

## “Don't Be A Warrior. Be A Doctor”

By **Saljooq Asif**

One of the greatest challenges that war veterans face is their return, homecoming, and reintegration into standard human society. After all, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and trauma resulting from war not only affects one person, but also “creates havoc among many” (“PTSD Awareness”). Dr. Jonathan Shay examines and elaborates upon these difficulties in his literary work *Achilles in Vietnam*, in which he compares the experiences of Vietnam veterans with poetic descriptions of warfare in Homer’s *Iliad*. Shay expertly discusses several issues that veterans often experience, including special comradeships and the rageful berserk state. If, as Shay explains, the horrors of war lead to trauma and the undoing of human character, then perhaps humanity can be restored by reciprocally gazing into the face of the Other, the one who “always eludes my grasp” (Irvine 10). Indeed, those who have been traumatized by the horrors of war must first become “inhuman” in order to become human once more (Butler 104). Only when both sides—veteran and civilian, traumatized and untraumatized, Self and Other—respond to each other’s calls with unadulterated love can true healing and unity be achieved.

In spite of the atrocities of war, Shay argues that soldiers can still find a unique sense of companionship in the midst of battle. Shay maintains, perhaps ironically, that war zones cultivate a strong sense of “human attachment” (39). He further explains that “[c]ombat calls forth a passion of care among men who fight beside each other that is comparable to the

earliest and most deeply felt family relationships” (39). Highlighting the profound bond between Achilles and Pátroklos in Homer’s *Iliad* as an example, Shay claims that such epic affections can only be encapsulated in the Greek word *phília*. The concept of *phília* transcends the insipidity of average friendships and does not necessarily include a sexual component. Certainly, *phília* can be regarded as an ultimate form of human connection, a type of zenithal love that is forged in the inferno of inhumanity. Such unique relationships often grow between soldiers, intertwining both minds and hearts and creating what Shay refers to as “a special comrade[ship]” (39). Shay elaborates that “the specialness of the special comrade who has died[...] comes not from objectively unique traits but from the movement of the soul that we properly call love” (44). Despite its brutality, war can also be the birthplace of something beautiful—a powerful human bond that blooms in the face of adversity, a human love that can be experienced by the very individuals perpetuating violence.

And yet, the loss of the special comrade and death of *phília* can lead to an individual’s stripping of humanity. The grief at the death of a wartime companion is enough to trigger a condition of extreme rage and violence, a transformation into the berserk state. As Shay has seen through his practice, the “replacement of grief by rage has lasted for years and becomes an entrenched way of being” for countless veterans suffering from PTSD (53). The berserk state is a condition entirely divorced from humanity, in which the subject is “socially disconnected,” “cruel, without restraint or discrimination,” and “insatiable” (82). The berserk state, interestingly, is disconnected from humanity through both its beastlike nature and godlike aura. In the former, individuals fall below humanity and exhibit animalistic behavior; in the latter, individuals rise above humanity and wield limitless power. Indeed, “as beasts are beneath human restraints, gods are above him” (84). Soldiers who enter the berserk state,

therefore, forfeit all human control and metamorphose into a being not of the human realm, a vicious creature that is “blind to everything but his destructive aim” (86). Although the berserk state can be provoked by several factors, including betrayal, humiliation, and entrapment, the death of the special comrade is perhaps the most significant trigger as it is inherently intertwined with the demise of *philia*. Whereas *philia* arises and emotionally connects soldiers during warfare, providing a haven of humanity in an otherwise horrific environment, the very loss of *philia* is enough to produce its exact opposite, a state of fury that is void of any humanity at all.

Shay’s discussion of the loss of humanity is somewhat related to American philosopher Judith Butler’s thoughts on humanity, even if her theories are slightly different. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, she examines the complexity of relationality while also delineating the distinction between being human and inhuman. Butler argues that humans, by default, are relational beings that are wholly dependent upon one another. Most humans “wish [them]selves to be wholly perspicacious beings,” creatures that are clear-sighted and all-knowing (102). And yet, as Butler claims, this state of being is a dream, an utter fantasy; such an existence would “disavow infancy, dependency, relationality, primary impressionability; it would be the wish to eradicate all the active and structuring traces of our psychological formations and to dwell in the pretense of being fully knowing, self-possessed adults” (102). Humans eternally push and pull one another in a reciprocal yet opaque relationship, essentially a “certain ambivalent gesture as the action of ethics itself” (103). When an individual removes himself from this dynamic and sequesters himself, unable to be touched or received by another being, he is consequently allowing for the demise of his own humanity. Indeed, “[o]ne seeks to preserve oneself against the injuriousness of the other, but if one were successful at walling

oneself off from injury, one would become inhuman” (103). By divorcing oneself from human relationality and erasing opacity in an attempt to maintain “self-preservation,” one is effectively engaging in “a pure ethics of the self, if not a form of moral narcissism” (103).

Although Butler’s theories on inhumanity seem starkly different from those of Shay, they are, in fact, quite similar on a deeper level. Whereas Shay claims that the berserk state strips an individual of his humanity by allowing him to descend into beastlike rage or transcend into godlike fury, Butler argues that inhumanity can be attained when one separates oneself from the rest of mankind and selfishly longs to preserve only oneself. According to both Shay and Butler, a human becomes inhuman once he loses his natural human behavior; for the former, this inhumanity manifests itself in violence and aggression, and for the latter, this inhumanity is present in the very departure from humanity. Shay’s berserk state, in fact, can be seen as an example of Butler’s philosophy on the inhuman; by supplanting rage for grief and fully embracing brutality, a soldier is preserving only himself in a “form of moral narcissism,” ultimately an “assertion of the self at the expense of any consideration of the world” (103, 105). A human soldier trapped in the berserk state, therefore, is inhuman.

If humanity can be rendered into inhumanity by an act of ‘moral narcissism,’ then how can humanity be restored? Butler maintains that becoming human is a process akin to a “double movement,” a state of constant uncertainty and contradictions (103). Butler writes that the essence of the human is “one in which we assert moral norms at the same time as we question the authority by which we make that assertion” (103). She further elaborates that only by “[p]ersisting in the vacillation between wanting to claim a right against such injury and resisting that claim, one ‘becomes human’” (103). This sense of ‘double movement,’ marked by opacity and filled with contradictions, is necessary to being human and may be connected to

Adorno's concept of fallibility. Indeed, Adorno implies that fallibility is what allows for one to be fully human. Butler writes that "there is something unyielding that sets itself up in us, that takes up residence within us, that constitutes what we do not know, and that renders us fallible" (104). Humans are human because of an inherent quality of which they may have no knowledge, furthering their own opacity and frustrating their ability to give an account of themselves. Once again, Adorno highlights an inherent contradiction within the human condition, something that Butler labels a 'double movement.' Adorno, however, further consummates this contradiction by arguing that one needs to be inhuman in order to be human. Although he ultimately "calls for the denunciation of the inhuman," he also claims that the inhuman is a channel through which one can regain his or her humanity (106). Butler elaborates:

After all, if being exposed to the rebuff of the other compels us to assert a right, which we must also refrain from asserting, thereby putting into question the legitimacy of that assertion, then in the latter gesture, characterized by restraint and questioning, we embody the "inhuman" by offering a critique of the will, of assertion, and of resolve as prerequisites of the human. In this sense, the "inhuman" is not the opposite of the human but an essential means by which we become human in and through the destitution of our humanness. (106)

If fallibility is equivalent to "something unyielding that sets itself up in us, that takes up residence within us, that constitutes what we do not know," then fallibility counteracts the inhuman and is integral to being human (102). Only by embodying the inhuman, as both Adorno and Butler imply, can one recognize one's fallibility and finally become human.

And yet, how can war veterans suffering from the berserk state, stripped of their humanity, recognize their fallibility and become human once more? Perhaps the answer lies in the enigma of love. Indeed, Adorno and Butler discuss love in regard to relationality and even opacity. According to Butler, "the blindness of love would seem to correspond to the primacy

of enthrallment, to the fact that from the outset we are implicated in a mode of relationality that cannot be fully thematized, subject to reflection, and cognitively known” (102). In this way, love seems to counteract the inhuman as it allows for “infancy, dependency, relationality, primary impressionability” (102). Love, as Butler explains, constitutes a “mode of relationality, definitionally blind, [that] makes us vulnerable to betrayal and to error” (102). Love, therefore, allows for the birth and recognition of fallibility and opacity. Butler continues:

After all, the love of the other will, of necessity, be blind even in its knowingness. That we are compelled in love means that we are, in part, unknowing about why we love as we do and why we invariably exercise bad judgment. Very often what we call “love” involves being compelled by our own opacity, our own places of unknowingness, and, indeed, our own injury. (103)

Butler insists that love is a mystery, something that is both blinding and unknowable. If humans are, by default, opaque beings, then love is only one important factor that augments this inherent opacity. Indeed, this love not only reminds individuals of their opacity and fallibility, but also acts to restore lost humanity.

Butler’s theories, although complex, are echoed by Shay’s own ideas about healing and recovery for war veterans. Shay also advocates for strong human connection, genuine love that can help treat mental and emotional trauma. He proposes:

We must create our own new models of healing which emphasize communalization of the trauma. Combat veterans and American citizenry should meet together face to face in daylight, and listen, and watch, and weep, just as citizen-soldiers of ancient Athens did in the theater at the foot of the Acropolis. We need a modern equivalent of Athenian tragedy. Tragedy brings us to cherish our mortality, to savor and embrace it. Tragedy inclines us to prefer attachment to fragile mortals whom we love, like Odysseus returning from war to his aging wife, Penelope, and to refuse promised immortality. (194)

Only communal love, Shay argues, can bring humans together, heal a war-torn soul, and recover lost humanity. Ultimately, however, the restoration of humanity and creation of love requires an effort from both sides, the traumatized and the untraumatized. For Butler, this

joint effort lies in the realization of human opacity and fallibility and that mankind exists in reciprocal “relations of dependency” (20). For Shay, this joint effort manifests itself in human association and the creation of a “community of listeners” (188). Butler and Shay’s philosophies, essentially, hinge on the primordial relationship between the Self and Other. Philosopher Craig Irvine elaborates that the Self and Other are eternally responsible for one another:

To answer the call of the Other is to give one’s very self, for this answer is the very *essence* of the self. With this call to aid, this primary responsibility for the Other’s suffering, arises the requirement for justice. The call to respond to the suffering of the Other is a call to establish equality. My responsibility for the suffering of *this* Other, in the immediacy of the face to face, entails concern for *all* Others. (12)

If Shay describes the remarkable comradeship between soldiers as *philia*, something stronger than average friendship, then Irvine speaks of something greater than just a human response or responsibility or call—something that, perhaps, can only be encompassed with the word ‘love.’

Although Shay and Butler’s theories, along with the concept of the healing force of love, essentially belong to the realm of philosophy, such themes have been extensively discussed in modern media, including television and film. Indeed, the British television program *Doctor Who* is remarkable not only for being the longest-running science fiction show in television history, but also for its depiction of a protagonist suffering from the trauma of war and PTSD. Originally running from 1963 to 1989, *Doctor Who* follows the adventures of a mysterious yet charismatic Time Lord named the Doctor,<sup>1</sup> a humanoid alien who travels throughout space and time. In 2005, the television show was revived albeit with a

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<sup>1</sup> When fatally injured, the Doctor has the ability to undergo a ‘regeneration,’ a life process unique to Time Lords. When the Doctor regenerates, he is able to take on a new body, physical appearance, and even personality, but is essentially the same person. Thirteen different actors have portrayed the character of the Doctor onscreen. The current Twelfth Doctor is portrayed by actor Peter Capaldi.

contemporary twist: the Doctor is a hardened war veteran, supposedly having committed genocide of his species and others in an attempt to end the catastrophic Last Great Time War. Indeed, “the Ninth Doctor bears battle scars and seems to suffer from PTSD because of his actions during the Time War” (Porter 225). In one episode, the Tenth Doctor admits, “There was a war... Everyone lost. They’re all gone now. My family, my friends, even that sky” (“Gridlock”). The Tenth Doctor later admits that he obsessively counted how many children he killed, revealing he will never forget the innocent “2.47 billion” lives he ended (“The Day of the Doctor”). Whereas Shay discusses special comradeships with other soldiers during warfare, the Doctor possesses a unique relationship with his species, the Gallifreyans. He reveals, “A Time Lord is so much more. A sum of knowledge, a code, a shared history, a shared suffering. Only it’s gone now, all of it. Gone forever” (“The Doctor’s Daughter”). The Doctor’s *philia*, essentially, lies with the members of his species, the very individuals he had to kill.

The Doctor’s horrific actions in the Last Great Time War, in fact, are intertwined with what Shay calls the berserk state, a condition into which the Doctor repeatedly slips throughout the show. When speaking about the last day of the Time War, the Eleventh Doctor admits, “And in that battle there was a man with more blood on his hands than any other, a man who would commit a crime that would silence the universe. And that man was me” (“The Day of the Doctor”). The Doctor, in fact, exemplifies the godlike power of the berserk state; not only is he constantly described as “the lonely God,” but he and others are fully aware of his potential (“New Earth”). When reliving his moments in the war, the Doctor shouts, “I fought in a bigger war you will ever know. I did worse things you could ever imagine and when I close my eyes... I hear more screams than anyone could ever be able to count! And do you know what you do with all that pain? Shall I tell you where you put it? You hold it tight... ”Til



it burns in your hand” (“The Zygon Inversion”). The Doctor is simultaneously haunted by his horrific actions and aware of his deific wrath. Indeed, when describing the Doctor, one character claims, “He’s like fire and ice and rage. He’s like the night and the storm in the heart of the sun... He’s ancient and forever. He burns at the center of time and can see the turn of the universe” (“The Family of Blood”). The Doctor, essentially, is a perfect embodiment of Shay’s berserk state, the very condition that robs the Doctor of his humanity and allows him to commit violence and genocide.

The Doctor’s fiery rage and inhumanity, however, are repeatedly extinguished by the help of his companions, humans who travel with him throughout space and time. If, as Irvine explains, one is responsible for giving “a response to the primordial call of the Other,” then perhaps the Doctor’s companions offer a sense of love that allows for his own return to humanity (11). The importance of the companion has been stressed throughout the show, as the role of the companion is integral to the Doctor’s development. The Doctor’s first companion after the Last Great Time War, Rose Tyler has arguably had the greatest impact on the Doctor. Indeed, by listening to his war stories and loving him unconditionally, she helps him recover and heal. In the season four finale, the Doctor admits, “[I was] born in battle, full of blood and anger and revenge... And you made me better” (“Journey’s End”). Many companions, such as Donna Noble and River Song, consistently remind the Doctor that he needs someone to accompany him on his travels, as his sense of solitude and trauma is enough for him to enter the berserk state (“The Runaway Bride,” “The Angels Take Manhattan”). The most recent companion, Clara Oswald, also reminds the Doctor that he must hold on to his humanity even after her ultimate death:

Now, you listen to me. You’re going to be alone now, and you’re very bad at that. You’re going to be furious and you’re going to be sad, but listen to me. Don’t let this

change you. No, listen. Whatever happens next [...] I know what you're capable of. You don't be a warrior. Be a doctor... Heal yourself. You have to. You can't let this turn you into a monster. So, I'm not asking you for a promise. I'm giving you an order. You will not insult my memory. ("Face the Raven")

Like many of his other companions, Clara cares for the Doctor and vice-versa; this genuine connection, this sort of *philia*, this "blindness of love" prevents the Doctor from slipping into the inhuman and experiencing the rage of the berserk state once more (Butler 102).

The 2009 film *The Messenger* is similar to *Doctor Who* in that it depicts a veteran not only shaken by the horrors of war, but also rehabilitated by the power of love. U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery does not suffer from the berserk state as much as he has become indifferent to humanity, secluding himself in what Butler calls an act of "self-preservation" (103). When his ex-girlfriend asks him what he wants to do after returning home, he responds, "You don't have to worry about me, Kelly. The world's my fucking oyster." Will refuses to open up to Kelly, hiding the fact that he was once suicidal and that he continues to be disturbed by his experiences in the war. Will's inhumanity, or more specifically, his indifference to humanity, is depicted when he recounts his suicide attempt: "It just didn't... Just didn't make sense anymore. The whole living thing... I was standing out there, on the edge for a while. It was cold and it was dark and I felt calm." Will may not be suffering from the berserk state, but he has devolved into the inhuman, someone flirting with Butler's concept of "moral narcissism" (103).

And yet, Will's work as a part of the Casualty Notification team may be what humanizes him once again. Indeed, Will's chance encounter with Olivia Pitterson marks the beginning of his reformation. When Will's partner, Captain Tony Stone, assumes that Olivia is having an affair while her husband is in Iraq, Will exasperatedly replies, "We walk into these people's lives. We don't know shit." In this scene, Tony increasingly resembles the inhuman

while Will breaks free from that state of being. In his ‘self-preservation’ and ‘moral narcissism,’ Tony assures himself that Olivia is guilty of infidelity and presumptuously believes that he knows all about these individuals’ lives. Will, however, begins to understand his own opacity and fallibility and spends the rest of the film trying to deepen his relationship with Olivia. By the final scene, there seems to be some semblance of love between them—not necessarily sexual love, but a sort of *philia*, a platonic love. Indeed, writer-director Oren Moverman claims that the film is “a movie about love, or the potential for love, and how it gets you through the hard stuff in life.” Will and Olivia possess a genuine connection and seem to understand one another; near the end of the film, Olivia says, “It was good. To know you,” to which Will replies, “Same here.” Will and Olivia are two individuals who hear and respect each other’s “primordial call” and bring out each other’s humanity after the consequences of war (11).

Of course, *Doctor Who* and *The Messenger* are not the only pieces of modern media that build upon the philosophical intersection of Shay, Butler, and Irvine and deal with wartime trauma. Nickelodeon’s animated television series *The Legend of Korra* depicts a deific character named Avatar Korra who suffers from PTSD after extremely traumatic battles with a communist terrorist, a religious extremist, and a group of anarchists. Only when Korra is able to understand her own humanity and that of others is she ultimately able to regain control of her godlike powers and defeat the show’s final antagonist, a power-hungry fascist. After a therapeutic session in which she revisits her past traumatic experiences with another human being, somewhat akin to Shay’s “communalization of the trauma,” Korra reveals, “I am finally able to accept what happened, and I think that’s gonna make me stronger” (194; “Beyond the Wilds”). In some instances, however, media can also reveal what happens when trauma is not communalized, when grief is not understood, when the call of the Other remains unanswered.

Indeed, in Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Warren Smith is a World War I veteran suffering from extreme PTSD who does not receive the human love and response that he needs. Although Septimus labels his own doctors as the epitome of "human nature," his physicians represent the exact opposite; indeed, these doctors are the inhuman, who "condemn [Septimus] to death" and are capable only of 'self-preservation' and 'moral narcissism' (Woolf 91). Ultimately, Septimus commits suicide as his "call to establish equality" remains unanswered (Irvine 12).

In his essay *The Other Side of Silence*, Irvine claims, "What lies on the other side of silence, a silence that envelops the suffering of the Other, is a call—in fact a demand... To answer the call of the Other is to give one's very self, for this answer is the very *essence* of the self" (12). In this eternal yet obligatory relationship between the Self and Other, Irvine believes that one is wholly responsible to respond to another's call. For Butler, the impulse to respond can be seen as not only an act of love, but also something necessary to being human. Shay's advocacy for the "communalization of the trauma" is, essentially, an example of Irvine's response to the call, of Butler's act of human love (194). Like the *Iliad*, *Doctor Who* and *The Messenger* are examples of fictional works, among others, but the nature of their genre does not reduce the importance of the insight they offer into recovery and healing. If these fictional narratives reveal anything at all, then they show how trauma, grief, and suffering must be shared and experienced by all. Only then can suffering cease, and perhaps only then can we become human.

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