fate" is a term from the lexicon of enchantment because it implies necessity and even submission to divine will. The death also has pathos, however, because the Green Beret has been snatched away from a "young wife" and a son, evoking a future as husband and father that he will never know. This injustice is "solved" in the song by the spectacle of successful male reproduction and replacement: "Put silver wings on my son's chest," the dead Green Berets asks his wife, so that the son can take his father's place. Like his father, "He'll be a man they'll test one day." "Have him win the Green Beret," the dead father insists. Yet the repetitiveness of the song, each stanza identical to every other musically, and involving only slight variations linguistically, suggests that the son may not only become a Green Beret like this father, but will then die like him too. After all, the second line told us that Green Berets "jump and die." What comes into focus then is a chilling logic of seriality or eternal repetition, patrilineal replacement by sons who themselves die in combat—an infinite cycle of death.

THE MOVIE

This brings us finally to the movie version of *The Green Berets,* starring and directed by John Wayne, with Ray Kellogg and Mervyn LeRoy as co-directors, and released in 1968.[119] Famous as the only film about Vietnam made during the war, the film met with strong criticism from film critics but still became a box office success.[120] The process of transforming the novel into a film that met with both Wayne's and the Department of Defense's approval was long and complicated, and by the time it was released the war had changed considerably from when Moore published his novel. Not only had it become a highly conventional war in the sense that half a million

conventional troops were stationed there in 1968 but the Tet Offensive at the beginning of the year had significantly strengthened opposition to it. The story had changed too. In order to simplify the narrative structure, which in the book had been episodic and focusing on multiple protagonists, the film has only two stories and uses John Wayne's character, Colonel Kirby, as well as a new character, Lieutenant Peterson (Jim Hutton), to link them. The name Kirby does not come from Moore's book either but instead recalls Wayne's frontier ranger in *Fort Apache,* Kirby York, which makes sense since *The Green Berets* is basically a Western set in Vietnam. Michael Wayne, the producer, says so explicitly in an interview with Lawrence Suid: "In a motion picture you cannot confuse the audience. The Americans are the good guys and the Viet Cong are the bad guys. It's as simple as that . . . when you are making a picture, the Indians are the bad guys."[121] This essentializing view of the Viet Cong as Indians (which automatically includes Vietnamese allies in the same racial category, thus completely obscuring the fact that the United States was supposed to be helping the South Vietnamese against Communist guerrillas and Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnamese Army) is of a piece with Moore's imperialist adventure logic in the book.

What is completely different and new in the film is the role given to American deaths, which almost never occur in the book. Perhaps in 1968, with so many servicemen stationed and dying in Vietnam, it was no longer possible to portray the war only as a "caper" (as a character in the Moore book calls one of his missions[122]). Whatever the reasons, the film transforms the material of the book into a classic combat melodrama, in which one character after another dies, in a sequence of increasing weight and pathos, culminating in the climactic and horrific death of the film's most important and endearing character, Lieutenant Peterson (who does not exist in the book). This crescendo of death structure is the dramaturgical and emotional backbone of the film, and one of the reasons for the film's success. The ending is genuinely moving, as several classes of my own students at the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne can attest, despite the film's other flaws.

As I mentioned earlier, the film is awkwardly composed of two completely independent stories, first about the defense of an outpost which looks exactly like a fort in a Western (and even has a sign with the name "Dodge City" at the gate) and then, in the second half, about a covert operation to kidnap a North Vietnamese commander. These two plots correspond roughly to the first and last stories of the book, and show the Special Forces in both its counter-insurgency and insurgency-support roles. The conversion plot has been transformed into a narrative about a skeptical journalist (played by David Janssen) who ends up enlisting after being convinced of the necessity for the war by witnessing the cruelty of the CV when they kill a young Montagnard girl he had befriended. In fact, the journalist can be read as a trace of Robin

Moore, except for the skepticism. The journalist also ends up having the role of the typical young adventure hero: innocent, he travels to the border and finds death and evil which transform him into a soldier thirsting for blood himself. At the end of the film he has enlisted and is heading back to Vietnam as a fighter this time.

The humorous story about Ed Hank and his latrine has been adapted into a subplot about a Sergeant Provost whose last wish is to have a latrine named "Provost's Privy" after him. With this story and many other humorous anecdotes, *The Green Berets* feels like one of those WWII films that often mixed comedy and war adventure in equal measure. The scene of torture from the book is reproduced but the character of Ngoc is now Captain Nim, played by George Takei (best known as "Sulu" on *Star Trek*) and meant to be a character we accept, torture and all, as Moore accepted Ngoc. After all, casting the popular *Star Trek* actor as Nim clearly signals that he is one of the "good guys" despite his sadism.

Both plots end with bloodshed, the first in a siege that costs several American lives and the second that ends with the death of Sgt. Peterson (played by Jim Hutton). Yet melodrama and adventure intermingle as we see soldiers taking pleasure in their work (one says to Kirby, in response to a command, "That just fits my pistol!") and any Special Forces soldier always kills several times his number of enemies in any encounter, while the overall structure of the film follows the melodramatic logic of increasingly important and poignant deaths. The two modes are woven together into a narrative that switches from excitement to pathos and back regularly, with WWII-style humor woven in throughout. The first part of the film initiates the series of deaths, beginning with the young captain who is supposed to leave the next day to go home after his tour. Unlike in the novel, where American deaths are almost nonexistent, as mentioned earlier, here the film's action stops for a moment, as in the end of *Sands of Iwo Jima*, for his comrades to stand around grief-stricken.

The next significant characters to die are Captain Nim, then Provost, who gets his wish in a comic interlude, and finally a young boy's dog. This latter duo, an orphaned South Vietnamese boy named Hamchunk (played by Craig Jue) and his dog, is one of the inventions of the film and they contribute both pathos and allegorical resonance to the film insofar as the boy represents Vietnam itself (made clear in the film by Oriental-sounding music playing on the soundtrack every time the boy appears on screen, and from Col. Kirby's speech at the end of the film). The use of a native child to represent a nation and its need for American protection (i.e., colonial occupation) is a convention that dates back to the Spanish-American War, during which Cuba and the Philippines were often portrayed as unruly children needing Uncle Sam's tutelage, only here the allegory has been reconfigured into melodrama.
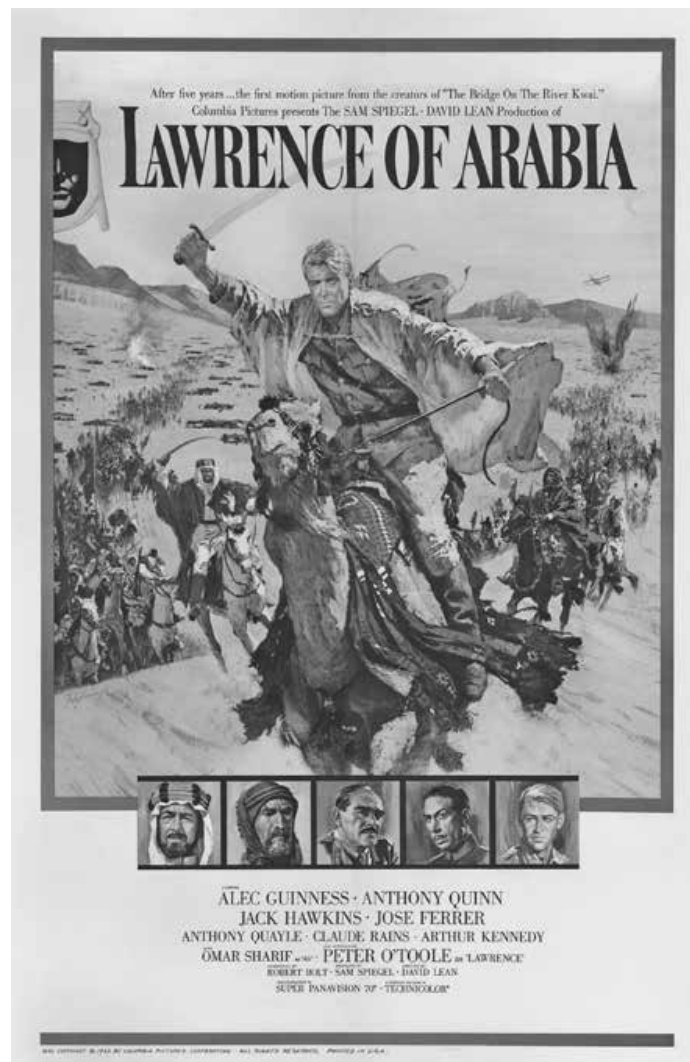
Figure 4.3   An American Poster for the 1962 Biopic "Lawrence of Arabia," Starring Peter O'Toole, Alec Guinness, Anthony Quinn. The Film was Directed by David Lean for Columbia Pictures. This Poster, Specifically Aimed at a U.S. Audience, Combines Colonial Imagery with Elements of the Western In Order to Make the Adventure Mode Familiar and Resonant for Americans. The Way O'Toole Rides the Camel Recalls Cowboy and Indian Imagery, While His Clothes Are a Mix of Colonial Khaki and Traditional White Bedouin Dress, Making Lawrence into a British Analog of Daniel Boone. (Photo by Movie Poster Image Art/Getty Images.)

During the final assault on the camp, the dog is killed and the boy buries him amidst flying bullets and artillery shells. Peterson, who had reluctantly taken the boy under his wing, finds him burying his pet and is moved by the fact that the child has no one else left except himself (see Figure 4.4). The scene is structured along classic melodrama lines in that the action stops for us to contemplate the moving tableau of the orphaned child's loss but we are reassured by the fact that this death has had a positive effect: it has converted
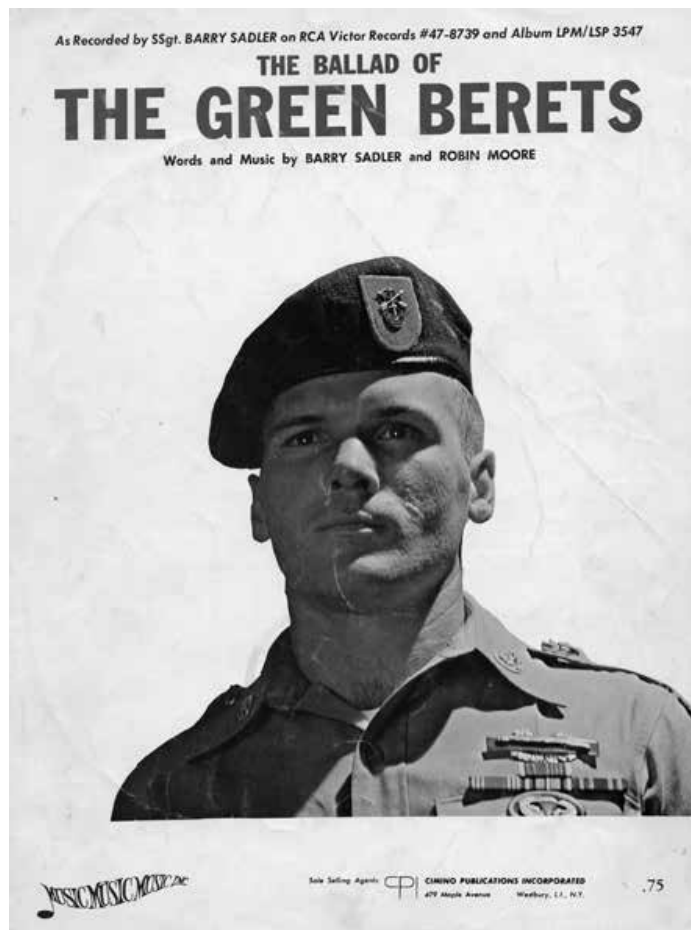
**Figure 4.4   Cover Page for the Sheet Music of "The Ballad Of The Green Berets,"
by Barry Sadler and Robin Moore, 1966.** This Photo of Barry Sadler Was Used on the
Cover of the Robin Moore Novel in Its 1966 Edition, Creating a Powerful Link between
the Book and Song, as well as the Film (Which Used the Song for Its Opening and
Closing Sequence). Sadler's Clean-Cut Blond Appearance Also Coincided Well with the
Novel's Racialist Tendency to Valorize Germanic and Scandinavian Characters. (Photo by
Buyenlarge/Getty Images.)

Peterson to accepting his role as adoptive father to the child as he sweeps him
under his arm and carries him to safety. The allegory could not be clearer:
a reluctant America has finally understood that child-like Vietnam needs its
active protection.

   As we can begin to see from the scene I just described, Sgt. Peterson is not
only a key character in the film but its emotional center and the focus of the
most intense scene of pathos as the end. Peterson is partly a comic character
(Hutton was known for his role as a bumbling army intelligence lieutenant in
The Horizontal Lieutenant in 1962) and a civilian at heart, surrounding him-
self with creature comforts, books, musical instruments and other domestic
objects.[123] His bed is decorated with opera posters and a sign that says "Home

is where the heart is," a slogan expressing crucial melodramatic values (domesticity, emotional truth). He is also a skilled fighter and an excellent trader and craftsman, who makes his own Hi Chi Minh sandals and trades them for bourbon and other supplies that he then uses to acquire guns and material needed at the camp. He is something of a thief and is nicknamed "the scrounger" by another character; he is in fact recruited to Kirby's A-Team (a typical Special Forces unit of twelve men) after being caught stealing from the group and being obliged to join or risk punishment. He is also a poet and is given by far the most memorable lines of the movie: "With joyous memories we leave the mystical city of Danang . . . What gay adventure lies ahead? Brother, this trip is going to make LSD feel like aspirin," he enthuses lyrically as the helicopter carrying the reporter and other members of the A-team approaches the camp. Most importantly, as mentioned earlier, he becomes the protector and father-figure for the young Vietnamese orphan who lives at the camp, Hamchunk, and, therefore, something of the film's affective epicenter.

All these quirky, compassionate and nonmilitary qualities make his death at the end particularly shocking and pathos-filled, in addition to the fact that he is killed in a cruel booby-trap that provides one of the only touches of horror in the film. It catches him by the feet and swings him upside down into a wall of punji sticks so that he is pierced all over his body in an upside-down crucifixion. His death is accompanied by several ironies, the first of which is that the mission has been successfully accomplished and the team is returning to their extraction point. Thus, like Wayne's character in *Sands of Iwo Jima,* his death seems pointless in that it happens after the main action. Secondly, one of the running jokes of the film has been Peterson complaining that he has had no choice in anything, starting with his forced recruitment to Kirby's A-team, so he asks to walk "point" (the most dangerous position) on the way back to the helicopter. It is because he is walking in front, as he has requested, that he happens to walk into the wire-triggered booby trap. According to the logic of civil religion and martyrdom, as Marvin and Ingle explain, the fact that he has asked to walk ahead gives his death greater ritual power because he can be regarded as a willing sacrifice who has volunteered for death. The film certainly uses this final and most poignant death as not only the climax of its entire narrative structure but the locus of its most elaborate rhetorical and ideological operations.

Peterson's death allows the film to end with a moment of high melodrama, as the tear-stricken and increasingly frantic orphan boy looks for him in one helicopter after another. The film milks this scene for all its emotional power during several long minutes before closing with a melodramatic tableau that also reinforce the political allegory surrounding Hamchunk throughout the film (see Figure 4.5). Kirby (Wayne) walks over to the weeping child and puts Peterson's green beret on his head, telling him that Peterson would

Figure 4.5   American Actors John Wayne (1907–1979, Left) as Colonel Mike Kirby, and George Takei as Captain Nim, in *The Green Berets*, Directed by John Wayne, Ray Kellogg, and Mervyn LeRoy, 1968. Here Takei, Known and Admired for His Work on *Star Trek*, Plays the Role of the Subordinated Native Ally to the White Hero. (Photo by Silver Screen Collection/Getty Images.)

have wanted him to have it, thus symbolically recruiting the boy for the next generation of soldiers, as in "The Ballad of the Green Berets." Kirby further reinforces this logic of patrilineal replacement by addressing the boy as "Green Beret."

Sadler's song, in a choral arrangement, now starts playing, gradually taking over the soundtrack, as the Marine Corps Hymn did at the end of *Sands of Iwo Jima.* We finally hear the last stanza (which hadn't been sung at the beginning of the film, when the song accompanied the opening credit sequence), about the Green Beret who has "met his fate," and we realize that we are seeing a literal illustration of these lines as the boy receives the fetish object that will seal his own fate as successor to the father who died for "those oppressed," that is, the children of Vietnam, including himself. Thus, we see pathos, music, allegory, and John Wayne all combined together into a potent brew of military melodrama and ritualized and serialized death. It is also a scene of pure jingoistic kitsch, as Kirby/Wayne leads the child by the hand down the beach (away from the helicopters, inexplicably heading the wrong way) against a setting sun that has made many critics snicker about the fact that it is geographically wrong (the sun would not be setting over the eastern sea coast in Vietnam, but over land to the west).

If the film relies heavily on pathos and even ends on a melodramatic note, much of is nevertheless structured by the adventure mode. This is apparent from the very first moments of the movie, during the green and orange credit sequence, which shows a series of images from the film against the sound of a weirdly jaunty version of "The Ballad of the Green Berets."[124] These images become increasingly violent and include several gruesome scenes of bodies scattered on the ground, fiery explosions, a contorted wounded man, bodies flying through the air, and dead bodies trapped on a barbed wire fence. The credits thus signal that violence will be the film's theme, and end on the positive and adventure-inflected image of a silhouette of two men and a 50-caliber machine gun.

The actual opening sequence is very reminiscent of Moore's book, as several Special Forces soldiers introduce themselves to an audience of reporters at a press meeting at Fort Bragg, the Special Forces headquarters. The men all seem German or Scandinavian and speak in several Germanic languages and explain their specializations and "cross-trained" skills. Two officers—one black and one Irish, clearly meant to offset the ultra-Germanic cast of the other men—then explain to skeptical reporters that the war in Vietnam is necessary to stop Communist world domination, showing captured weapons from China, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union as evidence. They also evoke a far-fetched and apocalyptic scenario of political assassinations, claiming that if the same thing that the Communists were doing in Vietnam happened in the United States, it would look like the systematic torture and execution of "every" politician, mayor, teacher and university professor in the country.[125] As is necessary in the war adventure genre, where protagonists need to be able to kill many adversaries with a clean conscience, it is important to establish the absolute evil of the enemy, and the film begins to do so right away in this early scene.

Another of the film's adventure features is the use of gadgets and technology that always work perfectly. One is the SkyHook, a hot air balloon contraption that allows the kidnapped North Vietnamese leader to be picked up by a passing airplane. Another is a special tractor that is flown to the outpost and serves to help tear down trees along the perimeter and create a wide "killing zone." The timing of the covert mission works perfectly and a bridge is expertly blown up by the retreating Green Berets as they leave the area. Although one is wounded as they flee (the only African American character) he will be "okay" after treatment.

The frequent humorous episodes are also a part of the positive war adventure dimension of the film. There are no conflicts between the men, every subordinate respects his superior officers and obeys instantly and with enthusiasm, while men of the same or similar rank enjoy collegial and mutually admiring relationships ("I've heard much about you . . . if only half of

what I've heard is true, I'm positive we'll work well together," Col. Cai tells Kirby). Thus, except for the occasional death of an American soldier or ally or pet (all clean and nearly bloodless deaths, even Peterson's punji stick crucifixion), the affective range of the film remains entirely with the positive: excitement, humor, camaraderie, and success. There are many scenes of enemy kills, always anonymous and always in groups. Some of the most troubling images of the film come from the climactic battle for the outpost, where multiple VC attackers dangle on the barbed wire and burn to death. At least two separate scenes give us point-of-view shots from an American airplane as it guns down a regiment of North Vietnamese soldiers or VC insurgents from the sky. When the outpost is overrun by VC halfway through the film the airplanes drop a full load of white phosphorus upon them in addition to machine-gunning them, and the Americans cheer from the perimeter as they watch. In short, the adventure mode is strong in the film because of its emphasis on killing and the gamut of positive affects it choreographs for its audience.

The ease with which the enemy are killed in large numbers brings us to the issue of race, which, as I mentioned earlier, is crucial in the adventure genre as a whole. The adventure narrative may have started with *Gilgamesh*

Figure 4.6   Colonel Mike Kirby (John Wayne) and Hamchunk (Craig Jue), Who Is Made to Represent Vietnam and Its Future in *The Green Berets* (1968). This Scene Has Been Much Mocked for Its Geographical Errors, Reversing the Sunset from West to East, and It Is Especially Heavy-Handed in Its Mixing of Melodrama and Jingoistic Propaganda. (Photo by Silver Screen Collection/Getty Images).

or *Beowulf,* but it assumed its modern form in the school of British and American imperialism where racial superiority is the first and most important lesson. A number of scholars have explored the dynamics of racism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British colonial adventure fiction, which also closely resembles the images of Native Americans in American adventure tales.[126] The racism that is specific to colonial and imperial endeavor tends to conceive of the other race as generally more primitive than the English or American Caucasian, but in two permutations: either childlike and naïve or brutal and cruel. In *The Green Berets* the first role (that of child) is given to the Montagnard, which were historically the Special Forces' particular focus for training. Tribal people living in the Vietnamese highlands, the Montagnard are depicted as so innocent that they do not understand money. While in the book they are "premoral creatures of instinct and feeling" (as Hellman describes Moore's characterization), in the film they are simply like children and are slaughtered by the Viet Cong.[127] The second role (that of irredeemable enemy) is given to Vietnamese Communists (both National Liberation Front guerrillas and North Vietnamese soldiers), who are depicted as savage and sadistic. They massacre the Montagnards, including raping and killing a little girl (the event that converts the journalist to the war), and are described as raping and killing a village chief's wife before his eyes by breaking "every bone in her body."

As in tales of Indian savagery, the point of this anecdote, told to the journalist by Kirby, is to illustrate the fact that the enemy represents a form of radical evil through his irredeemable sadism. When dealing with such an adversary, the only possible strategy is extermination. The racial logic underwriting the film is the same imperial logic that informed Lowell Thomas' narrative of T.E. Lawrence's violence against the Turks on behalf of the Bedouins. Just as Turkish troops committed "atrocities against women and children," and practiced "gruesome methods of torture," so do the Vietnamese Communists.[128] Just as Lawrence is free to punish the with what Dawson calls "righteous violence . . . free from guilt of remorse at his destructiveness" ("Do you know, one of the most glorious sights I have ever seen is a trainload of Turkish soldiers going up in the air, after the explosion of a mine?" Lawrence gloats to his biographer in the 1962 film), so the Green Berets are free to machine gun entire regiments from the air, burn scores of men with chemicals, and kill dozens of North Vietnamese guards when kidnapping the Communist commander. In addition, Kirby personally strangles one and Peterson stabs another in the side with a knife. Whether up close and personal, or mowed down from a distance, hundreds of Vietnamese die anonymously, un-individualized instances of a contemporary yellow menace. The fact that Americans cared little for the historical or cultural difference between Asian nations (lumping the Vietnamese and Chinese together into an Asian Communist

threat even though they were historical enemies) is reproduced in the film by having Hawaiians play the Vietnamese.[129]

However, the film holds back from the undisguised pleasure that the Green Berets experience through killing in Moore's book. Instead, it adopts the more morally acceptable stance of showing the men doing their jobs earnestly and professionally. The pleasure is thus reserved for the spectator, who is invited to exult in the success of the daring mission, the stealthy elimination of guards, the annihilation of attackers on the camp, the liquidation of an enemy regiment and so on. As in melodrama, the music is also very important in the adventure genre and cues spectators as to what they should be feeling as they watch. The music of *The Green Berets* is credited to Miklós Rózsa, a composer and arranger who did the music for *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), *Ben-Hur* (1959), and over a hundred Hollywood films, most of them adventure stories, Westerns or fantasy.[130] In *The Green Berets,* the score recalls the Hollywood Western of the 1950s, mostly emphasizing action and excitement, signaling to the audience that the violence on the screen, though supposedly representing a "real war," can be enjoyed with the same suspension of critical thought as any Hollywood action film. It is an ideal score for Wayne's vision of the movie, which was to represent the Vietnam War "from a hawk's point of view," in other words, wholly supportive of the war, but "strictly for entertainment," like a WWII movie.[131] The Western-style music of *The Green Berets,* however, was the almost last time that the Vietnam War was to be scored with anything except rock music.[132] As of the 1970s, the sound track for Vietnam was rock—and the effect often was to suggest a cool, hip and adventurous side of the war. No writer is more closely associated with the notion of Vietnam as a "rock'n'roll" war than the journalist Michael Herr, the subject of the next chapter, along with Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper*, which updates the irregular soldier adventure fantasy to the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Christopher Vogler's adaptation of Campbell's work for writers in *The Writer's Journey* is only one of countless uses.

2. John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 40.

3. Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers.* 3rd edition (Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 1998).

4. Philip Beidler, "Viet Pulp," *War, Literature and the Arts* 14.1 and 2 (2002), 246. The Mack Bolan series was written by Don Pendleton for Pinnacle and as of

1980 for Gold Eagle Publishers, and includes dozens of writers and spin-offs such as the action-adventure series Able Team, Phoenix Force and Stony Man (all with Gold Eagle).

5. James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 6–7.

6. I am indebted for this insight to John Hellman's discussion of Daniel Boone in *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 55–56.

7. Lillian Moore, *Daniel Boone: Hunter, Trapper and Indian Fighter* (New York: Random House, 1955).

8. Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 453–461.

9. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance,* 40.

10. Martin Burgess Green, *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 1.

11. Green, *Robinson Crusoe Story,* 2.

12. See Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Joseph Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880-1915* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); Martin B. Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Patrick Brantlinger, *Imperial Gothic: Atavism and the Occult in the British Adventure Novel*, *1880-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

13. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 21–22; Bernard Berganzoni, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (London: Constable, 1965), 17.

14. The talk and slide show that Thomas toured with all over the world was called "The Last Crusade—With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia."

15. The word "whacking" is all the more interesting and revealing here as it is also used in one of the more violent vignettes, which begins with the line "They whack-whacked the white horse on the legs and he kneed himself up." A few lines later the horse's entrails are spilling out between its legs. Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 89, 155.

16. Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*; Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989).

17. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance.*

18. Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994); Paul Zweig, *The Adventurer: The Fate of Adventure in the Western World* (New York: Basic Books, and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

19. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction,* 24.

20. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, 39.

21. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essay,* revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

22. The most important instance of this tradition is Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (New York: Doubleday, 1957); see also John McWilliams,

"The Rationale for the American Romance," *boundary 2,* vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 71–82.

23. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism,* 16.

24. Robin Moore, *The Green Berets: The Amazing Story of the U.S. Army's Elite Special Forces Unit,* foreword by Major General Thomas R. Csrnko (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2007), 1.

25. Ibid., vii.

26. According to Michael Kimmel, manhood is inevitably defined and conferred only by homosocial interaction with other men. Kimmel quotes an Army general who states any soldier fears "losing the one thing that he values more highly than life—his reputation as *a man among men*" (emphasis in original). Quoted in Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6.

27. Arthur Conan Doyle, "My First Book," in *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Interviews and Recollections,* ed. Harold Orel (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 92; R. M. Ballantyne, *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean* (1858), ed. J.S. Bratton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

28. Crane, *Red Badge,* 99, 91, 119, 99.

29. *Lawrence of Arabia,* directed by David Lean (1962; Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2018), DVD.

30. Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War* (London: Scribner, 2003), 7.

31. And the hero is almost always white, rehearsing and reinforcing the myth of a potent white masculinity being one of the main wish-fulfillment fantasies at stake in this type of story. See Johan Höglund, "The White Space of the Metropolitan Battlefield in the Avengers," in *Space Oddities: Difference and Identity in the American City,* eds. Stefan L. Brandt and Michael Fuchs (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2018); and also Joseph Darda, "Military Whiteness," *Critical Inquiry* 45 (Summer 2018), 76–96.

32. This is a scene satirized by Quentin Tarantino in *Inglorious Basterds,* only with a young German war hero, the exact equivalent of Audie Murphy, and the approving audience is German. *Inglorious Basterds,* directed by Quentin Tarantino (2009; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), Blu-ray.

33. Kirk Munroe, in Chapter XIV, "Refugees in the Mountain," *Forward, March!: A Tale of the Spanish American War* (1898), accessed July 6, 2020. http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16231?msg=welcome_stranger.

34. Gibson, *Warrior Dreams,* 6.

35. Prostitution seems to have been a particular interest of Robin Moore's. In the early 1970s, he co-wrote with Yvonne Dunleavy the memoirs of a prostitute named Xaviera Hollander, *The Happy Hooker* (New York: Dell, 1971).

36. Cited in Dawson, *Soldier Heroes,* 219.

37. See Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1962) for more examples and a more developed discussion of these types of friendships.

38. William Shakespeare, "The Life of King Henry the Fifth," *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), 960.

39. Jesse Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 1958), 29.

40. Ibid., 40, 44.

41. Broyles, William Jr. "Why Men Love War." *Esquire* (November 1984), accessed July 6, 2020, https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a28718/why-men-love-war.

42. Crane, *Red Badge,* 75.

43. *The Thin Red Line,* directed by Andrew Marton (1964; New York: Criterion Collection, 2010), Blu-Ray; *The Thin Red Line,* directed by Terence Malick (1998; Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2002), DVD.

44. Most adventure stories are written for and about boys, but one notable exception in recent popular culture is *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), which could be regarded as an adventure narrative about a girl. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Complete Series*, created by Joss Whedon (1997–2003; Beverly Hills: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

45. Martin B. Green, *The Seven Types of Adventure Tale: An Etiology of a Major Genre* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991), 41.

46. Robert Caserio, "Imperial Romance," in *Cambridge History of English Literature,* eds. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 517–532.

47. Hynes, *Soldier's Tale,* 5.

48. Crane, *Red Badge,* 125. Admittedly this is what one critic calls an "unresolved point of contention" in Crane criticism. Yet, even this critic, after claiming that "most of us" would read these words ironically, as yet another of Fleming's delusions, continues on to say "And yet Henry does change during his second day of battle . . . He becomes a good soldier, a brave warrior." John Clendenning, "Visions of War and Versions of Manhood," *War, Literature and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* (1999), 25.

49. Ibid., 126.

50. *Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone (1986; Culver City: MGM, 2001), DVD; *Red Dawn,* directed by John Milius (1984; New York: MGM/UA Home Video, 1985), VHS Tape; and *Top Gun,* directed by Tony Scott (1986; Hollywood: Paramount, 2020), DVD.

51. Because of its close links to masculine socialization, the adventure genre is also often concerned with father and son dynamics. On the whole, these tend to be positive and successful. Many adventure tales thus show real and symbolic sons effectively taking their father's place.

52. Green, *Seven Types,* 3.

53. Green, *Robinson Crusoe Story,* 2.

54. Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

55. Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation,* 491–533.

56. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice,* 100–105.

57. P.F. Kluge, "First and Last a Cowboy," *Life* 72 (January 28, 1972), 46. Quoted in Katherine Kinney, *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

58. *Hatari!*, directed by Howard Hawks (1962; Hollywood: Paramount, 2017), DVD.

59. Rudyard Kipling, "White Man's Burden," *Kipling Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 96.

60. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,* 225.

61. Ibid., 255–260.

62. Thorup, *An Intellectual History of Terror,* 67, 69.

63. Cited in Thorup, *An Intellectual History of Terror,* 69.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 71.

66. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,* 256–259.

67. Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 36–39.

68. William J Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1958); Hellman, *American Myth,* 15–38, especially page 17.

69. Hellman, *American Myth,* 45–46.

70. Ibid., 51–53; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 491–533.

71. *Bridge On the River Kwai,* directed by David Lean (1957; Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2011), Blu-ray.

72. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes,* 170–173.

73. Ibid., 190.

74. Hellman, *American Myth,* 53.

75. Cited in Hellman, *American Myth,* 53.

76. Moore, *Green Berets*, ix. Unless otherwise specified, I use the 2007 edition for page numbers, since this edition is more easily available now. However, the original 1965 edition is different in several respects, and I will specify that I am using this earlier edition when I need to quote from it.

77. Cited by Hellman, *American Myth,* 57.

78. Moore, *Green Berets,* 1.

79. Ibid., 24.

80. In the 1999/2007 edition, the final chapter about Moore's honorary green beret is replaced by a longer chapter about another real member of the Special Forces, General Henry Hugh Shelton. This chapter, titled "The Consummate Green Beret, General Henry Hugh Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," immediately signals the high rank and importance of its final example of a Green Beret, holder of the highest rank in the military hierarchy besides the President himself. If the first (1965) edition was structured to show Moore's honorary acceptance into the ranks of this elite group of warriors, the recent edition is constructed to demonstrate the acceptance of the Special Forces themselves into the highest echelons of power in the military as institution. In this way, Moore signals that the Green Berets themselves have come of age.

81. Moore, *Green Berets,* 18.

82. Ibid., 23.

83. Ibid., 20, 57.

84. Ibid., 73.

85. Ibid., 75.

86. Ibid., 78.

87. Ibid., 97.

88. Ibid., 320.

89. Ibid., 40.

90. Ibid., 400.

91. Ibid., 405.

92. Ibid., 185.

93. Ibid., 190–191.

94. Hellman, *American Myth,* 62.

95. "Born in Germany, he had been a member of the Hitler Youth," the narrator informs us. Apparently seamlessly, "Fritz made the adjustment from militant German youth to militant American youth, and was a valuable asset to the United States." Moore, *Green Berets,* 182.

96. Ibid., 209.

97. Ibid., 210.

98. Hellman, *American Myth,* 57.

99. Moore, *Green Berets,* 30–37.

100. Ibid., 25.

101. Ibid., 199.

102. Ibid., 138.

103. Ibid., 40.

104. Ibid., 212.

105. Ibid., 233.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid., 47.

108. Ibid., 52.

109. Ibid., 297.

110. Ibid., xii.

111. Ibid., 75.

112. Ibid., 219, 340.

113. Ibid., 181.

114. Ibid., 157, 169.

115. Ibid., 19, 73.

116. Hellman, *American Myth,* 65.

117. Roger Landes, "Barry Sadler and 'The Ballad of the Green Berets,'" in *The Vietnam War in Popular Culture: The Influence of America's Most Controversial War on Everyday Life,* ed. Ron Millam, vol. 1: During the War (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2017), 153–174.

118. Fussell, *Great War,* 21.

119. *The Green Berets,* directed by John Wayne, Ray Kellogg and Mervyn LeRoy (1968; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2007), DVD.

120. Suid, *Guts and Glory*, 256.

121. Ibid., 255.

122. Moore, *Green Berets,* 367.

123. *The Horizontal Lieutenant,* directed by Richard Thorpe (1962; Culver City: MGM, 2011), DVD.

124. In what Roger Landes calls "a turgid . . . singing lumberjack choral arrangement by Ken Darby; Landes, "Barry Sadler," 168.

125. Ironically, the assassination program they attribute to the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front sounded very similar to the Phoenix Program carried out by several American secret service agencies in the years 1965–1972, through the NLF also killed South Vietnamese officials during the same years.

126. Green, *Dreams of Adventure*; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*; Stuart Hannabuss, "Ballantyne's Message of Empire," in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* ed. Jeffrey Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

127. Hellman, *American Myth,* 62.

128. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes,* 180.

129. Suid, *Guts and Glory,* 253.

130. *The Thief of Bagdad,* directed by Michael Powell, Ludwig Berger and Tim Whelan (1940; New York: Criterion Collection, 2008), DVD; *Ben-Hur,* directed by William Wyler (1959; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2012), DVD.

131. Quoted in Suid, *Guts and Glory,* 256.

132. The main exceptions being *Go Tell the Spartans,* which included snare drums and brass, and *The Deerhunter,* which featured a bittersweet theme song performed on guitar. See Todd Decker, *Hymns for the Fallen: Combat Movie Music and Sound after Vietnam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 176.

Chapter 5

Adventure Revisited

Michael Herr's Dispatches *(1977) and* *Clint Eastwood's* American Sniper *(2014)*

If Robin Moore is easy to dismiss as a pulp fiction writer, and John Wayne's film as patriotic war propaganda, I want to turn now to two texts which revisit the adventure genre in a more critical or at least seemingly critical way. The first of these is Michael Herr's book, *Dispatches* (1977), based on several pieces he published in *Esquire* during the war and one of the most critically acclaimed accounts of the war. Herr also contributed to the screenplays of both *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987).[1] Some critics have hailed Herr's subjective account of being a freelance journalist in a war zone as the most accurate and realistic depiction of the Vietnam War ever precisely because it does not try to be objective or journalistic.[2] Herr's prose is a variant of New Journalism, woven together from stories of soldiers and officers, personal experiences, and those of his friends, in a highly idiomatic and informal language, emphasizing the omnipresence of fear and death but also pleasure and excitement.

Well educated, well read, and extremely thoughtful, Herr delivers an account of his experiences that is full of ironies and horror but equally saturated with fascination, glamour and the seductions of war, which is why he has been associated with the trope of Vietnam as a "rock'n'roll" war.[3] Herr is extremely self-conscious about the fact that he is writing about a side of war that most writers pretend does not exist—the alluring side—and he is of course horrified and disgusted by many of the things he witnesses. Nevertheless, the pleasurable aspect of war, which he examines unflinchingly and critically, is his real subject and it ends up outweighing the horror, or at least using the horror for its own pleasurable ends. In other words, the horror of the war becomes a part of what is attractive about it. No writer has dissected this ambivalence and this paradox with quite the same skill as Herr—and yet the result is a book that is deeply imbricated with the same

structures and affects of the adventure genre that Herr occasionally attempts to deconstruct or at least acknowledge.

In 2001, Michael Herr participated in a Dutch documentary about the topic that permeates his earlier work, namely, the pleasurable aspect of violence and death. This film, titled *First Kill*, by filmmaker Coco Schrijber, features interviews with Herr and several Vietnam War veterans who recall the perverse pleasure and emotion they felt when killing.[4] The film is interesting in its own right but makes a fascinating coda to *Dispatches* by discussing explicitly an issue that Herr treats more indirectly in that earlier work, namely, that war, and especially killing, is appealing for some men.

A recent film that purports to be realistic and based on biographical fact, and yet is a clear and vivid example of contemporary Hollywood adventure is Clint Eastwood's 2014 Iraq war film about Navy Seal sniper Chris Kyle, *American Sniper*.[5] The film presents itself as a credible and authentic portrait of the war, based on the fact that it is inspired by the memoir of its protagonist-hero, and uses during action scenes the gritty hand-held camera aesthetic which has now become synonymous with documentary-style realism. However, its narrative structure and story arc are pure adventure: a coming-of-age story of a hero discovering his exceptional talent for killing on a dangerous borderland and returning with honors.

Eastwood inserts a thin sub-plot about PTSD which is only alluded to in Kyle's memoir, and which helps to humanize this otherwise one-dimensional warrior who seems overly confident that every one of his targets fully deserved to die. The fact that Kyle is murdered by a fellow veteran is acknowledged but not allowed to raise questions about his use of guns and target practice as therapy for haunted soldiers. Instead, his death becomes the occasion for a hero's funeral and the display of widespread public admiration. Although the pleasures of killing are slightly muted, as Kyle, being a member of the U.S. military, must be made to appear professional rather than sadistic, the entire film is a celebration of his lethal talent and its transformative power. In this chapter, then, I will show how the adventure genre and its specific affordances shape even texts that appear either critical (as in Herr's case) or highly realistic (as Kyle's story is generally perceived) in their approach to war.

MICHAEL HERR'S *DISPATCHES*

According to Jim Nielson's survey of the book's reception, early reviewers and critics praised *Dispatches* for its apparent avoidance of ideology, its ironic self-reflexivity, its "verbal pyrotechnics," and for its seemingly subversive insistence that Vietnam was essentially unknowable and irrational.[6] The term that has most often been used to describe Herr's epistemological

and aesthetic stance is "postmodern," and critics who embrace this term for Herr's work tend also to insist that the Vietnam War itself was somehow postmodern: refusing narrative, clear beginnings and endings, refusing meaning itself.[7] Neilson contextualizes this enthusiastic reception by pointing to the political climate at the time of its publication: a moment when the United States was eager to forget the war and deny its own responsibility for the destruction of nearly two million Vietnamese and huge parts of the landscape and infrastructure of Vietnam.

Neilson suggests that there is a direct relationship between the enthusiasm with which Herr's account of the war as unknowable chaos was received and the assertion made by Jimmy Carter that same year that the United States had no reason "to apologize or to castigate ourselves or to assume the status of culpability" since in Vietnam "the destruction was mutual."[8] The claim that Vietnam was impossible to represent or understand fit perfectly the political needs of the moment, which was to avoid any understanding that would find fault with the way America had wreaked havoc for years on a small country fighting for its independence (or at least fighting a civil war, depending on one's political take on the conflict). In concrete terms, this included the fact that the United States, although it had initiated and then "lost" the war (though of course both statements are controversial and subject to debate by scholars of different political commitments), never paid a penny in reparations to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, using the politically motivated and essentially groundless issue of missing American POWs as a pretext. Although Herr himself does not use the term "postmodern," it is true that his book possesses many of the key traits associated with it: experimental form, lack of lineal structure, intertextuality and references of popular as well as high cultural texts, dense and informal prose emphasizing the subjective and fragmentary experience of first-person witnesses.

However, contrary to the general consensus about the book, *Dispatches does* have an argument—it just so happens to be one that most critics were not prepared to understand. This no doubt contributed to the impression that Herr was saying that the war was not understandable. What Herr was in fact trying to get across was something that had very rarely been admitted in serious war literature (though it is the staple of war adventure), namely, that *war is pleasurable*. This is Herr's real subject, the truth that he examines from every angle and which makes the book itself so titillating and powerful—gives it the electrical force of uttering a taboo. The fact that the book is self-conscious about the guilty pleasures of war does not in any way undermine its own participation in that pleasure, neither for Herr nor for his reader.

The great paradox and allure of the book, in fact, is that it can engage critically with the adventure mode, identify and denounce it, and yet still recreate it, produce it, and tacitly embrace it. Herr has a gift for naming things with

great insight and critical intelligence, giving the impression that he is above and outside all that he names. He refers to the period that Moore writes about in *The Green Berets* as "spookwar" and "adventure": "not exactly soldiers, not even advisors yet, but Irregulars, working in remote places under little direct authority, acting out their fantasies with more freedom that most men ever know."[9] Describing the transition from the spy war of the early sixties to the conventional war of the mid and late sixties, Herr writes, "the romance of spooking started to fall away like dead meat from a bone . . . their adventure became our war," acknowledging that the first phase of the war was often perceived as an occasion for fun, freedom, and unconventional tactics.[10] As John Hellman has argued, counter-insurgency interventions in Vietnam seemed to offer America of the early 1960s an antidote to the perceived problem of slackening masculinity and excessive conformism by staging highly romanticized performances of frontiersman-like heroism.[11]

Yet the conventional war of the late 1960s that Herr describes is also rife with adventure and primitive fantasy. His book bristles with examples of men in love with the power to kill: "Once I met a colonel who had a plan to shorten the war by dropping piranha into the paddies of the North. He was talking fish but his dreamy eyes were full of mega-death."[12] Another time he watches a man shooting an automatic weapon into a large pile of dead bodies; when the man walks back his face "was flushed and mottled and twisted like he had his faceskin on inside out, a patch of green that was too dark, a streak of red running into bruise purple, a lot of sick grey-white in between, he looked like he's had a heart attack out there. His eyes were rolled up half into his head, his mouth was sprung open and his tongue was out, but he was smiling. Really a dude who'd shot his wad. The captain wasn't too pleased about my having seen that."[13] The long description is telling of Herr's real focus in the book, namely, to document the war's illicit pleasures. It is a description that is both horrific, drawing on gothic imagery with the metaphor of the facial skin "inside out," and simultaneously enchanting—a description of intense pleasure ("really a dude who'd shot his wad"). The metaphor is explicitly sexual, and with the detail about the captain displeased about Herr having seen this perverse display, we are given the impression that we are seeing something thrillingly obscene.

The disarming thing about Herr is that his own position in relation to this pleasure is so complex: both critical and complicit. There is a critical edge in the above description in the comparison to gothic monstrosity as well as the overt revelation of pleasure in the incident, but Herr insists on revealing that he is not so very different. As he writes at one point, "every one of us there was a true volunteer."[14] His book is an anatomy of voyeurism, his own ("I was there to watch"[15]) and other people's. The link to pornography is made explicitly in the first chapter, where Herr compares looking at war photographs in

Life magazine to "looking at first porn."[16] He probes this strange fascination, the attraction and the shame that looking at dead and violated bodies arouses, drawing the reader into the same complicity with a second-person address: "you know how it is, you want to look and you don't want to look." These are "strange feelings," he says, for which he "didn't have a language," but looking at death was like looking at "all the porn in the world." [17]

An anecdote about a new correspondent who had just arrived in Saigon and was asking Herr and his friends about their work reveals the excitement and curiosity about war that Herr suggests brought all of them to the war: "Is it exhilarating? Boy, I bet it's exhilarating."[18] The man's naked excitement soon reveals something even more shameful, a voyeuristic curiosity about death and injury: "'What does it look like when a man gets hit in the balls?' the new man said, as though that was the question he'd really meant to ask all along, and it came as close as you could get to a breach of taste in that room; palpable embarrassment all around."[19] The man's question is embarrassing because it tacitly exposes their own motivations for coming to the war: curiosity about what happens to people when they are maimed and killed. It is embarrassing also because it touches on the issue of masculinity—it makes obvious that masculinity is somehow one of the stakes in their dangerous choice of careers as war correspondents—but calling attention to masculinity is always a breach of masculine decorum which requires that the male subject be unaware of his presentation of self as gendered.

The interesting thing about Herr is that he is acutely aware of his complicity in the voyeuristic pleasures of the war but wholly oblivious to the gender dynamics that inform them. Susan Jeffords, in her masterful study of gender in Vietnam War literature and film, points out that the overarching movement in *Dispatches* is from a position where Herr is initially perceived as feminized by soldiers ("tits on a bull," one calls him) because he does not fight, to finally being accepted as having "balls" to be there at all.[20] The transition from "tits" to "balls," as she calls it, is also a way of describing the classic adventure trope of the male rite of passage, from femininized youth associated with his mother to hardened man.

If Herr leaves this gender narrative tacit and unremarked, he nevertheless highlights a key event of this transformation: his first experience of shooting a gun at human beings. This happens at the end of the first chapter and is described as a turning point in his life. The context is the first night of the Tet Offensive and he finds himself no longer a reporter: "We were in the Alamo" and "I was a shooter." The next morning there are dead bodies everywhere and he wonders if any of them were shot by him and the possibility is elating: "there would never be any way to know for sure" but "I couldn't remember ever feeling so tired, so changed, so happy."[21] The passage has sometimes been quoted as an example of Herr's New Journalistic blurring of the

boundary between watching and doing, reporting and fighting, but few critics have paid attention to what Herr is really telling us here: that he was *thrilled* to have possibly killed one or more of those dead bodies himself. The mere possibility of being a killer was both life-changing and ecstatic—the language is that of profound enchantment and intensely emotional and transformative experience. The chapter ends joyously with an anecdote of Herr back in New York dreaming of a field of dead bodies—"when I got up the next morning I was laughing."[22] Thus, although Herr engages ironically with the war adventure mode, scrutinizing its most important feature—the pleasure in killing—he also writes his own book as an adventure with himself as protagonist.

Other key aspects of the adventure narrative are present in *Dispatches*. For instance, the book opens with two italicized anecdotes: one about an outdated colonial-era map of Vietnam that Herr has on the wall of his apartment in Saigon and another about an information officer's map and story about an area of woodlands that has been razed to the ground. The point of both anecdotes is about the fallibility of maps as official forms of representation, summed up in Herr's comment that "even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much anymore; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind."[23] The point that most critics retain from this passage is Herr's ironic distance from official narratives of the war, crucial for the way he sets himself up as a chronicler whose account will be unofficial but far more revealing than anything an information officer or a document like a map could show.[24] The opening pages of *Heart of Darkness,* in which Marlow recalls his boyhood fascination with maps like the nineteenth-century map on Herr's wall, are also subtly referenced.[25]

Though seemingly idiosyncratic and postmodern, Herr's overt disdain for the official and conventional in this opening scene is actually typical of the adventure genre, as is the casual Orientalism of his remark about Vietnamese faces. Recalling stereotypes of the inscrutable Oriental, the stony-faced Indian, and the mask-like visage of the African American, the line has been read as another example of the postmodern opacity of the war but it can also be seen as run-of-the-mill racist stereotyping so common in the adventure mode. The fact that Herr's book almost completely ignores the experience of the Vietnamese is also unsurprising if we look at it through an adventure lens. The focus on the excitement and pleasures of war becomes uncomfortable if the subjective experience of the victim of those pleasures is given equal attention. In other words, such a focus essentially requires the erasure and reduction of the Vietnamese to stereotype and two-dimensional supporting cast to the American experience Herr documents.

The real focus of this experience appears in the very next paragraph, the first paragraph of non-italicized prose. The relationship between the italicized and non-italicized passages is not exactly clear; both feature anecdotes and

commentary of exactly the same kind. However, the two anecdotes about the maps function as a kind of prolegomenon to the book, establishing Herr's ironic critique of official forms of knowledge, while the first non-italicized paragraphs introduce the subjects that will take up most of his attention: the embodied experience of being in war and the special aura around confirmed killers. The paragraph begins by mentioning that "the medics gave you pills" but that Herr never saw the need for them since "a little contact" (combat) would give him "more speed than I could bear."[26] The passage is ostensibly about how alert danger makes you, but the comparison to recreational drugs (speed) also reveals that the physical experience of contact/combat is both intense and pleasurable.

The next paragraphs segue into a story about a "Lurp," a long-range recon patroller who tells Herr a three-sentence story that he uses to initiate us into the enigmas of his book: "Patrol went up the mountain. One man came back. He died before he could tell us what happened." Herr reports asking what had happened and getting a look suggesting that the soldier "felt sorry for me, fucked if he'd waste time telling stories to anyone as dumb as I am."[27] Again, as with the line about the mysterious Vietnamese, this passage has been interpreted as an anecdote about the unknowability of the war. But that is not necessarily the only point of the anecdote. We know that the soldier is telling Herr his own story, which we have been given on a previous page. In fact, the soldier had been the sole survivor of two such incidents, one in 1965 when his entire cavalry platoon was wiped out, after which he had re-enlisted and joined the Special Forces. Then once more his entire Green Beret team is killed and he survives by hiding under their bodies while the "VC walked all around them with knives, making sure." Clearly traumatized by these two experiences, the man tried to go home but would sit in a window with a gun pointing out and making his "folks real uptight." So he came back to Vietnam, but "he put people uptight here too, even here." That is when he begins doing long-range reconnaissance patrols: "after that, there was nothing left for him in the war except the Lurps."[28]

As this anecdote and many others in the book make clear, Lurps are a kind of elite among infantrymen because they are all killers and slightly insane. Their long-range patrols take them into enemy territory for days a time, where they live out in the open and must kill at any instant. The constant state of vigilance and stress, plus hair-trigger killer reflexes, would be nearly impossible for most people. The result of the soldier's two close calls with death is that he was both an admired hero and a dangerous psychopath. His story suggests that some essential part of himself has died, if not literally then metaphorically. Too mad to be messed with, he emerges as a colorful but unsettling figure. Since "nobody was about to tell him to get his hair cut," he wore it long to his shoulders, "covering a thick purple scar," and sported

a gold earring and a headband as well as always carrying several weapons. Looking like a pirate or a teenager's idea of a mercenary, the Lurp appears in Herr's pages like a larger than life character—an adventure hero gone wrong. Even his buddies are afraid of him.

Yet, a super-soldier like this exudes fascination for other men, including Herr, it seems. He is a valued member of the company, known as a "good killer, one of our best," even if terrifying.[29] The story of his earlier experiences of survival position him as a victim of the war, while the end of the passage—about how prisoners were brought to the Lurp area, obviously to be tortured, since the area would be "off limits during the interrogation"—leaves us with a titillating suggestion of cruelty. In Herr's book, then, the Lurps are the dark children of the Special Forces—the next generation, harder and more crazy. The progression of the soldier in the anecdote from the regular army to Special Forces to the Lurps makes this clear. In this way, Herr is signaling his awareness of the violent literary tradition that Moore's book represents: and he is pushing the line one step further.

Like Moore, Herr describes a wide range of intensities that define living in a war zone. Flying over the jungle is "pure pleasure" and "I was never bored, never even unsurprised."[30] The most intense sensation of all is being under fire, or having what was called "contact":

> "Quakin' and Shakin'", they called it, great balls of fire, Contact. Then it was you and the ground: kiss it, eat it, fuck it, plough it with your whole body, get as close to it as you can without being in it yet or of it . . . Amazing, unbelievable, guys who'd played a lot of hard sports said they'd never felt anything like it, the sudden drop and rocket rush of the hit, the reserves of adrenalin you could make available to yourself, pumping it up and putting it out until you were lost floating in it, not afraid, almost open to clear orgasmic death-by-drowning in it, actually relaxed . . . Maybe you couldn't love the war and hate it inside the same instant, but sometimes those feelings alternated so rapidly that they spun together in a strobic wheel rolling all the way up until you were literally High On War, like it said on all the helmet covers.[31]

I have quoted this passage at some length because it not only tries to describe the "amazing" and "orgasmic" sensations of being under fire, drawing on a lexicon of sex and drugs, and apparently more intense than any "hard sport," but also because it performs a high-voltage literary riff about contact that one critic calls "a verbal equivalent to a guitar solo."[32] The experience Herr describes is rapturous and transcendent, exited and relaxed, dangerous and utterly seductive. It is like the most intense drug imaginable, a conceit that Chris Hedges, also a former war correspondent, discusses at length in his book, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (2002).[33] Here Herr does more

than describe the experience of combat danger; his passage is like a prose love poem or hymn to the experience. Whatever Herr's intention may have been, the passage cannot help but awaken the desire for such an experience, or at least awe at those that have lived it.

The emotional power of adventure is every bit as enchanting as anything melodrama can offer—and even more so, since you can live through it. Herr is perfectly aware of what he is saying and clearly shares the sentiment he attributes to one of his reporter friends when he hears that a British publisher wants him to write a book whose purpose would be to "take the glamour out of war": "Take the glamour out of war! I mean, how the bloody hell can you do *that*? . . . It's like trying to take the glamour out of sex, trying to take the glamour out of the Rolling Stones . . . I mean, you *know* that, it just *can't be done*! . . . Oh, what a laugh! Take the bloody *glamour* out of bloody *war*!"[34] The passage is repetitive and a little long because the point is so crucial—it is the end of last long chapter, just before a coda titled "Breathing Out."

Despite Herr's remarkably explicit treatment of the pleasures of war and specifically killing, most critics gloss over this aspect of the book. This is probably because most literature scholars are trained to pay attention to questions of representation, epistemology, language, authority, realism, metaphor and linguistic texture, but not affect and pleasure. Until recently, questions of aesthetics and emotion were often eclipsed by questions of meaning, and a book as literary as Herr's was never going to be recognized as having anything in common with a low-brow genre like adventure, and yet—as I have shown—it is deeply indebted to the adventure mode as well as largely self-aware about this entanglement.

FIRST KILL **(2001)**

A 2001 Dutch documentary starring Michael Herr and other reporters and veterans of the war brings his original interest in exposing the perverse pleasures of war clearly into focus. These taboo pleasures are the main subject of *First Kill* by Coco Schrijber, which features interviews primarily with Herr and a disabled veteran named Billy Heflin. As the title suggests, what the filmmaker really wants to explore is how it felt to kill and how some people found it made them feel good. Herr provides both personal testimony and some theorizing about it, while Heflin offers himself as an example of someone who enjoyed killing and still misses it. Other veterans provide similar testimonies. Schrijber sometimes films the interviewee while he's speaking and sometimes she shows scenes from contemporary Vietnam, including a Vietnam War museum with atrocity photos from the period, subtly suggesting that the fascination with death and violence continues in this displaced form.

Figure 5.1   Michael Herr, Author of *Dispatches,* Who Is Interviewed at Length in the Documentary *First Kill,* Speaks of the "beauty and pleasure in a situation that is commonly believed to be unrelievedly ghastly." Screenshot by Author. *First Kill,* 2001.

There is also an interview with photojournalist Eddie Adams, who famously captured the execution of a Viet Cong operative by South Vietnam's chief of National Police on a Saigon Street in 1968. The greatest amount of screen time is devoted to Herr, however, who is as eloquent as ever about the subject of war as adventure.

Offering fascinating context for his earlier book, Herr describes his initial attraction to the war in Vietnam as rooted in "violent and adolescent emotions." Although a "good middle-class Jewish boy," Herr had "really the same dumb fantasy as many of the kids going over there—I passionately wanted to see a war, for complicated reasons of my own." Once in Vietnam, he stayed because "I was into it—I was all caught up in the trip." It was interesting, he explains: "one was never bored." As he does in his book, Herr insists on the attraction of war: "The fact that there was so much beauty and pleasure in a situation that is commonly believed to be unrelievedly ghastly—that's a problem for the Western mind to deal with." We see a certain Orientalism still in place—why should "the non-Western mind" accept beauty and pleasure in war any more easily? Be that as it may, this entanglement of beauty and pleasure in war is Herr's argument throughout the film, as it was in the book. Later in the interview, he returns to this issue: "It is difficult to deal with the upside of a war—the parts that are beautiful." Speaking specifically of atrocity photographs, he argues that everyone feels attracted to them, because they're "obscene. . . it's the ultimate blood sport, and it would be not useful to pretend to anyone that it isn't exciting, that it doesn't really turn people on, always has done and always will" (14:40). Echoing cultural critics such as Paul Virilio, Herr reflects: "It can't be a coincidence that the bloodiest century

in history was also the century of the movie camera."[35] In a counter-intuitive argument, he even suggests that the television coverage of the Vietnam War helped prolong it.

While his book focused on infantrymen and especially certain soldiers who found they had a talent for killing ("the first taste made them crazy for it, just like they knew it would"[36]), in the film Herr is eager to suggest that *anyone* could become a killer under the right circumstances. He calls this one's "dark side," an aspect of a "collective unconscious," and suggests that "you're never far out of touch with it anyway—it's there." He reflects that "people would be shocked to learn what they're capable of . . . they're just very lucky that the circumstances of their lives don't put them in a position where they have to act it out." In a reference to school shootings, he castigates news anchor-men on the television news for asking how "this could have happened?" Herr claims they "should know," that "we all know" why they happen—implying that everyone secretly understands the desire to kill.

If *Dispatches* filtered all the soldiers' testimony through Herr's consciousness and colorful prose, in the film some of these men that Herr calls "so innocent and violent, so sweet and so brutal, beautiful killers" speak for themselves. The other most important voice in the documentary is Billy Heflin, a former "tunnel rat," who is now a heavily medicated and wheelchair-bound veteran. Heflin describes killing as deeply pleasurable: "every kill we made seemed like it made you feel a little better . . . there was a place where it sort of cheered you up to a certain extent . . . there was a place in your heart where it made you feel good." When the filmmaker asks him to compare it to something, he almost does not hesitate before answering: "sex." Thirty years later, Heflin admits that he still dreams of Vietnam. He wants to go back, but not to the Vietnam of today—he wants to "go back over there and kill. I miss it. I've never found nothing like that."

First Kill documents something that is an important part of the adventure mode, but one that is often muted or denied when associated to official war narratives, whether fictional or nonfictional, and that is the fascination and attraction of lethal violence. The thrill of inflicting death on animals or on people defined as less than human is a dark side of the adventure form, but a key aspect of it nonetheless. The film revisits Herr's earlier work and teases out the thread of argument that had run through the book but rarely been articulated fully, that is, that war was exciting and death was a crucial feature of that excitement. In *First Kill* an older and more reflective Herr is able to speak directly to the "unbearable reality of what we're really capable of and the kind of pleasure that people can get out of it." In so doing, he can reveal more clearly than he could in his earlier work the dark heart of the war adventure formula as it informs the way the Vietnam War was experienced as well as written about.

WAR ADVENTURE NOW

During the first years of the twenty-first century, war adventure has become the dominant genre of war narratives, in film and books. As Philip Beidler has remarked in an essay titled "Viet Pulp," a flurry of Vietnam memoirs has been published in recent years, many of which purport to be true accounts of experiences in elite hunter-killer units (far out of proportion to the actual existence of such units during the war).[37] The popularity of the Rambo series, about a Special Forces veteran whose survival and killing skills border on the supernatural, is a striking example of the genre (though, interestingly, Rambo is also an excellent example of melodrama in its depiction of John Rambo as a figure of perpetual suffering). The 2008 installment, *Rambo*, hit the screens as part of a hawkish backlash to the failures of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the release of a number of critical war films such as *Stop-Loss* (2008), *Lions for Lambs* (2007) and *In the Valley of Elah* (2007).[38]

The Hollywood war adventure counter-offensive of this period dwarfs this handful of critical voices and includes *300* (Zack Snyder, 2007)*, Transformers* (Michael Bay, 2007), most of the superhero films (including and especially the *Avengers* series) and even the relatively complex *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2007), which is about the addictive (i.e., pleasurable) intensity of the dangerous work of IED disposal experts.[39] Even closer in spirit to the original *The Green Berets* we have *Act of Valor* (Scott Waugh & Mike McCoy, 2012), about Navy SEALs, played by real SEAL servicemen, and structured like the earlier film into two parts, each showing (off) a different kind of SEAL mission, a rescue and a terrorism prevention.[40] There is one pathos-filled death, of a man who throws himself in classical war heroism style on a live grenade to protect his comrades (naturally, the one member of the team who has the most to live for, his wife expecting a child). Otherwise, the film is all action and successful gadget-heavy operations.

Similarly, *Lone Survivor* (2013), starring Mark Wahlberg, is based on a real Navy SEALs attempt to assassinate a Taliban leader that goes wrong and costs the lives of all but one.[41] Despite this failure, the film projects an image of the SEALs as an irresistible brotherhood of warriors: perfect men who all have wives and girlfriends but are tough and gritty at the same time—an elite team of morally righteous killers and all-around good guys. In accordance with the trend begun by *Saving Private Ryan,* the film spares the viewer no gore and blood.[42] Gone are the clean, bloodless deaths of *The Green Berets,* where enemies and allies generally just fall to the ground. In *Lone Survivor*, as in most recent war films, both enemies and allies are given spectacular injuries: exploding heads, missing limbs, spraying blood, broken bones protruding from open wounds. Despite the heavy carnage and the fact that all but one die, the film works hard to arouse admiration for

the rugged professionalism and grit of this band of fallen heroes. On IMDb, the Internet Movie Database, most of the viewer reviews praise the film's realism and its real-life models: "The recreation is riveting, disturbing in its intensity, and eye-opening. Whatever you feel about the war there, or even about soldiers killing other soldiers, you end up admiring the sheer abilities of these fit, smart, determined men."[43] The reviews also frequently cite the extreme brutality of the action, and account for it by the film's realism. In other words, despite the high death count and the carnage, the seductive aura of war adventure is fully active in this recent film just as it has been since the nineteenth century.

The appearance of the expression "war porn" in recent years is an interesting cultural indicator of the popularity of ultra-violent war-focused entertainment but also of a self-awareness and discomfort with the phenomenon of taking pleasure in the spectacle of violated bodies. One of the earliest instances of the use of the term was by Jean Baudrillard in a short essay called "War Porn" ("Pornographie de la guerre" in the original) in 2005 about the Abu Ghraib photographs.[44] Baudrillard's point in this essay is that the ubiquity of the torture images in the media had transformed them from information to pornography. He doesn't quite explain what he means but one can infer that he is commenting on the way they serve to titillate more than inform.

The term is picked up again by Tom Engelhardt a year later in an essay for *Z Magazine* (June 14, 2006). Also titled "War Porn," the essay traces the Abu Ghraib photographs to an entire colonial tradition of conquest, slaughter and trophies of that slaughter.[45] Citing an 1898 battle where the British killed 11,000 Dervishes while losing 48 men, Engelhardt examines the presumption of racial superiority that authorizes colonial invaders to not just conquer but massacre the supposedly barbarous Other. He also reminds readers of the custom of taking souvenirs from Vietnamese bodies during the Vietnam War and cites Michael Herr's *Dispatches* for accounts of photos of severed heads being circulated among soldiers.

Engelhardt's argument about the racial and genocidal logic of colonial warfare (including neo-colonial wars such as America's many third world interventions in Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines) recalls Foucault's argument in *Society Must Be Defended* that racism emerges in the modern period defined by biopolitical power as a justification for war. Foucault writes: "Racism first develops with colonization, or in other words, with colonizing genocide. If you are functioning in the biopower mode, how can you justify the need to kill people, to kill populations, and to kill civilizations? By using the themes of evolutionism, by appealing to racism." He continues: "How can one not only wage war on one's adversaries but also expose one's own citizens to war, and let them be killed by the million (and this is precisely

what has been going on since the nineteenth century, or since the second half of the nineteenth century), except by activating the theme of racism?"[46] Foucault's notion of biopolitics has been very influential in recent years but this argument that racism developed in the nineteenth century in order to justify war and colonialism, rather than the other way around, has garnered less attention than other aspects of the theory. For us, the crucial point here is that the racism of the adventure genre—closely tied to the history of colonial occupation and relations—is not just a literary device or insignificant detail, but the very core and motor of modern warfare in an age of biopolitics. Racism is what allows the modern state to exercise its traditional sovereign power of killing—in colonial and neo-colonial war the two forms of power work hand in hand.[47]

Thus, if Marvin and Ingle's theory of blood sacrifice helps us to understand the power of war to unite and regenerate modern nation-states, Foucault helps us to understand the centrality of race to the way these wars are conceived and represented. If melodrama is the genre of military self-sacrifice, adventure is the genre of racial genocide. This logic has not disappeared or even gone underground in contemporary culture; it is plain and evident to see in any Hollywood adventure film with its endless series of swarthy bad guys committing cruel and unnatural acts and then being exterminated by American technology wielded by its warrior elite. Audiences cheer: war adventure is a good time and it is good business.

CLINT EASTWOOD'S *AMERICAN SNIPER* (2014)

The most vivid recent example of this lucrative marriage of war and cinematic pleasure is Clint Eastwood's 2014 Iraq war film about Navy Seal sniper Chris Kyle, *American Sniper*. Both critically acclaimed and highly successful—the highest grossing film of 2014 and the highest grossing war film ever[48]—the film has been widely praised for its accuracy, as a vivid and complex portrait of Kyle, and as a searing portrait of the toll of war on American warriors. While profiting from the credibility provided by its biographical material and using real footage from Kyle's funeral to enhance its claim to realism, the film is as fanciful as Wayne's *The Green Berets* and hews as closely to adventure clichés. The frame narrative actually combines the two main forms of war adventure, weaving together both a boy-to-man rite of passage and a tale of a hero discovering his taste and talent for killing in a distant and dangerous frontier space.

The film follows Kyle (played by Bradley Cooper) from picture-perfect childhood to his impressive funeral cortège, and takes the form of a hagiography of an ideal American: from a small-town childhood of hunting with

his father, church sermons and stern moral lessons accompanied by colorful moral allegory (in which his father designates him as a natural-born protector of the weak), a youthful brush with rodeo and the cowboy life, the perfect balance of lustiness and restraint in dealing with his unfaithful girlfriend in early life, stoic endurance during military training, his patient courtship of skittish future wife Taya (Siena Miller), and finally, the humble hero who puts himself at risk to protect his men even though he is not obliged to. The film presents no real flaws or even complexity in his character or biography at all.

Nevertheless, one strange and chilling element emerges during his military training: an uncanny skill at shooting at living things (revealed in a scene where he is comically poor at hitting paper targets, but expertly kills a nearly invisible snake behind the row of targets) which turns out to herald a veritable vocation for killing.[49] This talent becomes the focus of the story as Kyle quickly accumulates kills and becomes known as "the legend" for his high score. The psychological drama in the film is created by the conflict between him and his wife as he repeatedly redeploys even as his time in combat situations begins to take its toll on his psyche. No serious war film can forego at least a passing acknowledgment of PTSD as a problem in the post-Vietnam military, and Eastwood makes good use of this convention to give Kyle a layer of vulnerability and sympathy-inducing distress that creates nuance in his otherwise uncomplicated killer persona. Foregrounding Kyle's frayed nerves and hypervigilance helps transform an executioner into a victim of the war and thereby deflect possible unease with Kyle's enthusiasm for assassination. Eastwood spends much more time on this trauma than Kyle does himself in his book, sensing no doubt from his longer life experience that some melodrama is needed in order to present a sniper as a hero. After all, Eastwood is old enough, predating the age of drone warfare by many decades, to remember that snipers have often been considered as little more than assassins, cold-bloodedly murdering their targets from a hidden position, an important task but often seen to be lacking in honor and valor. If the essence of combat has traditionally been regarded as a duel between adversaries who are equally formidable and equally at risk, the sniper's relative safety as he kills has sometimes been viewed as tinged with cowardice and even sociopathy.[50]

However, in an age of drones and remote assassinations, the role of the sniper can take on a less shameful and more normative coloring. In fact, compared to the increasingly common practice of firing rockets at targets from remote-controlled drones, a sniper's job seems relatively heroic. Certainly the film takes pains to present Kyle as exposing himself to danger. He is physically present in the war zone, risking his life, and not killing from a console in Nevada, and to further ennoble him the film presents his work as almost exclusively defensive. He is not an assassin but a protector, like a guardian

angel, shooting insurgents and other snipers as they wait in ambush for the comically under-trained Marines on the ground.

Like all popular culture products, *American Sniper* tries to please as wide an audience as possible. It, therefore, tries to seem both patriotic and critical, playing to viewers across the political spectrum. Not surprisingly, it has been praised and condemned for very different political tendencies. *The New York Post* reviewer Kyle Smith praised it for redeeming militarism itself: "After 40 years of Hollywood counterpropaganda telling us war is necessarily corrupting and malign, [...] *American Sniper* nobly presents the case for the other side," while *Time Out New York* foregrounded its dark portrait of war: "Only Clint Eastwood could make a movie about an Iraq War veteran and infuse it with doubts, mission anxiety and ruination."[51] One critic, writing for *The New Yorker,* actually called it a "devastating antiwar movie."[52]

Most critics, however, have focused on its realism and aesthetic power, claiming that the film sidesteps questions of politics and ideology. Rotten Tomatoes praises its "tense, vivid tribute to its real-life subject," and *USA Today* singled out Bradley Cooper's realistic portrayal of Chris Kyle for commendation: "Substantially bulked up and affecting a believable Texas drawl, Cooper embodies Kyle's confidence, intensity and vulnerability."[53] Similarly, *The Los Angeles Times* praised the film for its ability to engross the viewer in its realistic combat scenes: "Eastwood's impeccably crafted action sequences so catch us up in the chaos of combat we are almost not aware that we're watching a film at all."[54] In short, it is clear that *American Sniper* successfully sounds a wide spectrum of ideological notes, offering validation for their political views on the war to a wide range of viewers.

Nevertheless, this ambiguity and apparent political ambivalence should not be confused with ideological even-handedness or neutrality. The paradoxes of the film do not emerge from a thoughtful attempt to consider the different sides of the question of war as military strategy and foreign policy, or of the War in Iraq, or even of military service as a personal choice. The film may seem to pull in different directions but there is nevertheless a dominant vector of emotional and ideological effects choreographed by its narrative syntax and structure. A number of critics have read the film as a Western and it easily lends itself to such readings, with its Manichean binary opposition between a former cowboy, now lone gunslinger, and the "savages" of Iraq, and its many visual and verbal references to the Wild West.[55] However, underneath the trappings of the Western genre in this film lies the narrative structure of the war adventure mode more broadly, according to which, violence is both necessary and pleasurable. In the following section, I will demonstrate that the adventure paradigm is the dominant structuring principle of the film despite its occasional gestures towards realism, horror and melodrama. In fact, *American Sniper* is both the most successful and most sophisticated of

recent films which have reactivated the war adventure mode in the twenty-first century (others include *Fury, Lone Survivor, Dunkirk* and *1917*).[56]

By far the most important generic feature of adventure is its commitment to pleasure, excitement and specifically the satisfactions of violence. However, American war films are reticent to show U.S. soldiers—who must also seem innocent and *good*—enjoying or relishing violence, since this would blur the lines between our soldiers and the almost inevitably sadistic enemy. As a result, Kyle cannot be shown explicitly to take pleasure in killing enemies, and must instead appear very serious and professional throughout his sniping scenes (as he does on the main poster for the film, where he is shown with head bowed, like a warrior-saint). However, the film gets around this constraint by allowing Kyle's partner to express the visceral pleasure he cannot himself show. "Evil fucking bitch!" says the grinning spotter (Kyle Gallner) after Kyle pulls the trigger, reassuring the audience that Kyle was right to kill the Iraqi mother and manifesting the satisfaction that always accompanies the deployment of righteous violence against an enemy that "deserves" to die.[57]

Equally importantly, the film invites the audience to feel pleasure about Kyle's assassinations by making sure that each is clearly portrayed as unambiguously justified. Every one of Kyle's targets is shot while actually doing something dangerous or nefarious, such as burying an IED or running towards Americans with an automatic weapon. There is never any epistemological doubt or visual ambiguity about any of the targets—the film makes sure that Kyle's scope reveals clear and visible evil-doing to us. Filming through Kyle's scope is obviously meant to invite the viewer to identify with his point of view, and in so doing, to approve of the impromptu executions he performs. It is also a visual strategy adopted from first-person-shooter games,
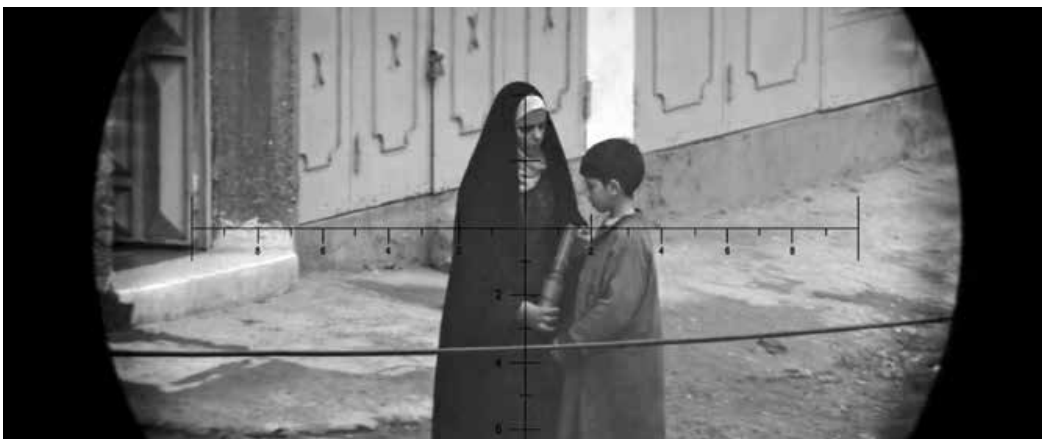

Figure 5.2   Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) Is Shown without Exception to be Able to See Evil-Doers Preparing Attacks on American Troops through His Sights on His Rifle, Making all of His Many Kills Unambiguous Justified, including This Mother and Child. Screenshot by Author, *American Sniper,* 2014.

which have become the main locus of a cult of war in American culture, an industry that far outstrips even the most lucrative Hollywood film.[58]

This film's desire to create absolute moral certainty around Kyle's killing structures the temporal loop that opens the film, that is, the scene with the mother and child duo. This opening scene is set up as a provocative challenge to the viewer, since we initially do not *know* that Kyle is a good guy and that the two clearly civilian figures are bad. We may be predisposed to assume that an American sniper in an American film is going to be doing the right thing, but it is still unusual and uncomfortable to see a woman and child as targets. Most spectators would feel this situation as one of moral ambiguity and tension, and the spotter's comment that Kyle will go to prison if he makes a mistake ("They'll fry you if you're wrong, they'll send your ass to Leavenworth"[59]) makes the scene all the more suspenseful.

Eastwood cuts from this high-tension moment to Kyle's childhood, where a shot rings out (anticipating the later shot that Kyle will end up taking when we return to this moment) and the young Kyle has expertly hit a deer and is praised by his father. From this positive moment of approved killing the film takes us through Kyle's life, showing us his upbringing in a solid Christian father-dominated family up through his enlistment and marriage, until we are back to the same scene, but with a totally different understanding of it. Through the extended flashback we have been reassured that Kyle is good and trustworthy, and we are now shown that the child is throwing a large "RKG Russian grenade"—as Kyle effortlessly identifies it—at an American convoy. The Russian origin of the anti-tank grenade further helps disambiguate the moral coding of the situation: Iraqi insurgents are not being armed by the plentiful supply of American weapons flooding into the country but by America's longstanding adversary. The film cuts between close-ups of the mother handing the grenade to the child and Kyle, making it appear that he can see them as well as we can, whereas in fact he is several hundred yards away. Kyle does not need to guess what the pair's intentions are because the child conveniently runs toward the envoy with the grenade, forcing Kyle to shoot him, upon which the mother picks up the grenade and hurls it at the American soldiers. Kyle shoots her too, and her grenade lands just before the envoy and explodes, confirming once and for all—as if any doubts remained—that the mother-child pair were intending to harm American soldiers and Kyle has done his job exactly right.

The oddly suicidal way in which they do it—walking out in front of the envoy in clear sight, instead of tossing the grenade from any of the buildings and rooftops along the road—is not scripted for any kind of realism but exclusively to give spectators epistemological and moral reassurance that the mother and child are definitely trying to harm American soldiers and that Kyle is right to shoot them. The absurdity of this scene gets lost in the

general flow of the film, which has every Iraqi plotting to kill American sol-
diers, and becomes quickly normalized. Nevertheless, in order to foreground
his ethical nature, Kyle is shown as troubled by the fact that he killed a child
("It's just not how you imagine the first one going down") though only to a
limited degree since in fact he sees the shot as absolutely justified in moral
terms ("It was evil, man. That was hate like I've never seen it before").
Back at the camp that evening, Kyle's friend Biggles helps Kyle (and at the
same time, helps the audience) to know what to think and feel about this
kill: "That kid could've taken out ten Marines. . . You did your job. End of
fucking story."[60]

Having established in this careful way that even children in Iraq are guilty
of evil acts and needing to be killed, the film can let Kyle go about shooting
every other target without hesitation or questions. And no Iraqi character
fails to confirm the film's conviction—mirroring Kyle's—that all Iraqis are
"savages." A man whose house Marines commandeer and who offers them
hospitality and dinner turns out to be a sniper with a large arsenal hidden
under his floorboards. Another man who becomes an informant will only give
them information about a notorious enforcer called The Butcher in exchange
for a large sum of money, displaying the cupidity and lack of moral integrity
in the local population. The Butcher himself is probably the most compel-
ling example of Iraqi savagery, as he sadistically drills his victims to death
with a power tool, including a child we are forced to watch being killed. As
if this parade of evil-doing were not enough, Eastwood makes Kyle and his
men discover an apartment where people are tortured and mutilated, a man is
hanging from the ceiling in chains, and body parts and heads are stored in a
macabre way on a kitchen shelf. This insistence on the insurgents' sadism—
their inherent savagery, seemingly unconnected to any political or historical
contingencies—is a device of the imperial war adventure genre and serves to
justify the annihilation of the irredeemably barbaric Other.

In short, the film amasses an array of evidence to prove that the Iraqi
insurgents are cruel, sadistic, and irredeemably evil, and that civilians are not
much better. When Kyle calls Iraqis "savages," he is not harking back to this
nineteenth-century racist nomenclature with a sense of historic irony or even
imaginary quotation marks. He means it perfectly earnestly: to him, Iraqis
are all "evil" and "savage," and he uses both of these terms without hesita-
tion or qualification. When his friend Biggles (played by Jake McDorman)
tells Kyle he's bought an engagement ring in Bagdad for this fiancée, Kyle
is appalled: "Dude, you bought it from savages? How do you know it's not
a blood diamond?"[61] Even though Biggles is severely injured shortly after
this conversation, he still manages to find the time to buy a new, smaller, but
untainted diamond ring, with his fiancée's father's help, in order to avoid giv-
ing her the ring purchased in Iraq.[62]

AQ: Perhaps "need to be killed"?

Eastwood's portrayal of Iraq is in fact a clear example of the influence of video game aesthetics on contemporary war films and the general blurring of distinctions between real war, film war and first-person shooters. A number of scholars have noted the stereotyped and "Orientalist" way that the Middle East is portrayed in military video games, depicting it exclusively as a war zone, devoid of ordinary life, urban infrastructure and a functioning society, and representing all or most local people as either enemies or targets.[63] As King and Leonard point out, most video games "engender spaces where you are able *only* to kill soldiers . . . by constructing scenes where there are no civilians present."[64] Similarly, Kyle is told as he arrives that Fallujah has been evacuated and so "any military-aged male still here is trying to kill you."[65] King and Leonard show how "video games play a fundamental role in solidifying the spatial mapping of the Middle east as an outpost, a marginal space, a frontier in need of saving."[66] This is precisely the way that *American Sniper* presents Fallujah, with Marc Lee (Luke Grimes) describing it to Kyle as "the new wild west of the old middle east."[67] This cognitive map of the Middle East as basically a battlefield for American cowboys (as Kyle literally has been) hunting faceless "Indians" (with one elite sniper opponent to give Kyle a noble duel-type scenario) is further reinforced by the way Eastwood has us looking down Kyle's sniper scope as he targets and kills nefarious evil-doers caught in the act of doing evil things. The way the film claims to tell the truth of the war, relying on the authority of Kyle's autobiographical experience, makes the cognitive mapping of Iraq as a lawless warzone, justifying America's presence and erasing all civilian causalities except those killed by insurgents, into a powerful ideological exercise in jingoist propaganda.

Since adventure portrays enemies as evil, and violence as necessary and exciting, the hero's confrontation with violence generally transforms him into a man. In other words, military adventure depicts war as a rite of passage. *American Sniper* hews closely to this formula despite the brief brush with PTSD which disappears miraculously once he begins to talk to physically injured veterans at the VA hospital. At this point, Kyle metamorphoses into a much-improved version of himself. Before his military training, Kyle had been a successful but relatively aimless cowboy working the rodeo circuit. His immaturity is represented at this early point in the film by his disorganized life and his girlfriend's infidelity. As soon as he begins his military training, however, he meets and successfully woos his future wife and mother of his children. Soon after his wedding he is deployed on his first tour, and then three more, to the growing consternation and resentment of his wife who finds herself raising his children largely on her own.

After his final return, his brief bout with PTSD and his decision to help other veterans, there is a quick succession of scenes at the end meant to show how he has been transformed into an excellent husband and father.

Figure 5.3   Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) is Depicted at the End of *American Sniper* as Dramatically Improved by His War Experience, Transformed into a Protective Father-Warrior Figure and Ideal Husband, Shown Here Watching Horses with His Daughter (Madeleine McGraw) in a Scene That Combines Innocence and a Subtle Referencing of His All-American Cowboy Past, Suggesting a Full-Circle Return to Manly Wholeness. Screenshot by Author. *American Sniper,* 2014.

For example, we see him teaching his son to hunt, in an exact reiteration of the earlier scene with his own father, and in another gentler scene we are shown Kyle watching horses with his daughter, subtly referencing his rodeo past while suggesting he has found both wholeness and innocence again (see Figure 5.3). There is also a long scene of him playing around with his kids at home just before he leaves for the last time. Another set of scenes at the end emphasize his virility and sexuality, and are meant to prove his full recovery as a man and a husband: one in which he pulls his wife into the shower with him, and another in which he points a gun at her in a playful version of a coercion fantasy. In case we need still more proof of his improved condition, his wife tells him in a key monologue how proud she is of him and how far he has come.

The ultimate proof is Kyle's transformation from rodeo-circuit nobody to national hero is the funeral cortège during the final credit sequence. The film ends with him driving off with the man who is going to kill him, selflessly devoting an afternoon to a needy vet and proving that he has become a more generous and civic-minded man than he was before he went to Iraq, after which the film cuts to real footage from his funeral motorcade, showing streets lined with crowds of people, the ultimate evidence of his metamorphosis into a public hero. Despite the film's lip service to the fact of post-traumatic stress disorder, the narrative arc shows the hero transformed into an exemplary man at the end, a formidable warrior, a playful father, an adored husband, a selfless friend and volunteer at the local hospital. It is not hard to imagine viewers leaving the film with a wish to become like him, despite the

tragic death than cut his life short. In any case, it is made clear that it was not war that killed him but the weakness and mental illness of another man.

The final scene—with Kyle's funeral motorcade—also allows Eastwood to mix fact and fiction in a way that is common to war adventure. As explained in chapter 4, war adventure generally aspires to be taken as authentic and true, often going to great lengths to present itself as grounded in historical or biographical fact. In the case of *American Sniper*, the fact that it is about a real person and based on his autobiography automatically lends the film a great deal of credibility. Eastwood amplifies this further by including archive footage of several news reports of terrorist attacks on American targets throughout the film. The combat sequences are also shot in the "immediate, chaotic, and claustrophobic" style that scholars have identified as typical of the most recent cycle of war films and their dual tendency towards representational realism and extremely conservative, moralizing and glorifying narratives.[68]

In short, *American Sniper* corresponds to this recent pattern of ultra-realistic and seemingly apolitical—yet extremely hawkish and conservative—combat films. Nevertheless, as I have been arguing, this mixing of fact and fiction and representational hyper-realism is actually a feature of the modern adventure genre that dates back to the eighteenth century. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was initially published as a travelogue and believed to be based on real events, and Defoe's *Captain Singleton* is believed to be based on British pirate Henry Every. In the nineteenth century, Daniel Boone inspired several biographies, each of which mixed fact and fiction to varying degrees, and the British archeologist and writer Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence inspired similar mythologizing about his military exploits in the Arabian Peninsula during World War One (as discussed in the previous chapter).[69] Placing the contemporary trend to combat realism in the contact of the history of the adventure mode makes it clear that this development is not really new at all. Instead, in a retreat from the more skeptical, ironic and horror-dominated narrative of the post-Vietnam era, it is a return to the conventions of the adventure genre, whose cultural work has traditionally been and continues to be the legitimation and re-enchantment of empire and the racist violence needed to sustain it.

CONCLUSION

Although war narratives and the adventure genre have overlapped for centuries, there has been surprisingly little critical attention to the pervasiveness of the adventure paradigm in twentieth-century war writing and cinema, especially in American culture. One reason for this may be that "adventure"

as a genre term is often assumed to refer mainly to nineteenth-century British literature, while in the United States other terms have had currency in critical studies, such as the "romance" or the Western. In addition, "adventure" is often assumed to mean a fictional genre of action and fantasy, whereas the war adventure mode, as I have argued, has come to shape a great deal of both fiction *and nonfiction* writing about combat since World War I and especially World War II.

As a historical form, the adventure genre has been the dominant mode of colonial exploration and warfare, and its racism and dehumanization of adversaries date from these cultural formations. Moore's *The Green Berets,* examined in chapter 4, was a useful text to start with because it exposes some of these key features of the mode in revealingly crude terms and has been very influential in the United States as a model of military adventure pseudo-journalism. While the adventure mode is fairly clear and easily dismissed in a text like *The Green Berets*, it is harder to detect and identify in a more literary work such as Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, which too has been highly influential on the representation of war in American culture. Both books are "about" the pleasures of combat in the lawless frontier zone of the Vietnam, though Herr is both more self-conscious and ironic about it. In the end, however, his irony comes to serve the pleasures of the text rather than dismantling and demystifying them. The horrors of Vietnam are folded into its larger adventure framework and become simply more challenges to survive. This has been one of the most striking features of the literature and film of the Vietnam War in general—the way that horror has emerged as an essential element but one that often serves the older and more powerful adventure paradigm, especially in film, as we saw in *American Sniper*. Yet horror has traditionally served an entirely different purpose when used to depict war, and this is the subject of the following chapter.

NOTES

1. *Apocalypse Now*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1979; Los Angeles: Paramount, 1999), DVD; *Full Metal Jacket,* dir. Stanley Kubrick (1987; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2001), DVD.

2. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 44.

3. David E. James, "Rock and Roll in Representations of the Invasion of Vietnam," *Representations* 29 (Winter 1990): 80.

4. *First Kill,* directed by Coco Schrijber (2001; Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2016).

5. *American Sniper,* directed by Clint Eastwood (2014; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2015).

6. Jim Nielson, *Warring Fictions: Cultural Politics and the Vietnam War Narrative* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 146–153.

7. See, for example, Lucas Carpenter, "'It Don't Mean Nothin': Vietnam War Fiction and Postmodernism," *College Literature* 30.2 (2003): 30–50.

8. Nielson, *Warring Fictions,* 144; quoted in Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *After the Cataclysm: The Political Economy of Human Rights,* Vol. II (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 320, n. 22.

9. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977, London: Picador, 1978, 47).

10. Herr, *Dispatches,* 47, 48.

11. Hellman, *American Myth,* 43–53.

12. Herr, *Dispatches,* 55.

13. Ibid., 24.

14. Ibid., 24.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 23.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 37.

19. Ibid., 38.

20. Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 42.

21. Herr, *Dispatches,* 60.

22. Herr, *Dispatches,* 61.

23. Ibid., 11.

24. See, for instance, Ty Hawkins, "Violent Death as Essential Truth in *Dispatches*: Rereading Michael Herr's 'Secret Truth' of the Vietnam War," *War, Literature and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* (2009): 129–145; Evelyn Cobley, "Narrating the Facts of War: New Journalism in Michael Herr's *Dispatches* and Documentary Realism in First World War Novels," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 16.2 (Spring 1986): 97–116.

25. Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness,* ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 7–8.

26. Herr, *Dispatches,* 12.

27. Ibid., 14.

28. Ibid., 13.

29. Ibid., 14.

30. Ibid., 17, 32.

31. Ibid., 57.

32. James, "Rock and Roll," 85.

33. Hedges, *War is a Force*.

34. Herr, *Dispatches,* 199.

35. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*: *The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

36. Herr, *Dispatches,* 35.

37. Beidler, "Viet Pulp," 254.

38. *Rambo,* directed by Avi Lerner (2008; Santa Monica: Lionsgate, 2018), DVD; *Stop-Loss,* directed by Kimberly Peirce (2008; Hollywood: Paramount, 2008), DVD; *Lions for Lambs*, directed by Robert Redford (2007; Culver City: MGM, 2008), DVD; and *In the Valley of Elah,* directed by Paul Haggis (2007; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2008), DVD.

39. *300,* directed by Zack Snyder (2007; Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD; *Transformers,* directed by Michael Bay (2007; Glendale: Dreamworks Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD; *The Avengers* 1–4, directed by Joss Whedon and Joe and Anthony Russo (2012–2019; Burbank: Walt Disney, 2019), DVD; *The Hurt Locker*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow (2007; Santa Monica: Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 2009), DVD.

40. *Act of Valor*, directed by Scott Waugh & Mike McCoy (2012; Los Angeles, Relativity Media, 2012), DVD.

41. *Lone Survivor,* directed by Peter Berg (2013; Universal City: Universal Pictures, 2014), DVD.

42. *Saving Private Ryan,* dir. Steven Spielberg (1998; Glendale: Dreamworks, 1999).

43. "secondtake," *Lone Survivor,* IMDb, accessed October 22, 2014, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1091191/reviews?ref_=tt_urv.

44. Jean Baudrillard, "War Porn," trans. Paul A. Taylor, *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 2.1 (January 2005), accessed July 11, 2020, https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/war-porn.

45. Tom Engelhart, "War Porn," *Z* (June 14, 2006), accessed July 7, 2020, https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/war-porn-by-tom-engelhardt.

46. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,* 257.

47. Ibid., 258.

48. Pamela McClintock, "Box Office Milestone: 'American Sniper' Hits $500M Globally, Becomes Top 2014 Hit in U.S.," *The Hollywood Reporter* (March 8, 2015), accessed July 7, 2020, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/box-office-american-sniper-quickly-765693.

49. The film even contains the unsettling line "I'm better when it's breathing" which is not in the Warner Bros. screenplay, by Jason Hall, *American Sniper* (screenplay), based on the book by Chris Kyle, with Scott McEwan and James DeFelice (Burbank: Warner Brothers, 2014, accessed July 8, 2020, http://pdl.warnerbros.com/wbmovies/awards2014/pdf/as.pdf, 23.

50. A quick review of other films about snipers reveals this unease; they are often hired assassins, troubled loners, rogue psychopaths or wildcards characters in one way or another: *Targets*, directed by Peter Bogdanovich (1968; Hollywood: Paramount, 2003), DVD; *Phone Booth,* directed by Joel Schumacher (2002; Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2009), DVD; *Shooter*, directed by Antoine Fuqua (2007; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2007), DVD; *Jack Reacher*, directed by Christopher McQuarrie (2012; Hollywood: Paramount, 2016), DVD.

51. Kyle Smith, "'American Sniper' is the year's Most Extraordinary Film," *New York Post* (December 23, 2014), accessed July 7, 2020, https://nypost.com/2014/12/23/clint-eastwoods-american-sniper-is-the-years-most-extraordinary-film; Joshua

Rothkopf, "American Sniper," *Time Out New York*, accessed July 7, 2020, https://ww w.timeout.com/us/film/american-sniper.

52. David Denby, "*Selma* and *American Sniper* Reviews," *The New Yorker* December 22, 2014, Accessed July 10, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/ 2014/12/22/living-history.

53. "American Sniper," 100 Best War Movies of all Times, Rotten Tomatoes, accessed July 7, 2020, https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/guide/best-war-movies-o f-all-time; Claudia Puig, "Bradley Cooper's aim is true in 'American Sniper,'" *USA Today* (December 24, 2014), accessed July 7, 2020, https://eu.azcentral.com/story/life /movies/2014/12/23/american-sniper-review/19157153.

54. Kenneth Turan, "'American Sniper' Goes Above and Beyond War-hero Tradition," *The Los Angeles Times* (December 24, 2014), accessed July 7, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-american-sniper-review-20 141225-column.html.

55. Martin Holtz, "Westerns and War Films: *American Sniper* as a Genre Hybrid," *Studia Filmoznawcze (Film Studies)* 38 (2017), 105–119; Julien Pomarède, "Normalizing violence through front-line stories: the case of *American Sniper.*" *Critical Military Studies* 4.1 (2018): 52–71; Lennart Soberon, "'The Old Wild West in the New Middle East': *American Sniper* (2014) and the Global Frontiers of the Western Genre," *European Journal of American Studies,* Special Issue: Popularizing Politics: The 2016 US Presidential Election, 12.2 (Summer 2017), https://journals.ope nedition.org/ejas/pdf/12086.

56. *Fury*, directed by David Ayer (2014; Culver City: Sony Home Pictures, 2015), DVD; *Lone Survivor,* directed by Peter Berg; *Dunkirk*, dir. Christopher Nolan (2017; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2017), DVD; and *1917,* Sam Mendes (2019; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2020), DVD.

57. "Shit yeah! Evil bitch!" in the screenplay by Hall, *American Sniper* (screen-play), 30.

58. See Patricia Keeton and Peter Scheckner, *American War Cinema and Media Since Vietnam*: *Politics, Ideology and Class* (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

59. Hall, *American Sniper* (screenplay), 29.

60. Ibid., 36.

61. Ibid., 81.

62. This sub-plot about the ring also succinctly recalls the imperial history of the war adventure genre, which has traditionally taken precious jewels as a theme, reflecting the extractive and mining interests of modern colonialism (where plunder-ing colonial territories and the Wild West frontier for precious metals, gold, silver, and precious stones was at the heart of the colonial enterprise; see Green, *Dreams of Adventure,* 11–12.

63. Vit Sisler, "Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 11.2 (2008), 203–220; Johan Höglund, "Electronic Empire: Orientalism Revisited in the Military Shooter," *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 8.11 (September 2008), accessed July 8, 2020, http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/hoeglund; Richard C. King and David J. Leonard, "Wargames as a New Frontier: Securing American Empire in Virtual

Space," *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games,* eds. Nina B. Huntemann and Matthew Thomas Payne (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 91–105.

64. King and Leonard, "Wargames as a Virtual Frontier," 100.

65. Hall, *American Sniper*, 26.

66. King and Leonard, "Wargames as a Virtual Frontier," 100.

67. Hall, *American Sniper*, 26.

68. Philippa Gates, "'Fighting the Good Fight'": The Real and the Moral in the Contemporary Hollywood Combat Film," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 22.4 (2005): 298.

69. The first biography of Boone was John Filson's "The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boone" in *The Discovery, Settlement and present State of Kentucke* (1784; Westminster: Heritage Books, 2007), but the most popular one was Timothy Flint's 1833 *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky* (Cincinnati: H.S. & J. Applegate, 1851). Lawrence's biography was written by Thomas Lowell as *With Lawrence in Arabia* (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1924).

Chapter 6

Horror, Irony, and the Anti-War Novel
Gustav Hasford's The Short-Timers

If melodrama is about dying, and adventure about killing, then the horror mode is about witnessing death. More specifically, it is about seeing the bodily violation of others: not just killing, but the dismemberment and reduction of bodies to meat. It is in principle a disenchanting mode, but as I will show in the last chapter, it has been recuperated within adventure narratives since the Vietnam War—that is, since the mid-1970s. It differs from the other two modes I have discussed in yet another way: by being primarily visual rather than plot-oriented. Melodrama and adventure are essentially narrative modes and usually require an unfolding of events, whereas horror occurs more as a scene or a moment: it is a spectacle. It is, therefore, more accurately defined as a representation strategy than a plot formula. In fact, one could call horror an anti-plot mode: it defies telos and closure, prefers open-ended or episodic narratives, and generally slows down the movement of the story, sometimes freezing it entirely.

Horror also differs from the other two modes in that it does not seek identification with the protagonists or objects of the gaze; in fact, character is not very important in horror. What matters is the body and its violation—a violation of its integrity, its uniqueness and its human-ness. Thus, when I speak of horror I am speaking of a strategy of representing death that emphasizes physical dismemberment and destruction. In a similar vein, Italian political philosopher Adriana Cavarero has associated horror with "the spectacle of disfigurement," emphasizing the "dehumanization and savaging" of the body as body as central to how horror works.[1] Some scholars have called this mode "Battlefield Gothic," and defined it in terms of its reliance upon images of bodies that have been fragmented, opened, torn apart or otherwise rendered thing-like in combat.[2]

The horror mode consists of a family of devices that run from gallows humor to graphic body horror, but irony is the overarching trope and disenchantment is the principle intended effect. In general, war irony emerges from a gap between ideals and reality, or between the official language of war and what actually happens to soldiers' bodies in combat (especially from injury, but also from disease and environmental hazards, lack of food, exhaustion, loss of motor and sphincter control due to fear, etc.). As Sarah Cole observes in *In the Violet Hour*, the disenchanting mode attaches itself to the body and dwells on its violation, refusing any redemptive or consolatory narratives and insisting that combat death is essentially in vain. War horror is thus in principle a resolutely anti-war aesthetic strategy.[3]

Despite what seems to be its bad taste and disregard for the dignity of the fallen, this mode is rooted in a profound compassion and pity for the dead. It wants to remind readers that glory and honor are meaningless to the people whose bodies have been broken by weapons in war. In a secular and modern world, where there is no official belief in an afterlife, the dead can be nothing but meat. This is a word—"meat"—that is often invoked in the war horror mode, and is meant to both shock and to remind us that human beings *are* their bodies. As does Judith Butler in *Precarious Life* (2006), the disenchanting mode insists on the fragility of the human body as a basis for a more ethical approach to human experience.[4] Human life is precarious, fragile and fleeting, and the official language of militarism works to camouflage this fact in a euphemistic rhetoric that denies the reality of combat which is injuring and maiming.[5] In contrast, war horror seeks to strip combat death of its romance and to lift the veil of denial or sacredness around it. War horror's principal relationship to death is that of uncompromising witness—it seeks to reveal the violent truth of war in order to demystify it and serve as warning.

War horror as an aesthetic strategy assumed a special importance with the Vietnam War. This can be explained by several convergent factors: the loosened controls on images of violence and graphic injury in the late 1960s, the racism and brutality of the U.S. policy of "attrition" as a measure of success, and the later unpopularity of the war which led to the relative ease with which anti-war material could be published or shown. Never before (or since) has a war been covered so openly by such a critical media. Even if news outlets supported the general thrust of the war, they were nevertheless willing to show soldiers as violent and cruel and to show the aftermath of battle. Scenes of American infantrymen lighting Vietnamese homes on fire were not uncommon on primetime television, as were images of actual firefights and dead bodies.[6] The contrast between the violence shown on television screens and the blithely indifferent attitude of many Americans going about their consumeristic lives created a jarring sense of contrast and even bitter irony which fueled many soldiers' feeling of alienation from their duties. Disenchantment

thus became more important in the context of the Vietnam War than in any other American war since many of the soldiers felt that they were really were dying for nothing—a feeling that was confirmed by the U.S. withdrawal of ground troops in 1973 and final defeat in 1975.

This is the context from which Gustav Hasford's *The Short-Timers* (1979) emerged, a short novel packing a ferocious critical punch.[7] Loosely based on Hasford's experiences as a Marine and military journalist, *The Short-Timers* is an unsparingly bleak look at a man's transformation from recruit to a hardened killer. Operating in a war horror mode that blossoms from time to time into pure surrealism, Hasford systematically deconstructs idealizing myths about every aspect of the military, from basic training and combat to the veteran's return home. The "unendurable truth" that Hasford attempts to convey in this novel and its sequel, *The Phantom Blooper,* is that the American deaths in the Vietnam War were essentially in vain.[8] In an article written in 1980, he writes that his friends in the Marines who gave their lives in Vietnam died "for nothing" ("Still Gagging").[9] It is a hard truth, he admits, but must be faced honestly to prevent the same pointless slaughter from being repeated.

In insisting on the lack of any redemptive value or meaning for the deaths in the Vietnam War, Hasford voices an unpopular view in American culture. Even people who concede that the war was a mistake will view the sacrifices made by American military personnel in Vietnam as heroic or valuable on the grounds that they were made for "for America" or "for freedom" or simply because they were made willingly (as the presumption always goes for military deaths). Hasford is aware that in order to expose the meaninglessness of the deaths of servicemen it is necessary to dismantle the myth of heroic self-sacrifice and the mythic dimensions of the nation itself, otherwise those deaths are easily reabsorbed into a meaningful narrative of patriotic sacrifice. This is what he attempts to do in *The Short-Timers*, a literary cluster bomb of irony and horror. In it, Hasford presents basic training as a form of insanity-inducing torture, combat as a confusing slaughterhouse where Americans are killed more often by each other than by enemy combatants, and the ending as a bitter anti-climax of defeat and denial. Hasford thus leaves very little for hawks and jingoists to recuperate. Horror and gothic tropes permeate the narrative, making his novel one of the most powerful anti-war narratives of the twentieth century.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HORROR

The term "horror" comes from the Latin *horreo* which refers to the sensation of shuddering or having gooseflesh. Cavarero insists upon the frozenness of

the reaction, in contrast to terror, which apparently triggers a desire to flee. Horror leaves the subject immobilized, but also repulsed, and is not a question of fear so much as "instinctive disgust for a violence that, not content merely to kill because killing would be too little, aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body." What is at stake, she argues, "is not the end of human life but the human condition itself."[10] In other words, horror is a reaction to a sight that represents an attack upon the humanity of the object.

One thing that becomes quickly apparent in discussions of horror is that the term is used both for the object (cause) and the reaction (effect) to it. This is linguistically unfortunate but there seems to be no easy way to disambiguate these uses. I also agree with Cavarero that dismembered bodies are uniquely linked to the sensation of horror but I would historicize her claim by locating its origins more specifically in the eighteenth century, as Karen Halttunen has suggested. Halttunen's work on the "birth of horror" in eighteenth-century broadsides and criminal narratives describes a marked change from the terse descriptions of crime at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when they were still framed in terms of sin and natural depravity, to the elaborate and graphic descriptions of mangled bodies and the fascination with reactions of witnesses that developed in the second half of the century. The word "horror" was in fact often used in these narratives, and there was an emphasis on the paralysis and speechlessness of witnesses that Halttunen explains in terms of the rise of Enlightenment ideas, which rendered certain kinds of crimes inexplicable and mysterious. In the face of such incomprehension, linked in her view to the modern notion of human nature as either essentially good or at least understandable in terms of environmental causes (e.g., people becoming murderers because of terrible childhoods or experiences), crimes that failed to be accounted for by Enlightenment paradigms became sources of morbid fascination. In such cases, writers would often reach for a vocabulary that they shared with authors of Gothic fiction, a vocabulary of moral monstrosity and horror as a kind of stupefying spectacle: "the failure of language in the face of horror quickly became one of the most pervasive conventions of the new murder literature."[11] "Murder literature" is a term that Halttunen uses to encompass the popularity and specific kind of fascination with atrocity in both fictional and nonfictional writing, and she locates its origins in the modern desire to understand human nature and the obstacle to that desire that certain extremely violent crimes represented.

Recent work on the Gothic as a mode (again, a category too broad to be accurately described simply as a literary genre) has begun to uncover its roots in a conflict that historians call the first global war, the Seven Years War, 1756–1763 (known as the French and Indian War in North America). Fought by a large number of belligerents, including France, Britain, Spain, Prussia, Russia, Austria, Sweden, India, and the Iroquois Confederacy, it left

somewhere between 900,000 and 1,400,000 people dead across the globe, including large numbers of civilians. Angela Wright has proposed in her excellent study of the international influences on the early gothic novel—*Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820* (2013)—that the Seven Years' war could be considered the "crucible" in which the Gothic was forged. Certainly the gothic genre was characterized by an "anxious fascination with the series of wars Britain fought with France."[12] Specifically, that fascination took the form of a preoccupation with the violation of bodies, and if there is one thing that characterizes the early gothic novel, it is an intense interest in cruelty and violation. One can take as an example the ending of Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), where the main protagonist and villain is punished and the text details at length the many afflictions that he suffers (e.g., "the Eagles of the rock tore his flesh piecemeal, and dug out his eye-balls with their crooked beaks") for the many gruesome crimes he himself has committed (and which were themselves described in meticulous detail throughout the novel).[13] In short, the gothic genre developed in close correlation to the rise of the horror aesthetic, as Halttunen defines it. The difference between them can best be characterized in terms of plot versus description, or the temporal unfolding of the story (in the Gothic, which is also very concerned with time as theme) and the aesthetic choices concerning the depiction of injury and violence.

As modern horror is particularly concerned with witnessing and the spectacle of atrocity, one of the most important early instances of modern war horror is Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War,* a remarkable set of eighty-two engravings created in the 1810s. These were scenes of violence and destruction from the conflicts between Napoleon's French Empire and Spain. Though pictorial art depicting the miseries of war existed before, never had it been portrayed on such a personal, individuated and bodily level.[14] Goya's engravings often depict scenes of single bodies being mutilated, like Plate 33, of a man being castrated, or Plate 37, of a single armless man hung in a tree. The most famous image from this series is probably Plate 39: *Grande hazaña! Con muertos!* (*A heroic feat! With dead men!*) in which two mutilated bodies have been left in unnatural positions on a tree (see Figure 6.1). Although the series begins with an obvious sympathy to the Spanish insurgents as opposed to the French soldiers who brutally repressed them, the images become more ambiguous later in the series, as both sides begin to look equally cruel and equally vulnerable. It is as if distinctions between the righteous and the repressive begin to break down as conflict continues and a dynamic of vicious reprisals is established with both sides becoming increasingly inhumane.

In this way Goya insinuates a critique of war and its tendency to not only self-perpetuate but spiral downward while seeming to merely represent injury
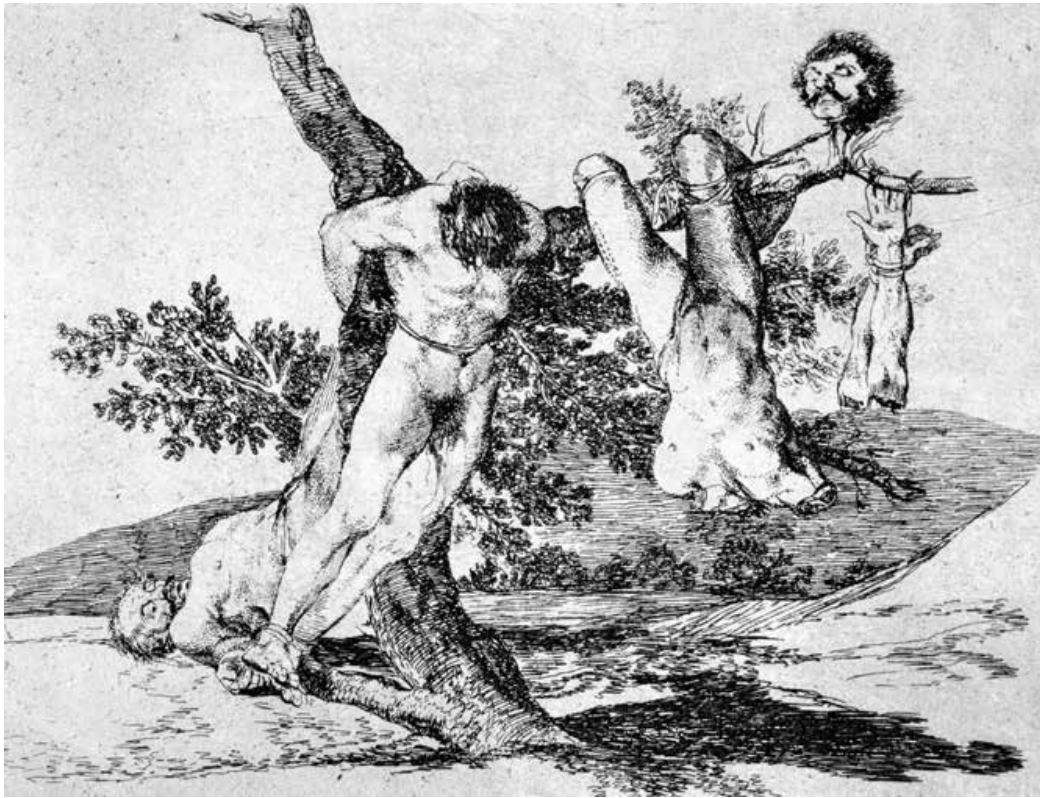
Figure 6.1   Francisco de Goya, *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, 1st Edition, Plate 39, *Grande hazaña! Con muertos!* (A Heroic Feat! with Dead Men!), 1863, Etching and Drypoint, 6 1/8″ x 8 1/16″. This Is the Most Famous of Goya's Remarkable Set of Anti-War Etchings from the Napoleonic Wars in the 1810s, and an Notable Use of Horror to Denounce War. (Pomona College Collection, gift of Mr. Norton Simon.)

in a realistic and detailed manner. At the same time, the engravings—in their individual and bodily focus—constitute an important contribution to the emergence of an aesthetic tradition of war horror and have greatly influenced twentieth-century artists.[15] Goya's work also initiates the special complicity between horror and irony that will characterize twentieth-century representations of war. Many of the captions are sarcastic or bordering on black humor, such as the one for Plate 39 mentioned above: *A heroic feat! With dead men!* to describe the hanging of the men's limbs and trunk on a tree. The irony in this caption, as in much war horror, is what is called "bitter," meaning tinged with outrage and condemnation. Thus, there has always been a layer of anti-war rhetorical effect in the use of horrific images and the specific type of irony that often accompanies war horror. As argued before, the link between horror and irony is the fact that both are based on a gap of some kind, usually between official or heroic discourse and the lived reality of war. The result is often some kind of black or gallows humor. As one critic says, black humor results from an "intensification of the sense of discrepancy between the real

and the ideal" and few human experiences produce as acute a gap between the real and the ideal as that of modern warfare.[16]

Another way of understanding horror is in terms of the breakdown of a fundamental category, such as that between the human and its others—the animal, the inanimate, the monstrous, the irrational, the abject. If ideal humanity is defined by integrity, both of a bodily and moral kind, then horror is defined by bodily violation and moral deformity—that is, by the physically and morally grotesque. In American literature, the first important writer of war horror is Ambrose Bierce in pieces like "Chickamauga" (1892), where we are confronted with a soldier who is missing a jaw: "from the upper teeth to the throat was a great red gap fringed with hanging shreds of flesh and splinters of bone."[17] The imitative Stephen Crane also includes moments of horror in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), such as the scene where a corpse's face is covered with ants, but also undermines his anti-war horror with a strong dose of adventure elements and a coming-of-age narrative.[18]

Horror emerges as the most significant literary approach to war writing during and after World War I and we can find examples of horror writing in authors from every nation, including the Frenchman Louis-Ferdinand Céline, the British war poets Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Isaac Rosenberg, and American writers such as Ernest Hemingway and William March (author of *Company K*).[19] For example, Owen's most famous poem "Dulce et Decorum est" (1923) describes a victim of poison gas drowning in his own blood ("Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs") while Rosenberg's "Dead Man's Dump" includes an image of "A man's brains splattered on/A stretcher-bearer's face."[20] In one of Ernest Hemingway's lesser-known World War I stories, "A Natural History of the Dead" (1933), the narrator describes the changes occurring to dead bodies left exposed in a war horror mode: "The dead grow larger each day until sometimes they become quite too big for their uniforms, filling these until they seem blown tight enough to burst. The individual members may increase in girth to an unbelievable extent and faces fill as taut and globular as balloons."[21] As we can see from the description here of faces like balloons, black humor is closely linked to war horror since the fundamental rhetorical operation at work in both is bathos, or a movement from elevated speech and ideals to a demystified vision of reality focused on the injured body.

The close relationship between horror and humor continues into the second half of the twentieth century, especially beginning in the 1960s, assuming memorable form in the work of Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* (1961), remembered as a satirical novel about the madness of war and the protagonist's attempts to be exempted from service on the basis of insanity, culminates in a scene of body horror that serves as the key to his character and to the entire novel: a remembered scene in which he

AQ: Please expand at first occurrence "Rosenberg, "Dead Man's" in note 20.

watched as a young soldier's insides "slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out . . . liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach, and bits of the stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten for lunch that day."[22] Although a horrific sight, one which makes the protagonist vomit and the co-pilot faint, Heller's overly specific detail about the "bits of stewed tomato" (and the fact that the protagonist is said to "hate stewed tomatoes" and the sight makes him dizzy) signal the presence of what can be called black or gallows humor. It also makes the death more intimate, personal and specific, in line with the underlying compassion that runs through war horror. As Heller himself said, "in each of my books, when they key death takes place, there is a great deal of pain and tenderness involved."[23] Kurt Vonnegut also includes many instances of graphic bodily violation in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), including the fire-bombing of Dresden (the main subject of the novel) and details from the Holocaust such as soap and candles made from human bodies, which serve as dark ironies that oscillate between bitterness and bleak fatalism about human nature.[24]

Horror is not necessarily always keyed to black humor, however, and other WWII novels include moments of body horror that are delivered entirely "straight." For instance, in James Jones' *Thin Red Line* (1962), a soldier named Welsh tries to help another (Tella) who has been hit in the chest and stomach, and who is holding his intestines (like Snowden) in with one hand while screaming.[25] When Welsh gets to Tella and tries to carry him to safety, Tella's body begins to stretch, as if it were to come apart in two pieces, and he begs Welsh to stop. Welsh tries once more and this time the body "jackknifed almost double like a closing pocketknife."[26] The comparison to an object and the threat of bodily dismemberment, coming apart in the middle, are both characteristics of horror, as well as the description of what Welsh sees: "the blueveined intestines, and the flies, the bloody hands, the blood running from the other, newer wound in the chest whenever he breathed."[27] Nevertheless, unlike the detail about Snowden's lunch, the graphic details here are delivered without gallows humor. The scene is pure violation of the integrity of the body, pure body horror, without even a shade of irony or dark humor.

Although Heller and Vonnegut were both writing about WWII, they were doing so against the backdrop of the war in Vietnam, which was getting under way with the Special Forces in the early 1960s and expanded into the deployment of large numbers of conventional troops in 1964.[28] The choice of horror for these two writers is best understood in terms of the Vietnam War context, because this is when horror becomes the dominant mode of narrative and representation in American war culture. This trend began already with the iconic photographs to emerge from the war in the 1960s, such as the self-immolation of Thích Quảng Đức in 1963, Eddie Adam's "Saigon Execution" in 1968, Ronald Haeberle's photos of My Lai in 1969, and Nick Ut's photo

of the little girl burned by napalm in 1972, and continued with the first wave of Vietnam films, such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978). Memoirs such as Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976) and Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977) also emphasized bodily horror and mutilation in their portraits of the war and its veterans.[29] Furthermore, the Vietnam War produced the first public confessions of war atrocities made voluntarily by soldiers in the extraordinary Winter Soldier hearings in 1971, and one of the first war-themed zombie films, *Deathdream* (1972), which uses the horror
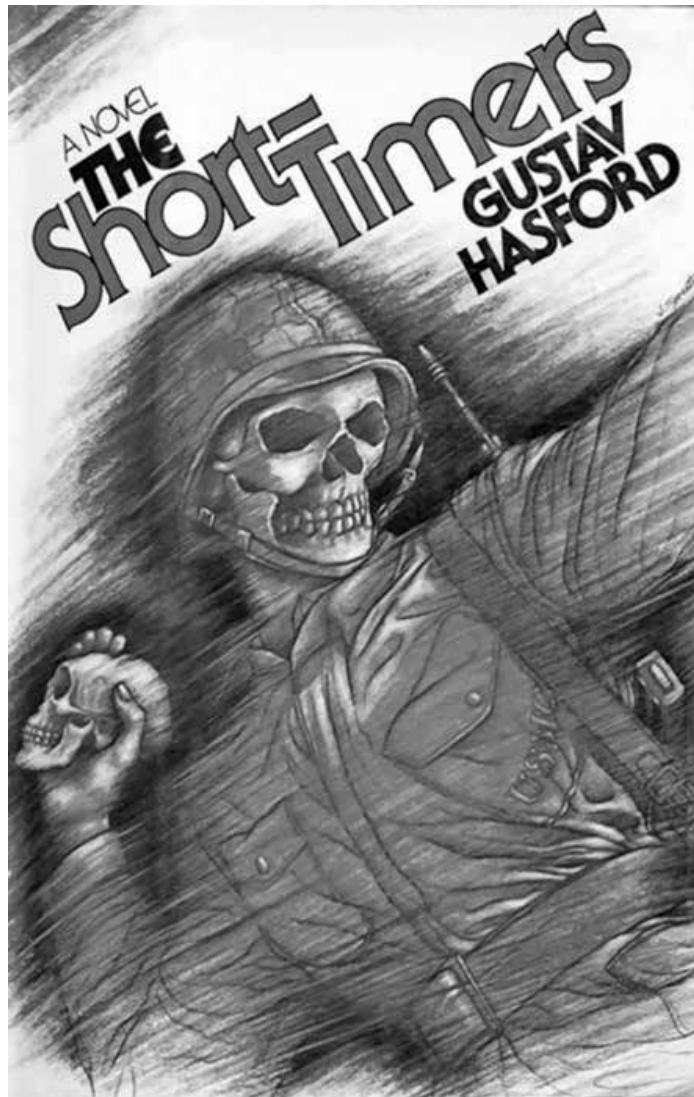
Figure 6.2   The First Hardcover Edition of *The Short-Timers*, Published by Harper & Row in January 1979. The Dust Jacket Copy Promised an Exploitative Military Exposé about "young Americans who are turned into violence freaks," but the Image Gestured towards the Horror Inside. Most of the Later Covers Have Stayed Safely within the Parameters of the Adventure Genre—Often Showing Just a Helmet, Like the Poster for *Full Metal Jacket*. (Reprinted by permission of Penguin Random House.)

AQ: Please provide in-text citations for figures 6.2 and 6.3

film genre (the decomposing body of the veteran who is a zombie-vampire hybrid needing blood to keep decay at bay) to criticize the war while it was still going on.[30] In this context, it is not surprising that the first important novel of the war is also written in the horror mode.[31]

THE SHORT-TIMERS

Gustav Hasford's debut novel, *The Short-Timers* (1979), is a ferocious attack on the Vietnam War, the military as an institution, and the U.S. government and culture that created both, relying heavily on body horror and a wide range of references to the horror film tradition. Since body horror of the kind described earlier has always gone together with anti-war writing, Hasford clearly assumed his novel would be taken as disenchanting and demystifying without the need for any explicit anti-war exposition. However, publishers at the time were more interested in sensational stories of soldiers running amok than in ideological denunciations of the recent war. As a result, Hasford's novel was marketed as a graphic exposé of ultra-violent soldiers, with the original dust jacket promising portraits of "violence freaks," much to his dismay.[32] Moreover, based on how he adapted the novel as a kind of dark adventure rather than anti-war horror, it is clear obvious Kubrick did not understand or fully share Hasford's fiercely anti-war intention. Hasford's sequel, *The Phantom Blooper* (1990), is clearly meant to correct some of the misinterpretations of *Full Metal Jacket* as well as to develop and push Joker's story forward from combat to veteran life. Hasford allegedly planned a third novel to complete a Vietnam trilogy but he never wrote it, completing only a detective novel (*A Gypsy Good Time*) in 1992 before allowing himself to die of untreated diabetes and alcoholism the following year.[33] The unfinished and open-ended conclusion to Joker's story is not entirely inappropriate, however, since the horror mode resists closure and resolution by its very nature.

   The Short-Timers is based on Hasford's experiences as a combat correspondent but Joker is not meant to be a stand-in for Hasford. It is not an autobiography. In fact, the novel began as a supernatural story Hasford presented at the Clarion Writer's Workshop in 1972 in which the characters literally become werewolves.[34] Although Hasford scrapped this format for a more realistic one, many traces of the werewolf narrative and other gothic monsters remain in the novel. For example, just before the brutal drill instructor is shot by the recruit who has gone mad, he smiles "an evil smile, as if he were a werewolf baring his fangs."[35] After Gerheim is killed, Joker does not call the police or MPs, as he would in a realistic novel; instead, he turns off the lights and gets into bed, listening to the breathing of the other Marines, "a hundred young werewolves with guns in their hands," standing at attention

in their beds, "horizontal in their racks, their weapons at port arms."[36] The image of werewolves appears at several more moments in the novel, including the very end, just after Joker has had to kill his best friend and assume responsibility for the squad as sergeant. "*Semper Fi*, my werewolf children," he writes, invoking the motto of the Marine Corps, signaling thereby his full identification with the Marines as the institution and his werewolf nature, like Gerheim before him.[37]

The werewolf is a suggestive trope for Hasford to evoke because it implies both a potential for brutal violence and a tragically irreversible and unchosen condition. The "wolf man," as portrayed by the Universal Studios film from 1941, is a tragic figure and a victim of his lycanthropy.[38] This is essentially how Hasford saw the American serviceman, an innocent who has been transformed into a psychotic killer by his training in boot camp and his experience in the field. Hasford also uses a range of other monster figures—such as the vampire, the centaur, the cannibal, and the reptile-man—to describe Marines and officers, but this is not the main thrust of what I call "horror" in his novel. Instead, I use "horror" to mean Hasford's strategic use of descriptions of the violated body to underscore the cruel consequences and senseless waste of life that was the Vietnam War for him.

Hasford plans his scenes of horror carefully and locates them strategically at the end of each section, of which there are three, so that each culminates in a scene of graphic violence and bodily violation (and each ends with the death of one of Joker's friends). For example, at the end of the first chapter, "The Spirit of the Bayonet," which is about basic Marine training at the hands of a brutal drill instructor, Sergeant Gerheim, one of the recruits, Leonard, driven mad by his treatment by Gerheim and the other recruits (who beat him savagely one night), shoots the drill instructor and himself. Gerheim's death is relatively neat, with only some blood that "squirts from a little hole in Sergeant Gerheim's chest" and which "blossoms" on his white shirt like a "beautiful flower."[39] This is possibly a sardonic homage to John Wayne's drill instructor in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, who dies in a similarly neat and bloodless way in the film.

Leonard's death, in contrast to Gerheim's, offers the first real spectacle of horror to the reader: "His head is now an awful lump of blood and facial bones and sinus fluids and uprooted teeth and jagged, torn flesh. The skin looks plastic and unreal."[40] The anatomical precision of "facial bones and sinus fluids" is coupled with the violence of "uprooted teeth" and "torn flesh," and the most terrible things of all is the indiscriminate mixing of the fluids and the bones and the exposure of both to the eye of the viewer. Here the reader is made to witness the effects of a bullet on the human body and the result is distinctly dehumanizing and uncanny. Leonard's head is a lump of tissue and his skin looks like plastic. Joker, who has been flirting with the

same madness that consumes Leonard, is clearly pushed over an edge at this point. Instead of reporting the deaths, Joker and the other recruits climb back in their bunks and he hallucinates a surreal experience of violation by his own rifle: "Blood pours out of the barrel of my rifle and flows up on to my hands. The blood moves. The blood breaks up into living fragments. Each fragment is a spider. Millions and millions of tiny red spiders of blood are crawling up my arms, across my face, into my mouth."[41] This disturbing vision—precipitated by Leonard's own inversion of the inside and outside—represents Joker's inauguration into the gruesome penetrations (mostly by American weapons) that will destroy all of his friends and drive him further into insanity in the coming chapters.

The next major scene of horror is of Joker's friend, the photographer Rafter Man, being crushed by an American tank. This passage seems intended to recall the scene with Sammy Snowden in Heller's novel. Like Snowden, Rafter Man comes undone and is turned inside out: "His intestines are pink rope all over the deck. He is trying to pull himself back in, but doesn't work. His guts are wet and slippery and he can't hold them in. He tries to reinsert his spilling guts back into his severed torso. He tries very hard to keep the dirt off of his intestines as he works."[42] The passage is repetitive and insists upon the grotesque absurdity of a man who has been cut in half trying to put his insides back into his body. The language emphasizes the wetness and fluidity of Rafter Man' intestines, the fact that his guts are soft and slippery and leave him obscenely exposed to things that should remain on the outside of his body, such as dirt and the reader's gaze.[43]

The saddest and most horrific scene comes at the end of the third section, during the siege of Khe Sahn, when several members of Joker's squad are deliberately dismembered by a sniper, including his best friend Cowboy. The scene is an uncanny repetition of an earlier sniper scene, at Hue, which was reported to Joker after the fact, in which a sniper shoots off the feet of several members of the Hardass Squad, one at a time, to lure them in, after which she shoots them in the head (I say "she" because this will turn out to be a teenaged girl sniper). Once more, the sniper begins by shooting a Marine named Alice in the thigh, then in the foot, then in a hand. As an added touch of horror, to make sure that we do not think that only the Vietnamese are savage, Alice's canvas bag of "a dozen decayed gook feet" that he carries as trophies spill all around him, revealing his hideous war trophies. The half-mad medic Doc Jay runs out to Alice and is shot in the thigh, "jagged bone protrudes," then in his foot, "a bloody lump," and then is "right hand is shattered."[44] New Guy runs out next only to be shot in the throat, causing him to gurgle and choke on his own blood as he tries to breathe. Next Doc Jay's ear is shot off, then his nose. Now Cowboy, the squad leader, runs out with his pistol in order to offer mercy killings to the three men and kill himself, but the sniper shoots off his hand before he can pull the trigger on his temple. He is already dying, going

into shock, the sniper having shot off his testicles. Another soldier, Animal Mother, is about to run out as well when Joker realizes he must shoot Cowboy to save the squad from more suicidal heroics. The scene is among the most savage and uncompromising in the history of war writing.

In a moving touch to an otherwise utterly unsentimental passage, Cowboy tries to help Joker to shoot him by saying "I NEVER LIKED YOU, JOKER. I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WERE FUNNY" (capitals in the original).[45] Although clearly untrue, Cowboy's taunt is intended to prompt Joker to action and to signal that Cowboy knows Joker must kill him. It works, and the passage describing the movement of the bullet into Cowboy's body is a long and anatomically explicit tribute to body horror:

> My bullet passes through his eye socket, punches through fluid-filled sinus cavities, through membranes, nerves, arteries, muscle tissue, through the tiny blood vessels that fed three pounds of gray butter-soft high protein meat where brain cells arranged like jewels in a clock hold every thought and memory and dream of one adult male homo sapiens. My bullet exists through the occipital bone, knocks out hairy, brain-wet clods of jagged meat, then buries itself in the roots of a tree.[46]

This passage is a good example of war horror because it exposes in precise anatomical detail the contents of the body, here specifically the skull, which are violently expulsed (with the verbs "punch" and "knock") and exposed into view, and transforms Cowboy's brains into mere "meat." At the center of this violent description lies the contrasting image of brain cells arranged like "jewels in a clock," a metaphor that recalls deist paradigms of nature like a watch made by a divine watchmaker. The effect here is to insist upon the fact that whatever divinity there might be in man is located in the matter inside his head, and it dies when this matter is penetrated or injured, thus undermining any redemptive or religious recuperation of Cowboy's death as anything but final and tragic.

The other word for the human body that Hasford uses twice in this passage is "meat," and herein lies the essence of what the war horror mode is about: the revelation that people are no different than any other kind of animal flesh when they are dead. The point here is not only that humans are animals, or that they are fragile, though these things are important, but also that war is essentially a mechanism for turning men into hunters of other men. This is the horror that Hasford wants to reveal, along with the unbearable truth that in Vietnam it was done with no redeeming purpose. "Meat" is a provocative and uncomfortable word, but it is meant to drive home the point that soldiers are bodies. Once they are injured or killed, the honor or principles for which they fought no longer have any meaning to them. Modern western civilization is based on a scientific worldview in which death is a final extinction of

the person while military rhetoric consistently appeals to a transcendental paradigm which implies that memory and posthumous honor should matter to soldiers who die.[47] The gap between these two visions of the world is the very ground from which war horror erupts.

In order for the true cannibal nature of the war—the fact that men become hunters of other men—not be lost on readers, Hasford makes sure that each of these climactic kills—of Gerheim, of Rafter Man, of Cowboy—is done by another American.[48] This point brings us back to Marvin and Ingle and their argument that the point of war is the death of members of a group at the hands of the group. If this is the taboo that cannot be known about war or it will not work as a ritual, it is precisely this knowledge that veterans threaten to bring back with them. In no other U.S. war was that taboo fact more visible than in the Vietnam War, which was regarded by many veterans—including Hasford—as a betrayal of America's children by a nation who sent them off to die. Hasford says so explicitly in an editorial he wrote in 1980 in the *Los Angeles Times*, where he writes bitterly that "even animals protect their young." The truth that he calls "unendurable" in his sequel, and which in *The Short-Timers* he describes as the "law of the jungle" that "no one wants to know," is the fact that more Marines go into the jungle than come out, that is, that Americans *must* die in the war.[49] In a crucial commentary on the essence of war horror, Hasford writes:

> The ugly that civilians choose to see in war focuses on spilled guts. To see human beings clearly, that is ugly. To carry death in your smile, that is ugly.[50]

Hasford's point here speaks directly to the graphic violence of his novel, namely, that *beyond* the violated bodies and "spilled guts," the even uglier truth about war is how it transforms men into psychopathic killers, revealed by the "smile" that carries "death." In other words, war is about men killing other men, and implied in the smile is the fact that they may like it—as we saw in the chapter about the adventure mode—and this is the real horror and the truth that "no one wants to know." Interestingly, Michael Herr's review of the novel zeroes in on precisely this taboo aspect of what Hasford was saying: "He was telling a truth about the war that was so secret, so hidden, that I could barely stand it."[51]

HORROR AS ANTI-ADVENTURE

In fact, one could argue that *The Short-Timers* is a direct attack on the adventure genre, engaging critically with its premises and exposing its dark and violent heart. This is apparent from a line in the novel where Joker explains

his work as a combat correspondence, which he defines as convincing people that "war is a beautiful experience." It amounts to saying, he suggests: "Come on, come all to exotic Vietnam, the jewel of Southeast Asia, meeting interesting, stimulating people of an ancient culture . . . and kill them. Be the first kid on your block to get a confirmed kill."[52] The passage satirically deconstructs the mixture of exotic tourism, adventure, and competitiveness that converges in the appeal of war to young men and suggests that Hasford's novel means to turn all these mythic allures of the war experience on their head.

Thus, instead of being a coming of age story about a recruit who touches death and becomes a man, it is the story of a man being made into a monster and losing essential pieces of himself and his humanity in the process. In addition to the trope of the werewolf discussed earlier, in an editorial piece written in *The Los Angeles Times* in 1980 Hasford also uses the trope of Frankenstein's monster and the zombie to describe men who were "killed in action for all intents and purposes but who don't know enough to lie down and die."[53] In the novel Hasford makes the identical point through a surreal scene after Joker has been knocked unconscious by a shell in Hue. While dreaming groggily, he imagines a three-way dialogue between the three parts of him—Body, Mind, Spirit—that appeared in a number of Marine recruiting posters in the 1960s promising that "The Marine Corps Builds Men."[54] During this conversation, Spirit decides to not return when Joker wakes up: "tell them man I'm missing in action." Using almost the same term "killed in action" that he uses in the editorial (admittedly a common expression, shortened in military jargon to KIA, just as "missing in action" is known as MIA), Hasford describes Joker waking up without his Spirit or soul, a vital piece gone.

This is a powerful metaphor for the feeling that many veterans have that a part of themselves—some vital, human, sensitive part—has died in the war; or, in other words, that they came back so changed that they do not feel whole anymore.[55] The fact that this feeling is linked to the killing that they must do is also highlighted by Hasford in the scene just after Rafter Man dies, when Joker reminisces about his first kill: of an innocent unarmed farmer. The passage acknowledges Joker's awareness of his own transformation into a sociopath or murderer; he killed the farmer simply because he could, because he had become aware of the magic killing power of his rifle and could not contain his desire to use it. Joker writes: "After my first confirmed kill I began to understand that it was not necessary to understand. What you do you become . . . and no amount of insight could ever alter the cold, black fact of what I had done."[56] Joker continues: "I was defining myself with bullets; blood had blemished my Yankee Doodle dream that everything would have a happy ending." In this way, Hasford uses the horror mode to make explicit something that remains tacit in the war adventure genre: that the hero's journey makes him into a killer.
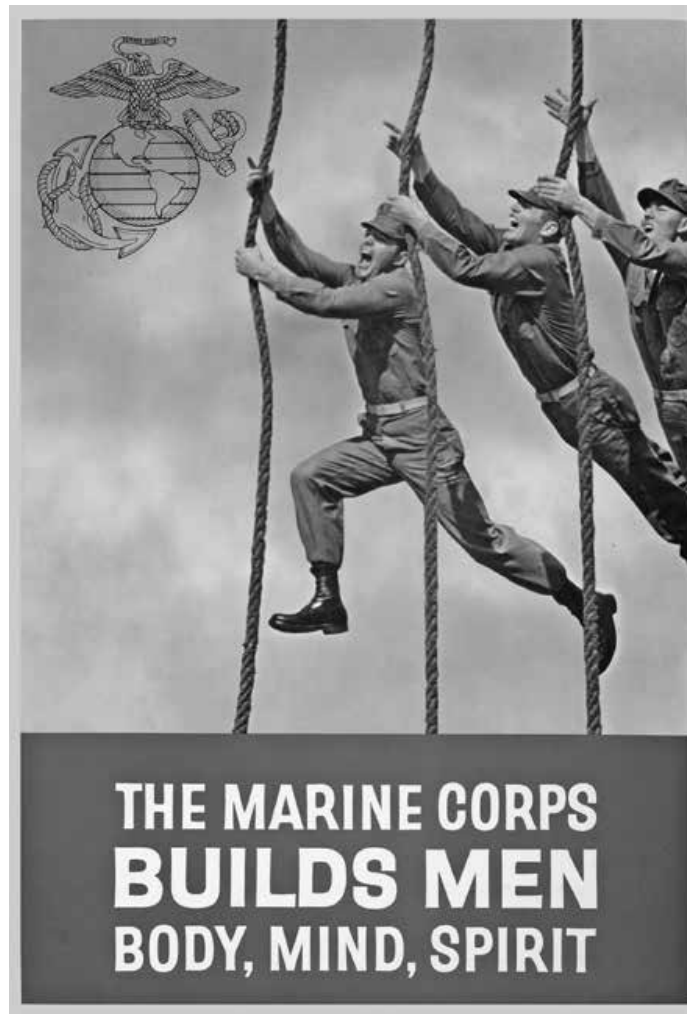
Figure 6.3   A Common Recruiting Poster Slogan from the 1960s. The Words "The Marine Corps builds men" and "Mind, Body, Spirit" Appeared with a Variety of Accompanying Images in this Era. (Reprinted with the permission of the National Museum of the Marine Corps, Triangle, Virginia.)

Hasford's critical distance from the adventure formula, however, takes the form of denying that there is anything positive or salvageable about this transformation. Instead of a happy ending, Hasford concludes the novel with the depleted squad returning to the base without four of its members, all of whom have been abandoned in the jungle despite the mantra that Marines never abandon their dead or wounded. The remaining Marines concentrate on walking and try not to think of anything, willing themselves into a state of denial. This is an ending that denies not only happiness, but closure and meaning, and leaves Joker returning to the hellish base at Khe Sahn, "an erupted pimple of sand bags and barbed wire on a bleak plateau surrounded by the end of the world."[57] On the walk home, "nobody talks. We're all too tired to talk, to joke, to call each other names."[58] If the structure of the journey

resembles that of adventure, namely, leaving society to enter a dangerous borderland and be transformed, in Hasford's horror version of the journey, there is no pleasure in it, the transformation is a monstrous one, and the return is neither triumphant or even fully possible. In fact, there is no going home. As Joker recognizes just before he shoots Cowboy, "those of us who survive to be short-timers will fly the Freedom Bird back to hometown America. But home won't be there anymore and we won't be there either. On each of our brains the war has lodged itself, a black crab feeding."[59] In other words, he will never be able to go home, and the man who does go home will be so changed by the war that it will no longer be him.

Two things need to be emphasized about this ending: first, that it is not really an ending. Nothing has been won or resolved or even ended. As I said earlier, the horror mode is less invested in narrative and more in representation of the body and since it traditionally went hand in hand with anti-war writing it resisted the satisfactions of closure. This is true for *The Short-Timers,* which is structured into three parts, each culminating in a scene of violent dismemberment of one of the protagonist's friends. The structure is more of an open-ended series than a telos, and establishes a pattern in which one can imagine the war continuing and more friends dying.

The second thing that is important about the ending of *The Short-Timers* is that the transformation that has occurred is not into hero or man, but into a kind of sociopathy characterized by hardness, lack of feeling and loss of soul. The madness-inducing violence in *The Short-Timers* does not begin when Joker arrives in Vietnam; however, it is already well under way during basic training, which is why Hasford spends a full third of his novel on this section. The extreme violence that recruits experience at Parris Island—a place the narrator calls a "suburban death camp"—is both physical and psychological. They are beaten regularly and all over their bodies, one has his front teeth knocked out, his mouth made into a "bloody hole," and Leonard is drowned in urine until he passes out.[60] When the entire platoon is punished for Leonard's mistakes, they turn the violence on him themselves. One night, he is beaten by the other recruits in a gang-rape-like nocturnal "blanket party," during which everyone strikes him with a bar of soap wrapped in a towel while Leonard "brays" like a "sick mule."[61]

In addition to physical abuse, recruits are subjected to extreme verbal abuse in order to break down their sense of self. They are called "maggots," "scumbags," "little pieces of amphibian shit," all terms emphasizing their lack of form and substance. They are also systematically compared to women in a process that is meant to associate femininity with formlessness and masculinity with successful completion of the training.[62] The treatment they receive at the hands of the drill instructor resembles both torture and brain-washing. As a result, all of the recruits begin to hear their rifles speaking to them and begin

to go a little insane as they become increasingly eager to attack the enemy and "punch their fucking heads off."[63] When Leonard kills Gerheim and then himself he is not an exception to the rule so much as an extreme version of what all the recruits have become. This is made clear in the scene immediately following the murder-suicide in the squad bay, when Joker goes back to bed, leaving the bodies on the ground, and the up-to-now realistic narration segues into a surreal fantasy of blood pouring out of his rifle and breaking up into "millions and millions of tiny red spiders of blood . . . crawling up my arms, across my face, into my mouth."[64] A powerful metaphor for madness and loss of control, the image of a swarm of spiders pouring into Joker's mouth is the first of several key scenes that suggest Joker loses his mind in the course of the book. Hasford's point is that it is not only war that drives veterans mad but that the process of losing their minds begins in basic training and is in fact the point of the treatment they receive.[65]

The descent into madness in the novel is accompanied by a symbolic movement from the "death camp" of Parris Island, through the purgatory of Hue during the Tet offensive (where Joker loses his soul) to the apocalyptic underworld of Khe Sahn during the famous siege of 1968. The final section of the novel, "Grunts," paints a portrait of Khe Sahn using gothic tropes that qualify it as one of the most powerful instances of war horror writing. The chapter unfolds like a surreal prose poem about a nightmare rather than a realistic war narrative and yet it is both realist and horrific: this is precisely Hasford's point, that is, the realism of war is horror.

In the hell-scape that Hasford paints in "Grunts," categories that are normally mutually exclusive, like the inside and outside of bodies, bleed into each other. The animate and inanimate, the natural and the metallic, are promiscuously confused: "clouds float across the white moon . . . like great back ships"; "a flight of B-52 bombers circles Khe Sahn, sprinkling eggs of black iron"; "black and wet, the earth heaves up like the deck of a great ship, heaves up toward the droning death birds."[66] The living and the dead are also confused: "we sleep, shadows in the earth . . . we sleep in holes . . . the holes are little graves and hold the rich, damp odor of the grave"; their camp is an old French outpost "patrolled at night by the ghosts of dead Legionnaires and the Mongol horsemen of Genghis Kahn."[67]

In fact, Joker no longer makes any distinction between himself and the devastated surroundings; his identity has fused with the Dantean place he dwells in: "in my guts I know that my body is one of the components of gristle and muscle and bone of Khe Sahn."[68] In his dreams at night, Joker no longer thinks of his girlfriend back home, but instead "in my dreams of blood I make love to a skeleton. Bones click, the earth moves, my testicles explode." And he listens "to the sound of the horror that is everywhere, buried just beneath the surface of the earth."[69] The references to hell are abundant: his tiny stove

"glows like a fragment on brimstone" and on a tree stump outside the base someone has written: "ALL HOPE ABANDON, YE WHO ENTER HERE." Joker writes of the sign: "We do not laugh . . . We have seen the sign a hundred times and believe it."[70]

If the final section of the novel presents its landscape of horror relatively straight, much of the novel consists of dark sarcasm and gallows humor. Even if Joker does not laugh at the reference to Dante's *Inferno*, he has wired Mouseketeer ears "as a joke" onto the "charred black" skull mounted on a stake next to it, "Sorry Charlie," the skull of "an enemy grunt who got napalmed outside our wire."[71] The skull greets the Marines on their way in and out of the base, always smiling "at us with his charred teeth, his inflexible ivory grin. Sorry Charlie always smiles at us as if he knows a funny secret. For sure he knows more than we do."[72] The secret that Sorry Charlie knows is death, but what is perhaps less clear is why death is funny, or why humor so often goes hand in hand with horror. Scholars have proposed various theories, including the notion that humor is a distancing technique to make horror bearable, that it serves a therapeutic purpose to be able to laugh at horror, and that it is a satirical tool to expose the incongruity of the world, the gap between how things are supposed to be and how they are.[73]

As I have argued earlier in this chapter, Hasford's use of humor in relation to horror is definitely of the latter kind, a fiercely satirical political weapon to denounce the cruelty of the war and motivated by a profound compassion for all of its victims, American and Vietnamese. As a war correspondent, Hasford found himself under pressure to present the war falsely, to conceal what was actually happening. In one important incident, Hasford wrote about a beehive bomb, a type of artillery filled with hundreds of tiny, steel darts used by U.S. forces, and the story was not only shelved but he was reprimanded for suggesting that Americans would use such a cruel (and probably illegal) weapon, although they in fact did.[74]

Hasford wanted to show the world what war really was: what weapons actually do to bodies, what military training actually does to men, and what combat situations are really like outside of the movies. This is also why his novel includes graphic depictions of bodily injury, numerous incidents of soldiers driven literally mad (Leonard, Crazy Earl, the laughing tank commander who runs over Rafter Man), and combat situations in which Americans kill other Americans (Leonard kills Gerheim, Animal Mother kills Mr. Shortround, Rafter Man is run over by an American tank, and Cowboy shoots Alice, Doc Jay and the New Guy before being shot by Joker). There is no glory or heroism in any of these situations. For Hasford, the Vietnam war was a colossal mistake, a huge ugly joke on the men who signed up or were drafted to fight it and who died for nothing, who killed for nothing, or who came back permanently damaged for no reason that made any sense at all. This is why his

hero is called "Joker" and why the novel is meant to be an uncompromising denunciation of the war. This is also why Kubrick's adaptation of the novel is so inaccurate and disappointing, as I will show in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 8–9.

2. Hynes, *Soldier's Tale*, 26.

3. Cole, *At the Violet Hour,* 43.

4. Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives* (London: Verso, 2004).

5. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 12.

6. The notorious news broadcast from Cam Ne by Morley Safer on CBS which showed soldiers burning peasants' huts to the ground with their Zippo lighters was aired in 1965.

7. Hasford, *Short-Timers*.

8. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper*.

9. Gustav Hasford, "Still Gagging on the Bitterness of Vietnam," *Los Angeles Times* (30 April 1980), accessed July 8, 2020, http://gustavhasford.blogspot.com/search/label/Written%20by%20Gustav%20Hasford.

10. Cavarero, *Horrorism,* 8.

11. Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 56.

12. Angela Wright, *Britain, France and the Gothic, 1764-1820: The Import of Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

13. Matthew Lewis, *The Monk,* ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 339.

14. For example, *Les Grandes Misères de la Guerre* by Jacques Callot, published in 1633, depicted large scenes with many people from a distance, lacking the individuation of Goya's work.

15. The delayed reaction (influence on twentieth-century and not nineteenth-century art) is mainly due to the fact that, although produced between 1810 and 1820, these images were not published until 1863, and so only became known in the second half of the nineteenth century.

16. Patrick O'Neil, "The Comedy of Entropy: The Contexts of Black Humour," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 10.2 (June 1983), 155.

17. Ambrose Bierce, Bierce, "Chickamauga," *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce* Vol. I–XII (New York: Gordian Press, 1966), 51.

18. Crane, *Red Badge,* 47–48.

19. William March, *Company K* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989).

20. Wildred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum est," *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry,* ed. George Walter (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 141–142; Rosenberg, "Dead Man's Dump," *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry,* 146–148.

21. Ernest Hemingway, "A Natural History of the Dead," *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: The Finca Vigia Edition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 337.

22. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Dell, 1955, 1970), 449.

23. Interview with Chet Flippo, "Checking in with Joseph Heller," *Rolling Stone* (April 16, 1986), 51.

24. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 96, 177–181.

25. Jones, *The Thin Red Line*, 246.

26. Ibid., 251.

27. Ibid., 250.

28. The best historical book on the Vietnam War remains George C. Herring's *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1965,* 4th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001).

29. "The Burning Monk," photo by Malcolm Browne (Associated Press, 1963); "Saigon Execution," photo by Eddie Adams (Associated Press, 1968); Army photographer Ronald Haeberle's 1968 photos of the My Lai massacre first appeared in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Nov. 20, 1969, front page); "Napalm Girl," Nick Ut (Associated Press, 1972); *Apocalypse Now,* directed by Francis Ford Coppola (1979; Hollywood: Paramount, 1999), DVD; *The Deer Hunter,* directed by Michael Cimino (1978; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2002).

30. *Deathdream* (AKA *Dead of Night),* directed by Bob Clark (1974; West Hollywood, CA: Blue Underground, 2004), DVD.

31. *The Short-Timers* is not the first novel written about the Vietnam war but I would argue it is the most powerful, and certainly the most influential by far, especially if we consider its afterlife in the adaptation into film by Stanley Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket.*

32. Original dust jacket text available on website run by Hasford's cousin, Jason Aaron, http://gustavhasford.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-short-timers-hardcover-first-edition.html; Hasford was strongly against the use of the words "violence freaks" to describe his characters, and claimed in a letter to a friend to have prevented the publisher from using them in the blurb: "I'm sick of films that depict Viet Nam veterans as 'Viet Nam violence freaks' (a phrase they tried to use as a blurb on SHORTY, before I politely suggested that the use of a such a phrase could possibly result in the instantaneous rotation of somebody's fucking kneecaps." Gustav Hasford, "Excerpts from private letters, January 1983-February 1984," "Remembering Gus," *JasonAaron.Info*, accessed July 10, 2020, http://jasoneaaron.blogspot.com/2010/05/remembering-gus.html.

33. Matthew Ross, *An Examination of the Life and Work of Gustav Hasford*, MA Dissertation (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, May 2010), accessed July 8, 2020, https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1251&context=thesesdissertation*, 99–102; Gustav Hasford, *A Gypsy Good Time* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

34. Hasford began writing the novel in 1968 while still in Vietnam, and had published a scene from it as a short story in the *Mirror Northwest* journal in 1972, "Is That You, John Wayne? Is This Me?," but the novel evolved in various forms over the seven years it took to write it. Ross, *An Examination of the Life,* 14–16.

35. Hasford, *Short-Timers,* 30.

36. Ibid., 33.

37. Ibid., 179.

38. *The Wolf Man*, directed by George Waggner (1941; London: Universal Pictures UK, 2010), DVD.

39. Hasford, *Short-Timers,* 30.

40. Ibid., 31.

41. Ibid., 32.

42. Ibid., 129.

43. For a brilliant discussion of the gender politics of the binary oppositions between fluid softness and hardness in novel, see Ray Zimmerman, "Gruntspeak: Masculinity, Monstrosity, and Discourse in Hasford's *Short-Timers*," *American Studies* 40.1 (Spring 1999), 65–93.

44. Hasford, *Short-Timers,* 171.

45. Ibid., 178.

46. Ibid.

47. Here lies a fundamental impasse between the modern state and its rhetoric concerning combat death. The United States, like other modern nations, is inherently committed to a liberal-democratic paradigm which is ostensibly secular. The validity of science and the irrelevance/nonexistence of the spiritual world is one of the tenets of our modernity. Yet the discourse of nationality, national belonging and especially of national military service inevitably implies the existence of bonds, meanings, forces, realities that transcend the purely scientific and material world. Certainly the discourse of military commemoration assumes a supra-sensible realm in which individual deaths are transformed into vitality for an abstract entity called "the nation" which is assumed to be more than individuals bound by a set of laws they agree to follow. But most soldiers, upon enlisting, even if they are prepared to give their lives in the defense of this thing or ideal called the nation, are not prepared to die for cynical geopolitical calculations, to save face for the president, to create new markets for U.S. manufacturers or impose U.S. resource extraction upon developing nations. Yet this is what many post–WWII uses of the military have been, and certainly it is difficult to see the American occupation of Vietnam as anything except an instance of either ideological fanaticism or political cynicism, given the awareness of the U.S. government throughout the early 1960s of the unattainability of its objectives.

48. For an extended reflection on the issue of American deaths at the hands of other Americans, see Kathryn Kinney, *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War* (2000).

49. Hasford, "Still Gagging," 175.

50. Ibid., 176.

51. Quoted in Patrick Webster, *Love and Death in Kubrick: A Critical Study of the Films from* Lolita *to* Eyes Wide Shut (Jefferson, NC, and London: MacFarland & Co., 2011), 134.

52. Hasford, *Short-Timers,* 45.

53. Hasford, "Still Gagging."

54. I gratefully acknowledge the National Museum of the Marine Corps for permission to use this image.

55. This also happens to be the way that trauma is understood by practitioners using a soul-based or Jungian framework for understanding what happens to soldiers in encounters with death and injury. See, for example, the excellent book on this by Edward Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul after War* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014).

56. Hasford, *Short-Timers*, 133.

57. Ibid., 146.

58. Ibid., 179.

59. Ibid., 176.

60. Ibid., 7, 15–16.

61. Ibid., 17.

62. For an excellent discussion of the gender dynamics of the boot camp section, see Ray Bourgeois Zimmerman, "Gruntspeak: Masculinity, Monstrosity and Discourse in Hasford's *The Short-Timers*" *American Studies* 40.1 (Spring 1999): 65–93.

63. Ibid., 20.

64. Ibid., 32.

65. Although Hasford's depiction of boot camp is arguably hyperbolic, it reflects the changes to basic training that had been introduced after WWII, after studies revealed that many infantrymen had never fired their rifle. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman describes these new conditioning techniques for overcoming the natural aversion to killing as so extreme that they amounted to "psychological warfare conducted not on the enemy—but on upon one's own troops." The result was that the nonfiring rate went down from 80 percent to 5 percent during the Vietnam War. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Bay Back Books, 1995), 253.

66. Hasford, *Short-Timers*, 143.

67. Ibid, 146.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., 144.

70. Ibid., 148.

71. Ibid., 147.

72. Ibid., 148.

73. See Linda Horvay Barnes, *The Dialectics of Black Humor: Process and Product: A Reorientation Toward Contemporary American and German Black Humor Fiction* (Berne: Peter Lang Ltd, 1978); O'Neil, "Comedy of Entropy," 145–166; Brom Weber, "The Mode of 'Black Humor'," in *The Comic Imagination in American Literature* (Washington, DC: Voice of America, 1974), 387–397; Linda D. Henman, "Humor as a Coping Mechanism: Lessons from POWs," *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 14.1 (Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 83–94.

74. Jason Aaron, "Mangling Frail Civilian Sensibilities: The Story of Gustav Hasford, Literary Snuffie," *Vietnam War Generation Journal* 2.1 (August 2002), quoted in Ross, *An Examination of the Life,* 10.

Chapter 7

The Hero's Journey to Film and Back

Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket
and Hasford's Counter-Attack

Full Metal Jacket (1987) is among the most acclaimed films about the Vietnam War. Kubrick's credentials as auteur director and maker of two other seemingly anti-war films, *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), immediately gave the film a prestigious pedigree and cultural importance.[1] It was the last film Kubrick released while alive, and the culmination of a longstanding desire to make a film about war.[2] Critical reactions to the film were overwhelmingly positive, with only a few critics taking exception, such as the *New York Times's* Pauline Kael, who found the film empty, mannered and disconnected from the point of the book (which she identifies, like I do, as "how these brainwashed men were destroyed from within").[3] Roger Ebert also panned the film, criticizing it for characters we don't care about and a "moral revelation" at the end that seems "phoned in from earlier war pictures."[4] Most viewers and reviewers, however, enthusiastically praised the film. Ethan Rocke, a former Marine turned journalist and writer, recalls watching the film hundreds of times before enlisting in the Marines to become a combat correspondent like Joker. He also claims that he has rarely met a Marine who did not love the film as much as he did.[5]

Praised by spectators from both left-wing and conservative backgrounds, *Full Metal Jacket* is an excellent example of the strategic ambiguity used by many of the most successful popular culture products. Credited by some as an edgy and powerful deconstruction of the Vietnam War, it happens to also be one of the most successful recruitment films ever made (as the aforementioned Ethan Rocke attests). In a 2018 editorial, Anthony Swofford (author of Persian Gulf memoir *Jarhead*) cites *Full Metal Jacket* as the reason he enlisted in the Marines, just like many Vietnam recruits cited *Sands of Iwo Jima*. The main element that Swofford credits for his desire to enlist after seeing the film is Lee Ermey's performance as the drill instructor who transforms

insecure boys into hardened killers. The promise of such a transformation "seduced" him and many of his friends, Swofford writes, despite the fact that it involved brutalization and humiliation. What appealed to Swofford and his generation was the prospect of becoming dangerous and strong as a result of this abuse. Swofford says that "Hartman had hooked us with the promise that he—this leather-faced, battle-hardened beast—could turn young, soft, irrel-evant boys into the most lethal human killing machines in history."[6]

The question of how boys become killing machines is also at the center of Hasford's novel, but the book and Kubrick's film present this issue very differently. In *The Short Timers*, Joker is a cold-hearted psychopath who kills an innocent farmer just because he can. In other words, he is a poten-tially unsympathetic character by whom we are supposed to be at least partly horrified. Kubrick replaces the horror of the story with adventure—keeping just enough gore and violence to conform to the "war is hell" convention indispensable to war film realism and credibility since the Vietnam war—and makes Joker (played by the boyish Matthew Modine) into a sympathetic and sane character, an Everyman that the spectator is invited to like and identify with. Thus, while *Full Metal Jacket* keeps some of Hasford's black humor, it does so without the compassion or outrage at the spoliation of the human body and soul that is at the heart of Hasford's use of horror.

Instead, Kubrick's film adaptation of Hasford's novel transforms war horror into military adventure, making it into a rite of passage narrative that appears critical on the surface because of its remaining traces of horror and irony but which has been drained of its capacity to disenchant combat. Instead, Kubrick presents the Vietnam War in *Full Metal Jacket* as a hero's journey in which young men are tested and transformed into warriors (albeit cynical, arguably *postmodern* ones, with no allegiance to anything except themselves and their friends). Thus, although the film is based on Hasford's novel and he collaborated on the treatment for the screenplay, the final ver-sion of *Full Metal Jacket* is ultimately a betrayal of Hasford's intentions and an object lesson in how commercial film can transform even a bitter denun-ciation of war into military propaganda.

Hasford responded to the release of *Full Metal Jacket* by writing a sear-ing sequel to the original novel, which continues the story of Joker into the heart of the Vietnamese insurgency and back to Alabama. In *The Phantom Blooper*, the fact that the protagonist Joker is a cold-blooded killer is made plain from the first pages in order to sharpen and continue the critique against the military that Hasford intended in the earlier work. Hasford also returns in this sequel to the horror mode of the first novel as a means of condemning the racism, sexism and corruption he saw in the war in Vietnam. A more com-posed and reflective work than *The Short-Timers*, *The Phantom Blooper* is about America as much as it is about Vietnam, and it remains the only novel

to date written by an American that sympathetically imagines the world of Vietnamese insurgents. Its bleak portrait of the United States reflects the conclusions that Hasford drew in his postwar editorials, such as "Still Gagging on the Bitterness of Vietnam" (1980), where he wrote that "the Vietnam experience damned the American way of life as a lie from top to bottom" for him and his fellow grunts.[7]

Expanding on the use of battlefield horror of the first novel, Hasford also borrows from the larger repertoire of the Gothic to represent the haunted psyche of the veteran. This use of the gothic tropes comes from a tradition dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Gothic offered a range of literary devices to depict what is now known as PTSD. At a time when psychological trauma was not recognized as a legitimate consequence of combat, the Gothic genre lent itself well to depicting the uncanny mental effects of injured psyches through tropes of ghosts, zombies and ghouls.[8] Hasford draws extensively on this literary tradition in *The Phantom Blooper* to represent the damaged Joker's return home.

Published in 1990, on the eve of the First Gulf War, as the United States was entering into a collective war fever fueled by a concerted effort on the part of the military and Bush administrations to "kick the Vietnam syndrome" (by which was meant the salutary caution about military interventions that had emerged after the defeat in Vietnam), the novel could not have arrived at a worse time. Out of sync with its jingoistic nation, *The Phantom Blooper* had little impact despite its mostly favorable reviews.[9] Though now largely overlooked and forgotten, Hasford's novel is among the most original and powerful literary texts to emerge from the Vietnam War. With its unforgettable language, its unflinching look at American failings at home and abroad, framed in terms of a critique of racial capitalism, its empathy for the Vietnamese nationalist cause, and its unique blend of bitter black humor and gothic satire, *The Phantom Blooper* is the most trenchant critical analysis of the war in literary form to date.

Reading Hasford's sequel in the light of *Full Metal Jacket* reveals the extent to which Kubrick strays from the original purpose of Hasford's work, as Hasford tries to retrieve the story from the adventure mode and steer it back into a critical mode through irony and horror. *The Phantom Blooper* is also a fitting way to end this book because Hasford engages with the John Wayne myth inaugurated by *Sands of Iwo Jima* more pointedly than any other writer. After *Full Metal Jacket* inadvertently retraces the footsteps of the earlier film, transforming Cowboy's death into a version of Sgt. Stryker's death by sniper, and the last scene into a comic, Mickey Mouse-themed, replay of the soldiers walking into the fog to continue the war, Hasford clearly intends to undo the John Wayne myth once and for all, revealing the horror underneath the bluster (adventure) and pathos (melodrama).

FULL METAL JACKET (1987)

Stanley Kubrick acquired the rights to Hasford's book in 1982 and spent the next several years talking to Hasford over the phone before finally hiring Michael Herr as screenwriter and shooting the film just outside of London.[10] Later, the three men clashed as Kubrick, with Herr's support, tried to give Hasford a mere "additional dialogue" credit. Hasford fought and won the right to be listed as a full-fledged screenwriter. The initial result of this collaborative effort was a treatment that ends with Joker's death and funeral, quite different from the final film's alive and victorious Joker. Although the ending of the story is important in terms of the transformation of the film from anti-war horror to adventure story, the change in the ending is only the tip of the iceberg. The addition of prostitutes, the rock soundtrack, and the training sequences accompanied by jaunty cadences all helped to shift the ideological and emotional impact of the narrative from a critical to a seductive register.

Several scholars have closely examined Kubrick's adaptation of Hasford's novel. An article by Thomas Doherty in 1988 already notes the transformation of the narrative from Hasford's "subversive" and "bitter" novel to Kubrick's "more . . . affirmative" film.[11] Along with Pauline Kael of *The New York Times,* who credits the novel with an "accumulating force of horror" that the film lacks, Doherty is one of the few to be troubled by the softening of the story.[12] Yet although he uses the word "genre" in the title of his review, he actually does not discuss the film's generic affiliations at all. This is precisely what is often missing from the toolbox of critics who want to get a handle on how the story changes: the shift in tone, ideology and affect which are all produced, as I argue, by the change in narrative genre. This chapter—like this book more generally—aims to re-stock that toolbox.

Two other scholars discuss this adaptation at some length: in 1998 Susan Jeffords ended her study of the "remasculinization" of American culture with a comparison of the novel and film, arguing that the film returns to traditional gender positions that the novel had successfully complicated and nuanced.[13] A decade later, Greg Jenkins published a hagiographic study of the adaptation, whose main purpose was to show Kubrick's artistry and skill in transforming what Jenkins called an "underwritten and unbelievable novel" into a "raw and beautifully measured film: a compelling rhetorical emblem of a troubled time."[14] Neither Jeffords or Jenkins pays much attention to the horror elements of the narrative, and neither has any sense of the book or film belonging to any genre besides war narrative. The following discussion intends to add that missing dimension to these discussions and to examine Kubrick's adaptation in terms of its changes to the ideological and emotional affordances of Hasford's original narrative.

Halfway between the novel and the final film lies the first screenplay completed by Kubrick and Herr in 1985, before Hasford officially joined the project during the shoot. This treatment, available online on a Kubrick-devoted website, shows the evolution of the story at an intermediate point.[15] The most dramatic change to the novel, dropping its third chapter, has already been incorporated. But the conflation of the two sniper scenes has not happened yet, and there are two separate scenes, though significantly different from the novel, one in which Doc Jay dies but Animal Mother rescues Alice, and a second one in which Cowboy is shot.

The most striking difference between the intermediary treatment and the final version is the ending. In the original screenplay, Joker dies and is buried at home, in a pathos-filled funeral scene during which his diaries are read much like Striker's unfinished letter is read in *Sands of Iwo Jima*.[16] In an uncanny circling back to *Sands of Iwo Jima's* paternal melodrama, it is Joker's father who reads Joker's diary "with tears streaming down his face," and ends with a poem by A.E. Housman, which transforms Joker's death into a willing self-sacrifice: "Here we lie . . . Because . . . We did not choose . . . To shame the land . . . From which we sprung."[17]

In addition to this melodramatic ending, the treatment retains more horror than the final version. There is more violence in the training camp, a second suicide attempt (by a recruit named Perkins who slashes his wrists), a helicopter scene in which Arvin soldiers throw prisoners out the window and are shot by Joker in retribution, and the sniper is decapitated by Animal Mother who holds up her head to the others before tossing it away (recalling the Medusa imagery Cavarero identifies with the origins of horror).[18] In contrast, the final version has scrapped the sad ending and replaced most of these horror elements with adventure motifs.

The omission of the third chapter of the novel sets the tone for this transformation. This is the nightmarish final chapter set during the siege of Khe Sahn which portrays the war as a Dantesque quagmire and ends with the agonizing mercy killing by Joker of Cowboy. Instead of this bleak anti-climax, situated in an apocalyptic landscape of uncanny fusions between terrifying weaponry, machine-like men and a wasted environment, the film substitutes a traditional adventure formula ending: the best friend is killed by a cruel sniper during the battle of Hue, the hero and his cohorts vow revenge and hunt the sniper down and successfully kill him (actually *her*, in this case). In the original treatment, Cowboy calls for his mother and asks "Why me?" but the final version has replaced this gesture toward vulnerability with a conventionally stoic adventure-mode death scene: Cowboy bravely affirms "I can hack it" as he draws his last breath.[19] This version leaves no doubt that the nineteen-year-old boy has successfully been made into a man before he died. The squad surrounds

Figure 7.1   In a Scene Added to the Story by Kubrick and Herr, Joker (Matthew Modine) Negotiates with a Saigon Prostitute for Sex Immediately after a Jump Cut from Leonard's Suicide. The Addition of Two Prostitute Scenes Helped to Shift the Film from a Horror to an Adventure Mode. Screenshot by Author, *Full Metal Jacket*.

him as he dies in Joker's arms in a pietà-like position that seamlessly combines the adventure-mode death with a melodramatic one.

Another key change introduced by Kubrick in the final film version was to make Joker a sympathetic and sane character with whom the audience can identify. In the novel, Joker is a far more unreliable and troubled protagonist who commits at least one war crime and who gradually loses his mind and his soul as the novel progresses (especially after his friend Rafter Man is run over by an American tank and he is knocked unconscious in a mortar attack). Even in the original treatment, the darkness of Joker is preserved in the scene where he shoots allied ARVN soldiers in cold blood to punish them for pushing prisoners out of an airborne helicopter. This scene is not quite as disturbing as when Joker tells us in *The Short-Timers* that he killed an innocent farmer for no reason at all but it does serve to drive home Hasford's point that Joker has been made into a hardened killer.[20]

In contrast, the film's Joker (played by the cute Matthew Modine, previously starring as the boy victim-hero of Alan Parker's war melodrama, *Birdy*) is made into the moral center of the narrative. Chaos unfolds around him but he keeps his wits and his heart in the right place, weeping for his best friend but nevertheless executing the sniper in an act of mercy. Joker is not only nice but he is a wielder of righteous violence, the kind that American audiences enjoy most, that is, violence fused with moral purpose. In killing the girl sniper, Joker both avenges his friend and puts her out of her misery,

appearing successfully transformed at once into both a hard man and a good one. This is the allure of the adventure genre, overwriting a successful rite of passage structure on what Hasford intended to be a scathing deconstruction of the myth that war makes boys into men.[21]

The death of the sniper (played by Ngoc Le) is a scene that has garnered much critical attention. For some critics it represents Kubrick's brilliant and feminist subversion of war clichés.[22] However, not only is this scene already present in *The Short-Timers,* the young female soldier is of a piece with Hasford's overall respect for the Vietnamese anti-American resistance, which he saw as anticolonial, democratic and egalitarian. The novel details how resourceful the Vietnamese were despite their poverty and how dedicated they were to a cause they believed just. In order to highlight this, in the novel he describes the girl sniper's home-made hand grenades (made from Coca-Cola cans), tube of rice and "knife for cleaning fish," emphasizing the fact that she is more like the ideal frontier hero, able to live off the land and construct her own weapons, than the Americans she is fighting. This detailed description of the girl sniper is also in the original screenplay.[23]

In striking contrast, in the final film version, the female sniper becomes simply another uncanny face of an anonymous Oriental enemy. It is conceivable—given the polysemic nature of visual narrative—to see this scene as a subversion of the male world of combat. However, the details about her resourcefulness and self-sufficiency are effectively lost in the final version and her femaleness is not nearly as subversive as it may seem. It is in fact a common convention of the adventure mode that the enemy be actually female or feminized in some way. As Adriana Cavarero points out, the original enemy in the horror adventure tale is the Medusa.[24] In Kubrick's film, the fact that the enemy is a girl makes her harder and more unsettling to execute, but it does not fundamentally destabilize the masculinity of the protagonists or disrupt the film's adventure logic of pleasure in violence. After the sniper kills several secondary characters, Joker and his side-kick Rafter Man (Kevyn Major-Howard) hunt her down and shoot her, avenging Cowboy (Arliss Howard) in the process, and the film ends on a distinctly upbeat mood as they sing the Mickey Mouse Club theme song while walking away.[25]

Kubrick makes other changes to this scene that soften the critical intent of the novel. For instance, in the book, Rafter Man is initially elated after his first kill but then sees his own grin in a mirror and is caught up short and walks away silently, troubled by the pleasure he has taken in killing. In the film, Rafter Man's elation is not made problematic in any way, neither to him nor for the audience. In fact, in an interview with *Rolling Stone Magazine* in 1987, Kubrick talks about his interest in capturing "post combat euphoria."[26] By itself, with no distance or critical intent, post-combat euphoria is a feature of the adventure genre; it speaks of the pleasure in killing. Patrick Webster,

in his book on Kubrick's films, notes that "one consistent theme" in nearly all of them "was that of men killing other men and the pleasure derived from so doing."[27] Thus, Kubrick's final take on the sniper scene is to focus on the pleasure of destroying her but without making this pleasure into an object of critical scrutiny or questioning. In contrast, in Hasford's book, Animal Mother cuts off her head and Alice cuts off a finger to get her ring, thus highlighting the way in which American soldiers dismember her body and annihilate her humanity. Hasford is trying to show that American soldiers were made into monsters by their training, and invites the reader to be disturbed by what we have allowed them to become. In the film, however, the character Donlon simply says, "Hard-core, man. Fucking hard-core" to Joker, in what seems like admiration of his toughness in being able to shoot her point-blank in the face.[28] The troubling mutilation and trophy-taking are deleted and the scene cuts away immediately to the jubilant retreat and Micky Mouse theme song.

In short, the film ends with a happy ending: a mission accomplished. Critics have argued that the infantile nature of the song at the end ironically undermines the ending and suggests the men are not fully matured, but this is to take "coming of age" trope too literally.[29] In the adventure mode, "coming of age" can also mean simply no longer being inexperienced—and being "blooded" (having killed) is the "experience" that counts most. In this logic, both Rafter Man and Joker have successfully come of age at the end and are rightfully gleeful about having killed the sniper who shot their friends, still being alive and being "short" (close to the end of their tour of duty). Joker's bitter reflections in the novel about never being able to go home again are gone and instead a happy Joker contemplates his return from the border back to what Marvin and Ingles call the "fertile center," the home associated with women and sex, in his monologue about "the things I will do after I rotate back to the World, which inevitably means erect-nipple wet dreams of Mary Jane Rottencrotch and the Great Homecoming Fuck Fantasy."[30] This speech had appeared in the original screenplay as a monologue much earlier in the film as the squad patrols Hue. Now these are the final words of the film, locating it squarely in the adventure mode, instead of the bleak retreat of the novel (pitched the horror mode) and the weepy funeral scene of the original screenplay (melodrama).

The change to the ending reveals much about the disparate visions Hasford and Kubrick each had of the project. Hasford's cousin, Jason Aaron, wrote in an article after his death that Kubrick and Hasford argued explicitly about the ending, with Kubrick trying to find what he considered a "satisfying ending" and Hasford telling him, "But Stanley . . . the Vietnam War bloody well wasn't satisfying," to which Kubrick answered, "Right, but they made you go . . . while we've got to convince people to pay to see this movie."[31] This quarrel highlights the tension between Hasford's desire to remain faithful to

the Vietnam War as he had experienced it and Kubrick's desire to produce a viable commercial product, and this remains a significant pattern in the difference between Vietnam war *writing* and Vietnam war *film-making*. Most veteran writers were motivated by a desire to tell their "truth" of the war, while Vietnam cinema is forced by the nature of its business model to be an entertainment product rather than a testimonial.[32]

Another major change in the genre coding of the book during the adaptation is the absence of body horror in the film. Horror, as I have defined it, concerns graphic depictions of violated bodies, including dismemberment and the exposure of the insides of the human body. Hasford has several key scenes of such body horror, including the extremely graphic deaths of Leonard, Rafter Man and Cowboy. Kubrick's film rewrites the story so that Rafter Man lives and Cowboy dies at the hands of the sniper, keeping only Leonard's suicide. The representation of these two remaining deaths is quite different, though. In the case of Cowboy, as mentioned above, instead of being castrated by the sniper and then his head blown open by Joker, he is shot in the chest (like Stryker) and dies bravely, repeating "I can hack it." Cowboy's death leaves his body intact and his defiant last words leave his military masculinity intact. According to the classic melodramatic pathos & action formula described by Linda Williams, his death has agency and motivates the remaining men to unite in hunting down his killer, temporarily solving a conflict that had emerged from the start between Animal Mother and Joker. The only body horror in this last part of the film are the slow-motion shots of Alice and Doc Jay being shot by the sniper, which are represented not so much by bodily dismemberment as by spraying blood. However, since these deaths are immediately revenged by the shooting of the sniper—also in satisfying slow motion—followed by her execution by Joker, there is no lingering sense of defeat in the film as in the novel.

The scene of Leonard's suicide is in many respects more shocking and more memorably gory than the later scenes just described, partly because it happens to a character we have come to know and partly because the suicide is depicted on screen, with blood spraying the wall behind him. It is also undeniably the scariest moment in the film, with D'Onofrio playing the unhinged Leonard with diabolical genius. However, the film does not linger on this moment, unlike the novel, with its hallucinations of spiders and werewolves. Instead, the film jump-cuts to Vietnam. In the original screenplay by Kubrick and Herr, the next scene is of a military movie theatre where Marines are watching John Wayne's *The Green Berets* ("a Hollywood soap opera about the love of guns") and laughing, as in Hasford's novel.[33] The final version uses an even more jarring jump-cut, to a street scene in Danang, with the camera following a prostitute from behind as she approaches Joker and Rafter Man to the sound of Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for

Walkin.'"[34] In practical terms, the audience is not given any time to process or reflect on Leonard's suicide, and it seems to have had no impact on Joker, as we see a relaxed Joker confidently negotiating for sex.[35] In other words, there is no sign of any trauma or after-effects from Leonard's death on Joker in the film, while the novel presents an increasingly violent, dangerous and self-alienated Joker. Instead, the jump-cut establishes a close connection between witnessing death and the purchasing of sex, jumping from a scene of violence to a scene of sexuality, which is a formula of the adventure genre (added by Kubrick and Herr, without Hasford's input).

The meaning of the suicide is also drastically different in the film than from the novel, largely due to the way Leonard's character has been changed from weakling to overweight simpleton. While in Hasford's novel, Leonard is a "skinny red-neck" who "can't do anything right" and cries at night, in the film he is drastically overweight (Vincent D'Onofrio had to gain 80 lbs. for the role) and seems almost mentally disabled. In the novel Leonard's madness is an extreme form of craziness that all the recruits share to some extent (other recruits speak to their rifles, for instance), whereas in the film Leonard is portrayed as an exception to the rule, an outlier who is driven mad by the betrayal of Joker and the platoon rather than the abusive treatment he receives at the drill instructor's hands. Kubrick omits the scenes of face-in-the-toilet drownings, beatings and other physical abuse and instead shows Joker caring for Leonard like a mother, given wide berth to try to help him learn. As a result, Leonard's madness does not seem to be caused by basic training at all (as it is in Hasford, evidenced by the other suicide attempt), but by his own inability to control his bodily appetites (and Kubrick adds the donut scene to make Leonard look more guilty). This completely subverts Hasford's point that it is basic training itself that begins to drive the recruits insane, and that Leonard is only a more extreme version of what has happened to all of them.

The character that changes the most in the journey to the screen—and who is instrumental in shifting the narrative from cautionary horror to militaristic adventure—is the drill instructor. First of all, almost all the violence of the novel's character Gerheim is omitted from the film's depiction of Hartman (as he is named in the film, played by Lee Ermey). There are only some slaps and punches and Hartman briefly choking Leonard on the first day. The verbal abuse remains quite similar to the novel but comes across differently on screen: funnier and wittier, almost poetic. This is because Ermey's character is charismatic and dominates the scenes in which he is present. The choice of actor for Hartman was another quarrel between Kubrick and Hasford, who wanted to hire his friend Dye Dale, a retired Marine Corps captain who served as technical advisor for Oliver Stone in *Platoon*. Instead Kubrick initially hired another actor but then switched to Lee Ermey, a former Marine drill instructor and initially the technical advisor to *Full Metal Jacket*, whom

Hasford disliked for his militarist views. In Ermey's hands, Hartman becomes a colorful but attractive character, a tough instructor who wants the best for his recruits. If in the novel Gerheim is explicitly described by Joker as *not* being one of those "I'm-only-rough-on-um-because-I-love-um" figures in Hollywood movies, in Kubrick's film that's exactly what he becomes.

Anticipating the testimony of veterans like Swofford and Rocke, Lee Ermey claimed in a 2006 interview that he received "nothing but compliments" from the Marine Corps about his performance, and that "even today, seventeen years later, there's not a day goes by on the base but what at least one person doesn't come up and tell me I'm the reason they're in the Marine Corps. *Full Metal Jacket* was their motivation."[36] This extraordinary claim, if even partly true, shows that something changed drastically between Hasford's bitter depiction of Parris Island as a "suburban death camp" and the training sequence in Kubrick's film. I would argue that several key factors intervened, all of which contributed to shifting the genre and consequently the politics of the film. The first is that Lee Ermey was a devoted military man, what Hasford called "a fucking pogue lifer" (his term for career officers).[37] Ermey plays the part in a way that suggests that he has his recruits' success at heart, gradually scaling back the abuse, gradually adding moments of approval and encouragement, in a way that transforms the training sequence into an attractive rite of passage.

An even more important reason the training sequence comes across as a recruiting ad instead of a devastating critique is the way Kubrick aestheticized it, not just with the sunsets and backlighting, but especially with the music. "Jodies" are the Marine Corps' term for the marching chants or "cadence calls" used during training and especially during drill, marches and runs. These are highly rhythmic songs that tend to express either complaints about the military or celebrate its values over civilian life, discuss sexual activities of various kinds, or imagine combat and violence, in nursery rhyme lyrics and maximum offensiveness.[38] The famous example of a jody that everyone remembers from the film is the scene in the barracks when recruits march back and forth, singing "This is my rifle, this is my gun, this is for fighting, this is for fun," apparently a common one used by various services.[39] There are many other moments in this first part of the film where we see the recruits marching or running while singing together, often in a call and response format with the drill instructor leading the call.

I would argue that these many scenes of rhythmic activity, depicting what William McNeill calls "muscular bonding," moving together in time to the sound of infectious melodies, is why so many young male viewers respond to the film as if it were a recruiting vehicle.[40] The scenes of drilling and marches that we witness are all catchy and relatively attractive exercises of modern ritualized community, building up *esprit de corps* and discipline, and

AQ: Please expand Rocke, "10 Things." at first occurrence in note 36.

integrating each recruit into a well-synchronized group. We can note that all the scenes in which the recruits are singing show them to be moving success-fully as one body. In fact, it is obvious from the way the film presents the training sequence that everyone is successfully integrated and trained, even (finally) Leonard. As McNeill argues, "moving big muscles together and chanting, singing, or shouting rhythmically" is a powerful source of emo-tional arousal, triggering a "sense of pervasive well-being" and a "strange sense of personal enlargement" that has been at the heart of human society and community bonding since the emergence of modern humans.[41] According to scholars like Robert Bellah and Terence Deacon, ritual is the motor of human sociability and religion, and collective repetition is its foundation.[42]

Apart from the training sequence, the musical soundtrack effects other major changes to the tone and genre of the film (in contrast to the novel). This soundtrack is composed of six country, pop and rock songs from the 1960s, including "Woolly Bully" by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs, "Surfin' Bird" by the Trashmen, and "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" by Nancy Sinatra (mentioned earlier). The rhetorical effect of these songs can be complex, as in the opening scene, where recruits are shaved to the sound of "Hello Vietnam" by Johnny Wright, a pro-war country song meant to signal that they are in a military barbershop, listening to music associated with career military offi-cers (as opposed to the rock listened to by the soldiers), and which is gener-ally taken to be an ironic moment (contrasting the syrupy patriotic sentiments of the lyrics with the violence that will follow).[43]

When asked about the rock music soundtrack in a *Rolling Stone* interview, Kubrick revealed that his true interest in the film was the adventure-oriented issue of pleasure in killing. Like Herr, Kubrick was fascinated with the way that soldiers could enjoy violence:

> What I love about the music in that scene is that it suggests post combat eupho-ria—which you see in the marine's face when he fires at the men running out of the building: he misses the first four, waits a beat, then hits the next two. And that great look on his face, that look of euphoric pleasure, the pleasure one has read described in so many accounts of combat. So he's got this look on his face, and suddenly the music starts and the tanks are rolling and the marines are mop-ping up. The choices weren't arbitrary.[44]

Kubrick claims that he's simply showing something that is "described in so many accounts of combat," but in depicting soldiers killing to the sound of rock music he is also creating aesthetic and emotional connections in viewers between the pleasure of violence and the pleasure of shooting human targets.

The most important function of this music, however, is to signal to the audience that the film is meant to be entertaining and fun, and so to distance

the spectator from the historical and political dimensions of the film in favor of a nostalgic immersion. David James argues that the sixties rock and roll soundtrack, which has become a convention since *Coming Home* (1978), is "essential to formal strategies that, since the late seventies, have made representation of the invasion [of Vietnam] pleasurable and hence financially feasible."[45] As we saw above, the making of a commercially viable product was a priority for Kubrick, and so the adding of music to accompany the fighting during the Tet offensive (the Dixie Cups' "Chapel of Love") and the fighting at Hue ("Woolly Bully") is entirely in keeping with this agenda.[46] The pleasurable aspect is linked to the way music can make the spectator feel "less critical" and more emotionally in tune with the film, a function that is "inflected by rock's specific musical properties—its rhythmic simplicity and energy, for example."[47] This can work in patterns of "parallelism, irony, or synergy" with the images and story. In Kubrick's case, James argues, the "low-grade forms of rock" such as "Woolly Bully" are used to "denigrate" the military actions shown on screen and create an atmosphere of "sardonic nihilism" which is perfectly in keeping with the postmodern depoliticization of the Vietnam War that Neilson has documented and which I discussed in chapter 5.[48]

Finally, one last important addition to the story that Kubrick introduces and which is crucial for converting Hasford's anti-war horror and irony into adventure is the use of prostitute scenes. These are wholly alien to the spirit

Figure 7.2   Cowboy Dies in a Pietà-Like Position, in Joker's Arms, Surrounded by the Members of His Squad, Defiantly Saying "I can hack it," Creating a Perfect Hybrid of Melodrama and Adventure Genre Conventions. Screenshot by Author, *Full Metal Jacket,* 1987.

of Hasford's book, and they unequivocally push the film into a sexy and glamorous register that the novel does not have. Prostitution during wartime is a tired cliché but one that is crucial to maintaining the fiction that war is a fun adventure for men and a kind of rite of passage. The film has two such scenes, both of which have been the subject of much critical commentary. One involves Joker negotiating the price of sex for himself and Rafter Man while Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" plays in the background. This is the first Vietnam scene, establishing it as a site of sex and criminality (as Rafter Man is robbed of his camera). The other scene, later in the film, involves a negotiation of price as well as a dialogue about whether the African American character named Eightball (originally "Alice" in the novel and treatment, played by Dorian Harewood) has a penis that is too large for the Vietnamese girl (played by Leanne Hong) to accept. Densely packed with racial and sexual clichés which are only partly undone (the girl inspects him and decides he's not "too boo-coo" or "too much" in French), both scenes serve to reinforce the adventure mode formula of a war-zone being a place of both violence and sex: death leavened by pleasure.[49] In fact, the first prostitution scene, with the prostitute repeating "me so horny" and "me love you long time," is credited with being the origin of a musical genre called "porno rap."[50] In short, Kubrick's added prostitute scenes not only changed the meaning and impact of Hasford's story but contributed to what has been called the "pornification" of popular culture.[51]

To sum up, *Full Metal Jacket* uses elements of the adventure genre, plus adding music and sex, in a way that makes combat appear attractive and which helped the film be commercially successful. Critics have tended to assume Kubrick is an anti-war director because his film *Paths of Glory* was a denunciation of WWI abuses of soldiers, the arrogance of generals, and the execution of cowards and deserters. A careful analysis of the earlier film reveals that *Paths of Glory* is not anti-war in any general sense either, but critical of certain abuses of military authority. Similarly, *Full Metal Jacket* is not an anti-war film, but a rather conventional portrait of the failures of the Vietnam War from the American side, including mendacious public relations and disinformation campaigns, underestimation of the enemy (during the Tet Offensive, for example), and the perennial military cliché of arrogant and out-of-touch officers. Like many commercially successful directors, Kubrick mastered the art of brilliantly balanced ambivalence and strategic ambiguity, so that every spectator finds something to reinforce the assumptions and political views they have going into the film. In fact, Lee Ermey claimed in 2006 that *Full Metal Jacket* was "one of the most influential pictures of all time as far as recruitment goes."[52] In short, the film represents a profound betrayal of Hasford's cautionary tale about the dangers and perversity of American militarism.

HASFORD COUNTERATTACKS: *THE PHANTOM BLOOPER* (1990)

Hasford's sequel to *The Short-Timers* is a continuation of Joker's narrative but also an angry riposte to the deformations of *Full Metal Jacket*. Like the first novel, it is divided into three parts: a relatively short first chapter, "The Winter Soldiers," set in Khe Sahn and picking up where *The Short-Timers* left off. A longer second chapter, "Travels With Charlie," portrays Joker's life in Hoa Binh, a National Liberation Front ("Viet Cong") village where he has been nursed back to health after being shot by New Guy and where he gradually comes to share his captors' views and values, as Hasford did.[53] A final chapter, "The Proud Flesh," named after the particularly tough scar tissue Joker now has on his face and body, is an account of the VA hospital where he recovers in Japan, his experience of a VVAW rally in Los Angeles after his return to the U.S., his visit to Cowboy's parents in Kansas, and finally his uncomfortable return to his own "home" in Alabama.

The book is more ambitious and developed than *The Short*-Timers; it is also more explicit in its politics, especially in its denunciation of the Vietnam War as an imperialist war and a symptom of American cultural and political shortcomings. In this respect, the novel follows the venerable American tradition of the jeremiad, as identified by Sacvan Bercovitch.[54] The moral center of the novel is a character ironically named Black John Wayne, an African American who articulates a neo-Marxist understanding of the Vietnam War and American politics that Joker comes to share. Black John Wayne's analysis of American society is essentially a critique of racial capitalism, the exact mirror opposite to the real John Wayne's racist and reactionary politics. Like the Black Panthers, Black John Wayne sees the war as instigated by a moneyed elite who use poor blacks and whites equally to do their dirty work in Southeast Asia ("They calling you a 'nigger' too, Joker. You just ain't got the word," he says to Joker[55]). Although Joker does not agree with Black John Wayne at first, he realizes in the final pages of the novel that Black John Wayne's analysis of American culture and foreign policy was spot on ("Walking the streets of the town I grew up in, I marvel at Black John Wayne's relentlessly perceptive vision of reality—a vision I had to struggle to attain"[56]). He sees that power is held by the capitalist class of Northern elites, and that the American public is kept in thrall by a culture industry intended to dull and distract it: "Americans are prisoners of their own mythology, having watched too many of their own movies. If they ever want to send Americans to the gas chambers, they won't tell us we're going to take showers, they'll herd us into cinder-block movie houses," Joker muses bitterly after coming home.[57]

In its desire to articulate a sustained critique of the United States and its war in Vietnam, *The Phantom Blooper* returns to the use of body horror that

characterized *The Short-Timers*. This includes an acknowledgment of the vast range of injuries and damage that the U.S. has inflicted on the Vietnamese people and their land (such as mutant animals in the jungle, deformed babies, people with scars and mutilations due to American bombs or torture at the hands of the South Vietnamese forces). In one such scene, Joker describes a Vietnamese forest "that is too dead even to smell dead," where "the trunks and branches of the trees are warped by unnatural cancerous growths that look like human faces and human hands and human fingers growing out of decaying wood." This forest is full of "monsters, freaks and mutants," such as a "water rat with two heads" and "a bird with extra feet coming out of its back."[58] In addition to the scars on the land, animals and people, the novel has three key scenes of body horror, each of which can be linked to a specific critique of Kubrick's film: first, involving the character of Joker, second, addressing the question of prostitution, and third, a bitter refusal of Kubrick's stereotyped vision of the Vietnamese people.

The first section of the novel is about Joker in Khe Sahn, in which Hasford shows that his protagonist is not the kind and cuddly Mathew Modine of Kubrick's film but a violent madman. The novel opens with Joker in a rainy trench, naked except for Cowboy's Stetson and boots, "scuttling like a crab" and impersonating a "Parris Island drill instructor" as he yells military-themed nonsense slogans into the night: "LISTEN UP, MAGGOT!", "DAMN THE TORPEDOES, FULL SPEED AHEAD!" and "SEND MORE CONG!"[59] His audience is the Phantom Blooper, a mysterious sniper alleged to be a former Marine, now converted to the Viet Cong cause, who has been shooting men on the base each night. The Phantom Blooper is a mythical figure, described by Joker at one point as "the dark spirit of our collective bad conscience made real and dangerous," a character who is never seen but whose actions have tangible consequences in the number of Marines he has shot through the wire.[60] As a larger-than-life symbol for defection and conversion, the Phantom Blooper is Joker's obsession at the beginning of the novel, as he spends nights trying to lure him out and hunt him, but in a twist of poetic irony Joker ends up becoming the Phantom Blooper himself.[61]

Joker's initial desire to kill the Phantom Blooper leads him to use a fellow Marine as live bait to draw the Blooper's fire and thus identify his position. As the Kid From Brooklyn, who is clearly mad, blithely scavenges North Vietnamese stamps for his stamp collection from enemy corpses just outside the wire, Joker calls for illumination rounds (probably a mischievous allusion to Herr's *Dispatches*, which includes a chapter titled "Illumination Rounds"), exposing the Kid From Brooklyn and making him a "perfect target" for the sniper.[62] Joker justifies his reckless behavior by quoting Sergeant Gerheim in a series of unhinged and fatalistic aphorisms: "Blood makes the grass

grow," "Dying, that's what we're here for," "We're only cheap live bait," and "Impaled on an Asian hook, wiggling until we draw fire and die."[63]

The Phantom Blooper thus begins with Joker essentially murdering a damaged and defenseless fellow soldier. The illumination rounds go up and Joker narrates that "one M-79 blooper fragmentation grenade hits the Kid From Brooklyn and the Kid From Brooklyn does a very bad impression of John Kennedy campaigning in Dallas and in silent slow motion the Kid From Brooklyn's head dissolves into a cloud of pink mist and then *bam* and the Kid From Brooklyn falls in pieces all over the area, killed in action and wasted, shot dead and slaughtered."[64] The passage is striking not only for its use of body horror conventions (the dissolving head, pink spray and pieces of flesh) but also the insistent repetition of terms used for the boy's death ("falls in pieces . . . killed in action and wasted, shot dead and slaughtered"). In this way, the writing draws attention to its own language and specifically to Joker's strategies of distantiation from his murder of the Kid From Brooklyn, including humor (the grim joke about Kennedy) and redundancy, all of which suggest that Joker repeats himself because he doesn't fully grasp the import of what he's doing. He's a classic unreliable narrator: reporting facts but not understanding their meaning. He knows he's killed the Kid From Brooklyn but he clearly cannot feel anything about it.

The passage then continues in pure body horror mode: "The Kid From Brooklyn's headless body is a contorted blob of wax in the ghost light of the illumination flare. One arm gone. One arm converted to pulp. Legs bent too far and in the wrong directions. Ribs curving up incredibly white from inside a glistening black cavity which, as though on fire, is steaming."[65] This description of the body dismembered and turned inside out recalls the description of Cowboy's death in the earlier novel, and is typical of battlefield horror as disenchanting spectacle. Clearly crazy, Joker reports this death with no comment and no emotion, except that "a shadow" walked across his "field of fire," suggesting that the Phantom Blooper is nearby, but since Joker is too frightened to fire, his sacrifice of the Kid From Brooklyn's life becomes a pointless waste.

In addition to this obvious murder, there is one other scene in this first chapter meant to drive home the fact that Joker is "dinky dau," or "crazy" in American military slang from the war. The section narrates a civil war within the base, between careerist officer Beaver Cleaver and Black John Wayne, the African American sergeant who is mutinously refusing to follow Cleaver's orders and risk his men's lives on pointless missions outside the perimeter (pointless because the base is scheduled to be evacuated within days). Although Joker is not politically in sync with the radical Black John Wayne at this point, he is nevertheless intuitively on Black John Wayne's side. Beaver Cleaver represents everything that Joker (and Hasford) hates about career

officers: he is cowardly, deceitful, corrupt, opportunistic, careless with other men's lives, and is suspected to have murdered a fellow officer who was liked by the other men. In addition, Cleaver trades ammunition to the Viet Cong in exchange for heroin, which he distributes to addicted Marines, and runs a brothel with under-aged mixed-race prostitutes.

Joker has every reason to dislike Beaver Cleaver, yet his behavior during the showdown between Cleaver and Black John Wayne still manages to startle and remind readers that Joker is not a character we are meant to identify with in any way, as we would in an adventure story. For example, when the standoff between Wayne and Cleaver disintegrates into a fight, Joker has Cleaver overpowered and cuts his tongue: "I pull the razor and the blue blade slices smoothly through the Beaver's tongue an inch deep, splitting the tip. Blood squirts out with such force that it shoots all the way across the bunker and splatters in a shiny wet pattern across the gray wall of sandbags."[66] As much as the reader is invited to dislike the opportunistic and cowardly Beaver Cleaver, we can see that Joker's casual violence crosses a line even for stressed-out Marines. Between his murder of the Kid From Brooklyn and his mutilation of Beaver Cleaver, Joker is acting pretty crazy. In fact, he has become a something of a sadist, or a sociopath, with no empathy or compassion. When Beaver "whimpers and his eyes beg" Joker callously says "*Sin loi,* Beaver—tough shit. Be advised, mercy is not what I do best."[67] In this way, Hasford drives home the fact that Joker is not a protagonist that we are meant to admire or like. He is not a cute Matthew Modine., guiding us through the madness of war. He is an unpredictable and troubled victim-villain of the war, hard and homicidal: both a casualty and a killer.

If Joker is meant to be understood as dangerously mad, he is by no means a lone exception. Several soldiers at Khe Sahn are described as having been driven insane, including the Kid From Brooklyn and to a lesser extent, Daddy D.A., who dry-fires his .45 automatic into his head in his free time. Moreover, the title of the section, "Winter Soldier," referring to the Winter Soldier Investigation into atrocities committed by U.S. Armed forces organized by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (of which Hasford was a member) in 1971, raises the specter of cruelty and sadism—of the kind the unhinged Joker practices in this scene—as a widespread phenomenon in the war. This first section of the novel, in short, makes clear that Joker is a dangerous and disturbed person, one of many acting beyond the law and beyond the limits of humanity. He is definitely not a recruit who been made into a "man" in any recognizable or desirable way.

If the first chapter of the novel is intended to revise the character of Joker away from Kubrick's attractive hero and back to the damaged protagonist of the original novel, the second chapter takes issue with Kubrick's depiction of the Vietnamese as prostitutes, criminals and cruel fanatics (such as the

teenaged sniper). In placing Joker into a Viet Cong village, Hasford projects his American readers into the lives and minds of the National Liberation Front, the feared and hated "VC," and tries to imagine the world of the people that ultimately defeated—at the very least, outlasted—the United States in Vietnam. Unique in Vietnam War literature, Hasford's sympathetic portrait of the Vietnamese insurgency is clearly inspired by Emile De Antonio's *I the Year of the Pig* (1968) for its vision of Vietnam, and by Steinbeck's *Travels with Charlie* (1962), from which Hasford borrows his punning chapter title, for its vision of America.[68] Steinbeck's account of a road trip across the United States with his dog is a lament for the disturbing changes occurring in the America of the early 1960s: a loss of purpose and connection, a rise of racial tensions and bigotry, the emergence of what would later be called "the society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord) and "the culture industry" (Adorno and Horkheimer) and the destruction of the natural environment.[69] These themes all find their way into Hasford's novel and shape the way Joker begins to respect and admire the land-centered nationalism and struggle for self-determination in the Vietnamese farmers and guerrilla fighters he comes to know. Like De Antonio, Hasford compares the Vietnamese struggle for independence to the American Revolution, and like one of the interview subjects in the documentary, he sees Americans as unable to face reality, as blinded by their Puritan origins from being able to take stock lucidly of their mistakes in Vietnam, admit defeat, and recognize the legitimacy of the Vietnamese desire to be free from foreign interference. Hasford describes this disconnection from reality as a matter of believing one's own lies, buying the propaganda propagated by Hollywood films, and preferring fantasy to difficult truths: "In America we lie to ourselves about everything and we believe ourselves every time."[70]

This second chapter, "Travels with Charlie," opens with Joker having already lived in Hoa Binh, "a Viet Cong village somewhere west of Khe Sanh," for over a year.[71] This section depicts his life among the villagers, especially the schoolteacher Song and the elderly Woodcutter, who both also happen to be officers in the National Liberation Front. Song has previously worked as a laundry maid and prostitute at a Marine base while serving as officer in a Viet Cong intelligence unit. Now she runs the school and has taught Joker Vietnamese, integrating him fully in the agricultural, political and military rhythms of the village and the insurgency. The transition from the insanity of the Khe Sahn chapter to the calm and focused life of the resistance is startling at first. Not only is it the only time (that I have been able to find) that an American veteran writer has tried to imagine the worldview and complex humanity of the Vietnamese guerrilla movement, it marks a departure for Hasford from his usual hard-boiled and bitter tone. Instead, it is both rhetorically complex and deliberately romanticized. It begins with an

ironically exaggerated image of the village like a tourist resort: "The Viet Cong schoolhouse is a spacious building of hand-made yellow bricks like a sunny resort villa in a Tahitian paradise." Hasford then reminds readers of the colonial history of Vietnam (like Tahiti for that matter): "There's a small courtyard off to one side where French colonial officials used to sit and drink fancy drinks and tell jokes beneath canvas canopies."[72] In a slightly sentimental touch that offers ironic contrast to the violence of the earlier chapter, Hasford paints a portrait of a revolutionary society focused on its most precious resource, namely its future: "Today the courtyard is full of laughing children" preparing for their afternoon nap as Joker and Song repair a courtyard wall that has been damaged during the night by a short-round, an artillery shell that missed its target and fell accidently on Hoa Binh. The scene is both idyllic and uncannily permeated by reminders of the war. Some of the children cry when they see Joker, a white American, a reminder that U.S. servicemen routinely terrorize Vietnamese civilians. But most villagers have gotten used to Joker after a year of his captivity and "rehabilitation" when the chapter opens.

Joker initially plans to only pretend to convert until he finds an opportunity to escape but discovers that he is so impressed with the dignity, determination and courage of the Liberation Front fighters and their cause that he gradually adopts their struggle as his own. In this respect, Hasford allows Joker to represent his own sympathy for the Vietnamese cause. In a letter to a friend, Hasford wrote, "Stanley and I still do not agree on several points, particularly on how to portray the Viet Cong. I think they are heroic and humane people and I'm glad they won. Stanley sees them as buck-toothed Japs left over from old John Wayne movies, who were out to spread the red blob of monolithic Communism across the face of the earth . . . not exactly a situation that results in a satisfying compromise."[73] Hasford has Joker, as unreliable narrator, filled with presumptions like Kubrick's, wake up in the village the first day expecting "a bucktoothed Jap officer wearing bifocals with lenses thicker than Coke bottle glass, a samurai sword in one hand and a bouquet of burning bamboo shoots in the other" to torture him. Instead, his captor Song says to him, "We do not torture. We criticize."[74] Of course, Hasford is aware that he is painting an unusually romanticized portrait, an exaggeration that scarcely compensates for the many vicious portraits of the Vietnamese as cruel savages populating American accounts of the war, and adds a passage explaining that if Joker were sent to the Hanoi Hilton it is quite likely he would be tortured.[75]

Nevertheless, Hasford found it important to present the Vietnamese as reasonable people fighting for a cause that Americans could easily understand if they could just look beyond their fearful caricatures of communist fanatics. Like De Antonio, Hasford emphasizes the sense of solidarity and coherent

purpose shared by the Vietnamese involved in the revolutionary cause, sharing the tactical and planning work equally among men and women, and sustained by a deep conviction that the U.S. forces are essentially invaders, the latest in a series of colonial oppressors. Countering the U.S. image of an ignorant or brainwashed population manipulated by cruel Communist fanatics, Hasford shows the South Vietnamese people as aware of their colonial history, lucid about the corruption of the Saigon authorities, deeply respectful of the experience and political vision of Ho Chi Minh, and both armed and active in the revolutionary cause, which they see as their own, not as imposed by the North. Hasford even includes a scene in which a North Vietnamese soldier recounts his journey to the South along the Ho Chi Minh trail, taking a figure that the United States tended to regard as some kind of Communist robot, and inviting us to see him as a young man like any other. The young soldier from the North speaks of his fears, of his loss of friends, of his hunger and illness, and reveals a humanity that asks the reader to think about the war in Vietnam in a more open-minded way than almost any other novel or memoir of that conflict.[76] The section on Hoa Binh is exaggerated and idealized to the same degree that the section on Khe Sahn is exaggerated and gothicized. Yet just as the hellish depiction of Joker's military base reveals a deeper truth about the misery of having been at Khe Sahn, so does Hasford try with his radically sympathetic portrait of the Southern Vietnamese guerrillas try to depict a deeper truth that most American accounts of the war totally missed, namely, that the Vietnamese guerrillas had a unifying purpose and grassroots support that eventually led them to win the war (with the help of the Northern Vietnamese Army of course) and create a Socialist Republic that exists to this day.

Later in the chapter Joker is trusted on missions, including one to the brothel run by Joker's former superior officer Beaver Cleaver and another Marine named Funny Gunny. This is a crucial scene and a very violent one; it is one the three key scenes of body horror in the novel. For most of the middle chapter, Joker has been observing life in the village and seeing how much the world of Vietnamese farmers resemble the world and values of the rural South that Joker comes from. Joker's mission into the village of Khe Sahn and its more urban setting precipitates a dark turn in the narrative. He learns on this occasion that the girls in this American-run brothel are all under fifteen and the children of French soldiers and American spies from the 1950s, chosen because they look Caucasian.[77] All those who are not simply orphans have been pressed into prostitution by threats to their family or by eliminating uncooperative parents through the Phoenix Program, a now well-known but initially covert U.S. program of kidnapping, torture and assassination of suspected NLF agents and sympathizers, carried out by the CIA, U.S. special operations forces and the South Vietnam security apparatus.

The passage in which "a fireteam of twelve-year-old girls with hammers" nail the Funny Gunny's hands and feet to a tree and then castrate him is the most horrific and hardest to read in this novel. A strawberry blond adolescent named Teen Angel cuts off the Gunny's genitals and stuffs them in his mouth, then sews his mouth shut.[78] As she paints his "crudely sewn lips" with red lipstick, she says to him "bitterly": "You Phoenix . . . I Phoenix *you*!," referring to the clandestine assassination program mentioned above. Like Beaver Cleaver before him, the Funny Gunny pleads for mercy with his eyes, "with the same expression I once saw on the face of a dying girl sniper during the Battle for Hue City," only this time Joker refuses to grant a mercy killing. He dry-fires his pistol at the Gunny once before walking away, once more saying "Be advised, mercy is not what I do best."[79]

As in earlier the scene where Joker cleaves the Cleaver's tongue, we understand as readers that a kind of rough justice is being meted out, but it is so gruesome and extreme that we cannot identify with it. The mutilation of Funny Gunny is presented as the children's "payback" for his treatment of them as pimp. We have seen that when Joker first arrives at the brothel the Gunny says to him, "Go ahead, sir. Pork her eyes out. She's clean. A real round-eye! They're spook kids. Little CIA bastards. We bring 'em in from all over Vietnam. They have to be twelve years old. Younger'n that , can't use 'em; no tits. Now, Tracy's thirteen and just startin' to get a nice little pair of tits on her. And her pussy is as bald as a clam and tight as a vise."[80] The girl is dehumanized and sexually abused, and we are invited to understand the logic of her and her cohort's revenge for the theft of their childhood, their families and their bodies. Nevertheless, the mutilation of the Gunny is uncomfortable to read and testifies to the way that abuse can turn even children into torturers, just as basic training turns young American boys into unflinching killers.

Although as readers we cannot fully condone or applaud the Gunny's torture and death (though some students have told me they can, when I have taught this novel), Hasford forces us to confront the ugly and abusive behind-the-scenes reality of prostitution that lurks behind Kubrick's comic and sexy scene of the Vietnamese woman pitching her wares to Rafter Man and Joker over Nancy Sinatra's song. Similarly, the absurdity of the other prostitute refusing the black soldier because he might be too big, with the pimp's full approval, suggesting that women were agents fully in control of the conditions of their sex work, is also an absurdly romanticized view of wartime prostitution that Hasford insists on demystifying. In short, the brutality of the castration scene is meant to counter-act the naivete and glamorization of wartime prostitution that is created by Kubrick's film and to highlight the violence done to the young women and girls forced into this type of work. The fact that the revenge scene is acted out by the girls themselves is Hasford's way of showing that the brutality of the war could damage the Vietnamese

people and turn them into cruel killers the exact same way that Joker had been turned into a psychopath at the beginning of the novel. The revenge is excessively violent and gruesome, and the fact that it is done by teenaged girls underscores the fact that the U.S. military's transformation of people into monsters spares no one, not even the most vulnerable or innocent members of the civilian population.

This disturbing scene of revenge by the teenaged prostitutes is soon followed by another scene of terrible brutality, the third and last in my series, this one clearly inspired by the My Lai massacre that took place in March of 1968. As is now well-known, an entire village was systematically destroyed by a company of soldiers intent on taking revenge for their own losses. In the course of several hours, between 300 and 500 civilians, including many women and children and elderly people, were herded together, hunted down, and executed. Women and girls as young as ten years old were raped, animals were shot, wells were poisoned, food set on fire, and the village was pretty much destroyed (See Figure 7.3).

Hasford recreates the horror of My Lai in a scene where Joker, who has been spotted by U.S. planes, is "rescued" from his captors. Shortly after Joker returns from the mission to the Khe Sahn brothel, Hoa Binh is first attacked

Figure 7.3   "My Lai Massacre," by Ronald L. Haeberle, Taken on March 16, 1968. The Scene in *The Phantom Blooper* Where Marines Ravage the Village Where Joker Has Been Living in order to "rescue" Him Is Clearly Meant to Recall the Massacre at My Lai, Which Is also Explicitly Referenced in a Later Scene When Joker Visits Cowboy's Parents. (The TIME Life Collection, by Permission from Getty Images.)

from the air and then overrrun by U.S. soldiers whose orders are to "kill everybody and let God sort them out."[81] A soldier walks by with the head of a teenaged girl we have come to know, another familiar character runs by with no hands, and Song herself is lynched, hung naked from a tree (reminiscent of lynchings of African Americans) while "baby-faced grunts laugh wildly as one of them takes out his shiny chrome Zippo lighter and set fire to Song's pubic hair."[82] Joker initially fires back upon the soldiers but is soon injured. Lying on the ground incapacitated, Joker wishes that he could just die and not have to "see this Mickey Mouse murder exhibition," directly referencing Kubrick's happy ending and returning the Mickey Mouse image back to the grim register in which he wrote it in the first novel, when he associated the Mouseketeer ears with a napalmed skull.

The last chapter, titled "The Proud Flesh," set in the United States, also uses horror to examine and criticize aspects of American culture. The objects of horror in this section are mainly the wounded and mutilated veterans in the VA hospital, especially the amputees who "prefer to call themselves 'gimps.'"[83] This section not only contains graphic descriptions of men with injuries but also several gruesome suicides, including a man who swallows his campaign ribbons with caramel candies and then bleeds to death as they cut open his stomach.[84] Another patient called the "Crispy Critter" was burned inside a tank and is charred all over his body and spends the nights "plea bargaining with God" to let him die.[85] A clerk at the hospital has no lips and has to pass feces into a plastic tube that hangs under his arm after someone had "pulled his intestines out and stomped them into the dirt" in Vietnam.[86] If the body horror of Hasford's novel seems heavy-handed at times, bordering on the grotesque, the point is that war not only kills, it annihilates the humanity of survivors, making horror the natural genre for any honest representation of war.

This final catalogue of horror is also meant to remind readers that soldiers are not only killed (like Cowboy in Kubrick's film) or spared (like Joker), but that many are "unlucky enough to get only half-killed," as Joker describes the gimps, "who are pieces of people with brains attached."[87] Joker himself becomes one of the walking wounded, a monster of sorts, but this time not a werewolf (as he was after basic training) but a Frankenstein's monster. The short section of the final chapter that narrates Joker's own wound is written in the second person: "You've got what the doctors call 'proud flesh' all over your face . . . a special kind of scar tissue . . . the toughest kind." With skin from his buttocks grafted onto his face, Joker says about himself, "You look a little like Errol Flynn in Errol Flynn had ever played Frankenstein."[88] As is often the case, black comedy is never too far away from horror, simply because disenchantment finds a natural ally in irony and gallows humor. The use of the second person also signals Joker's mental trauma, just as Ron

Kovic uses the third person to narrate certain chapters of his life in his auto-biography *Born on the Fourth of July.*[89] Both the use of the "you" and the "he" to speak of one's self are narrative techniques to evoke self-alienation and un-resolved emotional injury.

Thus, in *The Phantom Blooper* Hasford imagines Joker beyond combat—wounded both physically and mentally—coming gradually to see the war and the nation that was waging it in a fully disenchanted way, characterized by irony and a distance between reality and the falsely idealized discourse of institutions, media and nationalist myth. That gap—between the ideals associated with military service and the cruel truths of what has happened to Joker and his fellow recruits—is brought into sharp focus in the scene at Cowboy's parents' house in Kansas. The thoroughly exploited myth of the Iwo Jima landing is referenced through a letter from Cowboy that the Ruckers show Joker. Arriving after his death, the letter is printed on Marine Corp stationary, "the cheap stuff they sold in the PX, a blue flagraising-at-Iwo-Jima across the sheet," implying that the mass deaths at Iwo Jima had now become utterly commodified by the Marines Corps.[90] Insisting again upon the destruction visited upon the young men sent to war in the name of American freedom and democracy, who were encouraged to commit war crimes and atrocities on defenseless peasants, Hasford gives to Cowboy's mother a line that had been made famous by the mother of Lt. William Calley after the My Lai massacre: "I sent them a good boy and they made him a murderer."[91] Echoing Mrs. Calley, Mrs. Rucker tells Joker, "I sent them a good Christian boy and they made him into a damned killer."[92] The line does not make sense in terms of the plot since Cowboy's parents would presumably not know much about Cowboy's behavior in Vietnam, especially since he dies there, but Hasford clearly wanted to include it in order to evoke My Lai in juxtaposition to Iwo Jima and to show how radically different the two wars were. If Iwo Jima represents team work and sacrifice in the face of mass death, My Lai has come to signify the massacres of defenseless civilians by unchecked military vigilantes. Hasford's use of the line here also suggests that Calley was not an exception, and that in fact many American soldiers were made into ruthless killers during this war.

Finally, Joker's visit to his own house in Russellville, Georgia, in the final pages of the novel, adopts the trappings of the Southern Gothic in order to express his profound alienation. This section requires careful unpacking because it mixes the feeling of estrangement common to many veterans with a scathing political critique of the United States, and complicates both with an ambivalent reading of Southern history. Joker returns home only to discover that nothing is the same: he has changed, his family has changed, and "it's not America anymore."[93] The changes are multilayered and interrelated. His family has changed because his father has died, his mother has remarried a

cowardly and authoritarian man, perpetuating a stultified patriarchy but with a false and corrupt father-figure. After a series of verbal provocations, Joker threatens his new step-father with his gun, demonstrating how the violence of war is always inevitably brought home despite (and maybe partly because) of his mother's urgings to simply "forget what happened overseas . . . Just pretend it never happened."[94] Joker is sickened to see the denial and indifference to the war on the part of his family, his mother's absurd disapproval of swearing and blindness to real violence, and the contemptuous attitude of his stepfather, who considers Joker both an opportunist ("eating on our tax money") and a dupe ("Seems to me . . . that you got a little suckered in") for having served in Vietnam.[95] In keeping with Hasford's surprisingly feminist sensibilities, the most sympathetic characters in this final section are Joker's grandmother and little sister, to whom he gives most of his backpay and confides his intent to return to Vietnam.[96] These are the only characters who offer sympathy and affection, embracing Joker with no judgment or mistrust.

The larger form of alienation that Joker experiences, however, is from American culture and values. The words of Black John Wayne come back to Joker, and his evaluation of how America has fallen away from its best self can only be called a jeremiad, in the very tradition of the Puritans that Joker sees at the origin of America's troubles—their "vanity," their "horror of everyday life," and their indifference to facts.[97] This is the beginning of the quest for control and escape from reality that Joker sees as a national sickness that has led to the mindless sending of young men abroad to die in a misguided war. "Because of our history," Joker says, "we drop bombs bigger than Volkswagens onto barefoot peasants twelve thousand miles from home and call it self-defense."[98] Using Gothic images, Joker describes history as "a Frankenstein's monster puppet whose strings are manipulated by the White House" and American society as "a constructed phantom paradise" and an insane asylum where "we lie to ourselves about everything and believe ourselves every time."[99] The precise content of this critique is not always clear, because it combines an awareness of the economic basis of most of the injustice in the United States (Black John Wayne had told Joker that the "the devil is a green man, the money man," not the white man[100]) with a deeper cultural critique of the Puritan contempt for the world, for the body, for the messiness of life itself, and the resulting escapism into delusion and distraction through "sex, power, fame, money, booze, heroin."[101] "Americans are prisoners of their own mythology, having watched too many of their own movies," he writes, laying the blame partly at the feet of the culture industry and taking an indirect potshot at *Full Metal Jacket.*

The underlying thrust of Joker's critique, which at the end of the book has become aligned with Black John Wayne's (and reflects Hasford's opinions in his editorial pieces and interviews), is based on a neo-Marxist and

ecological understanding of power and exploitation. In a process begun with the enclosures in England which began in the fifteenth century, and continued relentlessly with the theft of Native American land, there has been a constant displacement of people living off the land and in proximity to natural rhythms towards cities and their alienating conditions. This is how Joker sees the transformation of the South even while he was in the Marines. "As more farms fail, the town grows," he observes when he arrives, comparing it to occupied Vietnam: "my happy little hometown has been transformed into a brick and neon camp for round-eyed refugees."[102] The main economic and political forces are responsible for the bombing and occupation of Vietnam are also responsible for the displacement and disenfranchisement of poor Americans.[103] Once a teeming agricultural town, Russellville's main products now are "cotton, corn and boys willing to die," with Joker himself as the main example of the latter, while his father had been an example of the former: a farmer who had worked the land all his life, but had been forced to go work in the coal mines while his son went to war.[104]

The Gothic is thus the natural register for writing about Joker's homecoming and how uncanny it feels. In a long tradition of descriptions of estranged veterans feeling disconnected from their hometown (we can think of "Soldiers' Home" by Hemingway[105]), Joker feels that Russellville has been taken away and replaced by a "replica." Everything is a fake: "The sun was bought on sale at Sears and stapled to the sky. The American hooches along the tree-lined street are colorful and unbelievably large . . . Translucent plastic grass like they put into Easter baskets has been manicured to within an inch of its life—the jungle tamed."[106] The scene recalls the uncanny descriptions of Khe Sahn at the end of *The Short-Timers*, where the physical location is described in odd metallic and mechanistic terms while the soldiers are compared to lizards. Categories are blurred and everything is depicted as sickeningly different than it should be, as artificial and somehow dead (i.e., plastic grass).

These uncanny descriptions of things looking like imitations of themselves are actually part of a larger gothic conceit in Hasford's two novels, namely, that Joker himself has become a mere imitation of himself . . . in the sense that he has lost a vital part of himself in the process of becoming a Marine. This is the main thrust of the first novel, which shows all the recruits being driven mad in boot camp and more specifically Joker becoming a murderer (killing an unarmed farmer) and losing his soul. Now, in *The Phantom Blooper,* the fact that he's been "made into a killer" is foremost on his mind as he returns to his hometown and realizes that "I'm not the person I was born to be."[107] Like many war writers before him, Hasford found that the Gothic could help him depict the damage that the experience of war has inflicted on his body, heart and mind (one thinks of Bierce, Owen, March). At various points in

the two novels, Hasford compares Joker to a werewolf, a robot, a ghost, a zombie, and to Frankenstein's monster.[108] These tropes help him express the extent of the harm and alienation created by training and combat, the irreversible metamorphosis into something monstrous and dangerous.

In short, Hasford uses the Gothic and horror genres to relentlessly demystify American militarism and the experience of combat and of being a veteran, highlighting and displaying at every turn the damage that it does to soldiers, to civilians, to the environment, and to American democracy and life itself. The two books, *The Short-Timers* and *The Phantom Blooper*, are a powerful anti-war diptych of horror that show Joker first descending into madness (in Hue and Khe Sahn) and then rising up and out of it, rediscovering his humanity among the so-called enemy, only to find that being rescued and sent home reveals the real madness of an unmoored and violent America. On the last page, Joker, who at twenty-one has "already killed more men than Billy the Kid," leaves Russellville and seems to be heading back to Vietnam. He pays a last visit to his father's grave and muses bitterly about how his father and his generation, who had served in WWII, "never talked about your war," and then "let me go off and stick my face into a meat grinder, when you knew it was going to be a meat grinder." The paternal silence that John Wayne embodied in *Sands of Iwo Jima* and that was experienced by the Vietnam generation is evoked here by Hasford as a profound betrayal. By saying nothing, his father—otherwise kind and loving and "dependable as a tractor"—allowed Joker and his generation of young men to go get slaughtered.[109] Hasford's work—and ultimately mine—is an attempt to warn young men and women *not to go.*

NOTES

1. I say "seemingly" because *Paths of Glory* was not antiwar as much as anti-incompetence and critical of the murderous vanity among WWI generals, while *Dr. Strangelove* satirized the madness of Cold War strategizing with nuclear weapons. Neither film signaled or assumed any principled opposition to the kind of war that the United States had waged in Vietnam and Hasford would later accuse Kubrick of carrying his WWII bias against the Japanese into the project, coloring his depiction of Vietnamese soldiers: "Stanley sees them as buck-toothed Japs left over from old John Wayne movies." Quoted in Jason Aaron, "Excerpts from private letters, January 1983-February 1984," "Remembering Gus," *JasonAaron.Info*, accessed July 10, 2020, http://jasoneaaron.blogspot.com/2010/05/remembering-gus.html. *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1987; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2007), DVD; *Paths of Glory,* directed by Stanley Kubrick (1957; Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 2006), DVD; *Dr. Strangelove*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1864; Culver City: Sony Pictures, 2001), DVD.

2. Making of Hollywood, "The Making of Full Metal Jacket," Warner Bros. 1987, YouTube Video, 30:49, posted July 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRkyKYz5SYM.

3. Pauline Kael, "Review of *Full Metal Jacket*," *The New Yorker* (July 13, 1987): 75–76.

4. Roger Ebert, "Full Metal Jacket: Review," *RogerEbert.com*, posted June 26, 1987, accessed June 7, 2019, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/full-metal-jacket-1987.

5. Ethan E. Rocke, "Ten Things You Never Realized About *Full Metal Jacket,*" *Task&Purpose.com*, posted July 31, 2014, accessed July 10, 2020, https://taskandpurpose.com/10-things-probably-never-knew-full-metal-jacket

6. Anthony Swofford, "'Full Metal Jacket' Seduced My Generation and Sent Us to War," *The New York Times* (April 18, 2018), accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/18/magazine/full-metal-jacket-ermey-marine-corps.html.

7. Gustav Hasford, "Still Gagging,"

8. I discuss this use of the Gothic more extensively in my essay, "Transnational War Gothic from the Civil War to World War One," in *Transnational Gothic: Literary and Social Exchanges in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Bridget Marshall and Monika Elbert (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 173–188.

9. For instance, Charles Salzberg of the *New York Times* called the book "well-crafted" and praised it for bringing "an empathetic view of a heretofore faceless enemy." "In Short; Fiction," *The New York Times* (April 15, 1990), accessed July 10, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/15/books/in-short-fiction-200490.html.

10. Ross, *An Examination of the Life*.

11. Thomas, Doherty, "Full Metal Genre: Stanley Kubrick's Vietnam Combat Movie," *Film Quarterly* 42.2 (Winter 1988–1989), 25, 30.

12. Kael, "Full Metal Jacket," 75.

13. Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 171.

14. Greg Jenkins, *Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaptation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarlane & Co., 1997), 147.

15. Stanley Kubrick and Michael Herr, *Full Metal Jacket: A Screenplay,* unpublished typescript, 1985, 1998, Visual Memory Website, accessed July 10, 2020. http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0065.html.

16. Kubrick and Herr, *Full Metal Jacket: A Screenplay*, 116–118.

17. Ibid., 117–118.

18. Ibid., 27, 57, 111–112; Cavarero, *Horrorism,* 7.

19. Kubrick and Herr, *Full Metal Jacket: A Screenplay,* 105.

20. Hasford, *Short-Timers,* 133.

21. Joker also executes the sniper in the novel, but commits many other far less palatable acts as well. He is a highly ambivalent character, appearing at times as a stand-in for Hasford, but also clearly meant to be an unreliable protagonist and a negative example of the damage done by Marine training and exposure to the war in Vietnam.

22. Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, "Full-Metal Jacketing, or Masculinity in the Making," *Cinema Journal* 33.2 (Winter 1994), 18.

23. Hasford, *The Short-Timers*, 117; Kubrick and Herr, *Full Metal Jacket: A Screenplay,* 107–108.

24. Cavarero, *Horrorism,* 7.

25. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the original screenplay has Animal Mother decapitating the sniper and displaying her head—Medusa-style—as a gory trophy, a scene that was actually shot but not used in the final version. According to producer Jan Harlan, Kubrick was trying to avoid "gratuitous" violence after the excesses of *Clockwork Orange*; "The Making of Full Metal Jacket" (1987; Burbank: Warner Bros.), YouTube Video, 30:49, posted July 16, 2014, accessed July 10, 2020, https ://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRkyKYz5SYM. Also, one can note the dramatic change from the original novel, which has the decimated squad walking back to the base, silent: "We're all too tired to talk, to joke, to call each other names." Hasford, *The Short-Timers,* 179.

26. Tim Cahill, "The Rolling Stone Interview" (1987), Visual Memory Website, accessed July 10, 2020, http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0077.html.

27. Webster, *Love and Death in Kubrick*, 117.

28. The word "hard-core" also evokes pornography, the association of women and sex, and links these terms to violence. The last voice-off of the film brings up sex as well, saying that "our thoughts drift back to erect-nipple dreams of Mary Jane Rottencrotch and the Great Homecoming Fuck Fantasy," ending the narrative with the promise of sex, which is traditionally the reward for killing (or the requisite training for it) in the adventure mode.

29. Willoquet-Maricondi, "Full Metal Jacketing," 18.

30. In the final screenplay by Stanley Kubrick, Michael Herr and Gustav Hasford, *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Screenplay* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 88.

31. Aaron, "Mangling Frail Civilian Sensibilities," accessed June 15, 2018, http://www.gustavhasford.com:80/litsnuffie.htm (website no longer online).

32. A similar question of endings was raised during the publication of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929. Remarque has the protagonist die on the last page, a final ironic defeat capping a narrative of horror and suffering. When the German publisher wanted to leave the hero alive in order to allow for sequels, Remarque said that the "triumph of survival" would defeat its pacifist purpose and create something like "an adventure yarn," explicitly invoking the adventure paradigm as incapable of sustaining an antiwar message. Quoted in Maria Tatar and Larry Wolff, "Introduction: Remarque at *Collier's*," *Erich Maria Remarque: Eight Stories* (New York: Washington Mews Books, 2018), xix.

33. Kubrick and Herr, *Full Metal Jacket: A Screenplay,* 39.

34. Nancy Sinatra, performed by "These Boots Are Made for Walkin,'" 1965, Western Recorders, vinyl.

35. Anthony Swofford writes in 2018 that the "murder and suicide hardly registered as significant" to him at the time he first watched the film at 17. Swofford, "Full Metal Jacket."

36. R. Lee Ermey, *The Few and the Proud: Marine Corps Drill Instructors in Their Own Words,* edited by Larry Smith (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), 160. Rocke, "10 Things."

37. Although Ermey retired from the Marines in 1972 due to injuries, he remained close to the military and regretted no longer being able to serve actively.

38. Carol Burke, *The All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing Military Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 28.

39. Burke, *The All-American,* 30.

40. McNeil, *Keeping Together.*

41. McNeill, *Keeping Together,* 4.

42. Robert Bellah, "Durkheim and Ritual," in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim,* eds. Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 183–210; Deacon, *Symbolic Species.*

43. "Hello Vietnam," Johnny Wright (1965, Kensington: Dekka Records). The explicitly pro-war lyrics included pap like this: "Kiss, me goodbye and write me while I'm gone/ Good, bye, my sweetheart, Hello Vietnam."

44. Cahill, "The Rolling Stone Interview."

45. James, "Rock and Roll in Representations," 81.

46. "Chapel of Love," performed by The Dixie Cups, released in 1964 by Red Bird, vinyl; "Wooly Bully," performed by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs, released as single in 1964, Sam C. Phillips Recording Studio, vinyl.

47. James, "Rock and Roll," 89.

48. Ibid., 90.

49. Kubrick, *Full Metal Jacket,* 87.

50. In 1989, two years after the film's release, the group 2 Live Crew recorded a song called "Me So Horny" that sampled the scene, especially the two phrases mentioned above, as the refrain to accompany sexually explicit lyrics. The group was prosecuted for obscenity in 1990, and store owners were arrested to selling the album, and the song received a massive amount of publicity, leading to numerous forms of imitation. The result is a sub-genre of rap that is defined by aggressive and graphic sexually explicit lyrics which has apparently recently replaced "porn groove" as the soundtrack of choice for pornographic videos. "Me So Horny," 2 Live Crew, on *Nasty as They Wanna Be,* 1989, Luke Records, CD. Source: "Dirty Rap," Wikipedia, accessed July 10, 2020, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_rap

51. Kaarina Nikunen, Susanna Paasonen, and Laura Saarenmaa, *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* (London: Berg, 2007).

52. Ermey, *Few and the Proud*, 160.

53. As he wrote in a letter to a friend in 1983: "I'm a vocal and adamant supporter of the National Liberation Front, or at least of the Vietnamese people in it." Letter to Bob Bayer, quoted in Aaron, "Mangling." Also, he wrote to his cousin Jason Aaron, Stanley and I still do not agree on several points, particularly on how to portray the Viet Cong. I think they are heroic and humane people and I'm glad they won." Quoted in Aaron, "Excerpts from private letters."

54. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). See the discussion of Edward Kienholz, *The Portable War Memorial,* as jeremiad, in chapter 2.

55. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper*, 25.

56. Ibid., 220.

57. Ibid., 221.

58. Ibid., 96.

59. Ibid., 3.

60. Ibid., 6.

61. Ibid., 6; the Phantom Blooper is named after the sound of the M-79 grenade launcher he uses; later in the novel Joker picks up a similar weapon, a RPG grenade launcher, and fires upon the "rescue team" attacking the village where he has been living. Ibid., 131.

62. Ibid., 9.

63. Ibid., 10.

64. Ibid., 11.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 35.

67. Ibid., 34.

68. *In the Year of the Pig,* directed by Emile De Antonio (1968; Paris: Pathé America; Homevision Entertainment, 2005), DVD. John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charlie and Later Novels, 1947-1962,* ed. Robert DeMott and Brian Railsback (New York: Library of America, 2007).

69. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1967, 1992); Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

70. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper,* 216.

71. Ibid., 59.

72. Ibid., 59.

73. Quoted by Aaron, "Excerpts from private letters, January 1983-February 1984."

74. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper*, 63.

75. Ibid., 64.

76. Ibid., 81–87.

77. Ibid., 136, 148.

78. Ibid., 153.

79. Ibid., 154.

80. Ibid., 148.

81. Ibid., 172. This is a reference to a statement made during the Crusades, by a commander during a massacre at Béziers in 1209. The slogan was revived during the Vietnam War and became popular among paramilitary types in the 1980s. A Washington Post article in 1986 describes t-shirts with these words worn by participants at a "convention of drugstore commandos" and other paramilitary buffs. Fred Reed, "Kill Them All and Let God Sort Them Out," *The Washington Post* (Dec. 7, 1986), accessed July 10, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/magazine/1986/12/07/kill-them-all-and-let-god-sort-them-out/6671ba98-1de4-4b7e-b074-f4b825b9a834/.

82. Ibid., 172, 166, 170.

83. Ibid., 181.

84. Ibid., 182.

85. Ibid., 184.

86. Ibid., 194.

87. Ibid., 181.

88. Ibid., 183.

89. Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July*, 28–31, 76–93, 96–110, 118–126, 186–209.

90. Ibid., 214.

91. "I sent them a good boy and they made him a murderer: The My Lai story, as readers experienced it when it was first published in 1969," Pulitzer.org, accessed July 10, 2020, https://www.pulitzer.org/article/i-sent-them-good-boy-and-they-made -him-murderer

92. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper*, 214.

93. Ibid., 220.

94. Ibid., 231.

95. Ibid., 230.

96. Ibid., 235.

97. Ibid., 221.

98. Ibid., 216.

99. Ibid., 215, 216.

100. Ibid., 25.

101. Ibid., 221.

102. Ibid., 222.

103. Hasford's critique of U.S. society is specifically Southern, a perspective that comes into view much more clearly in *The Phantom Blooper* than in *The Short-Timers*, and his position on the South is somewhat surprising given his progressive views in the rest of the book. On the one hand, he articulates a version of the Lost Cause ideology: "The South was the American Empire's first subjugated nation. We are a defeated people. Our conquerors have cured us of our quaint customs, quilting parties, barn raisings and hog killings, and have bombed us with revisionist history books and Sears catalogs and have made us over into a homogenized replica of the North." In this passage, as in all references to the South, Hasford omits any mention of slavery. Instead, he defines the "Confederate Dream" as "a desperate and heroic attempt to preserve from federal tyrants the liberty bequeathed to us by Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin." To drive home his vision of a post-racial South, where its history of slavery no longer matters, Hasford includes a short but warm exchange of cordialities between Joker and a "sexy, young black woman" driving the bus he takes to Russellville. This unwillingness to acknowledge the issue of slavery in Southern history creates a glaring blindspot in Hasford's otherwise radical vision of American society. On the other hand, what emerges clearly from the parallels Hasford draws between the South and Vietnam is a keen awareness of the price of industrial urbanization, especially the loss of a sense of purpose, community and connection to the land and natural rhythms. We learn that Joker's farmer father lost a crop one year because a neighbor, at the urging of Northern college kids, sprayed pesticide on his crops and killed all the earthworms in the area, effectively killing the soil. Soon after

that Joker's father had to go work at a strip-mine which seems to have led to his early death while Joker was away. Thus, Hasford's critique of late-capitalist modernity is ecological as well as neo-Marxist, but undermined from a progressive point of view by its many racial blind-spots. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper*, 216–217, 240. For more on Hasford's Southern background, see Matthew Ross, "Haunted by the Ghosts of Pickett's Charge: Echoes of the Civil War in Two Novels by Vietnam Veterans," *Southern Cultures* 21.2 (Summer 2015), 67–83.

104. Ibid., 220.

105. Ernest Hemingway, "Soldier's Home," *In Our Time* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 67–77.

106. Hasford, *Phantom Blooper,* 222.

107. Ibid., 220.

108. Hasford, *The Short-Timers,* 33; *Phantom Blooper,* 98, 126, 64, 183.

109. Ibid., 240.

Coda

The Future of War Culture, the Cultural War for the Future

In their book on American national identity and war, Marvin and Ingle argue that World War II was the last successful ritual of national unity since the calamitous bloodletting of the Civil War.[1] The second World War, they suggest, reset national time and created—for a while at least—a widespread sense of collective solidarity and kinship. If this is true then it could help us understand the extraordinary staying power of the Rosenthal photo as well as the increasingly polarized political culture we find ourselves in now three-quarters of a century later, as the ritual magic of this moment fades and our strained presidential elections often fail to create any sense of national purpose.[2] Of course, there are other reasons that contribute both to the power of that photo and to the fraying of our national culture—for the latter I personally see the impact of forty years of neo-liberalism playing an important role—but concerning the former it is impossible to deny that World War II continues to exert a fascination and influence on American society. Tom Englehart identified the triumphalism that defined the 1950s and 1960s as "victory culture" and wrote about its decline in the wake of the Vietnam War in his book *The End of Victory Culture* (1995).[3] Since the end of victory culture also implied the end of the knee-jerk militarism that got us into Korea and Vietnam and a turn to a more diplomatic, cautious, and internationalist approach to world problems, it is more than unfortunate that victory culture returned in the early 1990s (its revival already orchestrated by Reagan with the invasions of Granada and Panama in the late 80s) and again more fiercely than ever in the 2000s.

As I write now in 2020, America is still occupying, fighting, or bombing several countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The "active combat missions" in Iraq and Afghanistan ended in 2011 and 2014, respectively, but as Patrick Deer observes, "the disastrous state of Iraq, the

precarious military situation in Afghanistan, the ongoing Syrian conflict and refugee crisis, and the continuation of drone strikes in multiple theaters suggest wars without end."[4] The United States recently assassinated a top Iranian military figure and has made a number of threatening comments about Iran in recent months, making an armed conflict with that nation a real possibility in the near future.[5] The wars in the Middle East, though relatively low-key compared to the massive ground troop deployments and chemical warfare (such as napalm, white phosphorus, Agent-Orange) involved in Korea and Vietnam, have taken over 6,800 U.S. military lives, over 200,000 confirmed Iraqi and Afghan civilian lives, permanently wounded over 32,000 Americans and an unknown number of Iraqis and Afghans, led to over 970,000 disability claims filed as of 2015, and come at a direct cost of $1.6 trillion to U.S. taxpayers according to the Congressional Research Service (with indirect costs rising to between $4 and $6 trillion).[6]

One of the lessons learned by the political class from the Vietnam War was to avoid worrying Americans with national conscription and so the military has become all volunteer since the 1970s, making recruitment a constant preoccupation and source of ideological and logistical operations.[7] Two important results can be traces to this change. One, as Andrew Bacevich has argued, is a greater readiness to send troops anywhere at a moment's notice, knowing that the public is far less likely to protest or even notice than in the era of the draft and universal registration.[8] America's professional army has become a hammer that the U.S. political class is happy to send wherever anything that can be made to look like a nail emerges, and the media has always been more than willing to go along and play cheerleader (military actions selling the news and bringing in revenue).

The other major consequence of the transition to an all-volunteer Army has been a preoccupation with recruitment. In 1999, the Army failed to meet its recruitment goals for the first time and has been vamping up its efforts to make itself attractive to young men (and to young women) ever since.[9] Besides direct advertising, an ongoing presence on campuses through the ROTC, and recruitment stands at fairs and sporting events, the military has developed its online presence through social media (e.g., websites, Facebook, and Twitter).[10] Two other far more important and effective methods include war-themed films and video games. Films about war—either realistic like *American Sniper* and *Saving Private Ryan* or fantasy-based like *Wonder Woman* or *Transformers*—are big business.[11] War-themed video games—such as *Call of Duty* and *Player Unknown's Battlegrounds*—are even bigger business.[12] In line with its more proactive stance toward recruiting, the Department of Defense has actively sponsored films, such as the original *Top Gun* (1986) and its 2020 sequel *Top Gun: Maverick*, as well as a range of popular culture products such as *Star Trek IV* and *Iron Man II*.[13] It has also

aggressively developed video games that aim to promote military recruit-ment, such as *America's Army,* and uses video games in training of soldiers, blurring the boundary between the world of civilian and military gaming to the point where it effectively becomes irrelevant when one considers the numbers of young men enlisting because of the games they grew up playing and wish to continue playing in some form or another.[14] Between the gaming empire of the first-person shooter and the vast network of Hollywood films and their franchises in toys, clothing, and other commodities, the theme of war has never been more present and more potent in American culture than in the twenty-first century.

While fantasy films pull out all stops in their non-stop celebration of apocalyptic global warfare, films that claim to be realistic or historical must navigate a complex landscape of commemoration and celebration with an acknowledgment of trauma and costs, dancing ambiguously through a mine-field of caution and jingoism. Very few films dare to air a truly anti-war mes-sage, but many will happily wade into a bloody display of the "war is hell" trope as long as they can pull audiences back out of its grim implications through an uplifting double-punch of pathos and pleasure using the familiar formulas of melodrama and adventure. Leavening the horrors of wars with elegy and excitement, seemingly meaningful self-sacrifice and reassuring endings, Hollywood will continue to peddle war as long as anyone is buying. Tales of heroes—either callow Everymen like Joker of *Full Metal Jacket* or larger-than-life superheroes like Chris Kyle in *American Sniper*—will continue to mesmerize audiences and lure young people into military service (and for many, lead to injury, PTSD, drug addiction, or death).

But there are ways to resist this process. One is to learn how to recognize the ways in which war films work their mojo on us. For a media-saturated society, we are oddly illiterate about the way in which media works. We create fan-based communities and we discuss production, casting, costumes, inter-textual references, and a range of technical topics but we are not very good at recognizing the formulas and story devices that push our emotional buttons and format our watching experiences into pleasurable patterns which leave us open to ideological messaging. In this book, I have mostly avoided the language of ideology critique developed by the culture industry theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer because it feels outdated and heavy-handed, and much has changed in the world of media studies, popular culture and film and narrative studies since the 1960s.[15] Nevertheless, the basic thrust of their argument—namely, that commercial films and television are closely aligned with the ideology and interests of corporate capitalism—is as relevant as ever. The commercial media is simply not interested in questioning the current political and economic system, however, unsustainable it may be, and not questioning the value, morality, and point of contemporary military

interventions seems to be part of the devil's bargain that Hollywood has made with the Department of Defense. As a result, films may show PTSD and injury and individual soldiers damaged beyond repair, but rarely question the larger purpose and ethics of maintaining a global military empire and ever wonder if using it is right, worth it or even rational given the recent history of failure and stalemate in Vietnam, the Middle East and Africa (e.g., Yemen).

So, the first step to extricating ourselves from this twisted love affair with war is to identify its seduction strategies. If we can understand better the way we are moved by melodrama and excited by adventure we can learn to distinguish between pleasurable stories and real life. We could also become more canny about the mythmaking, white-washing, and repurposing of history in war films that purport to tell stories about real wars such as World War I or Vietnam. Watching *Dunkirk* does not make us know what it was like to fight in World War II any more than watching *American Sniper* teaches us anything about post-invasion Iraq. All these films can do is show us what some of us would like to see and believe, but they are fantasy films every bit as much as the *Avengers* series. I am convinced that if we learn to easily identify the main moves of their principal story formulas—which are usually some combination of melodrama and adventure, heavily spiced with comedy and spectacular special effects—we can stop being so easily lulled into complacency with the war culture and militarization that has engulfed American society.

Another way to disinvest from the myth of war as adventure is to remember that soldiers are not the only people involved in modern warfare, even though that is the illusion crafted by war games and many war films. In fact, one of the most troubling trends in warfare since World War I has been an increasingly high ratio of civilians killed, wounded, and displaced by war. The War on Terror probably has the highest ratio of military to civilian deaths of any war in history, though no numbers will ever be produced to verify this because the Department of Defense does not bother to keep track of enemy or civilian casualties, and even NGOs who do try to keep count do not include the vast number of "indirect deaths" that come from disease, lack of food and water, forced migration, and other causes. One could and probably should also include the people murdered by soldiers and veterans suffering from PTSD and alcohol and drug issues. The real cost on civilians and soldier's families and communities will never be known. One thing is clear: many people besides soldiers are affected by war and for them the war is anything but an adventure.

One final thing is also evident: we cannot afford to keep waging war around the planet as if there were no tomorrow, or there will be no tomorrow. All the money and energy and resources that are being spent now on wars to try to maintain our influence in the Middle East while bankrolling arms manufacturers who don't care if we "win" or not could be spent on transforming

our economy so that we do not need to depend on oil at all. The Green New Deal proposed in 2019 by Senators Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Edward J. Markey could also be a peace plan—a project for transforming swords into ploughshares—to dust off a very old trope that is more relevant than ever. Our planet is facing a crisis of unimaginable proportions and we are wasting precious time and making things much worse with the bloated military budgets we keep funding, the nuclear arsenals that we keep active, the fuel we waste on useless military exercises and operations, and the endless cycle of grim forever wars that we keep pursuing.[16]

It is time that we recognized that our wars in the Middle East have not made us safer but have instead made us much more vulnerable by creating rage, pain, and instability that will play out for generations. I do not pretend to have any political expertise on how to rebuild a region as destabilized and devastated as Iraq and Afghanistan now are after nearly twenty years of occupation, but a Marshall plan-type economic project would go much further in creating partnerships, friends, and allies in the Middle East than more of the same blind and chaotic aggression we have pursued. The situation is complicated, delicate, and fraught with dilemmas, and extricating ourselves from the mess we have created will not be easy, but the delusion that more war and military occupation can do anything except make things worse and create more misery must be exposed for the lie that it is. Many people recognize now that a police-action would have been a more rational response to the 9/11 strikes than starting a war with a secular country that had nothing to do with the attacks, which were carried out mainly by Saudi Arabian nationals (15 out of 19). Yet films like *American Sniper*, which was widely praised and massively successful, recklessly suggests that the war in Iraq is directly linked to 9/11 and that the insurgents there must be stopped in Baghdad before they attack San Diego (as Kyle argues at one point) and no one calls out this absurd inversion of the truth for what it is.

I have made film and popular culture an important part of my study because they have so much impact on our society, and have contributed especially to normalizing and glamorizing combat and war. One of the things that I have discovered as I researched this topic is that although novels and poetry can also fall into the convenient formulas of melodrama and adventure, they tend to be much better at looking at war with nuance, critical distance, and complexity. I have learned much from the authors writing about the Middle East wars: Helen Benedict's two novels about women soldiers, *Sand Queen* (2012) and *Wolf Season* (2017), and the Iraqi novelist Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), which reminds us the Iraq is not just an exotic warzone but a complex society with a long history, peopled by men and women like us (as well as monsters we could recognize).[17] Other books that try to say something meaningful about the war and the damage it has

done include Roy Scranton's *War Porn* (2016), and Luke Mogelson's *These Heroic, Happy Dead* (2016).[18] One can see right away from these titles that irony (and to a great extent, horror) continues to be the rhetorical mode of choice in the war novel, challenging the familiar tropes of war as adventure (which Scranton engages with fiercely) and noble self-sacrifice (sardonically referenced in Mogelson's title). Following Hasford's lead in sympathetic identification with the local population of these distant wars, many of these novels depict Iraqi people and their inner lives (as well as women soldiers and veterans, and a variety of perspectives) and all probe deeply into the complicated realities produced by the recent wars.

There are also films that question and think harder about many issues than the standard Hollywood fare. Most are independently produced and distributed and reach modest audiences but are important nonetheless. Many have been criticized for their didacticism and preachiness, which is the most common way of dismissing and marginalizing any work of art that tries to say something meaningful. It is ironic that in a culture saturated with commercial art whose purpose is either explicitly to sell something to us or to naturalize the system by which everything important is for sale, we cling desperately to the outdated modernist myth that art must be seemingly "disinterested." We hardly notice how didactic commercial culture is itself, insisting that we work, love, play, and dream according to the paradigms and possibilities established by Hollywood and Madison Avenue, but we bristle and cry foul when a film has a point of view, a discernable thought or desire to make us feel something new or unsettling.

Paradoxically, we take it for granted that films teach us about the world, and we glibly accept every new commercial war film's claim to realism and historical accuracy (consider the chorus of praise for *Dunkirk* or *1917*),[19] blindly oblivious to its formulaic satisfactions, but an independent film's earnest attempt to push us out of our comfort zone is often met with criticism and contempt. As Martin Baker has pointed out, the first films to be made about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were critical enough to be dismissed wholesale by *Variety* as a "toxic genre."[20] These include the wave of overtly concerned films produced by a set of high-profile directors in 2007: *Lions for Lambs* (Robert Redford), *Redacted* (Brian de Palma), and *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis), all of which called attention to the cynicism and political opportunism around the decision to deploy troops, and the violence and mental distress suffered by and reproduced by soldiers on the ground and back home.[21] A similarly hard-hitting film, though produced by a major studio (Paramount) at this moment when it was temporarily permissible to air dissatisfaction with the failures of the war in Iraq, is Kimberly Pierce's *Stop-Loss* (2008), about the practice of involuntarily redeploying soldiers who had technically fulfilled their terms of enlistment.[22] The film shows how

psychologically shattered service members are forced to return to war after coming home because of recruitment shortages. An independent film of the same period titled *G.I. Jesús* (2006) tells the story of a Mexican soldier who had enlisted in order to earn a Green Card struggling with his PTSD and guilt over the killing of a family much like his own in Iraq.[23] The fallout of the military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy on LGBTQ service members is the subject of Ned Farr's *A Marine Story* (2010), and the inhumane conditions of prisoners of the Global War on Terror held at a Guantanamo Bay detention center are depicted in Peter Sattler's haunting *Camp X-Ray* (2014, starring Kristen Stewart).[24] Some of these films may have moments of melodrama as they focus on victims of the recent wars both in the United States and abroad, but all refuse the myth of war as adventure so ubiquitous in commercial media.[25]

Even if novels and independent cinema will not pull us out of the military-industrial-corporate-entertainment complex alone (we will need a new antiwar movement for that!), every cultural product that challenges the myth and mystique of war in any way is valuable. The all-voluntary army has allowed the U.S. government to send soldiers into combat over and over because most of the population is not concerned or inconvenienced by it. Hollywood has naturalized and promoted war—intentionally or not—for over a century because it is hugely profitable to do so. It is up to us—readers, film-goers, citizens, scholars, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, humans, and inhabitants of Earth—to learn how to think more critically, more globally, more long-term, more compassionately and to start taking care of one another, our planet, and our future. I hope that in some modest way the issues I have raised and the narrative formulas I have explored in this book can help us on that path.

NOTES

1. Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation,* 152–154.

2. Barack Obama's election came close but ultimately he failed to live up to his potential as a progressive president, while his symbolic capital as an African American has been relentlessly exploited by white supremacist forces on the right. Ultimately, the United States is extremely divided at the moment for multiple reasons and the very real disparities between the richest and poorest are among the most toxic drivers of mutual mistrust. However, in Marvin and Ingle's sociological analysis, national rituals play an important part in the emotional investment of citizens in the social reality of the nation-state. Blood sacrifice may be the more emotionally charged ritual in some ways but elections are also important and can arouse powerful feelings of kinship and solidarity. So many of our recent elections have been not only very close but actually contestable, and the institution of the electoral college in my view substantially undermines the ritual power of democracy by universal franchise. True

democracy is the best way to create a sense of collective purpose and so we need to make the United States (and every nation) truly democratic by getting money out of the elections (overturning *Citizens United* would be the first crucial step) and cultivating grassroots organizations and direct democracy.

3. Tom Engelhart, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

4. Patrick Deer, "Mapping Contemporary American War Culture," *College Literature: A Journal of Critical Literary Studies* 43.1 (2016), 48.

5. On January 3, 2020, a US drone strike killed Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, considered the second most powerful man in Iran.

6. Deer, "Mapping," 48.

7. Melissa T. Brown, "Transitioning to an All-Volunteer Force," in *The Routledge History of Gender, War, and the U.S. Military* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 133.

8. Andrew Bacevich, *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country* (New York: Metropolitan Book, 2013), 13.

9. Randy Nichols, "Target Acquired: *America's Army* and the Video Games Industry," in *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*, eds. Nina B. Huntemann and Matthew Thomas Payne (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 40.

10. I gratefully acknowledge the insightful research on this topic conducted by Gaëlle Ramet in "'Wanted for the U.S.M.C.': Marine Corps Propaganda on Facebook" (MA Thesis, University of Lausanne, 2017).

11. *American Sniper*, directed by Clint Eastwood; *Saving Private Ryan,* directed by Steven Spielberg; *Wonder Woman*, directed by Patty Jenkins (2017; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2017), DVD; *Transformers*, directed by Michael Bay.

12. *Call of Duty* (Santa Monica: Activision, 2003–2019), online and device-supported video game; and *Player Unknown's Battlegrounds* (Seongnam: PUBG Corporation, 2017), online and device-supported video game.

13. *Top Gun*, directed by Tony Scott (1986; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2020), DVD; *Top Gun: Maverick,* directed by Joseph Kosinsky and scheduled to be released in December 2020 by Paramount Pictures; *Star Trek IV,* directed by Leonard Nimoy (1986; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2003), DVD; *Iron Man II,* directed by Jon Favreau (2010; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2010), DVD. Based on the list supplied by the Department of Defense to Stephen Underhill in 2013 and posted on Academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/4460251/Complete_List_of_Commercial_Films_Produced_with_Assistance_from_the_Pentagon.

14. Nichols, "Target Acquired," 41; *America's Army* (2003–2015; U.S. Army), online and device-supported video game.

15. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment,* ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). The whole question of how media and film influences audiences has gone though many permutations in the last fifty years. In the 1970s, film scholars spoke of "suturing" and the way that film position and "interpellate" audiences, based on

Marxist and Lacanian psychoanalytical models of spectatorship (i.e., Kaja Silverman, Louis Althusser). Then, popular culture scholarship, in an effort to be more flexible and responsive to resistance, swung to another extreme on the pendulum, and became interested mainly in how audiences appropriate meanings for themselves and read cultural products "against the grain" (much Cultural Studies scholarship is like this). I have adopted a position that tries to account for the ambiguity of popular culture while remaining attentive to its underlying ideological and emotional structures. I also feel it would be naïve to pretend that studios and their corporate owners are not exerting pressure both overtly and tacitly at every step of the production process in the service of maintaining both capitalism and militarism in their currently lucrative states (lucrative for corporate interests, not for the United States as a state).

16. There are the stirrings of an antiwar movement in organizations such as ANSWER (Act Now to Stop the War and End Racism), Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, Peace Action, and others, but more coordinated grassroots action is needed, on the order of the climate change protests and the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of May and June 2020, as well as the election of more antiwar candidates across the political spectrum.

17. Helen Benedict, *Sand Queen* (New York: SoHo Press, 2012) and *Wolf Season* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2017); Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, trans. Jonathan Wright (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013).

18. Roy Scranton, *War Porn* (New York: Soho Press, 2016); Luke Mogelson, *These Heroic, Happy Dead* (New York: Tim Dugan Books, 2016).

19. *Dunkirk,* directed by Christopher Nolan (2017; Burbank: Warner Bros., 2017), DVD; *1917,* directed by Sam Mendes (2019; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2020), DVD.

20. Barker, *A "Toxic Genre"*

21. *Redacted*, directed by Brian De Palma (2007; New York: Magnolia, 2008), DVD.

22. *Stop-Loss,* directed by Kimberly Peirce (2008; Hollywood: Paramount, 2008), DVD.

23. *G.I. Jesús*, directed by Carl Colpaert (2006; Chatsworth, CA: Westlake Entertainment, 2008), DVD.

24. *Camp X-Ray,* directed by Peter Sattler (2014; New York: IFC Independent Film, 2015), Blu-ray.

25. I have focused here only on US cinema but it's important to recognize that many excellent foreign films have been made about the recent wars, including the Argentinian *Blessed by Fire* (2005), about the war with Britain over the Falkland Islands, the Danish *Brothers* (2004), about PTSD and the war in Afghanistan, and the recent Belgian film *Insyriated* (2017), about a family trapped in their Damascus apartment as war descends on the city. It should also be said that important antiwar film-making is being done by documentary film-makers since the beginning of the Global War on Terror, including films such as Laura Poitras' *My Country, My Country* (2006), Patricia Foulkrod's *The Ground Truth* (2006), Robert Greenwald's *Iraq for Sale* (2006), Ellen Spiro and Phil Donohue's *Body of War* (2007), Kirby Dick's *The Invisible War* (2012), to name just a few. *Blessed by Fire* [*Illuminados por el fuego*],

directed by Tristán Bauer (2005; London: Soda Pictures, 2007), DVD; *Brothers* [*Brødre*], directed by Suzanne Bier (2004; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD; *In Syria* [*Insyriated*]*,* directed by Philippe Van Leeuw (2017; London: Curzon Artificial Eye, 2017), DVD; *My Country, My Country,* directed by Laura Poitras (2006; Zeitgeist Films, 2007), DVD; *The Ground Truth,* directed by Patricia Foulkrod (2006; Universal City: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD; *Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers*, directed by Robert Greenwald (2006; Culver City: Brave New Films, 2006), DVD; *Body of War: The True Story of an Anti-War Hero,* directed by Ellen Spiro and Phil Donohue (2007; New York: Docurama, 2008), DVD; *The Invisible War,* directed by Kirby Dick (2012; New York: Docurama, 2012), DVD.

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