

4-18-2023

Apocalypse Then and Now: Narrative Influence and Thematic Subversion of Victorian Literature in Modern American War Narratives

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APOCALYPSE THEN AND NOW: NARRATIVE INFLUENCE AND THEMATIC SUBVERSION OF VICTORIAN LITERATURE IN MODERN AMERICAN WAR NARRATIVES

A Dissertation

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

in

The Department of English

by

Douglas James Scully

B. A., University of Connecticut, 2014

M.A., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016

M. A., Louisiana State University, 2020

May 2023

The art of war is of vital importance to the State.

-Sun Tzu

The Art of War

Another mail, another mutiny! Mail succeeded mail, and still the weary burden was the same,
until we awoke with a start from our dream of fancied security.

-Vivian Dering Majendie

Up Among the Pandies: A Personal Narrative on Campaign During the Indian Mutiny

Ryan thinks we're still at war in little Coto de Caza.

-Vicki Gunvalson

The Real Housewives of Orange County

Acknowledgements

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue for the importance of community and understanding in order to help soldiers and others afflicted by trauma heal. The same applies to the process of writing this dissertation, as it would not have been possible without the love, support, and friendship of many throughout my academic career.

In regard to my years at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury, CT, I would like to thank Ms. Maura White whose pure enthusiasm for English literature and genuine connection to her students was what made me realize that focusing on literature was what I wanted to do as a career.

I had many great English professors while at the University of Connecticut for my bachelor's degree, but I would particularly like to thank Drs. Mary Burke, Mary Gallucci, and Sarah Winter. Each of these professors has had a profound impact on how I approach literature, pedagogy, and even fashion. I would also like to thank Dr. Jill Fenton who served as the Resident Academic Director for the University of Connecticut in London who went above and beyond to help me during my study abroad program.

It was upon Dr. Fenton's recommendation that I went to Royal Holloway and Bedford College, University of London for my master's degree in Victorian Literature, Art, and Culture. At this institution, I was lucky enough to study under many great scholars, but I would like to single out Dr. Juliet John. As a lonely American spending the summer of 2016 in the vast greenness of Egham, my meetings with her regarding my academic work towards my degree were a scholastic highlight.

Upon Dr. John's recommendation, I went to Louisiana State University next, where I have many professors to thank. First, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Sharon Weltman, who I

met when I first went to Baton Rouge, and who has been a steadfast supporter of my work in the years since, through a variety of classes and many different ideas (that she thankfully helped me rein in). I came to LSU specifically to work with her, and throughout my time here I have been extremely thankful for that decision.

I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Drs. Richard Godden, Jacob Berman, and Victor L. Stater. Both Drs. Godden and Berman have inspired me with their fantastic classes that I can only hope to emulate in my own career. Dr. Stater's historical point of view also inspired many passages of this dissertation. They have all served to expand my work beyond just the confines of "Victorian Literature" and I believe that this has truly deepened my scholarly efforts.

Throughout my time at Louisiana University, there have been many other professors who I wish to thank, but for brevity's sake, I will only here name Drs. James Catano and Michelle Massé. Dr. Catano served on my master's exam committee and was extremely helpful, especially considering the trouble that came with it taking place during the year 2020. Dr. Massé entrusted me to substitute for her for a week in a Contemporary Fiction course, which helped me find my voice as an instructor.

Before leaving the educational section of this acknowledgements behind, it would be remiss of me not to mention the amazing graduate coordinators whose extremely hard work and tireless efforts are the only reason that I, and many others, were able to finish our work at LSU. Therefore, a large thank you must go out to both Ashely O'Neill Thibodeaux and Whitney Mira.

I would also like to thank my friends who have supported me during the writing of this dissertation. To Liz Solecki, my family friend who, for as long as I can remember, has held up the golden idol of the great and glorious Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy and shown to me the true impact

that 19th century literature can still have on modern life in America. To Lisa Daigle, my friend since elementary school, you have served as a fantastic sounding board throughout my academic career, and I remain thankful to you for accompanying me to my first academic conference and for your continued help since that trip. To Ava and Robin Hofmann, I look back extremely fondly on our weekly dinners and movie nights where we would discuss life, the upcoming Oscars ceremonies, and my ideas for this dissertation, the latter of which you provided invaluable assistance with. To Krista Barrett and Anna McGill, I would not have been able to finish this dissertation without your constant assistance with ideas and writing and I hope that I am able to return the favor.

I would also like to thank my tattoo artist Kayla Fay who works at Body Images Tattoo Clinic. In these last few months where my brain has been extremely distracted by the duties of writing this dissertation, Kayla has been able to turn my ramblings about Victorian literature and modern American war narratives into beautiful art that I am proud to exhibit on my body. It is because of her hard work that every time I look in the mirror, I am happy with not only my body but with the intellectual work I have achieved; her tattoos remind me that all the stress and hardships of writing this dissertation have resulted in something beautiful.

Finally, I would like to thank my family (of which there are many members). To my grandfather Peter, I am sorry I was never able to meet you, but your photograph hangs above my bookshelf and has served as inspiration these last six years and more. To my grandmother June, I am extremely thankful for you teaching me how to read, and for doing so with children's editions of Shakespeare to instill a love of the classics in me from a young age. To my grandfather James, I thank you for your supporting my love of reading through constant email contact when we were all adjusting to the new digital age, and I miss you every day but feel that

I have honored your legacy by keeping my love for literature burning in your absence. To my grandmother Myrtle, who sadly passed away in the final days of writing this dissertation, I thank you for the love and support you gave to us all and I hope that I will continue to make you proud. To my brother Matthew and sister-in-law Nell, thank you for your invaluable guidance through the academic system that you gloriously trudged before me. To my brother Kevin, thank you for your indomitable research skills; they have helped and inspired me throughout my graduate career. To my little sister Molly, thank you for your youthful perspective and for the late-night Real Housewives texts that have helped keep me grounded (relatively) while spending so many hours writing and thinking about trauma and war atrocities. To our family dog Harry, thank you for the unconditional love, especially when I was quarantining in Connecticut in 2020-21 during the early stages of this project. To my parents, David and Dawn, a most especial thank you for all the love and support; you know that you are my bedrock and everything I am and will be is a reflection of your own greatness. And finally, a huge thank you to my many aunts, uncles, and cousins who have helped and supported me in various forms throughout the years; you are numerous (too numerous to mention), but with great numbers comes great force, and so I am lucky to have such an impenetrable force behind me.

I am sure there are many who I have not named here, and much more I could (and maybe should) write about those I have named. However, this dissertation is already long enough without an exhaustive list of every person I have met who has influenced me and my ideas here, so please forgive me for your absence and know that in my heart and mind I am thankful for you and your part in the ensuing pages.

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I argue that by looking at the lasting impact of Victorian war literature on a variety of modern media, one can see that an increased cultural awareness of trauma has led to less humane depictions of the traumatized. The multitude of Sherlock Holmes adaptations produced and set in various time periods and covering assorted wars serves as a strong example in my first chapter of how a Victorian-produced text can have a lingering impact, and the veteran Watson serves as a strong tool for adaptors to use when commenting on the shifting nature of war and the subsequent trauma. In my second chapter I discuss *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon*, which were both produced without a modern understanding of PTSD, but their portraits of the lingering impact of war on romantic triangles demonstrate the changing perception towards trauma from a national concern to a personal one. The nostalgia-tinged King Arthur of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the fantastical Iron Man of the Marvel Cinematic Universe serve as the basis for my third chapter as both seek to supplement their strength of force and character through their tools (most notably Excalibur and the arc reactor heart), but an over-reliance on these tools to maintain martial strength results in the mechanical completely draining the human. My final chapter analyzes *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series and how both utilize the tropes of Gothic literature (and their audience's familiarity with such tropes) as a means to help their audiences empathize with traumatized soldiers. Together, these chapters work to show how seemingly small changes to these reverberating ideas emulate the large changes in cultural perceptions of war and trauma and how this view of trauma as a personal issue has led to the dehumanization of soldiers, even the ones recognized as the greatest heroes. In the end, I advocate for empathy as a narrative tool through which some of this dehumanization may be lessened.

Introduction. I Love the Smell of Appropriation in the Morning

It is unsurprising that much of modern American media features war either prominently or as a peripheral element; in the last 100 years, we have spent years fighting in World War II (1941-45), the Korean War (1950-53), the Vietnam War (1955-75), the Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Invasion of Grenada (1983), the Invasion of Panama (1989-90), the Gulf War (1990-91), the Kosovo War (1999), the War in Afghanistan (2001-21), the Iraq War (2003-11), the War in North-West Pakistan (2004-17), the Libyan Civil War (2011), and the War on ISIS (2014-present). Neither war nor its depiction in forms of entertainment are new concepts, but as technology, enemy combatants, cultural perceptions, and other factors change, so does the media that portrays war change and adjust. One such adjustment is that public perception of war's traumatic effects has shifted from being placed upon the nations involved onto the individuals who fight for those nations. In an unfortunately paradoxical situation, the raised public awareness of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has resulted in less nuanced depictions of soldiers with trauma; what was once an undefinable issue that was seen as a national problem is now often portrayed as an individual issue that separates the traumatized from the non-traumatized and makes the traumatized into the villains.

The two world wars have provided cinema with some of the most popular war narratives; one film that is often held up as a modern classic is Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). The most famous section of this movie is the opening depiction of the Normandy landings. The minutiae of D-Day are impressively researched but, I believe, presented too comprehensively. In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien writes:

When a guy dies...you look away and then look back for a moment and then look away again. The pictures get jumbled; you tend to miss a lot. And then afterward, when you get to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which

makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it *seemed*. (68; emphasis in original).

By O'Brien's description, *Saving Private Ryan*'s depiction of D-Day may be what actually happened historically, but it could ring false to people who were there, as "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth" (O'Brien 171). By aiming for historical reenactment instead of reenacting the true soldier experience, the film solidifies its popular appeal. World War II is often viewed as a justifiable war, and to present it as a series of heroically won battles instead of as a series of traumatizing events for young men who were unaware of the full extent of what they were getting into allows this view to propagate further. In contrast to *Ryan*'s popularity, *The Thin Red Line* was another World War II film released in 1998 and was also a nominee for Best Picture at the Academy Awards in the same year as *Saving Private Ryan*, but its cultural legacy is less established. *The Thin Red Line* follows the thoughts and experiences of its soldiers in the fashion one would expect from a Terrence Malick film, which makes it less readily patriotic than its prototypically Spielbergian competition.

After the D-Day invasion in *Saving Private Ryan*, the film abandons its real-time maneuvers to tell the story of a unit of soldiers who risk their lives in order to save the life of one soldier (Private Ryan, as played by Matt Damon) whose brothers have all died in combat. During this public relations minded mission, almost all of the soldiers sent to save Private Ryan die, and he spends the rest of his life memorializing them. The soldiers are all given unique characterizations, but they are uniformly heroized. The ways in which the soldiers are portrayed as cannon fodder for the military's PR department separates them from the non-soldier characters who are briefly glimpsed. This is seen in the film's framing story, where elderly Private Ryan's family often remains at a distance and seems unable to fully grasp what happened to (and for) him. Even though, or possibly because, many of the soldiers are seen as disposable in

order to save the military from having to tell Mrs. Ryan that all of her sons had died, they are held up as heroes and unable to fully connect with non-soldiers. This film decidedly does not villainize soldiers, as I will argue many texts do, but it creates a similar distance between citizens and soldiers through its uncomplicated hero worship.

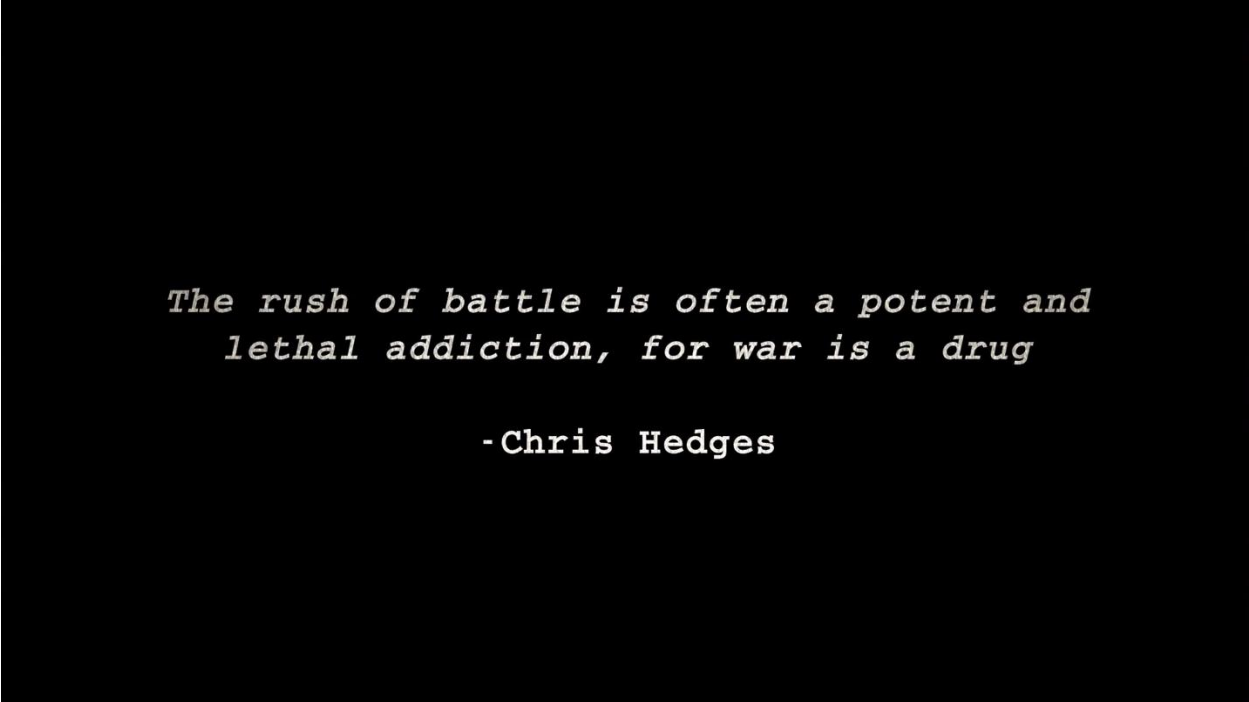
Depictions of the Vietnam War are unable to latch onto easy heroism, especially regarding soldiers. Narratives such as Oliver Stone's 1986 film *Platoon* often depict the loss of innocence that their soldiers face in the jungles of Vietnam. *Platoon* features Willem Dafoe and Tom Berenger as sergeants with opposing world views, and when Berenger's Sgt. Barnes murders Dafoe's more kind-hearted Sgt. Elias, the film's protagonist, Chris Taylor as played by Charlie Sheen, has no choice about which mentor to follow and so goes down the path of death and destruction preached by Sgt. Barnes. Taylor went to war with past ideas of heroism in his head, but once in Vietnam, he realized that heroics were no longer up for grabs; this film puts the decision to cause destruction in the hands of individual soldiers instead of in the governments. The most common way that the Vietnam war is used is in period pieces to demonstrate American unrest due to protests. Some films, novels, plays, etc. use the protests as background, like any other piece of period trapping, though occasionally it becomes a larger part of the plot. The Beatles jukebox musical *Across the Universe* (Julie Taymour, 2007) sets its story in this era and so recontextualizes many Beatles songs to depict protests and revolutionary thinking. Songs like "Revolution" fit in easily, but the film also changes the meaning of songs, switching "I Want You (She's So Heavy)" from a love song for Yoko Ono to a dystopic rendering of Uncle Sam drafting any and all fit male specimens. Even though this film maneuvers itself to revolve around the world of protestors, it fits into the popular usage of the Vietnam War as little more than window-dressing to justify setting a more recent narrative in the 1970s. While *Platoon* depicts

the inability for American soldiers in the Vietnam War to grasp the kind of heroism granted by World War II, *Across the Universe* and many other films depicting the period present the true heroes as those who are vocally anti-war. Heroism may have been attainable during the Vietnam War, but not by soldiers who supported their government.

Texts about the wars America has been in since September 11, 2001 have not been as popular with audiences as those about the World Wars or Vietnam, though several have met with critical acclaim; a good representative of this is *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2009), which won the award for Best Picture at the 82nd Academy Awards.¹ This film presents the Iraq War as a drug that the American military has hooked its soldiers on, making them only available to function properly while at war. This is established with the film-opening onscreen display of a quote from Chris Hedges's book, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*: "The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug" (Hedges 3; Fig. 1). When SFC William James, portrayed by Jeremy Renner, comes home to his ex-wife and son, he is unable to find contentment in that lifestyle and so ends the film by returning to Iraq, which he tells his son is the one thing he loves. This film demonstrates how alienated the modern military makes its soldiers feel from American civilians, which is perhaps why the film did not register with the average American filmgoer, even if it made an impact on the members of the Motion Picture Academy. This shows the full shift of attention from the nation to the individual, as the nation is now able to largely ignore the war by ignoring the individual.

Another frequent part of depicting the most recent wars is the heightened sense of uncertainty, which is highlighted in texts such as the musical *Who's Your Baghdaddy, or How I Started the Iraq War*. Originally titled *Baghdaddy*, this play, with music and book by Marshall

¹ As an example of general popularity, *Saving Private Ryan* grossed \$482,349,603 on a \$70,000,000 budget while *The Hurt Locker* made \$49,259,766 on a \$15,000,000 budget according to *Box Office Mojo*.



*The rush of battle is often a potent and
lethal addiction, for war is a drug*

-Chris Hedges

Figure 1. *The Hurt Locker*. Directed by Kathryn Bigelow, Summit Entertainment, 2009.

Paillet and lyrics and book by A. D. Penedo, was first produced Off-Off Broadway in 2015, then Off-Broadway in 2017 before gaining its current title when produced in Australia in 2020.² The story involves “an operative, a weapons inspector, two analysts, a German interrogator, and one more, each with noble intention, basically,” who meet in a support group discussing how and why their actions led to the Iraq War.³ Over the course of the musical, these six recount how their actions led to the moment on February 5, 2003 when Colin Powell spoke to the UN Security Council to justify the war. This musical uses the mysterious WMDs to highlight the feeling of uncertainty that permeated America after September 11, 2001, but still highlights the effect on individuals as five of the six (as one of the analysts had been killed while searching for the WMDs) are prodded by the support group leader to take responsibility for their actions, in a manner similar to how alcoholics at an AA meeting must take accountability. The format of this

² I will be writing based on the live-streamed version of the 2020 Australian production.

³ Lyric from the song “We Deserve Better.”

musical allows for the theme of national uncertainty to be processed through a handful of individuals, which demonstrates that even a national trauma such as September 11 can still be read through the more modern lens of personal trauma, guilt, and responsibility. The search for WMDs in the musical highlights the uncertainty of the individuals who are affected by war, as the government remains dedicated to the search while the individuals involved need to go to a support group to work through their trauma, guilt, and lingering questions.

Many of the other wars that America has been involved in during the last hundred years have not been as well represented in texts; this disuse can be symbolized by the treatment of the Invasion of Grenada in *Anger Management* (Peter Segal, 2003). In this film, Dave Buznik, played by Adam Sandler, and Chuck, played by John Turturro, have the following conversation in a bar:

Chuck: I have seen some shit, man. I kid you not, I have *seen some shit*. Wake up to the—sound of kids screaming, explosions everywhere. Never know when your number's up.

Dave: Oof. Vietnam, huh?

Chuck: Grenada, man.

Dave: Grenada?

Chuck: Yeah.

Dave: Wasn't that like twelve hours long?

The music at the start of this scene is intense, but as soon as Chuck reveals his PTSD stems from Grenada, the score stops playing and the diegetic rock 'n' roll from the bar starts up again. This switch in musical tones emphasizes the joke and even further undermines the effects of Grenada on Chuck. The four-day long invasion is much shorter than the more popularly represented wars, but it is nevertheless an incursion which resulted in casualties and international repercussions. The repercussions in America, however, are not as generally felt as those from longer wars, which leads to depictions such as *Anger Management*. While the world wars, Vietnam, and the post-9/11 wars are handled with a mix of reverence, despair, and confusion, many other military

operations like the Invasion of Grenada have become disregarded to the level that they can be treated as throwaway jokes in an Adam Sandler comedy.

To emphasize the influence of the past on the present, I will be comparing modern American texts like the ones already discussed to Victorian texts because of the similar military situations of the cultures. Just as the past one hundred years of American history have featured many years of fighting on foreign soil, England spent much of the nineteenth century fighting in other countries. During Queen Victoria's reign, the United Kingdom was involved in the First Carlist War (1833-40), the 6th Xhosa War (1834-36), the Rebellions of 1837 (1837-38), the Pastry War (1838-39), the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42), the First Opium War (1839-42), the Second Egyptian-Ottoman War (1839-41), the Uruguayan Civil War (1839-51), the First Anglo-Sikh War (1845-46), the Flagstaff War (1845-46), the Hutt Valley Campaign (1846), the 7th Xhosa War (1846-47), the Wanganui Campaign (1847), the Caste War of Yucatán (1847-1901), the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848-49), the Battle of Tysami (1849), the 8th Xhosa War (1850-53), the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64), the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-53), the Crimean War (1853-56), the National War in Nicaragua (1856-57), the Second Opium War (1856-60), the Anglo-Persian War (1856-57), the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (1857-58), the First Taranaki War (1860-61), the Bombardment of Kagoshima (1863), the Second Ashanti War (1863-64), the Invasion of Waikato (1863-64), the Bhutan War (1864-65), the British Expedition to Abyssinia (1867-68), the Klang War (1867-1874), the New Zealand Wars (1868-72), the Red River Rebellion (1869), the Third Ashanti War (1873-74), the 9th Xhosa War (1877-79), the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80), the Anglo-Zulu War (1879), the 'Urabi Revolt (1879-82), the First Boer War (1880-81), the Mahdist War (1884-89), the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885), the Sikkim Expedition (1888), the Anglo-Manipur War (1891), the First Matabele War

(1893-94), the Anglo-Zanzibar War (1896), the Second Matabele War (1896-97), the Cretan Revolt (1897-98), the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), the Second Boer War (1899-1902), and the Mahsud Waziri blockade (1900-02). Just as with America in the last one hundred years, Victorian England was an era dominated by military conflicts yet with the homeland remaining relatively untouched with civilians free to live their normal lives unburdened by the threat of conflict.

The reason why I will focus on specifically the Victorian period instead of the entire nineteenth century's worth of English texts is similar to the reason why my American texts will focus on those produced post-Vietnam: the general move away from hero worship. In his 1840 lectures, generally called "On Heroes and Hero-Worship," Thomas Carlyle spoke about what makes a hero, and included amongst his options for reaching that goal the title "Conqueror" (325). This implies that military conquest is one way towards becoming a great hero, which goes along with his description of Napoleon: "The grand fundamental character is that of Great Man; that the man be great. Napoleon has words in him which are like Austerlitz Battles...The great heart, the clear deep-seeing eye: there it lies; no man whatever, in what province soever, can prosper at all without these" (324). Napoleon may have been an enemy to Great Britain, but Carlyle is still able to see his virtues as a great man and a great hero, deserving of worship. This kind of martial hero-worship is clear in pre-Victorian texts like Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819). The absolute worship of the knights is clear from how "between every pause was heard the voice of the heralds, exclaiming, 'Fight on, brave knights! Man dies, but glory lives!—Fight on—death is better than defeat!—Fight on, brave knights! for bright eyes behold your deeds!'" (112). The knights are thus told at every possible opportunity that they are brave and that they will be remembered as heroes after death. In Victorian England before the Indian Rebellion, and in

America before the Vietnam War, soldiers were told that they were heroes and that their sacrifices were part of what made them deserving of worship, but after these events, public perceptions would shift.

Just as American texts after Vietnam became less about worshipping the heroic soldier than they did about worrying about the traumatized soldier, so did Victorian texts change from the early nineteenth century's depictions of soldiers as viable romantic prospects. Carlyle writes:

The Czar of all the Russias, he is strong, with so many bayonets, Cossacks, and cannons; and does a great feat in keeping such a tract of Earth politically together; but he cannot yet speak. Something great in him, but it is a dumb greatness. He has had no voice of genius, to be heard of all men and times. He must learn to speak. He is a great dumb monster hitherto. His cannons and Cossacks will all have rusted into nonentity, while that Dante's voice is still audible. (340)

This posits that martial strength requires a way with words in order to qualify for greatness, and this is often represented in texts by how the soldiers are able to use their words to woo romantic interests. Examples of these earlier depictions of soldiers can be found in the works of Jane Austen. In her 1817 novel *Persuasion*, the main romantic interest is the soldier Captain Frederick Wentworth. The snobbish Sir Walter Elliot does not think much of Wentworth, saying "Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember; quite unconnected; nothing to do with the Strafford family. One wonders how the names of many of our nobility become so common" (18). Contrarily, many of the female characters find him enchanting: "There was a very general ignorance of all naval matters throughout the party; and he was very much questioned, and especially by the two Miss Musgroves, who seemed hardly to have any eyes but for him, as to the manner of living on board, daily regulations, food, hours, etc." (46). Before he became a naval captain, Wentworth had been seen as an inappropriate match for Anne Elliot, the novel's protagonist, but once he has military credentials, Anne must fend off the Miss Musgroves and others before they can get married. His military credentials give him social support, but he is successful because of how he

is able to speak and entrance all the women with his stories. The depictions of soldiers in the early nineteenth century were influential on Victorian depictions, but there is a notable decline in romantic military heroes, as can be seen in American texts as the world wars get farther and farther away.

The connection between Victorian narratives and modern American texts can be seen through *Apocalypse Now*, a 1979 Vietnam war film directed by Francis Ford Coppola, which is based on Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's narrative is about a man named Charles Marlow who travels up the Congo River to find a man named Kurtz who runs a trading post where the native Africans worship him. This view is espoused by a Russian acolyte that Marlow finds and informs him that "this man has enlarged my mind" (97). This viewpoint, given by a fellow white man who is noted for his blue eyes, shows Marlow the reach of Kurtz's ability to evoke God-like worship. Similarly, *Apocalypse Now* is about Captain Benjamin L. Willard who is tasked with going up the Nùng River to find Colonel Kurtz who has taken over an outpost in Cambodia where he is worshipped as demigod. Just as with the Russian in the novella, Captain Willard encounters an American photojournalist who claims, "the man's enlarged my mind." Despite the wording being almost the exact same, the words as said by Dennis Hopper feel completely up to date. As can be seen by those plot descriptions, the two narratives share much of the same foundation even as the trappings have changed. The reason this translation works so well is that for both narratives to operate, the home nation must be a distant memory for the protagonist as he navigates a foreign land that exudes foreignness; just as the Congo was vastly different geographically from England, so was Vietnam from the United States of America. The lack of necessitated narrative changes from Conrad's novella to Coppola's film highlights the martial similarities of Victorian England and modern America.

Apocalypse Now also opens the discussion of how adaptations differ from appropriations when it comes to Victorian and modern war narratives. In *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders explores the subtle difference between these two terms, describing them in her introduction as “mediations and remediations...direct quotation and acts of citation” before stating “as my endless ruminating over terminology even at the outset suggests, this is a study sympathetic to theories of pluralism rather than fixity” (3; 6; 16).⁴ Definitionally, adaptations are more directly tied to their source material than appropriations, though when a text goes from adaptation to appropriation is impossible to pin down. *Apocalypse Now* offers a particularly confusing case as the narrative bones are so rigidly aligned with *Heart of Darkness*, but the further one gets from the baseline, the vaster the differences between the two texts get. One easy difference to point out is that Conrad’s narrative is short enough to be classified as a novella, while Coppola’s film was originally released at 147 minutes in length, with subsequent version being 196 minutes (*Apocalypse Now Redux*, 2001) and 182 minutes (*Apocalypse Now: Final Cut*, 2019). No matter which version of *Apocalypse Now* one chooses to watch, the length is enough to reasonably call the film an epic.⁵ To justify the transition from a short literary text to a long cinematic one, Coppola necessarily changed and added many things. *Apocalypse Now* straddles the line between adaptation and appropriation, which demonstrates how hard it often is to neatly divide the two terms.

Despite the difficulty in assigning definitions, this project will mostly rely on appropriations, as they are able to show the reach of Victorian influence more fully on modern

⁴ When explaining the difference, Sanders says the following about adaptation and appropriation: “appropriation carries out the same sustained engagement of adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, overt commentary and even sometimes assault or attack” (6).

⁵ Similar to epic poetry, epic films concern heroic figures and usually are long in length; they generally are expensive to make and so the term is sometimes broadened to refer to any big-budget film project.

American texts. Because adaptations are more linked to their source material, there is less room for the stories to adjust to modern times. Adaptations of Victorian war narratives, such as *Barry Lyndon* (Stanley Kubrick, 1975), often feel the need to remain bound to their original period and the changes in war culture since the end of the Victorian period has made the direct correlations harder to pin down. *Barry Lyndon* is able to change the tone from comedic to dramatic in order to better suit the cinematic format, but it is unable to change Barry's war experiences to be more Vietnam-esque and keep its time period setting the same.⁶ However, with appropriations, a text can take inspiration from another text, or multiple texts, and then use the influence to tell a whole new story. This is how the third season of Jonathon Nolan and Lisa Joy's HBO series *Westworld* was able to take the ideas from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* to tell their story about a soldier with PTSD being confronted by a series of robots who try to give him a reason to live by showing him the past, present, and future. Aaron Paul's character Caleb Nichols may not learn the true meaning of Christmas, but his journey towards self-discovery and his place in the world is one that Ebenezer Scrooge would have been able to relate to. In the course of my following chapters, I will occasionally discuss direct adaptations of Victorian narratives, but I will more often discuss how the ideas in a variety of Victorian texts have influenced a variety of modern American texts. There are enough strict adaptations of Victorian war narratives to justify their own book, but for the argument I want to make, my points will be better proven by looking at more indirect influences.

Further reasoning why I will be using specifically British literature from 1857-1901 rather than literature from the same time period in different countries can be seen by looking at various depictions of the Napoleonic wars. The climactic action of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*

⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray's source novel is set in the 18th century, but its ideas are still Victorian, similar to how I will be discussing *Sylvia's Lovers* by Elizabeth Gaskell in my second chapter.

(1862) may take place during the 1832 June Rebellion in Paris, but the narrative begins with Jean Valjean being released from prison in 1815, the same year as the Battle of Waterloo. Later in the text, the first book (“Waterloo”) of volume two (“Cosette”) acts as one of Hugo’s many digressions from his narrative; instead of continuing the story of Jean Valjean, this book gives a historical analysis of Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo: “What is Waterloo? A victory? No. A winning lottery ticket. Won by Europe, paid by France” (342). Seventeen years later, during the climactic rebellion, Hugo still demonstrates the importance of Napoleon to Paris, as Valjean’s adopted daughter’s love interest lets his young life be guided by the Bonapartist beliefs of his father. This demonstrates the understandably long aftereffects of the Napoleonic wars on France. Leo Tolstoy similarly details how Napoleon’s military maneuvers have impacted Russia in *War and Peace* (1865-67): “What had happened in Moscow was happening now in every town and village on Russian soil from Smolensk onwards...once the enemy began to get near, the wealthier elements of the population went away...while the poorer people stayed on, setting fire to all that was left” (923). Tolstoy then emphasizes that this reaction to Napoleon’s invasion has had a lingering effect by saying that this way of behaving “was, and is, deeply implanted in every Russian heart” (923). Napoleon may have lost the war, but his impact remained in Russia, as visible through the ashes of Moscow and other places on his path. France and Russia were on opposing sides during this conflict, but the literature from both countries, as represented by these two examples, show the lasting impact on both nations.

Conversely, William Makepeace Thackeray’s depiction of the Napoleonic Wars in *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) demonstrates the distance from fighting that is often present in Victorian literature. Before several of his characters are witness to a military conflict in Brussels, Thackeray’s narrator states that, “we of peaceful London City have never beheld—and please

God never shall witness—such a scene of hurry and alarm” (302). This sets the scene by placing the reader at a distance, which is even felt by his characters who are in Brussels:

After hearing the firing for a moment, the stout Major’s wife bethought her of her friend in the next chamber, and ran in to watch, and if possible to console, Amelia...She passed five hours by her friend’s side, sometimes in remonstrance, sometimes talking cheerfully, oftener in silence, and terrified mental supplication. “I never let go her hand once,” said the stout lady afterwards, “until after sunset, when the firing was over.” (302-03)

Most of the characters during this scene playact at terror, but the largest inconvenience most of them face is the noise level.⁷ This lack of consequences is shown by ostensible protagonist Becky Sharp’s consideration: “‘Suppose the French do come,’ thought Becky, ‘what can they do to a poor officer’s widow? Bah! the times of sacks and sieges are over. We shall be let to go home quietly, or I may live pleasantly abroad with a snug little income’” (310). While Hugo and Tolstoy would still lament the impact of Napoleon on their nations less than twenty years later, Thackeray comically dismisses the war as (mostly) inconsequential for his English characters and audience. While not all Victorian literature treats Napoleon as flippantly as Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* offers a clear example of how distant war felt for the English citizens of this period, which stands in stark contrast to those in other countries. These three examples show that even when tackling a similar subject matter, the Victorian view of war as a thing that happens elsewhere makes it the most suitable for comparing to modern American texts.

The importance of war being elsewhere than at home is also what separates modern American war narratives from recent war texts from other countries. Sébastien Japrisot’s 1991 novel *A Very Long Engagement* tells the story of Mathilde Donnay, a physically disabled young woman, as she searches throughout France for clues to the whereabouts of her childhood

⁷ One of the English characters does die at Waterloo, but it has little to no effect on Becky Sharp except one less man to flirt with.

sweetheart, despite his being reportedly killed during World War I. Eventually she is proven correct and finds her lover, Manech, in 1924. Due to the combined factors of her disability and the time period, Mathilde's ability to successfully search for her presumed-dead beau is largely in part thanks to the war being fought in France; she does leave the country over the course of the novel, but her search is focused on France, where she would most be able to effectively investigate. Similarly, Muhsin Al-Ramli's 2012 novel *The President's Gardens* relates the story of a group of friends living in Iraq whose fates are intertwined with war. One of the friends, Ibrahim, gets a job as a gardener for the President's gardens, and he is at first overwhelmed by the beauty of the flowers and great-smelling French perfume of the fountains. Eventually, he gets a promotion, which he is initially excited about until he realizes his new job is burying corpses; this dangerous career path leads back to the beginning of the novel when Ibrahim's village finds "nine banana crates, each containing the severed head of one of its sons," with Ibrahim among the nine (7). Coming from a poorer village, Ibrahim was amazed when he was welcomed into the wealthy world of the Iraqi elite, but because of his social status he was forced to do the dirty work left behind by the military and was ultimately seen as disposable. Like Mathilde and Ibrahim, Agu is also from a small village in Uzodinma Iweala's 2005 novel *Beasts of No Nation*. His village is in an unnamed country in West Africa, so while Agu is just a child, he is unable to live away from war as soldiers attack his home and he is forced to join their ranks and kill people for a cause that he did not sign up for. By the end of the novel, the child soldiers have revolted against their commander and escaped to find peaceful missionaries, but at this point he has already lost any remnants of his childhood innocence. The disabled Mathilde, the poor Ibrahim, and the child Agu are involved in wars to different degrees, but each's journey starts from their small villages; analogous small towns in the modern United States would keep these

disadvantaged characters relatively safe from the horrors of war. Each of the countries represented by these three novels have had their lands touched by war and so are different when compared to modern American as well as Victorian texts.

The American composer Dave Malloy highlights the difference between these two types of war narratives in his musical *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, which is an American adaptation of *War and Peace*. The show opens with the characters singing:

There's a war going on
Out there somewhere
And Andrey isn't here

These three lines are repeated four times before new lyrics are introduced, emphasizing the “out there”-ness of the war; the distance is so ideologically ingrained that they do not even think of Andrey as being at war as much as they think that he is not “here.” Later in this song, aptly called “Prologue,” the characters sing: “Chandeliers and caviar, the war can't touch us here,” which further emphasizes the distance the characters feel from the war. However, as discussed previously, Napoleon eventually does come to Russia during the course of the novel, though not of the musical. Malloy's musical highlights the sense of distance between its characters and the war being fought in their name, which its American audience would be used to; for those seeing the show at the Imperial Theatre on West 45th Street in New York City between 2016 and 2017, places like Afghanistan or Pakistan must have felt very distant. However, knowledge of where the story will go after the curtain comes down serves as a stark reminder to the audience that even those who feel most comfortable in their positions are possibly going to be in danger in the future. *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* fits into the elsewhere-ness of other modern American war texts, but it nevertheless allows for the possibility of war eventually coming to our shores.

While the majority of my major modern texts are American, I will discuss several from other countries, particularly England; the ones I have chosen generally fit into the elsewhere mode though the larger national canon does not. Texts such as the film *Eye in the Sky* (Gavin Hood, 2015) show that English narratives can operate in the elsewhere mode, as the film depicts Helen Mirren's UK military intelligence officer deciding whether or not to risk civilian deaths in order to kill three targets in Nairobi, Kenya while she and her team are safe in Eastbury, Hertfordshire, England. She ultimately decides to do the attack; the first missile they shoot kills two of the targets and injures an innocent child who lives next door, while the second kills the last of the targets as well as the little girl. The distance between the trigger and the targets is enough for Mirren's officer to order the second missile despite the knowledge that it would likely kill the child. However, while this film emphasizes the distance between England and the countries it is currently engaged in military conflicts with, many English films still show the impact of past wars that have touched English soil, specifically the bombings of World War II. This can be seen in the James Bond film *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012), where the impact of World War II on the London Underground system plays a large part in the narrative. America is not the only modern source of elsewhere-minded war narratives, but even America's closest allies in this type of presentation are still often subject to memories of war fought at home.

While the war narratives from Victorian England are comparable to those of modern-day America, the major difference that I will highlight throughout this dissertation is how trauma is represented. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder did not enter the pop cultural lexicon until late in the twentieth century, but the damaging psychological effects of war can still be seen in texts from before then, particularly in Victorian narratives. Many texts from this period recognize that soldiers who return home from war have been significantly affected and try to put this into terms

that an audience will understand. Victorian texts tend to do this by showing soldiers returning home from war to find their country is no longer recognizable to them; examples of unrecognizable homescapes will be examined in each of my four chapters when discussing Victorian texts. This dynamic is reversed in many American narratives since the onset of the Vietnam War; soldiers return home, only for their unchanged hometowns, families, and friends to not recognize them and to view their returning loved one as a hostile intruder. This shows the change from seeing the nation as traumatized, even if the term being used was not “traumatized,” to seeing the individual as traumatized, and how it relates to the cultural awareness of PTSD. While one might assume that greater awareness of trauma would lead to greater understanding of trauma, these texts highlight that the heightened awareness has instead led to a steep decline in empathy.

My focus is on pop-cultural visions of PTSD, but there will necessarily be some overlap with the medical view of PTSD; when approaching this angle of discourse, my main source will be Judith Herman, M. D.’s 1992 book *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman lays out her objective as such:

Trauma and Recovery represents the fruits of two decades of research and clinical work with victims of sexual and domestic violence. It also reflects a growing body of experience with many other traumatized people, particularly combat veterans and the victims of political terror. This is a book about restoring connections: between the public and private worlds, between the individual and community, between men and women. It is a book about commonalities: between rape survivors and combat veterans, between battered women and political prisoners, between the survivors of vast concentration camps created by tyrants who rule nations and the survivors of small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes. (2-3)

She writes that her book is about “restoring connections” and showing the commonalities between traumas from many sources, including war; this sense of connectivity and understanding is in line with the purpose of this dissertation in arguing that war trauma has often been singled

out as different (and often evil) when the general public should be more understanding. This similarity is why I believe that her descriptions of the medical view of trauma fit well with my pop cultural examinations. How PTSD operates medically is very different from how it operates in fictional texts, but it is still important to incorporate the medical side to help better analyze how media succeeds and fails.

A specific piece of information from Herman's book that will be useful in every chapter is that "traumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions" (39). In some cases, "some reenactments are consciously chosen," but, as is the case for many of the characters in my texts, "more commonly, traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing" (39-40). The often-subconscious reenactments of the fictional characters I will be discussing mimics the modern texts themselves which, consciously or subconsciously, reenact the tropes and stereotypes from Victorian texts. The way that modern texts use these same tropes and stereotypes to reach a new (or inverse) conclusion (that trauma is individual more than national), is very like how veterans relive past traumas to change or fix their inciting incident(s). In both situations, the trappings stay the same even as the end results differ. This facet of trauma is represented in nearly all the texts I will discuss, but it has further relevance as it is itself an act of adaptation and/or appropriation.

One place that the cultural and medical understanding often differ is about the existence of trauma at all. In my Victorian texts of choice, the medical knowledge of trauma was much different, so it is often up to the authors to figure out their own terminology. These authors try to put a name to something they sensed in their society that had no name, and would not until "in 1980, for the first time, the characteristic syndrome of psychological trauma became a 'real'

diagnosis. In that year, the American Psychiatric Association included in its official manual of mental disorders a new category, called ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’” (Herman 27-28). Once PTSD became an officially diagnosable disorder, the problem necessarily changed from what to call this mysterious thing to doubting the existence of said mysterious thing. Herman opines that: “dispute has raged over whether patients with post-traumatic conditions are entitled to care and respect or deserving of contempt, whether they are genuinely suffering or malingering, whether their histories are true or false and, if false, whether imagined or maliciously fabricated” (8). While this disbelief might have made sense when the term first came out, Herman argues that “in spite of a vast literature documenting the phenomena of psychological trauma, debate still centers on the basic question of whether these phenomena are credible and real” (8). This complaint from Herman demonstrates the value of examining the cultural understanding of PTSD alongside the medical; the medical professionals may be able to pinpoint and diagnose, but patients are more swayed by what they hear and see in their everyday lives, which include texts like the ones I will analyze. The existence of PTSD is often questioned by the public despite medical expertise, and one way of combatting this incredulity is better media representation.

There are many examples of how media representation can impact society, including in the Victorian and modern American periods. Charles Dicken is often cited for his novels bringing about societal changes, as “his anger about public and official indifference to the plight of the educational institutions” brought the issues with these institutions to a larger audience, according to Ronald M. Meldrum in “Charles Dickens as Artist and Reformer” (97). Because what he said helped lead to changes, the issues he points out are now often less prominent, and so:

his didacticism, so often objected to in his own day, paradoxically is now often overlooked and in fact the detailed scenes he created for socially oriented ends are now lauded as pure art. Dickens' art is substantial primarily because it is well founded on imagination, or direct and truthful observations of life. (97)

A modern example of a text having a social impact is the 2015 Pixar film *Inside Out*, directed by Pete Docter; as Mercedes Fernández Oromendia wrote in "Using *Inside Out* to discuss emotions with children in therapy," "*Inside Out* can be incorporated into our daily interactions with children and adolescents to help foster emotional awareness, empathy and compassion. The applications are endless." *Inside Out* works well as a piece of family-oriented entertainment, but it also has therapeutic potential that can help create empathy in its youthful audiences, in a similar way to how Dickens's outrage inspired his all-ages audience. There are many more examples, but as Dickens and *Inside Out* demonstrate, good empathetic art has the ability to inspire social change and progression.

In discussing how my varied texts of choice will show the changing nature of depictions of national and individual trauma, I will often refer to the national allegorical form, a concept that Fredric Jameson analyzes in depth in *Allegory and Ideology* (2019); this book includes a version of his article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," which was originally published in 1986. He describes allegory in general as "an interpretive virus that, spreading by way of its own propagations, proliferates and perpetuates itself" (1). He adds that the form "is also a surgical instrument and a diagnostic tool, by way of which the atomic particles of a sentence or a narrative, the most minute meanings and secondary connotations, are registered on the X-ray plate in all their guilty absence, in all their toxic participation" (1). His figurative language shows that allegories are widespread and that they are used to show problems that the authors identify, and that their use is not always a positive thing. Because allegories are used to expose toxicity, it is no surprise that the form is often used to comment on nations, with

many authors using the form to highlight what they see as wrong with their countries' politics. In diagnosing the issues with nations, authors often have individual characters stand in for their states, which will make the allegory an important form for my examination of personal and national trauma.

Jameson's use of the specific national allegorical form is generally focused on literature from the third-world, while I am focused on the first-world. He writes:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel... *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. (165; italics in original)

Jameson thus argues that every third-world text has no choice but to be read as a national allegory, and that this form of narrative is traceable back to Western media. In comparison, Jameson says that there is an "optional nature" to the national allegory in first-world texts (177).

While Jameson's argument is around what it means that every third-world text operates as a national allegory, much of my dissertation will be concerned with what a reader can take away from choosing the national allegorical option when reading Western texts. This element of choice relates to my discussion of "out there"-ness; in Jameson's third-world countries, the issues are ever-present, while Victorian and modern American citizens generally had/have the option to ignore what the military is doing abroad in their names. With the optional nature of western national allegories in mind, perhaps a better definition for my use of the term would be: *the story of the private individual destiny can be an allegory of the sheltered situation of Victorian English and modern American culture and society*.

Over the course of four chapters, I will analyze how the appropriations of Victorian narratives in modern America demonstrate the increasing lack of empathy in war narratives. The

first chapter will look at the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and their various adaptations and appropriations in a multitude of forms from a variety of nationalities. This will lay down a good baseline for Victorian ideas being applied to many wars. The second chapter will discuss Elizabeth Gaskell's 1863 novel *Sylvia's Lovers* and the 1989 musical *Miss Saigon* to show how seemingly small changes to these reverberating ideas emulate the large changes in cultural perceptions of war and trauma, particularly as applies to how the view of trauma has gone from being a national issue to a personal issue. The third chapter demonstrates how this view of trauma as a personal issue has led to the dehumanization of soldiers, even the ones recognized as the greatest heroes through Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885) in comparison with the Marvel Cinematic Universe (2008-present). The fourth chapter highlights Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1862 novel *Lady Audley's Secrets* and Suzanne Collins's Hunger Games series (2008-2020) that do not align with the dehumanizing trend because they advocate for empathy. I will end with a conclusion that connects these various ideas and further demonstrates the need for empathetic texts. PTSD is a medical reality that veterans and many others face, and so I believe that fictional depictions should use their popular appeal to spread awareness instead of sowing further discontent.

Chapter 1. “A Great Train of Wounded Sufferers,” or: The Watsons Are Afoot

Sherlock Holmes first appeared in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s 1887 novel *A Study in Scarlet* and since then has become one of the most popular characters ever to exist. Often in his adventures, both canonical and non-canonical, he is accompanied by his faithful sidekick “John H. Watson, M. D., Late of the Army Medical Department” (Doyle 15).⁸ In Doyle’s narratives, Dr. Watson fought and got injured in the Second Anglo-Afghan War, which was fought from 1878 to 1880. While many subsequent adaptations, parodies, homages, etc. have kept the military background, they have placed Watson in a variety of different wars. This malleability suggests that archetypes are adaptable despite the differences in wars; the cultural view of individual military men remains similar enough that a Victorian creation such as Dr. Watson can be plausibly placed on any battlefield.⁹ Watson’s ability to fit across time and countries allows different storytellers to use this specific archetype to comment on modern wars. In this chapter I will examine how Watson’s war experiences (or other traumatic events) have been used since his first appearance and how they chart a shift in public perception of trauma. It is clear through the various iterations of Watson that the detective genre is particularly adaptable to new generations and new wars, especially when one tracks how Watson began as a dedicated investigator seeking to right the wrongs he sees in his country yet has more recently been depicted as a possible threat to the safety of his homeland.

The urge to adapt Holmes and Watson is so strong that even Sherlockian criticism often takes on the form of adaptation. In “Sherlock Holmes, Order, and the Late-Victorian Mind,”

⁸ Generally, when I refer to the Watson from Doyle’s Holmes narratives, I will call him Dr. Watson.

⁹ I say the view of military men because the view of military women is often quite separate, though there are several female Watsons, notably *Miss Sherlock*’s Wato-San who served as a medic in Syria for the Japanese military.

Christopher Clausen laments that Holmes is “the subject of the most tedious pseudo-scholarship in the history of letters, most of it premised on the facetious assumption that Holmes was a historical character whose biography needs filling in” (105). This scholarship is referred to as The Great Game and its purpose, as per Lindsay Dearing in “Mormonism in *A Study in Scarlet*: Colonization on the Frontiers (of Sherlockian Logic),” is “to reconcile inconsistencies found in the Holmes canon by constructing a historical Holmes and Watson” (55).^{10;11} A well-known example of this is William S. Baring-Gould’s *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*, which states that in 1872 when Sherlock was 18, he was briefly tutored by Professor James Moriarty, and “there flared up instant hatred” (23). Dearing believes that this kind of criticism misses the point, giving an example specifically about The Great Game’s interest in *A Study in Scarlet*: “the important question is not ‘Where did “The Country of the Saints” come from’? or even ‘Why is this section included in *A Study in Scarlet*’? but ‘Why are Holmes and Watson not privy to the information detailed in the second half of the novel?’” (55). Like Dearing, Clausen feels that The Great Game has become ubiquitous and blocked out much other criticism despite the stories being written over a long time period and the fact that “the range of life—of people, settings, ideas—that Holmes encounters or reflects upon in that time is extraordinarily wide” (106). While there is criticism to be found that analyzes the Holmes canon, the prevalence of the Great Game to this day exemplifies how the desire to adapt these narratives is unusually strong.

Outside of the Great Game, Holmes and Watson have been adapted to various times and places besides Victorian London. Versions of this famous partnership have solved mysteries from settings as diverse as an Italian monastery in 1327 (Umberto Eco’s 1980 novel *The Name of*

¹⁰ The Great Game is also a term used to describe a series of military conflicts that the United Kingdom was engaged in during the nineteenth century.

¹¹ While this article was published under the name Dearing, she now goes by the name Lindsay Katzir.

the Rose) and “the Kingdom of Ey during the four hundred and sixty-seventh year of the reign of the Witch King Iustinian” (Alexis Hall’s 2019 novel *The Affair of the Mysterious Letter*) (Hall 3). One benchmark with which to measure the enduring appeal of Holmes is if you count how many television versions have already come out in the 21st century; there have been at least nine: *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century* (1999-2001), *Monk* (2002-09), *House* (2004-12), *Sherlock* (2010-17), *Elementary* (2012-19), *Sherlock Holmes* (2013), the fifth season of *The Flash* (2018-19), *Miss Sherlock* (2018), and *The Irregulars* (2021).¹² Each of these series presents a different take on the characters, which can be seen by analyzing the visuals that play during their theme songs. *Sherlock*’s intro is edited similarly to how the rest of the series illustrates what goes on in Sherlock’s mind, and the visuals the audience is shown are of London streets and environs where cars and such are moving in a controlled manner. This intro puts the viewer into Holmes’s mind and shows his logical view of the world, even if real-life London traffic is not usually that orderly. As another example, *Elementary*’s intro follows a clear marble through a Rube Goldberg device that smashes a bust and spills wine as it works towards dropping a cage over a toy criminal; at the end, the marble rolls away clean and untouched past the destruction it caused achieving its goal. Like *Sherlock*, this intro emphasizes how in control and orderly Holmes himself is, as represented by the marble, but differs from the other series in demonstrating how his actions lead to consequences that affect those around him. Thus, while both shows center around the same (or at least a similar) figure, the intros establish that *Sherlock* cares more about Sherlock himself while *Elementary* acknowledges that the chaotic way in which Holmes makes order of the world can have a detrimental effect on others. This posits *Sherlock* as a one-man show (as I will argue, the centrality of Watson in this series is questionable) and *Elementary* is

¹² There is also an upcoming CBS series about Dr. Watson returning to his medical career after the death of Sherlock Holmes (though whether Sherlock Holmes is going to stay dead in it is questionable) (Adreevna).

more of an ensemble. Those two shows, and many of the others listed above, were on television at the same time; this demonstrates not only the enduring popularity of Holmes and Watson but also how their partnership is open to a variety of interpretations.

This troubles Jameson's idea of the national allegory, as he stated such cases do. He writes that, "the term *allegory* is most often applied to what may be called a one-to-one narrative in which features of a primary narrative are selected (in the process rhetoric calls *amplificatio*) and correlated with features of a second one that then becomes the 'meaning' of the first" (4-5; emphasis in original). According to this, allegories operate as a "one-to-one narrative," so if Watson is a stand-in for England, or what England could be, then that is all he stands in for in Doyle's text. However,

Allegory turns against itself and indicts itself by way of a generic and pragmatic distinction between outright allegorical structures which have the objectivity of fixed forms and a multiple collection of seemingly random interpretations or readings now consigned to some general (and generally pejorative) category called *allegoresis*. (2)

These "random interpretations or readings" lend sources such as the Holmes stories to a variety of adaptations so that while Doyle's Watson represents the possible future of Victorian England, later adaptations have him stand-in for a variety of other nations in other times of war. As Judith Herman writes about trauma, "The knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level" (2). Just as every new war reminds nations of war's ill effects, so too do most new allegorical iterations of Watson. Almost every adaptation of the Holmes stories acts as a national allegory, but what Watson stands for changes, showing that the "one-to-one narrative" arrangement of allegories is changeable based on placement.

Sherlock Holmes is the main character with Watson as his sidekick, but Watson's presence is so important that even when his character is absent his absence is very much felt. In "'Side by Side': The Role of the Sidekick," Ron Buchanan states that "Watson, through his heavily detailed narrative, maintains Holmes's humanity, balancing Holmes's strengths of observation and deduction with his weaknesses of poor violin playing and depression over inactivity alleviated only by cocaine injections" (21). If Watson is gone, therefore, Holmes's connection to humankind (and thus his clients) is all but severed. Both Michael Chabon's 2004 novella *The Final Solution: A Story of Detection* and Mitch Cullen's 2005 novel *A Slight Trick of the Mind* focus on Holmes in his old age after he is done working with Dr. John Watson, and in both stories he has given up on solving mysteries after the separation. He comes out of retirement to solve one last mystery in each of those stories, but the children he takes as his assistants never truly fill the allegorical Watson role. Only with Watson can Holmes be entirely complete, as signaled by his cases; this is a theme in Anthony Harvey's 1971 romantic comedy *They Might Be Giants* where George C. Scott plays Justin Playfair who believes he is Sherlock Holmes and is unable to function in the world and escape danger from his family until he finds a Watson-figure in his new psychoanalyst, Dr. Mildred Watson (played by Joanne Woodward). Only after "Holmes" meets (and falls in love with) Watson is he able to live life fully again after the death of his wife. These all demonstrate how without Watson, Holmes is allegorically a man without a nation. Within Doyle's narrative, Holmes was a detective before Dr. Watson joined him at 221B Baker Street, but since their collaboration started Holmes is unable to fully exist without at least the phantom of Watson.

In looking at various iterations of the Holmes world, it is valuable to study the appropriations alongside the adaptations. While those two terms are closely related, it is

important to note the differences, which Julie Sanders elucidates in *Adaptation and*

Appropriation:

An adaptation most often signals a relationship with an informing source text either through its title or through more embedded references...appropriation frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the movement from one genre to others. (35)

Therefore, adaptation and appropriation both rely on the source text for inspiration, but appropriations can veer further from the exact word of the text. The exact line where adaptation turns into appropriation is up for debate, but both share a purpose of opening up the original text to a new or wider audience. In *A Theory of Adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, the authors note the paradox that arises from this purpose: "they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate" (3). No adaptation is going to be the exact same as the work it is adapting, but in making "simplifying" changes, the new medium also allows the text to be seen in a new light and by a new audience. Appropriations not only go through this change, but also through the changes they make in distancing themselves from the source. The distinction between adaptation and appropriation can be nebulous, but by looking at texts all along the spectrum from the most faithfully adapted to the most loosely appropriated I will be able to chart the reach and influence of Doyle's stories more fully.

My main texts beyond Doyle's own narratives will be Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot series (1920-75), an appropriation, and the BBC's 2010-17 series *Sherlock*, an adaptation. Poirot operates as a sort of anti-Holmes, with his methods in direct opposition to how Holmes solves cases, but Poirot's assistant, Captain Arthur J. M. Hastings, OBE, very much fits into the Watson model. Despite Christie's novels creating very different mystery formulas than Holmes (grand estates and gathering the suspects for a big reveal party, as well as the snoopy little old lady in

her Miss Marple series), she occasionally would use her own style to comment on things that Doyle wrote. Because Christie appropriates the source texts to create her own new mystery formulas, she demonstrates the influence of Holmes while showing how mysteries can adapt to different periods, and specifically wars. *Sherlock*, conversely, is an adaptation of the Holmes canon, but it is set in the 21st century and many of the mysteries and clues have been updated to feel more current for their audience. These two series are by no means the only Holmes-adjacent texts I will use, but their intense popularity levels make them good general representatives. Both the Poirot series and *Sherlock* retain the important background focus of countries at war, but the shift from the Second Anglo-Afghan War to World War I to the War on Terror demonstrates the ability for the mystery genre to remain relevant to whatever war is being waged.

In this chapter, I will be focusing on Dr. Watson and those who followed in his footsteps and how they are used to comment on trauma in pop culture. In my first section, I will break down the stereotype that Dr. Watson has become, and which parts of his character have been emphasized throughout various texts. Following that, my second section will detail the various first cases to see how the Watsons adapt to life post-trauma and how Holmes and his detective career play into their possible recovery process. My third section will cover the responses of the various Watsons to the staged deaths of the various Holmeses and how the death of a good friend outside of a warzone affects them. The fourth and final section will look at the final cases of Holmes and Watson in several narratives and I will analyze how the trauma recovery process has worked or not.

What Makes a Watson?

Watson is often presented as Holmes's sidekick, a role that he fits into but is not entirely defined by. Buchanan notes that the more general figure of the sidekick is a relatively new type

and rose to prominence alongside the novel form as “much of our classical literature reflects the exploits of significant individuals (as in *Oedipus Rex*), an ‘ensemble’ of equally strong individuals (as in *The Iliad*), or a strong individual surrounded by an ensemble of supporting characters (as in *The Odyssey*)” (16). Those kinds of narratives would not need a sidekick, so the purposes now filled by companions and helpers was then often fulfilled by a Chorus “commenting upon the action, marking the passage of time, [and] reacting as a miniature audience” (16). As an exploit of a significant individual, Holmes’s most direct predecessor was Edgar Allen Poe’s Dupin from his 1841 story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” but according to J. Madison Davis in “Playing by the Rules”:

The point of view of Poe’s genius detective, the Chevalier Auguste Dupin, would reveal too much of the significance of clues. It would deracinate the tension derived from challenging the reader to match Dupin’s thinking process. By using an anonymous narrator to describe Dupin’s enigmatic behavior, Poe avoided this. Doyle improved the strategy by adding personality to the narrator’s role, creating Watson, who stands in for the reader in trying to decipher the clues and in reacting to Holmes’s insights. (29)¹³

Thus Doyle’s Watson takes on the duties often prescribed to anonymous third-person narrators, but is given personality and is able to take action during the course of the narrative.¹⁴ Perhaps the reason that Watson is able to be such a strong character himself alongside the likes of Holmes is that, according to Doyle’s son Adrian Conan Doyle, Dr. Watson was created before Holmes and the original version of *A Study in Scarlet* was solely about Dr. Watson (Buchanan 21). Watson’s beginning as the only protagonist can still be felt by his equal partnership with Holmes which goes against the general figure of the sidekick: “As a character, the sidekick sometimes is static,

¹³ When Dr. Watson compares Holmes to Dupin in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes replies: “No doubt you think you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin...Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow” (Doyle 24).

¹⁴ Of course, Watson is not the first literary sidekick, as it was an established tradition due in part to characters like Cervantes’s Sancho Panza. The innovation here is putting this chorus/sidekick into the mystery genre, which itself was relatively newly formed.

not changing in personality or function. On other occasions, the sidekick evolves into an essential figure, assuming a higher degree of relevance but still maintaining a subordinate position to the hero(ine)” (Buchanan 15). Watson may be the one who assists Holmes, but in Doyle’s stories he is rarely if ever subordinate. Subsequent versions often feature Watson as an ancillary figure, but in his original form, Dr. Watson was of as much importance as Holmes.

A popular approach to Watson is that he is the more romantic member of the partnership and therefore allows stories to inject a love plot. Dr. Watson’s only canonical wife is Mary Morstan, whom he met in the 1890 novel *The Sign of the Four*; that story details Holmes and Dr. Watson helping her with a case and Dr. Watson waiting until their employer-employee relationship and her prospects at achieving a higher class have ended before he proposes to her. In “The Five Orange Pips” from 1891, Dr. Watson’s wife is mentioned but not named despite the story being set in 1887; while this could be an error on Doyle’s part, it has been interpreted by some Great Game adherents as a sign that Dr. Watson had a prior wife. Meanwhile, Holmes’s only romantic interest is Irene Adler who appeared in “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891) and was briefly mentioned elsewhere, though not by name; his relationship with her seems much more intellectual as she was able to outsmart him, while Dr. Watson goes through the romantic rituals of courtship and marriage. Many adaptations, such as *Elementary*, have embellished the sexual nature of Holmes and Adler’s relationship, turning the fascination into a lustful obsession, while Watson’s relationship with Mary (and others) is given a more typical romantic narrative, such as in Guy Ritchie’s 2009 film *Sherlock Holmes*.¹⁵ The Doyle stories themselves do not present much opportunity for a romantic interpretation, but in order to increase audience attachment, many versions highlight the love life of Watson.

¹⁵ Holmes and Adler’s relationship is further complicated in *Elementary* by the reveal that Irene Adler is also Moriarty.

Many texts use the ambiguity in how many wives Dr. Watson had to make one of his essential characteristics be that he is a womanizer. The television show *House* is a very loose appropriation of the Holmes canon, but in turning military man John Watson into oncologist James Wilson, the main attribute that is transferred is the preponderance of lovers. Dr. Wilson has many more known romances than Dr. Watson, but there is still an air of mystery that surrounds many of them as he tries to keep his dalliances hidden from House, which mimics the uncertainty of Dr. Watson's wives. Agatha Christie similarly uses this aspect of Watson in her Captain Hastings; in the first Poirot novel, 1920's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Hastings falls in love and proposes to a suspect who turns him down by saying in between laughs that "somebody might accept you next time" (137). The final words of the novel return to this subject as Poirot comforts his friend about his failed proposal: "Console yourself, my friend. We may hunt together again, who knows? And then—" (198). Poirot is rarely wrong, and so in the second novel in the series, 1923's *The Murder on the Links*, he falls in love with another suspect, and she accepts his proposal. As seen in *The Big Four* (1927), Hastings's attraction to women has become enough of a recurring problem for Poirot to make a joke about it after the villains have tricked Hastings with an auburn-haired woman:

"They set the girl on—By the way, *mon ami*, as an interesting fact psychologically, has she got red hair?"
"If you mean Miss Martin," I said coldly. "Her hair is a delicate shade of auburn, but—"
"They are *épatant*—these people! They have even studied your psychology." (80)

Even *Sherlock*, which prominently features Mary Morstan, played by Amanda Abbington who was John Watson-actor Martin Freeman's partner at the time, gives into this perceived aspect of Dr. Watson in the fourth and final season when the married John engages in a brief emotional

affair with a woman who he is unaware is Sherlock's sister.¹⁶ The mystery over how many wives Dr. Watson had continues to play a role in conceiving new versions of Watson, though the extent of his philandering fluctuates.

Contrarily related to his reputation with women, many fans like to read Watson as being in love with Sherlock Holmes. Billy Wilder's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970) features a Holmes, played by Robert Stephens, who spreads a rumor that he is Watson's lover in order to avoid a ballerina who wants him to impregnate her. Watson, who was unaware of the lie and enjoying the attention of all the other female dancers in the troupe, is then quickly surrounded by the male dancers as the women leave him behind. This little moment at the beginning of the film conflates his womanizing with his possible homosexuality.¹⁷ In interviews, Stephen Moffat and Mark Gatiss, the creators of *Sherlock*, have cited Wilder's film as a major inspiration on their show (Leader). This is not surprising when one looks at *Sherlock*'s handling of homosexuality; Holmes jokingly plays into the idea while Watson defends himself and villain Moriarty is relentlessly queer-coded, even going so far as to have him stealing the crown jewels and posing as a queen (Fig. 2). As a hugely popular television show in the modern era, *Sherlock* has been used by many as a basis for fanfiction that embraces the possibilities for non-heteronormative romance. One example is Katherine Addison's wingfic *The Angel of the Crows* (2020).¹⁸ In this version, Sherlock (or Crow) is an Angel and the Watson-figure, Dr. Doyle, is a transgender hell hound. At one point, Crow offers to have sex with Dr. Doyle, but the offer is refused as Dr. Doyle knows that Angels feel no sexual desire and "if you don't feel sexual desire

¹⁶ To distinguish the Watson from *Sherlock* from Dr. Watson in the Doyle stories and other Watsons, I will generally refer to him as John.

¹⁷ This moment further suggests that this aspect of Watson is more about his sexual rapaciousness than about what gender he is rapacious for.

¹⁸ Wingfic is a subgenre of fanfiction in which one or more of the characters have wings.



Figure 2. “The Reichenbach Fall.” *Sherlock*, written by Stephen Thompson, directed by Toby Haynes, Hartswood Films, BBC Wales, WGBH, 15 January 2012.

and someone coerces you into having sexual relations with them, I don’t see how it’s anything *other* than rape” (229; emphasis in original). Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s characters are platonic partners, but with fanfiction now responsible for the production of many new Holmes narratives, Watson and Holmes are free to have a range of sexualities.

Another important question surrounding Watson in later texts is how much he contributes to the partnership. In *Fanfiction and the Author*, Judith May Fathallah explains that in many adaptations “Watson serves more as a comic foil to Sherlock’s brilliance” (50). One prominent example is Nigel Bruce’s interpretation of Watson in the Basil Rathbone-starring series, which is much more comedic than Doyle’s Dr. Watson, but he is still a competent partner that Holmes completely respects. In subsequent comedic versions, Bruce’s bumbling has inspired takes where Watson’s purpose is to do slapstick while Holmes does all the detecting. Often, these versions of Watson resent being used as such by Holmes and is then turned against the man who is supposed

to be his partner. Recent examples of such Watsons are in Etan Cohen's *Holmes & Watson* and John Stevenson's *Sherlock Gnomes* (both 2018). Both of these films feature their Watsons revolting against Holmes to some degree, but ultimately failing and being put back in their place as the helpful sidekick. As these adaptations show, Dr. Watson's contributions to the partnership have often been downplayed and even ridiculed.

Conversely, there are many texts that seek to reclaim Dr. Watson's intellect and detecting abilities. Stephen King's 1987 short story "The Doctor's Case" features Holmes and Watson on a case together, but while Holmes is unable to function properly due to his allergies, this Watson is able to (mostly) solve the murder by himself. Watson's deductions in this case are particularly impressive to Holmes as it was the perfect example of the locked-room mystery, as there was no window or secret exit that allowed for a cheat in the premise.¹⁹ *Elementary* similarly elevates its Watson (Dr. Joan Watson, played by Lucy Liu). She starts out the series as Jonny Lee Miller's Holmes's sober companion, but once that arrangement is over, they renegotiate their relationship and establish that they are equal partners in solving crimes, with no one above the other. Clausen describes Watson as "a slow learner but no fool," which these two and others like them exemplify (107). Dr. Watson was smart enough to realistically be of help to Holmes, but slow enough that he never got too far ahead of his readership; this thin line on which Doyle balances his character has proven tricky for his imitators to replicate. Dr. Watson was invaluable in solving many of Doyle's original mysteries, and while many subsequent versions try to undermine his character, there are some notable examples of Watson being respected for his or her contributions.

¹⁹ The murderer was able to hide in the room as he was an artist and had painted a photo-realistic portrait of the bottom shelf of a bookshelf and concealed himself behind it; Watson discovered the truth because the painting contained shadows that were impossible given how cloudy it was on the day of the murder, which Holmes is too distracted by allergies to notice.

Going forward with this chapter, the Watsonian traits that most interest me are the ones that tie into his military service, such as his injury.²⁰ In the opening chapter of *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson details his injury:

The campaign brought honours and promotions to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster. I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery... Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawur. Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the verandah when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months, my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England. I was despatched accordingly, in the troopship *Orontes*, and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it. (Doyle 15).

Most adaptations and appropriations keep Watson injured, at least for the duration of his early cases. The first chapter of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, for example, opens with a similar, but much briefer, description of Hasting's injury: "I had been invalided home from the Front; and, after spending some months in a rather depressing Convalescent Home, was given a month's sick leave" (1). *Sherlock* has John injured and walking with a cane in the first episode, "A Study in Pink," but by episode's end John has proven his injury is psychosomatic after running around London without his cane. The psychological aspect of John's injury is emblematic of the modern trend of Watson as having PTSD. This trend remains in *Elementary*, even though Lucy Liu's Watson was never a soldier; her PTSD stems from a patient dying on her operating table. No

²⁰ That is not to say the previous traits are completely unrelated to Watson's military service, the connections are just more indirect. For example, Watson's womanizing can be tied into the stereotype of the sexualized soldier, a stereotype I will deal with directly in my second chapter.

matter whether the trauma Watson faces is physical, mental, or a combination of the two, it seems that trauma is an ingrained feature of being a Watson.

Watson's injury and emotional distress are also part of what makes him a fitting narrator in a classic Victorian model. In *The Measure of Manliness: Disability and Masculinity in the Mid-Victorian Novel*, Karen Bourrier writes that "in contrast to the strong hero, who is mainly distinguished by his athletic prowess, the weak or disabled man was physically distinct and able to articulate his feelings, as well as narrating those of his stronger friend" (2). That weak narrator/strong subject pairing works well with Holmes (a gifted boxer) and Watson (with his war injury). Bourrier further states that,

this pairing led to a formal innovation in literature: the focalization or narration of the novel through the perspective of a weak or disabled man. This narrative innovation demonstrates how, far from being marginalized in a culture that prized health and industry, weakness and disability came to serve an integral role in shaping narrative form, and ideals of what it meant to be a weak man in the Victorian era and beyond. (2-3)

Dr. Watson thoroughly proves those points; as Holmes's equal partner in crime-solving he is never marginalized. His continued presence in new texts, trauma and injury often intact, continues to shape the "ideals of what it meant to be a weak man in the Victorian era and beyond" (Bourrier 3). Watson, as narrator, is how the audience is able to inhabit the world of Sherlock Holmes, and his point of view is often necessarily that of a man who needs a cane to walk and has memories of the horrors of war. In Doyle's texts, these aspects never act as hindrances to his assistance in solving the mysteries or to his narration duties; for example, in *A Study in Scarlet*, he starts the fifth chapter ("Our Advertisement Brings a Visitor") by writing:

Our morning's exertions had been too much for my weak health, and I was tired out in the afternoon. After Holmes's departure for the concert, I lay down upon the sofa and endeavoured to get a couple hours' sleep. It was a useless attempt. My mind had been too much excited by all that had occurred, and the strangest fancies and surmises crowded into it. (Doyle 36)

Instead of allowing the narrative to follow Holmes as he runs around London, we instead get this moment, thanks to Watson's "weak health" to sit and ruminate on the case, and thus put some of the evidence together. Watson is never a weak character, but there are many moments throughout the stories where his "weak health" allows him to be a strong and effective narrator.

Watson's military career, or whatever analog replaces it, usually gives Sherlock access to weaponry (generally a gun). Sherlock often asks Dr. Watson to bring his service revolver along with them on a case for protection; thus, as Fathallah states, "Watson represents intellect, balanced by athleticism and capable physicality as a counter to Victorian fears of effeminate men" (48). His body may be athletic too, but it is the addition of the gun that helps compensate for his war injuries to make him such a physically able partner to Holmes; it acts in a similar manner to a prosthetic.²¹ This service revolver has become a connecting point throughout the various iterations, as evidenced by how Nicholas Meyer's deeply researched 1974 novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* features Watson discussing Holmes's use of his service revolver and in *Holmes & Watson* one of the few details that connects John C. Reilly's Watson to Dr. Watson is his service revolver. In other versions, such as the Robert Downey, Jr. franchise and *Sherlock Gnomes*, Watson's cane is also used as a weapon, giving the good doctor a less lethal but possibly more brutal way to take down enemies. Cisco Ramon, also known as Vibe, serves as the Watson figure in the fifth season of *The Flash* (to the aptly named master detective Sherloque Wells), and the prosthetic used to help him manage the powers he gained in an explosion also has the ability to shoot out energy; this superhero version of Watson's gear creatively combines the functions of both his cane and his service revolver. *Sherlock* has to find a more realistic way to update Watson's service revolver to its 21st century London setting, so "A Study in Pink"

²¹ This idea of weapons being a prosthetic will be further explored in my third chapter.

demonstrates that Watson's gun is important because he is a highly skilled sniper instead of just a man with access to a gun. This wide variety of texts shows that despite Watson's injuries he is used as Sherlock's protector due to his proficiency with weaponry.

In the following sections, I will look at how these traits and their deeper meanings are applied in a variety of texts through a focus on three major moments in the Holmes/Watson pairing: their first case together, their separation and reunion after Holmes fakes his death, and their final (or not-so-final) case. These three key moments will serve as a lens through which to view the depictions of trauma, from war or otherwise. Often in the first cases, Watson joins Holmes in solving mysteries to make sense of the world again after his previous worldview has been shattered by his recent experiences. The incident at Reichenbach, in which Holmes fell off a cliff alongside Moriarty and was presumed dead for several years, offers a chance to investigate the reaction Watson has to a dear friend dying outside of a war zone (or some similar environs), and then his reaction to having been lied to by his close companion. The final cases will allow us to see how successful Watson and Holmes have been at resolving the trauma that Watson originally had started out trying to fix. The general plots that attend these moments are usually similar, and the traits of the Watsons are all alike, but each adaptation or appropriation uses these building blocks to provide different messages about trauma and how to overcome it (or not).

Studies in Scarlet

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* introduced Holmes and Watson to the world with a murder mystery that makes an important character out of London despite the crime's main players being American. It is set in 1881 and begins when Dr. John H. Watson returns to London after being injured in the Second Anglo-Afghan war. A mutual acquaintance introduces him to

Sherlock Holmes, and soon after the two men move in together, Holmes and Dr. Watson investigate the murder of a wealthy American, Enoch Drebbler. Through clues and his connections to the lower classes of London, Holmes is able to discover that the man was murdered by another American who was operating as a cabdriver, Jefferson Hope. In between the two sections that Watson narrates is a section that details Hope's life in America and how the evil Mormon Drebbler's lecherous desires led to the death of Hope's lover. This split structure was originally praised upon the novel's release, but later "responses to the structure of *A Study in Scarlet* essentially fall into three categories: unfavorable, defensive, and explanatory" (Dearinger 53). In the years since *Scarlet*'s release, the sections narrated by Watson about his and Holmes's investigation in London continues to draw praise and inspire new creations, while the narrative that takes place in Utah is often considered inferior even by its defenders.

Despite the bad reputation that has been built up around it, the chapters that are set in America nevertheless contribute to the novel's overarching commentary on Victorian England. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was neither the first nor the only Victorian author to use Mormons as easy villains; while Mormonism was seen as an American religion, Sebastian Lecourt notes in "The Mormons, the Victorians, and the Idea of Greater Britain" that beginning in the late 1830s, many English citizens began to convert to Mormonism and "a growing number of journalists, travel writers, and novelists" used this cultural moment to stoke the fear of Mormons in their English readership (86). Lecourt further argues that "while one might expect polygamy to have been their main object of concern, such writers in fact took Mormonism to embody a wider set of problems relating to the global expansion of English civilization" (86). This view is present in *A Study in Scarlet* through Watson's narration; at the end of the story, Holmes points out to Watson a newspaper report that says the case "will serve as a lesson to all foreigners that they will do

wisely to settle their feuds at home, and not to carry them on to British soil” (Doyle 86).

Watson’s reaction is to say “Never mind...I have all the facts in my journal, and the public shall know them” (Doyle 86). Besides that statement being a refutation of the report, it also serves to contextualize why Watson is writing this story at all, and why he makes a point of observing the corruption of London itself throughout the story, calling it things like “that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained” (Doyle 15).²² Watson’s narrative fully supports Lecourt’s argument that despite the journalists of the time stoking fear of Mormons, the issue was an English one; Drebber and Hope were just more examples of the type who are “irresistibly drained” into London.

One of the key pieces of evidence at the first crime scene in *Scarlet* is “Rache” written in blood; this clue has been retained in many subsequent versions of the same case but is often shifted in order to comment on how the new text will differ from the old. In Doyle’s original, Detective Lestrade reasons, “it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish” (31). Sherlock instantly doubts this conclusion and is eventually proven correct when the killer is revealed to have written it as the German word for revenge, a calling card he had read about from another crime scene. The television series *Sherlock* reverses this exchange in “A Study in Pink” when the antagonistic Detective Anderson assumes “Rache” is referring to the German meaning, and Sherlock dismissively says, “Yes, thank you for your input,” while slamming the door on his face and closing him out from the crime scene entirely.²³ That swap indicates the series’ intentions of adapting the Doyle canon with updates to make the clues and solutions more sensical to a

²² Holmes, however, has quite the opposite opinion. In “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” he tells Watson: “It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside” (Doyle 323).

²³ In this case, the letters actually do mean “Rachel,” which was the victim’s phone password.

modern audience, where random German phrases would seem out of place. This change also has the added benefit of providing a moment of knowing for fans of the original texts; *Sherlock* mocks the source text's solution while inviting in its fans. *Elementary* took a different path to achieve a similar result in the fourth season episode "A Study in Charlotte"; "Rache" was tattooed on the dead German woman's body, so there was no question of it being a complete phrase and the meaning was allowed to stay as "revenge," but it turned out to be a cover-up tattoo of the murderer's (and ex-boyfriend's) initials, ACH. Both *Sherlock* and *Elementary* adjusted the meaning or circumstances of the clue, but the inclusion at all shows the intention to both acknowledge and update the canonical mysteries.

As an appropriation of *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* serves as a rejoinder to Holmes's detecting style, which involves Poirot finding many clues similar to those found by Holmes, only for him to interpret them differently; one such example is akin to the discovery of "Rache." Christie includes an image of a scrap of paper that is found in the dead woman's room with the letters "ll and" visible on them. While Holmes eventually discovers the full meaning (or lack thereof) of "Rache" by the end of the novel, Poirot instantly understands that "ll and" represents a torn-up piece of a last will and testament. Davis writes that Poirot is "a standardly oddball Holmes with a waxed mustache," but I argue that Poirot is less standard and more a rebuttal; they are both detectives, but they have diametrically opposed methods and Poirot often purposefully does the opposite of what Holmes would do. As related to this case, and this clue in particular, the lingering question in *Scarlet* makes the letters themselves important, as we are forced to try and decipher them with no outside knowledge; in *Styles*, we are aware what the letters themselves refer to and are forced to try and decipher the psychology of the suspects (and victim) to discover who would tear up a last will and why. This shift from

the physicality of the clue to the psychology behind the clue signals the main difference Christie seeks to strike by using Poirot as an anti-Holmes. In the second Poirot novel, *The Murder on the Links*, Poirot is constantly annoyed by another detective, Monsieur Giraud, with many similarities to Holmes, which serves as an even more direct indictment of Doyle's detective. *Styles*, however, was Christie's first novel and shows her putting her own stamp on the detective genre; while she may borrow from Doyle, her detective is much more interested in the mind than the data-driven Holmes.

Even though Poirot is a sort of anti-Holmes, his companion Hastings very much fits into the Watson template, including his reasoning for writing down an account of their first case together. Just as Watson was motivated to write after Holmes read him a biased news report, Hastings sets out to write because "in view of the worldwide notoriety which attended [the case], I have been asked, both by my friend Poirot and the family themselves, to write an account of the whole story" (*Styles* 1). Part of the notoriety around the case that Hastings wants to correct is the way that the idea of foreignness had been weaponized in a patriotic fervor. Many of the characters believe the murderer to be Dr. Bauerstein, who is first introduced in a very sinister manner:

As the motor drove away, Mrs. Cavendish suddenly detached herself from the group, and moved across the drive to the lawn to meet a tall bearded man who had been evidently making for the house. The colour rose in her cheeks as she held out her hand to him.

"Who is that?" I asked sharply, for instinctively I distrusted the man.

"That's Dr. Bauerstein," said John shortly.

"And who is Dr. Bauerstein?"

"He's staying in the village doing a rest cure, after a bad nervous breakdown. He's a London specialist; a very clever man—one of the great living experts on poisons I believe." (*Styles* 12-13)

Even though Hastings does not trust Dr. Bauerstein, he is not guilty of poisoning Emily Inglethorp.²⁴ Instead, the murderer is Emily's husband Alfred Inglethorp, who is first described to Hastings as such: "The fellow is an absolute outsider, anyone can see that. He's got a great black beard, and wears patent leather boots in all weathers!" (*Styles* 3). The patent leather boots may be a callback to the crime scene in *A Study in Scarlet*, and the beard allows for this English man to masquerade as the foreigner Dr. Bauerstein.²⁵ Alfred's accomplice is Evelyn Howard, about who Poirot says, "she is an excellent specimen of well balanced English beef and brawn" (*Styles* 112). Therefore, while the plan was to frame the foreigner that immediately set the stoutly English Hastings on guard at first sight, the actual murderers were two English citizens, one of whom had marital connections to a landed estate and the other is described as the personification of England itself. Hastings thus has to come to terms with the fact that the problem is not the foreigners he had been fighting, but instead those at home. By emphasizing this in his narrative, Hastings, like Dr. Watson, explains that though there was the appearance of foreign influence, the true evil nature of the affair was purely English.

Both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* were published well before the term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was described in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in 1980, but many versions of the same story that have come out since that year place less trauma on the home nation and instead make Watson somewhat culpable for the issues addressed. *Sherlock's* first episode, "A Study in Pink," begins with Martin Freeman's John in therapy, where his therapist believes he has a psychosomatic limp due to his PTSD from fighting in the more recent war in Afghanistan,

²⁴ However, Dr. Bauerstein is later arrested for being a foreign spy.

²⁵ When describing his mind's recreation of the initial crime scene in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes refers to the murderer and his victim solely as "Patent-leathers and Square-toes" (Doyle 34).

However, Mycroft, Sherlock's older brother who is often considered the smartest of the siblings, doubts this diagnosis, as he tells John, "When you walk with Sherlock Holmes, you see the battlefield... You're not haunted by the war, Dr. Watson. You miss it. Welcome back." The show wants the audience to trust Mycroft over the therapist, as seen by how, "the camera's responding close-up on Freeman's face as he performs a giveaway twitch of facial muscles solidifies this statement" (Fathallah 55-56). Mycroft's hypothesis fits in well with a common aspect of PTSD that Judith Herman, M.D. notes in *Trauma and Recovery*: "traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing" (40).²⁶ John has been traumatized in the war, but instead of imitating his literary counterpart by wanting to come home and restore order, he perhaps subconsciously wants his home to be more like war. He is offered a more sedate, typically English life when Mrs. Hudson offers to pour him tea while Sherlock is out, but John refuses this and insists on joining Holmes. Sherlock's company offers John a way to recreate the battlefield in London, which is why Mycroft is welcoming him back to war, instead of back to home.

This idea of Watson bringing the war back to the homeland is furthered by *Miss Sherlock*, which almost goes so far as to make its Watson figure into a terrorist. Moriwaki (the show's Moriarty) acts as psychological counselor both to Dr. Wato (often referred to as Wato-san) and her war photographer boyfriend, both of whom have PTSD from their experiences in Syria. Moriwaki uses her therapy sessions to convince her patients to commit acts of terrorism so that the horrors done in Syria can no longer be ignored in Japan at a safe distance. Moriwaki mainly brainwashes her patients into committing atrocities at her secret facility called the Dock. She has

²⁶ While Mycroft's description fits in well with Herman's descriptions of PTSD, he claims that it is a reason why Watson does not have PTSD, which suggests he (and the show that claims he is even smarter than his brother Sherlock) are possibly misrepresenting PTSD.

Wato's boyfriend turn himself into a virus-carrying chemical weapon who Sherlock is forced to kill, which drives Wato to the Dock where Moriwaki sets in motion a plan to have her kill Sherlock and set off a nuclear warhead. Wato does not follow through on this act of terrorism, but she would have if Sherlock had not been able to make her hesitate. While Dr. Watson and Captain Hastings came home from war to be astonished by the devolution of their country, John and Wato each find their homelands tranquil in their blissful ignorance of the war abroad and so with varying degrees of intent try to recreate the warfront at home. Once PTSD became a recognizable diagnosis to the general public, Watson's war experience became complicated, and adaptations have used this modern diagnosis of a Victorian character to show the effects a traumatized individual can have on their surroundings instead of how the surroundings have changed for the worse while the individual was away.

A Study in Scarlet introduced the world to the wounded Dr. Watson and his partner-in-solving-crime Sherlock Holmes through a mystery that exposed the dark heart of London, a dark heart that has been lightened over the years in order to darken the figure of Watson instead. In the original stories, Dr. Watson's view of London can be easily summed up by Stephen Sondheim's lyrics in the song "No Place Like London" from the Victorian-set musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*:

There's a hole in the world like a great black pit
And the vermin of the world inhabit it
And its morals aren't worth what a pig can spit
And it goes by the name of London.

The similarity between Sweeney Todd's and Dr. Watson's views of London suggests that Dr. Watson could become a threat to the city like the demon barber. To go from this place that Dr. Watson himself calls a "great cesspool" to the land of therapy and calm evening tea times as depicted in *Sherlock* is quite a jarring change (Doyle 15). Dr. Watson and Sweeney Todd were

both changed by their time away, and when they came home, it was London that they see as traumatized. Now that our cultural understanding of trauma often focuses on individual diagnoses, Watson himself is traumatized while the homeland is allowed to be generally blissfully unaware of the wars that are fought in its name. *Scarlet* and its imitators generally serve as an introduction to the Sherlock-Watson pairing, and thus the new worldviews that will be put forth. It is through these introductions we are able to see the figure of Watson's downfall from beacon of truth and honesty to potential terrorist.

Rewriting Reichenbach

Sherlock Holmes's literal downfall is another major point in the mythos of the characters and was established in two of Doyle's stories: "The Final Problem" (1893) and "The Adventure of the Empty House" (1903). In the first of those stories, Dr. Watson discusses how he and Holmes had not been in contact as much since Dr. Watson had gotten married, but while his wife is away, he goes on an international trip to help Holmes pursue Moriarty, "the Napoleon of crime" (471). Once they reach the now infamous Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland, Dr. Watson is separated from Holmes by a fake medical emergency, only to find that both his friend and Moriarty have plummeted to their deaths in his absence. "The Adventure of the Empty House" is set three years later, a period in which Dr. Watson's wife has died and he has tried to keep Holmes's legacy alive by continuing to solve crimes. While investigating a particularly confusing and gruesome murder, he discovers that Holmes is still alive and that the murderer is Sebastian Moran, the last of Moriarty's cabal. Together they defeat Moran and resume their partnership as it was before Dr. Watson's marriage had begun their separation.

These two stories establish a good point at which to check in on Dr. Watson's progress in living with his war memories as they show him dealing with the two first major deaths in his life

that are not fellow soldiers. As established in *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr. Watson had become accustomed to death at war, but Sherlock Holmes and his wife were civilians and their deaths hurt him in a different way. We see particularly in “The Adventure of the Empty House” that the combined impact of their deaths has had a profound impact on him and his emotional well-being. He does not feel like he himself is fully living until Sherlock Holmes revives him: “it was indeed like old times when, at that hour, I found myself seated beside him in a hansom, my revolver in my pocket, and the thrill of adventure in my heart” (Doyle 488). Even once Sherlock is back in his life, Dr. Watson has to deal with Sebastian Moran. Clausen states that “it takes no great discernment to observe that Moriarty is Holmes’s mirror opposite” (114); if Moriarty is Holmes’s opposite, then Moran serves as an inverse version of Watson. Like Dr. Watson, Moran fought with the English army in Afghanistan, but instead of being injured like Dr. Watson, he “made India too hot to hold him” (Doyle 494). Dr. Watson left as an honorable soldier, and while there is no official record of Moran being discharged for dishonorable behavior, it is known to Holmes that he was forced out because he “began to go wrong” (Doyle 494). Dr. Watson was injured by the foreign land, while Moran instead was injuring the land somehow. Thus, Moran shows a view of what could have happened to Dr. Watson if certain circumstances had changed; this hypothetical is not as far-fetched as it may seem since, as previously discussed, Watson’s initial reaction to returning home is the same as the demon barber of Fleet Street. The possibility of Watson trying to rid England of the “big black pit and the vermin of the world who inhabit it” becomes particularly likely at this point as Dr. Watson was facing a difficult time in his life after the deaths of his best friend and wife, so the return of Holmes allows him to feel happy again instead of continuing down a path of depression and possible destruction.

Holmes's attitude towards Dr. Watson in "The Adventure of the Empty House" demonstrates how seriously the reader should take Dr. Watson's emotional well-being. In *The Sign of Four*, Watson famously says to Holmes, "you are really an automaton—a calculating machine," but here Holmes is able to comprehend how horribly he has hurt Watson and is extremely apologetic (Doyle 96). When Watson first sees the resurrected Holmes, he faints ("for the first and the last time in my life"), which prompts Holmes to say, once Watson has been revived, "My dear Watson...I owe you a thousand apologies. I had no idea that you would be so affected" (Doyle 485). He did not realize his actions would have such an impact, but once he understands he does his best to make amends. He even does his best to care for Watson above his own interests, when he acknowledges his mistake by asking "Are you sure that you are really fit to discuss things? I have given you a serious shock by my unnecessarily dramatic reappearance" (Doyle 486). He also comforts his friend about the death of his wife, further allowing the moment to be first and foremost about Dr. Watson instead of Holmes: "Work is the best antidote to sorrow, my dear Watson...and I have a piece of work for us both to-night which, if we can bring it to a successful conclusion, will in itself justify a man's life on this planet" (Doyle 488). Over the course of this conversation, Holmes puts Watson's emotions before his own desires, worries about his friend's physical state, sensitively broaches the subject of his deceased wife, and then offers him a constructive way to regain a sense of purpose. Far from being a machine, Sherlock Holmes acknowledges the damage he has done and puts in the effort to comfort his friend even if it means temporarily putting a hold on the case that he has been working on for over three years.

Agatha Christie does a similar detective resurrection story in her novel *The Big Four* which features Hercule Poirot struggling with, and finally accepting, his life turning into a

Sherlock Holmes story. Hastings as narrator assures us from the start of the book that Poirot's dislike for the Holmes-type has not abated: "He had always scoffed at the popular idea of the human bloodhound who assumed wonderful disguises to track criminals, and who paused at every footprint to measure it" (*Four* 2). He seeks to distinguish himself from these "bloodhounds" by emphasizing how much more he is like a cat, a comparison that Countess Vera Rossakoff echoes by saying "he has the nine lives of a cat!" (*Four* 50; 191).²⁷

Unfortunately for Poirot, the massive evil institution that is The Big Four forces him to live out a Holmesian narrative: "This Big Four, they make me to bestir myself, *mon ami*, I run up and down, all over the ground, like our old friend 'the human foxhound'" (*Four* 46). It is only after he embraces that he must act like Sherlock Holmes that Poirot is able to defeat the Big Four; their evil plan is foiled when they think they have captured the wrong man when Poirot reveals his moustache has been shaved off and Hastings claims in his surprise that it is Hercule's twin brother Achille. Achille does not actually exist, but Poirot prepared Hastings for this moment by earlier telling him "Do you not know that all celebrated detectives have brothers who would be even more celebrated than they are were it not for constitutional indolence?" (*Four* 155). Poirot prefers to solve crimes in a much more cat-like method than Holmes's dog-like approach, but the Big Four proved to be enemies in need of the dog-like approach, leading Poirot to co-opt the Holmes brand, even going so far as to embody Mycroft Holmes, the lazy but brilliant sibling.

When Christie arrives at her resurrection scene, Poirot is apologetic like Holmes, but due to his focus on psychology over physicality, he was aware from the start of his plan that he would have to apologize. As Christie puts the supposed death and the resurrection in one novel, there is no interlude like between "The Final Problem" and "The Adventure of the Empty

²⁷ Countess Vera Rossakoff is roughly Christie's version of Irene Adler.

House” where Watson was narrating while assuming his friend was dead; however, even though Hastings knows when he narrates that Poirot is alive, he still writes that “even now I can hardly bear to write of those days in March” (*Four* 163). Hasting’s reaction to his friends return shows the complicated emotions he has to deal with in the moment. Just as Watson fainted for the only time in his life, Hastings states that he “for once did not attempt to evade the embrace with which [Poirot] overwhelmed me” (*Four* 175). He allows himself a slight moment of anger, perhaps the only time he does so in the entire Poirot series: “But Poirot—*why?*...But you might have told *me!*...But what I’ve been through—” (*Four* 175-76; emphasis in original). Hastings is usually not lost for words or unable to express himself, no matter how wrong he is; however, here the reader can feel his anger and confusion from his repeated uses of the word “but” to start his sentences and the words he emphasizes. Poirot, knowing his friend’s psychology well, anticipated this and explains to him using military terminology that it was for a reason: “A *ruse de guerre*, my friend, a *ruse de guerre*. All is now ready for our grand coup” (*Four* 175). Poirot is apologetic for what he did, but then helps Hastings process and understand the ruse by using language that would make sense to him as a veteran. Poirot’s first post-resurrection discussion with Hastings is similar in manner to that of Holmes and Dr. Watson, but Poirot goes in more attuned to Hasting’s emotions.

“The Empty Hearse,” the first episode of *Sherlock* series 3, portrays the resurrection of Holmes but noticeably makes Holmes much less apologetic. Before Martin Freeman’s John is aware of his friend’s return, his life is in a much less depressing place than Doyle’s Dr. Watson. While Dr. Watson was mourning his friend and his wife, John is about to propose to Mary Morstan when Holmes reappears. John is understandably angry at Holmes, but the episode, written by series co-creator Mark Gatiss, structures the reveal so as to make the audience laugh

at his emotional distress at not only his friend being alive but his proposal being thwarted; as Fathallah succinctly puts it, “in the original stories, Watson faints upon seeing Holmes return from apparent death. In the BBC adaptation, he punches him in the face” (56). The montage of John being angry and Sherlock expecting to be welcomed back with no questions while Mary looks on amused emphasizes that Sherlock is incorrigible, and that Watson should lighten up like his prospective fiancée. That this scene is presented as a montage allows for a quick comic flow, as opposed to a more static approach that would allow the viewer to sit with John’s pain and watch as he worked through his emotions in real time. Unlike his literary counterpart, Benedict Cumberbatch’s Holmes is not apologetic, and the episode’s sympathy seems to be more on his side that his friend should be happier to see him.

Mark Gatiss also co-wrote the television series *Agatha Christie’s Poirot*’s “The Big Four” episode, which was aired only a few months before *Sherlock*’s “The Empty Hearse.” In this slightly earlier take on the resurrection story, Gatiss completely eliminates any apologies and turns Hasting’s moment of comprehension into a joke. The episode is very different from Christie’s original. The novel is about a conspiracy consisting of a Fu Manchu-esque leader, a rich American with more money than Elon Musk, a French woman scientist along the lines of Marie Curie, and a character actor with the range of Daniel Day-Lewis who acts as an enforcer, all of whom threaten people with laser beams from their inner-mountain hideout in an attempt to be dictators over an anarchical world. In contrast, Gatiss’s version is about a poor unemployed actor that fakes such a conspiracy from a run-down old theater in a misguided attempt to win the heart of an actress who told him she would never date someone as unimportant as him. In Gatiss’s version, Hastings is removed from the narrative until after Poirot’s supposed death

instead of being his companion in crime solving.²⁸ At the end, we see him mourning with other friends at Poirot's funeral, but when Poirot's deception is revealed, Hastings is left out. Poirot's former secretary Miss Lemon, who was previously used in the series as a well-meaning scold as sour as her name promises, is given Hastings's original moment of anger. Only after the moment has passed does Hastings bumble in. He is not allowed the space to process his own complicated emotions as Poirot and the others have already moved past the anger phase and are laughing at Hastings's being the last to know. While *Sherlock* allowed John to be angry (though denying him much of an apology), Gatiss's *Poirot* episode does not even permit Hastings any human emotions, only using him as a walking (or bumbling) punchline. Gatiss's Hastings, like his John Watson, is not allowed to process his emotions. These decisions made by Gatiss undermine the relationship between the detective and his partner by undervaluing the role of the sidekick.

Other Holmes-inspired texts, including Nicholas Meyer's novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and the medical drama *House*, allowed their Watsons to be complicit in faking their Holmes's death in a way that emphasizes the co-dependent nature of their relationship and not requiring any apologizing or guilt on either side; the series *Elementary* had Lucy Liu's Joan Watson help Holmes fake his death but then had Holmes cut off contact, which allows the show to have Holmes and Watson as equal partners while still acknowledging the emotional toll that such an event would have. *Elementary* keeps Dr. Joan Watson complicit in the fake-death, but also deals with the emotional fallout the others avoided. Throughout *Elementary*, Joan and Sherlock negotiated and renegotiated their relationship, starting with her as his sober companion and then through various arrangements of friendship and working together. After his resurrection in the series finale "Their Last Bow," it becomes clear they had at the least an informal

²⁸ The episode does start with Hastings, but it is a flash-forward to later in the narrative.

arrangement set up for after his fake-death, and that he violated it. Both feel the need to apologize to each other; Sherlock apologizes for cutting off contact and making her think he might actually be dead, and Joan apologizes for publishing a book of stories about him despite knowing he would not want that (and doing so initially as an act of revenge). Sherlock later admits to their mutual friend Gregson that he relapsed after his fake-death and is afraid to let Joan know that is why he cut off contact. This nuanced portrayal shows that there is often a certain amount of trauma or emotional damage done by the incident at Reichenbach (or whatever substitute is used) even if Watson is aware of the plan from the start.

The death and resurrection of Holmes offers both Doyle and his followers an opportunity to check in on Watson's emotional well-being. Just like the Watsons, the audiences are fascinated and emotionally invested in the Holmeses, so how Holmes treats Watson in his time of need influences the audience's view of Watson and his mental state. Doyle and Christie had their detectives be apologetic, placing the focus on Watson and Hastings; they have been hurt and it is important to the authors and thus the audiences to acknowledge this pain. Gatiss's adaptations of both Holmes and Poirot shifts the focus onto the ingenuity of the detectives and treats their sidekicks' emotions as disposable, and the audience is encouraged to do the same. Others, by having the Watson-figure assist in the fake-death, assure the audience that Holmes needs Watson, perhaps more than Watson needs Holmes. Almost every Watson depicted has had trauma in their lives before meeting Holmes, an idea that needs to be reckoned with when the supposed death of Holmes offers a new source of trauma. Doyle and Christie show the need to work through individual trauma so that the work to fix the nation's trauma can be continued, while Gatiss's portrayals make a joke out of any hurt his Watson-figures may feel. When Doyle allows his Watson to process his grief, he is able to better help the nation through mystery-

solving, as his abilities without Holmes had been lessened. In adaptations that treat Watson's grief as a joke (if they handle it at all), his lingering melancholy is presented as a personal issue that he just has to get over instead of something that needs to be taken care of before the mystery solving can be accomplished. While other recent adaptations may work to present nuanced examinations of how the Reichenbach incidents affected both Watson and Holmes, Gattis's large pop culture influence (who, having also worked on such shows as *Doctor Who* and *Game of Thrones*, may be called "the Napoleon of television") shows a distressing lack of care for the trauma faced by the individual.²⁹ The incident at Reichenbach is extremely distressing for the already traumatized Watson, but the audience's view of how seriously to take his emotional distress depends on how the Sherlock-figure reacts to his friend's anger and sadness.

Their Last Bows

While not the last Sherlock Holmes story to be written, "His Last Bow" is the last Holmes story chronologically, taking place just before the start of the first World War. Holmes and Watson are reunited in 1914, 33 years after their first meeting, to help the British government as the threat of war looms. Holmes is undercover as an Irish-American named Altamont with Watson as his chauffeur. Holmes had come out of his bee-keeping retirement to spend two years crafting this alternate persona and has since caught and delivered several spies to Scotland Yard. After the case is over, Holmes gives a speech about the impending war:

Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But

²⁹ Gattis and his *Sherlock* co-creator Steven Moffat have garnered a bad reputation for how they treat both their characters and fans: "In 2012, Moffat rather spectacularly deleted his Twitter account after several conflagrations with irate fans and has not returned to that sphere of public discussion. He is often criticized for, on the one hand, stressing his own fannishness as a credential and, on the other, dismissing fannish desire as trivial and over-invested. He is keen to retain both his position as a fanboy and the authority over his texts...Gattis, another *Doctor Who* alumni, is generally less inflammatory in his dealings with fandom, yet he, too, is keen to stress his fannishness on the one hand and his authority over the text on the other" (Fathallah 51-52).

it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. (Doyle 980).

This story operates as a piece of propaganda, a form that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was well-versed in.³⁰ He received his knighthood for pro-war journalism during the Boer War and wrote several books and poems praising the glory found in war and the men who fight it. Clausen describes the Holmes canon's attitude to war: "the stories are consistently hostile to war, but the thought that England's preparations and policies (the subject of at least a half dozen stories) might contribute to the danger of war is never voiced" (115). By writing this story as propaganda, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle found a way to please his audience with the pro-British sentiment while putting an end date on the adventures of Holmes and Watsons, a feat Doyle was not able to accomplish when he had Holmes fall off the cliff at Reichenbach.

It is interesting to look at the story in comparison to *A Study in Scarlet* as a way of examining how successful Dr. Watson was at trying to bring order back to the corruption of London. The propagandistic and allegoric nature of the text implies that people like Holmes and Watson are needed to help England root out corruption, but unlike the foreigners in *Scarlet*, the spies of "His Last Bow" represent the evils of their own countries. Watson does not narrate this story, so he has no chance to tell the readers about how London is really the issue again, but we do get the speech about wind by Holmes. Instead of a "great cesspool," Doyle now offers hope for "a cleaner, better, stronger land" (15; 980). Holmes's view of London was never as dire as Watson's, but he had previously recognized that it needed help, and thought he was the one to assist. This comes across in "The Final Problem" when Holmes thinks over his life as he prepares to possibly sacrifice himself to Moriarty and concludes that "the air of London is the sweeter for my presence" (Doyle 477). The metaphor of the east wind suggests that the problem

³⁰ The patriotic, or nationalistic, focus of propaganda is particularly suited to being read as a national allegory.

comes from outside instead of London itself. That Holmes and Watson had been in retirement implies that perhaps they were successful (in their own minds at the very least) in rooting out the corruption of London, but now they have been called out of their retreats to stop the new threat from outside. All of this posits London (and England at large) as changeable; it may start as a cesspool, become somewhat sweeter due to the crime-solving duo, and eventually become a shining example of a city. Meanwhile, as Holmes states in his final speech, Dr. Watson is unchanging. Therefore, while Dr. Watson has not changed since he met Holmes (which was after he was already affected by war), these two men together have been able to somewhat relieve the trauma that previous wars had done to the land they love. They are prepared to keep repairing it in the future from the next war.

In her novel *Curtain*, Agatha Christie ended the relationship between Hastings and Poirot much more definitively than Doyle did with Watson and Holmes. The appropriation of Doyle is suggested by the title of this novel, as when the curtain drops is when actors take their last bows, and the narrative bears out this connection. Soon after the death of his wife, Hastings is invited by Poirot to come see him at Styles, the site of their first case together many years previously.³¹ Poirot is already aware of who at Styles is the murderer he is looking for, but he refuses to identify the person to Hastings. Poirot eventually dies and months afterwards Hastings receives a manuscript in which Poirot tells him that he murdered the murderer and killed himself, as that was the only way to prevent any future killings.³² Thus, unlike Dr. Watson, Captain Hastings is never able to see his friend again. This more definitive ending seems to come from the sense

³¹*The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is set in 1916, and Hastings marries the woman he meets in the second novel, *Murder on the Links*. He and his wife had four children, the youngest of whom is 21 in *Curtain*. However, the novel is generally accepted as taking place in 1975, the year it was published. If Poirot was already a retired member of the Belgian Police Force in 1916, then he would have to be at the very least 120 years old during *Curtain*.

³² While this is Poirot's one and only murder, he is an accessory to a murder in 1934's *Murder on the Orient Express* after he chooses to not expose the murderers.

that the first World War was the crucial event that made the detective story a less serious form of entertainment than it had been at Holmes's peak. After 1918, it was no longer easy for a serious writer to believe that domestic crime was among the most important threats to the stability of civilization. War, revolution, or foreign enemies had permanently replaced it. Who could regard a solitary murderer, or even a Napoleon of crime, with the same gravity in an age of world wars and political upheavals? (Clausen 122)

While I take issue with Clausen's use of the term "serious writer," this issue is perhaps partly why Christie ended her series not with her detective and his partner having a friendly chat about the troubles to be overcome but with a murder-suicide and the remaining partner having to deal with his emotions in a void. While Dr. Watson has some hope of meeting Holmes again after "His Last Bow," Hastings is left alone without his wife or his friend and in a world that has been shattered by the end of the second World War and possibly subsequent wars.

While the distinct Englishness of the murderers is often commented upon in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the murderer in *Curtain* is still English but this symbolic Englishness is more complex. Poirot compares Norton to Iago from William Shakespeare's *Othello*. Of Iago, Poirot admires that, "there is there the perfection of the art of murder. Not even a word of *direct* suggestion. He is always holding back others from violence, refuting with horror suspicions that have not been entertained until he mentions them!" (*Curtain* 195; emphasis in original). Despite such praising words, Poirot believes that Norton has outdone Iago:

For your great Shakespeare, my friend, had to deal with the dilemma that his own art had brought about. To unmask Iago, he had to resort to the clumsiest of devices—the handkerchief—a piece of work not at all in keeping with Iago's general technique, and a blunder of which one feels certain he would not have been guilty. (*Curtain* 195)

Norton, in Poirot's estimation, was too clever to have left behind a piece of evidence like the dreaded handkerchief from *Othello*, so Poirot felt justified in his decision to end Norton's murders by committing a murder himself. Shakespeare is a paragon of English literature, as

Poirot admits, but the character Iago is Italian. The comparison to an evil Italian could have resonance in a World War II-adjacent text like *Curtain* thanks to the reign of Benito Mussolini. However, within *Othello*, Iago is the insider who is trusted by those around him while Othello is the outsider who is often looked down upon for being black and foreign. If Norton is Iago, he could arguably represent either the Axis powers like Italy or the trusted countryman who is stoking fear to further corrupt his homeland. This latter option would further connect Norton to the murderers of *Styles*, but both allow for a more complicated sense of how English (figuratively) the evil that comes from Norton is.

Curtain connects to “His Last Bow” by both being final mysteries that are embroiled in wars. “His Last Bow” was written and published during World War I and is set on the eve of said war, while *Curtain* was written during World War II despite being set at some point after the war and not published until 1975; Holmes and Watson met during the Second Anglo-Afghan War and finished their collaboration on the brink of World War I, while Poirot and Hastings first worked together during World War I and ended after the end of World War II (possibly as far as after the end of the Vietnam War). Both pairs of sleuths have their careers together bookended by wars, though to very different effect. “His Last Bow” was written by Doyle as propaganda to get more volunteers in the army, which is antithetical to Christie’s fear of the death and destruction that war brings as seen by her writing *Curtain* as London was being bombed. Again, Christie’s novels work within a similar frame as Doyle’s but to different ends: while he reveled in the glory of war, she warned against what it does to all involved.

There are many more direct adaptations of Holmes that also applied the characters to a World War II narrative, with various messages about getting involved in the war. The Basil Rathbone series of films were originally the first film adaptations to maintain the Victorian

setting of the stories, but starting with the third film in the series, 1942's *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror*, the setting was changed to modern day so that they could sell war bonds and act as anti-Nazi propaganda. Most modern versions of Holmes that place him, often as an old man, in the time period of World War II do so as a way to comment on English involvement in the war. According to Baring-Gould, Doyle's Holmes was born in 1854, so he could have been alive at almost 90 during World War II (13). Both *The Final Solution* and *A Slight Trick of the Mind* show through Holmes that English indifference can have negative effects. In *The Final Solution*, the aging detective is unable to fully comprehend as the boy who holds the full answer to the mystery is non-verbal. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens write in "Traumatic Mirrorings: Holocaust and Colonial Trauma in Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution*" that, "ultimately, it would seem, *The Final Solution*...is less a detective story than an elegy for the detective story, a mournful reflection on the loss of the rational and moral order of the world, which is a necessary precondition of the genre" (572). This goes along with Clausen's contention that the World Wars destroyed the relevancy of detective fiction, but part of Craps and Beulen's reasons for why *The Final Solution* is antithetical to a typical Holmes narrative is "the fact that the Holmes character solves the mystery of the murder and of the missing parrot but does not even come close to unraveling the unspeakable secret shared by the parrot and the boy" (572). However, this inability for the detective to unravel the full complexities of the case is nothing new, as in *A Study in Scarlet*, "the exoticized Utah desert and project of colonization circumvents Holmes's usual methods of analysis, which attests to the complexities of colonialism and displacement in the nineteenth-century American West" (Dearinger 52). Both world wars brought new terrors into public knowledge, but they are not the first nor the last moments of brutality that the world has seen. While not as drastic as the First World War, the perceived evil acts of Mormonism and

supposed wild West depravity that Doyle depicts (controversially) are unable to be grasped and understood by Holmes, especially as Dr. Watson established earlier that Holmes has limited knowledge of fields that he feels do not concern him.³³ Therefore, I argue that the variety of World War II Holmes adaptations, both made during and after the war itself, attest not to the destruction of the detective genre, but instead show how the genre is fit and able to adapt itself to new generations and the worldly horrors they have faced.

Sherlock's final episode, "The Final Problem," goes in a very different direction, using its final mystery to explore the personal rather than the political. Instead of Holmes and Watson working with the government to aid in an upcoming war, here they are fighting against Holmes's sister and trying to recover memories that Sherlock has repressed. While the idea of Holmes struggling to recover lost memories was done in *A Slight Trick of the Mind*, that novel used the device to discuss the aftereffects of the bombing of Hiroshima; *Sherlock* uses the device to comment on Sherlock himself. As with "The Empty Hearse," this episode makes everything about Sherlock Holmes. Due to traumatic childhood events, Sherlock had forgotten about his sister Eurus, so in order to make him remember she traps him, John, and Mycroft on her island prison. Her plan is very reminiscent of a *Saw* film as she makes them go from room to room to play fatal games after she explains the rules to them over televisions with the help of recorded videos from Moriarty. Eurus never allows any harm to come to Sherlock, though she does try to have him kill John and Mycroft; this unbalanced sense of danger lends to the show's prioritizing of Sherlock over everyone else. In the end, Sherlock saves his friend and his brother, and realizes

³³ According to Dr. Watson's list in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes's understanding of literature, philosophy, and astronomy is "nil," his grasp of politics is "feeble," he has "variable" knowledge about botany, a "practical, but limited" understanding of geology, a "profound" hold on chemistry, is "accurate, but unsystematic" on anatomy, has an "immense" understanding of sensational literature, can play the violin, "is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman," and "has a good practical knowledge of British law" (Doyle 21-22)

all Eurus actually wants is his love, so he gives it to her. The series then ends with John receiving a DVD from his late wife which tells him about how important Sherlock is, and the audience is treated to a final image of Sherlock and John running to a crime looking very much as if they were Batman and Robin.³⁴

Clearly, *Sherlock*'s final episode retains little from Doyle's "His Last Bow." Instead of a wartime spy thriller, Moffat and Gatiss's series ends on an episode that is more of a family drama by way of an escape room. This changes the point of view from John to Sherlock. In the premiere of the series, John was the audience surrogate with whom the viewers identified as they met Benedict Cumberbatch's take on Holmes. By the time Sherlock was resurrected in "The Empty Hearse," it was clear that John's trauma was no longer the driving force of the series, as it acts as a mere inconvenience that gets in the way of Sherlock's dramatics. In this final episode, John's trauma from having watched his wife get murdered several episodes prior is pushed aside so that Sherlock can work through his childhood issues that he had suppressed. Part of Eurus Holmes's plan to make her brother realize what happened to them in their childhood involved starting an affair with John while his wife was still alive and then posing as a therapist so that he would confide in her after Mary's death. Through these actions, John's trauma and mourning is not allowed to exist on its own. John began the series as a traumatized soldier who used Sherlock as a way to experience adventure, but at the end of the series his pain was made into a red herring to distract Sherlock. *Sherlock* originally started off with commentary on modern wars, but even though later seasons turned Mary Morstan into an assassin with ties to war crimes, any

³⁴ Fathallah also notes that Sherlock is made to look like Batman elsewhere in the series, as a man "who stands alone on the rooftop of St. Bartholomew's hospital with the flare of his coat angled to recall Batman looking out over Gotham" (61).

actual point about wars was pushed aside in favor of a character study. This change from the source material is what prompted Fathallah to write that:

Despite the technological trappings...the BBC's *Sherlock* is, in many ways, more Victorian than its Victorian source: that is to say, it constructs a masculinity whose governing statements are drawn from our post-Victorian fantasies of an earlier, more 'reasonable' era. The construction of an England—specifically a visibly White London—at the centre of global politics mutually reinforces that construction. (49)

The narrative, she argues, recenters itself around a single great man and presents him as above (and better) than society in an old-fashioned way. This is contrary to Buchanan's point that Doyle's Watson was a partner that was able to equal Holmes instead of fulfilling the traditional role of a Chorus member who is enraptured with a singular great man (21). By minimizing John and all the suffering the series puts him through, the series *Sherlock* returns to the idea of the significant individual and becomes more conventional even as it tries to be more modern.

Conclusion

Sherlock steadfastly avoids providing a meaningful exploration of John's trauma, and while Doyle's original texts and Christie's Poirot series do not concern themselves first and foremost with the mental health of their Watsons, they do end by acknowledging their journeys. In the original stories, Dr. Watson was horrified by how corrupt London appeared to him upon returning home from war, and at the end of the series he has successfully helped Holmes eradicate much of London's own crime and is aiding his government by capturing spies in the lead up to World War I. In the Poirot series, Captain Hastings writes his first narrative to help clear the air about the foreigners suspected in a purely English crime and at the end is helpless to stop as his friend Poirot, a refugee, is driven to murder and suicide by the evil of England. Finally, in *Sherlock*, John comes home from war and seeks to disturb the tranquility he finds, and after the death of his assassin wife he has his trauma toyed with by the sister of his best friend for

unclear reasons. Each of these three trajectories views war as damaging and a source of lingering emotional fallout. The original stories are optimistic that Dr. Watson will be able to reshape the nation into proper form again, while the Poirot mysteries end on the pessimistic idea that Hastings is unable to do anything but watch from the sidelines as his country (and the world around it) continues to decline into further chaos, and *Sherlock* moves John from the foreground into the background, but in doing so suggests that he is doomed to a life of successive traumas. Moreover, no one really listens to John's expressions of self, especially since his therapists are either misdiagnosing him or actively trying to kill him. These concluding mysteries serve as not only the end of these classic partnerships, but also as final statements on how trauma is treated in their contemporary societies.

The Sherlock Holmes stories have been adapted and appropriated innumerable times since their original publications began in 1887; this means that the figure of Holmes's partner, Dr. John Watson, is one of the most adapted and recognizable figures in pop culture. Unlike many other popular figures such as Robin Hood or James Bond, he is not an action hero; he has an injury that does not allow him to move at a fast pace, and much of his time is spent at home with his platonic partner having things explained to him. One of the enduring aspects of this character that makes him so interesting and complex despite the lack of derring-do and bravado is his trauma. Even when a text's version of Watson has not gone to war, trauma is still a defining characteristic; for another example, Barry Levinson's 1985 film *Young Sherlock Holmes* features a school-aged Watson whose trauma is shown through his relationship to food and how other students consider him fat. The use of trauma allows Watson to also be a constantly timely figure, as the ever-changing and updating causes of his trauma allow their narratives to make arguments about whatever society or culture the text is based in. These adaptations and

appropriations shift from often showing Watson as a fighting spirit attempting to ease the pain of the country around him to making him a possible threat to society as he relives his war experiences “in [his] attempts to undo the traumatic moment” (Herman 39). This change from Watson’s individual trauma to the trauma of his country can be traced alongside the path of our cultural understanding of PTSD. Before PTSD was a common diagnosis that was very publicly visible, Watson was a savior figure; afterwards, Watson is being portrayed more and more as a possible threat.

Chapter 2. “Women Is So Fond O’ Blood,” or: National Responsibility Through Love Triangles

The sexual objectification of soldiers has been a recurrent trope through many eras of war narratives, but the depiction of such sexuality changes to suit the text’s culture’s knowledge and perception of trauma. Texts in the latter half of the Victorian period often demonstrate authors trying to reconcile the allure of military men with the growing sense that war had affected their mental health, which reflects the culture’s dealing with soldiers returning home injured and traumatized from conflicts such as the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80) that Dr. Watson had fought in. The need to reconcile attractiveness with trauma is even more felt in modern American media, partially because of the fallout of the Vietnam War (1955-75) and the recognition of PTSD by the DSM in 1980. I will use Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1863 novel *Sylvia’s Lovers* to exemplify how many Victorian authors often saw the nation itself as more traumatized from war than the soldiers while I will use the 1989 musical *Miss Saigon* to demonstrate how modern American texts often place the onus of trauma on the soldiers. Both texts make their point about trauma with romantic triangles that follow Jameson’s national allegorical pattern, but they disagree on where the trauma is placed. Many Victorian texts such as *Sylvia’s Lovers* grappled with the phenomenon of soldiers returning home traumatized both physically and mentally by suggesting that something was wrong in or with Great Britain, but modern texts with similar themes, such as *Miss Saigon*, often use the more current understanding of trauma to absolve the nations that enter into wars while turning the soldiers into both perpetrators and victims of trauma; the romantic triangles that form the narrative centers of these two texts make this difference readily apparent.

My two main texts in this chapter will be Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *Sylvia’s Lovers* and the musical *Miss Saigon* with music by Claude-Michel Schönberg, lyrics by Alain Boublil and

Richard Maltby, Jr., and a book by Alain Boubil and Claude-Michel Schönberg. *Sylvia's Lovers* is about Sylvia Robson who lives in a coastal English town called Monkshaven during the Napoleonic Wars. She falls in love with the sailor Charley Kinraid; shortly after they get engaged in secret, Charley is impressed by the Navy with only Sylvia's cousin and Charley's romantic rival Philip Hepburn as witness. Philip tells no one why Charley suddenly disappeared and marries Sylvia himself; when his deception is discovered he leaves Sylvia and their child to fight in the war. These various war-related disappearances not only affect Sylvia, but also her father Daniel Robson, who is tormented by memories of his escape from impressment during the American Revolution. *Miss Saigon*, produced 126 years after *Sylvia's Lovers*, similarly features a love triangle complicated by the military.³⁵ American soldier Chris Scott is a driver for the embassy in Saigon; shortly before the fall of Saigon, he meets Kim at Dreamland, a brothel, and they immediately fall in love. The two marry and he intends to take her to America with him, but they are separated, and he goes back home and marries Ellen. He generally tries to keep his war experiences hidden from Ellen, but she often hears him yell out Kim's name in his sleep; once Chris discovers Kim is in Bangkok with their child, he and Ellen go to sort out the messy situation. Despite the large gap in time between these two texts, they both demonstrate the impact of wars on their characters' romances; these triangles are thus used to comment on the effects of war itself.

When discussing how these two texts differ in their triangle make-up, I do not mean to imply that no Victorian texts feature a male soldier choosing between two women or that no

³⁵ *Miss Saigon* is an adaptation of Italian composer Giacomo Puccini's 1904 opera *Madama Butterfly*, which is based on American author John Luther Long's 1898 short story "Madame Butterfly," which in turn was inspired by *Madame Chrysanthème*, an 1887 novel by French author Pierre Loti. The reason I am using *Miss Saigon* instead of any its predecessors, and without references to them elsewhere, is because my focus with that text is on how the romantic triangle is used to comment on the state of nations and their soldiers when PTSD became common knowledge; none of those other texts would be able to accomplish that.

modern texts feature women choosing between two male soldiers; an example of the former is Thomas Hardy's 1874 novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* and an example of the latter is Hal Ashby's 1978 film *Coming Home*. I chose the texts for this chapter based on how they use the triangle for national allegory, and the difference in views of war trauma make the organization of the triangle matter specifically. In *Sylvia's Lovers*, Sylvia, as a representative of England, has to choose between the past (impressment) and the future (volunteer army) of the military; in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Sergeant Troy's choice is between the lower-class Fanny Robin and the upper-class Bathsheba Everdene.³⁶ Meanwhile, *Miss Saigon* features Chris choosing between feminine stand-ins for Vietnam and America, while Jane Fonda's Sally Hyde in *Coming Home* has to choose between Jon Voight's Luke Martin, who is paraplegic as a result of an injury in Vietnam, and Bruce Dern's Captain Bob Hyde (her husband), who has come back from Vietnam with PTSD. Because the general view in the Victorian period was that the nation was troubled while the modern view is often that the individual bears the brunt of war's effects, *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon's* triangles demonstrate concern for the future of their societies after war, but *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Coming Home* deal with more personal struggles. Romantic triangles have existed in various configurations long before the texts I am writing about, but the examples I am highlighting use their different make-ups to analyze placement of trauma during and after wartime. Because of the prevailing views of war and trauma when they are published, the national allegory that was once more apparent in male-male-female triangles is now more visible in male-female-female triangles.

³⁶ Romantic triangles focused on class can still be national allegories, such as in E. M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howards End*. In that novel, the romantic triangle is used to symbolize the rise of the middle class and so the outcome demonstrates the economic future of England; in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, there are no such societal consequences attached to who Troy chooses.

In my previous chapter, I briefly touched on the sexualization of soldiers when I mentioned that one of Watson's defining traits in many adaptations is the mystery surrounding his number of romantic partners. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson has romantic qualities in many stories, especially in *The Sign of the Four* (1890) when he meets his wife Mary Morstan, but the character is not overly sexual. Adaptations such as *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970, Billy Wilder) and *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986, John Musker, Ron Clements, David Michener, and Burny Mattinson) feature their Watsons lasciviously watching dancers, but generally the Watson figure ends up in a respectable marriage with Mary, who grew up in a military household and so knows what the life of a military man is like. This is different from the texts I will be discussing in this chapter, as the romantic triangles in *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* discuss war as an intrusive force in a relationship instead of as a known factor from the start. Mary Morstan understood Watson's military service from their time together solving her case, and he was also familiar with her family's military background due to the particulars of that case; the men and women in *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* have no such common understanding. By placing the men (who represent the military) at odds with the women (who represent the nations), these texts use the national allegorical form to comment on the soldier/citizen divide and how culpable the nations as a whole are for the wars they find themselves in.

This chapter will be divided into three sections and a conclusion. The first section will investigate the sexualization of soldiers in a variety of texts and how an increased medical understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder has impacted the way that soldiers are presented romantically. The second section will analyze the use of dreams, or nightmares, in *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* and how these presentations of the unconscious reflect the inner

lives of soldiers and impact their romantic lives. The third section will more specifically examine the composition of the various love triangles and how trauma effects them or is represented by them. The relevance of Jameson's national allegory to this section is demonstrated by how his example of a western national allegory is a nineteenth century (albeit Spanish) love triangle (176-177).³⁷ Critical sources more relevant to this chapter than others include Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985); both these works are seminal in their fields and will aid my analyses of trauma dreams/nightmares and romantic triangles. Through the use of these and other sources, this chapter will look closely at the romances in *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* and argue how the modern understanding of trauma has led to portrayals of soldiers as more threatening and troubled than their countries.

“Put Up Your Weapon in the Sheath. We Two Shall Mingle and Make Love”

Even as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*, the heroic Odysseus spends most of the narrative trying to return home from war, but before he can reunite with his wife the gods force him to make several stops, some of which serve to highlight Odysseus's sexual prowess. An example of this is when Odysseus and his men are on Circe's island; she turns Odysseus's men into pigs and attempts to do the same to him, but he is immune to her spells because of an herb he had been given by Hermes. Once she realizes her powers will not work on him, Circe recognizes Odysseus as a renowned military man and immediately urges him to “put up your weapon in the sheath. We two/shall mingle and make love upon our bed” (Book X, ll. 375-76). She transforms his men back into humans, and then they proceed to spend the next year feasting and having sex before

³⁷ “As far as national allegory is concerned, I think it may be appropriate to stress its presence in what is generally considered western literature in order to underscore certain structural differences. The example I have in mind is the work of Benito Perez Galdos...It is therefore not terribly surprising to find the situation of the male protagonist of *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887)—alternating between the two women of the title, between the wife and the mistress, between the woman of the upper-middle classes and the woman of the ‘people’—characterized in terms of the nation-state itself, hesitating between the republican revolution of 1868 and the Bourbon restoration of 1873.” (Jameson 176-77)

his men finally confront him by saying, “Captain, shake off this trance, and think of home” (Book X, l. 521). Many critics believe that Circe is one in a line of evil sexualized women that Odysseus encounters, such as Judith Fletcher, whose “Women’s Space and Wingless Words in the *Odyssey*” states that “Women’s voices pose a variety of threats to men throughout the *Odyssey*...Circe’s melodious song attracts the companions of Odysseus...[and] has the power to lure men to their deaths: (77-78). Others, such as Yvonne Rodax in her article “In Defense of Circe” take a more generous approach to Circe’s motives: “As a femme fatale, she is just about the most motherly, practical, and considerate siren on record” (582). No matter whether Circe entraps Odysseus or if he tames her, it is still clear that while Odysseus’s wife Penelope is at home in the kingdom of Ithaca holding off suitors, Odysseus takes a year off from his journey to have sex with a witch who had no interest in him or his body until she realized his military prowess. There is not much of a discussion of trauma when reading the *Odyssey*, as Odysseus’s military might mostly serves as a reason to worship him as a hero; his great strength makes him a role model on the battlefield and in the bedroom, as demonstrated by his year with Circe. While there are many centuries of literature separating the *Odyssey* from *Sylvia’s Lovers*, much of the intervening works similarly featured such hero worship and respect for military men.

Perhaps the most influential purveyor of military romantic leads in the early nineteenth century was Jane Austen, whose books were often written and set during the Napoleonic Wars. She features several as protagonists, such as Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* (1817) who both demonstrate stalwart and sedate romantic natures as they patiently pursue the women they love. However, she also contributed George Wickham from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) to the canon of military characters who fits into a different type: the dangerously sexual soldier. In “Sighing for a Soldier: Jane Austen and

Military Pride and Prejudice,” Tim Fulford notes that a significant difference between Wentworth and Wickham is that Wentworth is of a higher social class (153-54).³⁸ Because of Wickham’s lower class status, his uniform is more a distraction than a distinction:

a soldier posted away from his home district was free from those who knew him and his reputation. His very identity was changed: he was now an officer by title, and his previous self and his social status were covered by his gaudy regimental dress. But his dress and rank might well have been earned not by experience on the battlefield or parade ground but by influence, and the shiny uniforms masked a variety of characters and origins. (Fulford 157)

Whereas Odysseus is allowed to be sexually adventurous while remaining devoted to his wife, Austen’s audience would not be able to reconcile those two aspects, and so Wickham’s sexual rapaciousness must be villainized. Austen was not the first to do so, but her characters demonstrate how the aspects found within Odysseus had been split into the desirable (love for his wife back home) and the illicit (such as his year with Circe); Brandon and Wentworth demonstrate the patience of love just as Odysseus did as he sought a way back to Penelope, but Wickham’s lascivious adventures align more with Odysseus’s amorous stops along the way. If reading Austen’s texts through the lens of the national allegory, which Jameson defines as “the story of the private individual...[as] an allegory of...culture and society,” Colonel Brandon and Captain Wentworth represent a positive vision of England’s future (Brandon is the younger son of a landed family who never expected to inherit so made a name for himself, and Wentworth was poor but he made his fortune in the military, so both demonstrate the importance of hard work) while Wickham represents a threat to the nation that is quelled by such hard-working characters (specifically Mr. Darcy) (Jameson 165).³⁹ Austen’s works were widely read in the

³⁸ As noted in my introduction, Wentworth was poor, but he was able to attain status through his time in the military.

³⁹ As discussed in my introduction, I have amended his exact definition to apply to a broader range of texts than what he calls “third-world texts” (165).

Victorian period, so her presentations of military men and how their romantic dealings represented England, were influential for authors such as Gaskell.

A Victorian example of the dangerously sexual soldier type demonstrated by Wickham is Francis Troy in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Like Wickham, Troy's courting period is rapid and intense; not long after he meets Bathsheba Everdene and impresses her with his swordsmanship ("never since the broadsword became the national weapon had there been more dexterity shown in its management than by the hands of Sergeant Troy"), the two elope (Hardy 209). Bathsheba learns soon after their wedding that she was not the first woman that Troy had slept with when the bodies of his previous fiancée and their child arrive at her farm. Prior to their marriage, Bathsheba is entranced by Troy's swordplay and his uniform; these military signifiers make him a much more exciting romantic option for her than the older but rich William Boldwood and the steadfast and wise Gabriel Oak. It's not until after they are married that Bathsheba realizes Troy is hollow as the horse that was gifted to the Trojans by Odysseus and his men; his sex appeal makes him an intriguing prospect, but there is not much substance to make him a good husband. Troy represents a danger to Bathsheba's propriety because of his sexual nature, but his military training adds to his appeal instead of making him a physical threat.

Since PTSD entered the public consciousness, many modern depictions of soldiers keep the sexual excitement of the military but the danger stems more from their trauma than their sexuality; an example of this cultural view of soldiers is clear in Halina Reijn's 2022 film *Bodies Bodies Bodies*. The film takes place in a secluded mansion where a group of mostly young people gather for a hurricane party and once the storm starts, they begin to die one by one. The oldest person there is Greg, played by Lee Pace, who is there with his much-younger girlfriend Alice, played by Rachel Sennott. Once the first body appears, the young women in the house,

besides Alice, begin to suspect Greg. They cite the fact that he is a “vet” for why he could be a murderer, which is the same reasoning they had used when discussing why Alice would date an older man. His perceived military status is what makes him sexually appealing when they were having fun but also what makes him the number one suspect when people start dying. After one of the girls kills Greg in an attempt to protect her friends from getting murdered by him, Alice reveals that when she said he was a “vet” that she meant he was a veterinarian, and when asked why she called him “G.I. Joe,” Alice responds “because—have you seen him?” Greg is sexualized by others because of his perceived military credentials and militarized by his girlfriend because of his sexual credentials. From either perspective, the military is connected to sexual satisfaction, but also to the capacity for violence due to trauma. By killing him, the women of *Bodies Bodies Bodies* establish that being in the military gives a man sexual benefits but also makes him a threat in the long term that is best eliminated (though not always so bloodily) instead of married.

There are other cases in modern media where the deadliness of soldiers is seen as making a soldier even sexier, such as in *Black Panther* (2018, Ryan Coogler). This Marvel Cinematic Universe film features Michael B. Jordan as the villain Killmonger who served in the United States military. Throughout the film, Jordan is often shirtless and showing off the many scars that cover his body, with each scar correlating to a person he has killed, many while in service to the United States military: “I killed in America. Afghanistan. Iraq. I took life from my own brothers and sisters right here on this continent [Africa]” (Fig. 3). Part of the press coverage surrounding the film’s release was about a teenage girl after her orthodontist posted on Tumblr:

one of my patients came in for an emergency visit, because she snapped the wire on her retainer watching the movie when MBJ took his shirt off she clenched her teeth so fucking hard she snapped it. that is the fucking funniest shit ever to me this tiny 17 year old girl thirsting so goddamn hard she busted steel. (nitramaraho)



Figure 3. *Black Panther*. Directed by Ryan Coogler, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018.

Surely while this girl was “thirsting so goddamn hard” she was not thinking about the visual representation of military violence, but her experience led to coverage of the film, with such good press coming from things like Jordan offering to pay for her new retainer.⁴⁰ While this story is lighthearted and feel-good in presentation, the use of Jordan’s scarred body as the header photo for many articles inextricably links the idea of his sexiness and his characters scars. Even though most texts would not explicitly state that murder is sexy, the press surrounding *Black Panther* demonstrates how the two tend to become intertwined.⁴¹

This pop cultural view of soldiers as sexy and dangerous (and sexily dangerous) is seen as scary not only because of what the soldier might do to citizens, but because of how the soldier’s trauma is contagious; this transmittable version of trauma is exploited by Tim O’Brien in his 1994 novel *In the Lake of the Woods*. The novel is about a Vietnam veteran whose wife disappears; O’Brien provides clues and evidence for the reader to be able to deduce several possible solutions to what happens, and this lack of closure plays on the audience’s often

⁴⁰ One example of such an article with this story that uses the shirtless image is “Michael B. Jordan Hasn’t Paid for His Fan’s Broken Retainer — But Still Wants to Surprise Her” by Ale Russian and Karen Mizoguchi for *People*.

⁴¹ I will further discuss the use of the military in the Marvel Cinematic Universe in my third chapter.

inherent desire to see the veteran as cruel and murderous. There is the chance that he boiled her alive in the middle of the night, but:

the evidence does not exclude the possibility that they ran for their lives...And so one chilly evening he might have joined her on the shore...Maybe she scolded him for being late...They needed the solitude. They needed to go away together. Maybe they spent the night huddled at a small fire, celebrating, thinking up names for the children they wanted. (300).

Whether or not the veteran is traumatized is not so much the point in this text as how the view of traumatized veterans has made war narrative audiences as bloodthirsty as they view soldiers. The “happy” ending further signifies that the only way for this veteran and his wife to live in peace is to assume new identities, where his military background is not known. The idea of soldiers as necessarily traumatized makes them be seen as capable of traumatizing others (like this man is seen as a murderous husband), and this mindset demonstrates how the audience itself is deeply affected in a negative way by the depiction of war and war trauma in media narratives.

Because the pop cultural perception of PTSD means that traumatized soldiers are often portrayed as domestic homicidal threats, modern texts have to resort to different stereotypes in order to get the same sense of fun-danger that Francis Troy represents; two such stereotypes are the bad boy on the motorcycle and the time traveler. In modern media, motorcycles operate in a similar way as the military did before PTSD became recognized, in that when a romantic option is seen riding a motorcycle it often is commented on how dangerous such a mode of transportation can be, but it is also fetishized, often with a leather jacket with patches on it standing in for the military uniform. A serious example of this type is Charlie Hunnam’s character Jax Teller in the series *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-14) while an example in a romantic comedy is Matthew McConaughey’s Benjamin Barry in *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (2003, Donald Petrie). Unlike soldiers, motorcyclists are not necessarily forced to leave their lover for

long stretches of time, so that aspect of older military stereotypes is often represented through time travelers, such as Henry DeTamble in Audrey Niffenegger's 2003 novel *The Time Traveler's Wife* or Domhnall Gleason's Tim Lake in *About Time* (2013, Richard Curtis). This type allows for the man to be away from his lover for extended and unpredictable amounts of time without having to come back traumatized. Niffenegger herself points out the similarity between time travelers and soldiers in the anniversary edition of the text, where she includes messages from readers that say the book spoke to them, one example being "My husband is in the Army, our relationship is like the DeTambles', he's always leaving" (xix). The sexual thrills and extended disappearances of characters such as Odysseus and Francis Troy are traits that still excite audiences today, but the perception of PTSD has led to these qualities being given to other character types who are less likely to be traumatized.

This change in how soldier-lovers are depicted can be seen when looking at *Sylvia's Lovers* in conjunction with *Miss Saigon*. Both of Sylvia's lovers, Charley Kinraid and Philip Hepburn, are notable for their extended absences. Charley also has the sexual past of characters such as Francis Troy and George Wickham, but Sylvia is more personally affected by how both Charley and Philip are never with her when she needs them most. However, when they are around, they pose no physical threat to Sylvia, which cannot be said of many modern fictional soldiers. Chris does not mean to hurt either of his wives in *Miss Saigon*, but his violent nightmares are seen through staging to have a physical manifestation that could possibly hurt Ellen and his actions (or inactions) lead to Kim committing suicide; even without harmful intent, Chris's PTSD has violent consequences. These two examples demonstrate how even though soldiers continue to be sexualized for their military connections, the exact nature of the fetishization has been problematized by the acknowledged presence of PTSD; before trauma was

recognized, fictional soldiers' spouses were worried that their husbands would leave them unexpectedly for an unknown amount of time, while now those same spouses are worried about what will happen when their husbands are present.

“Like One Possessed”

Signs of trauma are visible to modern audiences when reading *Sylvia's Lovers*, despite being written more than one hundred years before the term PTSD entered the DSM. The terminology for trauma was still in very early stages of development at this point, and so while no one is called traumatized, they are told they have “brain fever” (Gaskell 309). Judith Herman writes that in the final decades of the nineteenth century, “the term *hysteria* was so commonly understood at the time that no one had actually taken the trouble to define it systematically” (10; emphasis in original).⁴² This lack of definition and the looseness of language with terms such as “hysteria” and “brain fever” show that even while trauma was not fully understood or medically recognized, there was still the cultural understanding that there was something wrong and that it was an illness akin to something like a fever. One of the traumatic symptoms that can be found in *Sylvia's Lovers* and many other texts that sought to display this feeling of something being wrong is nightmares. To modern audiences with a deeper understanding of PTSD, the use of war flashbacks in the form of dreams is a typical device, and to see such a trope used so far before the medical acceptance of PTSD demonstrates how war's traumatic effects had made themselves felt in cultures such as that of Victorian England.

The character in *Sylvia's Lovers* who has the most intense military-related nightmares is Daniel Robson, Sylvia's father, who was never a soldier himself but had escaped from impressment. In his youth, during the American Revolution, Daniel was almost taken by the

⁴² I will discuss in more depth the connection between “hysteria” and PTSD in my fourth chapter.

military, and in his escape he created a moment so fundamental to his character that he “never made a new acquaintance but what he told him of his self-mutilation to escape the press-gang” (Gaskell 81). Daniel may never have served in the military, but the lengths he went to in order to evade them gives him nightmares. At one point, Daniel’s wife Bell tells their nephew:

For good’s sake, Philip, dunnot thee bring us talk about t’ press-gang. It’s a thing as has got hold on my measter, till thou’d think him possessed. He’s speaking perpetual on it i’ such a way, that thou’d think he were itching to kill ’em a’ afore he tasted bread again. He really trembles wi’ rage and passion; an’ a’ night it’s just as bad. He starts up i’ his sleep, swearing and cursing at ’em, till I’m sometimes afeared he’ll mak’ an end o’ me by mistake. (Gaskell 220)

Though Philip responds to his aunt with selfish panic about his own mistakes, the narrator soon comes in to reemphasize her points:

Daniel Robson was, as his wife said, like one possessed. He could hardly think of anything else, though he himself was occasionally weary of the same constantly recurring idea, and would fain have banished it from his mind. He was too old a man to be likely to be taken by them; he had no son to become their victim; but the terror of them, which he had braved and defied in his youth, seemed to come back and take possession of him in his age; and with the terror came impatient hatred...the craving to hear the last news of the actions of the press-gang drew him into Monkshaven nearly every day at this dead agricultural season of the year; and a public-house is generally the focus from which gossip radiates; and probably the amount of drink thus consumed weakened Robson’s power over his mind, and caused the concentration of thought on one subject. This may be a physiological explanation of what afterwards was spoken of as a supernatural kind of possession, leading him to his doom. (Gaskell 221)

Unlike Philip, Gaskell’s narrator takes Bell’s fear seriously. Bell does not know how to articulate what is happening to her husband, so latches onto the supernatural terminology of possession; the narrator takes the terminology to show that not only is Bell afraid, but so is her husband. In their shared struggle, neither is able to put an exact term or reason to it, though the narrator offers Daniel’s drinking as a possible, but not certain, explanation. This uncertainty highlights the cultural struggling with how to speak about trauma when it is plainly visible but undefined.

The note that Daniel tries to medicate his trauma and alleviate his nightmares with alcohol is another sign that modern readers would recognize as a symptom of PTSD. As Herman points out, alcohol is used by victims of trauma as a means to “control their hyperarousal and intrusive symptoms—insomnia, nightmares, irritability, and rage outbursts” (44). The imagery of liquids connected to Daniel’s dealing with his past recurs after his cathartic rioting:

at several places he was urged to have a dram—urgency that he was loath for many reasons to refuse, but his increasing uneasiness and pain made him for once abstinent, and only anxious to get home and rest. But he could not help being both touched and flattered at the way in which those who formed his ‘world’ looked upon him as a hero; and was not insensible to the words of blessing which a wife, whose husband had been impressed and rescued this night, poured down upon him as he passed. (Gaskell 230)

In that scene, Daniel is uneasy but does not make recourse to alcohol, which suggests it may not actually be the source of his distress and that there are factors in play that are not fully understood. Instead, Daniel is employing another strategy common to trauma survivors: “traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing” (Herman 40). This is done as a way to try and rewrite what originally happened, as Daniel does when rioting against the press-gang. Though Daniel refuses drinks, he does enjoy the praise and thanks that is “poured down upon him,” which posits community engagement and emotional connections as an alternate form of liquid courage (Gaskell 230); Daniel has just faced his biggest fear by rioting against the press-gang, and though he is understandably anxious about the ramifications, the figuratively liquid response of those who know and respect him allows him to deal with his anxiety. Daniel Robson perfectly exemplifies the way trauma was beginning to appear in Victorian texts; there is a struggle to identify what exactly is the issue or the cause, but there are now-identifiable symptoms and attempts to ease the pain.

The use of nightmares in *Sylvia's Lovers* is in line with how Freud describes them in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. He describes how in the past, “the peoples of classical antiquity...took it as axiomatic that dreams were connected with the world of super human beings in whom they believed and that they were revelations from gods and daemons” (36). Because these past peoples viewed dreams as given from the gods, there was no need to investigate further why they had dreams (54). However, he says that more recent scholarship was very heavily focused on where dreams came from, including “a popular saying that ‘dreams come from indigestion’” (54). This particular view is on display in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843) when Ebenezer Scrooge dismisses the ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley: “you may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There’s more of gravy than of grave about you” (Dickens 45). While Freud acknowledges the role that external stimuli such as Scrooge’s beef play, he still argues that “all the material making up the content of a dream is in some way derived from experience, that is to say, has been reproduced or remembered in the dream—so much at least we may regard as an undisputed fact” (44). Freud first published *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899, decades later than *Sylvia's Lovers*, but his grappling with how dreams represent the past demonstrates how dreams were viewed by people in the nineteenth century, such as Elizabeth Gaskell when she has Daniel being haunted by his escape from the press-gang on a nightly basis.

It is also clear from *The Interpretation of Dreams* how the lack of understanding about mental illnesses, such as trauma, is an issue, but one that could be tied into dream states. Freud states that both his contemporaries and “medical writers in earlier times” are fascinated by the connections between dreams and mental illnesses (113). Despite this connection, he opines that

“very little research has hitherto been carried out into the modifications occurring in dream-life during chronic psychoses” (115). He concludes:

It is quite likely...that a modification of our attitude towards dreams will at the same time affect our views upon the internal mechanism of mental disorders and that we shall be working towards an explanation of the psychoses while we are endeavouring to throw some light on the mystery of dreams. (117)

He is arguing that even though the exact connections between dreams and mental disorders are not fully understood, looking into one will inevitably lead to information on the other. He says his argument is counter to popular discourse, in that he believes looking into dreams would affect our views of mental disorders instead of the other way around. This order of operations is in line with how dreams are used in *Sylvia's Lovers*; we are given Daniel's dreams to examine and are led to conclusions about his mental state from those dreams instead of the other way around. Because there was no steadfast terminology for Gaskell to use to say what causes Daniel's dreams, she “throw[s] some light on the...dreams” in order to “[work] towards an exploration of the psychoses” (Freud 117). The connections are easier for a modern audience who is aware of PTSD to make, but the easiness with which this conclusion can be considered exemplifies how some form of war trauma was visible to the general Victorian public even without exact diagnoses to fall back upon.

Nightmares serve a similar function in *Miss Saigon*, though their traumatic origins would likely be more recognizable to theatrical audiences from its 1989 West End debut onwards. Midway through the first act, years after the fall of Saigon, the song “I Still Believe” takes place during one of Chris Scott's nightmares. This song acts as the introduction to his American wife Ellen, who can do nothing but helplessly watch as her husband suffers:

Last night I watched you sleeping
Once more the nightmare came
I heard you cry out something

A word that sounded like a name
And it hurts me more than I can bear
Knowing part of you I'll never share
Never know

These are the first words Ellen sings in the musical, but she helps the audience fill in the time jump that has happened as the last time Chris was seen onstage, he was having a wedding ceremony with his Vietnamese wife Kim in the days leading up to the American departure. It also recalls the way that many traumatized veterans describe their nightmares; Herman emphasizes how these nightmares operate differently from others:

Just as traumatic memories are unlike ordinary memories, traumatic dreams are unlike ordinary dreams. In form, these dreams share many of the unusual features of the traumatic memories that occur in waking states. They often include fragments of the traumatic event in exact form, with little or no imaginative elaboration. Identical dreams often occur repeatedly. They are often experienced with terrifying immediacy, as if occurring in the present. Small, seemingly insignificant environmental stimuli occurring during these dreams can be perceived as signals of a hostile attack, arousing violent reactions. And traumatic nightmares can occur in stages of sleep in which people do not ordinarily dream. Thus, in sleep as well as in waking life, traumatic memories appear to be based in an altered neurophysiological organization. (39)

We get the sense that Ellen and Chris have been married for some time, and that though this nightmare is a recurrent feature, he has not shared the details with her. This sets up a difference between *Miss Saigon* and *Sylvia's Lovers*, because unlike Chris and Ellen, Daniel's inciting incident is fully known by Bell. Daniel shares his pain with anyone willing to hear it, whereas Chris internalizes his. This shifts the pain from one shared by a community to one that is more personalized, even though the hidden trauma nevertheless does damage to those it touches, like Ellen who is pained by her knowing ignorance. As a text dealing with the Vietnam War, audiences would be able to see and recognize Chris's nightmares as a symptom of post-traumatic stress, even before their full explanation later in the play.

The ability for audiences to label Chris with a disorder automatically personalizes it, while *Sylvia's Lovers* demonstrates that Daniel's pain and fear is shared with and by the majority of the town of Monkshaven. His past gives him an individual reason to fear the press-gangs, but he is not alone; when the press-gang arrives, there is collective panic:

No one spoke, no one breathed, I had almost said no heart beat for listening. Not long; in an instant there rose the sharp simultaneous cry of many people in rage and despair. Inarticulate at that distance, it was yet an intelligible curse, and the roll, and the roar, and the irregular tramp came nearer and nearer. (Gaskell 28)

This scene of town-wide distress demonstrates the unity of their panic: they all stop breathing together and then release in a “simultaneous cry.” In contrast, the press-gang is an “irregular tramp.” The townspeople are in unison with each other, but the press-gang disrupts their rhythm. Daniel's past offers the reader personal stakes as to what kind of lasting emotional pain can be done by the press-gangs, but Gaskell never suggests he is an outlier; he is a member of the Monkshaven community and thus his pain is their pain.

Like Daniel, Chris struggles with understanding his place in a community at home. Herman notes that to have such a support system is greatly beneficial: “if...the survivor is lucky enough to have a supportive family, lovers, or friends, their care and protection can have a strong healing influence” (63). It is because Daniel is part of this larger whole that he can feel put at ease after the riot by “the words of blessing which a wife, whose husband had been impressed and rescued this night, poured down upon him as he passed” (Gaskell 230). John McVeagh goes further in his article “The Making of *Sylvia's Lovers*” by suggesting that instead of just being part of the community, Daniel is the center around which all the other characters gravitate (274-75). Daniel may feel separate from those around him because of his past, but there are moments where he does realize how those around him do support him. In contrast, Chris is unable to feel

such togetherness or support as he shuts himself off from those closest to him, like Ellen. Chris's silence plays into a larger trend in how war stories are treated by civilians:

Too often, this view of the veteran as a man apart is shared by civilians, who are content to idealize or disparage his military service while avoiding detailed knowledge of what that service entailed. Social support for the telling of war stories, to the extent that it exists at all, is usually segregated among combat veterans...thus the fixation on the trauma—the sense of a moment frozen in time—may be perpetuated by social customs that foster the segregation of warriors from the rest of society. (Herman 67)

Chris's friend from the war, John Thomas, functions as part of a larger community through his work for an aid organization that connects Vietnamese children with their American soldier fathers; it is not until John is able to reunite Chris with his and Kim's son that Chris is forced to tell Ellen the truth; even then Ellen is only given half-truths until she finds out through an accidental encounter with Kim herself. Both Daniel and Chris feel like they must bear their burdens all by themselves, but Daniel is more easily able to recognize that he was wrong because he was truthful about his experiences while Chris's secrecy only made the situation worse. Neither Daniel nor Chris is explicitly labeled as having post-traumatic stress, but because a contemporary audience would be able to place that assumption on Chris, he becomes a character with an illness that he cannot fully share with others, while Daniel is allowed to be a member, even a leader, of a community.

Though Daniel and Chris have very different experiences in how they relate to the world and people around them, they are united by their nightmares; this connection demonstrates both the individuality of the soldiers and how the military tries to suppress it. Even though Daniel never actually served in the military, his escape from the press-gang via self-mutilation still had a life-changing effect. Before, he had been a sailor and as a farmer in Monkshaven he seems to live vicariously through the sailors he sees coming and going; this is because he was no longer

able to sail himself, for he “had never reached that rank aboard ship which made his being unable to run up the rigging, or to throw a harpoon, or to fire off a gun, of no great consequence; so he had to be thankful that an opportune legacy enabled him to turn farmer, a great degradation in his opinion” (Gaskell 81). Like many men of Monkshaven and other coastal towns, his whole life had been sailing, but his efforts to escape fighting in America have ripped away his sea-faring dreams. The British Navy had sought to use his sailing to their own advantage, and to avoid fighting he had to tear himself away from the only life he knew. It is this moment that haunts him at night, the moment when the military forced him to abandon his sense of self in order to survive. McVeagh argues that “the disappearance of Daniel Robson no doubt had something to do with the novel’s loss of cohesiveness” (276); however, as Daniel’s death is a major traumatic moment for his daughter Sylvia, perhaps any lack of cohesion is symbolic of the title character’s own trapped state and loss of self, reliving the death of her father over and over again as he relived the moment of his self-mutilation.

Chris’s nightmares of Kim have a similar theme. After his first night with Kim, Chris describes his previous worldview in the song “Why, God, Why?”: “A guy like me lives like a king/Just as long as you don’t believe anything.” However, once he falls in love with Kim, he feels that: “I liked my memories as they were/But now I’ll leave remembering her.” As he predicts, he does leave remembering her, both in his waking life and in his nightmares. He and Kim had, in their brief time together, set up plans for their life together after the war, plans that were nullified by the mass confusion surrounding the fall of Saigon. As these characters know all too well:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form

of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. (Herman 37)

Just as Daniel is haunted by the life he could have had as a sailor, Chris is haunted by the life he could have had with Kim. The military tried to tear down the lives of these two men, and while they had to change everything about their planned futures, the lives they had initially planned were never fully abandoned; instead of being discarded, they now serve as nightmares, reminding the characters of what they could have had if the military had not intervened.

The awful dreams that plague Daniel and Chris separate them from others, which necessarily influences their romantic relationships. Daniel and Bell love each other as Chris's wives both love him, but each of their relationships is affected by the dreams. Jameson brings up Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* when discussing national allegory by saying that "Freud showed us that our very dreams are allegories" (1). If dreams are allegories, then the dreams within these texts are allegories within allegories. Just as the audiences consuming *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* have to parse through the texts to analyze the allegories, so do the non-military characters in the texts parse through their loved ones' dreams. The audience sees Bell and Ellen in particular working through their husbands' nightmares and trying to determine what they mean and are guided to draw similar conclusions. Bell sees Daniel as possessed, and so is her homeland in a way possessed by the incursions of the press gang; Ellen is much less privy to the truth of her husband's situation than Bell, but once she uncovers what his dreams are about, she also connects her emotional state to the world around her:

There are days when your life clouds over
And the world gets so dark
That all at once you can't tell night from day.
There are times
When your heart cries this isn't happening
But the truth is cold and real

And I know this storm
Won't go away.⁴³

Their husbands' dreams trouble the women and make them wary of the world around them in the same way that allegories expose "the most minute meanings and secondary connotations...in all their guilty absence, in all their toxic participation" (Jameson 1). Allegories, including dreams, show their audience issues at work in the world, and this is seen in these texts to serve as a complicating factor in romantic relationships.

"One or Two Girls' Names Were Spoken of in Connection with Him"

Both of Sylvia's lovers are military, so instead of having to choose between a soldier and a farmer, which would provide two completely different lifestyles, she has to choose which version of a soldier she wants to be with. From the beginning of the book, Philip Hepburn is seeking to marry Sylvia, who seems unenthused at best. Once she meets Charley Kinraid, she falls in love with him and eventually they pledge their love to each other. The press-gang interrupts their romance though, and as he's dragged away by soldiers who mock his emotions, Charley tells on-looker Philip: "Tell her...what yo've seen. Tell her I'll come back to her. Bid her not forget the great oath we took together this morning; she's as much my wife as if we'd gone to church;--I'll come back and marry her afore long" (Gaskell 193). Due to the Marriage Act of 1753, "as if we'd gone to church" is not nearly enough to constitute a binding relationship. According to Jennifer Phegley in *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England*, this law stated that:

valid weddings could only be conducted by ordained Anglican clergymen in official churches after the intent of a couple to marry was announced publicly for three consecutive weeks, referred to as the reading of the banns. The couple was required to visit their parish clergyman to announce their plans to marry at least seven days before the clergyman would read the banns at the Sunday service. If

⁴³ These lyrics are from the song "Now That I've Seen Her" from the original cast recording. In recent productions, this song has been replaced by "Maybe."

the parties lived in different parishes, the banns were required to be published in both of them. A marriage could not be performed for parties under the age of 21 without the consent of a parent. If a parent objected to the marriage on the reading of the banns, the officiating clergyman could not proceed with the service. (111)

This act faced some opposition in Parliament as several members felt it would “impede the marriage of sailors, soldiers, and itinerant laborers” (Phegley 114). This prediction partially comes true when Philip neglects to relay Charley’s message, and instead marries Sylvia himself. Charley returns to marry Sylvia to find her already wed, and Philip decides to go to war himself so as to win back Sylvia’s heart. While both men are at war, Philip incurs serious injuries while saving Charley’s life. When they return, neither makes himself romantically available to Sylvia, but in her mind she still is able to make a choice of which of the two is her one true love. McVeagh notes that the structure of the narrative is meant to reflect Sylvia’s choice with a cheerier first section dedicated to Charley, a somber second section dedicated to Philip, and a melodramatic third section in which the decision is made (273); this focus on the triangle is also apparent in the progression of the novel’s title, from working drafts *The Specksioneer* (representing Charley) and *Philip’s Idol* to the final and all-encompassing *Sylvia’s Lovers*, as per Benjamin Lawson’s article “From *Moby-Dick* to *Billy Budd*: Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Sylvia’s Lovers*” (39). While Sylvia’s choice is not one she can physically act upon, it is still representative of the choice as to which soldier she feels would have made the better companion.

Sylvia’s choice represents more than just her own personal romantic inclinations, as Charley embodies the sexualized soldier stereotype with all its faults, while Philip represents a new kind of soldier. When the press-gang takes Charley, they look over Philip and decide he is not soldier material (Gaskell 192). This interaction implies that Charley, though unwilling, is the ideal figure of a soldier while Philip seems like he is not cut from the same (uniform) cloth. Charley makes a great addition to the Navy because he is a great sailor, and as the people of

Monkshaven make clear, this is linked to his sexual prowess: “they spoke of the specksioneer, with admiration enough for his powers as a sailor and harpooner; and from that they passed on to jesting mention of his power amongst women, and one or two girls’ names were spoken of in connection with him” (Gaskell 197). This conversation that Philip overhears in a pub seems to flow naturally from Charley’s talents as a sailor to his way with women; though the two may not literally be connected, the ideas are still joined together in the minds of those who know him, just as they were for Circe when she recognized Odysseus. Fulford notes that in villages like Monkshaven during the Napoleonic wars, soldiers were particularly sexualized:

As Napoleon’s fleet waited across the channel, the local militias, by this time swollen to three hundred thousand men under training per year, marched back and forth, camped, and danced at assemblies. For the inhabitants of English villages—especially in the southeast—the militia was, if not overpaid, definitely oversexed. (Fulford 156)

Charley was seen as promiscuous while as a sailor, and soldiers were seen as “oversexed” so as a sailor who becomes a soldier, Charley’s sexuality becomes even more threatening to the morals of the ladies of Monkshaven.

Once Philip goes to war, he comes home wounded after an incident in which he saves Charley’s life. In doing this, he recreates what Karen Bourrier in her book *The Measure of Manliness: Disability and Masculinity in the Mid-Victorian Novel* notes is a classic “pairing of masculine strength and weakness—with its emphasis on the erotic tension between the two men and its potential to structure the plot of the novel—has much in common with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s influential theory of the love triangle” (12). Sedgwick’s theory, as stated in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, argues that “the diacritical opposition between the ‘homosocial’ and the ‘homosexual’ seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men,” and that in spite of that dichotomy, “in

any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two [male] rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (2; 21). This argument suits *Sylvia’s Lovers* extremely well due to the interplay between Philip and Charley. Molly Haskell in *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* writes that men use women as mirrors in which to create enlarged images of themselves (1-2); with that idea in mind, a love triangle with two men would feature a woman who is forced to mimic both. If that is the case, then the men are not only using her as a source of reflection, but also a way to connect to the other man; when Philip marries Sylvia after Charley’s impressment, he is partly marrying Charley’s reflection, just as the returning Charley is greeted and re-proposes to what is partly a reflection of Philip. Philip and Charley are very different men, and while the object of affection for both of them is Sylvia, their Sedgwickian triangle implies that the two soldiers, one wounded and the other visibly unscratched, are also fascinated by each other.

Despite their mutual attraction (to Sylvia and perhaps each other), Philip and Charley are very different in their actions and motivations. John Kucich, in his article “Transgression and Sexual Difference in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Novels,” posits that *Sylvia’s Lovers* and the rest of Gaskell’s novels feature many masculinized female characters and effeminate male characters. He characterizes Sylvia’s lovers as “the manly but shallow Charlie [sic] Kinraid” and “the more faithful but effeminate Philip Hepburn” (189). He argues that Charley is the more manly because of his sexual history and, paradoxically, his faithfulness to Sylvia (191). Philip, Kucich believes, does not become manly until after he saves Charley at Acre, “in a melodramatic overcompensation for his prior unmanliness” (197). However, I believe that Philip exhibits masculine behavior throughout the entirety of the novel and his going to war is an attempt at a

different form of masculinity. The clearest example of his manliness pre-military is when he marries Sylvia, despite her engagement to Charley. Although she and Charley never legally married, the intention to do so was a known factor. As Sylvia was committed to Charley, any act between her and Philip could be seen as, or at least near, adulterous; as Sedgwick writes “‘to cuckold’ is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man” (49). Philip’s marrying of Sylvia then not only works within Sedgwick’s homosocial argument but defines Philip as performing a manly act. Lawson pinpoints an even earlier example of Philip’s masculinity: “he sails for London, where he succeeds in negotiating profitable business dealings for the shop which he and his co-worker are soon to own. He now feels worthy of Sylvia, able to support her financially” (47). This earlier incident poses Philip’s masculinity as one based around hard-work and dedication to family, instead of sex appeal and derring-do, which is in line with the preferred version of masculinity of many Victorian texts. Thus, Sylvia’s decision is between the man (and military) of the past and the man (and military) of the future, not between a masculine lover and a feminine husband.

One way in which her two options are presented to the reader is through how they look in their uniforms; this serves the dual purposes of highlighting sexual attractiveness and martial conformity. Before either of her lovers joins the military, Sylvia Robson has already been engaged to one (Charley Kinraid) and married to the other (Philip Hepburn). However, once Charley comes back as a military man, his uniform serves as a major point of focus. When passing him, Sylvia does not recognize Charley because “his back was to the morning sun; all she saw at first was the uniform of a naval officer, so well known in Monkshaven in those days” (Gaskell 327). Once she and her husband Philip realize Charley is now a man in uniform, his prior source of anonymity becomes a source of sexual attraction. Sylvia is understandably mad

with Philip for his hiding the fact that he knew Charley had been impressed, and so Philip decides that if he wants to win his wife's love back he similarly needs a uniform: "If Philip were gay, and brisk, well-dressed like him, returning with martial glory to Monkshaven, would not Sylvia love him once more?" (Gaskell 339). The idea of a military uniform granting supposedly weak men the illusion of masculinity is one that has remained in the cultural subconscious; as Chelsea Manning points out in Tim Travers Hawkins's 2019 documentary *XY Chelsea*, this way of thinking is all too common and extremely flawed:

Like, I was trying to, like, man up and I—I think I'm not alone in that. There's a lot of social pressure...to conform, and what better conformity environment than the military? So, I saw it as kind of like going cold turkey from, like, a drug addiction or something, or, like, trying to quit cigarettes or something. But, obviously, you can't stop being who you are. So, that was always—never gonna happen. (*XY Chelsea*)

Manning tried to change who she was by joining the military, but just as the uniform could not make her a man, it was similarly unable to change Philip's substance.

Philip believed that the uniform would distinguish him in the eyes of his wife, but after he goes to war and gets injured, he becomes swallowed by the uniform: "he was muffled up in a great military cloak that had been given him by one of his officers; he felt the September breeze chill after his sojourn in a warmer climate, and in his shattered state of health" (Gaskell 393). Even though he has a uniform of his own, his injuries and the cold air have required him to use a coat from another soldier on his return journey home. Instead of the dashing figure that Charley was, Philip is "muffled." Fulford notes that, "in the British countryside of the late eighteenth century the most striking new thing was an officer's coat...The red, blue, and green coats shone in a dazzling variety, identifying the wearers not as individuals but as members of different regiments" (154). These coats give the illusion of uniqueness because of their various colors, but they actually serve to group the men into identifiable depersonalized units; while this

depersonalization would affect Charley as much as Philip, Philip is then further hidden by the uniform because of the poor fit. Philip sought out the uniform in order to fix his relationship with his wife, but he ends up being anonymized through another soldier's too-voluminous coat. While uniforms were often seen as the makings of a man, they often are the unmaking of the individual.

Eventually, Philip is settled on as the better option over Charley, in a seeming subversion of the weak-man vs. strong-man dynamic. While Philip's injuries fit him into Bourrier's definition of "weakness," his wounds only serve to make him more well-respected:

Philip's long drooping form, his arm hung in a sling, his face scarred and blackened, his jaw bound up with a black silk handkerchief; these marks of active service were revered by the rustic cottagers as though they had been crowns and sceptres. Many a hard-handed labourer left his seat by the chimney corner, and came to his door to have a look at one who had been fighting the French, and pushed forward to have a grasp of the stranger's hand as he gave back the empty cup into the good wife's keeping, for the kind homely women were ever ready with milk or homebrewed to slake the feverish traveller's thirst when he stopped at their doors and asked for a drink of water. (Gaskell 396)

Philip's wounds leave him unrecognizable, but they also grant him more respect from his community. He is given more of a hero's welcome than Charley; this might partly be because, as Scott Krawczyk points out in his article "Broken Soldiers: Serving as Public Bodies," noticeably injured soldiers were often given what is now referred to as next-of-kin notification duties (93). Occasionally this job would go to friends, family members, or others suited to the case, but "the visibly wounded body, because it wore unmistakable signs of the battlefield, carried emphatic signifying power" (Krawczyk 93). Sylvia ultimately chooses, even if in just her own mind and not in any real practice, to accept Philip as her soul mate over Charley. As the text was written from a period distant to its setting, contemporary views may have been involved in the final choice. Phegley writes that:

during the 18th century, men participated in a lively network of masculine activities outside of the home, frequenting public houses and men's clubs after

work. Middle-class Victorian men, on the other hand, were expected to spend time in the evenings around the hearth reading and talking to their wives and children. (6)

Charley's less sedentary lifestyle might have been more acceptable to an 18th century audience, but for a Victorian readership, Philip seems like the more reliable option if the criteria is spending time around the hearth. The womanizing soldier is viewed as passé and the idealistic recruit who is willing to sacrifice everything for his home (with Sylvia, or for England in a larger sense) is chosen as the better option.

Sylvia's interactions with Mrs. Kinraid further complicate our understanding of Charley and Philip's possible traumas. "This pretty, joyous, prosperous little bird of a woman" comes to Monkshaven to find Philip and thank him for all he did to save her husband's life (Gaskell 387). When she finds him missing, she tells Sylvia about how Philip saved Charley's life at "St. Jean d'Acre, you know—though it's fine saying 'you know' when I didn't know a bit myself till the captain's ship was ordered there" (Gaskell 388). It is telling how she introduces the place with "you know" as if it is the most familiar thing in the world, even though she admits she had no previous knowledge of it herself; this implies a recent history with it, particularly of her husband telling her about it repeatedly. It bears a striking similarity to how the narrator prefaces Daniel's story of mutilation with: "and he began the story Sylvia knew so well" (Gaskell 81). This draws a parallel between Daniel Robson and Charley Kinraid. Philip may have been the one who came home from war with "his arm hung in a sling, his face scarred and blackened, [and] his jaw bound up with a black silk handkerchief," but Daniel has memories of his time at war and they have left such a strong impression on him that his wife is able to list off the slightest detail about the place where his near-death experience occurred (Gaskell 396). Obviously Mrs. Kinraid was not at the siege of Acre, but her husband's story has given her a vivid familiarity with the place.

Philip's presence at Acre and his lack of presence after, however, provide a complication to Bourrier's weak-man/strong-man dichotomy: "the strong man and the weak man are mutually dependent: while the strong man provides physical support to the weak, the weak man is more unexpectedly an emotional support for the strong" (13). In *Sylvia's Lovers*, Philip, who would still qualify as the weak man before his wounds, is the one that physically supported Charley during the battle, and then afterwards he refuses to provide the emotional support that Charley and his wife seek out. Charley's wife's intimate knowledge of Acre and Philip's abandonment of Charley (as a side effect of his abandonment of Sylvia) provide ominous harbingers of Charley's future as Daniel was able to live with his memories for years until ultimately his riot against the press-gangs led to his execution. From mere visual appearance, Philip seems to have taken all the damage of the siege of Acre while Charley escaped unharmed, but further examination shows how deeply affected Charley was by his near-death experience.

Sylvia's less sympathetic view of Charley seems to stem from the stereotype of soldiers as cruel in their sexual rapaciousness. In general, I am referring to the amount of sexual partners, though homosexuality also was of a concern at the time of Gaskell's writing; the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 put several measures in place to protect the purity of the female population, with one such measure being to ban male-male sex (but not female-female). Phegley attributes this at least partially to the homosexual acts that were happening in the military (163). As for male soldiers having sex with women, "plentifully available prostitutes in England and native women in the colonies provided an easy sexual outlet for single men, while more and more professions were the preserve of bachelors, particularly the armed services and the administration of colonial affairs" (Phegley 148). Whether through having sex with male soldiers, being promiscuous with women, or for other reasons, soldiers had a reputation for

making cruel marriage partners. This is best represented in *Sylvia's Lovers* through the cautionary tale of Alice Rose, as told to Philip:

Alice was a bonny young woman, with a smile for everybody when he wed her—a smile for everyone except our John, who never could do enough to try and win one from her. But, no! she would have none of him, but set her heart on Jack Rose, a sailor in a whale-ship. And so they were married at last, though all her own folks were against it. And he was a profligate sinner, and went after other women, and drank, and beat her. She turned as stiff and as grey as thou seest her now within a year of Hester's birth. (Gaskell 210)

Jack Rose, in this narrative-within-a-narrative, is a sailor not a soldier, but as is shown throughout the text with Charley Kinraid, sailors and soldiers share many traits in common and they often coincide. Thus, the Jack-Alice-John love triangle in this history mirrors the Charley-Sylvia-Philip romance. Both triangles conform to the blueprint laid out by Sedgwick: there is a woman “who functions as a subject of action but not of thought” (Sylvia/Alice), a man “who functions as a subject of thought but not of action” (Philip/John), and a man “who functions as pure object” (Charley/Jack) (33).⁴⁴ Sylvia is not present when John's brother Jeremiah tells Philip this tale, but it is safe to assume that similar stories of bad marriages are known to her, especially when we do see her talking with her acquaintance Molly who asks her “Whatten good's a husband who's at sea half t' year?” (Gaskell 103). These stories show that sailors themselves make bad husbands, so if soldiers are more extreme versions of the same thing, then to marry one, a “pure object” of sexuality, would be courting disaster. The cultural conversations surrounding soldiers have led Sylvia to distrust them, so when Charley moves on quickly after she refuses his offer of divorce and remarriage, it makes sense that she would assume he was confirming the stereotype.

⁴⁴ Sedgwick uses this specifically when describing Shakespeare's sonnets.

Sylvia's choice has a deeper meaning than just her own personal future if the situation is looked at through the lens of a national allegory; if Sylvia (as a "private individual") operates as a stand-in for the English coast, then her choice becomes about how best to serve the "destiny" of Britain (Jameson 165). Of the main characters, she is the one most tied into the land of Monkshaven itself; Charley comes and goes as a sailor, and even more so as a soldier, Philip works in town selling manmade goods, while Sylvia lives on a farm and works with the very soil of Monkshaven. She stays on her farm while she waits for the men to come back from war, just as England itself waited for soldiers to return. Her connection to Monkshaven is further shown through her connection to the feelings of the citizenry. Before Sylvia is introduced, Gaskell describes, from her future point-of-view, how coastal England felt during the time of press-gangs:

Now all this tyranny (for I can use no other word) is marvellous to us; we cannot imagine how it is that a nation submitted to it for so long, even under any warlike enthusiasm, and panics of invasion, any amount of loyal subservience to the governing powers...the common ventures and dangers, the universal interest felt in on pursuit, bound the inhabitants of that line of coast together with a strong tie, the severance of which by any violent extraneous measure, gave rise to passionate anger and thirst for vengeance...so you may imagine the press-gang had no easy time of it on the Yorkshire coast. In other places they inspired fear, but here rage and hatred. (10-11)

This opening description shows the threat of the press-gangs as well as the anger it inspired in the townspeople, which fully comes to fruition when Daniel leads his fateful riot. Though her father is the one who takes action, Sylvia's noted feelings in the earlier parts of the novel mimic the English coast state of mind that Gaskell lays out, even as others, generally Philip, try to stop her.

As England's stand-in, Sylvia demonstrates the need for her country to move forward instead of living in the past. After Gaskell notes the "simultaneous cry" of Monkshaven being

disturbed by the “irregular tramp” of the press-gang, she has Sylvia serve as the voice of the people:

‘But can we do nothing for ’em?’ cried Sylvia. ‘Let us go into t’ thick of it and do a bit of help; I can’t stand quiet and see ’t!’ Half crying, she pushed forwards to the door; but Philip held her back.

‘Sylvie! you must not. Don’t be silly; it’s the law, and no one can do aught against it, least of all women and lasses.’ (28)

Philip’s discouragement of Sylvia’s revolutionary thoughts is not unique, as he later admonishes her and her acquaintance Molly by telling them: “women is so fond o’ bloodshed” (Gaskell 67). His use of the word “fond” implies that women feel a romantic or sexual thrill from violence, when what Sylvia was trying to express was a desire for justice. The confusion between wanting violence and wanting to do good is perfectly in line with Western politics where the desire to spread supposedly righteous ideals often led to massacres. With Sylvia embodying the land and mindset of the English coast, when she is given the choice between Philip and Charley, she is given the choice of the country’s future. As Lawson notes about Sylvia, “words and legalities possess for her less force than action does” (46). Though words and legalities clearly represent Charley with his declarations of love and offer of divorce, “action” could possibly mean both men. Therefore, it is less about choosing actions over words, than about choosing between Charley’s dangerous actions and Philip’s devotional actions. Herman writes that “one of the many casualties of war’s devastation was the illusion of manly honor and glory in battle” (20). Though that mindset is still not fully adopted, it represents Sylvia’s ultimate choice to go with Philip, a less perilous choice for her and symbolically for that nation.

The very end of the novel fully establishes how much a part of the coast Sylvia is, and how deeply her romances affected it, through a vision of how they are still spiritually present in

Monkshaven many years after their deaths. This section begins with Philip's imprint on the coastal soundscape:

Monkshaven is altered now into a rising bathing place. Yet, standing near the site of widow Dobson's house on a summer's night, at the ebb of a spring-tide, you may hear the waves come lapping up the shelving shore with the same ceaseless, ever-recurrent sound as that which Philip listened to in the pauses between life and death.

And so it will be until 'there shall be no more sea.' (Gaskell 434)

The waves coming onto shore now are seen as reminiscent of the moment of Philip's death; the sound loops over and over again, just as do the memories of the man who died there. Philip is not the only death that is echoed here, as the name Dobson serves as a contracted reminder of Daniel Robson who died in his bid to liberate the men of Monkshaven from dying abroad. Yet, while these two men are brought into our mind, Gaskell reminds us how cultural memory works:

But the memory of man fades away. A few old people can still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot,—died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away. This is the form into which popular feeling, and ignorance of the real facts, have moulded the story. Not long since a lady went to the 'Public Baths' a handsome stone building erected on the very site of widow Dobson's cottage, and finding all the rooms engaged she sat down and had some talk with the bathing woman; and, as it chanced, the conversation fell on Philip Hepburn and the legend of his fate. (434)

The very personal love story that the novel has recounted is now nothing more than a legend or a myth, a part of the town that helps build its character and local color for the tourists who come there for the bathhouse. Just as I have posited Sylvia's choosing Philip suggests a less bloody future for England, the legend favors Philip as the one in the right, a man who was cruelly treated but over the course of time has been proven true of heart and mind.

Charley, as a representative of the past, is less clearly present at the novel's end, but his influence is still felt. Though the common favor runs with Philip, Sylvia's reputation has not been completely tarnished:

‘I knew an old man when I was a girl,’ said the bathing woman, ‘as could niver abide to hear t’ wife blamed. He would say nothing again’ th’ husband; he used to say as it were not fit for men to be judging; that she had had her sore trial, as well as Hepburn hisself.’

The lady asked, ‘What became of the wife?’

‘She was a pale, sad woman, allays dressed in black. I can just remember her when I was a little child, but she died before her daughter was well grown up; and Miss Rose took t’ lassie, as had always been like her own.’ (434-35)

The myth views Sylvia as having a heart of stone and cruelly leaving Philip to die alone, but an alternate version of the tale passed down from word-of-mouth serves to counter the legend by restoring Sylvia’s complexity. This old man is unnamed, and we get no other details about him, but in his feelings towards both Philip and Sylvia he has the same feelings that Charley Kinraid would have. This old man may not be Charley, but through his passed-down ideas, we see how the third member of the main love triangle had a loving respect for both the object of his affections and the man who saved his life.

The last lingering thread that this final section must tie up is that of the child Philip and Sylvia had. Gaskell has the conversation turn towards her to show how fully England has moved on since the Napoleonic wars and how it has further to go:

‘And the daughter?’

‘One o’ th’ Fosters, them as founded t’ Old Bank left her a vast o’ money; and she were married to distant cousin of theirs, and went off to settle in America many and many a year ago.’ (435)

While Sylvia and Philip both lived and died in Monkshaven, their daughter is able to go to America and start a new life. She represents the more personal outcome of the novel’s romance, so she has her own life, a narrative of which we are only granted this quick access to, while her mother and father are more tied into the town of Monkshaven. The mythological nature of this end-scene shows the town moving on with the future while dealing with the past in a way noted by Judith Herman: “folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their

stories are told” (1). The sound of the waves and the legends of the cruel wife show a town that barely remembers Sylvia, Philip, or Charley despite being very much a reflection of them and their personal strife; it is only through telling their story, be it Gaskell’s narrative or that of the unnamed old man, that their spirits can be exorcised. Thus, the novel itself acts in order to bring peace back to an England haunted by war and its aftermath, all through the presentation of a love triangle.

As with *Sylvia’s Lovers*, the women in the *Miss Saigon* love triangle also serve as representatives of the place they come from; because the gender ratio is flipped, though, the choice goes from a woman/country picking between soldiers to a soldier picking between women/countries. Both of Chris’s wives fit into stereotypes which are bound to their homelands. In her article “The Bind of Representation: Performing and Consuming Hypersexuality in *Miss Saigon*,” Celine Parreñas Shimizu describes the musical in a manner that encapsulates this: “the blockbuster musical hit *Miss Saigon* re-enacts on stage the warring encounter between Vietnam and the US through a narrative of interracial bodies enmeshed in sexual relations” (249). Chris’s wife in America, Ellen, fills the role of the woman worth fighting for, a woman who represents the best of the soldier’s homeland who will be there when he gets back from war and will provide him with a stable domestic life. She is seen to fit this role as the audience’s introduction to her is with the introduction of his American homelife, where she is the (attempt at a) calming force for him in their bed, and he reinforces this in the song “The Confrontation” when he tells her: “Lots of guys came back and had no life/I had you.” This suggests that the military was one life, and the domestic sphere is another, and Ellen is the homebound figure of domesticity in his life. Shimizu notes that because Ellen stands in for America, “the musical concludes with the American wife as a pillar of motherhood and the proper wife in the family and nation” (249).

Kim, Chris's Vietnamese wife is even more tied into her country, as lyrics repeatedly tell the audience. Shimizu believes that Kim's characterization makes her less complex and more "a repository of racial and sexual anxiety in the post-Vietnam era" (252). An early example of this is after Kim and Chris spend their first night together and he tells her he has no idea who she really is; her response both places her within a defined type and tonally accuses Chris (and the audience) for assuming she exists solely within that type:

Do you want one more tale of a Vietnam girl?
Want to know I was bound to a man I don't love?
Do you want to be told how my village was burned?
Want to hear how my family was blasted away?
How I ran from the rice field and saw them in flames?
How my parents were bodies whose faces were gone?
I have had my fill of pain.
I will not look back again.
I would rather die.

Lyrics like that make it easy to understand why, according to Jeffrey A. Keith in "Producing *Miss Saigon*: Imaginings, Realities, and the Sensual Geography of Saigon," Alain Boublil, the musical's lyricist, admits in interviews that he "began seeing Kim as a stand-in for an entire culture" (270). With both Ellen and Kim so firmly situated in their environments, Chris's choice becomes more about countries than women.

Besides her type as the terrorized Vietnamese villager, Kim's connection to her land is cemented by the title "Miss Saigon." Throughout the musical, there are several characters who take on this title. Gigi Van Tranh, a stripper at Dreamland with Kim, is the first to get the title after a john, Chris's best friend John, bribes The Engineer, the owner of Dreamland. Gigi uses her time with John to ask him to take her to America, and he rebuffs her. This leads her into singing "The Movie in My Mind," a song that demonstrates how no matter how many nights she

works at Dreamland, she still is entranced by the illusion of what a soldier is and then has her hopes dashed by reality:

They are not nice, they're mostly noise.
They swear like men, they screw like boys.
I know there's nothing in their hearts,
But every time I take one in my arms,
It starts: the move in my mind,
The dream they leave behind,
A scene I can't erase,
And in a strong G. I.'s embrace,
Flee this life, flee this place.

With Gigi's hopes dashed by the hollowness of her Miss Saigon title, the crown is free to later transfer to The Engineer himself. He sings "If You Want to Die in Bed" while packing his things to leave Vietnam for Bangkok with Kim, and while getting nostalgic over his trinkets he sings:

This was my greatest hit.
Miss Saigon, in her crown
I made queen of the town.
I got 'em paying more
For just another whore

His self-coronation is played for laughs as he acknowledges the title solely existed to cheat American soldiers out of more money. He is not able to hold onto his nostalgic glory for long, however, as once he gets to Bangkok he is unable to maintain his independent status and is often humiliated in front of possible johns by his employer. Unlike those two, Kim seems to rightfully earn the title after she has won the heart of Chris and the girls of Dreamland unite to crown her with more heartfelt pomp and circumstance than in the other occasions.⁴⁵ Gigi Van Tranh and The Engineer playact with the crown and are eventually rebuffed, while Kim's ceremonial coronation allows her to continue acting as the true Miss Saigon even as she faces hardships.

⁴⁵ The difference between Gigi's and Kim's coronations is further emphasized by Gigi doing a quick reprise of "The Movie in My Mind" as she prepares for Kim's wedding in which she states that Kim has been able to transform the "movie" into a reality.

Even though Kim is meant as a positive representation of Vietnam, she still acts as a reduction of the country, although I believe that the make-up of the triangle in *Miss Saigon* further complicates this inevitable reduction.⁴⁶ Jameson states that, “it does not matter much that the radical otherness of the culture in question is praised or valorized positively...the essential operation is that of differentiation, and once that has been accomplished, the mechanism [Edward] Said denounces [orientalism] has been set in place” (175). Kim, no matter how much the audience is meant to sympathize with her plight, is “different” than what the audience in the West End or on Broadway are typically used to, so she becomes an exotic representation of an entire foreign culture. Jameson goes on to say that:

on the other hand, I don’t see how a first-world intellectual can avoid this operation without falling back into some liberal and humanistic universalism: it seems to me that one of our basic political tasks lies precisely in the ceaseless effort to remind the American public of the radical difference of other national situations. (175)

Jameson believes that the only way to possibly avoid orientalism with characters like Kim is to embrace universalism. *Miss Saigon* on the surface falls into the trap by “remind[ing] the American public of the radical difference of other national situations” through the romantic rivalry between Kim and Ellen, but their relationship is not that simplistic. Ellen is introduced with the song “I Still Believe” which is a duet with Kim; even though neither woman definitively knows about the other at this point, the duet joins them in sharing a similar sentiment. Their similarities are further emphasized in “Room 317” when they first meet and their matching personalities clash and both cling to their beliefs, the same way they did in “I Still Believe.” Their relationship avoids full universalism, however as the differences between their nations is shown by Ellen offering to help support the child and Kim turning down her pity-charity (the

⁴⁶ Ellen also acts as a reduction of America, but this is less problematic than the depiction of Kim.

refuge of many Western philanthropists including Dickens's dreadful Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House*). In showing the relationship between Vietnam and America through the interactions of Chris's wives, *Miss Saigon* demonstrates more how the women are alike but have differences based on economic and geographic constraints more than cultural archetypes.

The interesting dynamic between Kim and Ellen does not easily fit into the Sedgwickian triangle format for various reasons. In *Between Women*, Sharon Marcus differentiates her book's goals from *Between Men* by stating in the introduction that "there are lesbians in this book...but this book is not only about lesbians; nor is it about the lesbian potential of all relationships between women" (2). While Sedgwick argued the homosocial undertones of Victorian romantic triangles with two men were implicitly homosexual, Marcus says that Victorian triangles that consisted of two women were very different because of "a fundamental but curiously overlooked point: even within a single class or generation, there were many different kinds of relationships between women" (2). While that is Marcus's reasoning for her discussion of women's relationships with each other in Victorian literature, she limits herself to this time period because "women, sexuality, and marriage began to change dramatically in the 1880s" (6). If the last decades of the Victorian period were too different from the range of 1830-80 that Marcus considers, then the temporal setting of *Miss Saigon* would be even more dramatic in its differences in gendered relationships. Because the relationship between two women in a love triangle is thus different than the relationship between two men in a similar situation, and because the Victorian period is so far removed from the Vietnam War, there is not an easy one-to-one correlation between the relationship Charley and Philip have with the one Kim and Ellen form. Thus, the allegorical outcome of the triangle must also change.

As the allegorical choice is now between countries instead of a choice made by a country, the end result of *Sylvia's Lovers* is reversed; instead of the romance showing personal strife reflected in the society, the international strife is reflected in the personal. The switch from two men to two women is less a reversal and more a progression, as Bourrier writes that the female equivalent of the weak-man/strong-man relationship is “the fortunate fair-haired woman and the unhappy-dark haired woman” (6). In the 25th anniversary production of *Miss Saigon*, this is put on stage literally as Kim has dark hair and Ellen is blond.⁴⁷ The overlapping relationships Chris has with his two wives mimics the way the military was interacting with the two countries. This is best exemplified in the “Fall of Saigon” sequence that is staged so as to maximize the confusion felt in the moment when America suddenly left Saigon, and Chris suddenly leaves Kim. This confusion is brought about through props, such as a fence that is able to switch sides in an effect that mimics the breaking of the cinematic 180° rule and an authentic helicopter that was meant to provide such a spectacle that the eye is distracted from the character drama below, and a large cast, both of Vietnamese citizens and American soldiers who can hide and disguise the appearances and disappearances of Chris and Kim.⁴⁸ This scene inextricably links the inadvertent dissolution of Chris’s first marriage and the military’s abandonment of Vietnam. Chris’s relationship with Ellen also mirrors how he views the military’s connection to America; in “Why, God, Why?” Chris sings that:

When I went home before
No one talked of the war
What they knew from TV
Didn’t have a thing to do with me

⁴⁷ All character and staging descriptions are taken from the taped recording, *Miss Saigon: 25th Anniversary*.

⁴⁸ The 180° rule states that a camera should not cross an imaginary axis in order to help align the audience with a sense of space between characters. Crossing the line, as *Miss Saigon*’s staging does, is used to create a sense of disorientation.

He exhibits a feeling of separation from and disdain for how the average American did not understand his experience of the war because of how it was being portrayed on television, yet when he is married to Ellen, he keeps things hidden from her and thus propagates the same relationship. Because the triangle is two-thirds female, with women seen as embodying their countries, *Miss Saigon* comes to the opposite conclusion of *Sylvia's Lovers* when questioning whether the society influences the individual or vice versa.

While the town of Monkshaven is as traumatized by the press gangs as Daniel or Charley, Chris's homeland is untroubled except for the places that he has touched. War has had an effect on his American landscape, but it is not the same as how Monkshaven itself trembles when the ships arrive. There are protests, but when Chris sings "what they knew from TV/Didn't have a thing to do with me," he is emphasizing how such protests often are disparate from the men they are meant to be protesting for. There is also John's charity that helps support the Vietnamese children of G.I.s, which does affect Chris in that it is how he finds out about his child with Kim, but this seems to be a patch on soldiers' existing trauma that does not do much good (Chris does find and support his son, but it comes at the cost of Kim's life). The only American space that is as traumatized as Chris in *Miss Saigon* is his marriage bed, where his trauma is infecting his domestic life and posing a threat to Ellen. When the navy arrives in Monkshaven, "in an instant there rose the sharp simultaneous cry of many people in rage and despair" (Gaskell 28); the townspeople have as violent a reaction to the military as Daniel Robson does, but it is not caused by him. The fear that Ellen feels after the Vietnam War is directly caused by Chris in how he wakes up in the middle of the night flailing and screaming. Both show the homeland is affected by war, but in the Victorian text it is in sympathy with the traumatized individual, while in the modern text it is as a result of a veteran spreading his trauma; it is the individual soldier who

creates fear instead of the government and military at large like in *Sylvia's Lovers*. Because the soldier is the one now traumatizing his homeland, the government that originally sent him to war is seen as less culpable in national grief.

Both texts make their respective cases through placing either the individuals or the culture as background; this placement allows the foreground to be seen as a natural extension instead of a separate being. *Sylvia's Lovers* does this by starting and ending the book at a point from the future when the main characters are all presumably dead. This allows Gaskell to begin from a point when she can judge the past as being under “all this tyranny” of the press-gang while safe in the knowledge that impressment is currently illegal (10). At the end, she literally puts the characters in the background, as Philip becomes represented by the crashing of the waves, Sylvia is demoted to a mythically cruel and self-serving town figure, and Charley exists only possibly as the savior of her reputation (434-35). Lawson argues that the message of *Sylvia's Lovers* is that the “romantic plot encapsulates public issues just as cultural contexts affect private affairs” (39); I believe that while *Sylvia's Lovers* covers both those ideas, it prioritizes the former and that *Miss Saigon* would later focus on the latter. *Miss Saigon* prioritizes its characters while the societal unrest is mostly mentioned in passing through lines like the aforementioned “What they knew from TV.” Even the “Fall of Saigon” sequence that relies on spectacle was deemed by Peter Filichia in *Strippers, Showgirls, and Sharks: A Very Opinionated History of the Broadway Musicals That Did Not Win the Tony Award* as succeeding more through “the agony on the faces of those who were left behind” than the famous stage bound helicopter (95). The reference to Americans knowing Vietnam through television would be clear to audiences in the late 1980s and onward as discussing the televised visuals of soldiers in Vietnam, as well as the anti-war protests covered on the news. This single line is enough to

evoke many visuals in the minds of each audience member, so that the play can then focus on presenting its character-based narrative knowing that the audience will have filled in the background with their own personal knowledge. The end of *Sylvia's Lovers* operates under the same logic, as the reader is able to apply the knowledge they have gained over the previous 45 chapters to fill in how the characters fit into the tourist trap that Monkshaven has since become. Therefore, while both *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* use military love triangles as the center of their narratives, the differences between the two allow us to extrapolate the shift in thinking about trauma on personal and national levels; *Sylvia Lovers's* focus on the town of Monkshaven prioritizes the mark trauma leaves on a country, while *Miss Saigon's* leaving the international politics to the audience's imagination allows the focus to be on the traumas of individual characters.

Conclusion

Though it is at the forefront of *Sylvia's Lovers* yet the background of *Miss Saigon*, the texts both exhibit the unwilling recruitment of soldiers as a connecting point between the Napoleonic Wars and the Vietnam War. Impressment and the lottery draft are very different in practice, but both had the destabilizing effect of removing men from their homes and loved ones. As previously quoted, Gaskell decries the "tyranny" of the press-gangs and is thankful they are no longer legal in Britain (10). Gaskell's novel starts its narrative in 1796, and *Miss Saigon*, set 179 years later in 1975, tells the story of an American soldier who was drafted to fight in Vietnam. The matter of soldiers forced into service and the resultant protests gave the wars very similar contexts, though a major difference between the two is public perception. Gaskell notes repeatedly how Daniel Robson and those like him "had a true John Bullish interest in war, without very well knowing what the English were fighting for. But in those days, so long as they

fought the French for any cause, or for no cause at all, every true patriot was satisfied” (86).

Even though these men were very much behind the national cause, they still hated the idea and practice of impressment. Gaskell describes the townspeople as acting “like a nest o’ wasps, when yo’ve set your foot in t’ midst. They were so mad, they were ready for t’ fight t’ very pavin’ stones” at Monkshaven’s first press-gang sighting of the whaling season (48). This paradoxical public attitude was not mirrored in Americans’ reception of the Vietnam War:

A notorious example of community rejection in recent history involves the war in Vietnam, an undeclared war, fought without formal ratification by the established processes of democratic decision-making. Unable to develop a public consensus for war or to define a realistic military objective, the United States government nevertheless conscripted millions of young men for military service. As casualties mounted, public opposition to the war grew. Attempts to contain the antiwar sentiment led to policy decisions that isolated soldiers both from civilians and from one another. Soldiers were dispatched to Vietnam and returned to their homes as individuals, with no opportunity for organized farewells, for bonding within their units, or for public ceremonies of return. Caught in a political conflict that should have been resolved before their lives were placed at risk, returning soldiers often felt traumatized a second time when they encountered public criticism and rejection of the war they had fought and lost. (Herman 71)

Instead of separating the war effort from the forced recruitment, the 20th century response was to protest both. The protests in both centuries worked as neither country continued with the practice, and the press-gang protests had the added effect of promoting “modern methods of accountability and record keeping” due to the lack of notice regarding the impressed (Krawczyk 93). The settings of both *Sylvia’s Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* feature protests against the militaries taking men away from their homes, but the more recent setting showed how the public began to turn against war as a whole because of this practice.

A strain that further connects these two texts and lends them lasting relevancy is the presentation of how disabled soldiers are treated upon their return home.⁴⁹ Many British soldiers

⁴⁹ For further discussion of the treatment of wounded soldiers, please refer back to my first chapter on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s character Dr. John H. Watson.

returned home from the Napoleonic wars with missing limbs, so much so that Princess Caroline is recorded as having asked “is every Englishman without an arm or a leg?” when she arrived for her wedding to the Prince of Wales in 1795 (Krawczyk 97). According to the historical reality show *Victorian Slum House*, legs would be “cut off free of charge.” However, if a poor man wanted the “Rolls Royce” of artificial legs, it was worth “20 Victorian pounds...equivalent to more than two years’ rent” (“The 1860s”). Vanessa Warne further elucidates in “‘To Invest a Cripple with Peculiar Interest’: Artificial Legs and Upper-Class Amputees at Mid-Century” that even if “a poor patient might one day find himself able to afford a sophisticated prosthesis,” the so-called “poor man’s stump” would render it unusable (83). This term refers to how surgeons would remove different amounts of leg depending not on the case but on the class of the patient and how much leg their social status required (Warne 83). Philip maintains all his limbs in *Sylvia’s Lovers*, but still is heavily wounded. Because of his injuries, Philip was subject to the Victorian “idea that the disabled body was a feeling body” (Bourrier 3). This idea of feelings being equivalent to physical injuries explains why during World War I, “the symptoms of mental breakdown were attributed to a physical cause. The British psychologist Charles Myers, who examined some of the first cases, attributed their symptoms to the concussive effects of exploding shells and called the resulting nervous disorder ‘shell shock’” (Herman 20). Even though what is now termed post-traumatic stress is no longer seen as inherently physical, this connection between feeling and disability allows Victorian wounds to be read as analogous in certain ways. Therefore, Philip’s wounds, along with Charley’s fixation on his near-death experience and Daniel’s vivid, recurring nightmares, can be read and understood alongside Chris’s nightmares in *Miss Saigon*. These characters and the examinations of their various conditions remain relevant as the military continues to exploit them; Krawczyk notes how

similar the treatment of those wounded at Waterloo is to modern “images in the popular press of amputees fitted with cutting-edge prosthetics and jogging with the Commander-in-Chief—and of rhetoric that justifies the continuance of war as a compensatory obligation” (102). These images attempt to avoid discussions of emotional distress, just as Chris does with Ellen, while promoting visible wounds as heroic and necessary sacrifices, as Gaskell picked up on through the reactions of people to Philip.

Such narratives are important to keep in mind as the continued downplaying of the psychological effects of post-traumatic stress in “good” soldiers leads to trauma being recognized as only affecting the person when it in fact touches whole nations. Accepting that whole countries are to blame is not an easy ask, as Filichia notes a possible reason *Miss Saigon* lost the Tony for Best New Musical was because “*Miss Saigon*’s message was too painful” (95). He believes the focus was on “Chris, an American serviceman, ultimately causing a Vietnamese woman pain from which she would never recover” (95). While that argument has validity, it means the show puts most of the blame onto the soldier and not on the government that placed him in that position and created the environment that led to the disastrous fallout of their romance. In *Sylvia’s Lovers*, the descriptions of Monkshaven, particularly the end when Philip is transformed into the crashing waves, demonstrates how Victorian novels were more able to admit the trauma that war caused to the nation, but the individual blame comes through in small moments like the story of Alice Rose and her husband that beat her, with the implication that Charley would do the same to Sylvia (Gaskell 434; 210). These examples are still tied into the land, as they are based on passed-down tales more so than on present actions, but it is clear that the trend towards personal blame has started.

The desire to not see modern Western texts as allegories, as hypothesized by Filichia, perhaps ties back into Jameson's reasoning for only discussing third-world texts. Maybe it is not so much that Western texts fit into the national allegorical mode as easily, but that our nations are less willing to see ourselves as a unified whole than we are willing to view foreign nations as easily reductive. Instead of saying "all third-world texts are necessarily...allegorical" like Jameson, I would posit that all third-world texts are positioned as national allegories by Western audiences while texts about our own countries trouble our "deep cultural conviction that the lived experiences of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics" (165). National allegory exists without national boundaries, but for a Western audience, our own biases have generally trained us to only recognize them in texts from so-called faraway lands. If more texts from America and other Western nations were widely read through the lens of a national allegory, that would necessitate a discussion of how culpable nations and governments are in producing war trauma. This resistance towards self-reflection infects texts like *Miss Saigon* that operate as national allegory yet still prescribe to the modern view of trauma as inflicted by the individual on his surroundings; America is a part of *Miss Saigon*'s national allegory, but as represented by Ellen, she is the one being traumatized by Chris instead of the one sending him off to be traumatized.

Sylvia's Lovers and *Miss Saigon* both use the idea of the stereotypical sexualized soldier for their main characters, but they give the trope complexities that allow it to have deeper and more relevant meanings. At first glance, the texts may seem to be an odd pairing, especially as they were written so far apart from each other. However, as Keith points out, *Miss Saigon* is a "19th Century storyline refracted through French imaginings and Western journalism" (270); and while *Sylvia's Lovers* has been accused of being too melodramatic, Sylvia only technically

marries one man, whereas *Miss Saigon* gets closer “to the even more dramatic [in comparison to divorce] plot device of the bigamous marriage” that was often used in Victorian literature (Phegley 21). Neither text mentions post-traumatic Stress, as both are set before the term was made official, but modern audiences will recognize symptoms such as particular nightmares and attempts to restage the past as emblematic of trauma. Trauma is now almost unavoidable in presentations of soldiers, but by putting it at the forefront of romantic triangles, *Sylvia’s Lovers* and *Miss Saigon* demonstrate the cultural shift in recognizing trauma as a national issue to a personalized concern. Unfortunately, the personalization of trauma has led to many narratives that suggest soldiers are a threat to the normal way of life instead of the government that sent those soldiers to war.

Chapter 3. “The Hollow Helmets of the Fallen,” or: The Dehumanization of the Inhuman

The chivalrous knight in shining armor is an image that is still often brought up as a representative of a masculine ideal. As Frances Gies writes in *The Knight in History*,

Of all the many types of soldiers that have appeared on the military stage in the course of time, from the Greek hoplite, the Roman legionary, and the Ottoman janissary to members of the specialized branches of modern armed forces, none has had a longer career than the knight of the European Middle Ages, and none has had an equal impact on history, social and cultural as well as political. (2)

However, with drone warfare becoming more and more prominent, the military uniform is getting further and further away from that old-fashioned ideal. Even though medieval knights were buried beneath all their armor and modern soldiers can operate drones from far away in relatively casual wear, both serve to make war more inhuman; instead of completely removing any trace of humanity, these different military aesthetics retain a human touch while dampening mercy and compassion often as a result of trauma. This connection is demonstrated by looking at Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885) in comparison with the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU; 2008-present). By making these men more heroic and less humane, such texts widen the divide between soldiers and citizens. Characters such as King Arthur and Tony Stark demonstrate that not only are soldiers different from civilians because of their military experiences, but that this difference arises from a detachment from humanity as a whole.

As demonstrated by my main texts in this chapter, both the knights of the round table and the Avengers are revered for their humanity and individual personalities, but when they go into battle this humanity is forced into the background by their use of technology. Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* is composed of twelve poems published between 1859 and 1885 which details the rise and fall of King Arthur as he takes over Camelot from his father King Uther before eventually dying on the battlefield at the hands of Mordred. In between the ascension to the

throne and the fatal battle, Tennyson includes stories of several of the famed knights of the round table and their various (often romantic) adventures. The MCU is also a years-long endeavor that began in 2008 with *Iron Man*, directed by Jon Favreau. Tony Stark, Iron Man's real name, was a rich playboy who rose to heroic prominence after creating his Iron Man suit to escape a terrorist organization, called The Seven Rings, that was holding him captive, and then helped form the Avengers, a group of heroes many of whom had their own movies. Eventually Stark died in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019, Anthony and Joe Russo), but the MCU carries on. Judith Herman points out the importance of strong leaders like King Arthur or Tony Stark when she writes, "the strongest protection against psychological breakdown was the morale and leadership of the small fighting unit" (25). But no matter how personable these knights or superheroes are, their bodies are vulnerable in their natural states, so armor is needed to make them valuable as war machines.⁵⁰ However, the humanity still lingers, which ultimately leads to their downfall. Both the worlds of the MCU and Tennyson's Camelot are undone by the fallibility of the human body, even as both demonstrate how technology seeks to eliminate as much humanity as possible. Taken together, these sets of texts demonstrate how an overreliance on technology has been a common thread through many wars, and how continued advances in technology make it easier to kill not only enemy combatants but also the humanity of soldiers.

For this chapter, I am using Tennyson's Arthurian poems because his works represent the Victorian fascination with the trappings of medieval literature. Tennyson and many others in the Victorian period homed in on the material aspects of medieval texts, as seen by accounts of how "armor came down from the attic, and antique dealers prospered" (Gies 206). A lot of the more

⁵⁰ As seen in *Avengers: Endgame*, even the Hulk, perhaps the most impregnable Avenger, can be badly injured through his use of the Infinity Gauntlet (see Fig. 4).



Figure 4. *Avengers: Endgame*. Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

unsavory aspects of the knights of the round table were scrubbed to meet public demands of decency, so what was left was their suits of armor.⁵¹ This led to many wealthy Victorians collecting suits of armors and weapons, some of whom would host or attend events like the Eglinton Tournament, “the most memorable single expression of Victorian enthusiasm...organized in 1839 by a rich young Tory lord, the earl of Eglinton” (Gies 206).⁵² Sometimes these events would lead to the kind of debauchery they had erased from many editions, such as the sexual escapades at a tournament on October 15, 1875 given in honor of Doll Zouche which ended when she “galloped romantically away on her favourite pony,” an incident which began divorce proceedings from her husband, as described by Mark Girouard in *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (205-06). While this proves Foucault’s argument that the Victorians were not exactly “the image of the imperial prude,” it

⁵¹ Robert Hamer’s *Kind Hearts and Coronets* uses this Victorian distaste for the more sexual aspects of medieval literature to show how old-fashioned, stupid, and boring the Reverend character is by bragging about his Cathedral as such: “And I always say that my west window has all the exuberance of Chaucer without, happily, any of the concomitant crudities of his period”

⁵² Even critics of this cultural movement relied on materials for their satire, as the rainy weather during the Eglinton tournament led to “the knight-with-the-umbrella [becoming] a derisive symbol” (Gies 207).

was still the kind of thing that was covered up so that the focus could remain on the medieval trappings (3).⁵³ Tennyson may not have been the first or last author to cover the life and death of King Arthur, but his version of events serves as a great representative for the material-focused Victorian brand of medievalism.

The Victorian interest (and therefore my chapter's interest) in armor and weaponry demonstrates the view of knights as weapons in and of themselves; Jeffrey J. Cohen refers to this as the inhuman circuit in his book *Medieval Identity Machines*. He introduces this theory by stating that this term describes "an identity machine that violates the sanctity of the human body by disregarding the natural boundaries of fleshly form" (37-38). The theory of the inhuman circuit says that a knight is more than just a human; he is a human plus his armor, shield, sword, horse, and any other accoutrements he uses for battle. This theory is written as applies to medieval literature, but it also works with Victorian medievalism and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In the medieval texts that Cohen wrote about, the human in the armor was still a major component of the equation; in medievalist texts and superhero stories, the human's role has become much less important. The Victorians viewed the humans as necessary to inhabit the suits of armor but stripped these bodies of much of their human nature by censoring their sexual proclivities. Tony Stark, particularly as played by Robert Downey, Jr., is charismatic and very personable, but the audience is often reminded that his heart is operated purely by machinery; in later appearances, even the human body may be missing as he sends out drone suits equipped with speakers for him to communicate through. As the descriptor suggests, the "knight in shining

⁵³ Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* that "it is a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch" (Foucault 12).

armor” is and has always been applicable to the theory of the inhuman circuit, but Victorian medievalism and modern superhero films tend to amplify the levels of inhumanity.

The emphasis on soldiers melding (both physically and psychologically) with machinery in this chapter acts as an extension of the ideas present in my previous two chapters. In my first chapter I discussed how over the course of many adaptations, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Dr. Watson has become more and more violent in his (or her) trauma response, while in my second chapter I argued that such villainization of the veteran has led to the absolution of the nation as a whole. With the nation absolved, that means that the civilians that make up that nation are each presumably unmarred by war; this chapter will analyze how such perceived innocence marks civilians as fundamentally different from soldiers like the knights of the round table or the Avengers. Because of the different approaches in each period to trauma as discussed, the ramifications of the soldier/citizen divide change, but all the texts so far mentioned in this dissertation, and especially those I will highlight in this chapter, make it clear that there exists a gulf of understanding between soldiers and those they are meant to defend. The popularity of the MCU, and also of Arthurian tales, demonstrates the reach of national allegory, even as it might go unnoticed by the consumers at large: “such allegorical structures, then, are not so much absent from first-world cultural texts as they are *unconscious*, and therefore they must be deciphered by interpretive mechanisms that necessarily entail a whole social and historical critique of our current first-world situation” (Jameson 178; emphasis in original). The allegorical content of Marvel movies might seem like “a half-forgotten habit, noticed only out of the corner of our eye,” but their unquestionable presence “nonetheless grounds the conceptual flight of fancy and certifies the reality of the disembodied intellectual operation” (Jameson 42). The increased reliance on technology in these movies as well as in Tennyson’s Camelot therefore stands in for

how military technology is changing the nation and its soldiers and citizen (and the relationship therein).

This chapter will be broken into three parts and a conclusion. The first section will delve deeper into the Arthurian roots of Marvel and specify how Marvel and Tennyson both operate in the same register even if one is not a direct link to the other. I further argue here that the use of Shakespearean style comedy acts as a device to emphasize the soldier/citizen divide. Following that, I will examine the deaths of King Arthur and Tony Stark and the resultant clash in each case between expectations of glory and the reality of trauma. The final section will bring those discussions together to look at the use of armor and drones and how the human past prefigured the inhuman present and warns about the nonhuman future. Through these three sections, I will argue about how King Arthur, Tony Stark, and their acolytes fall into the national allegory mode of having a person represent a nation even as they are somewhat stripped of their personhood. In my previous chapters, characters such as Dr. John Watson and Sylvia Robson were able to represent their environments because they eventually become reduced to almost mythological beings, whereas King Arthur and Tony Stark are instead reduced to symbols (respectively, Excalibur and the arc reactor heart). The combination of the allegorical need for personhood and the inhuman circuit's necessary inhumanity may seem uneasy in theory, but by structuring this chapter in such a way that goes from character creation to their death and ending with their symbolic legacies, the possible paradox will be explained.

Much Ado About Arthuriana

Marvel comics have long been connected to the mythology of King Arthur, rooting their own visions of America's heroes in the ideals of England's, particularly in the two-story arc "Doomquest" (1981). This story features Tony Stark, a rich playboy with the superhero identity

Iron Man, who, according to Terence McSweeney in *Avengers Assemble! Critical Perspectives on the Marvel Cinematic Universe*, was introduced “in *Tales of Suspense* #39 in March 1963...just two years after President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave his farewell address warning of the encroaching impact of the Military Industrial Complex” (42). In an introduction to a 2008 edition of *Iron Man: Doomquest* [republished in the 2018 Kindle version] the author David Michelinie states that sending Iron Man to Camelot is not a stretch because that particular superhero is a modern comparative to the knights of the round table:

we decided to take a step back and view the characters [Tony Stark and villain Doctor Doom] from a new perspective: what was the one thing that most set these guys apart from other heroes and villains in the Marvel Universe? It was in that sharper light that the answer became both obvious and visual: armor.⁵⁴ And what other characters in fiction tend to wear armor? Why, knights, of course! Our excitement almost exploded as we realized we’d hit on the perfect angle: We’d take our 20th century knights and throw them into the world of real knights, contrast their modern viewpoints and sensibilities with views of centuries past. And with Bob’s [Layton, co-plotter and artist] fondness for and knowledge of Arthurian legend as our guide, we were on our way.

In this arc, Iron Man goes to the past and in order to return to his present has to fight alongside King Arthur and the knights of the round table against the forces of Doctor Doom and the classic Arthurian villain Morgana LeFay. While fighting with the king and knights of Camelot, it is clear that Tony Stark’s suit of iron is just another iteration of their suits of armor. This connection is emphasized by issue #33 of *What If?* in which Doctor Doom refuses to help Stark go back to the future (Grant). In this parallel universe, after Doom has abandoned Stark in the past, Stark uses his suit to help Camelot continue to hold off the military advances of LeFay and is inducted into the Round Table for his efforts (Fig. 5). However, when a solar eclipse makes it impossible to use solar power for energy, the inevitable happens and Mordred murders Arthur.

⁵⁴ While this might have been a clear distinction in the Marvel comics of the 1980s, the MCU has armored many more heroes and villains, perhaps most notably Tom Holland’s Spider-Man.

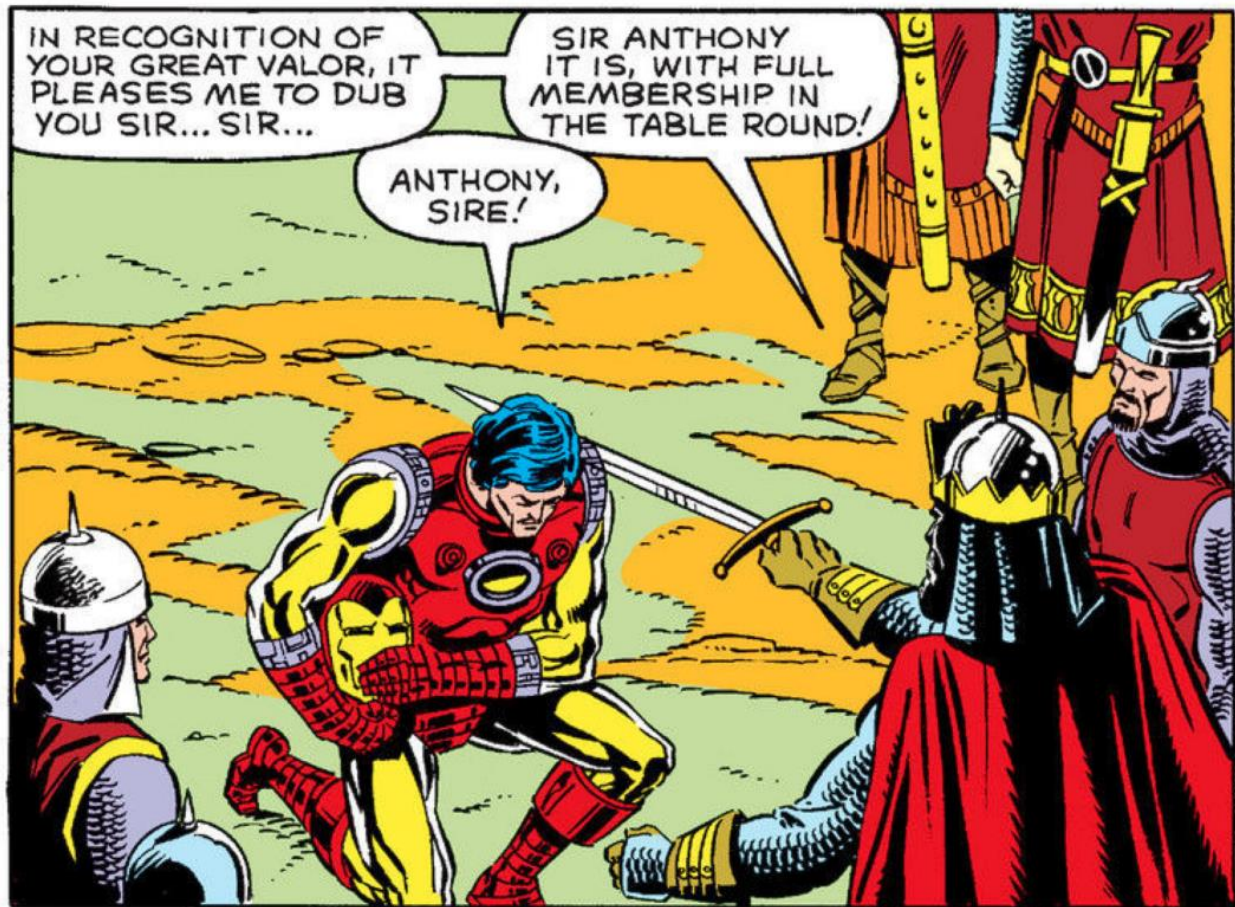


Figure 5. Panel from “What If Iron Man Was Trapped in the Time of King Arthur?” by Steven Grant. *What If?*, vol. 1 no. 33, March 16, 1982. *What If? Classic: The Complete Collection Vol. 3*, Marvel, 2020, p. 8.

While this signals the end of Camelot in most tellings, here Arthur feels he has a worthy successor and so Stark becomes the second King of Camelot (Fig. 6). By ending the story this way, Marvel posits that not only is Tony Stark worthy of being a knight at the round table, but that he is worthier than the others of taking over as King of Camelot. The Marvel connections to Arthurian legends have historically been strongest with Iron Man thanks to the acclaim and success of *Doomquest* and its legacy.

The MCU had been less explicit in its Arthurian connections than its source material until *Eternals* (2021, Chloé Zhao) suggested that Camelot may play an important part in the franchise going forward. This film introduced the immortal alien beings known as the Eternals who have



Figure 6. Panel from “What If Iron Man Was Trapped in the Time of King Arthur?” by Steven Grant. *What If?*, vol. 1 no. 33, March 16, 1982. *What If? Classic: The Complete Collection Vol. 3*, Marvel, 2020, p. 18.

protected humanity from creatures known as Deviants since 5000 BCE. At one point in the film, while the characters are preparing for battle, Thena, played by Angelina Jolie, arms herself with a sword that we are told is Excalibur; Sprite, played by Lia McHugh, sees this and remarks, “Arthur did always have a crush on you,” implying that not only does King Arthur exist in the MCU but that he has interacted and fought alongside some of its heroes. This aside alone could have been just a quick gag, but it gains relevance when viewed alongside the post-credits scene where Kit Harrington’s Dane Whitman is given the Ebony Blade in a case with the inscription “*mors mihi lucrum* [death is my reward],” which suggests that a future film or television series will feature Whitman as the hero known as Black Knight, an identity handed down to him from his medieval ancestors (Fig. 7). King Arthur himself may not appear in the MCU, but the mere mention of his name prepares the audience for the reveal of the Black Knight and his own famous (to comic readers, at the very least) sword. *Eternals* is an early part of the MCU’s Phase 4, and it is telling that in looking to the cinematic future it relies on references to the medieval (or, at the very least, medievalist) past.



Figure 7. *Eternals*. Directed by Chloé Zhao, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2021.

Before *Eternals* brought in actual medieval personages and artifacts, the MCU's foundational character, Downey, Jr.'s Tony Stark a.k.a. Iron Man, operated as a King Arthur-figure with Stark Tower as his own personal round table. Both Stark and Arthur take over their respective kingdoms after years away from public view, with *Iron Man* even having a presentation that refers to Tony Stark's taking over Stark Industries by saying "the prodigal son returns" while a magazine cover doubly emphasizing this is shown in triplicate (Fig. 8). Once enthroned, both men are forced to reckon with the legacies of their controversial fathers; an example of this is in the idyll "Gareth and Lynette" when King Arthur is holding court and is confronted by a widow:

Then came a widow crying to the King,
'A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
From my dead lord a field with violence:
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce, and left us neither gold nor field.' (ll.326-32)

Arthur responds not only by helping her out, but also by making a proclamation of how he will handle his father's legacy:

'Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so they say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!' (ll.336-41)

After years of prosperity, both men are killed in battles that are forecasted as fixed or necessary points in time; for King Arthur it is a mystical prophecy that he sadly must fulfill, while for Tony Stark his death is the necessary variable to save half of humanity according to Dr. Stephen



Figure 8. *Iron Man*. Directed by Jon Favreau, Paramount Pictures, 2008.

Strange (*Avengers: Endgame*).⁵⁵ Their rises and falls are meant to represent the state of the world around them, and the similarities in their paths suggest that both men come from similar environments; the Victorian view of medieval Britain can thus be compared to the technologically advanced surveillance state of post-9/11 America as represented by the MCU.

The path that these men share allows them both to be situated within the form of the national allegory. In *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*, Leo Braudy argues that the rise of Napoleon and the continued fascination with him as a figure and representative of France has “foreshadowed the twentieth-century politics of nations symbolized by a single individual who was not the monarch, but who was in effect the embodiment of the popular will” (285). Braudy suggests that this fascination is only going forth from the twentieth-century, though I believe that the impact started sooner after the Napoleonic wars. While *Idylls of the King* does use the monarch figure as the stand in for all of Britain, such is not always the case, as discussed in my chapter regarding *Sylvia’s Lovers*. However, I agree with Braudy that the conflation of Napoleon with all of France was influential in how future real-

⁵⁵ Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) is the “Sorcerer Supreme” and controls a device called the Eye of Agamotto which allows him to look at all possible futures.

life and fictional figures would stand out as the embodiment of their nations, such as King Arthur and Tony Stark, even if in such cases the allegory is something of which many audience members “are not necessarily aware but which catches our attention like a forgotten muscle” (Jameson 42). McSweeney notes that the use of national allegory is extremely prevalent in the MCU, even beyond Tony Stark as even Thor, who is not Earth-born, can be viewed as a stand-in for George W. Bush and his America (24).⁵⁶ What distinguishes Iron Man from the other heroes in the MCU is that he makes so many versions and copies of his suits so that it is never easily apparent if he is present. Similarly, when Arthur goes to court Guinevere in “The Coming of Arthur,” she is unable to figure out who he is

since he neither wore on helm or shield
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,
But rode a simple knight among his knights,
And many of these richer in arms than he,
She saw him not, or mark’d not, if she saw,
One among many, tho’ his face was bare. (ll. 49-54)

Like King Arthur, Stark’s presence can be felt even without his physical presence due to the nature of all-encompassing armor. They visually become just suits of armor instead of fully fledged individuals, which allows them to more easily be “absorbed into the standing army of the new national state, where...[they can lose their] distinctive identity” (Gies 6). Both of these sets

⁵⁶ “Even the Norse God of Thunder, Thor, who in spite of being from Asgard (one of the nine worlds of Norse mythology), emerges as distinctly American in the way he is constructed, both in the Americanisation of his values and Asgard’s depiction as a proto-American Empire. Kenneth Branagh’s *Thor* opens with Odin’s characterisation of Asgard as being a ‘beacon of hope shining across the stars’, heavily reminiscent of remarks made by many about America over the decades. For George H. W. Bush, America was ‘the last beacon of hope and strength around the world’ (1992), Barack Obama called America ‘the engine of the global economy and a beacon of hope around the world’ (2010) and George W. Bush stated in his address to the nation on the day after 9/11 that ‘America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining’ (2001c). These allusions and a narrative which follows an impetuous and vain young man on a journey to maturity led to many reviews with pun-laden titles like ‘The Summer’s New Hero: Thor-Ge W. Bush’ (Singer 2011) and Blockbuster: Bush v. Thor’ (Stewart 2011)” (McSweeney 24).

of texts engage with the national allegory mode as their heroes lose their personhood in defending the lands they love and shape.

As part of their national allegory, both *Idylls of the King* and the MCU push the idea that individual fortitude is the path to success, though the oft-ignored aspect of class disproves these ideals. In medieval texts, there are stories “of aspiring knights who were shepherds or cowherds or farmers before they decided to seek their fortune at Camelot, mirroring an actual world in which young men might dream of changing class solely by their strength in arms” (Braudy 25). This aspect makes the stories explicitly about trying to rise through the social ranks. However, Tennyson and Marvel ignore the class discussion as much as possible. Tennyson, as with much Victorian medievalism, treasures the so-called ideals of knightliness, because “whatever your class background, you could have a moral ancestry that stretched back to the Round Table, and under your black broadcloth wear the gleaming armor of the righteous warrior” (Braudy 289). The dream for lower- and middle-class readers went from wanting to climb the social ladder to ignoring the social ladder and believing that morals were enough to distinguish one’s self, even though the price of armor and other antiques that came into prominence at the historical point did make it very much about class. Similarly, the super-powered beings of the MCU are supposed to be heroes because of their moral rectitude and their extraordinary abilities. There is a reason, though, that the MCU started with Tony Stark and his vast wealth, and that the other heroes are only able to join the Avengers and make a larger positive difference in the world if they have access to him and his wealth; super-powered individuals with less wealth or connections are instead forced by the American capitalist system to be more local-minded (like the characters on the Netflix Marvel shows) or be super-villains like Michael Keaton’s Vulture in *Spider-Man*:

Homecoming (2017, Jon Watts).⁵⁷ Even though the Victorian readership and MCU's audience may "believe that they were engaged in a spiritual quest [rather] than in a materialistic conquest," the latter option is more truthful. Tennyson and the MCU may preach about individual moral strength, but wealth and access to it are critical to these heroes' successes.

A major component of the cinematic Stark is his relationship with Gwyneth Paltrow's Pepper Potts. Over the course of her seven film appearances, she has gone from Stark's assistant to the CEO of Stark Industries. In *Iron Man*, she and Stark have a flirtatiously fractious business relationship, though they do not kiss until the end of *Iron Man 2* (2010, Jon Favreau). They are dating in *The Avengers* (2012, Joss Whedon) and Stark agrees to give up his dangerous lifestyle for her at the end of *Iron Man 3* (2013, Shane Black) after she almost dies; he initiates the "Clean Slate Protocol" which blows up many, if not all, of his suits, and undergoes surgery so that his body no longer requires the suit to survive. However, by the time of his next appearance in the MCU he has apparently given up on this. Despite going back on this promise, they consider announcing their engagement to the world at the end of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. They are not married by the time Stark is stranded in space at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018, Anthony and John Russo), but *Avengers: Endgame* (2019, Anthony and John Russo) features Stark's return to Earth and includes a five-year time jump in which Stark and Potts get married and have a daughter named Morgan before Stark sacrifices himself to stop Thanos. Gwyneth Paltrow may not be in as many MCU movies as Robert Downey, Jr. but her character's influence is felt throughout because of how important their romance is.

Throughout all their appearances, their relationship is marked by their witty banter which aligns them with many cinematic lovers from the screwball comedy genre that was popular in

⁵⁷ I will not be using the Netflix Marvel shows for this dissertation as they are not considered part of the MCU canon.

1930s and 1940s Hollywood. In her essay “Bones, Balls, and Butterflies,” Sheila O’Malley notes that “the screwball-comedy era had dawned in 1934 with the one-two punch of Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* and [Howard] Hawks’s own madcap *Twentieth Century*.” In his liner notes for the 2001 Criterion edition of Preston Sturges’s 1941 screwball comedy *The Lady Eve*, James Harvey writes that the couple in that film, played by Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda, exhibit (in an extreme form) the typical screwball romance, with its “kind of energetic cruelty, a malicious exuberance.” He goes on to describe how “even when she is first seducing him, she does it with casual, happy, open contempt.” This same dynamic is present in Stark and Potts’s courtship; their flirtations often take the form of jabs and even when they are together as a couple they still interact via loving insults. One moment where this is clear is at the end of *Spider-Man: Homecoming* when Spider-Man decides not to reveal himself to the public, so Tony, Pepper, and Jon Favreau’s Happy Hogan must figure out a replacement announcement for the press:

Pepper: Are you kidding me? I have a room full of people in there waiting for some big announcement. What am I gonna tell them?

Tony: Think of something. How about, um, Hap, you still got that ring?

Happy: Do I—I—the engagement ring. Are you kidding? I’ve been carrying this since 2008.

Tony: Okay.

Pepper: I think I can think of something better than that.

Tony: Well, it would buy us a little time. [Pepper kisses Tony] Like we need time.

Pepper: I can’t believe you have that thing in your pocket.

Tony: Let me get the door for you, hon.

Pepper: I got it.

While that exchange may not be as barbed as some screwball banter, it still shows their loving combativeness; Tony tries to propose, Pepper makes fun of him for it, and when he tries to hold the door open for her, she shoots him down, but all the while it is clear they are very in love.

Harvey says that in *The Lady Eve*, “the oddest thing of all is that the effect of this anarchic, coldly brilliant comedy about the humiliation of a man by a woman, far from being unpleasant, is

not only exhilarating but positively good-natured,” and the same can be said of the romance in the *Iron Man* film series. Like the screwball couples before them, the positive nature of the romance between Tony Stark and Pepper Potts is never in question, even as they demonstrate their love through barbed remarks.

The path from screwball to superhero is most clearly seen in the 2021 limited series *Wandavision*. The series follows Wanda Maximoff (played by Elizabeth Olsen) after the events of *Avengers: Endgame*. In *Avengers: Infinity War*, she had killed her android lover, Vision (played by Paul Bettany) to stop Thanos from taking the infinity stone that was embedded in his head; this does not work as Thanos is able to manipulate time, so he brings Vision back to life only to kill him again in front of Wanda. After Thanos has the stone from Vision’s head, he is able to enact his plan that erases half of life throughout the universe, including Wanda, with a single snap. Five years later (in the film *Avengers: Endgame*), the remaining Avengers are able to perform a time heist that brings back all the people that had been snapped out of existence; thus Wanda was returned but not Vision, as his death had happened prior to the snap. Wanda, seen through flashbacks in *Wandavision*, is haunted by the memories of seeing her lover die twice and then his dismantled mechanical corpse upon her resurrection. Following the directions in a letter from Vision, Wanda goes to Westview, New Jersey where her expression of grief accidentally releases her powers and so she gains control of the town; in her mourning, she has resurrected Vision and placed him and herself (and the rest of Westview) in a world based on old sitcoms, including *Bewitched*, whose title sequence is parodied in the second episode, “Don’t Touch that Dial” (Figs. 9 and 10) *Bewitched* itself was partially inspired by the screwball comedy *I Married a Witch* (1942, René Clair); this connection draws a clear path from the screwball genre to the MCU. However, the retro world of Westview exists because of the



Figure 9. *Bewitched*, created by Sol Saks. Sony Pictures Television, 1964-72.



Figure 10. "Don't Touch that Dial." *WandaVision*, written by Gretchen Enders, directed by Matt Shakman, Marvel Studios 2021.

romantic connection between Wanda and Vision, and while the couples on old sitcoms may have served as Wanda's foundation, Vision, who was previously a computer system created by Tony Stark, had no such base knowledge. The most present romantic role models for Vision would have been his "father" Tony Stark and Pepper Potts. That both Wanda and Vision feel comfortable in Westview demonstrates that the sitcom antics Wanda knows and loves are not that far divorced from the screwball bickering of Stark and Potts.

Perhaps the reason why the romantic dynamic of screwball comedies has lingered long beyond the genre itself is because it has its roots in Shakespearean comedy, particularly *Much Ado About Nothing*. Celestino Deleyto in "Men in Leather: Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* and Romantic Comedy" says that Shakespeare's *Much Ado* is "the birth of modern romantic comedy" (92). He goes on to explain that one of the reasons that *Much Ado*'s lovers, Benedick and Beatrice, spend so much time fighting with each other is because:

erotic heat could not be directly represented on the Elizabethan stage, [so] Shakespeare took advantage of the common knowledge that erotic heat was no different from other kinds of heat in the human body and substituted verbal wit for it: the linguistic sparring between lovers which produced the necessary dramatic friction to metaphorically represent the erotic friction on which sexuality was based. (94)

Just as the Elizabethan stage would not allow the all-male actors to actually demonstrate "erotic heat" live for an audience, Hollywood in the early sound era would not allow many displays of passion in order to protect the audience's morals. In "A Proper Dash of Spice: Screwball Comedy and the Production Code," Jane M. Greene notes that the Production Code Administration's forced limitations were largely responsible for screwball films substituting antagonism and physical comedy for other, more lewd, physical acts (45). Contrarily, Molly Haskell, in her essay "Divorce, McCarey Style," contends that screwball is divorced from Shakespeare because even though the lovers are anarchic, they "don't fit the pattern of romantic

comedy and its denouements as practiced from the Greeks and the Romans through Shakespeare and beyond” because in those older texts, society is always restored in the end, while screwball never goes back to a sane level (8). O’Malley comes to a similar conclusion about the difference in endings, but instead of seeing it as a harsh divide, believes it to be a sign that screwball comedies are just an extension of Shakespeare’s comedies, a branch that has realized returning to society may not be the best end goal because “maybe it deserves to go down.” I believe that O’Malley’s theory of generic evolution is a better way of understanding the romance in screwball than the strict borders imposed by Haskell; if Shakespeare’s orderly chaos can evolve into the all-out anarchy of films like *The Lady Eve* and *I Married a Witch*, then it is not only possible but likely that such influential texts could serve as inspiration for the romantic aspects of the MCU.

Shakespeare also had a huge influence on Tennyson’s writings throughout his career. According to James O. Hoge, Jr. in “Tennyson on Shakespeare: His Talk about the Plays,” “Tennyson never wavered in placing Shakespeare above all other writers, and the influence of Shakespeare on his poetry...can scarcely be overemphasized” (147). The impact of Shakespeare on Tennyson’s works is evident even from *The Devil and the Lady*, an unfinished play written by a teenage Tennyson, according to E. A. Mooney, Jr. in his article “Tennyson’s Earliest Shakspeare Parallels” (118). Linda H. Peterson in “Tennyson and the Ladies” offers another source of inspiration by saying that Tennyson’s “lady poems” take their titles from both Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser, whose *The Faerie Queene* is set in the time of King Arthur. This shows an interplay between the two older poets in Tennyson’s imagination and presages the influence of Shakespeare on his own later interpretations of Arthurian England. The clearest influence of Shakespearean plays like *Much Ado About Nothing* in *Idylls of the King* is in the

poem “Gareth and Lynette.” Throughout the entirety of the poem, Lynette berates and harasses Gareth; even when she feels herself starting to enjoy his company, she feels the need to insult him:

‘Methought,
Knave, when I watch’d thee striking on the bridge
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier: but the wind hath changed:
I scent it twenty-fold.’ (ll. 966-970)

Despite, or perhaps more likely because of, the contentious relationship, Tennyson makes it evident to his readers that he thinks Gareth and Lynette should end up together, despite the source texts saying otherwise:

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he, that told it later, says Lynette. (ll. 1392-94)

The shift from Lyonors to Lynette as Gareth’s wife signifies Tennyson’s Shakespearean leanings when it comes to romance, even when covering medieval subject matter.

By melding Camelot with Shakespeare, Tennyson was able to redefine modern masculinity in a period where the image of the English man was in crisis. Of the timing, Margaret Linley writes in “Sexuality and Nationality in Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’” that, “‘Dedication’ and the *Guinevere* idyll were written around the time of the Divorce Act debates of the late 1850s...and just after the Indian Mutiny of 1857” (365). The violent racism of that military conflict and the idea of women gaining more rights led to a view of diminished manhood on separate fronts.⁵⁸ Tennyson responds to these national crises not by emphasizing the masculinity of his King Arthur, but by showing how he is good representation of a man because he has a potent combination of masculinity and femininity. This choice was, and remains,

⁵⁸ For further discussion of the conflict in India, look to my fourth chapter on *Lady Audley’s Secret*.

controversial, as seen by how Elliot L. Gilbert notes in “The Female King: Tennyson’s Arthurian Apocalypse” that:

Sooner or later, most readers of the *Idylls of the King* find themselves wondering by what remarkable transformative process the traditionally virile and manly King Arthur of legend and romance evolved, during the nineteenth century, into the restrained, almost maidenly Victorian monarch of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s most ambitious work. (863)

While Gilbert views Tennyson’s Arthur as lacking manhood, Linda K. Hughes in her article “‘All That Makes a Man’: Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’ (1859) as a Primer for Modern Gentlemen,” argues that Tennyson instead looks towards a more Spenserian (and I would add Shakespearian) King Arthur by “showing that man’s nature must be defined vis-à-vis a woman’s, woman’s vis-à-vis man’s; and that both should share the best of each other’s traits to be fully human” (54). The use of male romantic leads embracing their feminine sides not only is present in many of Shakespeare’s plays, as an author who fully embraced cross-dressing in both diegetic and extradiegetic manners, but also in screwball films; Howard Hawks’s classic *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) features a memorable scene of Cary Grant in a negligée, yet his viability as a romantic option for both Katharine Hepburn or Virginia Walker remains untainted. Both screwball and Tennyson were seemingly influenced by the recurring cross-dressing in Shakespeare, although Tennyson never has King Arthur literally wear women’s clothes. Instead, he uses the idea of men embracing their feminine sides to become better men to cope with and move on from the perceived attacks on Victorian masculinity.

I do not mean to imply with this section that the MCU based its depiction of Iron Man off Tennyson’s depiction of King Arthur, but I do suggest that those movies at the very least replicate Tennyson’s process of applying Shakespeare’s romantic comedy sensibilities to stories of men in armor. This shared interest demonstrates that the texts operate in a similar manner and

so can be discussed in conjunction with each other to look at each era's view of masculinity and warfare. Tales of the round table from the medieval and modern periods have different approaches, but the ideas and influences of Victorian medievalism can clearly be seen as also influencing the films of the MCU. The first set of Idylls was published in 1859, only two years after the Indian Rebellion. The final addition to the Idylls was published in 1885, several years after the First Boer War (1880-1881). Tennyson's King Arthur is explicitly connected to Prince Albert, which aligns Camelot with Victorian England; since that is the case, the wars that England fought while he was publishing his poems are very likely reflected or commented upon by the wars fought by Tennyson's Arthur. Similarly, the MCU is influenced by modern wars; *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011, Joe Johnston) depicts the origin of the titular superhero as a military experiment done in part by Howard Stark, Tony's father, to help America win World War II. By the time Howard has died and Tony has been kidnapped by the terrorist organization the Ten Rings in the beginning of *Iron Man*, Stark Industries has become a huge weapons manufacturer, so much so that their weapons are supplying both America and its allies (through legal means) and their terrorist opponents (through illicit means). The Indian Rebellion and the Boer Wars are much different for many reasons from World War II and the War on Terror, but Tennyson and Marvel use similar methods based on shared influences to make their thematic points.

The use of Shakespeare-style bantering in both textual environments separates the soldiers (be they knights or superheroes) and their lovers from those around them. The difference as demonstrated by Marvel is made clear in *Iron Man 2* when Justin Hammer, a business rival played by Sam Rockwell, tries to banter with Tony in front of journalist Christine Everhart, played by Leslie Bibb, but is obviously out of his league. The scene starts with Pepper Potts

present, and her and Tony banter together about his previous affair with Everhart until Pepper leaves:

Hammer: She's actually doing a big spread on me for *Vanity Fair*. I thought I'd throw her a bone, you know. Right?

Everhart: Yes.

Pepper: Well, she did quite a *spread* on Tony last year.

Tony: And she wrote a story as well.

Pepper: It was very impressive.

Tony: That was good.

Pepper: Very well done.

Everhart: Thank you.

Pepper: I'm gonna go wash.

Tony: Don't leave me.

Once Pepper excuses herself, Hammer tries to fill her spot as Tony's banter partner, but his failure is made clear by Everhart's comments siding with Tony:

Hammer: Hey, buddy. How you doing?

Tony: I'm all right.

Hammer: Looking gorgeous.

Tony: Please, this is tough.

Everhart: Can I ask you—is this the first time—

Hammer: *Fromage*. Say, "Brie."

Everhart: --that you guys have seen each other?

Tony: God, that's so awful

Everhart: Listen, is it the first time you've seen each other since the Senate?

Tony: Since he got his contract revoked—

Hammer: Actually, it's on hold

Tony: —when you were attempting to—That's not what I heard. What's the difference between "hold" and "cancelled"?

Everhart: Yes, what is?

It is plain for all, represented by Christine Everhart here, to see that even when Hammer tries to mimic Tony and Pepper's banter-ability, he fails miserably and awkwardly with bad jokes about saying "cheese" for a camera.⁵⁹ There is less interaction in *Idylls of the King* between knights and citizens, but the treatment of Gareth by Lyonors, even as she banters aggressively with him,

⁵⁹ Some, including myself, may feel Tony and Pepper's jokes about Everhart's sexual past are also bad, but the film presents them as "good" jokes.

demonstrates that there are different expectations between knights and other men; even when she thinks he is just a worker in Arthur's kitchen, she begrudgingly admits that he is talented. She keeps the same attitude when Lancelot appears, demonstrating that this is the kind of banter she does with all knights, and that if Gareth were as poor as he pretended to be, her bantering would be even more aggressive and without any romantic underpinnings.⁶⁰ Even with limited knight-civilian interactions, in Tennyson's *Camelot*, as in the MCU, playful bantering is the domain of soldiers, while others are left unable to enter into such joking conversations.

Who can and cannot banter in these texts works alongside my argument of how the placement of trauma has shifted in popular culture. Gareth's innate ability to banter demonstrates that as an individual, he is born to be a knight, and that even if he tries to hide his good breeding, his upper-classness shines through. This shows the knights, as medieval soldiers, are set apart from the citizens, as they are unable to access such playful codes and instead, if in conversation with those like Lyonors, would only be subject to pure anger. The soldiers (and their lovers, who are associated by contact) are able to have this fun secret code between themselves, but it comes off as hostile to any citizens that stumble upon it, thus separating the soldier from the citizen. However, the way it is presented shows the citizens in the wrong as the ones who would misinterpret what is meant well; the soldiers are the ones who are having fun, while the citizens are the ones creating a hostile environment, just as I argue that in many Victorian texts the nation is traumatized instead of the soldiers. However, even as the same general rules apply in the MCU, those soldier-heroes always act with the intent of saving citizen lives. Their banter then perhaps becomes a defense mechanism to allow them to continue saving lives in the face of evil, while citizens are unused to such extreme danger and are too busy screaming as they run for their

⁶⁰ The romantic nature of the banter is clear when Gareth states "Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;/ But truly foul are better" (ll. 924-25).

lives to playfully banter. Herman writes that “in fighting men, the sense of safety is invested in the small combat group. Clinging together under prolonged conditions of danger, the combat group develops a shared fantasy that their mutual loyalty and devotion can protect them from harm” (62). The banter between heroes, could be seen as the way they cling together as they work through their trauma as a unit to try and limit the trauma experienced by citizens. However, no matter whether the banter is hostile towards citizens or operates as a system through which to protect the unaware citizens, it serves to further widen the divide between soldiers and citizens; they are already separated by trauma and experience, but the banter separates them even more by language.

Fragile Men

Critical attention towards the fall of Tennyson’s Camelot is often focused on how Guinevere and her fellow mischievous ladies of Camelot did or did not rot the foundation of the glorious kingdom with feminine gossip until it collapsed. As seen in the idyll “Guinevere,” Guinevere is part of a group with Enid and Vivien:

the Queen who sat betwixt her best
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and the worst. (ll. 27-29)

Enid is the stereotypically “best” woman among the three as she is unflinchingly loyal to her husband Geraint, but even her loyalty can be seen as dangerous to the kingdom. As part of the court of Camelot, she can hear the rumors and gossip that abound, and even if she does not spread these lies (or, more often, truths), she still worries about them in supposed-private, which her eavesdropping husband takes as her believing in them. It is because of this misunderstanding that, according to Hughes, “Geraint loses the harmony of true manhood” (“All That Makes a Man” 55). If Geraint’s marriage to a truly steadfast woman can be threatened by gossip, then it

stands to reason that Camelot has no chance. Vivien is much more purposeful in her sabotage of Camelot; while Enid was an accidental victim of rumor, Catherine R. Harland argues in her article “Interpretation and Rumor in Tennyson’s ‘Merlin and Vivien’” that Vivien is the embodiment of “Rumor,” so much so that the capital R is a necessity (60). In “Listening to Guinevere: Female Agency and the Politics of Chivalry in Tennyson’s *Idylls*,” Stephen Ahern argues that of those three women, and indeed of everyone in the *Idylls*, Guinevere is “the most balanced and fully human figure” (97). However, even though she is not portrayed as purely good or evil like Enid or Vivien, her humanity is in part because she is flawed, and these flaws, especially her adulterous feelings for Lancelot, only help fuel the gossip that Enid suffers from and Vivien weaponizes. These three women each have different roles in the *Idylls*, but they are nonetheless represented as a group of friends and their varied yet combined contributions to gossip are often seen as the source of Camelot’s destruction.

There is also the critical argument that the reason Camelot falls in Tennyson’s *Idylls* is more the fault of the men, though still often related to rumor. Harland emphasizes that the reason that Vivien’s gossip is so fatal to Camelot is because everything she says is based in truth, and she is able to expose the faults of men at all levels of the hierarchy, from the transgressions of lesser knights like Sir Sagramore to the royal affair of Sir Lancelot and even the faults of King Arthur himself (62). Harland also points out that it is not just the ladies who gossip, but also the knights themselves (64). What differentiates the gossip between knights and the gossip of their ladies is that the men accept and laugh at what each other say, in a way that has come to be called “locker room talk;” however, when the women say things that imply the men are not as blameless as they claim to be, the knights “are constantly demanding ‘proof’ not only of individual fidelity but of the stories that characters tell about one another,” according to James

Eli Adams in “Harlots and Base Interpreters: Scandal and Slander in *Idylls of the King*” (422). Therefore, it is not the gossip itself that brings about destruction, but the masculine attempts to uncover the truth. Both the women and men of Camelot are gossips, but it is only the rumors that spring from feminine mouths that the men try to prove wrong, and it is the failure of such attempts that, some argue, leads to the fall of Camelot.

This dynamic falls in line with my assertion that Victorian narratives often saw the land as traumatized more than the soldiers. I have argued that in many national allegories, the women stand in for countries (such as Kim and Ellen in *Miss Saigon*) while the men are often there to stand in for the audience as they choose what is best for the country going forward. In Tennyson’s Camelot, gossip is undermining the kingdom that the soldiers fight to defend, and this gossip comes generally from the women, showing that the kingdom itself is flawed, as its allegorical representatives are the ones causing the fractures. The soldiers are gossips themselves, but they mostly seek to contain the feminine gossip and protect Camelot from such harsh truths, in much the same way I argued that Doyle’s Dr. Watson solved crimes with Sherlock Holmes as a way to combat the inherent evil he saw in London. Like Dr. Watson, the soldiers of Camelot return home from battles to a land that they imagine as a shining city on a hill only to be welcomed by vicious gossip that seeks to tear them down, and so they do their best to fix the trauma of their nation instead of being traumatized themselves.

Even as I put forth that Tennyson’s Camelot is traumatized while his soldiers are not, I will also argue that the physical fragility of the men plays a large part in the end of the kingdom; the man whose weak body most determines the decimation of the kingdom is, of course, the king himself. As Clyde de L. Ryals writes in his “The Moral Paradox of the Hero in *Idylls of the King*,” “Lancelot’s and Guinevere’s sin is...not the cause but the symptom of what is wrong in

Camelot” (58). The rumors hurt morale and can get in the minds of the men on the battlefield, but these rumors are only able to happen because the men are unable to rein in their physical urges, and in the end they are unable to overcome the physical match of the opposing army. Even as they may provide intimidating figures on the battlefield, they are still able to be killed because of their bodies; the armor itself is a “metaphysical prosthesis of knighthood...the projection of a grander and more terrifying figure than would be possible with the mere body inside” (Braudy 60). While Arthur is fated to die, and to take Camelot to the grave with him, Guinevere is allowed to live, perhaps because she “is not...made of the same metal as the King” (Ryals 59). In fact, Guinevere, as a woman, is expected to not be perfect in part due to “a medical establishment that also believed in the exemplary virtue of female physical frailty” (Braudy 333). Jeffrey A. Jackson says in “The Once and Future Sword: Excalibur and the Poetics of Imperial Heroism in *Idylls of the King*,” that “many readers might say that they are left instead with a clearer image of swords breaking throughout *Idylls*” (207-08); if Arthur and Guinevere are made of different metals, than Arthur must be the same as the swords that Jackson notes break repeatedly throughout the text. Guinevere is portrayed in a very human manner, faults and all, while Arthur is treated as a perfect beacon of hope; however, because everyone around him is unable to live up to his perfection, Arthur’s way of life is untenable in the long run, as opposed to Guinevere’s imperfections. Through the unrealistically high standard that King Arthur sets by example, he becomes a “monomaniac” and through his quest “to eradicate all blame from the world” ends up being eradicated himself (Ryals 61). Even as Arthur’s ideals and morals may be perfection, he is still physically a man, so when those who do not live up to his standards wish to bring him down, they are able to do so with fatal blows, whereas Guinevere acknowledges her faults and so is able

to live the rest of her life untouched by the scourge of war, even being promoted to Abbess. Camelot may fall, but the convent stands.

Arthur's inability to survive once his façade cracks while Guinevere is able to live a full life is emblematic of how post-traumatic stress is still perceived today. According to Herman:

In 1980, when post-traumatic stress disorder was first included in the diagnostic manual, the American Psychiatric Association described traumatic events as 'outside the range of usual human experience.' Sadly, this definition has proved to be inaccurate. Rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women's lives that they can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience. And in view of the number of people killed in war over the past century, military trauma, too, must be considered a common part of human experience; only the fortunate find it unusual. (33)

She highlights that no matter how one has received their trauma, their experiences are considered "unusual" even though statistics would argue otherwise. She acknowledges, however, how PTSD is often gendered between "sexual and domestic violence" for women and "war" for men.

Women, like Guinevere, are often given an outlet for their trauma if they are willing to pursue it; Guinevere is able to find this outlet in a convent where she is likely going to confession and being able to work through her past indiscretions. As she adjusts well to this new environment away from carnal temptation, she can ascend to the role of Abbess. Meanwhile, as discussed in my previous chapter, men who are traumatized by war are not given equal opportunities to tell their war stories. Daniel Robson in *Sylvia's Lovers* shares his story, but it is not often appreciated by the listeners, who would rather "idealize or disparage his military service [or lack thereof, in Daniel's case] while avoiding detailed knowledge of what that service entailed" (Herman 67). Ellen Samuels points out in her article "Prosthetic Heroes: Curing Disabled Veterans in *Iron Man 3* and Beyond" that the attention listeners pay to veterans is further problematized with disabled (and I would argue traumatized) soldiers because there exists "a fundamental tension between perceptions of disabled vets as heroic warriors or dangerous outsiders" (135). When a

soldier is uninjured physically or mentally, civilians want to valorize and ignore them, but when a disability of any sort is present, those two objects become troubled in ways that are unpleasant for civilians to consider. Because PTSD is often gendered, even before it was given a name in 1980, Guinevere can thrive while Arthur and his knights cannot survive once they are subject to horrors on that fateful final battlefield.

A male-female pairing that further emphasizes the difference in metal, and whose conflict paves the way for the epic final battle, is Merlin and Vivien. Both can perform magic, and just as Merlin famously had Arthur's ear, I have already discussed in this section how Vivien was one of Guinevere's trusted companions, alongside the more trustworthy Enid. In "Merlin and Vivien," Tennyson shows how this seeming match of equals ends in a decisive female victory, largely due to Merlin's misunderstanding of physicality. Merlin is renowned for his intelligence and is far from the typical "warrior-knight-lover" that the other male characters in the *Idylls* represent ("All That Makes a Man" 57). However, despite this intelligence, Merlin is not as knowledgeable about women. Vivien uses these two things to her advantage; she confounds his intellect by presenting him with incontrovertible truths about the fallibility at every level of Camelot's social ladder and then exploits his lack of sexual knowledge by seducing him:

She...made her lithe arm round his neck
Tighten, and then drew back, and let her eyes
Speak for her, glowing on him, like a bride's
On her new lord, her own, the first of men. (ll. 612-14)

The mental strain of the verbal attacks allows for him to be more susceptible to the physical attack, and ultimately after "he sees her as a playful kitten, as Eve, as actress, gossip, and whore," he gives in and at this moment of fragility is condemned to his tree prison (Harland 65). Despite most of this idyll documenting the battle of wits between the two, the conclusion ultimately comes about because Vivien uses her knowledge of her own physicality to exploit

Merlin's lack of knowledge about the same; it is because of this that his defeat is punished not just mentally, but also physically. Merlin's body may not be broken and destroyed like his king's will be, but his strong mind is unable to help in that future dilemma because his body was weak.

Tony Stark may not be a king, but he also dies on the battlefield due to his human frailty and leaves an empire crumbling down behind him. Like his royal forebear, Stark's kingdom starts off on shaky ground and then continues to be damaged by sexual reputations. Stark's father, Howard, had made the family's name through weaponry, and this continues through to Tony's reign as the weapons he introduces early in his tenure are the ones used by the Ten Rings organization that captures him at the start of *Iron Man*.⁶¹ Christine Muller emphasizes in "Post-9/11 Power and Responsibility in the Marvel Cinematic Universe" that in subsequent films his experience as captive has led to "his adoption of more altruistic aims in his business practices and his Iron Man persona" (279). However, apart from his superhero persona, he also has a playboy persona. Adams writes that in "Merlin and Vivien," "Tennyson's representation of sexual transgression is inseparable from his notorious preoccupation with the mechanisms of Victorian publicity" (421-22); just as Tennyson was frustrated with the salacious gossip of Victorian news, Tony Stark is continuously troubled by the publicization of his sexual antics. Even when Tony and Pepper are an established couple in *Iron Man 3*, the villain origin story is introduced through a past fling he had had and the continuing fallout of a quick flirtation. Throughout his film-spanning narrative, Stark struggles to suppress the playboy-view of Tony Stark in order to emphasize the invincibility of Iron Man. It makes sense, then, that when he takes the Infinity Gauntlet away from Thanos in *Avengers: Endgame*, his taunt is "I am Iron Man." This line is a callback to the end of *Iron Man* when he makes the same pronouncement to

⁶¹ While Howard Stark has been given a more heroic role in some other Marvel films, these heroics are based on his secretive projects, while his public persona is that of a man who designs weapons.

journalists to reassure them that the flying suit of armor the military has been butting up against has a relatively harmless human guiding it; when he says it in *Avengers: Endgame*, though, he is saying the opposite: the human may be gone, but the suits of armor and their founder's legacy live on. His battle cry seeks to emphasize the iron over the man, but the cosmic strength of the Infinity Gauntlet proves just how much of a man he is, as the effort results in his death.⁶² Despite his death, Tony Stark is at least successful in taking down the army of his enemy with him, as Stark is the only casualty of the battle that is not on Thanos's side, while the entire opposing army is turned to dust. Despite Stark's death, this is a triumphal moment, reinforcing Braudy's argument that "war was serious business, and if there was transcendence to be gained, it was often less gleefully triumphal than somber and death-filled, with an aura of noble failure that deflected the curse of ambition and assertion" (284). While the overall battle was won by Stark's side, the same of which cannot be said about King Arthur's final battle, it is still a moment defined by an epochal death; the moment would not be as memorable or as inspiring to future generations if the leader had not gone down gloriously on the battlefield. While their deaths may inspire others in the future, the immediate aftermath is much less optimistic.

I have discussed how Arthur and his men are generally untraumatized in comparison to the trauma apparent in Camelot itself as a result of gossip, and that it is when trauma touches Arthur himself in that final battle that he must die; the discussion of trauma related to Tony Stark in the MCU is also a question of when he is traumatized. Ellen Samuels writes of his PTSD:

In the first film, Stark has the sort of experiences we might expect to produce classic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): He is attacked, injured, tortured, and held captive for months, barely escaping with his life. Yet upon his return to the U.S., Stark shows no signs of post-traumatic stress but focuses with laser-like clarity of purpose upon his new goal of becoming a superhero. In *Iron Man 2*, Stark is dying from poisoning caused by the arc reactor in his chest and again

⁶² Again, for proof of the strength of the Infinity Gauntlet refer to Fig. 4 and the damage it did to the much more impenetrable Hulk.

experiences life-and-death conflicts close at hand; yet, while he acts out in various psychologically morbid ways, Stark never shows any of the classic symptoms of PTSD, such as flashbacks, nightmares, sleeplessness, panic attacks, or avoidance of past experiences. By contrast, in *Iron Man 3*, Stark shows all of these symptoms, indeed displaying such a textbook case of PTSD that, even without the diagnosis being explicitly named, reviewers frequently identified it as a key feature of the film. (133-34)

Samuels is arguing that even though Stark's inciting traumatic incident is the scene that began the entire MCU, he does not start showing signs of PTSD until *Iron Man 3*. However, I believe that one of the symptoms she points out, "avoidance of past experiences," is there from the moment of trauma. After his imprisonment by the Ten Rings, Samuels points out that he "focuses with laser-like clarity of purpose upon his new goal of becoming a superhero," including (at first) trying to maintain a secret identity, which runs counter to his prior tabloid-ready exploits. Also, as to those exploits, the moment of trauma is when Stark generally stops being a womanizer and begins to focus on a long-term relationship with Pepper Potts. In *Iron Man 2* when the arc reactor begins to poison him, he further changes his old ways by no longer thinking about what is best for him personally and hands over control of Stark Industries to Pepper. *Iron Man 3* is inarguably the Iron Man film with the heaviest focus on multiple symptoms of PTSD, but I believe that his trauma reactions are clear in the entire trilogy and his other franchise appearances.

While King Arthur died with no succession plans, Stark had plans in place; what has made post-Stark MCU analogous to the fall of Tennyson's Camelot is watching those plans fall apart bit by bit in Phase 4. Of Arthur, Gilbert writes that "all certainty is impossible for a man who rejects the stability of patrilineal descent and seeks instead to derive his authority from himself" (875). Arthur rejected the ruling style of Uther, and Gilbert blames the fall of Camelot partly on that decision. Tony Stark originally sets out to differentiate himself from his father, but

as the series progresses, he relies more and more on weaponry, like his father. Tony's acceptance of his father's legacy is cemented in *Avengers: Endgame* when he time travels to 1970 and is able to talk with Howard. *Spider-Man: Far from Home* (2019, Jon Watts) suggests that Tony had entrusted his legacy to Spider-Man/Peter Parker (played by Tom Holland), who is an orphaned teenager to whom Tony had become like a father. Peter spends this film trying to live up to Stark's legacy, but at the end is brought down by Mysterio/Quentin Beck (played by Jake Gyllenhaal). *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021, Jon Watts) begins where the previous *Spider-Man* ends and shows the fallout of Mysterio's plot to out Parker as Spider-Man and frame the super-hero as a villain. Not only does this revelation impact Parker's life, but it brings into public scrutiny the choices made by Tony Stark; the technology given to Peter by Tony is confiscated by the Department of Damage Control which prompts a news story wherein the reporter states: "Stark Industries was caught in the web of the Spider-Man-Mysterio controversy today, when federal agents opened an investigation into missing Stark technology." The technology that Tony gave out is described as stolen, as the public tries to make sense of his involvement while clinging to the heroic notion of Iron Man. With no son of his own, and a daughter who is too young to take over, Tony Stark tried to pass his legacy on to the closest thing he had to a son, which backfires horribly not only for the proposed heroic successor but also for Stark Industries.⁶³

The question of who will fill this void after Stark's own plan fell through is touched upon in *Eternals*. In a scene shown in the teaser trailer for the film, Sprite asks, "So now that Captain

⁶³ *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022, Ryan Coogler) introduces Dominique Thorne as Riri Williams, superhero name "Ironheart," who is a snarky tech genius like Tony Stark and who has built a suit similar to his, but it is unlikely that such a new and young character in the franchise will be able to fulfill his place as leader even though she might fulfill his bantering-tech-genius role.

Rogers and Iron Man are both gone, who do you think's gonna lead the Avengers?"⁶⁴ Ikaris, played by Richard Madden, responds, "I could lead them," and then the audience is shown Thena's amused reaction before shots of the entire group of Eternals laughing at the idea ("Marvel Studios' *Eternals* | Official Teaser"). This edit works on two levels; in the immediate sense, it plays the interaction off as a joke and makes the moment seem like a respite from the larger issue at hand, and in a lingering sense prepares the viewer to possibly seriously consider Ikaris as a possible candidate to lead the Avengers. Richard Madden is best known to audiences as Robb Stark, the "king of the North" from *Game of Thrones* who was a legitimate contender for a throne until his campaign was cut short in brutal fashion by the infamous event known as "the Red Wedding"; this teaser's stinger, once the jollity of the laughter subsides, sticks in the viewer's mind as they are already prepared to think of this actor as a leader in a fantasy world. However, within the context of the entire film, this scene plays very differently.⁶⁵ In the film, after Ikaris says "I could lead them," he adds "I figure I'd be good at that." This small addition turns what could have been a joke into a serious consideration, which has darker meaning once the film reveals that Ikaris is the villain and his plan is to murder every human being on Earth in order to allow for the creation of one alien being known as a Celestial. Further tying this to the fallout of Stark's death is the realization that the only reason Ikaris is able to sacrifice all of humanity for the birth of a Celestial is because Stark and the Avenger's successfully returning the population that had been killed by Thanos allows for there to be enough humans to qualify

⁶⁴ Captain America/Steve Rogers (played by Chris Evans) legacy is also troubled in Phase 4, but over the course of *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (2021), Falcon/Sam Wilson (played by Anthony Mackie) overcomes his doubts about taking over the title of Captain America and embraces the mantle that Rogers himself bestowed. Also of note: Rogers is referred to as Captain Rogers, which is a melding of his superhero title and his actual name, which suggests a more balanced and functioning inhuman circuit than Iron Man who is referred to simply by his superhero name.

⁶⁵ The MCU has a history of filming scenes just for trailers or deceptively adjusting actual scenes in order to keep their films' secrets from audiences before viewing; the quicker cut to a laugh is one of the more subtle instances of such.

for the ritual. *Eternals*, in a brief but important scene, highlights the void at the center of the MCU and posits that a genocidal higher being like Ikaris has the potential to step in and further destroy Iron Man's legacy.

Like Camelot after the death of King Arthur, the state of the MCU is in shambles; not only has Tony's planned successor been vilified, but the vacant spot is also being eyed by an alien with mass murder on his mind. While Stark has a succession plan, even if it is bound to failure, there is no hope for Camelot. King Arthur has no immediate heir, and there is only a vague promise that one day he will come back and Camelot will rise again. Tennyson says that Prince Albert was "scarce other than my king's ideal knight," which raises the question of if Albert is the successor to Camelot's throne ("Dedication" l. 6). However, while Prince Albert may be a male role model, and an example of national allegory, like King Arthur, he is as flawed a successor otherwise as Parker was for Stark. Neither Peter Parker nor Prince Albert can wield the amount of power that their predecessor had, and so the kingdoms are doomed to disappear as a result of unprocessed masculine trauma. There is always hope in Arthuriana for the return of Arthur and Camelot, but a surer thing is that the Avengers will rebound, as the MCU still makes a lot of money for Disney and the complete collapse of an empire is not good business for family-minded blockbusters; however, throughout the Phase 4 slate, Tony Stark's legacy has been as crushed as that of King Arthur. These texts disagree on where trauma stems from, be it the nation (Camelot) or the individual (Tony), but both feature empires falling to pieces because of the fragility of men's bodies.

Sturdy Machines

The inhuman circuit is unavoidable while discussing *Idylls of the King* and the MCU as it shows the unhealthy expectations these characters set. As Jeffrey J. Cohen writes:

Through a *participation contre nature* a series of animal and human affects are brought into deliberate, explosive contact, contaminating supposedly integral bodies with particles of otherness, so that each henceforth resists the placid rigidity of totalized form. Body and subjectivity are not resident in any single point within this circuit of forces, itself constituted only through those *movements* that harness corporealities to a flux of mutual transformations. (43-44)

The inhuman circuit relies on a human refusing to allow natural boundaries to define their power, and so rely on nonhuman elements. For Tennyson's knights, this means the horses they ride, the swords they brandish, the shields they wield, the suits of armor they inhabit, and any other armaments and ornaments that lend them success in battle. Besides Iron Man, many of the other superheroes also rely on nonhuman parts to define themselves: Ant-Man's Pym particles, Hawkeye's arrows, Spider-Man's web shooters, Black Panther's heart-shaped herb, etc. Just as in texts set during the Medieval period "a personality of mediocre status [was] raised above the peasant by his possession of expensive horse and armor," the heroes of the MCU are distinguished from those they save by their (often Stark-provided) accoutrements (Gies 2). The inhuman circuit can be applied to many less-fantastical characters, but they generally remain the same characters with or without the nonhuman circuitry; knights and superheroes, however, are defined by their being inhuman circuits. This dependency infers that the inhuman circuits of these characters could be unhealthily realized.

I have noted in previous chapters how the various Dr. Watsons and Daniel Robson attempt to rewrite their pasts by acting out similar situations in their present, and this form of dealing with trauma is very present in superhero narratives and Arthurian tales. As Herman states:

Adults as well as children often feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or disguised form. Sometimes people reenact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter. In their attempts to undo the traumatic moment, survivors may even put themselves at risk of further harm. (38).

She continues later in the text that, “more commonly, traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing” (40). In these two quotes, she uses the term “disguised” which takes on a rather literal meaning when the knights of the round table or the Avengers put on actual disguises to go out and do their trauma-correcting heroics. The inhuman circuit allows the knights and superheroes to do similar acts as Watson and Daniel Robson, though with the benefits (and downfalls) of various uniforms. The uniform allows a sense of anonymity that protects the soldiers’ identities, which would have helped Daniel Robson who was executed for his rioting, while this anonymity also strips them of interiority and unique personalities, which would hinder Watson who is able to continue solving crimes with Holmes because of his publicizing their personality foibles alongside their adventures and gaining clients as a result. The use of the inhuman circuit by knights and superheroes aids the soldiers in working through trauma, though not always in a healthy or useful manner.

Both King Arthur and Iron Man ultimately fail as inhuman circuits because of their over-reliance on the nonhuman. According to Cohen, the ideal inhuman circuit should have all pieces in perfect harmony with no piece taking prominence:

Just as the equine body learns a new type of control through changes mediated by the technological, the human body likewise must submit to a new regimen of training and corporeal response, a reconfigured experience of embodiment. Without the instantiation of an *intersubjective* discipline, horse and rider are not going anywhere in the cavalry charge except to a quick death. Steed and warrior and accoutrements become simultaneously active and receptive points within a transformative assemblage. (50)

In *Idylls of the King*, the self is finite while “things take on meaning in proportion as one uses them,” so that while the human self diminishes, the materials it consumes in turn consume it (Ryals 56). Thus, the more that King Arthur uses Excalibur, the more he becomes one with the

sword, embodying the inhuman circuit and losing his humanity in the process. This enjoining is a negative, as “Tennyson associates violence, for which the sword functions so often as a synecdoche, with division and private selfishness threatening Arthur’s larger design” (Jackson 212). Tony Stark is also unhealthily attached to his technology. In the first film, he builds himself an arc reactor heart, which is a device that allows him to survive by keeping his human heart functioning and safe from the shrapnel in his body from the explosion he experienced. The first one features moments where it seems dangerous to keep the arc reactor functioning, as he has to have Pepper fix it for him and warns her that if she touches it wrong, he will die, but it becomes even more unhealthy in *Iron Man 2* when the arc reactor heart is seen to be literally poisoning his body (Fig. 11). Later in that film, he is given a medicine to help control the poison, and he is able to undergo surgery in *Iron Man 3* so that he can live without the arc reactor at all. However, even with the ability to live as a fully organic human, Stark, like Arthur, ultimately chooses not to.

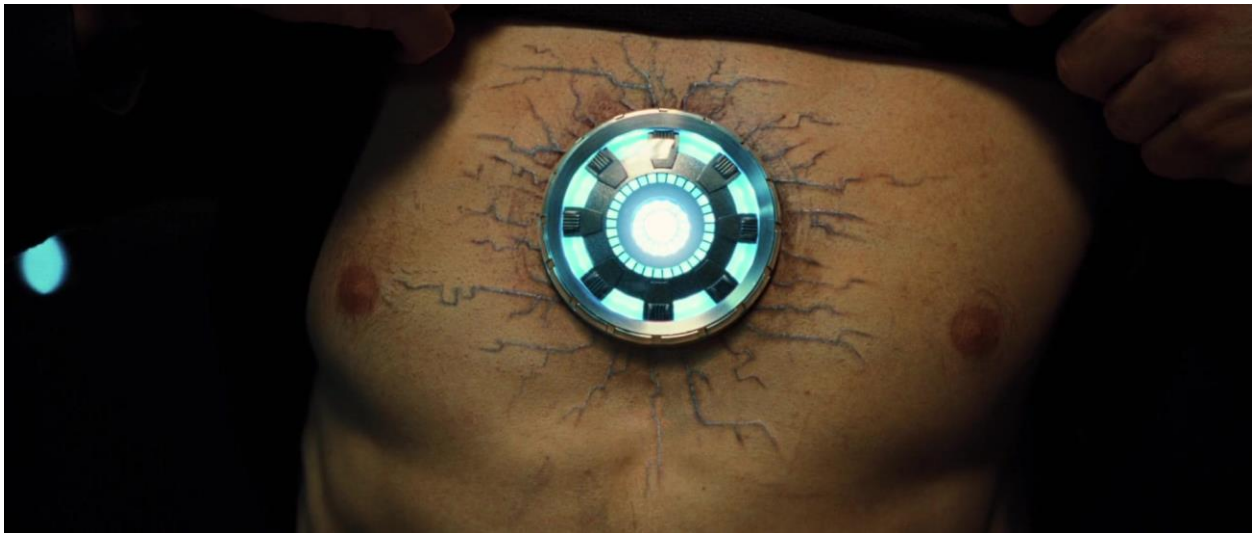


Figure 11. *Iron Man 2*. Directed by Jon Favreau, Paramount Pictures, 2010.

The more Arthur becomes his Excalibur, the worse the outlook gets for Camelot as their perfect ruler becomes less and less human. After his defeat, King Arthur asks Sir Bedivere to

dispose of Excalibur for him, and his deep connection to the blade allows him to realize that Sir Bedivere only faked throwing the sword back into the lake:

Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the office of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes. ("The Passing of Arthur" ll. 288-96)

After several such rounds of insults, Arthur succeeds in convincing Bedivere to dispose of Excalibur, which Jackson notes "is both literally and figuratively unwieldy in its rococo splendor" (213). A similar descriptor could be used to describe the Infinity Gauntlet. Tony Stark has had issues melding his body with machines throughout the films in the MCU, as seen by my previous paragraph's discussion of the arc reactor, but it is this jewel-encrusted glove that literally kills him even as it molds, forms, and melds with his body (Figs. 12 and 13). Both the rulers in these texts ultimately become victims of the inhuman circuit that had once defined and strengthened them.

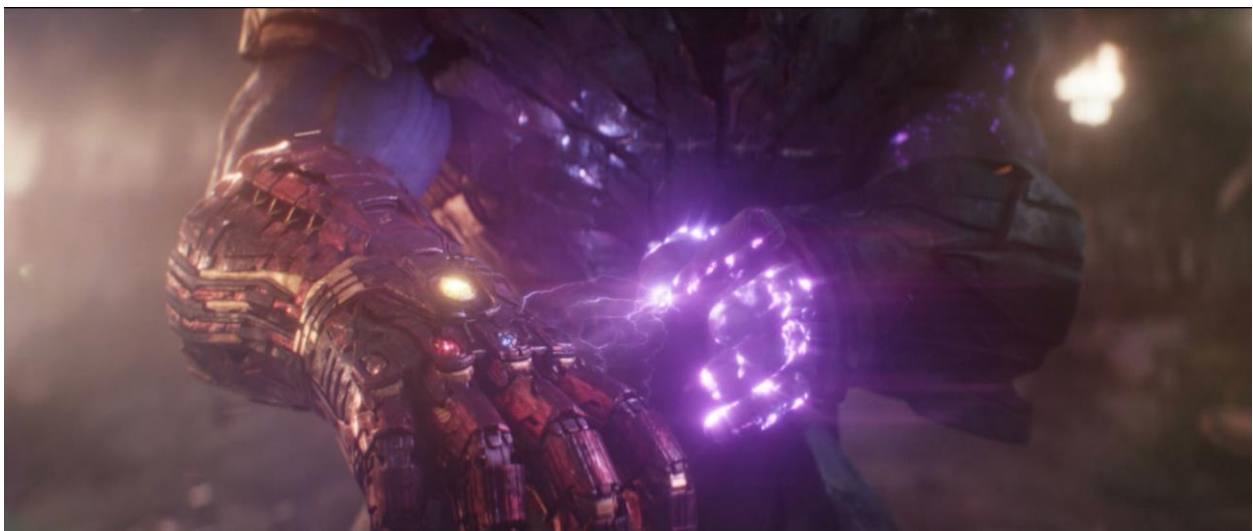


Figure 12. *Avengers: Endgame*. Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.



Figure 13. *Avengers: Endgame*. Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

I have argued thus far that Arthur and Stark both die after the inhuman circuit had stripped them of much humanity, but the reverse is also true; the inhuman circuit fails because their humanity weakened the mechanical aspects. Cohen shows that the purpose of each individual piece in an inhuman circuit is supposed to strengthen every other individual piece, through a historical example:

The advent in the eleventh century of the shock charge, the cavalry maneuver in which a long spear was couched under the rider's shoulder while the horse bounded toward deadly collision with the enemy...a saddlebow had to be added to assist in the prevention of the unseating of the knight at contact. Since lances so easily punctured flesh, heavy shirts of mail became necessary for knights in order to survive battle, and armor became essential to the preservation of their mounts. Men's bodies had to adapt to this increase in armaments through a more rigorous development of thighs, chest, shoulders. Warhorses were bred to have a sturdier musculature to support the growing weight of their armor, their rider's armor, and perhaps their rider's increased body mass. (50-51).

The technology that both of my examples use, from King Arthur's royal armor and magical sword to Tony Stark's perfected suits and intensely powerful arc reactor heart, is incredibly strong and can withstand many attacks. The only reason that these circuits fail in these particular battles is because of human frailty, both physical and psychological; these men's bodies are able

to be punctured if the weapons find weak spots in the armor, and their traumatized minds allow for mistakes that make such puncturing possible. The longer-lasting nature of the technology is emphasized in *Avengers: Endgame* by the arc reactor heart that is on Tony's funeral bier, even as its bearer has died (Fig. 14).⁶⁶ At this funeral, the arc reactor is placed in the water outside the cabin where Tony and Pepper lived with their child, in a way that is reminiscent of Excalibur's return to the lake. The use of this heart at Stark's funeral demonstrates Braudy's observation of the nineteenth century being the period that began to memorialize the "heroic dead" with material objects like "the triumphal arches, the bronze statues, and the grand mausoleums filled with bones" (Braudy 284). The suits and weapons used by both Arthur and Stark, and then left behind to memorialize them, only fall in battle because of the humans they rely on. Therefore, while the technology may negatively impact the humanity of the human component of the inhuman circuit, the non-human component is similarly damaged by the humans. Both of these fictional leaders are undone by their trauma and subsequent diminishing humanity, while their trauma and humanity are also acting as a damper to the technology they are using.



Figure 14. *Avengers: Endgame*. Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2019.

⁶⁶ He no longer needed the arc reactor heart to live after the events of *Iron Man 3*, but its resilience is demonstrated by surviving that long and its symbolic nature is demonstrated by its placement on the funeral bier.

The idyll that best shows the dangers of an imbalanced inhuman circuit is “Geraint and Enid;” as Geraint accumulates more armor, his humanity and marriage both suffer. Lawrence Poston III writes in “The Argument of the Geraint-Enid Books in ‘Idylls of the King’” that, “what is essentially a comic action in ‘Gareth and Lynette’ takes on more serious overtones in ‘Geraint and Enid’” (270). I previously argued that “Gareth and Lynette” was similar to *Much Ado About Nothing*, which itself has a dramatic doppelgänger in *Othello*, another Shakespearean play featuring lies about infidelity and false evidence being used in attempts to undo romantic relationships; thus Tennyson’s using similar story structures in both a comic and dramatic register is another Shakespearean touch within *Idylls of the King*. Geraint forces Enid to walk in front of him as he punishes her for the perceived gossiping sin previously discussed, and when he runs into enemy knights along their way, he defeats them and takes their armor:

Then Enid waited pale and sorrowful,
 And down upon him bare the bandit three.
 And at the midmost charging, Prince Geraint
 Drave the long spear a cubit thro’ his breast
 And out beyond; and then against his brace
 Of comrades, each of whom had broken on him
 A lance that splinter’d like an icicle,
 Swung from his brand a windy buffet out
 Once, twice, to right, to left, and stunned the twain
 Or slew them, and dismounting like a man
 That skins the wild beast after slaying him,
 Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born
 The three gay suits of armour which they wore,
 And let the bodies lie, but bound the suits
 Of armour on their horses, each on each,
 And tied the bridle-reins of all three
 Together, and said to her, ‘Drive them on
 Before you;’ and she drove them thro’ the waste. (“Geraint and Enid” ll. 83-100)

These extra suits of armor and horses become further extensions of himself through the theory of the inhuman circuit, but unlike the armor he himself wears, they cannot be pierced and bleed. Thus, the more armor he collects, the more impenetrable and less human he becomes. Ryals

writes that in the idylls, “one...attains knowledge of self by attacking, overcoming, and assimilating the not-self,” but Geraint goes beyond knowing himself as he overwhelms his person with a multitude of armored suits (54). The knight in shining armor is supposed to be a perfectly balanced example of the inhuman circuit, but by becoming a knight who hoards shining armor, Geraint tips the balance too much.

A modern parallel that emerges from Geraint putting his collection of armor on horses in front of him is the use of drones in warfare. Grégoire Chamayou writes in *Drone Theory* that:

The drone family is not composed solely of flying objects. There may be as many different kinds as there are families of weapons: terrestrial drones, marine drones, submarine drones, even subterranean drones imagined in the form of fat mechanical moles. Provided there is no longer any human crew aboard, any kind of vehicle or piloted engine can be ‘dronized.’ (11)

Going by this definition, I would argue that the empty armor suits on horseback are unmanned piloted vehicles, and so fit the definition of drones (specifically, “terrestrial drones”). The terminology may be anachronistic, but the definition makes the inclusion passable. Drones are an effective way of stripping humanity from war, and in a similar manner, the more armor he collects, the less Geraint can make humane decisions. Hughes argues that the best of men in *Idylls of the King* can unite their masculine and feminine sides, but “Geraint cannot join and relate the masculine and feminine within himself, but veers from one extreme to the other. Hence he has achieved neither self-definition nor full humanity” (“All That Makes a Man” 56). The more armor he collects, the less he is able to join the masculine and feminine because, “women functioned analogously to ‘foreign’ cultures and races as cultural Other in the Victorian era,” as Hughes notes in her article “Victors and Victims: Tennyson’s ‘Enid’ as Postcolonial Text” (419). Enid and her femininity are seen as other, so while the armor makes Geraint less human it also makes him more singularly masculine. This single-mindedness, lack of full human cohesion, and

increasing distance from seeing the nuance of the situation that is happening in front of him puts Geraint and his disembodied armor on similar footing that many find themselves in with drone warfare.

The empty suits of armor that fly ahead of Tony Stark are much more clearly coded as drones because of the time in which the MCU is made and set. As Muller notes, “the Avengers films emerge out of a ‘War on Terror’ era characterised by fear, a pervasive aura of risk, and distant combat fought by few on the behalf of many” (273). One of the most prominent components of the War on Terror has been the use of drones. Despite Tony Stark wanting to distance himself from his father’s reliance on weapons of war, after embracing his Iron Man persona, Stark creates an entire army of drones. He often attempts to use them for peaceful means, such as warning citizens to keep away from dangerous areas while he fights, but as seen in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015, Joss Whedon), his Iron Legion has the potential to be weaponized, as happens when the peace-keeping AI Stark creates, the titular Ultron, decides the best way to create peace is by destroying humanity, and in order to do so inhabits a human-less suit of armor. This trajectory mimics that of drones, as “their history is that of an eye turned into a weapon” (Chamayou 11). Despite Stark’s peaceful intentions behind the creation of drones, the destructive and nonhuman potential they hold is beyond his imagination. The dehumanization of weaponry is not new to drones, but drones do add to it. Braudy describes the change that occurred when guns started being used in similar terms as we often use when discussing the impact of drones:

Perhaps lowborn musket bearers could draw a bead on and kill a panoplied knight. But the crossbow and longbow had already made possible that undermining of social hierarchy. The difference was that with guns such slaughter occurred with greater and greater frequency. The longbow was only as good as the person pulling it, but the gun could kill regardless of the physical strength of the person at the trigger. (120)

Just as the gun was easier to kill with than a longbow, the drone is much easier to target with than a gun, which once again lowers the required skill level (in certain senses, as being a drone pilot still requires intense training). As pointed out in *Drone Warfare* by John Kaag & Sarah Krepps, drones “allow lethal action at virtually no risk to the perpetrator” (1). Therefore, not only are they easier to use, but they require much less risk, which allows the military to be more cost-effective and have less casualties to report. Drones provide modern militaries with useful weapons in several senses, just as Stark’s and Geraint’s empty suits do in their narratives. Tony’s Iron Legion serves as an analog for this modern weaponry, just as Geraint’s horses-and-armor-alert-system can when looking through a modern lens.

Because drones have so drastically changed the nature of warfare as a result of their inhumanity, or perhaps nonhumanity, it also necessitates a difference in war trauma. Chris Woods in *Sudden Justice: America’s Secret Drone Wars* recounts that:

“The PTSD rates for troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan...have varied a bit based upon the mission that you’re performing on the battlefield, but they range anywhere between 13% to 18%. In some cases, I’ve seen it as high as 21%,” says [senior USAF psychologist Dr. Wayne] Chappelle. In contrast, PTSD indicators among the drone community were far lower. “It ranges anywhere between 2% and 5%, so significantly less. The average rate of PTSD in the US population is about 5%. So it’s either at or less than what you would expect in the general population.” (187)

Woods’s own input next to Chapelle’s statistics is that “of increasing concern to psychologists was whether traditional markers for measuring combat stress like PTSD were the most reliable way to gauge the very real problems among remote warriors” (187). Therefore, while statistics might state that drone warfare is significantly less traumatic than in-person warfare, there is also the possibility that it is creating a new subset of PTSD that has yet to be identified or labeled, and so creates a situation similar to the many Victorian texts I have discussed where trauma is present but unnamed. While not discussing drones in particular, Samuels does point out that

studies have shown the act of witnessing itself has led to an increase in trauma: “veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan show extremely high rates of psychological trauma due to surviving or witnessing severe injury, with estimates ranging from 20 to 60% of returning veterans being affected by PTSD and related conditions” (136). The trauma and horror of bearing witness is one that extremely prevalent for drone operators, as evidenced by how “when Predator pilot Scott Swanson finally broke his silence 13 years later to describe his role in the attack, he described the sight of a body thrown through the air as still ‘burned into my memory’” (Woods 26). Geraint’s use of unmanned piloted vehicles (through his horseback armor hoard) still requires him to physically do the fighting himself, but for warriors like Tony Stark, killing from afar presents a new way to be traumatized.

The unsure attitude about drones in the MCU mirrors the use of drones as used in the last several American presidencies. This is not entirely surprising, since “like many American films...much...of the MCU...received both privileged access and extensive material in exchange for its favourable representation of the US military” (McSweeney 22). The use of drones during the last several US presidencies demonstrates a full-hearted belief in the technology, as Chamayou points out that “whereas the defense budget decreased in 2013, with cuts in numerous sectors, the resources allocated to unmanned weapon systems rose by 30%” (13-14). This shows not only the increasing usage of drones, but also how they are replacing other forms of military might. The beginning of drone warfare is already memorialized as “Predator tailfin number 3034 [which did the first drone strike on October 7, 2001] now hangs suspended in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, its place in history assured” (Woods 24; Fig. 15). Woods demonstrates President Bush’s hands-off attitude towards drone warfare by quoting a general’s remembrances of his instructions: “I want to give you three pieces of guidance. One,



Figure 15. Picture taken by author on July 14, 2022 of Predator tailfin number 3034 at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, VA where it is on display while the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum is under renovation.

we're going to fight through Ramadan. Two, I don't want you to bomb any mosques, and three, this is your fight, and fight it the way you see fit" (25). George W. Bush was president during the early days of drone warfare, and while he approved usage, he put his faith in his generals and allowed them to do as they saw fit. When Barack Obama took on the office of the President of the United States, he became much more involved in the use of drones, with his policy to "replace torture and Guantanamo with targeted assassinations and the Predator drone" (Chamayou 14). This led to more deaths but less visibility. The MCU has mirrored these presidencies: like Bush's drones, Stark's first uses of his armored suits were more exploratory. Once he got the feel for the technology, he used them constantly in order to provide a sense of

security and visible protection, much like Obama's use of drones to create a sense of safety, since during his presidency "drones [were] becoming banal—leaving their ethical implications unexamined and their ease of use celebrated as intrinsically good" (Kaag & Krepps 2). After Stark's death, the fight over the technology has led to chaos but little effectiveness, which is an apt descriptor for the Trump presidency's use of drones. Tony Stark fits the mold of Jameson's national allegory, and his use of armor allows for the specificity of him representing America and its leadership since the first fateful and fatal strike of Predator tailfin number 3034.

While I argue that Stark and King Arthur represent the inhuman tipping too much towards the nonhuman, the other end of the spectrum can be represented by berserkers.

According to Braudy:

the berserkers were a group of warriors whose behavior on the battlefield was so crazed and extreme that even their own side was appalled. In the few visual depictions we have, they are shown as coming into battle ferociously biting the edge of their shields, their faces and bodies sometimes painted red in an effort to make themselves invulnerable. (38)

While they have the accoutrements to make an inhuman circuit (such as the shield and body paint in the above quote), they lean too much towards the base human instincts. This is emphasized in the film *The Northman* (2022, Robert Eggers) where the protagonist Amleth, played by Alexander Skarsgård, is a berserker who uses a sword that was forged in human blood; even his nonhuman blade is tainted by humanity. By fully giving into their most basic instincts, the nonhuman aspects are rendered impotent, as demonstrated by the visual of a shield being bitten into. As quoted previously, Cohen argues that an inhuman circuit relies on balance between pieces, so just as King Arthur and Tony Stark lean too much towards the nonhuman, berserkers lean too much towards the human, so much so that they become animalistic. This emphasizes that "the line between man and beast can be crossed with ease" (Braudy 40).

Berserkers are mostly seen as medieval characters, but Braudy does mention modern cases, including the *Sergeant Fury* comic series from Marvel (42).⁶⁷ Berserkers, in both their medieval and modern contexts, show that while it is bad to make an inhuman circuit too nonhuman, it is also bad to make it too human.

Both ends of the spectrum (one end being a fully Iron Man with the other being a fully animalistic berserker) are demonstrative of the traumatic urge to “reenact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter” (Herman 39). In *The Northman*, Amleth becomes a berserker after the trauma of seeing his father murdered and his mother taken captive by his uncle who orchestrated the coup.⁶⁸ As a way of dealing with these horrors, he seeks to become a stronger fighter, one who could have saved his father and mother through action. As *The Northman*’s plot begins in the year 895, technology, while available, is not to the level of Stark Industries, so Amleth’s coping mechanism for his trauma leads to his taking the ultra-human (and thus animalistic) route. In 2008 and with specific training, Stark is much more able to develop advanced technology that allows him to try and overcome his trauma through more nonhuman means. Both Amleth and Tony seek to continue their fathers’ legacies and heal their minds from witnessing brutalities against themselves and those they love, but in doing so they gravitate towards opposing means of achieving an inhuman circuit.

An effect of the inhuman circuit being abused by Arthur and Tony (as well as Amleth) is that it separates them from the rest of humanity, which is a signal of how their followers also end up separated from humanity; as a result, the divide between soldiers and citizens is widened. This can be presented in cutesy ways, such as when Tony and Pepper are having a date night in

⁶⁷ Nick Fury is played in the MCU by Samuel L. Jackson, but instead of leading a troupe of berserkers (called the Howling Commandos), he leads S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division), one of his other roles in the comics.

⁶⁸ As this summary suggests, *The Northman* is inspired by the same history that inspired Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

The Avengers and in attempt to avoid Agent Phil Coulson, played by Clark Gregg, Tony pretends to be a machine, even outside of his armor: “You have reached the life model decoy of Tony Stark. Please leave a message.”⁶⁹ This moment is presented as fun, but it is telling in how Tony wants to present himself as fully mechanical to the civilian world and only make time for Pepper (which is also seen in the previously analyzed scene opposite Justin Hammer). The rest of the Avengers follow this pattern of marking themselves as separate from the civilian population, often through the use of their suits, which is why all new heroes have the moment of creating their own suits in an attempt of legitimacy. However, legitimacy is often not attained until Tony Stark switches out their homemade suits for one of his own, as seen with Spider-Man. Similarly, the raiment donned by the knights of the round table separates them from lesser knights and becomes something that even the most high-born seek to achieve so that they can be elevated from civilian status, as seen by the lengths gone to by Sir Gareth. The inhuman circuit, as mishandled by the characters in *Idylls of the King* and the MCU (as well as *The Northman*), makes it harder for citizens to connect with the soldiers who are meant to be protecting them.

The imbalance in the inhuman circuit is a strong thematic similarity between Tennyson and the MCU, as both warn that if too much humanity is stripped away the inhuman becomes nonhuman. Geraint almost reaches the nonhuman with his proto-drones, but he is able to be reined in and regain his humanity and his happy marriage: “He rested well content that all was well” (“Geraint and Enid” l. 951). However, Arthur is unable to return from the abyss. He goes too far in his assimilation with Excalibur, so that “in terms of moral considerations, Arthur must meet with destruction; he is guilty of violation of the freedom of others, and like any perpetrator

⁶⁹ Agent Coulson, though a member of the military-adjacent S.H.I.E.L.D., often functions as a “civilian” in that he is a fanboy of the superheroes who wants to be on par with them but is often ignored or lightly ridiculed by them until he dies and they memorialize him as one of their own.

of violence he must pay for this misdeed” (Ryals 68). In becoming more than synonymous with his sword, King Arthur becomes no more than a weapon and so is unable to be saved either physically or morally. Tony Stark also becomes too mechanical, with his final declaration becoming a refutation of Tony and an embrace of his superhero identity, for better and (mostly, I argue) worse. His human form has to die, and all that is left of him is the arc reactor heart that he kept as a souvenir after his lifesaving (and re-humanizing) surgery at the end of *Iron Man 3*; what is supposed to be the life-giving organ has been transformed into a lifeless mechanical remnant. Cohen writes that “no single object or body has meaning within this assemblage without reference to the other forces, intensities, affects, and directions to which it is conjoined and within which it is always in the process of becoming something other, something new” (76). The inhuman circuit is more than just a human and it is more than just the rest of its parts; it is a new thing entirely and thus depends on balance to maintain its existence. However, when Arthur and Tony use the inhuman circuit to heal trauma (either within their nation as is the case with Arthur or within themselves as is the case with Tony), they do not seek balance, they seek over-correction. Regarding such over-corrections, Chris Ewart states in “An Arm Up or a Leg Down?: Grounding the Prosthesis and Other Instabilities,” there are “dangerous implications” when “impossible weapons” are used as prosthetics (169). The inhuman circuit is meant to create and function as a balanced dynamic, not as a way of erasing trauma and making a nation or individual better than before. When used for such purposes as a trauma corrective, as is the case with King Arthur and Tony Stark, the non-human can take over and destroy the human.

Conclusion

Tennyson and the MCU may not have any direct connections to each other but looking at them in concert with each other provides an interesting look at the dangers of modern warfare.

Idylls of the King and the MCU are both operating in similar registers, as the Shakespearean influence on both is apparent, particularly in their romantic storylines. This similar register allows for both to emphasize the strength of the women as opposed to the fragility of the men. Because the men in both of these series of texts are weak, they often seek out technology to become stronger and better warriors. Unfortunately, in both *Idylls of the King* and the MCU, the use of non-human technology is overdone, and the delicate balance required to maintain an inhuman circuit is disturbed and leads to the destruction of humanity. While the technology of war for King Arthur and the Victorians is very different from what is available in both the real-world 21st century and in the 21st century of the MCU, both warn of overusing technology as a salve for trauma that separates the warrior from the war and thus the soldier from the civilian. Interestingly, this is achieved in both texts through the use of empty suits of armor. Tennyson was not directly referencing drones like the MCU is with this imagery, but by looking at these texts next to each other, the difference between Geraint's uninhabited armor to Tony Stark's Iron Legion is not that vast. Neither case works out well for the man operating the uninhabited machinery, which can serve as a warning about the current world's reliance on drone warfare and how it strips modern war of the smallest shreds of humanity, which can have horrible consequences.

Knights and superheroes both seek to augment their humanity after trauma has been inflicted on their nation or their selves but doing such leads to an increased soldier/citizen divide within the texts. There are limited knight/citizen interactions in *Idylls of the King*, but the romantic comedy sensibility brought to Arthuriana by Tennyson is carried forth by the 1960 Broadway musical *Camelot*, with music by Frederick Loewe and book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner; in this musical, Arthur and Guinevere giddily show their distance from the civilians in

the song “What Do the Simple Folk Do?” where they contemplate how their non-knightly citizens deal with hardships in life, coming to such conclusions as “they whistle for a spell...they sing...they dance a fiery dance...[and] they sit around and wonder what royal folk would do.” This lack of awareness and confusion about the lower classes in *Camelot* demonstrates how separate the royals (who are also the warriors, and the women who are close to warriors) are from the civilians and how much dissonance there is between the two groups. Similarly, the friction between heroes and civilians in the MCU becomes progressively worse as the franchise goes on and the civilian death toll rises. I have described how much of the Phase 4 slate operates as the heroes facing the trauma of Tony Stark’s death at the end of Phase 3, but Phase 3 is largely defined by the anger civilians have towards the heroes for years of collateral damage. In the aftermath of Phase 2’s *Avengers: Age of Ultron*’s complete destruction of the country of Sokovia, Phase 3 starts with *Captain America: Civil War* (2016, Anthony and Joe Russo) in which the governments of the world seek to enact the Sokovia Accords, which would grant the UN control over the Avengers; at the signing of the Sokovia Accords, a Sokovian terrorist sets off a bomb, which kills King T’Chaka (played by John Kani) of the nation of Wakanda, which in turn inspires the angry Wakandan civilians in Ryan Coogler’s Phase 3 entry *Black Panther* (2018). This chain of events demonstrates how the superheroes, even as they seek to protect citizens, end up causing traumatic events that often turn the citizenry against them. Both the superheroes and the knights are meant to protect citizens, but in doing so they distance themselves as well.

The presentation of the soldier/citizen divide in both Victorian and modern American texts demonstrates that it is a recurrent real-world problem. Samuels notes that “superhero culture...often acknowledges but rarely theorizes the constitutive origins of superheroes within

the major military conflicts of the twentieth century” (130). In doing so, the MCU does not purposely make much of a statement about the divide, but it does highlight it, the same as Tennyson does by putting his knights on a similarly high pedestal as the Avengers. Both Tennyson and the MCU glorify the men (and in the MCU some women) who use their traumatic pasts as a reason to slash and smash things in an attempt to make things better, but such violent expressions are often dangerous in real life, and serve to separate traumatized individuals (including soldiers) from those around them:

The damage of war may in fact be compounded by the broad social tolerance for emotional disengagement and uncontrolled aggression in men. The people closest to the traumatized combat veteran may fail to confront him about his behavior, according him too much latitude for angry outbursts and emotional withdrawal. Ultimately, this compounds his sense of inadequacy and shame and alienates those closest to him. The social norms of male aggression also create persistent confusion for combat veterans who are attempting to develop peaceful and nurturant family relationships. (Herman 64)

As Herman states, the violent reactions soldiers have to stimuli separate them from civilians, while the normalized aggressions accepted in a patriarchal society and performed by civilians separate them from soldiers. It then creates a strange paradox that characters like knights and superheroes who commit violent acts that would alienate them from civilians in real life are instead used to valorize them and have them used as stand-ins for entire nations in Jameson’s national allegorical mode. Jameson argues that such national allegories in western literature are often unconscious because they “necessarily entail a whole social and historical critique of our current first-world situation” (178); such critique would force citizens to consider how they could proudly state they “support the troops” while still fearing them. *Idylls of the King* and the MCU both expose the soldier/citizen divide to those who are looking for it, and in doing so demonstrate that such a divide exists in the real world and problematizes both Victorian and modern American views of soldiers.

Chapter 4. “No Reconciliation Where There Is No Open Warfare,” or: Gothicizing War Texts

Within the Gothic tradition, the ruinous relationship between mankind and nature often mirrors the heroines’ (and occasionally heroes’) tortured minds and souls. This allows for older texts, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s 1862 novel *Lady Audley’s Secrets*, to explore traumatized individuals before 1980 when PTSD became a recognized disorder, and for newer texts, such as Suzanne Collins’s *Hunger Games* series (2008-2020), to demonstrate how traumatized individuals affect the world around them. Both texts understand, and seek to make their readers understand as well, that individual and collective pain are fused together and should not be separated. Braddon uses Gothic tropes to grapple with the traumas from various sources, and Collins is similarly able to do so, albeit with a more complex understanding of PTSD. While the display and presentation of traumatized troops are almost always easily able to bring about feelings of sympathy and/or horror, the use of the Gothic, and particularly Gothic landscapes, in texts such as *Lady Audley’s Secret* and the *Hunger Games* franchise allows for empathy.

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that Victorian authors grappled with the emotional fallout from wars by depicting England as under attack; Doyle’s Watson saw London as an epicenter of criminality, Gaskell’s Sylvia struggled in her small seaside town as the men around her were snatched away and returned as shadows of their previous selves, and even Tennyson’s glorious British kingdom of Camelot was rotting from the inside with prophesied betrayals before its bloody final battle. In contrast, the comparatively modern texts I have examined have often placed the onus of war’s afterlife on the soldiers; the BBC’s John Watson (as played by Martin Freeman) actively seeks to make London more like a warzone, *Miss Saigon*’s Chris alone has to choose the future of American/Vietnamese relations in miniature, and Iron Man/Tony Stark chooses to sacrifice his own life to heal a world that his family’s

legacy of war profiteering helped to desecrate. Frederic Jameson wrote that “allegory is...a surgical instrument and a diagnostic tool, by way of which the atomic particles of a sentence or a narrative...are registered on the X-ray plate in all their guilty absence, in all their toxic participation” (1). The texts from both eras use allegory, and specifically national allegory, but the participants that the authors seek to examine seem to have shifted from a national scale to a personal one. By examining how this wide variety of texts use similar conventions and tropes to reach different conclusions, I have demonstrated that more modern authors have placed the trauma almost solely onto the soldiers, allowing their fellow citizens to remain blissfully and willfully ignorant. In this chapter, I will instead show how an increased understanding of trauma can allow for a more complex mingling of national and personal trauma instead of substituting one for the other; this is partially possible due to the conventions of Gothic literature.

My main texts for this chapter will be *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games trilogy—*The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010)—as well as the prequel *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2020). *Lady Audley's Secret* is about a man named Robert Audley who suspects his uncle's young wife, Lady Lucy Audley, played a part in the disappearance of his friend George Talboys. Eventually it is discovered that Lucy Audley (née Graham) was in truth Helen Talboys (née Maldon), George's wife who faked her death while he was abroad and then remarried under her pseudonym. When Robert brought George to visit his uncle, Lucy pushed her first husband down a well to keep her secret hidden. She assumed that George died from the fall, but he had survived and decided to leave the matter alone. Collins's Hunger Games series, written over 140 years later than *Audley* and set even further into the future, describes the rise and fall of Panem, a dystopian country that is in the same general geographical space as the United States of America. The original trilogy follows

Katniss Everdeen as she volunteers for the 74th Annual Hunger Games, a yearly tradition where 24 youths aged 12-18 are forced to fight to the death until one lone victor stands. After she exploits the Games' need for a winner, she and her fellow victor Peeta Mellark are targeted by Panem's ruler Coriolanus Snow, resulting in a revolution that unseats Snow and puts an end to the gruesome tradition of sacrificing the young.⁷⁰ The prequel is set during the 10th Annual Hunger Games, and shows how Snow, before becoming president, was able to help shape the Hunger Games from a gladiatorial mess to a cross between American Idol and the Iraq War. Though the Hunger Games series has a very different plot from *Lady Audley's Secret*, both situate their characters in Gothic environs and use many aspects from that literary tradition; as a result, both are able to make complex statements about how trauma effects individuals and nations.

This chapter will be broken into three sections and a conclusion; the first section will detail how the Gothic tradition works with the modern American war narrative, the second section will focus on the mingling of nature and trauma in *Lady Audley's Secret*, and the third section will argue how these ideas are also present in the Hunger Games series and what that entails. Both *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series have critics who will argue they do not fit into the Gothic tradition as Gothic has a set period, but I will dispute these claims. To present the bona fides of these texts, I will use scholars such as Julian Wolfreys, Jarlath Killeen, and Jeffrey L. High, as well as canonically Gothic texts such as Horace Walpole's 1764 *The Castle of Otranto*, Ann Radcliffe's 1794 *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. I believe that these accepted Gothic texts share much

⁷⁰ The reason that Katniss and Peeta are fellow victors despite only one being allowed is that they exploited the popular audience attachment to them as a couple and formed a suicide pact where either both lived or both died; the Capitol decided to allow both to live.

Gothic DNA with *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series. However, if my readers should disagree, I would like to share this (somewhat amended) disclaimer given by John Ruskin in "The Nature of Gothic" (1853):

And if, at any point of the inquiry, I should interfere with any of the reader's previously formed conceptions, and use the term Gothic in any sense which [they] would not willingly attach to it, I do not ask [them] to accept, but only to examine and understand, my interpretation as necessary to the intelligibility of what follows in the rest of the [chapter]. (33)

"Like a Fire in a Forest": Grafting the Gothic Tradition onto the Modern War Narrative

The duration of the Gothic tradition has long been a source of contention, though its beginnings are relatively clear. According to Julian Wolfreys in *Victorian Hauntings:*

Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature:

It is generally agreed amongst critics that the gothic...had a life-span of approximately 56 years. It was given life in 1764 with the publication of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. It died allegedly somewhere around 1818 or 1820, with the publication of, respectively, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. (8)

Otranto tells the story of a medieval lord named Manfred whose castle and family are besieged by a curse that ultimately drives him to abdicate the position he had desperately tried to retain. Within this narrative, there are many things that would later come to be called tropes of the Gothic tradition; there is a feeling of being constantly surveilled (which is supported by the painted figure of Manfred's grandfather leaving its frame to follow him), characters often travel through "a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church," and there is a supernatural presence guarding over the proceedings such as when, "three drops of blood fell from the nose of Alfonso's statue" (Walpole 25; 26; 89). Subsequent Gothic texts recreate moments like those examples, which demonstrates how *Otranto* is effective as a point of origin. While I may not agree with the end-date assigned by Wolfreys (credited to the general

critical consensus), *Otranto* serves as a perfect introduction to the Gothic and allows readers to view the themes, motifs, and tropes that would become standard in following years.

The tropes that began with *Otranto* are particularly well-suited to war narratives, as can be seen through the example of surveillance paranoia in modern media. In his article “*Dorian Gray* and the Gothic Novel,” Lewis J. Poteet argues that Gothic literature presents a “radical bifurcation of nature and art” (241). This posits the paintings with watchful eyes as against-nature, and so implies that surveillance is unnatural. The feeling of being surveilled is one that has been common to many wars but has become an increasing concern in 21st century wars after “the infringements of personal liberties in the United States after passage of The Patriot Act,” according to Melissa Ames in her article “Engaging ‘Apolitical’ Adolescents: Analyzing the Popularity and Educational Potential of Dystopian Literature Post-9/11” (9). The abundance of surveillance can be seen in a wide variety of forms such as in *The Real Housewives of Orange County* where housewife Vicki Gunvalson feels trapped inside her mansion in the California suburb of Coto de Caza after her marine son-in-law installs a security camera system while he is in between deployments.⁷¹ On a larger scale, the 2012 London Olympics attempted to make surveillance feel cuddly by having their mascots “both have a huge single eye made out of a camera lens,” as described in the *Forbes* article “London's Amazingly Explicit Surveillance State Mascot For The 2012 Olympics Has A Huge Camera Eye That ‘Records Everything’” by Kashmir Hill. The fact that modern wars have impacted both the *Real Housewives* franchise and the Olympic games shows the cultural prevalence of this fear and how it can bring war to a variety of seemingly non-war related media. Just as the tortured characters of Gothic novels have to hide from paintings with roving eyes, characters in modern war narratives have to deal with

⁷¹ *Real Housewives of Orange County* season 8 episode 5, “The Party is DONE!”

CCTV and government interference. By running away from these unnatural modes of surveillance, the characters find themselves within the natural world.

As with many war texts discussed in previous chapters, location is very important to the Gothic tradition, as seen by Anne Radcliffe's 1794 novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. *Udolpho* tells the story of Emily St. Aubert who is orphaned and then forced to live with her uncaring aunt. Her aunt discourages Emily's romance with Valancourt until she discovers Valancourt's connections in French society. However, before Emily and Valancourt can wed, her aunt uses their marriage funds to marry her own suitor and run off to Italy, along with an unwilling Emily. Eventually, Emily, her aunt, and the evil new uncle Signor Montoni arrive at the castle Udolpho where dark secrets and possibly supernatural happenings threaten Emily. After a series of hardships, Emily eventually escapes Udolpho and reunites with Valancourt. The castle Udolpho is a striking location that sticks in the readers' minds so that we can feel as overwhelmed as Emily does when she notes that, "every room in the castle feels like a well" (Radcliffe 234). Despite the power Udolpho retains over the mind of the reader and its placement in the novel's title, the castle appears in less than half of the text. It is a testament to Radcliffe's place in the Gothic canon that a location with so little textual presence left a large imprint on the genre going forward. In "Narrative Enclosure as Textual Ruin: An Archaeology of Gothic Consciousness," Jan B. Gordon argues that "the very proliferation of fragments in Gothic fiction—abandoned houses, rusty locks, ill-fitting bolts, crumbling graves, incompleting manuscripts, half-formed sensibilities—shares the ontology of the interrupted...by creating the sense of an ending that is indeterminate and temporary" (213-14). Therefore, even as Emily escapes Udolpho, it is only an escape from the physical enclosure of the castle, while the impact of it leaves a permanent mark on her. This is comparable to many war texts that take place away from the battlefield but are

still often heavily defined by the scenes set therein. Both Udolpho and the battlefield may only take up a small part of a soldier's life or of a war narrative, but their impact is similarly haunting and impactful.

The dread-inspiring power of the battlefield suggests a recurring aspect throughout the Gothic tradition: the clash between humans and nature, which is a theme Thomas Hardy considers throughout his oeuvre. As Jarlath Killeen notes in *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1825-1914*, "the writing of Thomas Hardy is pervaded with a sense of the British regions as Gothic localities; his Wessex is a terrain of history, legend, portents, superstition, folklore, ghost and fatalism, a place stuck in the past" (95). The cruellest of his natural creations is perhaps Egdon Heath from 1878's *The Return of the Native*: "the face of the heath by its mere complexion added half-an-hour to eve: it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread" (9). The heath's volatility is on full display when the widow Mrs. Yeobright dies from heat exhaustion and a snake bite; the "sapphirine hue of the zenith in spring and early summer had completely gone," and is replaced by a sun that "stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her" (266; 278). Along her journey she runs into a particularly disturbing area:

The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude, and wild, and for a few minutes Mrs. Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group but was splintered, lopped and distorted by the fierce weather that there held them at its mercy whenever it prevailed. Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from fire marking their sides, while the ground at their feet was strewn with dead sticks and heaps of cones blown down in the gales of past years. The place was called Devil's Bellows, and it was only necessary to come there on a March or November night to discover the forcible reasons for that name. On the present heated afternoon when no perceptible wind was blowing the trees kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air. (268)

This aural image of the supernaturally moaning landscape is part of the Gothic tradition and a signal of nature's hostility, much as the battlefield in war texts is hostile. While Mrs. Yeobright and the other characters of the novel are thrown about and victimized by life, Egdon Heath maintains mastery over everything from the flow of time to the fate of humans. In this novel, as in many Gothic and war texts, humans and nature are in conflict, and nature shows no signs of weakening.

Even when Gothic texts are set in cities, nature finds a way to infiltrate and show its hostility towards humankind, as seen in Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The narrative is set in industrialized London, yet when describing Dr. Jekyll's residence nature imagery is used:

Even on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood, like a fire in a forest; and with its freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger. (39)

The image of a forest fire encompasses the duality that Stevenson uses throughout his text; it is both beautiful to behold and horribly destructive. As the story progresses, nature becomes even more aggressive:

It was a wild, cold, seasonable night of March, with a pale moon, lying on her back as though the wind had tilted her, and a flying wrack of the most diaphanous and lawny texture. The wind made talking difficult, and flecked the blood into the face. It seemed to have swept the streets unusually bare of passengers, besides; for Mr. Utterson thought he had never seen that part of London so deserted... The square, when they got there, was full of wind and dust, and the thin trees in the garden were lashing themselves along the railing. (80)

The imagery here is reminiscent of Hardy's *Devil's Bellows*, though Stevenson's wind goes beyond the trees to seemingly knock over the moon and come close to drawing blood from the faces of passersby. Even though *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* takes place in urban London, nature

still has a significant amount of power and can unleash pain and misery upon the masses. The threat of nature may not be as pronounced in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as in Gothic texts set in the countryside, but the threat is not entirely absent.

This infiltration of nature into the urban landscape is thematically in line with my discussion of PTSD and war literature. Just as nature is a destructive force in Stevenson's London, the influence of traumatized soldiers on the homeland is often depicted like a forest fire. In my first chapter I detailed how many modern adaptations of Dr. John Watson try to infect their homelands with their own PTSD, in my second chapter I emphasized how Chris's nightmares haunt his American wife Ellen and shatter the peace of their domestic sphere, and in my third chapter I showed the multiversal consequences of one weapons manufacturing heir being blown up in a warzone. Just like a forest fire, the progression here shows how PTSD, as presented in modern media, can spread wildly; Watson shows the initial spark, Chris shows the spark jumping as his trauma singes both his marriages (and in effect two countries), while Tony Stark's narrative arc demonstrates the devastatingly full effect as his trauma goes beyond his own home, and relationship with Pepper Potts, to the entire multiverse. Just as Stevenson's wind feels alien in the city as it tries to draw blood from Mr. Utterson's face, PTSD in these modern narratives is from another environment but is nonetheless invasive.

The difference between those modern war narratives and the Hunger Games series which I will be discussing in this chapter is that they fit more easily into the national allegorical mode, as previously established, while the Hunger Games, and its Gothic forbears, do not. The texts I have focused on in previous chapters all have characters who easily can be seen as representatives for their respective countries, which is not true of either the Hunger Games series or of *Lady Audley's Secret*. In Braddon's novel, the only character who seems to be in tune with

their environment is the relatively minor figure Harcourt Talboys, but he and his forbidding estate are known for being cut off from the rest of the nation and the world as a whole. In *The Hunger Games*, the nation of Panem is severely fractured, so no character is able to represent it. There are people who, within the texts, represent certain districts or zones, but they are all rendered realistically human and so demonstrate that their interests are not fully aligned with their land. The inability for characters in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Hunger Games* to fully acclimate to their harsh environments demonstrates the Gothic theme of nature imposing its harsh will on mankind, a theme that is nearly impossible to find in texts when characters and their countries are interchangeable.

I am not saying that these texts are not allegories, but that they do not easily fit into the form of national allegory and this complexity lends them a unique power. Jameson writes that:

It is always better, when confronted with so multifarious a term, to begin by identifying its various enemies, which is to say, its opposites. Maybe we can reduce them to two: the first condemns the multiplicity and dispersal of allegory with the unity of the living symbol. The second denounces everything cut-and-dried, abstract, desiccated in the allegorical narrative, with the concreteness of reality itself and the perceptual three-dimensionality of realism. (2)

Neither *Lady Audley's Secret* nor the *Hunger Games* series fits into these anti-allegorical categories; they do not condemn the multiplicity of allegory as I argue that they instead further divide their symbols, and they do not represent reality or realism as both are part of naturally heightened genres (respectively, sensation literature and science fiction). The majority of national allegories, like many of the texts I have previously discussed, use their allegorical mode to show the corruption of a country by the corruption of a single man or woman); *Lady Audley's Secret* and the *Hunger Games* series demonstrate the corruption of their countries by the effects on a wide variety of men and women. This approach more visibly demonstrates the far-reaching

effects of war trauma and how it can affect anyone, not just soldiers; by bringing forward the idea that war can traumatize anyone, the threat becomes more immediate.

When the effects of war feel closer to home for civilians, the individual soldier becomes less of a pariah, and the audience gains empathy and understanding instead of sympathy. In his article “Sympathy, Empathy, Care,” Stephen Darwall defines sympathy as “a feeling or emotion that (a) responds to some apparent threat or obstacle to an individual’s good or well-being, (b) has that individual himself as an object, and (c) involves concern for him, and thus for his well-being, for his sake” (261). He goes on to say that “empathy consists in feeling what one imagines he feels, or perhaps should feel (fear, say), or in some imagined copy of these feelings” (261). Darwall feels that the more humane of the two is sympathy as it increases the level of concern, but I argue that in order to have better representations of trauma, empathy is more significant than sympathy. Sympathy, while it raises concern for an individual other than oneself, also acts to separate the two individuals involved. When soldiers and citizens are already separated in the public consciousness by such a wide gulf, sympathy only widens the gap. Empathy, however, would allow citizens to imagine how their traumas are comparable to soldiers with PTSD and then more serviceable actions could take place. Nancy E. Snow argues in her article “Empathy” that “empathy’s moral significance is to view the ability to empathize as instrumentally valuable, though not necessary or sufficient for moral perception and responsiveness” (74). Unlike Darwall, Snow does not pit empathy up against sympathy but says that empathy is “valuable” in working towards moral actions. Empathy and sympathy are not opposites, and viewing them as such can be morally questionable; without empathy, sympathy would only serve to make the distance between traumatized soldiers and the citizenry they are meant to protect larger, which in turn fails to protect the mental well-being of either side.

“Different Degrees of Madness”: Traumas Unearthed in *Lady Audley’s Secret*

Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* is often held up as a prime example of the sensation novel. Patrick Brantlinger in “What is Sensational About the ‘Sensation Novel’?” describes the genre as a “unique mixture of contemporary domestic realism with elements of the Gothic romance, the Newgate novel of criminal ‘low life,’ and the ‘silver fork’ novel of scandalous and sometimes criminal ‘high life’” (1). While the Gothic tended to look to the past for its narratives, sensation novels often focused on the present (or near-present as is the case with *Lady Audley’s Secret*). This modernity is because while the Gothic tradition supposedly ended by 1820, the sensation novel “flourished in the 1860s only to die out a decade or two later” (Brantlinger 1). Brantlinger also argues that “in the sensation novel, the Gothic is brought up to date and so mixed with the conventions of realism as to make its events seems possible if not exactly probable” (9). Lyn Pykett in *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel* highlights how this topicality brought with it other contemporary descriptors: “variously described as ‘fast novels’, ‘crime novels’, ‘bigamy novels’ or ‘adultery novels’, sensation novels were pre-eminently tales of modern life” (4). While the elements that made up sensation novels had existed in previous genres, they are pushed to new heights in this genre and thus appear different from before for reasons of extremity. These unrecognizable extremes are why contemporary critics saw the sensation novel as, “a new kind of fiction which appeared from nowhere to satisfy the cravings of an eager and expanding reading public possessed of suspect, or downright depraved tastes” (Pykett 3). However, with the benefit of time, Carol Margaret Davison points out in *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764-1824* how critics have come to realize that this heightened genre, “draws upon Female Gothic concerns and conventions in combination with detective fiction” (224). At the time in which Mary Elizabeth Braddon wrote and published

Lady Audley's Secret, her text may have come across as an engrossing oddity that came out of nowhere, but subsequent studies of it and other sensation novels have revealed that, as is always the case, this genre was not a wholly new creation.

One way in which *Lady Audley's Secret* engages with its Gothic past in order to move forward into the future is by making the story almost fully set in England while having the characters often bring up Gothic's supposedly foreign roots. Mary Elizabeth Braddon has characters (especially Robert Audley's cousin and Lady Audley's step-daughter Alicia Audley) say things such as, "since Robert Audley has taken it into his head to conduct himself like some ghost-haunted hero in a German story, I have given up attempting to understand him" (223). Even Braddon's narrator joins in by describing a servant who appears to walk through walls as "like a ghost in a German story" (162). Brantlinger believes that falsely attributing the Gothic to foreign literature "hardly gives British fiction prior to the 1860s its due with regard to the illegitimate and indecorous" (7). The attribution of the Gothic to the German was problematic before *Lady Audley's Secret*; according to Jeffrey L. High in "Schiller, Coleridge, and the Reputation of the German 'Gothic' Tale," "by the early nineteenth century Gothic tales were so clearly established as 'German stories'—thus the title of a three-volume British collection of 1826—that Edgar Allan Poe felt the need to reclaim the genre for all humanity in 1839" (50). Braddon also works to reclaim the Gothic sensibilities for England with her novel. Even though the characters protest that the things that scare them in their lives are Germanic, everything that happens in the text is British. The only influence being exerted is by the British themselves, who are mentioned as being at war in India, or trying to make money in Australia, or hiding their wives in Belgium. Even as the characters, and the Victorian public, had in their heads that the

Gothic's roots were Germanic or otherwise foreign, *Lady Audley's Secret* explicitly states that the modern horrors and traumas her characters face are completely British.

When the narrative focuses in and around Audley Court, Braddon creates an atmosphere that fully aligns this seat of British aristocracy with the Gothic tradition. The town of Audley is described as “straggling, old-fashioned, [and] fast decaying” (Braddon 49). The home itself is similarly in a state of ruin and full of old-fashioned mystery; Braddon describes it as “a dreary place enough, even in all its rustic glory” and since it is an estate in a Gothic novel, “of course, in such a house, there were secret chambers” (49; 8). Like many Gothic novels, Audley Court is haunted by ghastly figures, most prominently Lady Audley's lady's-maid and confidante Phœbe Marks; even on Phœbe's wedding day, Braddon notes that “a superstitious stranger might have mistaken the bride for the ghost of some other bride, dead and buried in the vaults below the church” (99). Audley Court also features paintings that seem as lifelike as the one in *The Castle of Otranto*. One of the older paintings hanging on the walls prompts Robert Audley to observe, “that fellow with the battle-axe looks as if he wanted to split George's head open” (Braddon 62). Once Robert and George are able to enter Lady Audley's rooms (through one of those secret chambers), the work-in-progress portrait of Lady Audley is even more haunting:

No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in that portrait... The perfection of feature, the brilliancy of colouring, were there, but I suppose the painter had copied quaint medieval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of a beautiful fiend. (Braddon 65)

Braddon, in this passage and throughout the novel, makes the Gothic more modern; she allows for older paintings to be haunting like the medieval portraiture in *Otranto*, but she acknowledges

that the “medieval monstrosities” inspired more recent traditions like the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and so the hauntings are passed down.

The genetic line of portraiture relates to Lady Audley’s secret genetic disorder. Saverio Tomaiuolo wrote in *In Lady Audley’s Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* that, “the choice of a Pre-Raphaelite painter as the author of Lady Audley’s portrait is indicative of Braddon’s desire to render in detail the complexity of her female character” (148-49). By making Lady Audley a more complex figure, her secret inherited trauma is more understandable to a reader instead of rendering her as a monster. Judith Herman notes that “for two decades in the late nineteenth century, the disorder called hysteria became a major focus of serious inquiry. The term *hysteria* was so commonly understood at the time that no one had actually taken the trouble to define it systematically” (10; emphasis in original). *Lady Audley*, being published in 1862, was written before the medical establishment began its serious inquiry into hysteria, so while Herman notes it was loosely defined by the end of the century, it is even more loose in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. There was no accepted terminology for the disorder, but its presence was felt by many, including Mary Elizabeth Braddon, whose lover’s wife was in an asylum in Ireland for such a condition (Killeen 23). Braddon’s text seeks to make the reader empathize with women who suffer from such a malady, and she uses the pre-Raphaelite painting, among other things, to help make the connection. This choice demonstrates how the text is drawing upon Gothic conventions while seeking to examine them in a new light, especially regarding a growing awareness of trauma.

Audley Court itself promotes a similar reading, as its visage appears to be old ruins (a Gothic mainstay), but shows the efforts of modernization and changing to suit the fashion of different time periods because it:

must have been the handiwork of that good old builder—Time, who, adding a room one year, and knocking down a room another year, toppling over now a chimney coeval with the Plantagenets, and setting up one in the style of the Tudors; shaking down a bit of Saxon wall there, and allowing a Norman arch to stand here; throwing in a row of high narrow windows in the reign of Queen Anne, joining on a dining-room after the fashion of the time of Hanoverian George I, to a refectory that had been standing since the Conquest, had contrived, in some eleven centuries, to run up such a mansion as was not elsewhere to be met with throughout the county of Essex. (Braddon 8)

The Gothic tradition often sees its texts set in the far past, but *Lady Audley's Secret* demonstrates that the past has lingering effects; the roots of Gothicism may be old, but they continue to grow and thrive, even when presented in states of decay and deathliness. Just as Audley Court is a combination of all its history, so too is the history of trauma cumulative. Herman notes that there have been three major trauma movements in the medical community:

The first to emerge was hysteria, the archetypal psychological disorder of women. Its study grew out of the republican, anticlerical political movement of the late nineteenth century in France. The second was shell shock or combat neurosis. Its study began in England and the United States after the First World War and reached a peak after the Vietnam War. Its political context was the collapse of a cult of war and the growth of an antiwar movement. The last and most recent trauma to come into public awareness is sexual and domestic violence. Its political context is the feminist movement in Western Europe and North America. Our contemporary understanding of psychological trauma is built upon a synthesis of these three separate lines of investigation. (9)

As Herman notes, the modern understanding of trauma requires all three of these phases.

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to read Lady Audley's trauma, or the trauma of any other characters in the novel, as relatable to PTSD. Just as the Victorian audience's read of Audley Court is inspired by the cumulative generations' worth of architecture, the modern reader can understand the novel's grappling with Lady Audley's predicament with the cumulative decades' worth of medical research.

Lady Audley's complexity within can be glimpsed even from her outside appearance. The many descriptions of Lady Lucy Audley are very much in line with the descriptions of heroines

in previous Gothic texts. In the highly influential Gothic text *The Monk* (1796), Matthew Lewis describes his heroine as such:

Her skin though fair was not entirely without freckles; Her eyes were not very large, nor their lashes particularly long. But then her lips were of the most rosy freshness; Her fair and undulating hair, confined by a simple ribband, poured itself below her waist in a profusion of ringlets; Her throat was full and beautiful in the extreme; Her hand and arm were formed with the most perfect symmetry; Her mild blue eyes seemed an heaven of sweetness, and the crystal in which they moved, sparkled with all the brilliance of Diamonds: She appeared to be scarcely fifteen. (10-11)

Similarly, Lady Audley is described as such: “The innocence and candour of an infant beamed in Lady Audley’s fair face, and shone out of her large and liquid blue eyes. The rosy lips, the delicate nose, the profusion of fair ringlets, all contributed to preserve to her beauty the character of extreme youth and freshness” (Braddon 50). Lady Audley shares fair skin, rosy lips, gorgeous blue eyes, beautiful ringlets, and an ethereal youthfulness with *The Monk*’s Antonia, but while Antonia is endlessly virtuous, Lady Audley tries to murder multiple characters out of self-interest. Braddon has Robert Audley make particular note of this subversion when he tells Lady Audley, “I do not believe in mandrake, or in blood-stains that no time can efface. I believe rather that we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime, and breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer, and admire its tranquil beauty” (124). Lady Audley appears to be perfectly in line with the type of virtuous heroine common to the Gothic novel, but her tendency towards murder complicates the trope while still being very much in line with the tone of the Gothic tradition.

Lady Audley’s first husband, George Talboys, is instead the character who most fulfills the narrative role that his wife’s appearance suggests. Braddon describes him as such:

He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, with a dark face, bronzed by exposure to the sun; he had handsome brown eyes, with a feminine smile in them, that sparkled through his black lashes, and a bushy beard and moustache that

covered the whole of the lower part of his face. He was tall, and powerfully built; he wore a loose grey suit, and a felt hat, thrown carelessly upon his black hair.
(17)

While his facial hair and tanned skin differentiates him from figures like Lewis's Antonia, he does share her lashes and a sense of femininity. His lack of masculine strength is also emphasized by the oversized suit, making him appear small and fragile in a manner similar to Philip Hepburn when he returns from war in *Sylvia's Lovers* (Gaskell 393).⁷² Like Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, George spends much of the narrative hidden away (mourning his wife alone in his room, trapped at the bottom of a well, or in self-exile to New York) while the Gothic horrors that pertain to his person continue on in his absence. Because of this, George is not a character who is present for most of the text, but his lack of presence is part of what makes him fill the position of characters like Lewis's Antonia or Radcliffe's Emily. Like many innocent Gothic heroines before him, George is whisked away to a large estate and becomes involved in a series of dark and dreary happenings that he must fight to survive through so that he can have his happily ever after, which he does. Though George Talboys is not the focal point of the novel, he is the one who most cleanly aligns with the traditional role of the Gothic heroine.

With George in the narrative role of the Gothic heroine, that leaves Lady Audley as the villain. However, instead of purely evil motives like Signor Montoni in *Udolpho*, Lady Audley felt that she had to murder her husband because he did not understand her: "He did not know the hidden taint that I had sucked in with my mother's milk. He did not know that it was possible to drive me mad" (Braddon 335). Lady Audley's "madness" comes from her mother and her grandmother, as the women in the family were known to have gone "mad" after giving birth

⁷² For discussion of that particular oversized coat, see my second chapter.

(Braddon 298). When she gave birth to her and George's son Georgey, "the crisis which had been fatal to my mother arose for me" (Braddon 300). Similar to how George is a masculine inversion of the typical Gothic heroine, Lady Audley is a more complex version of a Gothic villain. She may haunt a large estate wherein she attempts to commit murder and does commit arson, but Braddon goes to great lengths to alert her readers that her actions are beyond her control and driven by an inherited illness. Unlike many modern texts with better understandings of trauma, Braddon seeks to demystify her supposed villain by evincing empathy for her despite all the arson and attempted murder.

While the audience is meant to understand these complexities, the characters themselves do not initially, and it is only through eventual understanding that the husband and wife come to terms. Soon after the birth, George abandoned the family to go to Australia and make his wealth, misinterpreting the hereditary cause for mere unhappiness with their financial standing. The lack of money was a major concern for Lady Audley, then Helen Talboys, who married George thinking that, "dragoons were always rich," as opposed to her father who was in the navy and whose constant debts taught her what it meant to be poor (Braddon 157; 296). Despite her desire for riches, she sees her actions as more influenced by her hereditary inheritance, an influence that George misunderstands. She also demonstrates misunderstanding of him, however, especially when she underestimates the impact her fake death would have on him. She tells Robert at a dinner:

I did not think men were capable of these deep and lasting affections. I thought that one pretty face was as good as another pretty face to them, and that when number one with blue eyes and fair hair died, they had only to look out for number two with black eyes and hair, by way of variety. (Braddon 77)

Neither husband nor wife fully understood each other until she tried to kill him. Braddon shows the truth of this when George tells Robert that, "God know that from the moment in which I sank

into the black pit, knowing the treacherous hand that had sent me to what might have been my death, my chief thought was of the safety of the woman who had betrayed me” (377). George had approached Helen that afternoon to confront her, but once he saw her true self in that instant, he understood her. Even though these two characters seem irrevocably at odds with each other, the moment when they should be most separate serves as the most important link.

This connection is based on the similarity between their circumstances, even though their traumas come from different sources. George is a dragoon so even though his injury did not come from a war, he still couches it in those terms⁷³:

when some of our fellows were wounded in India, they came home bringing bullets inside them. They did not talk of them, and they were stout and hearty, and looked as well, perhaps, as you or I; but every change in the weather, however slight, every variation of the atmosphere, however trifling, brought back the old agony of their wounds as sharp as ever they had felt it on the battle-field. I’ve had my wound, Bob; I carry the bullet still, and I shall carry it into my coffin.
(Braddon 47)

In order to express the deep emotional wound that he has sustained from Helen’s “death,” he relies on military language. This language carries over to his friend Robert when he worries that he might suffer the same fate as his friend: “what if she [Clara Talboys, George’s sister and Robert’s future wife] sends me away to fight the battle, and marries some hulking country squire while my back is turned?” (Braddon 373). Although he knows that his friend was digging for gold in Australia when Helen became Lucy, his friend’s military rhetoric led to him speaking of this non-military work in military terms. Lady Audley’s hereditary trauma is not as often couched in military discourse, but the similarities between her madness and her first husband’s heartbreak are nonetheless emphasized. The reader is made aware of the connection by how the two react in the same traditionally Gothic manner to a triggering event. When George sees the

⁷³ I have previously described a similar occurrence as a way of dealing with a traumatized individual in my first chapter when discussing how Hercule Poirot explains to Captain Hastings why he had to fake his death in *The Big Four*.

portrait of Lady Audley and realizes that Helen is still alive, Robert tells him that he looks, “white and haggard, with your great hollow eyes staring out at the sky as if they were fixed upon a ghost” (Braddon 67). After Lady Audley discovers that her first husband saw the portrait, her second husband expresses concern by telling her, “once last night, when you looked out through the dark green bed-curtains, with your poor white face, and the purple rims round your hollow eyes, I had almost a difficulty to recognise my little wife in that ghastly, terrified, agonised-looking creature” (Braddon 70). Both resemble the living dead when they are exposed to reminders of their traumas which foreshadows the sense of understanding that will come once she tries to murder him.

Even though neither of these characters is literally traumatized by a war, their trauma is understood through that lens. The doctor that cursorily questions her after her lies have been exposed tells Robert that Lady Audley has “latent insanity” and “has the hereditary taint in her blood” (Braddon 323). What she refers to as her “terribly silent struggle” is similar to our current understanding of postpartum psychosis or depression (Braddon 252).⁷⁴ This is a medical topic that has recently been explored in fictional texts like the black comedy film *Tully* (2018, Jason Reitman) and the horror television show *Servant* (2019-23, created by Tony Basgallop), but medical understanding is still very much in development. Much of the understanding that those modern texts do have is based on research that has taken place since the publication of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, so the lack of terminology in the novel is unsurprising. Despite this, Braddon helps her reader to attempt to understand what Lady Audley is suffering through George Talboys. When George expresses understanding of her affliction, and when the narrator connects the two traumas through their similar reactions, the reader is able to comprehend that

⁷⁴ The idea of a “silent struggle” is similar to my discussion in my second chapter relating to how Daniel Robson’s trauma is presented.

the “terribly silent struggle” that Lady Audley suffers through is similar to George’s “horrible heart wound,” and that it is a question of “different degrees of madness” rather than entirely separate issues (Braddon 252; 326; 297). When discussing the Vietnam War, Herman writes that:

Predictably, those who are already disempowered or disconnected from others are most at risk. For example, the younger, less well-educated soldiers sent to Vietnam were more likely than others to be exposed to extreme war experiences. They were also more likely to have few social supports on their return home and were consequently less likely to talk about their war experiences with friends or family. Not surprisingly, these men were at high risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder...Traumatic life events, like other misfortunes, are especially merciless to those who are already troubled. (60)

Like those soldiers, both Lady Audley and George Talboys feel isolated from all around them and their traumatic states suffer because of this, but eventually realize their respective “silent struggles” can be expressed with each other. The reader understands Lady Audley through George, and they are made to understand George’s emotional trauma through the metaphor he makes between himself and soldiers with bullets from India (Braddon 47). Through this chain, it becomes clear that Mary Elizabeth Braddon relied on her readership in 1862 to understand the plight of soldiers coming home wounded from the Indian Rebellion of 1857 so that they could understand and empathize with her characters and their various struggles.

The relatability to war is emphasized elsewhere in the text as well, as much of their lives is influenced by the Indian Rebellion. This is most explicitly stated in the novel when Alicia makes fun of one of her father’s friends:

‘What do you think Major Melville told me when he called here yesterday, Alicia?’ Sir Michael asked, presently.

‘I haven’t the remotest idea,’ replied Alicia, rather disdainfully. ‘Perhaps he told you that we should have another war before long, by Ged, sir; or, perhaps, he told you that we should have a new ministry, by Ged, sir, for that those fellows are getting themselves into a mess, sir; or that those other fellows were reforming this, and cutting down that and altering the other in the army, until, by Ged, sir, we shall have no army at all, by-and-by—nothing but a pack of boys, sir, crammed up to the eyes with a lot of senseless schoolmasters’ rubbish and dressed

in shell-jackets and calico helmets. Yes, sir, they're fighting in Oudh in calico helmets at this very day, sir.' (Braddon 280)

It is clear from Alicia's disdain that she has often heard these older men discussing the military, and in particular India as she mentions Oudh, and that it has become such a regular topic of conversation that she is tired and bored of it. Her boredom with the topic of calico helmets and soldiers in Oudh may not seem as strong a reminder of the war as the bullets in bodies that George recounts, but her annoyance demonstrates more clearly the unescapable nature of the war. Even Alicia Audley who is generally able to avoid displeasure from her home in the English countryside where she can run to the stable of her favorite horse Atalanta at any inconvenience is unable to avoid an annoying amount of discussion regarding the rebellion in India. In his book *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma*, Christopher Herbert writes of *Lady Audley's Secret* that "there may in fact be no other contemporary document that testifies in such a concentrated, single-minded way, or with such prescience, to the transforming effect of the Mutiny on the Victorian psyche" (240). He argues that the dates between 1857 and 1858 which become so important to Robert Audley's investigation into the history of Lady Audley would be as impactful to Braddon's readership in 1862 as the date September 11, 2001 is to modern Americans (247). Though the text takes place in England and follows a bigamy plot, Braddon uses her timeframe and other details of her characters' lives to suggest the lingering effects of the Indian Rebellion.

The Gothic tradition of showing nature's harsh relationship with mankind helps to reinforce these war-adjacent psychological disturbances. Throughout the novel, Braddon makes reference to the connection between man and nature, most explicitly when describing how George's father's turn away from stoicism is mirrored by the change of seasons: "There were primroses and early violets in the hedges now, and the streams which, upon [Robert's] first visit,

had been hard and frost-bound as the heart of Harcourt Talboys, had thawed, like that gentleman, and ran merrily under the blackthorn bushes in the capricious April sunshine” (370). Robert Audley has his own connections to nature, as every time he takes a train ride in his various travels the views out his windows mimic his state of mind; when he is upset about George’s disappearance and is going to see George’s father-in-law for answers, his view is “misty” and “opaque,” just like his grasp of the situation at hand (138). Later, when he is grappling with his understanding of the world after discovering Lady Audley’s madness, the view out his window “seemed unreal” (336). Like before, the landscape that passes him by reflects his mood on the trip. While Robert Audley and Harcourt Talboys are in sync with nature, George and Lady Audley are consumed by it. George becomes one with the earth when he is pushed down the well by Lady Audley; even though he climbed out of the well, the idea of him having stayed down there lingers and leaves an image of his body being consumed by the ruin of a well. Lady Audley’s fate at the hand of nature is signified through the name of the Belgian town where Robert Audley deposits her: Villebrumeuse. Literally translated, the town is named “foggy city.” Before she knew about her final destination, she intended on using her beauty to make the best of her situation as “there was scarcely any spot upon this wide earth in which her beauty would not constitute a little royalty, and win her liege knights and willing subjects” (325). This plan seems reminiscent of Vivien’s successful plan to trap Merlin in a tree, but Lady Audley ends up being the one trapped by nature in her city of fog.⁷⁵ *Lady Audley’s Secret* takes advantage of the Gothic trope of the battle between man and nature to show the mental state of its characters; some are in communion with nature for both better and worse, while George and Lucy’s traumas are represented by their disconnect from and possible consumption by nature.

⁷⁵ For further analysis of Merlin and Vivien, see my third chapter.

“As Long as You Can Find Yourself”: The Nature of Names in the Hunger Games Series

Suzanne Collins’s Hunger Games series consistently shows the battle between humanity and nature, particularly through the characters’ names, including Katniss Everdeen, the heroine of the original trilogy. Katniss explains her name’s meaning early in the first book of the series: “small, bluish tubers that don’t look like much but boiled or baked are as good as any potato...I heard my father’s voice joking ‘As long as you can find yourself, you’ll never starve’” (*The Hunger Games* 52). He says it jokingly, but it nevertheless implies that katniss is not a glamorous or sought-after plant but can save lives in tough situations. The reaping ceremony at the start of *The Hunger Games* demonstrates how fitting the name is for his daughter. This ceremony is presented to the people of Panem as a holiday, although Katniss notes that, “despite the bright banners hanging on the buildings, there’s an air of grimness. The camera crews, perched like buzzards on rooftops, only add to the effect” (*HG* 16). Once everyone in the district has gone to their appropriate place of pseudo-celebration, Effie Trinket, a representative of the Capitol, chooses one male and one female aged 12-18 to “compete” in the Hunger Games; she picks the name Primrose Everdeen, so Katniss volunteers to go in her younger sister’s place. Like her namesake, Katniss does not originally look like much to the other citizens of Panem as, “in District 12...the word *tribute* is pretty much synonymous with the word *corpse*” (*HG* 12; emphasis in original). No tribute, even a volunteer, from District 12 would seem a likely choice to win the Games, especially since Districts 1, 2, and 4 were commonly known for semi-illegally training children from a very young age to win the Games. Despite her underdog status, Katniss manages to win the 74th Annual Hunger Games and in doing so saves the life of her fellow District 12 tribute Peeta Mellark; during the course of the televised Games they had emphasized their roles as star-crossed lovers (a reality for him, not for her), which forced the Capitol to

change the rule about only having one victor as the citizenry (particularly those in the Capitol) grew attached to the couple and did not want to split them up. The Capitol tried to reverse this rule change at the end of the Games, but Katniss and Peeta form a suicide pact that makes the Capitol reverse their reversal. Therefore, Katniss went into the Games with little public attention (attention is paid to her fashion and her romance, but not much to her survivability), and wins the Games in a way that also allowed her to save Peeta's life, fulfilling her father's description of Katniss. Both the plant and the heroine are able to survive in adverse situations and provide lifesaving help to those who need it.

Katniss's nickname, given to her by her other potential love interest Gale Hawthorne, is Catnip, a very different type of plant and one that foreshadows her public persona as the face of the rebellion. Katniss explains the origins of this nickname in the first chapter of the first book, even giving it to the reader slightly before telling her actual name:

“Hey, Catnip,” says Gale. My real name is Katniss, but when I first told him, I had barely whispered it. So he thought I'd said Catnip. Then when this crazy lynx started following me around the woods looking for handouts, it became his official nickname for me. I finally had to kill the lynx because he scared off game. I almost regretted it because he wasn't bad company. But I got a decent price for his pelt. (*HG* 7)

This name, and the story of the lynx, hint at her future of inspiring followers, even if it is against her will, and how she will always put her own interests (and those of the ones she loves) before those of her followers. The lynx specifically foreshadows her relationship with President Alma Coin in the third book, *Mockingjay*. President Coin exploits Katniss's image to inspire a rebellion, which Katniss reluctantly goes along with. Her reluctance is shown by how when she agrees to be the rebellion's symbol, “my apparent interest in the proceedings—the first I've shown since I've been here—takes them by surprise” (*Mockingjay* 37); after her lack of interest, her participation shocks them, but they soon discover that the only reason she shows interest is

that she sees it as an opportunity to make personal demands: “*Buttercup* [her sister’s cat who was originally not allowed in the rebel base]...*Peeta’s immunity...I KILL SNOW*” (*Mockingjay* 37-38; emphasis in original). President Coin accepts these terms because she is desperate to build her rebellion’s following like the lynx “looking for handouts” (*HG* 7). The final murderous demand dooms President Coin to a fate similar to the lynx after Katniss eventually realizes that Coin would also be a tyrant. Right before the execution is set to take place, President Coin (now interim President of Panem instead of just President of the rebels) holds a vote as to whether the Hunger Games should continue and Katniss realizes that Coin’s Panem would not be much different than Snow’s, so “the point of my arrow shifts upward. I release the string. And President Coin collapses over the side of the balcony and plunges to the ground. Dead” (*Mockingjay* 372). Like the irresistible urge cats feel towards catnip, Katniss inspires others, but she chafes against this attraction and shows throughout the trilogy that she will sacrifice those who follow her to make life better for herself and her loved ones.

While the novels in this series may not obviously seem to operate as part of the Gothic tradition, Katniss fits much more into the model of the Gothic heroine than Lady Audley, despite the higher body count. Like *Udolpho*’s Emily St. Aubert, Katniss comes from a small town and after the death of her father is forced into a living situation that is unpleasant to her. Emily was forced to live with her self-involved aunt, while Katniss remains in her home but resents her mother’s reaction to her husband’s death:

The district had given us a small amount of money as compensation for his death, enough to cover one month of grieving at which time my mother would be expected to get a job. Only she didn’t. She didn’t do anything but sit propped up in a chair or, more often, huddled under the blankets on her bed, eyes fixed on some point in the distance. Once in a while, she’d stir, get up as if moved by some urgent purpose, only to then collapse back into stillness. No amount of pleading from Prim seemed to affect her.

I was terrified. I suppose now that my mother was locked in some dark world of sadness, but at the time, all I knew was that I had lost not only a father, but a mother as well. (*HG* 26-27)

Udolpho's Emily eventually begins to feel sympathy and pity for her aunt after they are both tormented by Signor Montoni, and similarly Katniss accepts her mother's pains from lingering traumas once she has had her own Hunger Games experiences. The connection becomes especially clear to Katniss when she watches videos of the 50th Annual Hunger Games. As what was called a "Quarter Quell," the 50th Games had special rules, in this specific case it was that each district had to send four tributes instead of two. When watching the reaping ceremony, "as Maysilee Donner [one of the tributes chosen] bravely disengages herself and heads for the stage, I catch a glimpse of my mother at my age...Holding her hand and weeping is another girl who looks just like Maysilee [her twin sister]" (*Catching Fire* 196). Like a true Gothic heroine, Katniss is allowed to be angry at those who put her in an awful position but is kind and empathetic enough to learn the error of her judgmental ways.

Her narrative arc also is reminiscent of constantly beleaguered Gothic heroines such as Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre from the book that bears her name. *Jane Eyre* (1847) begins with Jane's childhood under her abusive aunt at Gateshead Hall, who then sends her to Lowood Institution where she is unjustly punished, and then takes a job at Thornfield Hall where she is almost trapped in a bigamous marriage, only to escape and discover an estranged cousin who wants to marry her against her will and take her to India. Katniss's misfortunes follow a similar procession; she volunteers to be a tribute in the 74th Annual Hunger Games to save the life of her sister, is forced to be a tribute again in the 75th Annual Hunger Games as punishment for her previous rebellious actions, and then in order to try and prevent a 76th Annual Hunger Games from happening is forced into a warzone reminiscent of a Games arena that ultimately results in

the death of her sister anyways. According to Davison, Charlotte Brontë brought together the worlds of social realism and the Gothic tradition in examining the realistic psychological aspects of characters like Jane Eyre in her heightened environments (221); the same combination of real-world psychology and outsized world-building can be said of the Hunger Games series. The innocent girl from a small town being forced into a series of unfortunate events is a major narrative trope of the Gothic tradition that Collins fully embraces and is one that Lady Audley never really has to suffer despite her physical appearance fitting the general description of a Gothic heroine.

The difference in Katniss and Lady Audley's roles in the Gothic tradition is made clear by their fates, especially regarding nature. Lady Audley is shut away in an asylum in a Belgian town whose name suggests that she is literally being swallowed up by fog, while the epilogue of *Mockingjay* finds Katniss in a meadow over a decade after her assassination of President Coin with her husband Peeta and their "children, who don't know they play on a graveyard" (*Mockingjay* 390). Katniss has not forgotten the past as she is fully aware of the graveyard she is sitting in, but enough time has passed that she has allowed herself to move on and embrace life with her family and enjoy the natural world around her. These disparate endings reflect the two characters' different relationships to nature. Lady Audley attempted to use nature as her weapon, especially in her hope that the earth in the well would swallow the body of her first husband, but it rebelled against her and ended up consuming her in fog, while Katniss whose name and nickname represent resourceful parts of nature is allowed to play happily ever after in a meadow. In Gothic novels, nature is a hugely powerful force that will decimate any human who seeks to tame or overcome it while rewarding those who accept it, which is demonstrated through Lady Audley and Katniss Everdeen.

Katniss's support system at home, consisting mostly of her sister and her fellow tribute, is linked to her by their nature-bound names as well. Katniss's sister's name is Primrose; though a primrose is a plant like katniss, it has very different properties. As demonstrated by their usage in *Lady Audley's Secret*, primroses are appreciated for their beauty and heralded as a sign of springtime: "There were primroses and early violets in the hedges now, and the streams...ran merrily under the blackthorn bushes in the capricious April sunshine" (Braddon 370). The other major member of Katniss's support system in District 12 is Peeta Mellark, whose name is fittingly reminiscent of pita bread considering he is the son of a baker and has used that upbringing to aid Katniss in the Games arenas; he is able to lift heavy objects with little effort due to the heavy sacks of flour he carries at home and is able to do excellent camouflage as a result of his carefully curated cake decorating skills. While bread is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, it is created using natural ingredients. Both Primrose and Peeta live up to their names as Katniss does to hers. Primrose provides warmth and joy (as well as medical attention) wherever she goes just like her floral namesake, and Peeta's two major assets in the Games show that like bread he can be hardy and adaptable to almost any meal/situation. These names also suggest their fates; like a flower, Primrose is trampled under the heavy steps of the rebellion while Peeta continues supporting Katniss through tough situations like the bread that sustains life when other foods are unavailable. Though Katniss herself represents a part of nature that can sustain life and endure mankind-generated hardships, Primrose and Peeta suggest that nature works best when many different aspects of it are in harmony and that there is no need to act alone; solitude is the downfall of mankind more so than the natural world.

Contrarily, the people of the Capitol often have names based in the history of ancient Rome or Greece, which recalls the very Gothic idea of ruins; perhaps the best example of this in

the series is Caesar Flickerman, the host of the Hunger Games whose seeming agelessness only further emphasizes his being a relic of the past. When Katniss sees him in person for the first time, her reaction shows the mixture of awe and horror that his appearance inspires:

Caesar Flickerman, the man who has hosted the interviews for more than forty years, bounces onto the stage. It's a little scary because his appearance has been virtually unchanged during all that time. Same face under a coating of pure white makeup. Same hairstyle that he dyes a different color for each Hunger Games. Same ceremonial suit, midnight blue dotted with a thousand tiny electric bulbs that twinkle like stars. (*HG* 124)

Like the ruins implied by his namesake, Caesar is majestic in his timeless glory, but the secret of his ancientness disturbs Katniss even as she finds herself drawn to him. His surname emphasizes that even though he remains a constant fixture, he is nevertheless transitory in nature; "Flickerman" suggests images of how the flame in a gas lamp or the static on a television screen flicker. The conflict between the long-standing impression of his first name and the illusory disposition of his surname is fitting for a man who is an institution of the Hunger Games for decades on end with no sign of stopping and yet his inevitable aging is clear from those same decades even if the effect is not visible. Because of this, Caesar Flickerman is a perfect representative for the Capitol as it is during the time of the original trilogy. Like Caesar, the Capitol is gorgeous to behold:

The cameras haven't lied about its grandeur. If anything, they have not quite captured the magnificence of the glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal. All the colors seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes, like the flat round disks of hard candy we can never afford to buy at the tiny sweet shop in District 12. (*HG* 59)

Both the Capitol and Caesar disguise their less desirable aspects (respectfully tyranny and old age) under layers of distractingly glimmering rainbow spectacles. In this aspect, they resemble Gothic ruins, such as Udolpho or Audley Court. Like many Gothic ruins before them, Caesar

Flickerman and other citizens of the Capitol distract their viewers from their trauma-inducing hardships with decadent majesty.

The president of Panem during most of the original trilogy is Coriolanus Snow, whose name encompasses both old Rome and nature, though the use of snow suggests that the union of nature and man-made is less than perfect. The president's first name is reminiscent of Caius Marcius Coriolanus, the military Roman leader whose military successes and eventual assassination formed the basis for Shakespeare's tragedy *Coriolanus*.⁷⁶ As with Caesar, the name Coriolanus inspires memories of not only a figure from ancient Rome (or Greece, as is the case with some other Capitol denizens), but also of destruction and decay; both their namesakes were assassinated and so while their legacy remains their bodies were destroyed. Unlike many figures in the Capitol, however, President Snow's surname also encompasses nature. While Katniss, Peeta, Primrose, and others with nature-bound names generally represent the more admirable characters of the novels, Snow remains a major villain to the end, even though he and Katniss come to enough of a mutual understanding that before she is meant to execute him, she remembers his saying "*Oh, my dear Miss Everdeen. I thought we had agreed not to lie to each other,*" which acts as her catalyst to assassinate President Coin instead (*Mockingjay* 372; emphasis in original); this moment of recognition between the two brings to mind the moment of understanding when Lady Audley pushes George Talboys down the well. Snow's generally antagonistic relationship to the novels' heroes, however, is reminiscent of the way snow interacts with the natural world around it. While it may at first appear to be beautiful in its pure white state, it eventually devolves into what Braddon refers to as "miry slush" (Braddon 130). It also

⁷⁶ In the acknowledgements of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, Collins writes: "I'd like to thank...David Levithan, my most excellent editorial director, who was everywhere at once—forging that title, trimming those unwieldy passages, and arranging clandestine manuscript handoffs at (where else?) the Shakespeare in the Park production of *Coriolanus*" (518).

has the power to kill any greenery it may cover. With these aspects of snow, President Snow is just further made to resemble Caesar and the Capitol in how they distract with beauty while suffocating the natural world.

The implications of President Snow's name are brought to fruition in the prequel novel, as it becomes clear the influence Snow has had on Panem over the course of 65 years. *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* takes place before, during, and after the events of the 10th Annual Hunger Games. While readers had originally met Snow as the aged president, at this point in his life he was, "as poor as district scum...at eighteen, the heir to the once-great house of Snow had nothing to live on but his wits" (3). While he and his family live "in the penthouse of the Capitol's most opulent apartment building," much of the Capitol still shows the aftereffects of war:

Now, though the streets were finally clear, rubble still lay in piles on the sidewalks, and whole buildings were gutted as the day they'd been struck. Ten years after the victory, and he was dodging between chunks of marble and granite as he wove his way to the Academy. Sometimes Coriolanus wondered if the debris had been left there to remind the citizens of what they had endured. People had short memories. They needed to navigate the rubble, peel off the grubby ration coupons, and witness the Hunger Games to keep war fresh in their minds. (3; 12-13)

Before Snow came to power, the Capitol of Panem was more obviously in a state of ruin, as its debris-laden streets are like the ones described in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; this stands in stark contrast to the multicolored wonderland that Katniss first sets eyes on. While the Capitol remains a symbol of the corrupt government that has emerged victorious from a rebellion, Snow has put a more distracting face on it. The last words of *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* sums this up well: "Snow lands on top" (517). Just like natural snow blankets nature and kills all the greenery it covers, President Snow is able to put a glimmering sheen on top of the bombed-out buildings. In the trilogy that is largely from Katniss's perspective, the reader can see Snow as a powerful

force whose rein is coming to an end, while *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* emphasizes his true nature through a shift in perspective (with young Coriolanus as our major point of view) and a vision of what Panem was like before he got his rose-and-blood scented hands on its governance. The prequel delves further into his character and this development demonstrates that he truly is as decrepit and destructive as his appellation implies.

As demonstrated by Snow, not all characters with nature-based names are working towards the same goal; Gale Hawthorne shows the self-harming power that nature contains when harnessed by the cruelty of humans. Gale is introduced as a romantic interest for Katniss, and therefore Peeta's main rival in his attempts to win her affection. Because the Capitol's propaganda relies on Katniss and Peeta's star-crossed lovers narrative, Gale is forced to pretend to be her cousin. Katniss does not like this arrangement, but she understands it: "He was too handsome, too male, and not the least bit willing to smile and play nice for the cameras. We do resemble each other, though, quite a bit. We have that Seam look. Dark straight hair, olive skin, gray eyes. So some genius made him my cousin" (*CF* 12). Gale is less understanding, however, as he is pained by seeing the girl he loves on the television with Peeta, and so he limits their interactions after her victory. His coldness towards Madge Undersee, the daughter of the mayor of District 12, in *The Hunger Games* demonstrated early on that he is more revolutionary in his beliefs than Katniss, but once the Capitol turns Katniss herself into propaganda the stakes become even more personal for Gale, who then willingly, wholeheartedly, and without question embraces the plots and schemes of President Coin. He becomes such a part of her operation that it is implied he was the one who is responsible for the attack where "a Capitol hovercraft manned by rebels bombed the children to bring a speedy end to the war" (*Mockingjay* 359-60). While this act is atrocious because it is a horrible war crime that resulted in the loss of many children's

lives, it also has a personal angle for Katniss as it is the attack that killed Primrose. Gale's name is reminiscent of a strong wind and, just like the wind, he can be used as a horribly destructive force if manipulated in the right (or wrong) way; after all her efforts to keep Primrose safe from the machinations of the Capitol, Katniss is unable to save her from Gale's force once he has been radicalized by President Coin.

There is also the reverse of that, as Effie Trinket shows what can happen when man-made objects cooperate with nature instead of opposing it. Effie's surname, Trinket, perfectly encapsulates her personality as her character initially plays as just another colorful bauble that the Capitol has on its figurative shelf, but her first name suggests hidden depths to her character. Effie is short for Euphemia, which is the name of a Christian saint who was martyred in 304 AD. According to the tourism website for the city of Rovinj in Croatia:

She was born in 290 to a well-known patrician family. When she was fifteen years old [sic], she was arrested by Diocletian's soldiers, and when she refused to give up Christianity, she was tortured with cruelty (on a wheel). She still remained loyal to Christ, and was thrown to the lions who eventually killed her but did not devour her body. ("The Legend of St. Euphemia")

Though Effie does originally start off as a Capitol pawn, by the end of *Mockingjay* she has become "Effie Trinket, rebel," even if such a label is admittedly "quite a stretch" (365). When she is reunited with Katniss after President Coin's victory, "she stands and kisses me on the cheek as if nothing had occurred since our last meeting, the night before the Quarter Quell" (*Mockingjay* 365). Like St. Euphemia, Effie remains true to her event-loving self with excellent managerial hostess skills even as the ruling regime changes. The two-part film adaptation of *Mockingjay* (2014 and 2015, both directed by Francis Lawrence) furthers the parallels by making President Coin's rebel forces more blatantly into the lions from the legend of St. Euphemia. In the novels, Effie had been placed in jail by President Snow after the events of *Catching Fire* and

had only been given a pardon by the rebels because they wanted to please Katniss; in the films, Effie is waiting in the bomb-shelter of District 13 with the survivors of District 12's evisceration and is a key part of President Coin's efforts to turn Katniss into the face of the rebellion. The death of St. Euphemia suggests that though the lions may have killed her, the fact that they did not eat her offered a testament to her faith. The rebels in the films strip Effie of the vestiges of her figurative life by forcing her to refrain from wearing her gaudy Capitol clothing, wigs, or makeup, though like the lions they allow her to keep her faith by letting her continue to help Katniss. Though Jesus Christ is arguably not "natural," his presence is seen as natural by the churches that have sanctified Euphemia. Therefore, her narrative is one of a girl who forsook her roots to man-made systems (as she came from an aristocratic family) in order to embrace the natural (Christian) order of the world, just as Effie Trinket disposes of her connections to the ruinous Capitol in order to aid Katniss's natural progress.

As evidenced by all the names, Suzanne Collins uses the Gothicized idea of nature vs. humanity and other tropes as a way of commenting on the war in Iraq. Collins mentioned in an interview for the first book's tenth anniversary with David Levithan for the New York Times that "I was flipping through the channels one night between reality television programs and actual footage of the Iraq War, when the idea came to me." She also says in this interview that the romantic rivals Peeta and Gale operated "less as two points on a love triangle, more as two perspectives in the just-war debate." Many critics, such as Brianna Burke in her article "'Reaping' Environmental Justice Through Compassion in *The Hunger Games*," have labeled the love triangle as "clichéd," but I believe that the war commentary adds a more complex angle to the triangle (Burke 546). By turning the debate over what justifies a war into a young adult romantic triangle, Collins can involve her young readership in a conversation about the nature of

warfare, specifically with the Iraq war as an initial jumping-off point. An example of how this romance uses the imagery of the Iraq war is connected to my previous chapter's discussion of drones. In that chapter, I discussed the civilian deaths inflicted by drone strikes, and the reason Katniss finally gives up on Gale as a romantic possibility is when she learns that he played a part in the drone strike that purposefully killed innocent civilians, including Prim. Ames argues that aspects such as the love triangle allowed young readers to have "a safe space to wrestle with, and perhaps displace the fears" they may feel about the world at war (7). Instead of having young adult readers picking between Team Peeta and Team Gale, Collins has them navigating the pros and cons of drone usage. The use of the familiar structures of the Gothic and of love triangles allows Collins to have her message about war understood by her younger readership.

Even as this intent is meant to make the novels relevant to the current world, it also serves as a connection to the past. As Davison writes, "most Victorian Gothic works chronicle the invasion of pasts upon presents and raise the joint spectres of individual and social regression" (220-21). While most of Collins's novels' mentions of war are in relation to the one that left the Capitol as seen in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, Collins does at one point emphasize that our own history is not totally blameless when Katniss considers that, "frankly, our ancestors don't seem much to brag about. I mean, look at the state they left us in, with the wars and the broken planet. Clearly they didn't care about what would happen to the people who came after them" (*Mockingjay* 84). By putting this sentiment in the third book of the trilogy, Collins reminds her readers that these books are not just dystopian fantasies with no real-world inspiration; they are a sign of things to come because of the wars in our own modern lives. Ames discusses this when she writes that Collins's:

focus on being watched certainly could be read as alluding to our current culture of forced surveillance, but the moment where Katniss reflected on the dangers of

speaking out against the Capitol could also be read as a commentary on the ease in which an American citizen today could be reclassified as an enemy of the state. (Ames 11-12)

This suggests that the modern inconveniences of America that Collins's readers are aware of could possibly lead to the futuristic repression of Panem. Just as the portraits in Gothic novels have led to today's CCTV, they could eventually lead to Panem's surveillance techniques. When discussing the role of the painters in Gothic novels, Poteet states that they are noted for "their self-absorbed, narcissistic, egomania and the fluidity of their aims...to possess the souls of innocent victims," which could also be said of those who surveil in Panem (244). Collins's series is able to join war theory with the Gothic tropes previously discussed, particularly relating to nature, in order to engage her readers in how the world around us was shaped and is shaping the future.

Collins was also influenced by the Vietnam War, as seen by the televised proceedings. Katniss and the other tributes in the arena are aware they are being filmed and that visions of their battles will be broadcast around Panem, inspiring both Capitol devotees and the rebels, albeit for different reasons. This is clear when in *Catching Fire* she notes that, "Peeta showing up in the arena wearing a mockingjay is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it should give a boost to the rebels in the district. On the other, its hard to imagine President Snow will overlook it" (283). This brings to mind the televised images of American soldiers in Vietnam, some of whom would decorate their helmets with doodles of peace signs or other anti-war slogans. The connections to Vietnam are stronger in *Catching Fire* than in *The Hunger Games* because in the latter book the arena was a woods like the one Katniss grew up with in District 12, which is geographically in the same space as the current day Appalachian mountains. On the other hand, the second arena she is subject to is quite different:

Where the sand ends, woods begin to rise sharply. No, not really woods. At least not the kind I know. *Jungle*. The foreign, almost obsolete word comes to mind. Something I heard from another Hunger Games or learned from my father. Most of the trees are unfamiliar, with smooth trunks and few branches. The earth is very black and spongy and underfoot, often obscured by tangles of vines with colorful blossoms. While the sun's hot and bright, the air's warm and heavy with moisture, and I get the feeling I will never really be dry here. (CF 274-75; emphasis in original)

The foreignness of the specific type of trees as well as the general jungle aesthetic is similar to the environment that American soldiers found themselves fighting through in Vietnam. While Katniss felt more at home (somewhat) in the arena in the first book, the second book puts her more in line with the Gothic protagonists who feel haunted by the foreign-seeming natural world around them.

Collins's personal connection to Vietnam and its jungle environment is explicated in her autobiographical children's picture book *Year of the Jungle* (2013). In this book, when little Suzanne finds out her dad has to go away, the words accompanying the illustrations say:

My dad has to go to something called a war. It's in a place called Viet Nam. Where is Viet Nam? He will be gone a year. How long is a year? I don't know what anybody's talking about.

Then someone says he'll be in a jungle. My favorite cartoon character lives in a jungle. He has an elephant and an ape for friends and he bangs into trees a lot.

Rascal [the family cat] and I want to go to Viet Nam, too. You can fly anywhere in your dreams...

While she initially envisions her father working in some *George of the Jungle*-inspired paradise, after months pass and she has gone from kindergarten to first grade, she accidentally watches footage of the war on television:

From the TV, I hear the words "Viet Nam," and I look up.
Explosions.
Helicopters.
Guns.
Soldiers lie on the ground. Some of them aren't moving.

My mom runs across the living room and turns off the TV. “It’s okay. Your dad is okay,” she says. I don’t say anything. Later, I hide in the closet and cry.

It provides her a non-animated vision of a jungle that includes death and carnage, making her consider that, “maybe my dad is lost in the jungle Maybe he can’t get out. Maybe he never will. How long is a year? A year is long.” This picture book is a glimpse into Suzanne Collins’s childhood and how her perception of Vietnam was very connected to the jungle environment; just as Katniss only knew the term jungle from what her father told her, Suzanne learned about it from her own father’s experiences. Considering that, it seems to be no coincidence that the televised jungle warfare in *Catching Fire* is reminiscent of the Vietnam War and that the natural world is a focus of terror.

By showing the evolution of the games, Collins represents the evolution of war. The Hunger Games have become appointment television by the time that Katniss competes in them, but originally they were not getting the television ratings expected of them:

the tributes would be dumped into the Capitol Arena, a now-dilapidated amphitheater that had been used for sports and entertainment events before the war, along with some weapons to murder one another.⁷⁷ Viewing was encouraged in the Capitol, but a lot of people avoided it. How to make it more engaging was the challenge. (BSS 14)

The shift from throwing all the tributes into a pit together with a bunch of weapons to the high-tech environs that Katniss found herself in demonstrates the changing nature of war; just like the Hunger Games, war has evolved over the course of centuries as technology has progressed. While the Hunger Games may have started out as primitive kill-or-be-killed gladiatorial fights in an abandoned baseball field, by their seventy-fourth year they are able to feature such advanced

⁷⁷ Due to the description of this amphitheater, I believe that at least the first ten Hunger Games took place at what is currently known as Coors Field, which would place the Capitol in Denver, CO.

technology as the muttations; Katniss is horrified by these creations when she notices their origins:

For a moment it hangs there, and in that moment I realize what else unsettled me about the mutts. The green eyes glowering at me are unlike any dog or wolf, any canine I've ever seen. They are unmistakably human. And that revelation has barely registered when I notice the collar with the number *I* inlaid with jewels and the whole horrible thing hits me. The blonde hair, the green eyes, the number...it's Glimmer [a tribute that Katniss had killed]. (*HG* 333; emphasis in original)

Besides showing the advance in weapons technology, these muttations also connect the war to the Gothic tradition, as the repurposed body parts being given life in a new body is very much in line with texts like *Frankenstein*. To reanimate the dead in the form of attack dogs goes against the laws of nature; Suzanne Collins demonstrates this by having the technological developments reenforce the Gothic theme of the war between nature and humankind.

Along with this depiction of the evolution of war, Collins's works often touch upon the shifting attitude towards victors/veterans and the traumas they face in the aftermath of their wars/games. Herman discusses how returning home from war can be just as traumatic as war itself:

A notorious example of community rejection in recent history involves the war in Vietnam, an undeclared war, fought without formal ratification by the established processes of democratic decision-making. Unable to develop a public consensus for war or to define a realistic military objective, the United States government nevertheless conscripted millions of young men for military service. As casualties mounted, public opposition to the war grew. Attempts to contain the antiwar sentiment led to policy decisions that isolated soldiers both from civilians and from one another. Soldiers were dispatched to Vietnam and returned to their homes as individuals, with no opportunity for organized farewells, for bonding within their units, or for public ceremonies of return. Caught in a political conflict that should have been resolved before their lives were placed at risk, returning soldiers often felt traumatized a second time when they encountered public criticism and rejection of the war they had fought and lost. (71)

When Suzanne's father returns in *Year of the Jungle*, she tries to connect with him, but his reaction demonstrates that he is having trouble adjusting. She notes that he "stares into space. He is here but not here. He is back in the jungle. I need to tell him that I know. About the jungle. About the things that happen there. The words are hard to get hold of" (*Year of the Jungle*). With that, Collins describes how in her childhood she struggled to find a way to tell her father that she saw his trauma and that she wanted to connect with him. This inability to communicate is also seen in the relationship between Katniss and her mother. Their relationship at the start of *The Hunger Games* is antagonistic. When her mother and sister come to say goodbye to her before she departs for the Capitol, Katniss takes the time to chastise her mother: "Listen to me. Are you listening to me?...You can't leave again...You can't clock out and leave Prim on her own. There's no me now to keep you both alive" (*HG* 35). Her mother protests that her trauma response to the death of her husband was one of sickness, which Katniss somewhat considers: "That part about her being ill might be true. I've seen her bring back people suffering from immobile sadness since. Perhaps it is a sickness, but it's one we can't afford" (*HG* 36). However, once she has experienced the Hunger Games herself and is traumatized by it, she begins to understand what her mother went through. This is underscored by her seeing her mother's reaction when she was the same age as Katniss and her best friend was sent to fight in the 50th Annual Hunger Games. Through the trilogy's use of first-person narration, the reader understands Katniss, and thus understand her trauma and her evolving notions of her mother's trauma. While little Suzanne Collins in 1968 was unable to find the words to express her connection to her father, who was similarly unable to connect with anyone upon returning home, she is offering her generally younger readers a voice through which they can relate to veterans.

Just like Katniss, Collins's audience learns to empathize with traumatized individuals instead of merely feeling sympathy.

Because the Hunger Games series operates to engender understanding for traumatized individuals through the use of Gothic tropes, it belongs in conversation with *Lady Audley's Secret* despite the fact that there is no explicit link connecting the two like the texts in most of my previous chapters. Both texts begin with separately traumatized characters at cross-purposes (George Talboys and Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*; Katniss and her unnamed mother in *The Hunger Games*) who by the end of the narrative have come to some sort of agreement (even if that agreement is only one-sided, in the case of *Lady Audley's Secret*) and go their separate ways. Just as George decides not to trouble Lady Audley further once he understands what she is going through, Katniss's mother ends her narrative journey by leaving Katniss alone after the fallout of President Coin's assassination: "between my father and Prim and the ashes, the place [District 12] is too painful to bear. But apparently not for me" (*Mockingjay* 380). Katniss and her mother are on good enough terms that Katniss can "dial the phone number, and weep with her," but her mother has decided that while her daughter's place is in District 12, she belongs in District 4 (*Mockingjay* 386-87). Through these plots and other aspects of both narratives, the readers are able to gain understandings of the traumas faced by the characters, even as the medical, cultural, and literary understandings of trauma had shifted in the years between their publication dates. As Herbert writes, the setting of *Lady Audley's Secret* "would have triggered immediately the rush of half-hallucinatory memory that the phrase 'September 11, 2001' triggers for Americans today" (Herbert 247). Though the markers left by Braddon to identify the effects of the Indian rebellion may be missed by many modern readers, in her own time she was writing in a similar manner as Suzanne Collins. The discourse around trauma and war has changed in the

146 years between the two texts, but they both demonstrate the need for understanding and empathy in worlds largely devoid of the two and that the social and cultural practice of isolating those with trauma (specifically hysterical women in the Victorian period and veterans with PTSD in modern America) has remained frustratingly stagnant.

Conclusion

Unlike the texts from my previous chapters, *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series refuse to fit themselves snugly into the national allegorical mode of storytelling. George Talboys at first seems like his narrative's best option of fitting into this specific allegorical mode, especially because he shares his name and a career in the military with England's patron saint, St. George. However, his devotion to his country is severely lacking which makes his naming more ironic than symbolic. After he is pushed down the well by his wife, George Talboys considers going back to Australia before deciding upon New York, never considering a life in England until he has been gone for some time and realize that he "carried the old bullet in my breast; and what sympathy could I have with men who knew nothing of my grief?" (Braddon 378). His return to England is brought about by his need to be around those who knew the pain he had experienced more than it was done out of love of country. Helen Talboys also makes a feint at being a part of a national allegory, especially in the mode of Kim or Ellen in *Miss Saigon*, when George initially believes he is returning home to "a girl whose heart is as true as the light of heaven; and in whom I no more expect to find any change than I do to see another sun rise in to-morrow's sky" (Braddon 21). However, by the time George comes home to England (the first time, after he has been in Australia making his fortune) she has become Lucy and had moved on to Sir Michael Audley and all that remained of her previous life was "a baby's little worsted shoe rolled up in a piece of paper, and a tiny lock of pale and silky yellow hair,

evidently taken from a baby's head" which she has hidden in "a secret drawer, lined with purple velvet" (Braddon 31-32). Purple is a color often associated with British royalty, so the velvet lining the drawer signals an attempt to establish herself within the upper echelon of English society while the contents remind the reader and Lady Audley herself that her life is a lie and she is not the paragon of English society that she longs to be. The only other option to put the novel in the mode of a national allegory is Robert Audley, a man about whom Braddon constantly reminds the reader, "there was some slight differences, not easily to be defined, that separated him from other men of his age and position" (281).⁷⁸ Braddon actively establishes that none of her main characters is representative of the entirety of England and that together they signal the fracturing of the English identity in the wake of war and other traumas coming to light.

The Hunger Games series troubles the national allegory with a single character as it refuses to make Katniss Everdeen into a typical "chosen one." Many young adult series focus their narratives on heroes and heroines who are special and have a natural right to some form of control. In J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Harry Potter is explicitly referred to as "the chosen one" and the whole narrative is predicated on how he is the only one physically able to destroy the great evil that faces the wizarding world (39). The narrative of Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series begins when heroine Beatrice Prior is informed that instead of snugly fitting into one of her society's personality-based factions, "you display equal aptitude for Abnegation, Dauntless, and Erudite. People who get this result are...are called...*Divergent*" (22; emphasis in original). Violet Eade in Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* trilogy is seen as unique just because of her gender, seeing as the narrative is from the point of view of a teenage boy who grew up

⁷⁸ Braddon never explicitly states what the "slight differences" about Robert Audley are, but they are often mentioned in connection with how he has little interest in romancing his cousin or other attractive women and how obsessed he is with his friend George Talboys, which I believe opens up the possibility of an LGBTQ+ reading.

thinking that “we survive alone on a whole big empty woman-less world that ain’t got nothing good to say for itself, in a town of 146 men that dies a little more with every day that passes” (20). All those characters could be turned into figures in a national allegory as they represent exceptionalism and thus can stand out as an exceptional example of what their country is or should be. Unlike those examples, there is nothing particularly special about Katniss Everdeen. Amber M. Simmons argues in “Using the Hunger Games Trilogy to Encourage Social Action” that “Katniss Everdeen is the most accurate depiction of a teenager that I have ever encountered in adolescent literature” (22); this teenage accuracy makes Katniss more relatable to teenagers than the typical “chosen one.” Even after Katniss’s image has inspired such hope in the rebellious forces, her own lack of specialness is apparent to those trying to use her, as is emphasized by her mentor Haymitch’s reaction to seeing her attempt at inspiration in a propaganda shoot: “And that, my friends, is how a revolution dies” (*Mockingjay* 72). While the image of Katniss Everdeen that is projected to the public of Panem could fulfill the purposes of a national allegory, the real Katniss is defined by her everyday nature.

Despite my assertion that these texts eschew or refute the nation allegory, the way in which they do so further proves my argument. *Lady Audley’s Secret* posits that England is too varied and complex to be represented by a single character, while the Hunger Games series claims that each character is too complex to be reduced down to a simple metaphor. In doing so, they demonstrate once again the change from the Victorian view of trauma as nation-based and the modern view of trauma as individualized; even if the texts do not subscribe to their culture’s way of thinking, they acknowledge them while disowning them through the use of realism. Despite calling realism an enemy of the national allegory, Jameson still argues that realism has a place in allegory. He writes that to say realism is opposite to allegory:

presupposes a radical difference between meaning and empirical reality, and attributes to allegory a failed attempt to produce an impossible unification of these dimensions (which are ultimately those of thought and experience, or better still, of soul and body). But in an age that prizes difference and differentiation, heterogeneity, incommensurability, a resistance to unification, this failure cannot continue to be a reproach; and it is our fault then, as readers—perhaps as old-fashioned readers—that we fail to acknowledge the reality of the literal level of the allegorical text. (2)

I agree with Jameson that allegory is often more realistic than it is given credit for and to outright state that a text is too realistic to be allegorical is not a strong argument. But I feel that the realistic nature of the characters in *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series preclude those texts from being the same kind of national allegory as texts like *Sylvia's Lovers* or the films of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. While some characters in *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series are in touch with nature, there is enough of a focus on those who go against it that the strong connection featured elsewhere is missing; Lady Audley is unable to represent England while she is being consumed by fog and no character can truly represent Panem while Katniss and Peeta's natural characteristics are being crushed by the machinery of the Capitol. The Gothic theme of nature tormenting mankind allows for the characters to escape the general bounds of the national allegory.

Both Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Suzanne Collins used Gothic tropes, particularly the theme of nature's war against humanity, to discuss the trauma they saw effecting the world around them. Though PTSD was not a term when Braddon published *Lady Audley's Secret* in 1862, her narrative clearly attempts to deal with the lingering pains of individuals and England at large especially after the Indian Rebellion in 1857. Suzanne Collins, writing in the twenty-first century, would be aware of the idea of trauma and uses her young adult Hunger Games series to try and educate her audience on how trauma affects individuals and their surroundings to bring about a sense of empathy. This sense of empathy links this modern series to *Lady Audley's*

Secret as Braddon makes sure to have readers understand why her characters do what they do.

The reader may not sympathize with Lady Audley as she attempts to murder those who get in her way, but they are likely to empathize by the time they reach the end of her narrative. As

Braddon's narrator states, "there can be no reconciliation where there is no open warfare. There must be a battle, a brave boisterous battle, with pennants waving and cannon roaring, before there can be peaceful treaties and enthusiastic shaking of hands" (249). Her characters are not able to understand each other until they have boisterous battles, generally attempted murders, and the same can be said of the characters in the Hunger Games; Katniss spends most of the original trilogy wanting personal revenge against President Snow, but after their conflict comes to an explosive end, they reach an understanding that leads to her forgoing his execution. Both texts reach these places of understanding using the Gothic, which links the (relatively) new ideas of and about trauma to traditional tropes. In complicating the national allegory through the Gothic tradition, *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Hunger Games series eschew the clichés that inspire sympathy and instead engender empathy in their audiences.

Conclusion. “As Long as Cold Beer, Hot Food, Rock 'n' Roll, and All the Other Amenities Remain”

War narratives in both Victorian England and modern America often operate in the national allegorical mode as a way of commenting on the trauma of war, but as the cultural awareness of PTSD increases, empathy in texts has paradoxically decreased. By looking at the many texts I have analyzed throughout this dissertation, the patterns and stereotypes placed on soldier characters are dispiritingly clear. Improved medical knowledge regarding PTSD has increased representations of war trauma in media, but the positive nature of this representation is very much in question. It is hard for civilian consumers to understand and empathize with traumatized soldiers if the media representations they are bombarded with highlight the violent and volatile aspects of trauma with none of the complexity. It is only through better representation that empathy can be engendered, and the most helpful kind of representation would present traumatized soldiers as human beings and not ignore the part that governments play in these issues.

My first chapter regarding various adaptations of the Sherlock Holmes canon demonstrates that Victorian war narratives are seen as relevant in the modern day and how the Victorian's undefined-but-aware view of trauma has struggled to update to modern medical knowledge. In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original stories, Dr. John Watson returns home from war with a war wound that impairs his mobility as well as an outlook that his contemporary London has been corrupted and invites evil from all around; only through helping Sherlock Holmes solve crimes is Dr. Watson able to put order to the chaos he sees in what he no longer recognizes as his homeland. In these original stories and novels, England is presented as traumatized, but more recent adaptations of the Holmes canon often explicitly diagnose Watson as having PTSD. Two twenty-first century adaptations, *Sherlock* and *Miss Sherlock*, go so far as

to have their PTSD-diagnosed Watsons try to recreate warzones in their homeland, which completely reverses the purpose of Doyle's original mysteries. In the source texts, the nation is traumatized and Dr. Watson seeks to restore order to it, but now Watsons are traumatized and they attempt to create chaos in their orderly homelands. Instead of bringing a complex contemporary understanding of trauma to recent adaptations, often the advent of PTSD's diagnosability has made Watson into a sort of villain. Instead of complicating the narrative, many Holmes adaptations have just swapped Watson for London as the source of darkness and terror.

While my first chapter refers to Sherlock Holmes adaptations through to the 2020s, my earliest central modern text from the other three chapters is from 1989, nine years after PTSD was officially recognized in the American Psychiatric Association's manual; this time period is particularly comparable to Victorian England in terms of interest in trauma and allegorical narratives. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman, M. D. highlights that there were three recent periods in the which trauma theory was most popular: 1) late nineteenth century concerning women labeled with hysteria; 2) from the first World War through to Vietnam with soldiers coming home from war; and 3) discussions of sexual and domestic violence that rose to prominence with the second-wave feminist movement (9). Meanwhile, allegory was a popular form in Victorian England, and then "a serious revival of interest in allegory can be dated to the period of 'theory' that set in after World War II" (Jameson 22). These overlapping timelines demonstrate the ability to intermingle trauma ideology with allegorical narratives, and how the two fit well together. The timeline also demonstrates that the focus of trauma theory moving away from soldiers onto abused women would allow for allegories that did not fully consider the complexities of war trauma; soldiers had had their moment in the theoretical spotlight, but after

the Vietnam war ended, complex stories of war trauma quickly fell out of fashion. I have discussed in my introduction how Victorian England and modern America share cultural attributes, so it makes sense that they would have similar narrative patterns and theoretical interests, leading to more comparable texts.

While my first chapter demonstrates how these similar ideas work with the individual soldier, through the character Dr. John H. Watson and all his adaptational descendants, my second chapter demonstrates how these changes to theme within these ideas affects the view of national responsibility. By looking at the love triangles in *Sylvia's Lovers* by Elizabeth Gaskell and the 1989 musical *Miss Saigon*, the audience can see how the women are compared to the nations they come from and thus their relationships with men determine the culpability of nations in warfare. Sylvia, as a stand-in for England (or even more specifically, rural coastal England), has to choose between two different soldiers (the impressed sailor Charley Kinraid and the volunteer shopkeeper Philip Hepburn), and the reader can see through her choice how the impressment of the past was cruel and traumatic while a volunteer military can be heroized. With a similar structure but a different outcome, *Miss Saigon* shows through its soldier-protagonist Chris Scott how individual soldiers have to choose between women/nations: should he stay true to All-American Ellen or abandon his duty for the foreign beauty of Vietnamese Kim? These two texts both use love triangles and national allegories, but by shifting the choice from the woman/nation to the soldier/individual, the burden of trauma has shifted. In *Sylvia's Lovers*, as in many Victorian texts, the nation has to make a choice and acknowledge the sins of the past, while in *Miss Saigon*, as in many modern American texts, the individual has to make a choice based on where he (and not the country that forced the choice upon him) will do the least amount of traumatic damage.

With trauma becoming so personalized, many modern narratives necessarily promote the idea that soldiers traumatized by war are almost non-human in how they are unrelatable to modern audiences, as is discussed in my third chapter. Alfred, Lord Tennyson's vision of King Arthur's Camelot and the Marvel Cinematic Universe's presentation of our world under the protection of Tony Stark/Iron Man both separate their militarized heroes from the civilian citizenry, but the texts again vary on who or what is to blame for this. In Camelot, the kingdom is doomed but it is because of a prophecy that cannot be altered and this destruction is aided by the gossip of women. The knights of the round table are on a pedestal, but they are being undermined and led to destruction by their kingdom's own fate and the women who make up the populace they mean to protect. However, Doctor Strange's prophecy in *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame* is not about the Avengers or their world falling apart, as much as it is about the necessity for Tony Stark alone to die. Both of these narrative cycles valorize their heroes, but one is about the inevitable downfall of a corrupted kingdom, while the other is about the necessity for the traumatized leader to sacrifice himself so others can be saved from trauma.

However, there are some texts from the modern period that seek to generate empathy for their traumatized protagonists instead of dehumanizing them, such as Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series as discussed in my fourth chapter alongside Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. Braddon uses Victorian society's intrigue about hysteria to comment simultaneously on the national trauma caused by the Indian Rebellion of 1857, in a way that many critics, such as Herbert have noted is comparable to the way American texts handle the September 11 attack. Similarly, the *Hunger Games* series uses the popular dystopian young adult genre to reach its readers and help them process the ideas of trauma and how it affects both nations and individuals, a cause that is personal for Suzanne Collins as seen by her illustrated

children's book *Year of the Jungle*. All of these texts go against the trends of their respective cultures and try to help their readers understand that wars have an effect on both the individuals and the nations and that in order to do anything about it we have to recognize this connection.

I argue that the texts in my first three chapters fall into the narrative structure laid out by Frederic Jameson that he calls the national allegory, while the texts in my fourth chapter purposely avoid doing so; Jameson concerns himself mostly with what he calls third-world texts while my interests are more Western, but my usage goes along with his reasons for not using texts from the western world. Jameson writes that, "it is precisely this very different ratio of the political to the personal which makes such texts alien to us at first approach, and consequently, resistant to our conventional Western habits of reading" (165-66). He is arguing that third-world texts are more political than Western texts and that such political texts are "alien" to Western readers. I argue that because such ideas are alien to Western readers, we tend to avoid seeing the political in our own texts but that by reading these texts like Jameson reads third-world texts, a troubling trend becomes apparent about how popular culture is portraying traumatized soldiers. Jameson believes that all third-world texts are necessarily national allegories and that Western texts only are on occasion, so he focuses his attention on the former, while I feel it is important to examine the latter as well.

Part of the reason I feel that it is important to examine these types of texts is because of their popularity. The third world texts that Jameson cites are often lacking in international reach because of their origins, while the texts that I have cited are much more well-known to a general audience. A popular line from the Marvel Comics canon, and stated throughout *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, is that "with great power comes great responsibility," and so with more power (from a larger audience) comes the responsibility of representing a common phenomenon well and

empathetically. Jameson's argues that his third-world texts "necessarily project a political dimension," but I argue that while popular Western texts do not "necessarily" need to be read national allegories, many should be. In order to further my desire to show how this responsibility impacts a larger audience, I have also taken my popular modern texts from a variety of media; the audience that would see a live musical is not necessarily the same audience that would see a new MCU movie, but both audiences (as well as the audiences that amass for other types of media discussed in this dissertation) are voluminous, and so should be illuminated by responsibly empathetic texts.

Responsibility, however one defines it, is key, as texts need more than just intent to fully bring about empathy, as demonstrated by the reception to the 2022 film *The Whale*, directed by Darren Aronofsky. In an interview with *Yahoo! Entertainment*, Aronofsky said that the film was "an exercise in empathy," as "people with obesity are generally written as bad guys or as punchlines...we wanted to create a fully worked-out character." However, many critics felt the film failed specifically in that regard. For example, Christy Lemire, writing for *rogerebert.com*, starts her review with "*The Whale* is an abhorrent film." She goes on to note that "We can tsk-tsk all we like between our mouthfuls of popcorn and Junior Mints while watching [Brendan] Fraser's Charlie gobble greasy fried chicken straight from the bucket or inhale a giant meatball sub with such alacrity that he nearly chokes to death," which hints at the disconnect between audience and subject matter that gets in the way of empathy. Katie Rife in her review for *Polygon* further discusses how Aronofsky's film fails as an empathetic experience:

Aronofsky posits his sadism as an intellectual experiment, challenging viewers to find the humanity buried under Charlie's thick layers of fat. That's not as benevolent of a premise as he seems to think it is. It proceeds from the assumption that a 600-pound man is inherently unlovable. It's like walking up to a stranger on the street and saying, "You're an abomination, but I love you anyway," in keeping with the strong strain of self-satisfied Christianity that the film purports to

critique. Audience members get to walk away proud of themselves that they shed a few tears for this disgusting whale, while gaining no new insight into what it's actually like to be that whale. That's not empathy. That's pity, buried under a thick, smothering layer of contempt.

This critical consensus surrounding *The Whale* highlights how important it is to have texts that can help an audience gain empathy for characters unlike themselves, but also how hard it is for texts to do that when (particularly Western) audiences are more familiar with a sense of disconnect. The 600-pound Charlie is as much an oddity to the general populace as veterans; until popular culture provides complex and empathetic portrayals, characters like those will remain at a distance, but just proclaiming one's intent to make an empathetic text is not enough.

The over-abundance of well-meaning but questionably-successful trauma texts like *The Whale* has had the negative effect of dominating the cultural conversation, leading to articles like Parul Sehgal's "The Case Against the Trauma Plot" for *The New Yorker*. Sehgal argues, "with the trauma plot, the logic goes: Evoke the wound and we will believe that a body, a person, has borne it." This idea that trauma is supplanting logic and good storytelling is a natural conclusion to come to when surrounded by endless depictions of trauma with little thought beyond using trauma as a story point, but I disagree with much of how she states this argument. The lack of empathy from many existing trauma plots bleeds through into Sehgal's article when she writes things like "in a world infatuated with victimhood, has trauma emerged as a passport to status," or when she questions the diagnosis itself:

the expanded definition has allowed many more people to receive care but has also stretched the concept so far that some 636,120 possible symptom combinations can be attributed to P.T.S.D., meaning that 636,120 people could conceivably have a unique set of symptoms and the same diagnosis. The ambiguity is moral as well as medical: a soldier who commits war crimes can share the diagnosis with his victims, Ruth Leys notes in "Trauma: A Genealogy" (2000).

I am not arguing that a war criminal and his victim are interchangeable, but I do not understand why it is an issue to suggest that both might have trauma from the same event; one can be guilty of a crime and still be traumatized from it. Sehgal also suggests that the reason people believe they are traumatized is because of the movies, writing that “traumatic flashbacks were reported only after the invention of film. Are the words that come to our lips when we speak of our suffering ever purely our own?” Again, the use of trauma in film is abundant, but to discount pre-cinema texts does a disservice to works like *Sylvia’s Lovers*, as I have analyzed the traumatic flashbacks of several characters therein. Sehgal’s own example is Jane Austen, when she says that, “Jane Austen’s characters are not pierced by sudden memories; they do not work to fill in the gaps of partial, haunting recollections;” however, I believe that several of Austen’s books, including *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*, do in fact rely upon “sudden memories” and “haunting recollections.”⁷⁹ Even as I disagree with much of Sehgal’s article, her arguments do further highlight the amount of shamelessly opportunistic trauma narratives that drown out the truly empathetic ones.

In *Apocalypse Now*, Col. Kurtz, as played by Marlon Brando, says, “as long as cold beer, hot food, rock ‘n’ roll, and all the other amenities remain the expected norm, our conduct of the war will only gain impotence.” What Kurtz says highlights the Western audience’s avoidance of confronting the troubling allegories in modern war texts. In the Victorian period, authors and their audiences were trying to understand the troubling world around them in the face of so many distantly fought wars, and in so doing created and read texts where the nation was struggling; in modern American war narratives, there is less need to struggle for traumatic terminology as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders has defined PTSD and allows the texts I

⁷⁹ *Persuasion* often has its heroine have memories about how she regrets her past dealings with Captain Wentworth, and much of *Pride and Prejudice*’s plot hinges on traumatic romantic backstories relating to Wickham.

have discussed and many similar ones to simply traumatize the individual character and ignore how such personal trauma could affect or be inflicted by the nation. The diagnosability of PTSD should have led to a more complex understanding of the effects of war, but instead it has offered an easy out that allows American audiences to place the blame on veteran scapegoats and then enjoy their “cold beer, hot food, rock ‘n’ roll, and all the other amenities” in blissful ignorance.

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