ABSTRACT

BILL CAIN’S _9 CIRCLES_: DRAMATURGICALLY RE-EVALUATING AN AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MILITARY AND INDIVIDUALISM

by Sarah Saddler

This thesis explores the intersection of traumatic wartime experience and theatrical performativity through the lens of Bill Cain’s play _9 Circles_ (2010). The written text is accompanied with the production of _9 Circles_ at Miami University (2012). The thesis examines how _9 Circles_ works in uncovering how war violence grows into traumatic injury. As a dramatic text and performance, _9 Circles_ addresses the myth of the American soldier in Iraq. The play deconstructs our civilian-minded mentality toward understanding war, ultimately allowing the reader/audience to question the collective responsibility toward understanding wartime experience.
BILL CAIN’S 9 CIRCLES: DRAMATURGICALLY RE-EVALUATING AN AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MILITARY AND INDIVIDUALISM

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PROLOGUE

9 Circles: The Journey Begins

Jesuit priest/playwright Bill Cain wrote the play 9 Circles (2010) as the response to the war crimes of Steven Dale Green. 9 Circles is the theatrical embodiment of the crime. In the play’s re-telling of Private Daniel Reeves’ (Green) journey through the nine circles of hell, the reader/audience experiences a range of emotions. In the playwright’s mission to inspire empathy for Private Reeves, issues surrounding wartime experience are evaluated. The play explores the intersection of war-inflicted trauma and crime. Its focus is that of the Iraq War. However, its ideas can be applied toward the wider ranging areas of trauma, mourning, and communal grief. The performance of 9 Circles asks the audience to increase their individual awareness toward the violence of political warfare. The play exists as a statement on/performance of a collective and individual American trauma.

This thesis is an examination of the dramatic text and embodied performance of 9 Circles. The play allows the reader to ponder political and ethical issues perpetuating within American culture. This thesis seeks to address many of these issues more deeply. As will be further discussed within the following chapters, rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in returning soldiers are increasing. Performative military therapy methods are being created as a fresh means to destigmatize the seeking of mental health treatment for those returning home from Iraq. Yet, the problem persists. This thesis seeks to address the problem of increasing rates of PTSD through the lens of Cain’s text. The following written work is formed from an interdisciplinary blend of research. It invokes performance studies scholars, military professionals and trauma experts as its principle means of study. It is further enhanced by the personal experience of directing 9 Circles at Miami University in February of 2013.

Chapter One, “9 Circles: A Dramaturgical Analysis,” provides a dramaturgical examination into the life of playwright Bill Cain. This chapter also provides further analysis on the historical ideas presented in the text, focusing specifically on war-inflicted trauma. As the focal point of this work is a dramatic text, 9 Circles is then placed within the context of other
post-9/11 war plays. In providing a dramaturgical analysis of *9 Circles* within this thesis, the reader is better equipped for the ideas set forth in the following theoretical chapter.

Chapter Two, “*9 Circles*: Deconstructing the Myth of the Warrior Ethos,” is a theoretical examination of the play. I analyze the play as a statement on a collective and individual American trauma. In touching upon problematic notions of the stereotyped American soldier in Iraq, I seek to understand how *9 Circles* deconstructs the notion of the Warrior Ethos (a U.S. military creed). I also attempt to understand how trauma is further convoluted within the crime of Daniel Reeves. With assistance from performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan, I work toward the argument that *9 Circles* taps into the collective American misunderstanding of war. I conclude with a reading of *9 Circles* through postmodern scholar Frederic Jameson’s representation of war.

Chapter Three, “To Hell and Back: *9 Circles* in Production,” is an analysis of the production of *9 Circles* at Miami University (2013). I discuss my experience directing the production as the practical component of my master’s creative thesis. I provide an analysis of the pre-show preparation, design concepts, and rehearsal process. I also provide an analysis of the discussion with my pre-show panel “Americans in Iraq: Understanding the Consequences.” As I sought to inspire critical thinking in the audience, the *9 Circles* talkback discussions are then examined more intimately.

The appendix of this thesis includes my directorial preparation for *9 Circles*, such as my director’s production PowerPoint and casting expectations. Since the work I have completed on this thesis inspired an outside vein of work focusing on military therapy methods, I also include a previously written paper that explores the Theatre of War Project.
CHAPTER ONE

9 Circles: a Dramaturgical Analysis

Cain had a stab of feeling after reading a newspaper article detailing atrocities a young soldier had committed in Iraq. It wasn’t the crime that struck him so much as the fact that the soldier had sought help from a psychiatrist before he’d committed the crime. ‘That impressed me; the play existed from that moment forward’, Cain declares.

Margot Melcon, American Theatre, 2011

My writing all comes from feeling. The essence of this play is an overwhelming feeling. When I found out about the crime, I had this initial overwhelming of repulsion. Then when I found out about him seeing the shrink, I thought, there’s something in this pattern that’s heroic. Then the writing became a passion. But what’s it about? It’s about that feeling. It’s about the feeling of a man standing in front of a row of tanks saying “you’ll go no further.”

Bill Cain, Personal Interview, 2012

Introduction

As a dramatic text, 9 Circles (2010) focuses on the representation of war trauma as viewed through the eyes of a soldier who commits a war crime against a civilian Iraqi family that ultimately costs him his life. On a deeper level, it examines issues regarding the role morality plays within governmental affairs, stemming from the true events of the early 2000’s from which playwright Bill Cain found his theatrical inspiration. In the opening chapter of this thesis the historical context behind 9 Circles will be intimately examined, beginning with Cain’s professional career as writer, artistic director, and Jesuit priest. It will then extend into his compulsion to write 9 Circles. I then provide for the reader a brief summary of Green’s crime and subsequent trial. Since this play is richly indebted to the layout of psychological trauma and its effects upon soldiers overseas, as well as our responsibility as members of a civilian society in understanding such trauma, the chapter will then seek to provide a general overview of those medical issues. I lastly explore how 9 Circles fits amidst the politically turbulent theatre scene of the post-9/11 era, as it is my belief that the play stands apart amongst such militantly strong pro or antiwar plays of this past decade. Serving as a literary framework for this dramaturgical
analysis are interlaced excerpts from my approved personal interview with Mr. Cain in September of 2012.

Bill Cain: A Career outside Playwriting

Bill Cain grew up a brainchild of the flowerpower generation in Manhattan in the 1960s. Writer Margot Melcon’s interview with Cain for American Theatre in October of 2011 allows the reader to experience Cain’s early life on a personal level through first allowing Cain to re-live his childhood in the inner city environment. She writes how “he split his undergraduate years at Boston College between artistic interests and working with the poor,” then quotes Cain explaining his experience creating his very first piece of theatre, a musical show that hosted audiences of a leukemia ward for children and a state prison for the mentally ill (Melcon). Cain recalls to Melcon his personal response to the reaction of these non-traditional audiences; “the difference between doctor, nurse, inmate, patient and guard had vanished. I said to myself: This is what religion is” (Cain). He concludes his memory of the experience by saying “I’d been training in prayer for five years by that time, and when I got home that night I realized that was the first real prayer I’d ever said” (Melcon). What that prayer entailed was not further elaborated within Melcon’s interview, but it showcases how from a young age Cain was undoubtedly moved by the kinship his theatrical work was able to produce between diverse communities of American citizens.

In the time between his graduation from Boston College (1970) and his first playwriting venture, Cain founded the Boston Shakespeare Company (1975) and worked as its Artistic Director for seven seasons (1975-1982). The BSC was “first at a Back Bay church and then at Horticultural Hall,” reviewer Joel Brown writes in his March 19th Boston Globe article about Cain’s return to Boston to direct 9 Circles in 2011 (Brown). Looking back on his experience founding the Boston Shakespeare Company in the ’70s, Cain fondly announced to Brown “my heart is in Boston. I’ve had the chance to work in a lot of places, and do a lot of work, but there’s nothing I’m prouder of than the Boston Shakespeare Company” (Brown). In Virginia Carr’s Shakespeare Quarterly article titled Boston Shakespeare Company (summer of 1980), she reviews Cain’s experimental 1980 season, in which he explored the work of William Shakespeare in nontraditional ways. Carr quotes Cain explaining that while the “productions
remained traditional,” “Bill Cain has experimented with what he terms ‘surreal’ effects: drumbeats, recorded voices, overlapping scenes, and pantomime” (Carr). It appears that Cain was emphasizing the traditionally disparate nature of his Romeo and Juliet. While the production used the accustomed Elizabethan costumes, drumbeats were added as a pulse beat to the fight scenes and the prologue was spoken “by the entire cast, some in street clothes, as if they were ending a rehearsal” (Carr). She further writes “Cain argued in the program that these effects were designed to ‘rediscover the passion of the play’” (Carr). As an Artistic Director Cain altered certain aspects of his Shakespearean plays, evidencing how even back in the 1980’s he sought to stretch the expected parameters of a theatrical production.

The period after Cain wrapped up working as Artistic Director at the Boston Shakespeare Company and before his playwriting debut (1989) is devoid of any professional dramaturgical credits. However, it can be inferred that during this time Cain was devoted to becoming a member of the Jesuit Society. As referenced earlier in Cain’s confession that creating his first piece of theatre was akin to having a religious experience, a large portion of his career outside theatre is dedicated to his Catholicism. Cain began working in the profession in the 1990s, starting at the St. Francis Xavier Church in Manhattan. While not much is known of Cain’s descent into the profession or specific dates of his employment within the Jesuit Order, he elaborated to me in an interview how his invocation of Dante into the text of 9 Circles was not a part of his Jesuit training, but merely a piece of literature he had admired. Although there are no specific references to the Jesuit Society within his text, his relationship with God undoubtedly weaves into his reasons for writing 9 Circles, and is later discussed within this chapter.

Cain took a stab at a television career by working as writer of “Nothing Sacred” for ABC (1977), a show which explored the life of “Father Ray,” a priest living in New York City who faces constant doubt about the church’s overall educational merit. After he created, wrote, and produced the television show it faced fierce backlash against its controversial content from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. James Sterngold of the New York Times covered the issue in a ’97 interview with Cain; “Asked if the criticisms were troubling, he responded: ‘What do you mean by trouble? To me, that’s not trouble. I’m happy there’s a debate. That’s what we are trying to do’” (Sterngold). The show made several conservative Catholic groups

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1 This portion of the interview existed in conversation, near the end of my conversation with Cain. For this reason was I not able to provide the exact words he used to make this point, so my summarization is merely a paraphrase.
alarmed by its gritty nature; “the series had dealt with abortion, contraception, priests and sex” (Sterngold). Cain then admitted in the interview that all the episodes were based on real experience. “The goal of Jesuits is to find God in the world,” he says, adding that the device of comedy was purposefully interjected in the show “to convey the reality of a priest’s life” (Sterngold). Regardless of the fact that other reviewers harshly critiqued the show, most particularly Ray Kerrison of the New York Post who called the show “slime,” Cain maintained a calm demeanor with response to these reports, declaring “If I react to that criticism, I would be paralyzed” (Sterngold).

**Bill Cain, the Playwright**

Three years after retiring as Artistic Director of the Boston Shakespeare Company, Cain decided to try his hand at professional playwriting. His first critically acclaimed piece, *Stand-Up Tragedy*, debuted in 1989. *Stand-Up Tragedy* localizes its plot on a teacher working with troubled Catholic school students in the lower east side of New York City, and garnered positive reviews and a short Broadway run (1990). In its *New York Times* review Mel Gussow writes “A former teacher in a Manhattan elementary school, Mr. Cain clearly wants to shake up the system of education and also to aerate what is generally accepted as socially response theater,” later writing that Cain “holds everyone up for criticism” in this performance staged with the intent to make “theatregoers uncomfortable” (Gussow). In his interview with Melcon, Cain adds that the play was created to “take what’s unseen and bring it to light—to show the person who feels unseen and hasn’t had a chance to see him or herself in their full glory,” which she later wrote was his “ongoing artistic credo” (Melcon).

Other reviews of *Stand-Up Tragedy* were not as complimentary. *New York Times* theatre critic Frank Rich complained “the audience is in school,” later adding “finally, Mr. Cain just throws up his hands in despair, disposing as many characters as possible in a denouement that, for all its tragic pretensions, proves laughably melodramatic,” echoing other reviews who found Cain’s text over-the-top (Rich). A June 1992 *Chicago Tribune* review by Richard Christiansen describes how Cain’s leading male oversteps his boundaries, writing “by interjecting himself so completely and confusingly into the boy’s life, however, the teacher upsets what the school’s priest-principal dourly calls ‘the ecology of evil’ (Christiansen). Here the reviewer recognizes Cain’s personal background in religious education within the production; as Melcon writes, “*Stand-Up Tragedy* is drawn from Cain’s own experience witnessing the struggles and
frustrations of teachers and students” (Melcon). Stand-Up Tragedy was also received at Connecticut’s Hartford Stage Company (1989) and on the Arena Stage in Washington D.C (1991). With regard to which venue is more difficult to be a part of, theatre, or television, Cain admits to Melcon that “theatre is harder...because it’s a series of duchies around the country ruled over by absolute monarchs. Getting your play across the drawbridge is not always easy” (Melcon).

Cain wrote his second play Equivocation (2010) a noteworthy eleven years after his first play received mediocre success. Equivocation was a major triumph, and largely established Cain as a hard-hitting playwright. In a 2010 interview with Cain, critic Tim Appelo called Equivocation “The Da Vinci Code for smart people” (Appelo). Its March 3, 2010 New York Times review proclaimed Equivocation “explores the moral obligation of artists to resist the manipulation of those in power,” not so subtly adding that it “suffers from its own overweening ambitions” (Isherwood). Regardless of what the Times thought, however, Equivocation put Cain on the theatrical map almost overnight. A quirky take on William Shakespeare’s decision to resist a royal command to write a propaganda play that San Francisco Bay Chronicle critic Robert Hurwitt wrote was a “head blend of backstage comedy, Shakespeareana, father-daughter drama and Elizabethan-Jacobean political mystery with trenchant takes on government-authorized torture,” Equivocation showcased not only Cain’s knowledge on Shakespeare from his time spent in Boston, but his artistic inclination to invoke major historical events to explore personal character transformations (Hurwitt).

Also noteworthy in mentioning with regard to Cain’s personal investment in political themes is his claim that Equivocation was a statement on the events of September 11th, 2001. Diane Snyder of Time Out New York covered Equivocation when it went to the Manhattan Theatre Club in February of 2010. Her critique of the play included a short interview with Cain, in which he discussed his experience visiting the Tower of London three years after the twin towers went down. He elaborated “(Equivocation is) a 9/11 play, and I was so mad when the building(s) went down. I was toxic with rage. In part the play is a journey for me from that rage to tenderness, which is what Shakespeare finally arrives at” (Synder). In her interview, Melcon also describes his inspiration in creating Equivocation: “Cain describes being hit by the 16th-century juxtaposition of tortured prisoners incarcerated for their beliefs...across the river at the same time, a torrent of Shakespeare’s words was echoing in the Globe Theatre” (Melcon). She
too quotes Cain: “I wondered which was more valuable: the political statement of a prisoner of conscience or a man who was writing to support a corrupt regime. The process for me is then unpacking that feeling, researching, trying to find out the story behind it” (Melcon). When asked
what the word “equivocation” meant to him in a 2010 interview for *New York Magazine*, Cain replied “the woman who protected Anne Frank died at 100, three weeks ago. (Miep Gies said) ‘we are hiding no one’. That’s what equivocation is… (we) told the truth in difficult times” (Melcon). In this second playwrighting venture, Cain succeeds in establishing his unique artistic doctrine: invoking major societal issues to emblazon personal transformation.

*How to Write a New Book for the Bible* (2011), Cain’s most recent play, is inspired by based Cain’s personal life, and referred to as his “Mom and Dad play” (Melcon). The writing of *9 Circles* precedes *New Book for the Bible*, and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. The play is the story of a man who returns home to care for his ailing mother, and Melcon writes “the title is born of [Cain’s] personal philosophy that religion is an integral element of everyday life” (Melcon). On the Berkeley Repertory Theatre’s announcement of the play in their 2011/2012 season, it quotes the *San Jose Mercury News* review, saying “Cain has created a profound meditation on the shared narratives that hold a family together through the vagaries of life and death” (D’Souza). The *LA Times* offered “growing up during the civil rights era, attending Jesuit schools and tutoring in Brooklyn’s tough Beford-Stuyvesant neighbored, [Cain] gained an awareness of live theater as a community-binding ritual akin to religion” (Johnson). In response to the religious material the play presents, Cain says “The Bible is the story of a family”… “religion doesn’t belong to the people who are trying to make it a rulebook about sexual behavior. It’s much bigger than that. It’s about the innate revelation that exists in every family” (Melcon).

**9 Circles: Production History and Awards**

*9 Circles* had its world premiere at the Marin Theatre Company in Mill Valley, California. It was directed by Kent Nicholson and produced in the smaller, more intimate Lieberman theatre. Its production immediately received praise by theatre critic Robert Hurwitt of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who called it “a sharp, concentrated staging,” later adding “Director Kent Nicholson brings verbal battles to a boiling point on [set designer] Michael Palumbo’s stark concrete-platform set, and tightens the focus on Marker’s isolation in the nether circles” (Hurwitt). Chad Jones of the *Bay Area Backstage Theatre Dogs* review highly praises Marin’s actor Craig Marker, saying that Marker “shows us how his mind and emotions work in relation to his actions, we empathize, and empathy is a hugely important factor here” (Jones). Jones also praises Cain’s scene set-up; “we don’t have scenes here; we have circles—nine of
them…very quickly, we spiral down with Daniel as he’s arrested in the U.S. and charged with unspeakable crimes against Iraqi civilians” (Jones). Actor James Carpenter played all of the other male roles; he too received the critics’ praise: “as a lawyer who wants to use Daniel’s case to prove the futility of the war in a court of law, Carpenter is fascinating in his single-mindedness” (Jones). Jones ends his review with “Cain’s script zeroes in on one soldier’s story and leaves us feeling the inescapable historic and emotional weight of the entire war,” at the same time maintaining that empathy for the lead character was keenly felt by the audience throughout the performance (Jones).

*America*, the national Catholic-Jesuit magazine, did a feature on Cain after the premiere of *9 Circles* at Marin in November of 2010. Writer John Coleman wrote about how the production led him contemplate many controversial topics, namely politically-motivated torture practices, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and suicide rates in returning soldiers. Coleman also talks about his personal reaction to Reeves’ final soliloquy in the play, writing “I, for one, would have found it hard to sentence him to death,” which evidences his own empathetic response to the plight of PFC Daniel Reeves (Coleman). Coleman also had the opportunity to sit down with Cain and discuss his use of Dante’s *Inferno* in the play, subject matter not ventured by many other interviewers during their time spent interrogating Cain. When asked about the reason behind his structural invocation of Dante’s nine circles of hell, inspired by the text of Italian poet Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, Cain exclaimed:

> Heaven and hell are not so far apart…In the *Divine Comedy* they are adjoining territories. To get to one, you have to pass through the other. Although some of the people you meet in hell are undoubtedly evil, many are not. There are many good, beautiful, unlucky people in hell…there is compassion for the damned. At the very center of hell there is a terrible violence, but the ones perpetrating the worst of it weep as they do it (Coleman).

The Boston Publick Theatre premiere of *9 Circles* ran from March through April of 2011. The role of Daniel Reeves was played by actor Jimi Stanton, who had recently wrapped up performing for the Cornerstone Theatre Company’s production titled *Outside the Wire*. *Outside the Wire* was written by Stanton himself and centered on returning Iraqi veterans. Directed by Eric Engel, the Artistic Director of Gloucester Stage Company in Boston, this production featured a minimalist set filled with rows of what appear to be government-issued lockers.
framing the back of the circle-shaped stage area. In her June 5th, 2011 review, critic Alexandra Bonifield of criticalrant.com noted how through the break of fourth wall audience interaction, the audience became less of a non-passive entity and more of a judicial summoning on the role of Daniel Reeves. Bonifield also took particular notice of the set, “an intimate, under street level thrust-ish space...(which)...lends itself to enraptured mutual transcendence.” She describes how “the audience peers into the heart, mind and soul of the soldier and sees him as a military system pawn and scapegoat as well as an agent of evil...(concluding that)...at its conclusion, the Boston audience (sophisticated, well-heeled, attuned, alert) sat for a moment in stunned awe then sprang to its feet” (Bonifield).

Another noteworthy production of 9 Circles wrapped up its performance dates at the Los Angeles Bootleg Theatre on November 12th of 2011. The Bootleg Theatre is a former 1930’s warehouse that boasts its ability to help “artists create original and daring interdisciplinary work” (Griffin). Reviewer Lucy Griffin covered the production in LA Arts Beat on October 11th, first admitting that if she picked up a newspaper article and read the story of Green’s vicious crime, she “would never consider the human qualities of the monster” (Griffin). She writes that through decisions made by director Justin Zsebes and the impressive voices of the supporting cast, the audience is able to “realize Reeves has become a scapegoat, a tool being used to prove a point on morality in a war completely devoid of morals” (Griffin). She further explains how the crew was responsible for changing Reeves’ costumes on stage, as well as for positioning his character in “cold, concise movements” at the beginning of certain scenes. This decision further emphasized Reeves’ role as U.S. army pawn. She ends her review with “9 Circles is an important play to see. It offers the idea of one of the most important lessons one can learn; how to feel the pain of our enemy” (Griffin). The concept of feeling the pain of the enemy is also a direct statement taken from Cain’s script, uttered by the Army Attorney who visits Daniel Reeves in prison.

9 Circles was also recently performed in Phoenix, Arizona by the iTheatre Collaborative. The January 2012 production garnered positive feedback from reviewer Kerry Lengel, who most aptly identified the important theme in the play as religion. Lengel writes “but as 9 Circles delves deeper into the psyche of a murderer, it becomes clear that Cain’s interests are intellectual and spiritual rather than polemical” (Lengel). As other reviewers have tried to do, Lengel also pinpoints Cain’s purpose in writing the play within his critique, finishing his article with the
powerful statement “He aims to look evil in the eye without flinching and discover what lies behind it” (Lengel).

The Gloucester Stage Company in Boston performed the most recent production of 9 Circles throughout the second half of August 2012. This production featured the same cast and director as the Boston Publick Theatre, and received positive reviews, most noteworthy of which was Mark Sardella, who refurbishes Cain’s statement that the play was not an anti-war play. He writes: “Cain has said that 9 Circles is not an anti-war play…Still, the play does raise many of the contradictions and questions surrounding war in general and the Iraq war in particular” (Sardella).

Outside of its still-flourishing stage popularity throughout the United States, 9 Circles succeeded in continuing Cain’s success on the theatre awards circuit. On April 3d, 2011 writer and former chair of the American Theatre Critics Award board Elizabeth Maupin reported that Cain won the ATCA Award for the second year in a row for 9 Circles. The year before Cain was awarded the generous twenty-five thousand dollar prize for Equivocation. Maupin describes the prestigious award: “The ATCA Award recognizes playwrights for the best scripts that premiered professionally outside New York City during the previous year” (Maupin). The plays are announced as a part of the Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Rachel Lee Harris of the New York Times also recorded Cain’s recognition of the prize on the same day, as did the Theatre Bay Area magazine in May of 2011.

9 Circles: The War Crimes

As previously noted in excerpts from interviews with Cain, 9 Circles was written as a response to the 2006 war crime of Private First Class Steven Dale Green. In my interview, Cain informed me that “(9 Circles) is not about Steven Dale Green” (Cain). Cain instead alludes to the significance of the political ideas present, rather than the specific figure who committed them. Therefore, a brief overview of the event of Cain’s inspiration will dramaturgically aid in providing a clearer historical context for this analysis.

TIME Magazine editor Jim Frederick covered the final trial decision of Steven Dale Green for the New York Times in May of 2009. Steven Dale Green grew up in Midland, Texas. Convicted of previous misdemeanor crimes, he was initiated into the military on a morality waiver. Once overseas, Frederick explains how several months after he arrived in Iraq, Green was honorably discharged from the army for possessing what the military claimed was an
antisocial personality disorder. Weeks after he was discharged for this disorder, the news of his war crime broke out, previously unknown due to the fact that Green and his squadmates had claimed the crime was at the fault of Iraqi insurgents. As a neighboring May 2009 New York Times article reiterates, “Mr. Green's trial was the first capital punishment case tried under a 2000 law allowing federal criminal courts to try crimes committed overseas by former members of the military, military dependents, contractors and other civilians” (Hammer).

Frederick’s account outlines Green’s war crime in specific detail. Three years prior, on March 12, 2006, PFC Steven Dale Green and three of his fellow soldiers became intoxicated off of Iraqi whiskey, donned “long black underwear they called ‘ninja suits’,” and escaped their post to attack an Iraqi family in their nearby home (Frederick). It was later reported the crime was premeditated. Green had been talking about the event several days up until its execution. Alongside his four squad mates, the group entered a civilian home, shot three of the family members dead, then proceeded to drag the eldest daughter, fourteen year-old Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi, into the next room. There the company raped her, shot her in the head, and then set a part of her body on fire. According to Frederick, the trial that followed was one concerning “one of the most notorious crimes committed by a U.S. service member during the Iraq war.” The Iraqi Minster of Human Rights attended the trial, with federal prosecutor Brian Skaret asking for the death penalty and defense attorney Scott Wendelsdorf pleading for a life imprisonment sentence. The trial was not short of emotional fervor: Frederick quotes Wendelsdorf’s closing remarks, “The United States of America failed Steven Green…America does not kill its broken warriors! Spare this boy. For God’s sake, spare him” (Frederick).

Wendelsdorf’s closing remarks must have merited him some sway from the jury, for Green was found guilty of sixteen counts of murder, rape, and related charges, spared the death penalty and received life in prison.

Jim Frederick went on to publish Black Hearts: One Platoon’s Disintegration in the Triangle of Death and the American Ordeal in Iraq (2010), which is the story of 101st Airborne Division, Green’s regiment. The preface of the book features praise from assorted newspapers and magazines on Black Hearts, most notably The New York Times Book Review and the Military Review. Joshua Hammer from the Book Review wrote “Fredericks extraordinary book is a testament to a misconceived war, and to the ease with which ordinary men, under certain conditions, can transform into monsters,” which clearly coincides with Cain’s treatment of PFC
Reeves within *9 Circles* (Hammer). *The Military Review* likened Frederick’s book to Dante’s Virgil, also noteworthy since Cain divided his scenes into Dante’s circles of hell. The review further elaborated: “Frederick acts for us as Dante’s Virgil, only instead of a descent into Hell proper, he takes us into the Triangle of Death” (*Military Review*). Frederick’s book and Cain’s play were both premiered in 2010.

Briefly summarizing Green’s war crime is advantageous when dramaturgically researching *9 Circles*. The playwright undoubtedly took inspiration from Green’s story when creating the play. Cain dramatically enhanced certain fragments of Green’s tale, such as the Army Attorney’s re-telling of how the President went on television and spoke to the nation about Reeves. George Bush never went on air and spoke about Green. Furthermore, a vast majority of the textual lines were derived from true events. These aspects, among others, emphasize how the ideas presented in Cain’s script are not only grounded in real life, but reaffirm their societal relevance.

**9 Circles: A Brief Overview of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

As a dramatic text, *9 Circles* is the recreation of how politically-motivated psychological trauma is manifested and grown into crime. As an embodied performance, *9 Circles* is a production that portrays how a soldier suffers from traumatic events overseas. Psychological trauma studies have taken off in recent decades, largely due to the increase in PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) in returning soldiers from World War II, Vietnam, and now our current conflicts in the Middle East. Judith Herman as asserted in her work *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence* that prior to its resurgence, its study “has an underground history” (Herman 57). Herman means that as a respected medical field, trauma studies have been denied a place in history, due to its socially repressive and uncomfortable content. In her work, Herman informs her reader that we must restore connections that have been severed between those who have undergone trauma particularly victims of political terror and combat veterans. “Like traumatized people,” she writes, “we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and future” (Herman 53).

The focal point of *9 Circles* is the war crime of Private Reeves. Incensed by both witnessing and being unable to prevent the murder of his Sergeant, Private Reeves entered into what many trauma psychiatrists call the state of “rage,” otherwise known as the “berserk” state
or “snap”. Trauma studies as a field of inquiry largely originated with Sigmund Freud’s studies of hysteria in the 1890’s. “Hysteria” was an emotional response that was thought to happen in women. It was characterized by anxiety, feelings of a lack of control, and extreme mental stress. Freud conducted studies on numerous female patients in order to further pinpoint the cause of this phenomenon, and eventually published The Aetiology of Hysteria (1896) concluding that childhood sexual abuse was discovered to be the cause in nearly all traumatically-inflicted patients. However, horrified by this discovery, within the year Freud had retracted many of his earlier held beliefs, opting instead to focus on female sexual excitement. Herman asserts in her work that regardless of the fact that Freud repudiated his earlier belief, his creation of psychoanalysis as a field of study is the brainchild of how we study trauma today.

Eventually, the work of Freud and his followers was pushed aside; it was not until World War One that symptoms remarkably similar to the female condition of hysteria were seen on the battlefield. Matthew J. Friedman of the U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs notes certain symptoms of onset PTSD: soldiers called out for their mothers in the face of death, entered in states of numbness in which they refused to feel any pain, and returned home suffering from extreme bouts of mental stress (Friedman). Further known as “shell shock” in the First World War and now “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” PTSD is presently defined as

…a cluster of symptoms caused by an individual either having experienced, or being witness to, an event “that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of others” (Criterion A, p. 467). The disorder is characterized by involuntary re-experiencing of memories, avoidance and emotional numbing, and hyperarousal including, for example, hypervigilance and outbursts of anger and hostility. (Herman)

In his book Achilles in Vietnam, writer and psychiatrist Jonathan Shay prefers to use the word “berserk” in replacement of the ancient word “aristeia”. He writes “berserk comes from the Norse word for the frenzied warriors who sent into battle naked, or at least without armor, in a godlike or god-possessed—but also beastlike—fury.” Freud’s hypothesis that “hysteria” was experienced by solely the female sex was largely critiqued. The continued increase in rates of PTSD amongst both male and female soldiers serving overseas furthermore underscores the ability for both sexes to experience psychological trauma.

This brief summary of Freud’s work was outlined in the opening chapter of Herman’s work Trauma and Recovery. I have read parts of Freud’s Aetiology of Hysteria, and I concur with her findings.

For more information on this, please see an interview with Executive Director Dr. Matthew Friedman, who works for the Virginal National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In his 2005 interview with PBS he elaborates on the past names for PTSD and the evolution of the term “soldier’s heart.”
Four years after his crime, *The Associated Press* interviewed Green out of his federal prison cell in Tucson, Arizona. In these interviews, Green announced that his war-torn environment was the cause for his actions: “If I hadn’t ever been in Iraq, I wouldn’t be in the kind of trouble I am in now,” he stated (Barrouquere). Admitting to possessing “an altered state of mind,” Green admits he did not consider Iraqis “as humans”. Green also stated “there’s not a word that would describe how much I hated these people,” again suggesting his traumatically inflicted mental state during the time of his crime (Barrouquere). *9 Circles’* Private Daniel Reeves is trauma-stricken Steven Dale Green.

**War Plays Post-9/11: A Selective Overview**

*9 Circles* is a play written in the midst of an intense American political arena, which extends back through several decades of United States and world history. In the decade prior to the fateful morning Cain decided to put pen to paper, the nation was fraught with tension, largely sparked by the 2003 invasion of Iraq following the 2001 terrorist strikes on the World Trade Centers. In turn, those recent events have been read as the effects and response of the mid-east political disturbances that began in the 1980s, namely the Iran/Iraq War and the subsequent Gulf War of 1990-91. When Cain decided to dedicate his play to a war-related topic, it joined the considerably-sized arena of political theatre that had thrived for decades before his time.

Not as immediately accessible as live television reports or newspaper headlines, plays written as statements on the events of 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Iraq evolved slowly. Promptly following the attacks on the Twin Towers, artistic works that provided the most coverage were books and magazine articles. One of the first plays to cover the attack was Anne Nelson’s *The Guys*, inspired by her experience aiding a New York City firefighter in writing eulogies for several of his partners who died that day. It debuted in January of 2002 at the Flea Theatre, located within a few blocks of Ground Zero in New York City. After its initial premiere *The Guys* continued to enjoy success nationwide, and its *New York Times* review allotted its appeal to the lead character of fire captain Nick, who Bruce Weber writes “gives (a) credible and powerful voice to a very specific kind of pain that we crave these days to understand but from the outside seems only blindingly enormous and beyond sharing (Weber).” Weber’s words suggest that Nelson’s play enjoyed success because she wrote the words that expressed feelings Americans could not discuss, which also alludes to the cultural trauma we face as American citizens in the wake of this war.
While Nelson’s play continues to enjoy success in regional theatre houses at home and overseas, it was difficult for many other newly written war plays to make their way into final production. During the first decade of the 21st century, audience attendance also proved to be a daunting task for those theatres who took on the risky venture of producing a war play. A review done on a 2008 show titled Surrender discusses reasons behind why so many Iraq War plays failed to be produced or widely viewed, referencing Culture Project director Allan Buchman. “There’s fatigue,” Buchman said, "If you watch your computer screen and the Dow drops 250 points, do you really want to go out to a play and watch some more bad news (Alter)?" Hit hard from the recession and war-ravaged daily in the newspapers and at home, it is no wonder the American public shied away from theatres showing works that focused on the nation’s ongoing turmoil. At the same time audiences were turning away from the brutally honest works of political playwrights, more commercially accessible Broadway theatres were finding it just as equally difficult to establish revenue during the lowest of the recession years.

While numerous war plays found it hard to establish bearings, still, others managed to find their voice amidst the hundreds of books, reports, articles, and television programs also covering the conflict overseas. In 2004, the year following President George Bush’s decision to invade Iraq, the play 9 Parts of Desire made its American debut at New York City’s Ensemble Theatre. Originally produced in London’s theatre scene and written/perform by actress Heather Raffo, 9 Parts stood as a powerful testament that political theatre has the potential to triumph over the glossy television screen. Born of an Iraqi father, Raffo was inspired to return to her family’s homeland following the Iran/Iraq War of the 80s. Inspired by Ntozake Shange’s poetic work for colored girls who considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf, 9 Parts offered Americans insight into the hidden lives of Iraqi women faced head-on with the realities of war. “Americans were hungry for the face of Iraq,” said Raffo in a 2005 American Theatre interview, “they only knew Saddam. They wanted me to tell them everything” (Renner). Like many other war plays that incorporate actual interview text into their script, Raffo had traveled to Baghdad following the Gulf War and interviewed Iraqi women of various ages and occupations. She then dramatized their words in the form of her script, hailed by John Layr of the New Yorker as “an example of how art can remake the world” (Layr).

David Hare is another such playwright who has enjoyed much success with his work done on events following 9/11. His play Stuff Happens was widely hailed as brilliant for re-
casting the roles of the American administration that led us into war. The text is a careful arrangement of words spoken by George Bush, Tony Blair, and other members of the administration, and stands as judgment toward a potentially mistaken political system during the height of conflict. Its 2004 Olivier Theatre review, written by Michael Billington, attributes Hare’s success to how “Hare avoids the trap of agitprop by cannily subverting the play’s anti-war basis” (Billington). Billington also addresses how playwright Hare has insisted that by writing Stuff Happens, he is “writing a history” (Billington). By clearly delineating between what is quoted verbatim by the politicians and what is being dramatically enhanced, Hare succeeds in using actual political text to re-challenge the national opinion on members of the American and British administration.

Victoria Britton and Gillian Slavo’s Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom is another recent play that invokes written political talk to make the judgment that the Bush administration immorally held prisoners in cells at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib in Iraq, and Bagram in Afghanistan. Guantanamo debuted in New York in August of 2004, at the height of the trials against those who detained prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. Written when the fates of those being detained was still yet decided, Guantanamo tells several contrasting stories based on the lives of actual prisoners. Letters written home by the prisoners are juxtaposed against the voices of several politicians, such as Donald Rumsfeld. In its 2004 New York Times review, reviewer Ben Brantley attributes the appeal of the show in its portrayal of the prisoners’ ongoing existential condition of waiting. “When the performance ends, you may so share their claustrophobia that you wind up gratefully gulping down air as soon as you hit the sidewalk,” Brantley writes (Brantley).

Other Iraq war plays have taken the literal leap of faith from the safety of the stage and into the throws of the audience. An immersive theatrical show titled Surrender opened in New York City in 2008, in which audience members are transformed by actors playing American soldiers into fellow comrades. They learn the basics of warfare, including how to shoot an M4 rifle, how to properly travel in squads and how many push-ups are expected on an hour-to-hour-basis. Once training is complete, the audience then assists their fellow soldiers in raiding a mock Iraqi village. This village is separated throughout eleven separate rooms of the Ohio Theatre, all rooms in which the audience is confronted with the realities of warfare. Writer and Director Josh Fox spoke to the nature of his immersive creation: ”Surrender is about addressing the huge
cultural gap between the military and the non-military,” he asserted, alluding to the frustration felt by those who wish there was less of a divide between civilian and military awareness (Alter).

The documentary-like nature of many Iraq war plays has not gone unnoticed by writers and historians in the recent decade. In 2010 writer Michael Balfour wrote an article published in the *New Theatre Quarterly* Journal titled “Mapping Realities: Representing War through Affective Place-Making,” in which he discusses how war plays paradoxically seek to represent the truth rather than dramatize a reality. Balfour begins his article by discussing the public’s response to the melodramatic news stories campaigned by over eager journalists on the war. Specifically referring to the work of playwrights David Hare and Jonathan Holmes, Balfour allows his reader to juxtapose the seemingly accurate portrayals of wartime events in our current media system with the documentary dramas pioneered by political playwrights. He writes that the new documentary-esque plays are being written as a response to the “urge for authenticity, for information that was undressed and without spin” (Balfour). Balfour also pinpoints what he believes is the reason for the success of this type of theatre: these war plays “provided a response to the excess of fiction that seemed to prevail during this period,” again referring to the melodramatic coverage on the War on Terror (Balfour). Balfour’s remarks can also suggest the reason behind the success of *9 Circles*; like many of the other plays mentioned above, *9 Circles* is the story of a real event. Cain selectively uses imagined and actual text spoken by Steven Dale Green, making his audience (sub)consciously aware that the crime they are bearing witness too was a real event.

This short observation of scope of post-9/11 war-themed plays is noteworthy when placing *9 Circles* within a frame of reference. It emphasizes how it fits within the political theatre scene and showcases its ability to stand out amongst the plays of its generation.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this dramaturgical analysis was to establish a detailed historical and theoretical context behind the play *9 Circles*. Through firstly examining the personal and professional life of playwright Bill Cain, the reader is able to contemplate his reasons in writing the play. In providing an overview of the true events *9 Circles* was inspired by, the reader is then prompted to understand the play on a deeper level. Since the theoretical framework for the following chapter of this thesis revolves around issues of psychological trauma within theatre studies, it is important to provide a brief overview of how these areas intersect. Finally, in
placing *9 Circles* within the timeframe of plays written after the events of September 11th, 2001, we can work to understand how the play exists as its own unique statement on war.

As evidenced in the play’s general reviewer praise and continuing performance in theatres across the United States, *9 Circles* has succeeded in standing apart from the host of antiwar plays written post 9/11. As a text based on true events, it has also supported Margot Melcon’s establishment of Bill Cain’s artistic credo: “to take what’s unseen and bring it to light” (Melcon). As dramaturgically uncovered within this chapter, *9 Circles* uncovers the deeply rooted issue of war-inflicted psychological trauma and brings it to light.
Works Cited


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CHAPTER TWO

9 Circles: Deconstructing the Myth of the Warrior Ethos

At a deeper level, the Warrior Ethos recognizes that each of us, as well, has enemies inside himself. Vices and weaknesses like envy and greed, laziness, selfishness, the capacity to lie and cheat and do harm to our brothers.

- Steven Presfield, 2010

War is one among such collective realities, which exceed representation fully as much as they do conceptualization and yet which ceaselessly tempt and exasperate narrative ambitions, conventional and experimental alike: unless, of course, this particular reality ceases to exist.

-Fredric Jameson, 2009

The idea is, in this context of war, there is a solution to war. The solution is finding out who you yourself are. Once you discover yourself, you don’t see people as objects; you see them as life yourselves.

- Bill Cain, 2012

Introduction

While illustrative of divergent viewpoints on war, the quotes displayed above leap off of the page and into the hearts and minds of those exposed to and/or affected by violence. In the first excerpt from former United States Marine Stephen Pressfield’s book The Warrior Ethos, Pressfield defines what it means to be a warrior of the U.S. military. The passage that follows is a portion of postmodern scholar Fredric Jameson’s essay “War and Representation,” in which Jameson touches upon the problematic implications behind theatrical attempts to represent war. While seeming somewhat displaced yet constitutive in the frame of this thesis, the closing quote is a remark made from an interview with Jesuit priest/playwright Bill Cain in October of 2012. The quote illuminates his inspiration behind writing the play 9 Circles (2010). 9 Circles tells the story of Army Private Daniel Reeves’ dissent into the nine circles of hell and the soldier’s eventual acceptance of the war crimes he committed while in Iraq. The play is inspired by the 2006 crimes of Steven Dale Green, currently serving out five consecutive life sentences at the

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6 My personal interview with U.S. Marine Leo Anderson in August of 2012 provided me with a more thorough understanding of Pressfield’s work, such as my knowledge that many soldiers carry it with them in their traveling packs, as it contains great emotional appeal.
United States Penitentiary in Tucson, Arizona.\textsuperscript{7} In its theatrically enhanced portrayal of war trauma, \textit{9 Circles} dually lives as acknowledgement of the individual American soldier’s positionality within warfare. Within this comprehensive acknowledgement of the soldier’s positionality while serving overseas, there exists a gateway to the collective American society’s acknowledged responsibility toward understanding war.

Divided into three subsections, the first portion of this chapter will discuss how as playwright, Bill Cain invokes stage performativity to first propagate then deconstruct the Warrior Ethos military creed. Within the text Cain guides his audience to an interpretation of a psychoanalytic state of the American soldier while in Iraq. This first analysis is supplanted with an examination of the text as a statement on the performance of collective military trauma. The script fundamentally coexists as a reading of the soldiers’ mourning process as response to the loss of their Warrior Ethos. In seeking to further explore the major dramatic question of the play, “what led PFC Reeves to commit this crime?” the final segment attempts to pinpoint Cain’s answer with assistance from postmodern theorist Fredric Jameson. I invoke Jameson to make the argument that as a formally individualized civilian entity, Daniel Reeves’ time in Iraq can be understood as a postmodern moment, and is furthermore reminiscent of the struggle that the collective military society faces overseas.\textsuperscript{8} It is then through viewing Reeves (representative of a communal group) as undergoing a postmodern condition that the individualized civilian reader/audience member of \textit{9 Circles} is better able to understand the American misunderstanding of our soldiers’ experiences serving overseas.

\textbf{9 Circles: Deconstructing the Myth of the Warrior Ethos}

To initiate its partially Brechtian structure, the text of \textit{9 Circles} begins with an unidentified cast member announcing to the audience that the first scene will take place within circle one; numerically uttered throughout all nine scenes of the play.\textsuperscript{9} Furthermore and in addition to the alienation of his audience, Cain invokes Italian poet Dante Alighieri in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{7} Steven Dale Green was stationed in Iraq from September of 2005 until May of 2006; he was honorably discharged from the army in May of 2006 for having a diagnosed antisocial personality disorder. The event of his crime was unknown at the time of his discharge. The opening scene of the play is prior to the news of Reeves’ crime becoming known, therefore Reeves is attempting to remain in the military in spite of his known personality disorder.

\textsuperscript{8} In labeling Daniel Reeves’ time as a postmodern moment, I am referring to Jameson’s essay “Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in which he identifies postmodernism as a new outgrowth borne of the modern movement. Within his essay, he discusses how postmodernism is characterized by the indifference of moral judgements, as well as a “genuinely dialectical attempt to think of our present time in History.”

\textsuperscript{9} Cain uses Brechtian devices, among other presentational theatre strategies, to develop the desired relationship between the audience and his play.
century circular journey undergone throughout the text of *The Divine Comedy*. At the opening of the first segment of *The Divine Comedy* titled *The Inferno*, Dante writes how the poet/Dante must be “ready to sustain the war”; this refers to his impending descent through the nine circles of hell (Ciardi 8). Dante and his comrade, the poet Virgil, are lead through Satan’s darkest levels. *The Inferno* is a literary work wrought with allegorical intensity. For the reader/audience member of *9 Circles*, Private Daniel Reeves is presented as our Dante, an American soldier posed on the precipice of his decent through hell. Rather than a fiery haven full of teary-eyed sinners, the partially expressionistic hell of *9 Circles* is Reeves’ experiences dealing with the American legal system prior to his conviction of a rape and murder. As the circles progress, characters personifying symbolic entities within the American military and civilian societies enter each scene: an army lieutenant, public defender, army attorney, pastor, civilian lawyer, military shrink, defense lawyer, and prosecutor confront Reeves. While each of these characterizations are rich in dramatic texture, the most notable depiction within the play is that of Reeves himself. Reeves signifies the individual in contact with the collective military body. Through analyzing Reeves within the text, the audience of *9 Circles* is more susceptible to re-analyzing their position on the mental health of soldiers fighting in Iraq, and perhaps analyzing themselves.

The audience of *9 Circles* is initially exposed to Private Daniel Reeves as a hotheaded soldier who spits out words filled with a sense of frenzied loyalty to the United States Army. Upon hearing he has been honorably dismissed from duty in the opening scene, Reeves recites his oath of enlistment to the Lieutenant:

I, Daniel Edward Reeves, so SOLEMNLY SWEAR I will SUPPORT AND DEFEND the Constitution of the United States AGAINST ALL ENEMIES, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC, that I WILL OBEY THE ORDERS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulation and THE UNIFORM CODE OF MILITARY JUSTIC. SO—HELP—ME—GOD. So help me God the first time I said it—I knew it was the truest thing I ever said (Cain).

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10 In his essay “Dante’s Inferno: Critical Reception and Influence,” David Lummus quotes Dante describing his inspiration in writing the work. “The subject, he writes, is literally ‘the state of souls after death,’ but allegorically it is ‘man according as by his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will’ he is deserving of reward or punishment by justice.’” When I interviewed Mr. Cain, he informed me that *The Inferno* was not a part of his training to be a Jesuit priest, but “part of the play (Cain).”
As presented in Cain’s above grammatical emphasis, the audience first experiences Reeves as a soldier fiercely contending his army dismissal. As the news of his crime is not realized until the following scene, the audience knows nothing of his prior actions, pre-existing personality disorder, or impending government-imposed death. They only see the desperation of a soldier to remain in the service of a coalition whose job it is to serve his country. By positioning his opening scene as prior to the knowledge of Reeves’ crime coming to light, Cain sets up an image that will be deconstructed throughout the course of the play. The purpose of the subsequent transformation, from presenting Reeves as the stereotyped American soldier to the trauma-stricken convict, is to allow the audience to momentarily consider how the American soldier is forged within the eyes of the civilian public. By initially composing Reeves as in an unrealized post-crime state, the reader/audience is also more deeply able to empathize with his consequent journey back and forth through time. In choosing to experiment with the temporality of Reeves’ individualized civilian and collective military existences, Cain not only re-stabilizes his Brechtian influence but also leads the audience as Virgil does Dante, allowing them to sit inside the mind of PFC Reeves (mimesis) through his sharp descent.

It is only through understanding our misconceptions of the soldier that we may allow ourselves to re-analyze how it is we view those citizens, such as Reeves, who serve overseas. The initial representation of Reeves as a strong, patriotic soldier capitalizes on the conventionally fashioned image of the military serviceperson as a heroic, warrior-like defeater of all enemies foreign and domestic. This image has persisted throughout the western literature of history, since before the days Homer depicted Achilles as the mightiest warrior in the Greek army. Today, the conception of the emotionally unbreakable military volunteer is replicated throughout film and theatre depictions of wartime experiences. It is also addressed in scholarly discourse. Postmodern scholar Fredric Jameson writes in his essay “War and Representation” (2009), “there exists some stereotype of war for such passages to defamiliarize and that there must then also be representations of war that are content to confirm the stereotype” (Jameson 124). In 9 Circles, Cain concentrates his artistic efforts on ramifications produced by the later portion of Jameson’s utterance. According to the essay, the current over-mediatized American culture has been so over-exposed to the horrific portrayals of war that subsist in popular media representations that we have acquired a (de)sensitivity towards those who serve overseas. While not present in Jameson’s essay, this idea can be developed further to suggest that the military itself may aid in
the societal (mis)understanding of the life of the soldier while overseas, an allegation evidenced in its expectation of soldiers to live up to values outlined in the army creed Reeves recites to the Lieutenant in the opening scene of *9 Circles*.

According to federal law, every soldier who enlists or re-enlists in the army must recite the oath Reeves emphatically states to the Army Lieutenant at the opening of the play. This oath is used in all of the Armed Forces units except the National Guard, who has a separate statement of their own. According to Reeves, the aforementioned pledge of military allegiance is the “truest thing” he believes he has ever said, as it undoubtedly is for troubled teens who seek refuge in the life that boasts of serving for their country (Cain 259). Similar in nature to the Army Creed is the Warrior Ethos. Positioned under “Army Values” on the United States Army’s official website, the Warrior Ethos creed begins “I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade” (U.S. Army). Several discourses on war and theatre have discussed the Warrior Ethos in context to societally manufactured images of the American soldier. In performance studies scholar Scott Magelssen’s essay “Rehearsing the Warrior Ethos: “Theatre Immersion and the Simulation of Theatres of War” (2009), Magelssen provides his reader with a firsthand analysis of reenactment efforts staged by the National Training Center at Fort Irwin to recreate a 1000 square-mile simulated Iraqi village in the Mohave Desert. His essay serves as a critique of such performative wartime training practices. Magelssen defines these events as rehearsals designed to instill the values upheld in the ethos: placing the mission first, never accepting defeat, and never, ever quitting.

*The Warrior Ethos* is also the title of a book written by former marine Steven Pressfield. Within it are Pressfield’s surmising’s on the nature of warfare and what it means for soldiers to live according to the Warrior Ethos. Pressfield describes how the Warrior Ethos evolved out of

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11 Within the first scene of the play, upon being honorably discharged by the Army Lieutenant Reeves responds: “Sir I made an OATH.” He then proceeds to say the oath I quoted at the beginning of the middle paragraph on page four of this chapter.

12 See the Army Forced website for further information on specific oaths.

13 In Magelssen’s essay he furthermore highlights for the reader how the “warrior” mentality is engrained in soldiers during training through quoting Lt. Gen. Russell L. Honoré, Commanding General First US Army: “We are in a war with no rear areas or front lines. We have to instill the Warrior Ethos into the mobilized…Soldiers must have tough, realistic, hands-on, repetitive training until their response is intuitive” (First Army Public Affairs Office 2004). Magelssen furthermore delves into others who have referenced the ethos in their work: “William Safire, the ‘On Language’ columnist for the New York Times, offers an etymology of this recently emerged appellation for servicemen and -women: Safire writes that “warrior” is less clumsy than “service member” when it comes to gender-neutral descriptors that apply across the armed services, and offers the Naval Academy’s course on “the code of the warrior” and the US Army’s “Warrior Leader Course” for platoon leaders as examples of increasing usage” (Magelssen, Safire 2007).
the need for survival. The ethos is derived from the warrior societies of ancient Rome, Greece, and Persia; Pressfield’s book presents stories from the infamous battles fought by the likes of Alexander the Great, Xerxes, and Leonides. Presfield reminds us that in ancient warfare, the god that ruled over a battlefield was Phobos, ruler of terror. It can therefore be surmised that the Warrior Ethos evolved as a “counterpoise to fear” (Presfield 12). In order to escape from the self-damaging fear of dying, the ethos exists out of the necessity for self-preservation. The creed is a set of ethics (ethos) that are taught from those older than us; we are not born with it. Our fathers (note gender specificity) instill it within us, as their fathers did for them.\(^{14}\)

The Warrior Ethos is a code of ethics that orders men to fight for their comrades. There is no “me” in the Warrior Ethos, only “us”.\(^{15}\) In what Pressfield calls “former warrior cultures,” which stand opposed to civilian cultures, and most noteworthy of which is the current U.S. social climate, boys are taught starting from a young age to feel a deep love and similarity with their fellow soldiers through the education system. This too differs from contemporary U.S. society in that elementary and high school education for our youth is not focused on warfare, but is academically-based and supposedly gender neutral.

A central faith of the Ethos is that “the group comes before the individual” (Pressfield 36). Unlike the others, this faith is duplicated within our current military ethics system; honors are often awarded to those who have risked their own lives for the life of another. Pressfield traces this presence from within Israel’s Yom Kippur conflict back through time, emphasizing its manifestation in those highly revered three hundred men who lost their lives to the Persian army at the Battle of Thermopylae. This fidelity in selflessness is wrapped up in the desire for honor, as well as “the ancient precept that killing the enemy is not honorable unless the warrior places himself equally in harm’s way” (Pressfield 43). Another important facet of the Ethos is the willingness to endure adversity. Pressfield writes how U.S. Marines expect to receive the most dangerous jobs, under the most grueling conditions, at the most hazardous times. Marines are offended when faced with anything else. Soldiers take pride in enduring such pains, since they do so in the name of freedom. For this reason dishonor is conferred to materialize when a soldier

\(^{14}\) Interestingly enough, an Army Lieutenant character in the play makes it known that Reeves grew up without a father figure present in his life. He simultaneously invokes a Freudian psychoanalytic read of Reeves, by suggesting that he has an incestuous relationship with his mother. While the play text only extends this far, it can be read that the Army Lieutenant is then suggesting that like many other young men, Reeves sought a kind of guidance in the Army that is akin to the presence of a father figure in his life.

\(^{15}\) This belief counteracts the notion of American exceptionalism, which centers on the notion of the individual. As we will see in 9 Circles, Reeves strongly identifies the notion of individualism in his pre-military state.
is in violation of an aforementioned military commandment. Military dishonor is viewed as worse than any hardship soldiers can endure, since it means soldiers have violated a military oath and shamed the establishment for which they made that oath. Therefore, regardless of any emotional trauma that they might carry, a soldier is commanded to “back down to know one, avenge every insult, never show fear, never display weakness. Play hurt, never quit,” furthermore summarized by Pressfield as our “American brand of honor” (Pressfield 49).

As it stands within the text, the crime of Reeves within 9 Circles was borne of an overdependence upon the ideals that the Warrior Ethos demands soldiers live up to. In presenting the audience with the exact words of his oath at the start of the play, Cain sets the stage for us to witness its destruction. In attempting to convince the Army Lieutenant that he should remain in the army, we see Reeves’ belief that the warrior should never quit. Throughout the first half of the play Reeves maintains a sardonically tough exterior, often laughing during moments of extreme duress. In these moments we see Reeves’ belief that the warrior never displays weakness. When discussing the event that inspired him to talk to an army shrink, witnessing the death of his Lieutenant, Reeves takes the responsibility of his superior’s death as his own. In this we see the warrior mentality that the group comes before the individual. As demonstrated in these textual examples, it would appear that Daniel Reeves’ military training was a success, and clearly evidences that Reeves reveres the tenants of the Warrior Ethos. In light of this, it is devastating (yet purposeful on Cain’s behalf) that the trauma of war leads him to commit a crime that ironically embodies the kind of violence the ethos purports to squall.

Daniel Reeves dishonors himself, his squad, and the military faction represents when he carries out his crimes against humanity. Reeves is everything Pressfield claims an honorably branded soldier is not. He acts out of selfishness and not selflessness, he is unable to endure the comparatively hellish adversity that faced him head-on, and he is ultimately imprisoned by his

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16 In Circle 2, the young female lawyer (YFL) informs Reeves that a lawyer will be appointed for him, to which he asks “wait a minute. Who wants me dead?” When she replies “the government,” the text then reads “Reeves laughs out loud. Whoops loud (Cain 266).”

17 My use of the word “shrink” in place of “psychiatrist” corresponds with the name of the character in the play. In Circle 6, he informs the shrink that the only thing that bothered him about his Lieutenant’s death was that “I didn’t kill the FUCK who SHOT him BEFORE he had the chance,” to which the shrink replies “soldier, you couldn’t have saved him (Cain 299).”

18 In the opening scene of 9 Circles, the audience learns that Reeves is being honorably discharged (this was prior to the news breaking of his crime) due to a personality disorder. Reeves then attempts to state to the Army Lieutenant that his disorder makes him an even more equipped soldier, as killing others does not bother him. Here the audience is simultaneously made witness to a symptom of his trauma: constriction.
own weakness of war-inflicted trauma. Within this frame, Reeves symbolically performs as the absolute embodiment and ultimate failure of the Warrior Ethos Creed. In his desperation to “never show fear, never display weakness,” and “never quit,” Reeves proves himself to be the semiotic paradox that encompasses the stereotyped military persona Jameson identifies with. His trust in the Warrior Ethos is what simultaneously enlivens and destroys him. Within this reading, the audience is led to the conclusion that the Warrior Ethos is not only problematic in its expectations of soldiers, but has the potential to perpetuate what it claims to fight against. In this way Cain allows us to contemplate the notion of the Warrior Ethos as a myth. This myth is bolstered by a military institution who views American soldiers as the embodiment of a creed, not living, breathing organisms incapable of suffering long-term trauma.

As awe-inspiring as the Warrior Ethos is meant to be to those in search of the courage to keep fighting, Pressfield is careful to admit that it has an “evil-twin manifestation” (Pressfield 17). The mindset of the Warrior Ethos must remain distinct from what Pressfield calls the “tribal mindset” (Pressfield 17). The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word tribe as “a group of people forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor” (Oxford English Dictionary). According to Pressfield, tribes are small, intimate communities who “prize loyalty and cohesion” (Pressfield 18). When their sense of intense loyalty to one another is mixed with what Pressfield calls “criminal, political, or extremist religious doctrine,” other group dynamics emerge. Pressfield identifies groups such as al Qaeda and the Aryan Brotherhood as the result of such an amalgamation (Pressfield 26). Following Pressfield’s thinking, one can conclude that the Warrior Ethos (western U.S.) is more accepting, while tribes can see themselves as victims to an outside enemy force.

In differentiating tribal groups from the U.S. Military, Pressfield attempts to make a distinction between modern-day political conflict and ancient modes of warfare. However, this juxtaposition falls short. While Pressfield’s analysis suggests tribes possess a sense of loyalty not as severe as that of the military, the similarities between the two groups are clear. The argument can be made that the military possesses a tribal mindset. This mindset is characterized by an obligation of intense loyalty to one another. Within The Warrior Ethos Pressfield argues that a misguided ethos has the potential to turn a tribe into a terrorist organization. His analysis allows the reader of 9 Circles to critically think on the American soldier’s positionality within the U.S.
Military. Within the play, Cain conflates Pressfield’s tribal mentality with the United States Warrior Ethos mentality.

With this regard to Pressfield’s analysis, *9 Circles* purposefully equates Reeves with the same mindset Pressfield assigns to terrorists in tribes. This equation is made through assigning Reeves with a sense of obsequious loyalty to the army. Through making it known that Reeves viewed the army as a parent-figure, Cain suggests that the military population is akin to that of a closely bonded, loyalty-driven tribe.\(^\text{19}\) He also continuously makes reference to the separation between military and civilian life in the text: in circle two Reeves shouts to the lawyer “The *Marines* are at war. The *Army* is at war. You know what this country is fighting? An *obesity epidemic!*” (Cain 265). Evidenced in this and other moments, Cain suggests that soldiers possess a fierce sense of allegiance to one another, rather than to their individualized civilian responsibilities or personal “bodies.” This allegiance is furthermore characterized by a devotion to an idea of what is constantly strived for, but never fully realized in actuality. These notions extend beyond the dramatic text and into the news coverage on the war. Seeking to break free of a dissatisfactory individualized life, reports and articles have discussed how many young men enlist in hopes of gaining financial security and assured career options. A 2009 *New York Times* article writes: soldiers are “lured in by a steady paycheck, benefits, and training,” particularly in light of the recent recession that forced many out of work and into the social welfare system (Alvarez).

Soldiers that depart from civilian society and enter the military body form a distinct community. While in this military community, the life of a soldier remains separate from the lives they led pre-deployment. They become a part of the military, further defined in this analysis as a tribe. Within the text of *9 Circles*, Daniel Reeves is a part of a tribe, driven by a sense of intense loyalty to the United States Army. In his depiction of the United States military as a tribe within the text of *9 Circles*, Cain blurs the lines between the bonds that unite soldiers and terrorists. In doing so, the audience is left pondering the difference between enemy and comrade. Within this analysis, Cain asks the audience to question what is ethically right and wrong within the rules of warfare. If the warrior values engrained within soldiers is what may lead to their destruction, what new American wartime ideology should be constructed? Not only does *9

\(^{19}\) Pressfield also identifies the connection between the U.S. military and the tribal mindset, writing “a strong case could be made that what the U.S. military attempts to in training its young men and women is to turn them into a tribe (Pressfield 18).”
*Circles* question how it is civilian society has constructed what it means to be a soldier, enemy, and criminal, Cain simultaneously asks us: if terrorists are not the enemy within *9 Circles*, who is? Within his depiction of Reeves’ crime, Cain suggests that the enemy is not those othered counterparts we fight against in the Middle East. Our enemy is our own misunderstanding of war and the soldiers that fight within it, due to our overdependence upon a mythic creed that leaves no room for psychological breakage.

**Trauma, Mourning and the Soldier**

At the heart of *9 Circles* lies the subject of war-inflicted trauma. The play serves as a commentary on how violence-related trauma is born, grows, and manifested into crime. The performativity of trauma in theatre studies is an ever-shifting field. This field is heavily influenced by the work of performance studies scholars, cultural anthropologists, psychiatrists and sociologists. Dramaturgically speaking, western-minded military trauma as a field is often traced back to the time of *The Poetics*, written by Aristotle in the third century B.C. It was during this time plays such as Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* and Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* confronted issues of war-inflicted trauma upon the minds of soldiers fighting in the Trojan War. In his books *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*, clinical psychiatrist Jonathan Shay does a cross-reading of events from the Trojan War to battles fought in contemporary warfare. While the bulk of Shay’s work concentrates on ancient warfare juxtaposed with the Vietnam War, several aspects of his texts are examples written into the text of *9 Circles*. These texts serve as a gateway to understanding how trauma played its hand in the crimes of Daniel Reeves.

*Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* addresses the subject of anger within trauma. The book focuses specifically on the actions of Spartan War hero Achilles from Homer’s *Iliad*. In referring to Achilles’ behavior during combat Homer writes “In his ecstasy of power he is mad for battle…pure frenzy fills him” (Shay 1628). After the death of his cousin Patroclus, Achilles’ thirst for avenging his loss lies within the slaying of all Trojan soldiers, particularly Hector (Shay 1628). Shay introduces chapter five with this quote, invoking it as an example of introducing what he calls the berserk state to his reader. His use of the term berserk is an invocation of the Norse word for fury, and its subsequent state is that which Achilles and Daniel Reeves have both experienced: the moment when a soldier loses control of his mind, body, and emotions. Shay refers to the berserk state as “a special state of mind, body,
and social disconnection” (Shay 1632). It is triggered by the experience of experiencing or witnessing a highly traumatic event. As Shay delineates the symptoms, characteristics, and consequences of experiencing the berserk state, he provides several examples of what induces such frenzy that evidence how traumatic experience contributes to the onset of this psychological jolt. Each of these examples are also identified as stressors, further defined within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders portion discussing post-traumatic stress disorder.

To more deeply delve into the berserk state as a form of psychological trauma, it is perhaps best to understand its development. The condition presents itself as an anti-intrusion state. Rather than admit surrender, the traumatized soldier may unleash his emotions in extreme or unexpected ways. In Judith Herman’s influential text *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), she delves into the history and characteristics of the trauma neuroses of war. Herman is quick to point out that “there is a simple, direct relationship between the severity of the trauma and its psychological impact,” leading us to better understand Reeves’ state upon committing his crime (Herman 34). She writes:

> Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. Moreover, traumatic events may sever these normally integrated functions from one another. The traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but without emotion...traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own (Herman 34).

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20 Pressfield cites one example of a berserk trigger a soldier who explains how when facing the enemy from several feet away, he pulled the trigger on his M-16 and it did not shoot. In response to the betrayal of his weapon failing him, this soldier quickly resorted to instead attacking the enemy with a knife. Even after it became clear he had destroyed his attacker, this soldier kept butchering. Other examples quote soldiers explaining how upon witnessing the further mutilation and abuse of their comrades’ dead bodies at the hand of the enemy, they entered a state of rage which blotted out all sense of former mercy. More broadly speaking, witnessing the death of a close friend in combat or the deliverance from what would seem to be certain death in combat are also examples cited within the text.

21 According to the DSM section that denotes the criteria for PTSD, a patient suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present:

1. The person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.
2. The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Note: in children, it may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.
Each of the aforementioned characteristics correspond with the psychological post-crime state of Daniel Reeves. At the opening of the play he does not clearly remember committing a crime against an Iraqi civilian family; the young female lawyer must recite to him the details of his actions. He is also quick to point out that he feels nothing emotionally for the life of the child, her family, or any Iraqi civilian. The principle symptom of his trauma, which is the crime itself, presents itself as detached from his psyche, his character, and his overall life. In Reeves’ final monologue, his crime is presented as an amalgamation of his traumatic symptoms: the key event within his berserk state. He also recognizes the crime for its horrific signification as the death serum begins to take hold.

In the moment that Daniel Reeves commits his crime, he was psychologically experiencing the berserk state. His berserk state was triggered by the event outlined in scene six of 9 Circles. During this scene, which takes place between Reeves and an army psychiatrist, the audience learns that prior to committing his crime Reeves witnessed the death of his lieutenant at an army check point. The scene between him and the army psychiatrists serves as a commentary on and performance of trauma. With difficulty, Reeves accounts to the shrink that his superior, a man he greatly loved and admired, died of a gunshot wound in his arms. It is also at this moment that Reeves admits he wants to kill everyone; summons the psychiatrist chooses to ignore. By admitting “I want to kill everybody,” it can be inferred that Reeves is unconsciously aware that the berserk state has taken over his mind and body (Cain 299). A part of him comprehends that his mental state has been compromised, due to the trauma of witnessing the death of his lieutenant. Because the audience has witnessed Reeves proclamation and subsequent therapy session, they are also able to acknowledge that he has been affected by his trauma. This scene is vital to the mission of Cain’s play. The war crime of Reeves is both the result of an overdependence of those values expected within the Warrior Ethos creed and the result of war-

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22 For reference please note in Circle 2: Dui Reeves’ lines “This isn’t a DUI, is it? What did I do? Did I get in a fight? Did I black out? I didn’t hit somebody with a car, did I? Whatever. (Cain 261).”

23 In Circle 5 Reeves admits to the civilian lawyer “I don’t give a fuck about the girl.” He later says “she ruined a lots of good men’s lives, sir. She fucked up a lot of good men’s lives....’she doesn’t matter. She really doesn’t matter (Cain 286).”

24 In the final monologue of the play, Reeves has had the lethal injection poison injected into his veins. In his poison-induced state, he sees the child he killed standing in front of him. He then speaks what she spoke as she was being attacked, and proceeds to feel the pain of his own crime upon her body. The play ends with “a breathing out of a spirit into the darkness,” symbolizing Reeves’ own awareness of his actions finally destroying him (Cain 315).

25 Upon being informed her patient wants to kill everyone, the army shrink responds “if you tell me you want to kill everybody or kill yourself, I have to warehouse you. If you don’t want to go home, do NOT tell me you want to commit MURDER or SUICIDE (Cain 299).”
inflicted trauma. In light of this analysis, the scene then allows the audience to re-consider the responsibility of the United States military toward taking care of its soldiers, as well as the true impact trauma can have upon their capacity to do harm.

In her book *Mourning Sex*, Peggy Phelan discusses how trauma can be performative. The noted performance studies scholar remarks upon the mournful nature of disappearing bodies. In her introduction, Phelan writes that she is interested in examining how we perform our recovery from the trauma of death or loss. The subject of war trauma and PTSD, and in *9 Circles* specifically is thus particularly fruitful when analyzed through the lens of Phelan’s theory. In *Mourning Sex*, Phelan writes that mourning is a performative process/act. She asserts that trauma is linked to bodily injury, and leaves its victims with metaphorical (or sometimes physical) holes. The trauma-inflicted, mournful body remains the focus of her work. It is important to note that her definition of the term “body” extends past the human form and suggests that other forms can be bodies, such as buildings. As the pain of trauma leaves the body filled with holes, her book is an exploration into the ways in which we fill the holes that trauma has left gaping within us. *Mourning Sex* is a useful tool to use when analyzing the crime of Daniel Reeves as a manifestation of mourning, and traumatic injury.

As a performative response to the subject of war trauma, *9 Circles* also performs as the embodiment of political violence that is derived from loss and physicalized through the mourning process. The body of a soldier reeling from the trauma of loss is the principle subject of Cain’s play. If we were to apply Phelan’s theory to Daniel Reeves’ psychological condition, we might conclude that he is in a mourning process, both literally and symbolically. At the start of the play, as well as throughout its duration, Reeves mourns the loss of his two fellow comrades subjected to gruesome ends by Iraqis soldiers. He more significantly mourns the loss of his lieutenant who was earlier identified as the principle trigger for his berserk state. If we were to consider the possibility that mourning as an event extends itself beyond mourning the force of death, as Phelan would assert, Reeves is performing the act of mourning multiple loss(es): real, symbolic, personal and extra-personal. As result of joining the army and fighting overseas, he has also lost any vestige of his rational self that existed prior to deploying. He is mourning the loss of his former self—a self/body that had not been exposed to the trauma of war. His self/body, representative of any soldiers’ body, was put into contact with another body: the body of war. *9 Circles* is the story of a soldier performing the loss of his rational self (a pre-war
condition). War then, as a traumatic force that employs soldiers as witnesses of cultural and ethical violence, subsequently leaves them filled with mental (and often physical) holes. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a state that performatively displays the absence of normality: the lives the soldiers lived before they entered combat are gone. PTSD is thus synonymous of the holes that gape within the minds (and again, often physical bodies) of soldiers sent overseas.

As I present Reeves as in mourning for the loss of his civilian body, I also aim to present him as in mourning for the loss of his Warrior Ethos. The moment he slips into his berserk stage, the weight of his trauma temporarily paralyzes his consciousness. All notions of what the Warrior Ethos expects its soldiers to live up to were thus removed from Reeves’ mind, replaced by intense anger. His crime can thus be properly analyzed as a traumatically-inspired symptom Reeves underwent while in mourning for the loss of his Warrior Ethos, which is thus presented as a myth perpetuated by the institution of the United States Armed Forces. This in turn allows us to turn our gaze back upon our own individualized mourning process as response to losing family members overseas. It also provides a gateway for us to more deeply comprehend what has been lost from those who return home, and how it is we as a collective civilian body can fill the holes through more fully understanding their (and our own) grief.

In this identification of war trauma as interwoven with the responsibility of the United States Armed Forces, it is not my intent to present the U.S. Military as an institution that seeks to destroy its most faithful employees. I seek rather to emphasize how the ideas presented in 9 Circles allow the audience to interrogate how it is we must re-evaluate our understanding of war and the soldiers’ positionality within it.

**The Soldier’s Postmodern Crisis**

As Cain’s purpose in writing the play is to lead his audience to question the “victim versus monster” nature of his leading male, the major dramatic question of the play remains as such: “what led Private Reeves to commit this crime?”  

The conclusion of this chapter will invoke Fredric Jameson essays “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” and “War and Representation” to explore Cain’s answer to this question. I will argue that Reeves’ time in Iraq can be understood as postmodern in nature, and is furthermore reminiscent of the struggle that the collective military society faces overseas. It is then through viewing Reeves as experiencing

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26 This dramatic question was earlier referenced as my own leading dramatic question of the play, within the introduction to this chapter.
a postmodern and existential moment that the reader of 9 Circles is better able to understand the American misunderstanding of the American soldiers’ experience in Iraq.

Throughout his work, political theorist Fredric Jameson identified the formation of a new historical period (condition) known as postmodernism, which can be understood as “the cultural predicament brought on by late capitalism’s extension of commodification into virtually all aspects of social and cultural life” (Fortier 177). In his essay “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Jameson defines certain features of what he identifies as the postmodern period: pastiche, the death of the subject, and the nostalgia mode. Through focusing specifically on his concept of the death of the subject, the text of 9 Circles can be further defined as the theatrical representation of a postmodern military societal moment. The death of the subject concept is defined as “the end of individualism as such” (Jameson 72). By this, Jameson means to highlight the ways in which we view the individual experience versus the collective experience. The study of the individual, or the “unique self,” is something Jameson associates with classical modernism, noting it is “over and done with” (Jameson 72). Because of the advent of capitalism, the individual is no longer. He has been transformed into part of the economic modes of production that control all aspects of cultural and economic life. Jameson deepens his argument to claim that the individual has only ever existed in myth; we have only ever been cogs in the machines of industrial production. For this reason does he believe originality is a thing of the past; all things exist in this world in the form of copies, or reproductions of pre-existing forms.

In 9 Circles Daniel Reeves is depicted in a light that engages with Jameson’s concept of the death of the subject. Throughout the text, Reeves is depicted not as one unique soldier who stands apart against a body of others, but a member of a collective military body. The reader comes to know him as a young man who was a part of an institution that seeks to reproduce soldiers who often break under the toll of military duress. In other words, the playwright displaces Reeves’ subjectivity by positioning him not as an individual facing extraordinary circumstances, but as a representation of every American soldier who is sent overseas. He does this in several ways, particularly by ensuring that the experiences Reeves endured overseas were reminiscent of the experiences every American soldier has also faced or feared. On countless occasions within the text, the reader is made subject to hear Reeves’ account of what he and his buddies, his comrades, his lieutenant, his superiors, and his fellow HUMVEE drivers endured. The audience rarely hears him say “I,” only “we,” in reference to the collective experience he
and his men endured. This thought is further solidified by a comment Bill Cain made to me in a September 2012 interview: “this play is not about Steven Dale Green. It’s much bigger than that” (Cain). In this statement, Cain asserts that the play centers on a collective experience shared by every soldier who was sent to Iraq/Afghanistan. It is through understanding this point that the reader is able to understand how Reeves’ crime was not individualized, but the misplaced aggression of a collective, trauma-inflicted body. Central to Jameson’s reading of the lack of a postmodern subject is Reeves misunderstanding of an idealized individualized hero and further complicated by an audience’s commodified world view.

By understanding how the death of the subject concept, interpreted above as the representation of the trauma of the collective American military body, is embodied within 9 Circles allows the audience to understand and make sense of Reeves’ war crime. In his essay “War and Representation” (2009), Jameson writes of the postmodern “existential experience of war,” that suggests when situated overseas, soldiers undergo an identity crisis as result of the shift of their place within the mode of production (Jameson 1534). No longer a part of a United States civilian society, and its notions of an exceptional, individualized military presence/subject, soldiers lose sight of how to fit within the collective military body while in Iraq. Jameson writes that this identity crisis then invokes “the death anxiety,” which he identifies as “the quintessential form of representation (that) war takes in most people’s minds” (Jameson 1534). For Jameson, this postmodern existential condition is most interesting because it involves all character types within in the division of labor fighting alongside each other, without the presence of a governmental institution. While serving in Iraq, soldiers are yanked from their civilian roles and transplanted into a role they do not understand: that of the soldier. They are taken from one mode of production (the United States economy) and pulled into a drastically different one, the military culture.

If we apply these selected ideas presented in “War and Representation” to 9 Circles, Reeves’ crime can be read as the result of experiencing what Jameson refers to as the “existentialist experience of war,” and moreover understood as a postmodern moment the soldier experiences in Iraq. Stripped of his civilian role of a troubled Texan teen, Daniel Reeves has been transplanted into the war machine, thereby becoming confused as to how to think, act, behave, and function. The crime he commits can be interpreted as the disastrous consequence of Reeves’ postmodern, existential, late-capitalist crisis moment(s). Since Reeves exists as a
representation of a collective American military body, 9 Circles then makes the statement that any American (soldier) has the potential to be Daniel Reeves. Therefore, if unable to withstand the strains placed upon them through the transformation process of leaving civilian society and entering the military body, every American soldier has the potential to commit a crime against humanity or stray in some way from any heretofore modern ethos.

Throughout his essay Jameson invokes well-known film and literature representations of soldiers’ experiences to emphasize his conclusion that due to its existential “proximity of scene, (war) is virtually nonnarrative and that this raw material (his essay’s analysis of various war films and works of literature) seeks to appropriate its missing protagonist from any number of narrative paradigms” (Jameson). In other words, throughout film and literature discourses surrounding warfare, authors/writers have placed their soldiers within decided frames of reference, in an attempt to give what is ultimately unrecognizable a face.27

While we have established that Reeves’ crime can be interpreted as the result of the soldier’s postmodern crisis in Iraq, this still does not provide the reader with an answer to the major dramatic question of 9 Circles: “what led Private Reeves to commit this crime?” The conclusion of Jameson’s essay allows the reader to further ponder the possibility of Cain’s placement of Reeves within 9 Circles. As already discussed, Cain situates his leading figure within a decided frame of reference: as a representation of the collective United States military body. If we are following along the lines of what Jameson asserts near the conclusion of “War and Representation,” Cain’s placement of Reeves within this frame of reference allows us to better come to terms with what we can never understand: how a soldier could rape and murder a fourteen year-old child, and then set her body on fire. By positioning him within a frame of reference, in this case a trauma-inflicted group, Cain is attempting to provide his audience a gateway to understanding that the major dramatic question is ultimately unanswerable. Nonetheless the audience must also ask, is there blame? This paradox underscores Jameson’s and other postmodernist’s notions of the lack of a single verifiable universal truth.

By viewing 9 Circles through the lens of Fredric Jameson’s work on postmodernism and war, the reader is better able to understand that the play is meant to be both a representation of the trauma of a collective military body and an attempt to highlight the way in which society

27 This follows postmodernist Francois Lyotard’s thinking when he described a postmodern characteristic as an attempt to make “the the unpresentable…perceptible” (The Postmodern Condition)
attempts to give a name to what we ultimately cannot name or understand. The question constantly reemerges, what leads a soldier to commit a war crime? Through presenting the soldiers’ experience overseas as the collective postmodern crisis moment of anyone who might serve overseas, I, following Jameson, intend to pinpoint the ways in which Cain is purposefully allowing the audience to ponder a postmodern crisis moment the soldier faces overseas. *9 Circles* is Cain’s attempt at presenting the postmodern moment of a collective military population in order to emphasis our responsibility as citizens to understand that which we cannot understand: war and the full effect it has upon the mental state of its soldiers.

**Conclusion**

Jesuit priest/playwright Bill Cain makes a statement on how American civilian society should re-analyze our personal and collective responsibility toward understanding war and the a/effect it has upon soldiers within his play *9 Circles*. The first portion of this chapter discussed Cain’s psychoanalytic deconstruction of Private Reeves throughout the course of the play. In presenting the army creed, or Warrior Ethos, as a myth perpetuated by forces within the Armed Forces, Cain first asks his audience to re-cast their image of the stereotyped American “warrior-eque” soldier. I also aimed to present Cain’s deconstruction as a focal point in allowing his audience to contemplate how the United States military may aid in perpetuating the collective civilian and individual soldier’s expectation to serve as embodiments of those values outlined in Steven Pressfield’s analysis of the creed.

The second portion of this chapter deepened the aforementioned interpretation on the Warrior Ethos by presenting the text of *9 Circles* as a commentary on war-inflicted trauma. Through reading Reeves’ therapy session with an army psychiatrist as a performance of his trauma, I applied Peggy Phelan’s theory on mourning to state that Reeves simultaneously performs the act of mourning his former (individualized) civilian self, prior to experiencing the trauma of war. Reeves, as a representation of a collective military body, is mourning the loss of his Warrior Ethos, otherwise known as his drive to become a stereotypically constructed image of the American soldier.

Finally, through using Fredric Jameson’s essay “War and Representation” I aimed to pinpoint how the experience of the collective military body in Iraq can ultimately be understood as postmodern in nature. *9 Circles* as a dramatic text attempts to give a face to what is ultimately unrepresentable in discourse and media: how deep the impact of war trauma can be upon
soldiers. This final critique of the dramatic text is not to discount any previous analysis, but rather to position Cain as an asker of questions, not answerer of what proves ultimately unanswerable. In understanding that we cannot truly measure the impact war has upon our soldiers, we can turn to our responsibility as a collective military and civilian population toward understanding that we do not understand. With this (mis)understanding in mind, the collective United States community can better turn to how to cope with increasing rates of PTSD in returning soldiers.
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CHAPTER THREE

The Journey into Hell and Back: 9 Circles in Production

Ms. Saddler’s production of 9 Circles was a thought-provoking piece of theatre. Her analysis, research and understanding of the script were evident throughout the production in the choices made by Ms. Saddler and her collaborators from the set and costumes to lighting and music. Her passion for and deep commitment to the ideas in the script served the university community by bringing attention to not only the issues facing Iraqi war veterans, but all American citizens as our country faces tough questions about the consequences of war.

Dr. Teresa Durbin-Ames, March 2013

Director’s Vision

An American war crime was committed on March 12th, 2006. Private Steven Dale Green was sentenced to life in prison for raping and murdering an Iraqi child and her family. Two years after his actions became known as “one of the worst war crimes of the Iraq War,” the Rand Analysis for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) reported that “nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder” (“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”). Playwright Bill Cain’s play 9 Circles (2010) is the theatrical dramatization of Green’s crime. The play is about war-inflicted trauma. Through witnessing the story of Private Daniel Reeves (Green), the audience wonders about their own responsibility toward the Iraq War.

The final chapter of this thesis examines the theatrical direction of Bill Cain’s 9 Circles at Miami University (2012). This production is the practical component of a creative thesis in directing offered by the Department of Theatre. This chapter begins with a discussion of the first design meeting for 9 Circles. Insights on several pre-rehearsal directorial steps made to prepare the production are then offered. The 9 Circles audition and rehearsal process will then be examined, followed with observations on the roundtable discussion “Americans in Iraq: Understanding the Consequences.” A brief personal reflection on the process of directing 9 Circles concludes this chapter.

28 Teresa Durbin-Ames is the Chair of the Theatre Department at Ashland University.
29 NBC News, the New York Times, and the U.K.’s Daily Mail have all labeled Green’s crime as among the worst in Iraq War history, throughout their coverage of the event.
9 Circles Begins

How can we come together as a community of American citizens to better understand our responsibility toward understanding the consequences of war? The first 9 Circles design meeting (October 2012) began with this question. My director’s talk was accompanied by a PowerPoint slide presentation. The slides served to provide image journal projections, design visions, and a general overview of the play’s historical context for the production team. I provide the PowerPoint in the appendix of this thesis. This meeting was the first of many meetings that lasted until February 2013. The director’s presentation concluded with the following statement:

While Cain insists that this is not a war play, we are staging it as one. I (Sarah Saddler, Director) want the audience to see that the trauma of war attaches itself to the human soul and takes it on a journey into the innermost circles of hell. This play is the journey of a soul into hell, with the last scene portraying both the deepest layer of that world and a place of revelation(s). The costumes, lights, music, and scenery must take the audience on a journey into the innermost circles of hell and back out again (Saddler).

Pre-Casting Preparations

Auditions for 9 Circles took place during the first week of January 2013. Auditions were held prior to the university holiday break. This decision was made so the actors could have more time with the script. The Miami University casting requirements requested eight separate actors rather than double-casting the production. This was done to provide more acting opportunity for the undergraduates in the Department of Theatre. Prior to auditions, a list of character descriptions for each role was hung on the audition wall.

A scenic concept for each circle of the play was created prior to auditions. These scenic concepts were created so each scene was different from the scene that preceded it. The goal was to make each scene contrasting in tone, texture, and emotional intensity. The dramatic question of the play served as inspiration for creating these scenic concepts. The major dramatic question of 9 Circles was: what led Daniel Reeves to commit this crime, and for this is he a victim or a monster? Each scenic concept was created to portray Daniel Reeves as a victim of war trauma,

30 The world premiere of 9 Circles (Marin Theatre Company, 2010) was performed by three actors. Each actor (except for Reeves) performed multiple roles. The majority of professional productions of 9 Circles followed this casting format.
31 This question was asked during the original director’s talk for 9 Circles. It was inspired by the director’s research on playwright Bill Cain. Cain has admitted during multiple interviews that his goal in writing the play was to inspire
or a monster who murders a family. Leading the audience to the eventual conclusion that Daniel Reeves cannot be classified as either a victim or a monster was the end goal in creating this. Reeves acted as both a victim of war trauma and as a man who commits a monstrous act while under the influence of his trauma. The list of scenic concepts was further developed as the rehearsal process continued. It served as a significant pre-rehearsal directorial step because it molded the overall production concept of 9 Circles.

Marketing the performance of 9 Circles to the Miami University student audience was another component of the pre-casting process. Before the start of the 2012/13 school year I contacted Dr. Patrick Haney, Chair of the Political Science Department. Dr. Haney offered several email lists of those interested in seeing 9 Circles. He then suggested I read the book Shade it Black: Death and After in Iraq. He explained that Shade it Black was the summer reading text for undergraduates of the Political Science department. Inspired by the ideas in Shade it Black, Miami University Professors Jennifer Kinney and Nancy Arthur were programming a year’s worth of campus wide events geared toward war and the consequences it has upon American society.

The 9 Circles design team received an invite to present a portion of the script at the Miami University Social Justice Symposium in October of 2011. This event was part of a year-long series of events created to increase awareness on the Iraq War. Two theatre graduate students presented a staged reading of the seventh scene of 9 Circles at the symposium. Upon the conclusion of the reading, several audience members offered their input on the ideas presented within the scene. One man in the audience notably spoke on how important it is members of the American community attempt to understand the atrocities committed in war.

9 Circles playwright Bill Cain was interviewed on September 8th, 2012. This telephone interview served as a crucial step in furthering the second chapter of this thesis. During the course of the interview Mr. Cain elaborated on his gender-specific casting requests. He also discussed his initial reaction to the news of Steven Dale Greens’ crime. His initial reaction to the news of Greens’ crime inspired him to write 9 Circles. He offered his opinions on the recent empathy. He sought to make the statement that in wartime, there is no way to gauge the difference between victim of trauma and monster of war.

32 To elaborate further, in scene one the Army Lieutenant showcased Reeves as a victim of honorable dismissal. In scene two the Public Defender showcased Reeves as a monster who raped a child. This continued throughout the duration of the performance. The seventh scene portrays Reeves as both a victim and monster. The defense showcases him as a victim. The prosecution showcases him as a monster. The audience is purposefully torn between deciding where their own judgment stands, which is the purpose of the play.
referral back to Greek tragedy as a means to define war and its consequences today. He discussed the differences between present-day warfare and the drama pioneered by ancient Grecian playwrights.33 This portion of the interview served as the inspiration for the paper on the Theatre of War Project included within the appendix of this thesis.34

**The Casting Process**

Auditions for *9 Circles* took place on January 7th in the Studio 88 Theatre. Callbacks were held the following evening. Stage manager Erin Mizer prepared an audition sheet several weeks prior to this date. Those auditioning were asked to prepare two contrasting contemporary monologues. Each audition was not to exceed three minutes in length. As director, I was searching for actors willing to push emotional boundaries during their audition. I asked the stage manager to include a signed portion on the audition form that read “by signing this, I am stating that I have no problem speaking the offensive language contained within the script.” This waiver was created because the script of *9 Circles* contained potentially very offensive material. All those who auditioned agreed to sign their signature.

Twenty five actors read for the first night of auditions, the majority of which were Miami University theatre majors. My thesis advisor Dr. Paul K. Bryant Jackson and stage manager Erin Mizer observed the auditions with me. As director, I noticed how the actors auditioning for Daniel Reeves performed monologues that showcased a psychological instability. In doing so, they were tapping into the war-induced traumatic state Reeves (Green) experienced while overseas. Similarly, the females auditioning chose audition pieces specific to each female character of *9 Circles*. The overall specificity of those auditioning demonstrated that the list of character expectations were clearly understood.

Fifteen actors were requested to return for callbacks the following evening. On this night actors were asked to read select scenes from the play.35 I provided those auditioning with insight into each scene. I asked the actors reading for the part of Daniel Reeves to play the part much younger. I also requested that all those auditioning make at least one strong physical choice

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33 Please reference my complete interview with Bill Cain within the appendix of this chapter.
34 Upon finishing my work on *9 Circles*, this interview conversation inspired me to continue thinking about the military therapy methods that use Grecian tragedy as a means to catharsis for soldiers returning home, most notably the Theatre of War Project. My paper “The Theatre of War Project: Surrogating a Modern Military through Ancient Antiquity” is included within the appendix of this chapter.
35 The scenes the actors read on the night of callbacks were those I selected because of their emotional intensity. They included portions of the script in which Reeves suffers traumatic flashbacks, as well as featured the most vulnerable moments showcased by the supporting ensemble characters.
during their read. Some actors took this challenge and made strong physical choices such as touching their scene partner. Other actors were afraid of being physically vulnerable and chose to remain in their chairs. Making this request for physical movement aided me in discovering which of those auditioning were willing to tackle the intense material of 9 Circles.

For the final casting decisions, I cast actors who displayed different personalities and acting styles. Actors with varying physical dispositions were cast to present Daniel Reeves as more unique in contrast. As each character’s title is their job, each character is representative of a symbolic entity of the American population. The characters represent the forces of American government, the civilian society, the military, the field of psychiatry, and members of the clergy. Therefore, each actor cast was starkly different to both Reeves and their fellow cast members. Their physical and emotional differences emphasized their contrasting symbolic representations within American society. My priest was smaller-statured, dark-haired, and wore glasses. My defense lawyer was tall, thin, with a scruffy beard. My prosecutor was blonde, fair skinned, with a French twist hairstyle. My public defender (YFL) was short, African American, and wore heels. The shrink was tall, Serbian, and wore a military uniform. I cast male actors in the roles of Reeves, the priest, defense lawyer, and army attorney. I cast female actors in the roles of prosecutor, young female lawyer, and shrink.36

The biggest difficulty in casting was deciding the role of Daniel Reeves. Two actors were considered for this role. Senior Brendan Monte had years of acting training and stage time. Freshman Connor Flanin had no prior college acting experience. A senior in the theatre department, Brendan had a hard-earned reputation for being talented. He was good-looking, had a masculine energy, and radiated confidence. His physical description went against the skinny, awkward Reeves the design team had originally envisioned. Both Brendan and Connor possessed the energy required for the leading role of the play.

I cast Brendan Monte as my Daniel Reeves because he allowed me to practically apply the theoretical chapter of this thesis into performance. The second chapter of this thesis focuses on playwright Bill Cain’s deconstruction of the Warrior Ethos within the text of 9 Circles. The

36 Cain is gender-specific with his casting requirements. I inquired into the reasons behind his gender-specific casting during our personal conversation. Please find this conversation in the appendix of this thesis. During my callbacks I experimented with reversing the genders of the prosecutor and defense lawyer. However, given the talent of the female actress who read for the part of prosecutor I cast the production according to Cain’s gender-specific guidelines. While the argument can be made that any gender-specific casting requirements may be problematic in terms of their gender implications, my reasons for casting according to Cain’s script were in casting the best actor for each part (regardless of gender).
Warrior Ethos posits that American soldiers are mentally unbreakable, strong, and will never accept defeat. The upholding of the Warrior Ethos by the U.S. Military contributes to the societally stereotyped version of the American soldier in Iraq. In possessing a masculine energy and strong physical appearance, Brendan Monte represented the stereotyped image of the American soldier. In casting him as Daniel Reeves, the audience witnesses the deconstruction of the stereotyped vision of an American soldier in the performance. As a dramatic text and embodied performance, 9 Circles attempts to deconstruct what is recognizable within the eyes of mainstream civilian American society. Furthermore, having portrayed many complex roles and a fourth-year senior with much training Brendon Monte was cast as Daniel Reeves.

The auditions for 9 Circles attracted a large amount of male-specific attention. As previously noted, the second chapter of this thesis asserts that 9 Circles works to deconstruct the Warrior Ethos. I observe how soldiers feel the need to live up to those values demanded by the U.S. Military, values further embodied in the Warrior Ethos creed ("Warrior Ethos- Army Values"). Throughout the 9 Circles casting process, the same ideal of the warrior-like American soldier attracted the most “warrior-like” actors of the Miami University Department of Theatre. In many ways this audition process confirms how United States military servicemen uphold a certain reverence within civilian society. Reminiscent of this observation is a statement by American political journalist Chris Hedges in his book War is a Force Which Gives Us Meaning:

> The prospect of war is exciting. Many young men, schooling in the nation that war is the ultimate definition of manhood, that only in war will they be tested and proven, that they can discover their worth as human beings…the admiration of the crowd, the high-blown rhetoric…the ideal of nobility beckons them forward (Hedges).

Hedges’ quote highlights the attraction of war for males seeking to “discover their worth” through political nobility. His quote also coincides with the attraction 9 Circles received by the male actors within the Miami University Department of Theatre. It can be concluded that the audition process of 9 Circles confirms the existence of the Warrior Ethos within the Department of Theatre. Male actors sought to embody war on stage, thus embodying warriors. There is an attraction in embodying this representation, further proven in Hedges’ statement. However, the
play seeks to first deconstruct then reject this ideal. Therefore, the male-specific attraction to *9 Circles* reveals the play’s own necessity within American culture.

**The Set Design of *9 Circles***

*9 Circles* was an all-student designed production. I collaborated with each designer for two months prior to the beginning of rehearsals. The *9 Circles* scenic designer was senior Weston Oberg, with Associate Professor Gion DeFrancesco serving as his advisor. The costume designer was senior Meghan Gallatin, with Professor Leticia Delgado serving as her advisor. The sound designer was senior Keith Arcuragi and lighting designer senior Christi Muller, with Professor Russ Blain as their advisor.

I informed the scenic designer that I wanted a minimalistic set inspired by the art movement of expressionism. The desire for minimalism was derived from the overall scenic structure of the play. Because *9 Circles* deploys Brechtian-inspired language and stage devices, minimalism was desired. Because my image journal contained expressionistic art works, the artistically distorted images served as inspiration in creating the set. The decision was also made to set the play in an arena-structured stage space. It was my belief that the audience would be more fully immersed within the world of Daniel Reeves if *9 Circles* was staged in-the-round. Since the play is also titled *9 Circles*, staging the play in a large circle was also fitting to the overall structure of the dramatic action.

The set for *9 Circles* was an interrogation room. The floor was curved in order to give it a distorted feel. The scenic concept was that the audience was seeing what Daniel Reeves sees. The audience would see through the eyes of a trauma-stricken soldier recently returning home from Iraq. The floor consisted of grey tiles with a large blood-red fault line running through its center. Smaller red fault cracks ran over the stage. Two lights hung above the room. One was hung at a slightly different level than the other. Surrounded on all four sides were raked audience seats. Four large grids suspended above each audience side. These grids were tilted at a different angle and painted to look like prison bars.

Throughout the performance of *9 Circles* the set floor was interpreted in different ways. At certain points it looked like blood was soaking through the floor. At other moments the red fault line was barely noticeable due to the furniture or lighting wash. To one passive observer the

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37 The play is brechtian in its break of the fourth wall, its episodic scenic structure, and in its request for actors to change costumes on stage.
fault line was mistaken for the image of the river that runs through the country of Iraq. He remarked that the cracks looked like water veins of the river. Since it helped divide the space into playing areas, the fault line proved advantageous to the blocking of each scene.

The set consisted of two chairs, a table, a bench, and a small metal stool. The cast began blocking with two contrasting chairs. One chair had arm bars and the other had no arm bars. This quickly proved problematic in terms of the symbolism it set forth. Having two different chairs also began complicating the blocking. The scenic designer allowed me to have two identical chairs. The bench doubled as the prison bed for Reeves. The small metal stool was incorporated during the scene with the Defense Lawyer as a table for his folder.

The performance of 9 Circles opened with two chairs and the table. As the scenes progressed, the actors (serving as the set crew) began pulling elements of the set away. Eventually only two chairs remained on the stage. By the final scene of the play, the only set piece remaining on stage was Reeves’ execution chair. As 9 Circles is the journey of Daniel Reeves’ descent into hell, the deeper he journeyed the more earthly elements (furniture pieces) were removed.

**Lighting Design**

The lighting design for the show was inspired by the expressionistic work of Edward Munch’s Scream. This painting was featured in my image journal and sent to the lighting designer as inspiration. Because the set design was presentational, the lighting design sought the same effect. Characters were lit realistically within the scenes. In the transition between scenes more colorful, non-realistic lighting choices were implemented. For the final scene of the play, the designer incorporated red and orange washes, sudden transitions from light to dark and varying levels of intensity. She also experimented with distortion. There were several moments the audience could only see Reeves’ silhouette as he spoke the words of his final monologue. His face remained in the dark for the majority of the monologue. This decision was made so the language of his final monologue was best showcased to the audience.

I suggested that a lighting change be implemented at each moment in the play Private Reeves experiences a traumatic flashback. This decision was made for the audience to better identify the results of war-inflicted trauma. The lights faded and concentrated solely on Reeves.

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38 My advisor, Dr. Paul K. Bryant Jackson, had made this remark about halfway through the rehearsal period. The other observers who I reference were friends who invited the show.
throughout the three times he experiences a flashback. This happened when Reeves sees his friend’s dead body in circle one, witnessing the death of a child in circle four, and when remembering the death of his sergeant in circle six.

**Costume Design**

The costume design for *9 Circles* was inspired by stereotypical representations of the military and civilian American societies. As emphasized earlier in this chapter, each of the characters in *9 Circles* are representations of populations within American society. The costume designer was asked to exaggerate the difference between the military and civilian characters of the play. She chose a theme of blue and orange for the civilian characters and green for the military characters. This design choice further emphasized a significant idea of *9 Circles*: the problematic gap between the military population and civilian culture within the United States.

Private Reeves changed all of his clothing on stage. These costume changes were incorporated into the action of each scene. The stage directions request that Private Reeves remove all of his clothing during the seventh circle of the play. In this scene Reeves is saying his final prayers before his execution. I requested that Private Reeves remove his orange t-shirt and shoes during this scene. Wearing just orange pants and a white t-shirt, Reeves was fully clothed for the remainder of the play. Near the end of tech week a professor at Miami University suggested that Reeves pray in the nude. He had no knowledge of the playwright’s request for this choice within the script. This showed me that I had missed a strong opportunity for a powerful moment within the performance. Seeing Reeves nude before his execution would have served to further deconstruct the image of an American soldier as hyper-masculine, strong, and heroic.

**Sound Design**

I wanted the music within *9 Circles* to be the same music soldiers in Iraq listen to pre-combat. Inspiration for this decision was derived from a *New York Post* article titled “Notes from the Front.” This article discusses the types of music soldiers listened to overseas. This request was also inspired by Jonathan Pieslak’s book *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (2009). Pieslak discusses how music is an integral part of how the lives of soldiers fighting overseas. Listening to certain kinds of music can better prepare soldiers to enter combat. It also has the potential to ease war-inflicted trauma.

Believing that music can be used as a psychological tool upon the audience, we featured music that allowed the audience to be immersed within the world of Private Reeves. In order to
understand that Daniel Reeves is suffering from the trauma of war, the audience had to empathize with his fate. Therefore, the audience had to see through Reeves’ eyes (set design) and hear what Reeves heard (sound design).

The sound designer’s pre-show music list featured artists such as Disturbed, Three Days Grace, and Eminem. Each of the pre-show songs had a theme that tapped into the emotions of the play. These included anger, sadness and pain. Except for the first song “Down with the Sickness” by System of a Down, none of the pre-show songs featured an artist screaming for extended periods of time. In addition, no songs were played that contained offensive words regarding race or gender. It was the intent that the audience be energized with the music, not frightened or offended before the start of the performance.

In order to prevent confusing or distracting the audience with songs between each scene of the play, environmental noises were played during scene changes. The sound designer compiled a series of atmospheric environmental sounds that showcased the emotions of each impending scene. These sound cues began as physical environmental noises (the sound of war in the distance, prison bars slamming, the catcall of prison mates) then shifted to psychological sounds. Throughout the last three circles of the play the audience hears what was happening inside Reeves’ mind. These environmental sound effects included chiming ringing noises at the start of circle five and the sound of a dog barking prior to circle six.

**Props**

The actors of 9 Circles were responsible for setting each scene of the play. This decision was made out of my directorial belief that a run crew moving the set would spoil the Brechtian-inspired structure of the performance. The props list was as follows:

- Briefcase, Army Attorney
- Briefcase, Defense Lawyer
- Folder, Lieutenant
- Bible, Pastor
- Folder, Public Defender
- Notebook, Shrink
- Handcuffs, Reeves

The props designer inspired by the prop images found in the initial production presentation. He was also inspired by props used in the film *A Few Good Men* (1992). He found a similar briefcase for the Army Attorney as that of the military characters in the movie. In order to further showcase the divide between the military and civilian characters within the play, the (civilian)
Defense Lawyer’s briefcase was brown and slightly worn-looking. The (civilian) Public Defender used the same folder as that of the Army Attorney. She was instructed to hold the briefcase in a different way. This was so the audience would not be able to tell it was the same briefcase they later saw handled by the Army Attorney. The bible carried by the Pastor was extremely worn-looking. Since the Pastor stresses the importance of his bible throughout circle four, I requested that the bible appear well-used. The handcuffs were used throughout circle five and served as the script’s “restraints”. They were simple metal handcuffs. A glass of water was worked into the dramatic action of the play. At the start of circle five the Army Attorney offers Daniel Reeves a glass of water while he is being placed into his prison restraints. This glass of water was not a part of the original stage directions. Since Reeves is on stage the entire duration of the show, it was important he be provided refreshment for his voice.

The Rehearsal Process

Rehearsals for 9 Circles ran from January 28th until February 27th. The first night of rehearsal featured a read-through of the script. This read-through followed with designer presentations. Once the read-through was complete, each designer spoke on their design concept. The scenic designer passed around the set model. The sound designer played songs which served as inspiration for his work. Once the read-through and designer presentations had commenced, the cast began work. I passed out hand-outs I had created. These hand-outs contained explanations for references made throughout the script. They also provided definitions for the advanced terms within the text. Once we went over each reference in the hand-out, we discussed each person’s character biography. I had requested that each cast member create a character biography over the holiday break. The remainder of the first night was devoted to processing each person’s perception of their character.

On the second night of table work the cast and I finished discussing character biographies. We then conducted another read-through of the play. Upon the second read-through, we stopped frequently to explore each line more thoroughly. Actors were asked questions concerning their involvement in each scene. The discussion opened up to include how each scene was significant to the overall message of the play. Once the second read-through was complete, the group discussed each person’s reaction to 9 Circles. This opened up a discussion about the general themes presented within the play, as well as its societal importance.
The third and final night of table work featured an Augusto Boalian workshop I facilitated with my cast. I led the ensemble through five Boalian workshop exercises. These were The Human Orchestra, Columbian Hypnosis, the Jump, the Mirror Exercise, and the Trust Fall. This workshop was created and implemented in order to establish the cast of 9 Circles as an ensemble of actors. Since all of the actors except for the Defense Lawyer acted exclusively with Daniel Reeves, I sought to unite as a community of actors. This workshop was done as early in rehearsal process as possible. I gave the actors more time to bond once it was completed. This workshop was crucial to the success of the subsequent rehearsal process.  

Rehearsals lasted from 7:00 PM to 11:00 PM every evening of the week except for Saturdays. The rehearsal process was fast-paced. The creative team (myself, the stage manager, the assistant stage manager, and cast) spent the first week blocking each scene. Once each scene was blocked, the actors and I went back and began “working” each scene. “Working” a scene meant exploring the emotional and physical texture of each scene more deeply. Once this process was complete, the cast began running the first half of the show. Once we were accustomed to running the show in halves, we began running the entire production twice an evening. Each evening of rehearsal underscored a new journey taking place. New discoveries were made on every night of rehearsal. The rehearsal process ran smoothly and without major difficulty or problems. The cast of 9 Circles worked hard each evening. If something was not working, each cast member proved eager to try a different tactic in order to achieve their character objectives. There was minimal downtime in terms of rehearsal schedule and every rehearsal lasted the full four hours.

My role as Director during the 9 Circles rehearsal process meant I pushed the cast to take physical and emotional choices. Realizing early on that the actors were afraid to take major emotional and physical choices without directorial urging, the cast and I continued to experiment with games. Some of the less-experienced actors seemed intimated with the strength of the actor playing Daniel Reeves. To help with this issue, I had each actor do a “push-and-pull” exercise with the actor playing Daniel Reeves. Each actor would sit in a chair across from Brendan (Reeves) and hold his hands in theirs. From there they would read their scene, pushing and pulling each other’s hands according to the varying energy levels in the scene. This exercise

39 During the spring of 2012 I took a Boal workshop with Dr. Ann Elizabeth Armstrong. The text from which I drew these exercises was *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (2002)
helped immensely in terms of establishing a personal connection between each actor and Brendan (Reeves). Each actor’s vulnerability in front of Brendan (Reeves) continued to improve until the night of opening.

9 Circles opened on the evening of February 27th and enjoyed a run of sold-out performances. The cast received standing ovations each night of performance except for the Sunday afternoon show. The House Manager was ordered to forbid late entrances into the theatre beyond the start of the performance. There were no major audience distractions throughout the production run.

“Americans in Iraq: Understanding the Consequences” Pre-Show Discussion

“Americans in Iraq: Understanding the Consequences” was created to discuss the ideas behind 9 Circles. It took place on February 27th in Studio 88. This was also the day the show opened. Its panel members were Dr. Elizabeth Mullenix, Dr. Paul Jackson, Dr. Andrew Gibb, graduate student Nicoly Woodcock, U.S. Marine Leo Anderson, U.S. Marine Stephen Endicott, and myself. Dr. Mullenix is the Chair of the Miami University Theatre Department. Her scholarly work focuses on the intersection of war and theatrical performance. Dr. Andrew Gibb is a professor within the Department of Theatre who focuses on ethical issues within performance. As previously noted, Dr. Jackson is my thesis advisor and served as the host of the roundtable. A second-year graduate student in the English Department, Nicoly Woodcock taught a class on the representation of war in American literature. Leo Anderson is a personal acquaintance. He has been a Lieutenant in the Marine Corps for the past three years. I made contact with his Staff Sergeant, Stephen Endicott, soon after Lieutenant Anderson agreed to participate on the panel. Staff Sergeant Endicott has served three tours in Iraq. He originally traveled overseas as a part of the forces fighting in the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

“Americans in Iraq: Considering the Consequences” focused on hearing each panel member’s response to 9 Circles. The main focus in its creation it was to feature the voices of those involved within the military. This was immensely important because 9 Circles is a play that dramatizes an institution in which hundreds of thousands of Americans are employed. The panel began with opening statements made from each panel member. These statements largely focused on each person’s initial reaction to reading the play. The panel then opened up for Dr. Jackson to ask certain panel members questions concerning their opening statements. Throughout the panel discussion, each participant offered their insight on 9 Circles from their
unique standpoint within either the educational or military field. The discussion concluded with
questions asked from the audience. It lasted around an hour and a half and included
approximately thirty observing audience members. These audience members largely consisted of
graduate and undergraduate students in the Miami University Department of Theatre.

The voices of Staff Sergeant Endicott and Lieutenant Anderson were a significant portion
of the discussion. “We need to remember that this play is not truth,” Sergeant Endicott reiterated
to the panel audience (Endicott). Both men expressed their concern that audience members
would derive a negative opinion of the military from the play. At certain points throughout the
conversation, both men stated that the ideas in *9 Circles* were based on fiction and not fact. It is
important to note that some panel members felt that systems, no matter how strong, do fall apart,
and that Green was a walking example of such a fissure. Endicott and Anderson seemed
concerned that audiences would associate Daniel Reeves as a representation of the U.S. Military.
Seeking to remove the stigma associated with the armed forces they believed the play presented,
the military panel members were quick to defend the institution of the military. Their opinions
optimized the potential for the panel to both the opinions of theatre scholars and the military
professionals whose roles were represented within the play.

**Talk-Back Discussions**

As the director of *9 Circles*, I was asked to speak at six talkback classroom discussions
once the performances ended. I presented for Dr. Ann Elizabeth Armstrong’s community theatre
course, Dr. Jackson’s theatre history class and American theatre class, Professor C. Francis
Blackchild’s directing seminar, Professor Rodney Coates’ Penny Lecture Series, and two
*Experiencing Theatre* 191 talkback discussions. I also defended my staging choices as a part of
the TH 491 capstone seminar ethical discussion.

In these talkback discussions I offered my insight on the play and its importance in
today’s society. Three cast members attended each talkback with me. Once I was finished
discussing why I chose to direct *9 Circles*, I then turned the discussion over to the cast members.
Each cast member had the opportunity to discuss their acting process. Many cast members spoke
on the difficulties in performing *9 Circles*, such as its difficult language and political themes.
Other cast members discussed the difficulty for them in relating to their characters. For the
Penny Lecture Series course, three cast members performed certain scenes from the play for the
student audience.
The talkback discussions concluded with questions from the class. Many students in each of the talkbacks were intellectually invested in the subject matter of *9 Circles*. For example, the students in the theatre history course asked a series of questions that prompted over an hour of meaningful discussion. On another occasion, a male student about to deploy to Afghanistan voiced his support of the play. A lot of students wanted to know more information about the true events that the play is inspired by. Many of the theatre majors focused their questions on performance-related topics, such as why I chose to stage the play in an arena stage space. Other students simply made comments on the ideas presented within the play. One student spoke on how *9 Circles* makes strong statements concerning the power media has over news stories. I have recently been contacted by a student who is writing his final paper on the ideas presented within the text. I have also been sent another written response by a student in the Penny Lecture Series, in which a portion of her paper went as follows:

…This past lecture was definitely one of my favorites so far. Sara(h), a 2nd year graduate student in the Miami University theater department, was the director of the production, *9 Circles*…From the lecture, I could tell Sara(h) was very passionate about the play and wants everyone to be just as excited as she is about the play. A Jesuit priest named Bill Caine wrote the play after reading about the real events in a newspaper. I thought this was very interesting that a priest wrote a play after randomly reading about it. This makes the play even more impressive and fascinating…(Anonymous)

**Conclusion**

Miami University’s production of Bill Cain’s *9 Circles* theatrically embodied the trauma of war. The design team sought to take each audience member on a journey into the hell of Daniel Reeves. Evidenced in the scenic, lighting, sound, and costume design choices, audience members were meant to journey alongside Private Reeves through hell. Through watching the story of Daniel Reeves unfold on stage, the audience was asked to feel the trauma of war. The brechtian-inspired staging choices were created for the audience to critically think on their understanding of war. The overall goal in this immersion of the audience was to lead them to the conclusion that Daniel Reeves (Green) is neither a victim nor monster. He is a victim of war trauma who commits a monstrous deed.

The purpose of Miami University’s production of *9 Circles* was to inspire critical thinking about the ideas presented in the text. Within this frame of thinking, it is also hoped that
audience members are able to ponder their own responsibility toward understanding those who suffer politically-motivated violence.
Works Cited


EPILOGUE

9 Circles: The Journey Ends

The absolute center of hell in Dante’s Inferno is an extraordinary place. The center of hell is frozen, where even tears freeze in the eyes. Something about that spoke to me. In the very end of the play, he (Reeves) experiences an epiphany. As she was being raped, he was being raped. He was in the same position the girl was in. He was being raped

Bill Cain, From Personal Interview

This thesis has addressed how Bill Cain’s play 9 Circles inspires critical thinking on issues surrounding war and trauma. The first chapter of the thesis provided a selective dramaturgical analysis of playwright Bill Cain’s career. The purpose of this analysis was to provide historical context behind themes invoked within the play. The second chapter was a theoretical analysis of the play. In discussing how 9 Circles works in deconstructing the myth of the Warrior Ethos, the postmodern crisis suffered by soldiers overseas becomes clear. The third chapter of this thesis was an examination into the theatrical direction of 9 Circles for Miami University in February of 2013. In immersing the audience in the hell of Private Reeves through its design choices and the performance of the actors, the production inspired critical thinking on issues surrounding the American society’s responsibility toward understanding war.

9 Circles is significant as a dramatic text and performance of/on war trauma. In the final scene of the play, the audience sees Private Reeves’ final realization of his crime. An emotional testimony uttered as his final thoughts alive, playwright Cain leaves his audience in a state of mourning. The audience grieves the impact of war upon the wasted life of those like Daniel Reeves (Steven Dale Green). They also reflect upon their own mourning process toward those they have lost overseas. This reaction inspires critical thinking and allows the audience to ponder their own responsibility toward understanding the impact of the Iraq War.

9 Circles stands apart from previously examined works of the post 9/11 era due to its religious content. While other playwrights shy away from the use of religion in theatrical text, Cain invokes his Jesuit religion as the script’s focal point. “The goal of the Jesuits is to find God in the world,” Cain says (Melcon). Perhaps Cain believes his mission is to remind his audiences that God does exist in our world. To reiterate Margot Melcon’s words, Cain is interested in “finding the truth (god) in difficult places” (Melcon). As a religiously motivated theatre artist Cain reminds his reader/audience that compassion must exist for all. In experiencing his final
epiphany, Daniel Reeves realizes his own self-awareness in committing war crimes. In turn, the audience faces their own self-awareness of their role within our current frame of government, religion, and overall civic virtue, and thereby repeatedly visits the recurring question: what made Steven Dale Green commit these crimes?

My theatrical direction of 9 Circles and the writing of this thesis were not intended to emphasize Cain’s religiously motivated purpose in writing the play. I sought instead to draw attention to the ways in which American society dramaturgically constructs wartime ideology. My central goal was to showcase to the audience/reader an embodied deconstruction of the myth of the idyllic American soldier/warrior. Through capitalizing upon the postmodern crisis of the traumatized soldier, I sought to display an absence of any verifiable truth within the performance of 9 Circles. Daniel Reeves must not be classified as a victim or monster. He is both and more. In attempting to lead the audience to this conclusion, I sought to inspire further critical thinking upon the ideas presented in the text. The questions of 9 Circles brought forth, remain and persevere within society today. For this reason the play remains immensely important within the frame of performance studies, war trauma studies, and the collective societal understanding of politically-motivated acts.
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INTERVIEW WITH BILL CAIN

Sarah Saddler

1. **What is the link between your Jesuit faith and Dante’s Inferno? Specifically, why Dante and how does the teaching of his inferno coincide with Reeves’ time in prison?**

   After I had wrote the first scene and I emailed it to Beth, my agent, I had called it circle one. When I continued to write circles, I was then exposed to Dante. I got a recording of the Inferno and started listening to it. I was overwhelmed by it. I went through the text more of less five times back to back. The whole thing takes about 12 hours to go through. The Inferno is not a part of my personal background; it is a part of the play.

2. **In your performance notes, you specify that the sexes claim must remain how you delegated them to be in the play. What is the reason behind this? In your notes, you write that women unlock the key the ultimate mystery, yet the prosecution is a woman.**

   I don’t sit down with a grid saying “how will this all work”, I sit down and I write. Well, the essence of the prosecutor is not about attacking the defense or Daniel Reeves, it is about the protecting the girl. Therefore I saw her as a female, because she is mainly thinking of the girl while everyone else is thinking of something else.

3. **One news report has said that Green has converted to Catholicism since his conviction in 2009. What do you think of this? Had you had the chance to speak to Green personally? (Does Green know there is a play written about him?)**

   That was news to me. I didn’t know that. The piece is not intended to be about Stephen Dale Green. The piece is about a fictional character named Daniel Edward Reeves. I followed the pattern of the original story; it was not intended to be a documentary. You’re approaching it with a scalpel; I’m approaching it with an original feeling. My writing all comes from feeling. The essence of this play is an overwhelming feeling. When I found out about the crime, I had this initial overwhelming of repulsion. Then when I found out about him seeing the shrink, I thought, there’s something in this pattern that’s heroic. Then the writing became a passion. But what’s it about? It’s about that feeling. It’s about the feeling of a man standing in front of a row of tanks saying “you’ll go no further.”

4. **You wrote the ending of 9 Circles before Green was sentenced to live in prison-can you explain why you chose to execute him?**

   The absolute center of hell in Dante’s Inferno is an extraordinary place. The center of hell is frozen, where even tears freeze in the eyes. Something about that spoke to me. In the very end of the play, he experiences an epiphany. As she was being raped, he was being raped. He was in the same position the girl was in. He was being raped.
5. In an earlier interview, you admitted that you did not believe 9 Circles was a war play. Can you elaborate more on this?

It’s about the journey. When you say you want the audience to go every step of the way with Reeves, that’s what it’s about. Wall Street is the same thing, we need to make more and funnier. Any kind of thing that you lose your soul to…in the course of the journey, the individual individualizes. He separates from the crowd and becomes himself. The idea is, in this context of war, there is a solution to war. The solution is finding out who you yourself is. Once you discover yourself, you don’t see people as objects; you see them as life yourselves. You have empathy. Did you see Barack Obama’s speech last night? It was brilliant. He talks about how we are doing this thing together. In the play, finally, in the final scene Daniel feels the pain of the enemy. He becomes her. Have you seen the movie Stuntman? You should. Someone said that it was “a movie that wants to be anti-war, but ends up with increasing the sentiment.” Opposing war is futile; it’s ends up the opposite. Understanding war is a way to understanding the whole issue. I have a friend who after 9/11 said “I would take every man in the war go to Afghanistan… It isn’t about opposing, it’s about creating something different. That’s what Gandhi did when he said “I will make salt”. I have nothing against anti-war plays. I think there’s a certain amount of violence in anti-war plays that fuels the flame. My goal in this play is to create empathy.

6. How do you feel that myth works in this play? (I’m working on a play for MATC and I see myth as huge in this play)

Here are a couple of thoughts for you. I haven’t talked about this to too many people. I am very interested in what you’re trying to do, so here’s my thought. When you’re talking about Xerxes, Alexander, etc. you’re talking about Greece. You’re developing a myth based on Achilles, Homer, etc. I think the anthropology of theatre is many hundreds of years behind us. Everyone looks to the Greeks to create a drama. But to the Greeks, the higher the tension, the higher the conflict and violence, the greater the play. They needed the play to be a hero for their society. They were dealing with war and warring city states, and the drama reflects that as well. I believe that we are dealing with an entirely different problem, we are still creating plays that try to do this. But that was a Greek truth, not a modern truth. Our problem is inclusion. Our essential problem is inclusion. How do we move from tribes to this society? People now cannot think beyond the Greeks and Shakespeare, so the problem is ours. Our problem is “how do we all get on the same bus?” It’s the difference right now between the democratic rhetoric and the republican. Drama uses a republican strategy; it contains two opposing forces so that one must die. People take for granted “drama is conflict”, and that not true. Your Professor that tells you that all of theatre is conflict is wrong. There are many other things than conflict in drama. I wrote a play in which there was entirely no conflict. The play Nathan the Wise by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, you should read that. It gets around the conflict. It violates the warrior.
7. **What has your response been to the response of the work?**

Well, I don’t think about that all that much. I will say this, I never thought that anyone would produce it. When I wrote it I thought “no one is going to do this.”
CHARACTER EXPECTATIONS AND SCENIC CONCEPTS

9 Circles

Sarah Saddler

Inspiration: Each scene depicts Reeves in a certain light—as either a “victim” or a “monster”. When writing down this analysis, I tried to highlight the “victim” or “monster” opinion of each character, and in each scenic situation. It is through emphasizing these portrayals of Reeves that the audience will be able to understand the oscillating nature of trauma and whether or not this person is a complete monster, like most of society would immediately think upon hearing the news of his crime. Something that may help the actors is knowing whether or not they view and approach Daniel Reeves as a victim or monster. It must be clear throughout the play how each character approaches the situation.

1. Circle One: Private Reeves, Lieutenant

Victim of honorable dismissal
This scene is about introducing the character of Daniel Reeves. We see that he is gung ho to be a soldier, but there is something very wrong with him. It serves to build up the dramatic tension before his crime is revealed in the following scene. This scene is important because portrays Reeves as a victim, not the monster. This must be clear, so that the audience is even more shocked to hear of his crime in the following scene. It is also vital that the actor playing Reeves not play “crazy”—he must be completely honest with every word he speaks. The lieutenant must treat Reeves as a “normal” victim of honorable dismissal.

Private Daniel Reeves: 19 years old. Texan accent. Capable of being vulnerable and showing extreme duress on stage. Must be likeable to the audience. Intense; powerful; dark; scary; childlike at times. Must have a certain physicality to his body—I want the actor to experiment with moving a certain way, like he is always afraid something is going to attack him. Has angry outbursts at odd times. Paranoid, strong and weak at the same time. We must be able to see through him, and see that he has been greatly disturbed by the events he witnessed while overseas. He wants more than anything to be normal. Wrapped up in this intense need to be normal is the need to feel accepted, wanted, protected, even loved. We see throughout the course of the play that he pushes away everyone that tries to make personal contact with him—there are times he insults others, seeks to show off and/or get attention, or seeks to fulfill the “monster” stereotype. The moments in which we see his truest self are reflected in the scene with the shrink and his final monologue.

Lieutenant: An army lifer; 30 years old. Realistic—he has a seen a lot. This war has mellowed him out regarding the idea of warfare—he is unsure about his place in all of this, just as much as Reeves is. However, he knows he will never leave the army. He understands that Reeves has good intentions, but he quickly finds out that Reeves is trauma-stricken. He learns throughout the scene that Reeves is damaged goods, and feels bad for him. He feels bad for discharging him, but has no reservations about that being the right decision. He is tired of the war, tired of seeing boys like Reeves. I want him to be the father figure Reeves should have had. The lieutenant’s
character objective is for Reeves to peacefully accept the news of his honorable dismissal. I do not think the Lieutenant knows about Reeves’ crime. He cannot, otherwise he would not treat him as such.

2. Circle Two: YFL (Young Female Lawyer), Reeves

_Monster of raping a child and killing a family_: This scene is about finding out what Reeves does; Reeves is depicted as a monster in this scene. At first we believe that his crime of drunk driving is bad enough and we learn that he is irresponsible, which means we already don’t like him. By the time the YFL admits to his actual crime, the audience must be disgusted and appalled. A large division between the YFL and Reeves must exist.

_YFL_: Public Defender, says that she believes anyone is capable of doing anything during times of duress, but I am not sure if she believes this. I think she feels she has to say that. When the scene begins she speaks to Reeves like she has known exactly how this meeting was going to go-her only job was to get Reeves to say “not guilty” tomorrow at his court hearing. Then Reeves starts talking, and she reads his crime to him again. It is difficult for her to be in the same room as him-Reeves disgusts her. While she believes in having sympathy for soldiers, she can’t bring herself to deal with Reeves. He is not her responsibility; he will be handed to a lawyer the following day and off of her hands. She would never represent him. He is a monster to her, and the audience must see themselves reflected in her character. She is a representation of each audience member in the theatre. She must be convincing in horror at his crime, and make it known that she considers herself nothing like him. Her job is to temporarily represent people who can’t afford someone better. She has run into car thieves, petty thefts, etc, but never someone who has committed such a grave offense. We have to see her nativity, horror, vulnerability in the eyes of Reeves. She must appear different from him. Her character objective is to deny Reeves the opportunity to upset her, while Reeves’ character objective is to unsettle her. He is not ready to face the truth of his crime yet, he does not fully understand the implications of what he has even done. Therefore, he tries to ignore it the entire time, focusing on distressing her. Maybe if he psychs her out, everyone will leave him alone.

3. Circle Three: Army Attorney, Reeves

_Reeves as a monster of warfare_: In circle two the audience is enlightened into the crimes Reeves committed; they are led to believe that he has no hope for any future; he is screwed. In the next scene, this scene, we are introduced to an Army Attorney who visits Reeves because he wants to see what kind of soldier he is. In order to satisfy his ego, he visits Reeves out of the desire to represent him at a military trial. The Army Attorney is a negative embodiment of the military—cold, egotistical, impersonal, confident, and powerful.

_Army Attorney_: Strong, arrogant, asshole. Believes that the only society that exists is the military society—stands for everything wrong in the military. As an army attorney, he stands for everything right within the United States. Believes initially that Reeves is a stain on the image of the United States, that he is not an accurate representation of the army. However, after speaking to Reeves his mind goes off in another direction—the possibility that Reeves is exactly what the war needs. He, messed up as he is, made us feel the pain of our enemy. Regardless, he sees
himself as nothing like Reeves—he is honorable, Reeves is mutation of honor. He considers himself fundamentally better than Reeves, he only considers Reeves as a political weapon that can be used to psych the enemy out. Wrapped up in this is the desire to end the conflict overseas, so that he can not only stop the senseless killing for no reason, but he can fulfill his family dreams of becoming a war hero.


Reeves as a traumatized victim who has been touched by Satan: This scene allows us to view Reeves in a different light, in the same light that the Lieutenant views Reeves in the opening scene. The pastor does not think Reeves is a monster, rather tries to understand his crime. This scene is different from the others, because we see that the Pastor understands Reeves on a deeper level than all other characters. By the end of the scene the Pastor has influenced Reeves so much that he “goes into a frenzy”: I think this is the turning point in the play, when Reeves begins to understand what he has done.

Pastor: Early 50’s. The pastor understands Reeves on a level that no other character does. He understands him better than every other character, because the Pastor sees himself as a monster who is still in the process of trying to find the Lord. The pastor visits Reeves because he sees HIMSELF in Reeves, and he is terrified but wants to help. Every word he says he consider the absolute truth—he has accepted the ugliness of who he is, and he considers it his religious obligation/life goal to bring others to understand the consequences of their actions. At the same time, he understands that people can make mistakes, can be terribly immoral and ugly. And he also understands that these people need God. He is a lonely man, and feels like it’s his duty in life to help others. He made that promise to God, as a way of repenting for the sins he has committed. His objective is to bring Reeves to God, in the end.

5. Circle Five: Civilian Lawyer, Reeves

Reeves as a monster who killed a dog too/victim who has a story to tell: In this scene the audience is again jerked back to the idea of Reeves as a monster, who even went so far as to kill an innocent animal. This scene is powerful, because it draws parallels to animal lives vs human lives—dogs and humans—civilians and soldiers. It also depicts Reeves’ recognition in human horror at the loss of an animal, rather than the lives of human soldiers overseas. This touches upon the American denial/unwillingness to understand what is happening overseas. Wrapped up in this scene is also the involvement of the media while overseas.

Civilian Lawyer: In his 40’s. Tired but extremely enthusiastic and likeable. Must be seen as very intelligent, right from the beginning. He takes charge of Reeves, he has a keen insight into the minds of criminals such as Reeves, from working with other rapists and murderers. He is torn between his own curiosity of Reeves and the reasons behind his crime, and his own involvement in the court case. Has a love for the way the American legal system can represent even the worst of murderers of victims—he has no problem lying for Reeves. Therefore he is absent of a lot of emotion—this is his JOB. He is smarter than all the other characters. More than anything, he wants to understand why Reeves committed the crime he did. He feels that he must understand it,
because that is how he can represent it. Ultimately he also seeks for the jury to not vote Reeves as “guilty”, he feels it’s his responsibility to fix him.

6. Circle Six: Shrink, Reeves

*Reeves as a victim who has witnessed an extremely traumatic experience and his seeking help:* This scene once again shifts gears, to portray Reeves as he was before. The audience is made witness to Reeves as a soldier who suffered the loss of a beloved Lietenant and claims responsibility for it. This scene is important because the audience is being shown (perhaps) WHAT LEAD to the crime. It also clearly places blame in the Shrink who sent him back into warfare.

**Shrink:** Been in the military for too long-she is resentful of every figure in a uniform, including herself. She seeks to be a woman in a man’s world. For this reason she behaves like a man, in her mannerisms, way of dress, and the way she treats Reeves. She never believes that Reeves will commit the crime he eventually commits, and throughout the scene she must be impatient, resentful, with almost a mocking air toward Daniel. She understands that Reeves has suffered a traumatic event; this is made clear in the text. However, she would never consider that he would commit such a crime. IN her mind every soldier in this “violence” she refers to as war is undergoing the same thing. For this reason she does not kick him out of the military. The Shrink’s objective is to comfort Reeves in his trauma, while Reeves’ objective is to get her to say it’s okay for wanting to kill everyone. He wants her to acknowledge that his trauma is NORMAL, though of course it is not.

7. Circle Seven: Prosecution, Defense, Reeves

*Reeves as BOTH a victim and a monster.* According to the Prosecution he is monster, according to the Defense he is a victim. This scene is the accumulation of every viewpoint that the audience has been witness to up until this point.

**Prosecution:** The Prosecution must be strong but feminine; intelligent yet motherly. It must be clear that she has a daughter around the same age as the child Reeves raped. She is the voice for the child when no one else remembers what happened or the pain of what she must have gone through. The prosecution is pre occupied with one thing-receiving justice for the child and the family who also died. This is her character objective.
The Theatre of War Project: Surrogating a Modern “Military” through Ancient Antiquity

Sarah Saddler

TH 610

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"The core message for every audience member is that you are not alone - not in this room, not in this country, not in this world and not across time." Former writer and director Bryan Doerries speaks in favor of his ever-growing experiment titled the Theater of War Project. Organized by the social impact company Outside the Wire, Theatre of War is a program which offers staged readings of Greek playwright Sophocles’ Ajax and Philoctetes to audiences of formerly deployed soldiers, their families, and local community members. In its mission to “forge a common vocabulary between civilian and military personnel, as well as de-stigmatize the seeking of psychological help for symptoms of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)”, the Theatre of War Project is a tool in examining how citizens seek to improve civic dialogue surrounding wartime experience. This paper seeks to understand how the project also works in closing a gap for soldiers in their transition from war to home, while simultaneously opening a space which prompts a conversation concerning its role as surrogate for Greek forms of tragedy. In wish to form a cross-temporal connection between the ancient and modern, the Theatre of War stimulates a new national discourse, in which the U.S. Military is hegemonically cast as our nation’s storyteller of American wartime ideology.

The Theatre of War Project presents itself as an evening of performance, followed with a panel and then an open discussion forum. The estimated two-hour long program first features a read-through of a modern translation of either Ajax or Philoctetes, performed by well-known theatre and film actors sitting at a table with their scripts, facing the sitting audience. Regarding the material selection, creator Bryan Doerries writes “Plays like (Ajax and Philoctetes) read like textbook descriptions of wounded warriors, struggling under the weight of psychological and

41 Ibid.
physical injuries to maintain their dignity, identity, and honor.”42 Once the read-through is complete, the performance then opens into a panel discussion featuring a military officer, an enlisted member, a military spouse, and a mental health professional. Speaking casually and without a rehearsed script, they offer their insight on the texts. From there, the discussion is opened for the audience to discuss their personal reactions, offer suggestions, and ask questions. The project is funded by the U.S. Defense Department, sponsored by the Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and featured as a part of the United States Organizations (USO). As of 2010 the Theater of War has been presented to more than 20,000 servicemembers at military bases, churches, universities and other venues across the United States and in Europe.43

Founded in 2008, the Theatre of War Project is promoted on the U.S. Army’s website as “designed to remove stigma related to psychological injuries by illustrating that many of the bravest war heroes in history have lived with the psychological effects of battle.”44 Although a mental health professional is present and offers a voice at each panel discussion, Doerries insists the project does not qualify as psychotherapy, as none of its participants have undergone clinical trials. It is more broadly defined as a public health project designed to make soldiers feel as if they are not alone in their pain. The dramatic texts illustrate how thousands of years before our conflicts in the Middle East, the bravest warriors of the Grecian army faced the same feelings of isolation, psychological trauma, and mental instability. Through hearing the downfalls of the historical war heroes Ajax and Philoctetes, soldiers empathize with their fates. Ajax, faced with

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43 According to its website, the project is also funded “through a generous grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in collaboration with the USO”, and a large part of its sponsors are theatres across the United States. The project has a range of University Theatre Partners that it performs as a part of, including the Actors Theatre of Louisville and the Classical Theatre of Harlem. Throughout 2011, TOW traveled to these theatres to perform.

44 (“Toda’ys Focus: Theatre of War” Jan 26, 2010)
the shame of his dishonor by the Gods, kills himself with his own sword near the conclusion of the play named for him. Philoctetes gets bitten by a snake when walking on sacred ground; his un-healing wound plagues him for the remainder of his life. Present-day soldiers are meant to identify with the physical and psychological pain these two war heroes faced in battle, creating a shared wartime experience suffered by warriors throughout the ages.

The Theater of War emphasizes the deployment of the performative language upon the American civilian population as correlative to the effects of Greek drama upon its 5th century B.C. military society. Born of the belief that “Greek drama was a form of storytelling, communal therapy, and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans”, the Theater of War program recognizes the ways in which Greek tragedy served as a form of trauma therapy for the ever-battling city-states of Athens, Sparta, and others. Fed to audiences of those whose lives were consumed with battle, hardship, and day-to-day traumas, they inspire both then and now again what scholar Peter Meineck identifies as a “cultural catharsis.” The communal discussion provides a space for soldiers and their families to receive, recognize, and attempt to recover from the trauma of experiencing war which often intensifies upon their return home.

In his work on the Theatre of War, Meineck first focuses on the way in which “Athenian tragedy offered a form of performance-based cultural catharsis.” He draws parallels between the

47 Scholars in both theatre and psychiatry have recognized the value in the classics as a gateway to approaching politically-motivated trauma. Director of the Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives project, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, aforementioned Greek classics scholar Peter Meineck has provided a substantial body of knowledge within this area, of which his essays “These Are Men Whose Minds the Dead Have Ravished: Theater of War: The Philoctetes Project” and “Combat Trauma and the Tragic Stage: ‘Restoration’ by Cultural Catharsis” are key. His work closely aligns with that of Veteran’s Administration psychiatrist Jonathan Shay’s books Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character and Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming, whose texts have also pinpointed Greek tragedy as a literary key to understanding how to better tackle increasing rates of PTSD. In his text, Shay redefines Aristotle’s term “catharsis” through placing it within a frame which identifies symptoms faced by combat veterans, upon which Meineck transposes it into the cultural mindset, in identifying the pain of war as universally communal. A recent winner of a MacArthur Foundation Genius Award, Shay’s fame also highlights the way American society has attached itself to Aristotle’s idea of spectacle, or opsis, as a means of trauma therapy through the incorporation of performative therapy methods.
Theatre of War Project and the drama of Ancient Greece to make the argument that the Theatre of War also produces a similar cultural catharsis within the United States. His first likeness invokes Joshua Ober’s text *Democracy and Knowledge* to equate the after-reading discussion offered by the Theater of War to the democratic town hall structure of ancient Athenian government. Citing the sameness of these two spaces in terms of the mutual involvement and observation on behalf of the spectator, he asserts that both Theatre of War and Ancient Greece provided a Boalian-esque “Invisible Theatre” space, prompting debate rather than passive witnessing.

Meineck then illustrates a correlation between Theatre of War and the ancient Grecian Festival of Dionysus, reiterating his overall hypothesis that “theater may have always been intended to address the experiences of fighting men.”48 These venues similarly seek to provide therapeutic results for soldiers upon their “nostos”, or “homecoming” from battle. A “staging of returns”, the Festival of Dionysus featured performances which offered soldiers the opportunity for catharsis through the theatrical portrayal of trauma. An annual festival which embraced Grecian religious ritual as well as tragic performance, the Festival of Dionysus was furthermore a celebration of Greek nationhood in all its war-torn glory, destruction, and loss. Upon leaving the battlefield in actuality, soldiers had the opportunity to face it again through the lens of theatricality. As an event designed for soldiers who have recently returned home from war, the Theatre of War Project is meant to be akin to that of the Festival of Dionysus. In its oral reenactment of Greek drama, American soldiers are mentally transformed back onto the battlefield. This transference thus fills in the gap soldiers face upon their arrival home, helping with the transition from their military to civilian lives. Greek nationhood is thus being

intertwined with our own, aiding in the working through of both our individual and communal cultural trauma.

Throughout his work Meineck bolsters his thesis that the re-embodiment of the classics aids in a way that eases war-related pain. He concludes his essay by reiterating his support of Slavatore Slattis’ remark that the incorporation of the classics within the modern frame is key in

“…understanding the way in which these cultures are penetrating each other. The ‘classical’ can be the stimulus for a resolute comparison not only between ancients and moderns, but also between ‘our’ cultures and ‘other’ cultures.”

Slattis’ invocation of “penetration” suggests that one culture moves through another—rather, one culture is inside its counterpart. Within this frame American cultural trauma is defined as within Greek cultural trauma—or visa versa. As this contemplation is a reflection upon the ways in which nationhood is constructed, American nationhood is then being re-invented through the lens of the Greek body politic. This analysis proves beneficial in understanding how the invocation of classical texts can be advantageous as a means to close a gap for soldiers in the transition from military to civilian life.

With the closing of one gap, another opens. While the Theatre of War proves fruitful material in uncovering the necessity for a national conversation on the problematic relationship between war and the societal stigmatization of mental health, it prompts a series of other questions. At the expense of adopting another culture’s trauma as our own, what history is being erased in the process, and at what price? Within the problematic penetration of contrasting nationhoods, what accounts for the extreme differences between our society and the ritualized religious and militaristic nation-state of 5th century Greece? Furthermore, what accounts for the

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oxymoronic situation in which Theatre of War attempts to de-stigmatize the seeking of mental health treatment in dramatically personifying an era which embraced political glory and shamed physical (Philoctetes) and mental (Ajax) weakness?

I suggest that the Theatre of War project may not succeed as a penetrated extension of classical Greece, but exists as a surrogate for it. Coined by scholar Joseph Roach, a surrogate is a stand-in that attempts to fit “into the cavities created by loss or death or other forms of departure.” Centering on the “three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution”, Roach examines the process of surrogation through the lens of Circum-Atlantic memory. Inspired by Roach’s analysis, the performances offered by the Theater of War serve as surrogates for performances offered to citizens of Ancient Greece. Although they work in filling in the metaphorical and literal gap a soldier experiences upon his return home, they open a gap between one culture and another. This gap, perhaps reminiscent of Peggy Phelan’s concept of “holes” or Rebecca Schneider’s “remains,” is multi-layered with history, performance, and community loss. Therefore, within the Theatre of War our culture is not penetrating that of Ancient Greece, but attempting to exist as a surrogate for it, in its reenactment of not only the texts themselves, but the after-performance town-hall conversations which take their cue from the Festival of Dionysus.

Within his text, Roach warns his reader that “surrogation rarely if ever succeeds”, for the reason that the “fit cannot be exact.” He writes:

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51 In her book Mourning Sex, performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan writes that mourning is a performative process/act. She asserts that trauma is linked to bodily injury, and leaves its victims with metaphorical holes. The trauma-inflicted, mournful body remains the focus of her work as she leads her reader through chapters filled with a heavy intensity. In her book Performing Remains, performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider writes on her experience witnessing Civil War battle reenactments, “reenactment is an activity that nets us all (reenacted, reenactor, original, copy, re-event, bypassed, and passer-by) in a knotty and porous relationship to time. It is about the temporal tangle, about the temporal leak, and about the many questions that attend time’s returns.”
“Selective memory requires public enactments of forgetting, either
to blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or,
more desperately, to exaggerate them in order to mystify a
previous Golden Age, now lapsed... I believe that the process of
trying out various candidates in different situations—the doomed
search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins—is the
most important of the many meaning that users intend when they
say the word *performance.*”

Here Roach pinpoints the danger in the process of surrogation: through the attempt to recover a
Golden Age, here the ancient civilization of Greece, a “public enactment of forgetting” must
occur. In our attempt to penetrate, or to use Roach’s term *blur,* the clearly disparate societies of
ancient Greece and the United States, what is being left behind? In order to answer these
complicated and multi-layered questions, further thought and personal experience within the
Theatre of War environment is required. In light of this, I seek instead to focus not upon what is
being historically forgotten within the lens of this project, but the new story being written within
this frame of surrogation.

“Social identities and notions of self are intimately intertwined within the institutions in
which individuals are embedded.”

This statement by historian Ramon Hinojosa alludes to the
connection between individuals and the societal institutions they ascribe to. In turn, these
institutions help to characterize the nationhood within which they operate. In its entwinement
with both the Department of Defense, as well as the United States Military, the Theatre of War
Project is thus an extension of the institutions of the U.S. government and U.S. military body. In
publicly supporting, as well as financially endorsing the Theatre of War Project, the institution of
the military perpetuates notions of “military” self through their performative enactments of

2-3.
53 Hinojosa, Ramon. "DOING HEGEMONY: MILITARY, MEN, AND CONSTRUCTING A HEGEMONIC
MASCULINITY." *Journal Of Men's Studies* 18, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 179-194.
Theatre of War. The perpetuation of this military self, surrogated from ancient Grecian dramatic texts, works in establishing and maintaining a unique military persona. Since the Theatre of War restricts its usage to two texts within the classical Greek genre of tragedy, this military persona is selectively advanced. As time passes and the Theatre of War continues to perform, it continues to project a notion of military self, further satisfied in the duration and success of its surrogation.

With the continuation of the Theatre of War Project in army bases, schools, and theatres across the United States exists the potential for a new story to be written on war and trauma, one established and maintained by the hegemonic force in control of Theatre of War. The projection of a military self performed in the embodiment of Grecian texts further presents the U.S. Military as a hegemonic force in establishing a fresh military persona, one inspired by the war heroes Philoctetes and Ajax. “Hegemony is likely to be established if only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power,” sociologist R.W. Connell asserts in her work on hegemonic masculinity.54 Connell’s usage of “cultural ideal” furthermore engages in this problematic notion of temporal transaction: if we are taking a cue from a civilization whose cultural ideals prized heroism and spurned weakness, are we not then establishing a similar idealistic image of the soldier? Given that the project repeatedly identifies its goal in de-stigmatizing psychological injury, its surrogated cultural ideal thus reveals that the fit is not exact.

The thoughts presented in this paper were formulated not from personal experience of the Theatre of War environment, but merely my concerns regarding its usage of Greek texts. I am only a passive observer, rather than an engaged spectator, which reveals a weakness in this selective analysis. Nevertheless, examining the Theatre of War’s ability to create a new ideology

on war and trauma reveals the perpetuating construction of American nationhood through the lens of Greek drama. I close with the ending remarks by Rebecca Schneider in her work *Performing Remains*, in which she highlights the anxiety surrounding cross-temporal performance efforts:

“The danger of falling, deliberately, into a supposedly bygone political action—how dangerous is that, really? Does such cross-temporal articulation not also underscore the unfinished project of protest? ...Of critical thinking about the vexed returns of affiliation, or “relative” pain? Certainly such anachronistic actions get it wrong—their time is out of joint. But the very wrongness of such acts might spark fugitive thinking against the grain of comfort."\(^{55}\)

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Bibliography


