"...CLEARLY ONE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL AND MOST IMPORTANT SCHOLARLY WORKS TO HAVE EMERGED FROM THE VIETNAM WAR. BEYOND THAT, IT IS ALSO AN INTENSELY MOVING WORK, INTENSELY PASSIONATE, REACHING BACK THROUGH THE CENTURIES TO TOUCH AND HEAL."
—TIM O'BRIEN, AUTHOR OF *GOING AFTER CACCIATO* AND *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*

ACHILLES IN VIETNAM

COMBAT TRAUMA AND THE UNDOING OF CHARACTER

JONATHAN SHAY, M.D., PH.D.

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"Fuck it. They're dead. No big fucking deal. Move on."

"_____'s dead."

"Fucking _____ fucked up. He's dead."

"He shouldn't have *fucked up*. He wouldn't be *fucking dead*."

"Where, where's the compassion? Where's your sense of human—This is another fellow American."

Y'know? He didn't fuck up. He's dead. You know?

Why can't I feel? Y'know, why can't I grieve for him? That's where they put that hardening in you.

"Don't mean nothin'" and "Fuck it," the Vietnam combat soldier's mantras, spread out to engulf everything valued or wanted, every person, loyalty, and commitment.

CHAPTER 3

Grief at the Death of a Special Comrade

The dignity of these humans is to weep.
—Martha Nussbaum,
Introduction to *The Bacchae*, p. xl

We can never fathom the soldier's grief if we do not know the human attachment which battle nourishes and then amputates. As civilians we have no native understanding of the soldier's grief. Combat 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. The experiences of Vietnam combat veterans and the accounts of comradeship in Homer's *Iliad* illuminate each other, enhancing our understanding of the soldier's relationship to a special comrade, be it Achilles to Pátroklos or an American soldier to his buddy. We often hear that the death of a special friend-in-arms broke the survivor's life into unhealable halves, with everything before his death radically severed from everything after.

After probing the relationship to a special comrade, I shall examine grief *per se*. Vietnam and the *Iliad* again throw light on each other, clarifying the role of Thetis, Achilles' goddess mother, and the state of being "already dead" while still biologically alive.

Any blow in life will have longer-lasting and more serious consequences if there is no opportunity to communalize it. This means some mix of formal social ceremony and informal telling of the story with feeling *to socially connected others* who do not let the survivor go through it alone. The virtual suppression of social griefwork in Vietnam contrasts vividly with the powerful expressions of communal mourning recorded in Homeric epic. I believe that numerous military, cultural, institutional, and historical fac-

tors conspired to thwart the griefwork of Vietnam combat veterans, and I believe that this matters. The emergence of rage out of intense grief may be a human universal; long-term obstruction of grief and failure to communalize grief can imprison a person in endless swinging between rage and emotional deadness as a permanent way of being in the world.

SOLDIERS' LOVE FOR SPECIAL COMRADES—VIETNAM AND TROY

Pátroklos and Achilles were virtually brothers by adoption. The word *brother* appears as symbol in the everyday talk of Vietnam veterans, as in "How y'doin', bro?" or the much more deeply felt "I had to. He's my bro." The "brotherhood of soldiers" has become a dead metaphor in the mouths of political speechifiers and rear-echelon officers visiting the troops, but the reality of combat calls forth the language and emotion of the earliest and strongest family relationships in every place and era. A veteran, speaking of his closest friend-in-arms, says:

> It's a closeness you never had before. It's closer than your mother and father, closest [sic] than your brother or your sister, or whoever you're closest with in your family. It was . . . y'know, you'd take a shit, and he'd be right there covering you. And if I take a shit, he'd be covering me. . . . We needed each other to survive.

The kin relationship, brother, seems to be the most accessible and commonly spoken symbol of the bond between combat soldiers[1] who are closest comrades.

Modern American English makes soldiers' love for special comrades into a problem, because the word *love* evokes sexual and romantic associations. But *friendship* seems too bland for the passion of care that arises between soldiers in combat. Achilles laments to his mother that his *phílos*, his "greatest friend is gone." (18:89f) Much ink has been spilled over whether this word (and the abstract noun *phília*) and all its linguistic relatives should be translated under the rubric of "friend, friendship," etc. or of "love, beloved," etc. However, the difficulty of finding the right word reflects differences between ancient Greek and modern American culture that need to be made clear. "*Phília* includes many relationships that would not be classified as friendships. The love of

mother and child is a paradigmatic case of *phília*; all close family relations, including the relation of husband and wife, are so characterized. Furthermore, our [word] 'friendship' can suggest a relationship that is weak in affect . . . , as in the expression 'just friends'. . . . [*Phília*] includes the very strongest affective relationships that human beings form, . . . [including, but not limited to] relationships that have a passionate sexual component. For both these reasons, English 'love' seems more appropriately wide-ranging. . . . [The] emphasis of *phília* is less on intensely passionate longing than on . . . benefit, sharing, and mutuality. . . ."[2] Many individuals who experience friendship as one of the central goods in their lives find that their employers will not recognize *phília* between people whose relationship is not familial. Veterans have lost their jobs because they left work to aid another veteran, in circumstances where the same absence would have been "understandable" and charged against sick or vacation time had the other been a spouse, parent, or child. Many people today view friendship purely as a leisure activity, or a sweetener that with luck arises among co-workers, neighbors, or members of a voluntary association such as a church or club but which will be put aside if it gives rise to any conflicting claims at work. Many veterans have also alienated their spouses because they would leave home to go to the aid of fellow veterans. The ancient Greeks, perhaps because their societies were so highly militarized (every male citizen was also a soldier), simply assumed the centrality of *phília*.

HOMER ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACHILLES AND PATROKLOS

Achilles, mourning the death of Pátroklos, recalls "how in his company he fought out many a rough day full of danger, cutting through ranks in war and the bitter sea." (24:7ff) Apart from military comradeship, Pátroklos may be Achilles' brother by adoption;[3] they grew up together in the same house. Pátroklos's ghost asks,

> "[Do not] inter my bones apart from thine
> but close together, as we grew together,
> in thy family's hall. . . .
> [Your father] adopted me
> and reared me kindly, naming me your squire [*therápon*].

> So may the same urn hide our bones, the one
> of gold your gracious mother gave." (23:98ff)

Homer makes clear that Achilles accepts this request (23:201ff); burial in the same urn is an emblem of their family relationship. While the kin relationship of brother seems to be the most frequent symbol of the relationship between combat soldiers who are closest comrades, in our culture the powerful territory of feeling and symbolism of *mother* often seems to apply just as well.

Apart from being his figurative or legal brother, what else was Pátroklos to Achilles? The word *squire* used by Fitzgerald in the passage quoted above puts us on the wrong track. A better fit, militarily speaking, for the Greek word *therápon* is "second-in-command" or "executive officer." When Achilles commits his company of Myrmidons to relieve the Greeks who are near collapse fighting among their ships, he sends Pátroklos at their head, saying, "Now go into action, prince and horseman!" (16:147f) Achilles and Pátroklos customarily did military planning together, as Pátroklos's ghost sadly recalls: "As living men we'll no more sit apart from our companions, making plans." (23:91f)

Pátroklos also went with Achilles to Troy as his political adviser and emotional stabilizer. Nestor recalls this to Pátroklos:

> ". . . these were [your father's] words to you:
> 'My child, Akhilleus [Achilles] is a higher being
> by his immortal blood; but you are older.
> He is more powerful but your part should be
> to let him hear close reasoning and counsel,
> even commands. He will be swayed by you
> for his good.'" (11:907ff)

Most adults who have not read the *Iliad* since high school or college cannot remember Pátroklos's name, only "what's-his-name, you know, Achilles' friend." Virtually everyone who read the *Iliad* in college and most who read it in high school have been told that these two comrades were also lovers. This belief carries the ancient authority of both Aeschylus and Plato, even though the plain sense of Homer's text is devoid of evidence that these two comrades-in-arms, Achilles and Pátroklos, were sexual partners.[4] Achilles' grief for Pátroklos would not have been greater had they been a sexual couple, nor less if they had not been. Many combat veterans are

denied compassionate understanding by civilians, because so many people cannot comprehend a love between men that is rich and passionate but not necessarily sexual. Veterans need to voice their grief and love for their dead comrades if they are to heal. However, many have learned to keep quiet because of their culture's discomfort with love between men that is so deeply felt.

Foster brother, closest friend, comrade-in-arms, second in command, emotional stabilizer—all together these constituted the relationship of Pátroklos to Achilles, and together they represent what Achilles lost when Pátroklos died. We must feel the value of this bond if we are to understand Achilles' grief when death broke it.

The Specialness of the Special Comrade

A veteran speaks of his dead friend this way:

> [He] was the kind of kid that grew on you. He couldn't *tell* a fucking joke. When he wanted to, he couldn't. Y'know, he would fuck up a two-word joke—and he'd take a half hour to tell it.
>
> If I'd get fucked up and I was drunk and being a nasty motherfucker, he would lead me back. If I was losing it—and there *was* times that I was losing it—I couldn't, I couldn't get my mind operational again. Y'know, he'd fucking shake me and it was like he was the fucking team leader, y'know? He'd pull me back into reality. "We got to move on. . . , c'mon." Y'know, "We gotta get going. We gotta get going". . . .
>
> Y'know, I remember at night, [he'd] be snoring and shit, making these weird fucking noises. . . . He go, "HHHsshh-WHEEeee". . . . And it seemed like he was always fucking far enough away so I'd have to fucking crawl across everyone to get to him. . . . You'd wake him up and [whispers], "Don't make no more fucking noises!"
>
> And he'd say, "You gotta stop this fucking drinking. You're getting paranoid and shit, y'know, hearing these fucking sounds." Or, uh. . . . He was fun to be with.
>
> Y'know, he would argue with me over the map. Like I'd be carrying a lot of shit with me, and he'd say, "Well, I'll carry some of the stuff."
>
> "You ain't carrying shit. You just carry that motherfucking radio, and shut the fuck up."
>
> I was close to the other guys, but I wasn't as close as I was to him.

The parallels here to Pátroklos's character—the buoyant heart, the generous, nurturing disposition—are very clear. In many combat veterans' descriptions of their lost friends-in-arms, we hear language strikingly similar to that used by Achilles to pay homage to Pátroklos.

One veteran of the 173d Airborne said,

> We called him "the Keeper of the Minds." He was the one who would not let you lose it. I can even remember guys calling out, "Get the Keeper over here!" when someone was losing it. His name was _____. When he was killed . . .

A person who is deeply loved and cared about can never be a replaceable part, a rank and MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) with just another service number on his dog tags. The *particularity* of the person, 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. The Marine in Larry Burrows's famous *Life* photo *Reaching Out, Battle for Hill 484, DMZ, 1966*, reproduced on the cover of this book, cares about the other wounded Marine in particular, not as a buddy-in-general, replaceable by any number of other Marines. Men learned in combat that to care passionately for the well-being of an individual person is to become vulnerable to pain and grief. Many soldiers drew the logical conclusion from this and say that after a special comrade was killed, they "just stayed the fuck away—didn't get close to nobody." Often they cannot remember the names or faces of anyone else with whom they served after that particular person was killed.

PORTRAIT OF PATROKLOS

A veteran in our program has written:

> Gentle people who somehow survive the brutality of war are highly prized in a combat unit. They have the aura of priests, even though many of them were highly efficient killers.

The *Iliad* makes clear that Pátroklos had precisely this kind of gentle character. It was in no way incompatible with being a formidable warrior: In Book 16 he kills twenty-four named warriors,

including Zeus's son Sarpêdôn, King of Lykia. We learn about Pátroklos's gentleness and compassion from our own observation and the reports of others.

In Book 11, for example, Achilles has sighted a wounded man in the distance being evacuated in Nestor's chariot, and he sends Pátroklos to learn his identity. When Pátroklos arrives at Nestor's hut, Nestor plants the idea that if Achilles cannot lead the Myrmidons himself to throw back the Trojans, he should at least allow Pátroklos to lead them in Achilles' armor as a tactical deception. "Taking you for him the Trojans may retire from the field and let the young Akhaians [Greeks] have a respite exhausted as they are." (11:926ff) What then follows reveals several aspects of Pátroklos's character, most significantly his compassion:

> At this, Pátroklos' heart bounded within him
> and he went running back along the shipways
> toward Akhilleus. Just as he passed the ship
> of great Odysseus . . .
> there came Eurypylos, the wounded man,
> . . . struck by the arrow,
> limping out of combat. Sultry sweat
> ran down his shoulders and his face, dark blood
> still trickled from his wound, but he limped on,
> unshaken spirit.
> Seeing him, Pátroklos,
> moved to compassion, said . . . (11:933ff)

His enthusiasm, his loyalty to Achilles, and his desire to gloriously rescue the beleaguered Greeks send him running back with his heart pounding. But all of these are overridden by his compassion, which halts him by the wounded Eurypylos.

> Supporting him
> with one arm round him, under his chest, [Pátroklos] led him
> into the hut. A squire put oxhides out
> on which [Pátroklos] laid the wounded man, then took
> his sheath knife and laid open the man's thigh
> to excise the biting arrow. With warm water
> he washed the black blood flowing from the wound
> then rubbed between his hands into a powder

over the wound a bitter yarrow root,
that dulled all pangs of pain. Now the gash dried
as the blood and powder clotted.[5] (11:957ff)

We see Pátroklos here in the intensely maternal role of an attentive surgeon, one who is not only competent but who cares:

Pátroklos stayed
inside the shelter with Eurypylos
to give him pleasure, talking, and to treat
his aching wound with salve against the pain . . . (15:454ff)

At this moment Pátroklos hears the cries of Greek soldiers in panicky retreat, and he continues his run back to Achilles from Nestor. He arrives in tears at the mauling of the Greek fighters, prompting Achilles to tease him:

"Pátroklos,
why all the weeping? Like a small girlchild
who runs beside her mother and cries and cries
to be taken up, and catches at her gown,
and will not let her go, looking up in tears
until she has her wish: that's how you seem,
Pátroklos, winking out your glimmering tears. . . ." (16:7ff)

Because this teasing is so memorable, we tend to overlook the fact that Pátroklos's tears are genuine and an important expression of his character. He replies,

"Akhilleus, prince and greatest of Akhaians,
be forbearing. They are badly hurt. . . ." (16:25f)

We shall see below that Achilles' ridicule of his friend's tears is contrary to the values of the Homeric warrior, even though it seems natural to *us* that a soldier should sneer at tears.

Homer asks us to believe that gentleness and compassion really were Pátroklos's leading character traits, equal to his fighting prowess against the enemy. If we fail to perceive this, we will be unable to comprehend the pain at his death. A convenient way to sidestep Homer's emphasis on Achilles' anguish is to dismiss the portrait of Pátroklos as idealized, to assume that it is exaggerated,

not real, too good to be true. How will the average mental health professional hear the following description of a veteran's dead friend?

> He wasn't a harmful person. He wasn't a dirty person. He had this head that was wide up at the top, and his chin come down to a point. He had this hair he used to comb to his right side, and he always had this big cowlick in back. Big old cowlick. And when he smiled—you ever hear "ear to ear"?—it was almost a gooney-looking smile. You know, it was just WA-a-ay—it was huge. He just had this big, huge smile. He never said nothing bad about nobody. He was just . . . he was a caring person.

Yet Homer's portrait of Pátroklos's character is unwavering: This young Greek is a formidable, efficient killer *and* a gentle, compassionate human being. While modern readers may find this implausibly idealized, there can be no doubt about what Homer intended us to believe about Pátroklos. After he is killed, diverse voices testify to the sort of person he was. Ironically, the first tribute to Pátroklos comes from Zeus, who has just engineered his death and now calls him "gentle and strong." (17:227) The next characterization of the dead friend also comes from a god: Athêna calls Pátroklos "glorious Akhilleus's faithful friend." (17:625)

Other soldiers, fighting to prevent Pátroklos's corpse from being captured by the Trojans, corroborate with homages of their own. Meneláos organizes the defense of the body while he looks for Nestor's son, Antílokhos, to take word to Achilles:

"Remember poor Pátroklos, each of you,
his warmth of heart. He had a way of being
kind to all in life. Now destiny and death
have overtaken him."

Then Meneláos turned to search the field, . . .
looking for Nestor's son, . . .
and . . . red-haired Meneláos
cried:
"Antílokhos, come here, young prince,
and hear sad news. . . .
Our best man,
Pátroklos, fell—irreparable loss
and grief to the Danáäns [Greeks].

Here is your duty:
run to the ships, tell all this to Akhilleus [Achilles]. . ."

Hearing these words,

appalled and sick at heart, Antílokhos
lost for a time his power of speech: his eyes
brimmed over, and his manly voice was choked. (17:757ff)

We not only hear that Pátroklos was warm of heart, kind to all, *and* the best fighter on the field that day, but we see here the effect that his death has on someone who has no kin or power relationship to him. Antílokhos, blind-sided by the news, is momentarily, perhaps dangerously incapacitated by grief, standing so near the edge of furious combat over the body.

Time and again Homer makes very sure that we understand that gentleness and kindness were Pátroklos's leading traits of character by bringing testimony to it from every conceivable quarter: gods, concubines, soldiers under his command, soldiers of higher rank unrelated to him, horses, and even the enemy themselves. Lykáôn, a prince of Troy whom Achilles has captured and is about to kill, knows of Pátroklos as Achilles' "friend, that gentle and strong soldier." (21:112) The grieving Myrmidons weep for their "mildhearted friend." Achilles' immortal horses mourn "their splendid charioteer, the kind man." (17:478ff, 23:324f)

We learn from the captive Brisêis, whom Agamémnon has returned to Achilles after Pátroklos's death, that his compassion extended also to the powerless:

The girl
Brisêis. . .
saw Pátroklos lying dead
of spear wounds, and she sank down to embrace him
with a sharp sobbing cry, . . .
"Pátroklos, very dear,
most dear to me, cursed as I am. . . .
Evil follows evil so, for me.
. . . when Akhilleus killed my lord,
. . . not a tear
would you permit me: no, you undertook
to see me married to the Prince Akhilleus

. . . Now must I mourn
your death forever, who were ever gentle." (19:309ff)

The Vietnam veterans who lost gentle comrades did not start out as the monsters of cruelty they became in their berserk states. *Phília* was reciprocal, as evoked in the veteran's words quoted above, "You'd take a shit, and he'd be right there covering you. And if I take a shit, he'd be covering me. . . . We needed each other to survive." Our culture insists upon the gender association of nurturance and compassion as maternal, whereas the ancient Greek culture understood *phília* to be equally available to both genders. Another veteran described his role in explicitly maternal terms:

I became the mother hen. You know, "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, get over here, get over here. Stay down. All right, now, now, everyone keep, y'know, y'know—the shit hits the fan, hit the fucking ground, don't worry about nothing, just stay down now."

It was constant now. I was watching the other five guys like they was my children.

Veterans often speak of the gentle side of themselves as having died with the special comrade with whom they experienced mutual and reciprocal maternal love.

The terror and privation of combat bonds men in a passion of care that the word *brother* only partly captures. Men become mothers to one another in combat. The grief and rage that they experience when the special comrade is killed appear virtually identical to that of a child suddenly orphaned, and they feel that the mother within them has died with the friend.

THE GRIEF OF ACHILLES

Homer's dramatic method conveys Achilles' grief by showing his actions, such as blunt self-mutilation, weeping, and loss of appetite; by telling us his thoughts, such as his self-reproaches and his intrusive memories of the dead; and by poetic stratagems that make us understand that Achilles is "already dead."

Achilles has a premonition as he watches the battle from a distance, the moment Antílokhos reaches him with the news. (18:2ff)

After this moment of anticipatory "gloom and anger," Achilles' grief begins:

> A black stormcloud of pain shrouded Akhilleus.
> On his bowed head he scattered dust and ash
> in handfuls and befouled his beautiful face,
> letting black ash sift on his fragrant khiton.
> Then in the dust he stretched his giant length
> and tore his hair with both hands. (18:25ff)

Since Achilles' display of anguish bears similarities to biblical scenes of grieving,[6] it doesn't seem all that remote from what might come naturally to us. "Tearing one's hair" is idiomatic in English, usually representing anger, vexation, or frustration. In context here, however, it appears to be simple self-mutilation and self-inflicted pain. What comes next seems to confirm this by taking Achilles one step further toward impulsive suicide: Antílokhos grabs Achilles' hands to prevent him from slashing his own throat. (18:35ff) We do not learn Achilles' suicidal wish by overhearing his interior thoughts but rather by his friend's empathic understanding of what he is feeling. We hear nowhere else in the *Iliad* of a suicide after the death of a *phílos*. The impulse to suicide as a part of intense grief was apparently not a culturally assumed expectation. In some cultures suicide is a predicted complication of bereavement, such as among the West African LaDongaa, who tie the hands of mourners as a matter of "natural" precaution.[7] Neither was it so alien an idea to Homer's audience that they needed to have it explained to them.

What Homer shows us next, the condolences of Achilles' mother, the sea-goddess Thetis, makes us understand that Achilles is "already dead" before he begins his berserk frenzy. He weeps and wishes aloud to his mother that he had never been born, renounces this life, and hopes that his own death will come quickly. (18:79, 96f, 111) He proclaims his guilt (18:111ff) for not covering Pátroklos in battle. These aspects of grief—weeping, wishing one were dead, self-reproach—are all familiar to us, as are intrusive memories of the dead and loss of appetite:

> Now pierced by memory,
> he sighed and sighed again, and said:
> Ah, once

> you, too, poor fated friend, and best of friends,
> would set a savory meal deftly before us
> in our field shelter, when the Akhaians wished
> no time lost between onsets against Trojans.
> Now there you lie, broken in battle. Ah,
> lacking you, my heart will fast this day
> from meat and drink as well. (19:346ff)

The salty old soldier, Odysseus, rejects this impulse:

> How can a fasting belly mourn our dead?
> So many die, so often, every day,
> when would soldiers come to an end of fasting? (19:447ff)

So far, Achilles' grief is familiar from our experiences in civilian life. However, unless one has had a terrifying misfortune of comparable extremity, there is little parallel in civilian experience for the role played in Achilles' life by his mother, the goddess Thetis. I submit that in addition to other dramatic and mythic roles that she plays, Thetis is an "imaginary companion" such as has sustained many in extreme danger and deprivation. One veteran in our program conversed regularly with a guardian angel while on long-range patrol in enemy territory. These dialogues became part of the shared life of his team, with his men asking him what the angel had said. Because we have become accustomed to condescending to Homer's gods as the products of "primitive" or "magical" thinking, or treating them as purely artistic or mythic symbols, we are prone to overlook their function as dramatized embodiments of combat soldiers' inner experience. Guardian angels, imaginary companions, and personal patron saints to whom one appeals *in extremis* are probably considerably more common and "normal" than mental health professionals care to admit.

Being already dead

"I died in Vietnam" is a common utterance of our patients. Most viewed themselves as already dead at some point in their combat service, often after a close friend was killed. Homer shows Achilles as "already dead" before his death in a series of fine poet-

ic stratagems. The transformation begins as soon as Achilles hears the news of Pátroklos's death from Antílokhos:

> "Here's desolation. . . .
> Lord Pátroklos
> fell [*keimai*]". . . .
> A black stormcloud of pain shrouded Akhilleus [Achilles]
> . . . . he scattered [grasped] dust and ash . . .
> and befouled his beautiful face. . . .
> Then in the dust he stretched [*keimai*] his giant length. . . .
> From the hut
> the women . . .
> flocked in haste around him,
> crying loud in grief. All beat their breasts. . . .
> His mother [the sea goddess, Thetis] heard him in the depths
> offshore . . . [and] cried in sorrow [*göoio*]. . . .
> Bending near
> her groaning son, the gentle goddess wailed
> and took his head between her hands in pity. . . . (18:20–79)

Homer affirms that Achilles is "already dead" through a decisive set of poetic parallels. "Darkness," a "dark cloud," or a "blinding cloud" covers a man's eyes when he is killed (e.g., 20:479). Dying men grasp, claw, grip, or clutch the earth with their hands (e.g., 11:485, 13:593, 17:353). Homer uses the same word, *keimai*, for Pátroklos falling dead in battle as for Achilles falling beside his body in grief. Words and conventional gestures associated with mourning the dead are used in reference to Achilles: Concubines and Nereids beat their breasts (18:33, 18:56); Thetis's cry for Achilles is called a death lament [*göoio*] (18:56). The same word is also used three times in this sense as death lament in Book 24 (lines 840, 894, 911). When Thetis comes to comfort her son, she "[takes] his head between her hands" (18:79), the gesture of the chief mourner in the funeral for a dead man.[8]

Speaking of the time after his closest friend-in-arms was killed, a veteran said:

> And it wasn't that I couldn't be killed. I didn't *care* if I was killed. . . . I just didn't care if I lived or died. I just wanted blood. I just wanted revenge, and I didn't care. I didn't see myself going home. No . . . nope . . . no, I didn't.

Achilles renounces his return home before Pátroklos's pyre:

> Apart
> from the pyre he stood and cut the red-gold hair
> that he had grown [as a vow for safe homecoming] for the river
> [god] Sperkheios.
> . . . In pain,
> he said:
> ". . . [The] vow
> to you meant nothing, that on my return
> I'd cut my hair as an offering to you. . . .
> Now, as I shall not see my fatherland,
> I would confer my hair on the soldier Pátroklos."
> And he closed his dear friend's hands
> upon it, moving all to weep again. (23:163)

Another veteran in our program wrote:

> In my wildest thoughts I never expected or wanted to return home alive, and emotionally never have.

The sense of being already dead may contribute to the berserker's complete loss of fear, which we shall see below. It may also be the prototype of the loss of *all* emotion that defines for combat post-traumatic stress disorder the prolonged states of numbness—the inability to feel love or happiness or to believe that anything matters.

Grief and the Warrior's Rage

The title of this section is borrowed from a paper by Stanford University anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage,"[9] on the Ilongot headhunters of the Philippines. What I want to emphasize here is the rapid transformation of grief into rage. For many of the veterans in our treatment program for combat post-traumatic stress disorder, replacement of grief by rage has lasted for years and become an entrenched way of being. Much therapeutic effort aims at reawakening the experience of grief, which we regard as a process of healing, painful as it is. This reflects our *beliefs*, not conclusive scientific fact. We simply do not know which aspects of emotion

are biological universals, like the heartbeat, and which aspects of emotion are culturally constructed.

In "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage," Rosaldo points out the Ilongot headhunters' unelaborated connection between grief and killing, to ease the pain of grief. Homer hints strongly at such a direct connection when one of Achilles' Myrmidons kills a Trojan and says:

> "By heaven now I've eased
> my heart somewhat of anguish for Pátroklos,
> tearing out a man's guts. . . ." (17:602ff)

The principal feature of Achilles' grief is, of course, his rage at Hektor and lust for revenge. Achilles tells his mother:

> "I must reject this life, my heart tells me, . . .
> if Hektor does not feel my battering spear
> tear the life out of him, making him pay
> in his own blood for the slaughter of Pátroklos!" (18:102ff)

Carrying out this revenge dominates the *Iliad* until Hektor's death near the end of Book 22.

The text of the *Iliad* shows many cultural roots of Achilles' rage. In Homer's culture a killing created a debt that could be discharged either by the blood of the killer or by substitute material compensation. Achilles phrases his own desire for revenge in the language of "blood-price," i.e., "making him [Hektor] pay in his own blood for the slaughter of Pátroklos!" (18:105f) This compensatory concept has already been voiced at 9:769f, "a normal man will take the penalty [blood-price] for a brother slain or a dead son," and reappears as a motif on the shield of Achilles at 18:572f, "two men at odds over satisfaction [blood-price] owed for a murder done."

The combat veterans that I treat are neither feral men nor lifelong misfits. Therefore, we need to ask whether the berserk rage that emerged out of their grief is a product of acculturated emotional responses (as, for example, the concept of vendetta), or whether it is a reaction that every human being in every age and society would experience in a similar circumstance. We simply don't know enough to settle this question now. I believe that the

emergence of rage out of intense grief *is* a biological universal and that long-term obstruction of grief and failure to communalize grief can lock a person into chronic rage. This has not, to my knowledge, been established by controlled, prospective psychological research within our own culture, not to speak of cross-culturally.

I now turn to the communalization of grief in the *Iliad* and to the broad range of personal and social actions that I shall collectively refer to as griefwork. Griefwork of American soldiers in Vietnam provides a startling contrast to that of soldiers in the *Iliad*, a contrast that has enhanced my understanding of both the Homeric culture and our own.

COMMUNALIZATION OF GRIEF IN THE *ILIAD* AND IN VIETNAM

> My platoon was in a fucking fire fight at LZ _____. I was short[10] and wasn't supposed to be out in the boonies at all. I got the supply chopper back to _____ . . . and was in Southie [South Boston] forty-eight hours after getting shot at.

DEROS, the longed-for, lifesaving day when a man's twelve-month individual tour of Vietnam combat duty ended and a thirty-day home leave customarily began, came for most with a blessed fairness and reliability that marked few other experiences in Vietnam. Yet it carried a curse that was recognized by very few at the time: It prevented the communalization of combat traumas, which arises automatically from unit cohesion. There is a growing consensus among people who treat PTSD that any trauma, be it loss of family in a natural disaster, rape, exposure to the dead and mutilated in an industrial catastrophe, or combat itself, will have longer-lasting and more serious consequences if there has been no opportunity to talk about the traumatic event, to express to other people emotions about the event and those involved in it, or to experience the presence of socially connected others who will not let one go through it alone. This is what is meant by communalizing the trauma. The all-encompassing barrier that incest victims encounter in revealing their victimization is an essential part of what makes incest so injurious.[11] Bereavement is only one of

the traumas of combat; how it was shared, or failed to be shared, is the main theme of this section. *Griefwork* encompasses the whole range of formal and informal social exchanges that soldiers at Troy and in Vietnam practiced after a death.

When and how did the Greek invaders of Troy mourn their dead? Who did what, and when? I ask these questions and take the trouble to answer them because they allow us to notice things about *American* soldiers' experiences in Vietnam that are so easily taken for granted that they are almost invisible. I shall concentrate on the Greeks because, like the Americans in Vietnam, they were foreign troops at a great distance from home overseas. Trojan dead, like locally based Vietcong, were in the hands of their own townsmen and families if the enemy didn't carry them off. The purpose here is not to reconstruct ancient Ionian or Mycenaean funeral practices but rather to illuminate our own recent conduct toward war dead and to speculate on its consequences.

As we work our way through the social and psychological processes of grief portrayed at Homer's Troy and compare them to those found among Americans in Vietnam, we shall have to untangle several separate sources of difference: contrasting cultures, changes in the nature of warfare, and institutional and historical factors peculiar to the Vietnam War.

During this comparison of Achilles' griefwork with that of Americans in Vietnam, we must also bear in mind *the enormous advantage that the powerful have over the powerless in the conduct of griefwork*. Communalization is virtually guaranteed and automatic when someone as powerful as Achilles grieves. My guess is that friends of the eight colonels killed in action between 1961 and 1972 had considerably more opportunity to communalize their grief than the enlisted men who lost friends. Homer also shows us the situation of the powerless:

> and the [slave] women wailed in . . . grief for Patroclus
> calling forth each woman's private sorrows. (Fagles trans. 19:357f)

Slaves are forbidden to weep except to mirror the mood of their masters; when their masters grieve, they have license to wail their personal sorrow.

When were the dead brought to the rear?

Some things don't change much. In both Troy and Vietnam the dead were brought out of battle along with the wounded, either during the fighting or immediately after danger had passed. Greeks and Trojans took great personal risks to bring in the dead from the midst of the most ferocious combat, as was also true of Americans in Vietnam. I shall not dwell on this here. What has changed greatly is the utter disappearance of truces to collect or mourn the dead. A number of truces were held during the Vietnam War, but none for funerary purposes. Veterans have described private, infinitely fragile, unspoken truces that they observed to allow the enemy to collect their dead without being fired upon, particularly after engagements with the North Vietnamese. Reciprocal gestures of respect have also been reported: One veteran described a North Vietnamese practice of marking American bodies with lime to make them visible from the air and voiced the belief that they did this only for American soldiers who had fought well.[12] Unfortunately, such stories of mutual respect for the enemy's need to gather and mourn their dead are painfully rare, outnumbered a thousand to one by stories—on both sides—of the dead being used as booby traps or as bait for ambushes; of mutilation and degradation of the dead; and of cruelty and contempt for the bereaved.

We witness two funerary truces in the *Iliad*. In Book 7, many dead lie on the field following the tremendous battle that ensues when a Trojan breaks the truce that has been declared to end the war by single combat between Meneláos and Paris. Both sides want a pause to collect and cremate the dead. The Trojan herald comes to the Greek camp with an offer:

> "I am directed
> . . . to make this inquiry:
> Will you accept a truce in the hard fighting,
> allowing us to burn our dead? Next day
> again we'll fight, until inscrutable power
> decides between us, giving one side victory." (7:468ff)

Both for the stated reasons and for secret military reasons, the Greeks accept the offer:

> Agamémnon responded to Idaíos [the herald]:
> ". . . As to the dead,
> I would withhold no decency of burning;
> a man should spare no pains to see cadavers
> given as soon as may be after death
> to purifying flame. . . ." (7:482ff)

The scene at dawn the next day is remarkable both for its emotional power and for the fact that Greeks and Trojans weep freely within view of each other:

> [the sun]
> had just begun to strike across the plowlands . . .
> when these two groups [Greeks and Trojans]
> met on the battlefield, with difficulty
> distinguishing the dead men, one by one.
> With pails they washed the bloody filth away,
> then hot tears fell, as into waiting carts
> they lifted up their dead. . . .
> [The Greeks] piled
> dead bodies on their pyre, sick at heart,
> and burned it down. (7:502ff)

The closing lines of the *Iliad*, Book 24, lines 930 onward, describe the cremation and burial of Hektor during a truce granted for that purpose by Achilles to Priam, Hektor's father and king of Troy.

Time and safety to mourn were built into ancient warfare and were absent in Vietnam.

Who brought the dead to the rear?

American dead in Vietnam were often handled in the field by medics, who were valued and socially integrated members of the dead man's combat unit. But very soon the dead passed into the hands of strangers, helicopter crews who had no personal connection to the surviving men of the combat unit and whose first priorities may have been other tasks, such as medical evacuation of the wounded, or resupply.[13] Medical evacuation crews legitimately focused their energies on getting the living wounded aboard and away to a field hospital; if there was room, the dead

were sometimes quickly hauled or thrown aboard without ceremony. Medevac often came very soon after a call for it, so from the point of view of those left behind, a dead man sometimes virtually vanished. Sometimes he was gone before his closest friend-in-arms even knew he had been hit.

Once in the rear, American dead became the responsibility of personnel attached to Graves Registration, whose task was identification, preservation, preparation, and very prompt shipment of the bodies to the United States. One veteran in our program who dealt with every step of getting the dead out of Vietnam during his two tours in a transportation company states that a soldier's body often was actually aboard a plane, heading back to the United States, within twenty-four hours of being hit. These rear-echelon support troops usually had no social bond whatever to the combat unit the dead man came from. Sometimes a surviving friend would witness the way the body was handled by Graves Registration and experience this as indifference or disrespect. One veteran described going to Graves Registration in search of his dead friend and beating up the sergeant there because he was cooling beer in the chest holding the corpse.

The *Iliad* leaves the strong impression that a dead man's closest comrades, having fought to prevent his body from falling into enemy hands, carried it to the rear. For Greeks and Trojans this began a rich and densely varied series of activities by the bereaved for the dead and significant involvement of the bereaved with each other. In Vietnam, when the corpse disappeared from the battlefield the thread of griefwork snapped at its origin.

When were the dead mourned?

Grief turns the attention of the survivor inward to feelings, memories, and imagined what-if scenarios; attention to the present sensory world is largely shut down. In Vietnam, American troops were exposed to attack twenty-four hours a day but were most often attacked at night. *There was no safe time to mourn.* Allowing one's attention to turn inward to grief could result in one's own death and the deaths of others. Night warfare reflects a change in the customs of war since Homer's time.

In the *Iliad*, combat is suspended every night. While there is no explicit mention that mourning took place at night, this is a rea-

sonable inference. If it was safe enough to sleep, it was safe enough to grieve. In addition, there were funerary truces when grieving was not only safe and acceptable but socially compelled.

What was the level of trust, safety, and social cohesiveness in the rear during mourning?

I have already indicated that a degree of security from enemy attack is essential for griefwork to proceed. During much of the Vietnam War, combat soldiers felt as unsafe in the rear as out in the field. Many veterans have told me, "There were two wars going on—one out in the boonies against the V.C., another in the rear between blacks and whites. I felt safer in the boonies." Virtually all combat units were racially integrated and mostly color-blind in combat, but when they came to the rear, social cohesion fell to pieces. Men segregated themselves rigidly along racial lines in the rear, preventing units from mourning together in relative safety. Racially motivated killings and riots were common in Vietnam. American soldiers in the rear were not safe *from each other*.

Men also felt unsafe in the rear because of the large number of Vietnamese civilians employed on American bases. In part this fear reflected racist identification of all Vietnamese as enemy "Gooks," and in part it reflected the reality that some of these civilians were gathering intelligence for the enemy, both on military operations in the field and for attacks on the rear-area bases themselves. For many years of the Vietnam War there was *no* safe rear area, because of the Vietcong's "unconventional" warfare. If you cannot let down your guard, you cannot grieve.

Among the many Greek contingents at Troy, we hear of nothing equivalent to racial antagonisms serious enough to make the men a danger to each other. Captive women must have sometimes sought revenge for their slaughtered families by fomenting hostility among their ultracompetitive slave masters, but we do not hear of this. The Greek units appear to have been internally very cohesive. Although we hear of some comings and goings from the beachhead, the overall assumption appears to be that everyone came over with his contingent, is there "for the duration," and will return with his contingent if he survives to do so, along with the bones of men who have died.

The individual (as contrasted to unit) rotation policy practiced in Vietnam, which moved individual men in and out of combat units on a preordained time schedule, systematically destroyed the unit cohesion of combat groups. Very, very few Vietnam veterans went over with the unit they had trained with, fought with that unit, *and* returned "to the world" with it.[14] I estimate that of the three-quarters of a million Vietnam combat veterans, only a few hundred or thousand did so. By contrast, my impression is that this was the majority experience in World War II, particularly in the Pacific. Even men who went over as individual replacements in World War II spent weeks or months with their units after fighting ended and universally returned by boat. "The long trip home" is generally credited as an opportunity for mutual support and communal reworking of combat trauma.

Survival and success in combat often require soldiers to virtually read one another's minds, reflexively covering each other with as much care as they cover themselves, and going to one another's aid with little thought for safety:

> . . . if one of the Recon outfits, the shit hit the fucking fan, we'd be out the fucking door on the helicopters. And I don't care a shit if we were totally fucking exhausted. . . .
>
> One of the teams got trapped, and . . . we got on a pickup. They picked us up, we flew in, and the pilot said, "Can't go in. They're receiving fire. Receiving fire." I'm on the radio [internal voice circuit of the aircraft] talking to this fucking pilot, and y'know, we're all sitting on the doors, three on each door.
>
> And I said to the pilot, "Well, get down fucking close, and we'll kick ammo to them."
>
> And the pilot said, "Okay, I'm going to make one fucking pass, so when we get down there . . ."
>
> I said, "Well, you got to get like about ten, fifteen feet off the fucking ground. You gotta roll in, because I want to drop it right in on them."
>
> "Oh, yeah, no fucking problem."
>
> And then I whipped the fucking headset off, and I said to the guys, "Listen, when this motherfucker gets close, we gotta go."
>
> An' we all went.
>
> Now, you're talking about a fucking plane that's moving like a fucking tornado. And we crashed and burned, too. I remember my fucking head was all bruised and shit.

It didn't matter. It didn't matter getting out of that fucking helicopter.

And I was so fucking proud of the other five guys. Because they went with it. . . .

Now we're all here. We kick some fucking ass. . . . Now the bond begins. The bond begins of you can count on everyone. The other team appreciated what we did. Y'know, they weren't alone. And I knew if that same situation happened that I could count on six more to come and get me. . . .

Half of us couldn't fucking walk after we got out of there, we were so fucking bruised from the fucking brush and trees and whatever else we landed on. But we weren't going to leave them, even though the pilot said it was impossible to do this. . . . So you gotta pull devious shit. Y'know what I'm saying?

This illustration of cohesion within an airborne reconnaissance unit can be summed up in the words of this same veteran: "You grew like a hand."[15]

Use of mind-altering substances

The word *wine* apears fifteen times in Fitzgerald's translation of the *Iliad*, sometimes as a figure of speech but most often to refer to part of a meal or a libation. It was clearly available in quantity on the Greek beachhead at Troy. To be sure, wine played a role in the Homeric rituals of mourning—to quench the embers of the funeral pyre (e.g., 23:274, 24:947). At no point do we see a soldier drowning his grief in wine, nor do we hear it mentioned. It is hard to imagine that there was no wine at the funeral feast that Achilles made for the Myrmidons (23:36ff), yet wine is not mentioned. Nor is it mentioned in the brief notice of the funeral feast made by Priam for Hektor. (24:959) This is a startling piece of cultural pharmacology; we unthinkingly assume that "drowning one's sorrows" is somehow natural and not culturally constructed.

Mind-altering substances of all sorts seem to have been the main shrines to which American soldiers brought their grief. I shall give two illustrations from the accounts of veterans of the days immediately after the deaths of their special comrades-in-arms:

And I cried and I cried and I cried. They started giving me I don't know what kind of pills. They gave me some pills. And I had

to write down what happened, because there was no body to be identified. He would have been missing in action. So I wrote the letters.

This veteran believes that to the authorities in the rear, his tears were evidence of mental sickness that required a mind-altering medication. This soldier had never used alcohol or other drugs before this—and lest a jaded reader think this veteran used the episode to justify a subsequent addiction to the pills he was given, all subsequent substance abuse by this veteran involved alcohol.

The second account exemplifies widespread self-medication of grief with alcohol:

I mean, I did it with the alcohol. And I did it when I was in the 'Nam. For that two days I stayed fucking shitfaced, just to numb it. Just so I wouldn't have to think about it.

This man had been a heavy user of alcohol before the death of his friend and remained so afterward. He came from a background where heavy drinking was customary at wakes for the dead.

Who wept for the dead, and how were tears valued?

An American soldier who wept for a fallen friend was warned not to "lose it" and to "get your mind straight." One man, holding a dead friend, was told, "Stuff those tears!" and "Don't get sad, get even!" by his company commander. Open grief at the death of a comrade was fully accepted by the Homeric warriors. I count eight separate deaths to which soldiers in the *Iliad* responded with tears. Several of these are quoted in the course of this chapter and need not be repeated. The general answer to the question of who wept is: *everyone*. American military culture in Vietnam regarded tears as dangerous but above all as demeaning, the sign of a weakling, a loser. To weep was to lose one's dignity among American soldiers in Vietnam.

Homer's world valued tears as intrinsic to the dignity of war heroes. What evidence confirms that a social group places high value on a specific activity? I shall demonstrate the positive value placed upon weeping among Homer's warriors by showing (1) what other activities are displaced in order to engage in it, (2) the prestige within that social group of the people engaging in the activity, and (3) the language used to speak of it.

What could be more highly valued to a soldier than final victory? In the *Iliad*, however, the Greeks displace immediate exploitation of Hektor's fall, preferring the activities of weeping and burying:

> . . .[N]ow that the gods at last have let me
> bring to earth this man who wrought
> havoc among us . . .
> come, we'll offer battle around the city. . . .
> Will they give up their strongpoint at this loss?
> Can they fight on, though Hektor's dead?
>
> But wait:
> why do I ponder, why take up these questions?
> Down by the ships Pátroklos' body lies
> unwept, unburied." (22:450ff)

These priorities seem fantastic to our modern mind.

When we examine the social prestige of the Homeric characters engaged in weeping for the dead, we find consistently that this is a high-status activity. Achilles, the *de facto* king of the Myrmidons, repeatedly leads them in lamentations for Pátroklos: "Akhilleus led them in repeated cries of grief." (23:17ff, cf. 18:368) But even more telling is the scene after Pátroklos's cremation, when *all* the Greek commanders, including Agamémnon, are present and participate personally in collecting the bones:

> "Son of Atreus [Agamémnon],
> noblemen of Akhaia's host, begin
> by wetting down the pyre with tawny wine,
> . . . Then come,
> we'll comb the ashes for Pátroklos' bones! . . ."
>
> They did his will: . . .
> Shedding tears
> for their mildhearted friend they gathered up
> his bones into a golden urn (23:272ff)

This job, which our culture would declare to be a filthy one and assign to underlings, is done, weeping, by the highest Greek nobility with their own hands.

Let us for a moment recall Achilles' brutal teasing of Pátroklos: "Pátroklos, why all the weeping? Like a small girlchild who runs beside her mother . . ." (16:7ff) In one word, "girlchild," Achilles connects tears with two signifiers of low status in his culture, female and child, a very modern devaluation of tears customary in the American military in Vietnam. The series of scenes surrounding the death of Pátroklos proves how highly abnormal this disparagement was for the Homeric warrior.

The powerful are clearly at a great advantage for full communalization of their own grief. Achilles could write his own script for mourning Pátroklos; he had total control over what was done, when, and with whom. Contrast this to the utterly disempowered condition of the American grunt when he had lost an equally low-status and powerless friend. He could not even assert choice over his own time to weep or the social or physical location of his own body when he mourned. Even less could he arrange the weeping or feasting of anyone else.

Finally, the word *terpo*, which Homer uses about tears in the scene between Achilles and Priam, connects weeping to joy, satisfaction, and solace, indicating a positive value of mourning and tears. Fitzgerald's translation is particularly resonant when he speaks of the "luxury of tears":

> But when Akhilleus' heart
> had known the luxury of tears [*göoio tetárpeto*], and pain
> within his breast and bones had passed away,
> he stood then, raised the old king up . . . (24:617ff, cf. 4:758ff)

Who washed and prepared the dead for cremation/burial and shipment home?

I have already noted that in Vietnam the service troops of Graves Registration had no organic social connection to the combat units from which the dead came—they were, in a word, strangers. Instead of launching a restorative period of grief by handling and washing loved, dead comrades, these men in Graves Registration were themselves traumatized by their gruesome duties to strangers. This is a paradox: The opportunity to see and care for

the dead body of a loved person reduces trauma to the bereaved, while seeing and handling the dead bodies of strangers is often traumatic in itself.

The following passage is important not for the details of what was done to prepare Pátroklos's body, but for who did it, and for the fact that it was done communally:

> With this Akhilleus called the company
> to place over the campfire a big tripod
> and bathe Pátroklos of his clotted blood.
> . . . They bathed him then, and took
> sweet oil for his anointing, laying nard
> in the open wounds; and on his bed they placed him,
> covering him with fine linen, head to foot,
> and a white shroud over it.
>
> So all that night
> beside Akhilleus the great runner,
> the Myrmidons held mourning for Pátroklos. (18:402ff)

Pátroklos's closest comrades prepared his body for cremation and burial. It is reasonable to infer that this was the case for all Greek soldiers who died at Troy.

One Vietnam veteran, answering how the death of a soldier in his unit was marked, said simply, "Zip." Another said that the battalion commander droned through the names and ranks of the men who had died since the last "debriefing" and then, without pausing for breath, concluded with, "The mess tent is open." In other units, a chaplain or the battalion commander said some words, but the prevailing impression I have been given is that communal recognitions of deaths were perfunctory, delayed, and conducted by rear-echelon officers who had no emotional connection to the dead or their comrades.

One veteran from an elite unit bitterly resents that nothing ceremonial marked the death of his closest comrade:

> They didn't even have a fucking stand-down for the fucking kid. They had a fucking stand-down for all the fucking pot-head motherfucking dope-stuffing motherfuckers. [Stand-down] is when guys in the outfit get killed, they'd bring the whole unit back, and they'd set his rifle up and put his helmet or his boonie cap on, and play taps and shit. Pay him fucking respect. They do this for all these motherfucking junkie motherfuckers around here. They can't do it for a fucking kid who did every fucking thing he was asked to do. Fucking kid never complained about nothing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THWARTED GRIEF

If military practice tells soldiers that their emotions of love and grief—which are inseparable from their humanity—*do not matter*, then the civilian society that has sent them to fight on their behalf should not be shocked by their "inhumanity" when they try to return to civilian life.

The expectation in the *Iliad* appears to have been that the bones of the dead would be returned home at the end of the war:

> These corpses we must fire abaft the ships
> a short way from the sterns, that each may bear
> his charred bones to the children of the dead
> whenever we sail home again. (7:394ff)

Modern transportation makes possible swift repatriation of the intact dead body. Greek remains stayed with the combat unit for the duration; American remains flew away from the battle site sometimes in a matter of minutes and from Vietnam within days of death. I want to draw attention to this difference as a powerful symbol of the possibilities for griefwork by soldiers in these two wars. Needless to say, I am not advocating a return to the ancient practice, but I strongly urge that the needs of the dead soldiers' surviving comrades be considered in policies and practices regarding the handling, location, and transportation of the remains. Soldiers can mourn their fallen comrades without stealing grief from the families at home.

What Homer shows us of Greek and Trojan warriors in communal mourning indicates that it was intensely and positively valued. By contrast, accounts given by American veterans of the Vietnam War indicate that mourning was dreaded, perfunctory, delayed, devalued, mocked, fragmented, minimized, deflected, disregarded, and sedated. Obviously, the social and emotional processes of grief cannot proceed in the midst of active combat where it would endanger everyone, but elsewhere it can be

encouraged. My guess is that the company, a unit of roughly a hundred, about the size of the troop of Myrmidons, is the largest group that can promptly meet the mourning needs of the bereaved soldier with a richness and authenticity that will make a difference in the rest of the soldier's life.

One of our veterans was spattered with blood and flesh when his closest friend was hit near him. "I was like *The Night of the Living Dead* after that," he recalls. Thwarted, uncommunalized grief is a major reason why there are so many severe, long-term psychological injuries from the Vietnam War.

CHAPTER 4

Guilt and Wrongful Substitution

I should've took the fucking round myself.
—Airborne veteran

The soldier's grief helps us comprehend the powerful bond that arises between men in combat. This bond may be so intense as to blot out the distinction between self and other, leading each to value the other's life above his own. But now the other is dead; the survivor still lives. "It should've been me!" is the cry of guilt that goes up in the midst of grief from a survivor condemned by his very survival.[1]

ABANDONMENT AND WRONGFUL SUBSTITUTION

Guilt torments one of our veterans, "Sarge," for the death of a younger man in his team while Sarge was hospitalized with a serious infection. He said:

> In my heart it's—if I was there, he wouldn't be dead. I didn't do my job. I didn't bring him home. . . . When it come the time, Doc, I didn't take care of him. When he needed me, I wasn't there. . . . I should've took the fucking round myself.

Another is similarly tortured by guilt for all the deaths in his platoon, which was wiped out in Cambodia while he was on home leave between combat tours. These accounts remind us that Achilles' guilt toward Pátroklos is also couched in terms of abandonment:

> I could not help my friend in his extremity.
> . . . He needed me
> to shield him or to parry the death stroke.