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Understanding Nationalism

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Hogan, Patrick Colm.

Understanding Nationalism: On Narrative, Cognitive Science, and Identity.

The Ohio State University Press, 2009.

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5

HEROIC NATIONALISM AND THE NECESSITY OF WAR FROM KING DAVID TO GEORGE W. BUSH

THE MAIN HEROIC PLOT involves, as we have seen, two components—a usurpation sequence and an external threat sequence, commonly a war story. The nationalistic functions of this narrative structure are self-evident. The usurpation sequence fosters an emotional commitment to the internal hierarchy of the national in-group. It creates an internal or secondary in-group/out-group division between loyalists and usurpers, with all that this entails evaluatively, emotionally, and so forth. It also links rebellion with social suffering, thus providing an aversive model for our imagination of political change. Conversely, narratives of this sort commonly identify the rule of the rightful leader as utopian, as marked by abundance of food, general health, general security, universal religious devotion, and so on. The threat/defense sequence no less obviously contributes to the saliency of the national category (through emphasis on threat to the group as such), its opposability (through coordinated battle against the enemy), its affectivity (through the many emotionally charged consequences of war), as well as our sense of its durability (through the nation's ultimate triumph) and our

understanding of its functionality (after all, the entire conflict, with all its consequences, is a matter of nationality). The increases in our imagination of opposability, durability, and functionality are also bound up with the heroic narrative's strong reenforcement of the demonization of the enemy (both external and internal) and its concrete development of the divine election of the nation.

No less important, heroic narratives naturalize war. In other words, they take events that should be extraordinary and terrible and make them simultaneously ordinary and enticing. Greenfeld notes a view from early nineteenth-century Germany that is inseparable from heroic employment: "War was a good thing in itself. It was an ennobling, purifying rite which alone could assure true consciousness of nationality" (370). The emotional enticement is primarily a matter of the formation of heroes. The point is so obvious that it is easy to forget. Heroic narratives do not treat wars as a muddle of individual actions and reactions, partially coordinated, partially accidental. They treat war, and particularly victory, as the result of deliberate, brave, and celebrated (thus "glorious") actions by exceptional individuals. The point is not at all confined to fictions. For instance, the creation of heroes is stressed by Kevin Foster in connection with the Malvinas/Falkland Islands war (see, for example, 87). Speaking about nineteenth-century German nationalism, Maas comments that, "In the myth of the founding of the Reich, the dead soldiers would be martyrs for the unified nation. In recollection, the psychology of victory transfigured everything in the light of the national heroes" (217, my translation; see also Morgan 81, on Welsh national heroes). Of course, imagining heroes is inseparable from imagining enemies. As Eliot Weinberger explains, regarding the war in Iraq, "First, an Enemy is created by blatant lies that are endlessly repeated until the population believes them: in this case, that Iraq was linked to the attack on the World Trade Center, and that it possesses vast 'weapons of mass destruction' that threaten the world. Then, a War of Liberation, entirely portrayed by the mass media in terms of our Heroic Troops, with little or no imagery of casualties and devastation, and with morale-inspiring, scripted 'news' scenes—such as the toppling of the Saddam statue and the heroic 'rescue' of Private Lynch—worthy of soviet cinema."

The relation between nationalism and heroic tragicomedy has been recognized implicitly for some time. However, the recognition in these cases has not concerned narrative prototypes. Rather, it has concerned particular works or exempla.¹ It has also commonly been mischaracterized as

1. For example, Li refers to a mid-seventeenth-century work, *Shui-hu hou chuan*, that

a matter of epics, rather than heroic tragicomedies. (The crucial feature is not that the works are narratives in verse, but that they follow a particular narrative prototype.) There is, in fact, good reason for the focus on exempla. It has often been the case that nationalist movements have championed one or perhaps two heroic or at least partially heroic stories. Indeed, nationalism is shaped, in any given case, not only by the universal, prototypical structures and still broader universal schemas, but also by the more culturally and historically distinctive particularizations of those structures in paradigmatic exempla—often, though by no means always, epics. Thus, for example, Quint explains that, “In the Europe-wide quest for national origins and identity of the early nineteenth century, heroic poetry held a special allure. It could embody a pure state of national feeling because its martial subject not only invokes the patriotic unity of a people at war but also provides the mythic memories that can mobilize them” (353). As to particular paradigms, Quint cites the *Poema de Mio Cid* in Spain (353), *La Chanson de Roland* in France (356, 358), the Icelandic *Njalssaga* (353, 359), and other European works. The modern, nationalist use of celebrated heroic stories from the past is not confined to Europe. Non-European cases include Turkey, where national leader Kemal Atatürk’s “cultural policy fueled interest” in *The Book of Dede Korkut* (a collection of primarily heroic narratives), so that it came to be “accepted as the national epic of the Turkish people” (Mack 1497); India, where the Bharatiya Janata Party used the *Rāmāyaṇa* to advance its Hindu nationalism; Mali, through the explicitly political versions of the Malian *Epic of Son Jara* (such as that of Fa-Digi Sisòkò, which celebrates the Malian prime minister, linking him with the great ancestral hero Son Jara; see 11.824–34), and through the use of a song from the epic for Mali’s national anthem (see Durán xviii). Similarly, in Iran, the *Shâhnâme* has served to enhance commitment to the nation and to the internal hierarchy of the nation. As Vaziri explains, “It is fair to say that, when nationalism and national identity became concerns in the twentieth century, the *Shah-Nama* certainly served as the traditional folk source of such modern notions” (125). As Davis notes, “The Pahlavi kings who ruled Iran from 1925 until 1979 . . . assiduously promoted the study of Ferdowsi’s poem” (xxxv; in contrast with Vaziri, Davis accepts

expresses “nationalist strivings.” This work “uses the valiant exploits of the surviving bandit-heroes in fighting Chin invaders, defending the Sung dynasty . . . to express the hopes and anguish of Ming loyalism following the Manchu conquest of the Ming dynasty in 1644” (628). Without conceiving of it in these general terms, Li is referring here to the prototypical invasion/defense scenario of heroic tragicomedy, here recruited to standard nationalist purposes.

that the poem is at least “quasi-national” and exhibits “‘nationalist’ sentiment” [xxix]). An interesting manifestation of this bond between nationalism and particular, paradigmatic heroic tragicomedies may be found in the use of such works in thinking about battle or in giving courage and comfort to soldiers in battle and to nationalist revolutionaries (see, for example, Service iv, Quint 256, and Tagore, *Home* 139, for Chinese, European, and Indian examples²). Wachtel cites one Yugoslavian writer, referring to the primary national heroic tragicomedy of Yugoslavia: “[D]uring the course of the War of National Liberation, the verses of *The Mountain Wreath* sounded like a password on the lips of our fighters, and they could achieve their heroic feats” (144).

As I have already indicated, and as the preceding comments again suggest, heroic emplotment is the narrative form most fundamental to nationalism. Nationalist sacrificial and romantic stories are, in contrast, situationally specific deviations from that heroic emplotment. More exactly, prototypes do not arise and become dominant in a particular society in a particular period simply by accident. There are two principal ways in which one narrative prototype becomes dominant. Perhaps most obviously, different prototypes are triggered by different social conditions. Anything along the lines of an attack tends to trigger the heroic prototype; famine or military defeat may trigger the sacrificial structure. However, such historically particular triggers are not the primary source of the heroic prototype’s dominance. In keeping with the usual operation of human cognition, the three prototypes are themselves hierarchized, with a default that may be overridden in specific circumstances. That default prototype for national emplotment is heroic.³ In other words, everything else being equal, we tend to think of the nation in terms of a heroic narrative.⁴ This is true for a simple reason. The heroic narrative derives from the two *social* happiness goals—authority and esteem of the in-group over out-groups and authority and esteem of a given individual within the in-group. When treating the national in-group and its hierarchy, the narrative prototype bearing on these social goals is necessarily fundamental. It is only when the heroic

2. In the case of Tagore, the revolutionary aptly carries “a small edition” of the relevant text along with “a little pistol” (139), suggesting a direct parallel between the two.

3. Similarly, our default prototype for a pet is a dog or a cat. It is only in particular circumstances that this default is overridden and we envision a goldfish or a parrot.

4. This is related to the common observation that nationalism is bound up with warfare. For example, as Balakrishnan explains, “For Weber, like Hegel, the modern state possesses a historical purpose and collective meaning because it organizes a community into a sovereign polity ready for war. It is during war that the nation is imagined as a community embodying ultimate values” (“National” 208).

structure is displaced that one of the other structures—otherwise usually confined to physical and personal contexts—comes into play. As a result, heroic emplotment is ubiquitous in nationalist thought and action.

On the other hand, heroic emplotment is not quite identical in all cases. Again, prototypes are the result of weighted averaging. Insofar as the familiar heroic stories in one nation differ from those in another, the prototypes held by the citizens of those nations will differ as well. Thus, we may refer, not only to heroic tragicomedy in general, but to the standard American or Israeli or Indian heroic tragicomedy. (I say “standard” as prototypes will differ, sometimes significantly, from person to person and group to group within a nation as well.) In India, particularly among Hindus, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a paradigmatic heroic narrative. That is not true in, say, the United States. For this reason, certain features of the standard Indian heroic prototype may differ from those of the standard U.S. heroic prototype. For instance, the Indian prototype may stress abduction as a characteristic crime of the enemy, due to the central abduction of Sītā in the epic. (There is at least some suggestion of this in popular Indian film.) The cross-cultural features (e.g., demonization of the enemy, whether as Satan or as the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s Rāvaṇa) are almost always the most important, as they manifest human cognitive and emotive propensities most fully. Still, the national variations may be consequential as well.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, we may divide the most important forms of emplotment into explicit and implicit narratives. Some nationalist plots are explicitly articulated as stories. In other cases, nationalistic ideas are presented as the result of purely rational, objective, causal analysis—while, in fact, they are tacitly guided by an heroic structure.⁵ In the case of explicit heroic plots, we may also distinguish between paradigmatic and popular or ephemeral narratives. Again, nationalists often champion one or perhaps two ancient heroic stories (often epic poems). These have long-term influence on nationalist thought and action. At the same time, nations continually generate heroic fictions that are particular to their current conditions. Collectively, these may have intense effects for shorter periods of time. In the remainder of this chapter, then, I consider one ancient, paradigmatic work; one current, popular fiction; and one implicit narrative from practical politics. Specifically, I begin with the biblical story of King David. This is a crucial paradigmatic narrative for Israeli nationalism, but it has also been influential throughout the Christian world,

5. As already noted, we find this in the formulation and statement of policies, in the writing of histories, and elsewhere. The point holds, for example, with respect to the historical work analyzed in chapters 4 and 5 of Chatterjee.

including the United States. I then turn to the blockbuster American film *Independence Day* (directed by Roland Emmerich), one of the twenty largest-grossing films of all time in the United States.⁶ I conclude the treatment of the main heroic narrative with a tacit, and highly consequential emplotment—President George W. Bush’s response to the bombings of September 11, 2001, as presented in his September 14 speech at the National Cathedral (“President’s Remarks”).

Again, after the main narrative sequence defining heroic tragicomedy, there is often an epilogue of suffering, a questioning of the values that motivated and (apparently) justified the battle along with the practices that brought victory. This epilogue is common in literature proper (prominent examples range from *Gilgamesh* to *The Iliad*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Mwindo Epic*, and *The Tale of the Heike*). But, of course, it occurs in nonfiction also. I conclude this chapter with a brief examination of the epilogue of suffering in the emplotment of the Vietnam War. Specifically, I consider one of the most influential treatments of that war—the Winter Soldier Investigation into U.S. war crimes (an investigation that continues to have significant consequences for national thought and action in the United States, as shown by its prominence in discussions of John Kerry’s candidacy for president in 2004).

EMPLOTTING PALESTINE

Israel, David, and the Amalekites

A few years ago, when flying back to New York from Tel Aviv, I picked up a copy of *Ha’aretz Magazine* (June 8, 2001). The first article in that issue, “Running out of time,” by Arie Caspi, treats the al-Aqsa Intifada and the larger conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. In the course of the article, Caspi worries that Israel has squandered its reserve of Western guilt over the Holocaust, and is now back at the point where Jews began—or worse, for now some sectors in the West have come to identify sympathy for Jews as victims with support for Jews as oppressors. The point is significant in itself. But one particular aspect is important for our current purposes. Caspi speaks of a new “narrative [that] begins with Auschwitz and

6. As of May 2005; see <http://www.the-movie-times.com> (accessed May 2005). I should perhaps note that I have not chosen this film because I think it is somehow unique. Rather, I have chosen it because I take it to be fairly ordinary, though popular. Indeed, it would be counterproductive to take a unique film, since its very uniqueness would suggest that it probably does not tell us much about the society generally.

ends with the death of Mohammed Dura, the Palestinian boy shot and killed in front of the television at the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada” (4). The fact that Caspi refers to this as a narrative may seem inconsequential. But it is not. Caspi’s imagination of the position of Israel is a profoundly narrative imagination. The point becomes particularly apparent when Caspi begins to discuss the international evaluation of Israel and its relation to Palestinian public relations. Specifically, Caspi insists that non-Israelis are now much more likely to accept Palestinian views—including misinformation—“because the Western media now considers us the villain. And once you become the villain, you can be blamed for anything” (5).

The phrase “the villain” does not merely suggest criminal behavior on the part of Israel. It suggests a story in which “the hero” is a well-defined character, with particular heroic traits, and “the villain” is his or her opposite. We really can blame the villain of a story for anything, and we do. Once we learn that a particular character is the villain, we come to suspect that he or she is behind every terrible event in the story. Our attitude is a presumption of guilt, just as our attitude toward the hero is a presumption of innocence. In the real world, things do not work that way. In the real world, it is fairly rare to find heroes and villains. In a conflict between two groups, there is usually some genuine conflict of rights, there is usually some mix of motives on both sides, there is usually some cruelty and terror from both camps. It may be the case that one side has more justice in its cause than the other, that one side perpetrates more terror than the other—primarily because one side has more power. Currently, Israel is causing incomparably more pain to the Palestinians than the reverse—because Israel is incomparably more powerful.⁷ But to imagine Israel—or,

7. We may divide this pain into pain caused by military action and pain that results from living conditions. As to the latter, one simply has to note some basic facts about life in the Palestinian territories and compare them with facts about life in Israel. For example, in a region where water is a crucial resource, Israel appropriates “80 percent of the water extracted from West Bank aquifers” (Chomsky, *Failed* 174). Clearly, Palestinians do not appropriate 80 percent of the water from any Israeli aquifers—presumably not because they are more generous. Or consider Gaza, which has “poverty rates at nearly eighty percent and unemployment at nearly forty percent” (Chomsky in Chomsky and Achar 240, citing 2006 United Nations data). In contrast, the poverty rate in Israel in 2006 was 24.5 percent (Sinai) and the unemployment rate was 8.4 percent (according to Bank of Israel data; see http://www.bankisrael.gov.il/deptdata/mehkar/indic/eng_g04.htm [accessed November 10, 2007])—though even these statistics are misleading since, for example, 50 percent of Israeli Arabs live below the poverty line (Sinai). As to the pain of military action, according to official Israel Defense Forces figures, the proportion of Palestinians to Israelis killed at the start of the al-Aqsa Intifada was twenty to one (Chomsky, *Hegemony* 181; later the ratio dropped [185]). A revealing instance may be found in June 2006. At a time when Israeli jails held perhaps a thousand Palestinians without charges (thus people who were, in effect, kidnapped), Palestinians

worse, Jews—as “the villain” is to imagine that there is something deeper than this imbalance of power. For example, in most stories, we know that a victory for “the hero” would bring peace and justice. But who is the hero in the narrative suggested by Caspi?⁸ Is it the Palestinian Authority? In narrative terms, perhaps. But in actual life it seems clear that Jews could expect no better treatment from the Palestinian Authority if the military situation were reversed—and even the situation of the Palestinians would remain fairly grim, as Amnesty International reports on the Palestinian Authority indicate (see the dozens of documents treating political imprisonment, torture, unfair trials, detention without charge or trial, etc., at www.amnesty.org).

In saying this, I am of course restating, in a particular context, what I argued more generally in the preceding chapter. I am presenting an instance of the ubiquitous emplotment of war, with its oversimplifying consequences. But, again, the emplotment of nationalism—and war—is not merely general. It involves genres, particularly heroic tragicomedy, and paradigms of those genres. The case of Israel and Palestine is no exception. In this case, a crucial paradigm is the story of King David, a story that has figured consequentially in the development of Israeli nationalism, including its relation to the Palestinians.⁹

Consider again the article in *Ha'aretz*. Caspi explains that “Israel’s military might forced the Arab nations to accept its existence. . . . We felt omnipotent. The entitled underdog.” This bears straightforwardly on the heroic plot. But how does it relate to the paradigm of David? The connection becomes clear in the next sentence: “We played at being . . . King David.” Here, Caspi is taking up a specific element of this paradigmatic work, not merely its general heroic structure, but its particularization of that structure. More exactly, Caspi is alluding to a common metaphor for Israel’s position as a small nation surrounded by much bigger, hostile

kidnapped an Israeli soldier. Israel responded with “bombing and shelling” in “acts of collective punishment,” which Amnesty International condemned as “war crimes.” Chomsky explains that “UN agencies . . . warned of a ‘public health disaster’ as a result of developments ‘which have seen innocent civilians, including children, killed, [and] brought increased misery to hundreds of thousands of people’” (in Chomsky and Achcar 239–40).

8. I should note that, despite Caspi’s fears, this narrative is not widespread in the West—quite the contrary, in fact.

9. Since one reader has asked, I should stress that this is not the only story that has been important for Israeli nationalism. It is not possible to assimilate all nationalist emplotments (for Israel or any other nation) to a single paradigm. Nationalist emplotments are diverse, with many sources, outcomes, emotions, in-group/out-group structures, and so on. On the other hand, not all sources are of equal importance and influence. The story of King David has been one of the most consequential for Israeli nationalism.

countries—the metaphor of David and Goliath. The analogy is so widespread that Simha Flapan includes it as the sixth of seven “myths” about “the birth of Israel”: “The tiny, newborn state of Israel faced the onslaught of the Arab armies as David faced Goliath: a numerically inferior, poorly armed people in danger of being overrun by a military giant” (187). Its use is by no means confined to 1948.¹⁰

When assimilating Israel to David in this way, one does several things. One associates Israel with an historical right to the place. At the same time, one associates the Arab world with power and threat. However vast Israeli weaponry might be, imagining Israel as David—a boy with no armor and only a slingshot for a weapon (1 Samuel 17: 39–40)—involves imagining the enemy as incomparably stronger and more dangerous. This simultaneously stresses God’s support of the home nation, for that support allows the nation to defeat the enemy despite overwhelming odds. Finally, this assimilation is not merely a matter of personal understanding and imagination. It is politically consequential. To grasp the full extent of these connections, we need to consider that paradigmatic story itself in detail.¹¹

David was the second king of the united Jewish people. He followed Saul and was succeeded by Solomon. After Solomon, the society divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The story of David is a clear heroic tragicomedy, of the standard sort. Again, it is of great importance

10. Nor was it confined to Israel. For example, the 1967 war was often characterized in terms of David and Goliath, including by the United States (see Black). While most uses of this paradigm are straightforward, there are interesting variants in which Israel does not appear as David. Consider, for example, a recent interview with Irena Klepfisz, a Holocaust survivor and child of one of the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising. Her primary concern is for the Palestinians, for they are human beings suffering right now. But at the same time she is worried that Israel has taken “the wrong road to safety,” explaining “I don’t want the Jews in Israel to die” (Rothschild 29). One might wonder what raises this concern. For Klepfisz does not say that she does not want some Jews to be killed in terrorist attacks. She says that she does not want “the Jews in Israel to die,” as if they are, as a group, assimilable to a single person and thus might die collectively. In part, this is, of course, a result of the Holocaust and the tendency of anyone—perhaps especially a Holocaust survivor—to assimilate any threat against Jews to that single overwhelming historical horror. But it is also due in part to an implicit emplotment of the Israel/Palestine conflict in terms of the paradigmatic heroic tragicomedy (and the associated use of the metaphor *NATIONS ARE PERSONS*). One need not engage in subtle hermeneutics to uncover this link. The entire interview is recounted under the rubric of the opening quote from Klepfisz, “Israel is not David in this case. It is Goliath” (27). If Israel is David, certain things follow. But if Israel is Goliath, then other things follow—for example, though Israel is overwhelmingly stronger than its opponents and currently defeats them with ease, it risks being killed by the tiny, stone-hurling Palestinians, as Goliath was killed by David.

11. We obviously need to consider the current conditions in detail, too. But that is beyond the scope of this study

for Israeli nationalism today. The centrality of this story is reflected in a range of things, from the Israeli flag¹² to the common insistence that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish people. Interestingly, Jerusalem is sometimes referred to as Israel's "eternal, undivided capital" (quoted in Said, "The End" 4). But the centering of Jewish nationalism in Jerusalem is no more eternal than any other nationalist centering. In fact, the unique position of Jerusalem begins with the reign of David and is established in the heroic narrative surrounding his reign.

The story of David begins in 1 Samuel, continues in 2 Samuel, and is completed in 1 Kings.¹³ It is retold in Chronicles. I will begin with the

12. The Israeli national emblem, the star (or shield) of David, does not derive from the story (see Wigoder 618). But its resonance is clearly the result of its linkage with this story.

13. Just what marks this as one story rather than two or three? In fact, this is not really a significant issue. Any narrative discourse may be divided in several ways. We could consider Saul's conflict with the Amalekites as a story or we could consider the treatment of all the Kings as a story. It depends on our purposes. In this case, we are concerned with the operation of stories in nationalist employment. In that context, some stretch of discourse counts as a story if it functions as a cognitive structure for organizing nationalist thought and action. Here and elsewhere, that organization is most often defined by prototypes. In other words, the prototype picks out some sequence of events from the discourse as a story. For example, prototypical heroic organization commonly begins with usurpation and/or invasion, often prefaced by a limited amount of information that serves to contextualize the usurpation and/or invasion—without thereby suggesting an endlessly unfolding sequence of prior causes, such as we would find in reality. In the case of David, we have a prototypical structure with further additions and developments, as is commonly the case. Moreover, as I indicate below, the additions and developments are largely fragments of the prototype structure.

There is, of course, a further complication in this case, since the version in Chronicles differs in some respects from the version in 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, and 1 Kings. For the most part, the versions are the same or compatible. As a cognitive structure, it is undoubtedly the case that the overlapping parts of the two versions and the parts that closely match the heroic prototype constitute the key features of a single paradigm, with far greater and more consistent effects than the contradictory parts or less prototypical episodes. On the other hand, in some circumstances, distinctive features of alternative or less prototypical versions may be strongly activated (for those who actually remember them). It would be valuable to examine those differences in the development of Israeli nationalism—across different nationalist writers and across different periods—to see how the different versions and different elements of those versions did or did not appear and how consequential they were when they did appear. However, that would be a project for a book devoted entirely to Israeli nationalism and the story of King David. My purpose here is simply to establish the basic biblical structures available for nationalist use. To that end, I treat the two versions, including all incidentals. In keeping with the likely cognitive organization of the story in most people's minds, I treat differences as versions of or alternatives for a single story, rather than separate stories. Put very simply, I have no reason to believe that people cognitively store and process the Solomon of Kings and the Solomon of Chronicles as different persons with their own separate stories. Insofar as they have encoded the differences at all, people presumably handle them in the usual way—the same way in which they handle contradictory information in the real world. For instance, if one person tells me that Smith was at the department meeting and another says that Smith was not, I do not form two separate ideas about two separate Smiths. Rather,

former, then treat Chronicles on some specific points where the accounts differ. I will also extend the discussion to include the reign of Solomon. The story of Solomon is, in effect, the culmination of the story of David. (It is not uncommon for heroic plots to continue across two generations of rulers; sometimes, it may go even beyond two generations, though two generations may be stressed even in those cases.)

The first book of Samuel introduces the idea of the kingship of Israel. This change in governance is not without problems. Indeed, this text is remarkable for its ambivalence regarding kingship. Biblical scholars identify two distinct strains in the narrative—one supportive of the monarchy, the other opposed. This is one of the ways in which this narrative is more complex than one might initially expect, one of the ways in which even paradigm texts are often more equivocal than their later nationalistic advocates allow. In any case, the kingship is first established with Saul. However, Saul is soon rejected by God and David is chosen in his place. Though he is not deposed, this rejection by God establishes a situation in which Saul can take up the role of the usurper, though he was initially the rightful ruler.

The story of Saul stresses a number of national opponents. Of these, the Philistines are no doubt the most important. They constitute the exemplary enemies in this narrative. However, the Amalekites, too, have an important position, for Saul loses God's favor due to his behavior in the war against this group. Here, then, we have the usual two enemy out-groups, one of which is more fully demonized than the other. Specifically, God orders Saul to "kill man and woman, babe and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15: 3). However, Saul is rejected by God because he spares some of the animals as well as the Amalekite king. The nature of Saul's sin suggests that the Philistines fall into the category of enemies who should be dominated; indeed, they may even be allies, as we will see. The Amalekites, in contrast, are enemies so demonic—so antithetical to divine will—that they must be eliminated entirely (see also 15: 18).

The next episode brings us to the anointing of David for the kingship. From here, the narrative takes up David's heroism, and begins to establish

I have one set of ideas about a single Smith and that set of ideas includes two alternatives on this particular issue. On the other hand, these two versions of Smith may be connected with different evaluations of Smith by my two informants. Something along these lines is certainly the case with the different versions of the story of David and Solomon. As we will discuss, these different versions deal in quite different ways with important aspects of the heroic prototype.

him as an ideal to be emulated. This occurs most clearly in the renowned episode of David and Goliath. When everyone else is “dismayed and terrified” (17: 11) by Goliath, David agrees to fight him, though David is “only a boy” (17: 33) and does not even have armor. David defeats Goliath handily and, in consequence, the Israelites defeat the Philistines. The selflessness of David’s act, his complete devotion to the well-being of the group, and his full protection by God are all common heroic characteristics with obvious consequences for national identity. What is distinctive about the story is the gross disproportion between David and Goliath. As we have seen, this aspect of the battle has been important in the metaphorization of Israel’s situation in the modern Middle East.

Following this, Saul becomes “jealous” (18: 9) of David’s success and his popularity with the people. Moreover, in connection with this, Saul is “seized” by “an evil spirit” (18: 10). As a result, he begins to make attempts on David’s life. This variation on the usurpation sequence is fairly common in heroic works, with the current ruler attempting to kill his heir, often his own son (as in the *Mwindo Epic* or, with some variations, the “Bogach Khan Son of Dirse Khan” episode of the Turkish *Book of Dede Korkut*). This leads to David’s exile, again a standard element in heroic plots.¹⁴

David’s exile serves to take us on a tour of the land that covers its northern, southern, and eastern extremes, and to a lesser extent the western extreme as well. David’s wanderings lead him to Ramah, north of the Sea of Galilee, through Aphek, also in the north, but west of Ramah, close to the Mediterranean—towns near the northern border of Israel today. He travels to En-dor and Jezreel, just north of what is now the West Bank. He moves through the region around Jerusalem, south to the area between Bethlehem and Hebron (all now in the West Bank), to En-gedi, on the bank of the Dead Sea, just within Israel, and to Gath, west of Hebron (in modern Israel). Finally, when he must flee to the land of the Philistines, he has occasion to travel south into the Negev in pursuit of the Amalekites. Though there is little sentimentalization of the land, it is delineated with almost cartographic precision. Interestingly, in this case, the exile among the Philistines does not have the usual function of contrasting with the national territory (e.g., by establishing the hero’s feeling of alienation). Rather, David is quite at home in the Philistine territory, suggesting that this territory should be part of David’s nation as well.

14. For example, in the *Rāmāyana* of India, the current ruler operates as usurper by exiling his son and heir, just at the moment when that son is supposed to become king.

This tour does not lack contemporary relevance. David's journey maps out virtually the entire area claimed by proponents of "Greater Israel" (Reich and Goldberg 146), which encompasses "all of Palestine, including Judea and Samaria," thus including the West Bank (Reich and Goldberg 122, 215). The broader link between David and Israeli expansionism has been fairly explicit. For example, as Christopher Hitchens recounts, David Ben-Gurion referred to the "Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt . . . as a campaign for 'the kingdom of David and Solomon'" ("Israel Shahak" 9).

David's exile also introduces us to David's wives. They, too, mark out the boundaries of the nation, for one is from the south (Abigail of Carmel) and one is from the north (Ahinoam of Jezreel). These two wives have another function as well, for David's kingdom was continually at risk of dividing into two halves—Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south). Indeed, after the death of Solomon, it did just that. The fact that he draws one wife from the north and one from the south serves to dull regional subnationalism. Indeed, one could see the marriages here as an almost allegorical union of the north and the south with the one king, David.

The exile ends with a curious alteration of the standard structure. The Philistines do attack, and they defeat Saul. But David is not there to defend Israel. Indeed, it seems at one point that he is about to join forces with the Philistines against his own people. Instead, however, he ends up fighting, and defeating, the Amalekites. This may be related indirectly to a defense of Israel, for the Amalekites are, again, the great foes of Israel. Indeed, it turns out that the man who killed Saul was an Amalekite. Though this was evidently a mercy killing at Saul's request (or at least it is reported as such by the Amalekite), David has the man executed (see 2 Samuel 1: 5–16). This episode suggests a threat to the kingdom by the Amalekites, a threat defeated by David, if only after Saul is dead. Thus, it suggests the standard structure of the usurped hero's return from exile to defend the nation. However, to complicate matters further, this account directly contradicts an earlier account, according to which Saul kills himself (1 Samuel 31: 3–6). Perhaps the extant text is a combination of different versions, any one of which might make more sense on its own. In any case, the story tends to recapitulate the characterization of Amalekites as the unredeemable enemy, the enemy to be exterminated, as opposed to the Philistines, who should merely be defeated (and may even be used by God to defeat Israel, when Israel requires punishment).

The division, particularly the characterization of the Amalekites, is not without consequences for Israeli nationalist thought today. For example, Hitchens has noted that "state-sponsored Israeli rabbis . . . argue in public

that the Palestinians ought to go the way of the Amalekites” (“Fallen Idols” 9). Similarly, Alexander Cockburn reports that “Nathan Lewin, a prominent DC attorney often tipped for a federal judgeship,” has maintained “that the families of Palestinian suicide bombers should be executed.” Cockburn goes on to say that “Lewin cites the biblical destruction of the tribe of Amalek as a precedent” (9).

Following the death of Saul, David becomes king of Judah. There is a period of civil conflict, from which David emerges as king of Israel and Judah. The period of conflict is due to David’s rejection by Israel and the assumption of the throne of Israel by Ishbaal, the son of Saul. This is a second version of the usurpation story, now in a more standard form. The restoration of David as king of the united Judah and Israel is of course the restoration of divinely chosen rule. This unification, an overcoming of regional subnationalism, is obviously of central importance to the nationalist function of the story. Indeed, it is crucial to the paradigmatic status of David that he accomplished this.

After the kingdoms are unified, David’s next task is their centralization, their orientation toward a capital that has no regional affiliation, and that can serve as a common focal point for the nation, both in politics and in religion. Thus, the next event after David’s anointing as king of Israel (he had already been anointed king of Judah) is the conquest of Jerusalem. The sanctification of this national center is accomplished by the transportation of the Ark of the Covenant to the city (2 Samuel 6).

The remaining stories of David in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings present a series of loosely connected incidents, often involving fragments of the heroic plot (as with Absalom’s usurpation and David’s second exile). However, this part of the story does not have the same nationalistic value, except of course for the fact that David’s many military triumphs are important for his standing as a leader who could advance the dominant position of the national in-group. The treatment of Solomon in this context is somewhat diffuse as well, though it is clear that David’s work of sanctifying the national center, Jerusalem, is brought to completion by Solomon’s building of the temple—the religious/national center within the center.

Interestingly, the reader does not have the sense that the rule of either monarch was particularly utopian. David’s reign continues to be troubled, while Solomon’s seems problematic due to continuing military conflicts, as well as the complaints that arise from Israel immediately after his death (1 Kings 12: 4). In this respect, Chronicles is closer to the canonical form of the heroic plot. In Chronicles, the reign of Solomon appears much more idyllic. Though Israel still complains after his death (2 Chronicles 10: 4),

the general sense of his reign is one of peace, power, and prosperity for the kingdom. Thus, we are informed that, “For riches and for wisdom King Solomon outdid all the kings of the earth” and “All the kings of the earth sought audience of Solomon to hear the wisdom God had implanted in his heart” (2 Chronicles 9: 22–23). Indeed, “In Jerusalem the king made silver common as pebbles, and cedars plentiful as the sycamores of the Lowlands” (9: 27). More generally, “Yahweh brought Solomon’s greatness to its height in the sight of all Israel, and gave him a reign of such splendor as none that had reigned over Israel before him had ever known” (1 Chronicles 29: 25). Thus, in this version, the story of David culminates in the utopian rule of his son and successor, Solomon.

There are other aspects of the Chronicles version that are relevant here, especially with respect to Solomon. The most important concerns the temple. Again, David establishes Jerusalem as the political and spiritual center of the nation, locating the government there and the Ark of the Covenant. However, it is Solomon who builds the temple, “the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 3: 1). Here in particular the heroic narrative of David culminates in the reign of Solomon. The building of the temple in effect absolutizes the centering of the nation in Jerusalem. Out of the entire world, Yahweh explains, “I chose Jerusalem for my name to make its home there” (2 Chronicles 6: 6). Within this home of Jerusalem, which is itself within the home of Israel/Judah, the temple is God’s particular “dwelling” (6: 1). It is the “house built” so that God’s “name might make its home” (6: 5). At the same time, the temple serves as a metaphor for the nation as a whole, taking up the common THE NATION IS A HOME metaphor. In keeping with this, the destruction and reconstruction of the temple are, symbolically, the destruction and reconstruction of the nation. Indeed, the destructions of the temple are crucial events in the destruction of the nation, crucial events in an historical heroic tragicomedy. The destruction of the first temple occurred at the time of the Babylonian conquest and exile. The destruction of the second temple occurred as part of the Roman defeat of the first Jewish uprising. The ritual prayer at the western wall, the remaining wall of the second temple, suggests (and fosters) the continuing centrality of the temple in modern Israeli nationalism. The different Jewish festivals relating to the first and second temple have the same function. Tishah B’Av, “the most important fast after Yom Kippur” (Pilkington 174), commemorates and laments the Babylonian destruction of the first temple and the Roman destruction of the second temple. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple after its desecration by the Hellenizing ruler Antiochus, a rededication resulting from the nationalist/religious

Maccabean revolt (Pilkington 168–69). The conflict over the Temple Mount (or Haram al-Sharif) is unsurprising in this context. The Temple Mount, now the site of a Muslim shrine, is also the site of the temple of Solomon and the temple of Herod.

Despite what I said about Solomonic utopia, there is an important ambivalence that is part of this story as well. As we have noted, heroic plots often involve an epilogue of suffering, a period of anguish for the great hero, a second exile in which that hero is punished for the violence and cruelty of his or her heroism, so that he or she may return to the nation with greater wisdom. In this case, as told in 1 and 2 Chronicles, these two aspects of one leader—the violent warrior who crushes the enemy on his or her rise to power and the peaceful ruler who governs with wisdom and benevolence after he or she has achieved power—are split into two figures, David and Solomon. Indeed, in 1 Chronicles, the difference between these figures is related implicitly to David's military brutality. God explains to David that he cannot (as we might put it) culminate his own story, he cannot build the temple, because, as God puts it to him, “you have been a man of war and have shed blood” (28: 3). Thus, it remains for the relatively pacific Solomon to build the temple. The point is in significant contradiction with the story as told in 2 Samuel, where the reason David does not build the temple is that God does not require a temple: “I have never stayed in a house from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until today, but have always led a wanderer's life in a tent. In all my journeying with the whole people of Israel, did I say to any one of the judges of Israel, whom I had appointed as shepherds of Israel my people: Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” (7: 6–7). Thus, 2 Samuel does not present any criticism of David's militarism. In connection with this, 1 Kings portrays Solomon himself as militaristic and violent. In Chronicles, however, we see the ambivalence that often goes along with nationalism in heroic plots, the sense that the violence of the in-group is wrong and that the ideal leader eschews that violence, even against out-groups.

Unfortunately, this part of the heroic plot appears to play almost no role in the nationalism of any country. The point is unsurprising. Such a pacific attitude is bound up with universalism and human empathy. Thus, it works strongly against nationalism. Indeed, in both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, Solomon is presented as universalistic, welcoming into the Temple “the foreigner too, not belonging to [the] people of Israel” (1 Kings 8: 41; 2 Chronicles 6: 32). This universalism is symbolized in his marriage practices. While David takes wives from the northern and southern regions of his nation, Solomon takes wives from around the world: “King Solomon loved many foreign women: not only Pharaoh's daughter but Moabites,

Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites” (1 Kings 11: 1). Indeed, in 1 Kings, the great fault of Solomon is that he opens the nation to religious diversity and establishes “pagan shrines . . . for his wives and for traders,” as the *Jerusalem Bible* editors put it (435n.11c). In many ways, the rule of Solomon manifests the conflict between nationalistic particularism and a broader sense of human communality. In short, it incorporates supranationalist elements. That is clearly part of what makes his reign utopian in 2 Chronicles, but also part of what makes it a period of decline in 1 Kings. In the latter, it is precisely Solomon’s cosmopolitanism, his acceptance of his wives’ different religions and the building of shrines to their gods and goddesses, that leads Yahweh to punish Solomon and the nation by dividing the kingdom into Israel and Judah after Solomon’s death (1 Kings 11: 11–13).

The obvious question here is what consequences all this has for contemporary national conflicts. The question applies to not only Israel and Palestine, but the entire Judeo-Christian world, for, again, biblical stories have been important for many European and American nationalisms. Indeed, they are perhaps particularly important for the United States, with its lack of ancient sagas and medieval epics. On the other hand, the story of David has the most direct bearing on Israeli nationalism—which itself has very significant consequences for the rest of the world.

Unlike a writer such as Stanley Fish, I do think that being aware of our prejudices can help to limit them (for discussion, see my *On Interpretation* 38–42). Awareness of the way the David story operates to shape and orient Israeli nationalism can contribute to an effective critical analysis of dominant Israeli ideology on this issue, at least for some Israelis. For example, this paradigmatic story provides one prominent structure for understanding and imagining Palestinians. As such, it tends to limit that understanding and imagining to two models—Philistines and Amalekites. In this context, thinking of Palestinians as Philistines becomes, in effect, the liberal position. One result is that a fuller humanization of Palestinians—an understanding of them as people like anyone else, as opposed to understanding them as the less dehumanized of two paradigmatic enemies—appears to be a form of extremism, perhaps even betrayal of the nation. At the same time, a virtually complete dehumanization of Palestinians (in their assimilation to Amalekites) enters all too easily into political discussion. Awareness of this skewing of the debate is at least a first step toward correcting it.

On the other hand, there are two problems with such a critical analysis. The first is that I have done only a small part of the ideological work here. There are other stories, metaphors, symbols, rituals that contribute to Israeli nationalism and its associated ideologies. Moreover, there is a parallel set of Arab stories, and so on. These prominently include the

heroic tragicomedy of Muhammad, as recounted in the Qur'ān, a book orthodox Muslims take to be the final, complete, and encompassing revelation—identical with the book that rests by the side of Allāh Himself (“We have revealed the Koran. . . . It is a transcript of the eternal book in Our keeping” [43: 2–3]). There is no issue of metaphorically assimilating Jews to this or that out-group in the Qur'ān. Jews figure explicitly in the narrative, and in a way that is hardly promising for the future of Jewish/Arab relations. Specifically, the Qur'ān asserts that “God made a covenant with the Israelites. . . . But because they broke their covenant We laid on them Our curse. . . . You will ever find them deceitful” (5: 12–13). It goes on to adjure believers not to “take . . . Jews . . . for your friends” (5:51) and to insist that the Jews are, in a crucial way, the fullest enemy of the Muslim: “You will find that the most implacable of men in their enmity to the faithful are the Jews” (5:82).

The second problem is that this all concerns ideology. And ideology is secondary. Identity categories are bound up with real, material conflicts and no amount of ideological critique will, by itself, resolve those material conflicts—the limitations of land, the scarcity of water. Of course, I am not saying that ideological analysis is irrelevant. It remains important, particularly for those of us who do not have any personal interest in the ownership of land or the control of water. However, pointing out that there is a dehumanizing plotment cannot change political conditions if material conflicts are not altered. One's hope, of course, is that ideological critique will contribute at least something to constructive work bearing on these material conflicts.

Caspi ends his article by worrying that, in Israel/Palestine, “No one ‘learns his lesson.’” Thus, all attempts at military deterrence will lead to retribution, with the standard result of spiraling violence. He sees this as the result of “mythology” (5). The case is overstated. The violence is no doubt much more a matter of such practical issues as unemployment and water rights. Nonetheless, there is an ideological element here, and a narrative one, both suggested by Caspi's term *mythology*. If nothing else, the preceding discussion has, I hope, begun to clarify one component of that mythology on one side of the conflict.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

America Leads the World to Freedom

Again, the heroic emplotment of nationalism is not cultivated solely by classics, paradigmatic works of the past. It is cultivated by current, popular

works as well. Indeed, in an age of mass media when relatively few people read Virgil and many people see many movies and television programs, it is almost certainly the case that those popular works are collectively more important than the ancient epics. Of course, no single work is likely to be crucial. However, some works are particularly close to the national prototype and popular enough for us to take them as fairly representative of the collective impact of popular media on nationalism.¹⁵ *Independence Day* is a case in point. It is, as I have already noted, one of the largest grossing films ever in the United States.¹⁶ It is also a work that adheres very closely to the universal heroic structure—while at the same time clearly manifesting the standard American version of that structure.

The main plot of *Independence Day* concerns an alien invasion of the Earth. After an initial loss, the Americans regroup and defeat the invaders. This is clearly the standard threat/defense sequence. There is, in addition, a very muted usurpation narrative—in this case, an inexplicit attempt to control the national leader, rather than explicitly taking over his role. Specifically, a repugnant secretary of defense tries to manipulate the president (e.g., through concealing crucial information) until the president realizes his perfidy and removes him from office. American particularity enters most strikingly with the fact that this is a global battle in which the United States leads the rest of the world to freedom—a standard element of specifically U.S. nationalism (see, for example, Wallerstein 123, on this aspect of American national ideology). In other words, the United States does not fight a local battle for its own freedom. Rather, it takes charge of a battle that benefits all nations. It has a “mission to redeem the world” (bound up with its “divinely ordained destiny”), as Weeks put it (144; quoted in Chomsky, *Failed States* 92). Moreover, in both the film and standard American ideology, the United States does this primarily through ingenuity—our national intellectual trait of practical intelligence or Yankee know-how—combined with the more standard heroic trait of selfless bravery.

15. This impact is a matter of forming our prototypes and linking those prototypes to nationalism. Again, as cognitive structures in individual people's minds, prototypes are formed by a sort of weighted averaging across instances. Thus, a film such as *Independence Day* will have different impacts on different people, depending on the precise set of national heroic narratives they have experienced to that point. The number of such narratives will affect the degree to which this film has an effect (e.g., it will probably have more of an effect on young viewers than on old viewers, other things being equal). But so will the precise nature of the cognitive structure formed by the prior experiences, the emotional effects of different components of that structure and of the film, current conditions that affect the salience of memories and the context-sensitive configuration of prototypes at that moment, and so on.

16. Again, the point here is not to say that *Independence Day* is itself strongly influential. Rather, the point is that films—including *Independence Day*—are, on the whole, strongly influential and that the popularity of *Independence Day* makes it an apt example to analyze.

In fact, the film develops nationalist concerns with such precision that it almost seems as if the filmmakers had an understanding of identity categorization comparable to that presented in the preceding chapters. The film begins with a date, July 2. If it was not clear already, this indicates that the Independence Day named in the title is July 4, the anniversary of the independence of the United States. On the other hand, it is important that the film is not called “The Fourth of July.” “Independence Day” retains a generic sense, applicable to any “free” nation. This combines with its American particularity to suggest that the United States is the exemplar of global independence. The first shot in the film is the American flag on the moon. This has many implications. First, it once again indicates that this is a specifically American national film. It also suggests the territorial scope of the nation, extending beyond even the planet. After the flag, we see the associated plaque. The plaque explains that “MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON.” Viewers are well aware that the people who landed on the moon were American. Indeed, we see Richard Nixon’s signature on the plaque. However, the plaque identifies those Americans as representatives and leaders of “THE PLANET EARTH.” The rest of the plaque furthers the point, explaining that “WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND.”

Once the global—and even extraterrestrial—authority of the national in-group is established in this way, a shadow passes across the moon and we see the invading alien spaceship moving toward the Earth.

We cut from here to New Mexico, a space monitoring station. We first see a young East Asian man. He wakes his boss, an older white man. They are joined by a black man and a white woman. To some, this may seem like a politically correct inclusion of minorities. It may be. But it simultaneously results from a standard development principle that operates as a technique of nationalization. Specifically, the narrative brings together a range of characters from subnational identity groups in order to subsume the relevant subnational categories under the national category. The next scene takes us to Washington, D.C. In Washington, we first see the famous sculpture of U.S. soldiers raising the flag on Iwo Jima. The reference to the Second World War is crucial. There is a virtually universal sense that the Second World War was entirely justified on the part of the allies. As a result, the United States has tended to justify subsequent wars by claiming a close analogy with the Second World War. The filmmakers are clearly setting up a parallel with the Second World War in this fictional case as well.

We are soon introduced to President Whitmore, his name partially recalling our national poet, Whitman (perhaps fused with Mount Rushmore).

His cabinet is uniformly white. However, it does include one woman, Connie, who is arguably the most loyal and sensible member. More important, we learn that Whitmore was a pilot in the Gulf War (the first, of course, since the second had not yet occurred at the time of the film's making). The link suggests the continuity between this conflict and the conflict in Iraq, thus further particularizing the heroic tragicomedy, not only to the United States, but to a specific moment in U.S. history—perhaps unwittingly helping to prepare the way for the second gulf war.

The film continues with the tour of the national territory. Having covered the moon, New Mexico, and Washington, D.C., we now turn to New York. We are introduced to New York by the Statue of Liberty, with its visible inscription of July 4, 1776. Again, we are faced with the theme of the United States as the source of liberty. The inscription also suggests the durability of the nation, a property that will, of course, be important in what follows.

From here, we turn to a chess match in Central Park. Two characters are engaged in an intellectual form of warfare. We eventually learn that they are Jewish, a father and son. The son is aptly named “David.” He wins the chess match. The scene suggests a number of things. First, it prepares us for the intellectual part of the war, the aspect of strategy and ingenuity. Second, it begins to point toward a connection between this David and the divinely chosen David of the Bible. Such a connection relates to the implication of divine preference for the United States. (In keeping with this, at the end of the film, just before he flies off to save the world from destruction, David gives his father a yarmulke and, it seems, a copy of the Torah.) Simultaneously, it suggests that the martial victories of King David are now recapitulated by the intellectual victories of the American David. Finally, it brings Jewish Americans into the film's treatment of national unity across potential ethnic subnationalisms.

This incorporation of subnational identity groups is continued when David goes to work and meets his associate. It seems likely that we are supposed to assume that this associate is gay. This is not explicit. However, the character is given a series of stereotypically gay mannerisms and is played by the well-known gay rights activist Harvey Fierstein. This, too, serves to defuse a potential threat of subnational divisiveness.

It is almost as if the filmmakers were given a list of subnational groups to include, for the next scene takes us to a trailer park in California. This obviously extends the geographical survey of the nation. It also extends the integration of subnational groups. Up to now, the characters have had no identifiable class background. They are all vaguely middle class. Here,

we have a widely ridiculed, lower economic class—“trailer trash.” In this case, the film doubles up on subnational groups, as we see a group of dark children and hear Spanish being spoken. Russell, the main character in this group, may not be Hispanic himself. However, his children (e.g., his oldest son, Miguel), are clearly Hispanic. Russell is himself a Vietnam veteran and an alcoholic. The connection with Vietnam serves to establish a continuity in American militarism from Vietnam through the Gulf War to the present conflict. Since he is impoverished and addicted, it also suggests the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans. That mistreatment is, of course, commonly blamed not on the people who sent them to war but on the peace movement that worked to bring them home. In any case, we later discover that Russell is abused by his neighbors. This is literally due to his idea that he was abducted by aliens. However, it clearly suggests the stereotype of the abused and discarded national hero, specified in this case to the “hero” of Vietnam.

The alien ship now begins to send out smaller pods that will travel to the major cities of the world. The first glimpse we get of this is in the Northern Desert in Iraq. This again suggests the crucial importance of Iraq for American “national defense.”

As the alien ships seem to pose a danger, we find that the sinister secretary of defense wants to run, while the brave general and president insist that they will stay while others are moved to a secure location. The general asks Whitmore what will happen if the aliens turn hostile. Whitmore introduces the crucial element of divine election, responding, “Then God help us.”

Here, having seen the general pattern of integrating subnational groups, we may wonder why blacks have been so underrepresented. The film would have a serious flaw in serving national integration if it did not include an African American among the heroic warriors. Thus, a black family is introduced. The man is wearing dog tags, so we identify him immediately as a soldier. Though on leave, he has to report immediately to his base, due to the crisis. Though his girlfriend, Jasmine, is angry, he shows no hesitation in his commitment to duty.

We return to Washington, this time introduced by the Lincoln memorial—in part, perhaps, to suggest the emancipation of the slaves, thus a moment of important national division and reconciliation. We are also introduced to the president’s young daughter, who parallels Jasmine’s young son, and we learn that the president’s wife is away, just as Jasmine’s boyfriend is going away. The parallelism serves to connect these seemingly very different (American) families, thereby partially occluding subnational differences.

At this point, the shadows of the pods pass over the Washington Monument, the Statue of Liberty, and so forth, suggesting the threat to our traditions and our freedoms. In between, we see the pictures on the president's table. There are, of course, pictures of his wife and daughter. However, more important, there are pictures of the president with the Dalai Lama and with the Pope, suggesting the close connection between his temporal authority and the authority of God.

We now return to David. Like the president and the general, he refuses to run and hide. Having isolated the signals sent by the mother ship to its pods, he manages to interpret the message. Specifically, he learns that the signals are cycling down to zero. He realizes that zero is the point when the ships will attack. It is never quite clear why a countdown necessarily means destruction. David does, of course, turn out to be right. But the obscurity of the inference is important. It suggests that it is necessary for us to have faith in military expertise, even when the arguments do not seem compelling. The point is illustrated as David tries to communicate his discovery to his ex-wife, Connie. Connie initially hangs up on him. David shows persistence and ingenuity. As a result, he is able to communicate his "findings" to the president. However, due to Connie's skepticism, the president, David, the general—all the main heroes of the film—are almost killed. They manage to escape just in the nick of time. The message (or at least one message) is clear—we must trust the inferences of our experts when they point to the malevolence of out-groups.¹⁷ (This is, of course, just what the American public did during the lead-up to the Gulf War.)

The point is enhanced by the fact that, in Los Angeles, a group of (presumably liberal) crazies is trying to welcome the aliens while in Washington the despicable peaceniks are out with signs demanding that we not make first contact through a military attack. Again, the film is specifying the heroic structure in ways particular to the contemporary United States. We often find some obstacle to the prosecution of the war in heroic plots. Here, the obstacle is not, say, the self-indulgence of the great hero (as it is, for example, in the *Iliad* or the *Shâhnâme*). Rather, the obstacle is members of the in-group who do not recognize the malevolence of the out-group, members of the in-group who are inadequately nationally iden-

17. Peter Rabinowitz has rightly pointed out to me that it is common in films of this sort for the character who should be trusted to be the one who is least trusted initially. This is a narratively important point and extends back at least to the biblical prophets who go unheeded, Cassandra, and so on. I suspect that this figure results primarily from the emotional intensification of narrative. The tragic outcome is rendered all the more painful by the fact that we could have known and averted it. As *Independence Day* shows, the discounted prophet role may be effectively taken up in heroic nationalist narratives by a character whose distrust of the out-group is particularly extreme.

tified. Indeed, these are, in effect, the film's version of traitors. However, they are themselves naïve, not malevolent traitors. That is made clear when the crazies in Los Angeles turn out to be the first ones annihilated by the aliens. Clearly those calling for peace and friendship with the enemy are both profoundly mistaken and profoundly dangerous—even to themselves. At this point, the only hope seems to be that mentioned by a newscaster just before the fatal attack: “God help us all.” In other words, the only hope appears to be divine preference.

It is now July 3. The initial attack has occurred. The Statue of Liberty is face down in the water. Liberty itself is profoundly endangered. The president compares the present crisis to the Gulf War. Now the retaliation, the self-defense begins. Our African American hero, Captain Hiller, is at his military base. The United States will launch a counterattack. The planes take off. The great battle scene will begin. But it is a slaughter. The Americans do not have a chance. They are, in effect, facing a mighty Goliath. Only Hiller survives, killing one of the aliens through his remarkable ingenuity. Specifically, he uses his parachute to blind the pursuing pilot (who is evidently not using anything like radar). Hiller then ejects before crashing into a wall. The blinded alien crashes. However, it survives and exits the pod, only to be knocked senseless by a crushing blow from Hiller's fist, in good epical fashion. Unsurprisingly, the alien is slimy and has many tentacles. It is made to be as disgusting as possible, thus foreclosing any possibilities for empathy.

As Captain Hiller is outwitting this alien, other alien ships are destroying his military base in a scene that seems designed to recall the attack on Pearl Harbor. Here again, the film is both invoking and reenforcing the use of the Second World War as the paradigm of U.S. military action. Obviously, fictional space aliens are the culprits in this film. However, films such as this encourage us to model real contemporary events on such a fiction—and on the historical events of the Second World War. They create a context in which it is easier to see, for example, the September 11 bombings as an invasion, thus the initiation of a war/the beginning of a heroic plot, rather than, say, a criminal act.

While this is going on, the president learns that many years ago the United States had actually captured three such aliens. The secretary of defense had kept this secret—a form of usurpation, since he was in effect running part of the government without the knowledge of the president. Subsequently, the film cuts among several story lines. Jasmine and her son survive the attack, find a truck with the keys, then drive around picking up other survivors, including the First Lady. Hiller has bundled the alien up in

his umbrella and is dragging it across the desert when he meets a caravan of trailers escaping the devastation. The caravan prominently displays an American flag. It includes Russell. Hiller explains that he saw a base when he was flying over. The caravan then proceeds to that base, which happens to be the ultrasecret location of the captured ship and aliens.

The president, his staff, and David are now at this ultrasecret location, Area 51, in Nevada. They are trying to figure out what to do—especially since the captured aliens have been dead for fifty years and are now evidently preserved in formaldehyde. Fortunately, the caravan arrives with the fresh alien. Through peculiar means, the alien manages to communicate with the humans. Whitmore says that the humans wish to negotiate a peace. This follows the usual ideological principle that our national group is peace-loving and resorts to war only when forced by the enemy. The malevolent alien replies, “No peace.” Whitmore asks, “What is it you want us to do?” It replies, “Die.” This is a representation of pure out-group malevolence. The president manages to learn that this species is like locusts. They simply consume all the resources of a planet, then move on.

The unspeakable vileness and inhumanity of the alien, and the absolute nature of the threat, prepare the audience for the president’s decision: “Nuke ’em. Let’s nuke the bastards.” Here the in-group determines to use its ultimate weapon. When this, too, does not work, the situation seems hopeless.

At this point, romantic concerns enter briefly, both comic and tragic. Hiller steals a helicopter to rescue Jasmine and the First Lady. (He cleverly guesses where they will be.) He brings them to Area 51. He and Jasmine are eventually married there. But the president’s wife has been too badly injured and dies. Thus, July 3 ends in a moment of both national and personal sorrow.

As July 4 begins, David suddenly realizes that he can use the captured alien pod to upload a virus that will lower the enemy’s shields. As a result, the aliens will be defenseless and we will be able to defeat them. The secretary of defense objects to the plan and the president finally realizes that he is a pernicious influence on the government. Now the president fully takes charge, first roughing up the weasely secretary, then firing him. This ends the very limited usurpation/restoration sequence. He agrees to David’s plan. It is, we may infer, only through David that America will defeat this foreign Goliath.

Before initiating the attack, the president contacts allies throughout the world, forming the sort of coalition of the willing celebrated later by George W. Bush. First, we see British soldiers in Iraq hearing about the

coalition. This once again suggests the importance of Iraq for American national interests. It also suggests the particular closeness of Britain to the United States. Immediately following this, we turn to Israel, probably the most loyal American ally. A third sequence takes us to Russia and a fourth to Japan. Russia and Japan are, I believe, chosen to indicate that old conflicts have been overcome and every free nation in the world now recognizes that freedom can be maintained only by following the leadership of the United States.

American pilots gather at Area 51—including Russell, who has been recruited to join the force. The president gives a speech in which he makes explicit some of the distinctive themes of U.S. nationalism. Tacitly recalling the moon plaque we saw at the outset, he explains that we must be “united” as “mankind” in “fighting for our freedom.” He connects this with the date, going on to say that the Fourth of July is not just America’s, but the world’s Independence Day. The point may seem to be very egalitarian and global. But it is not. The United States is clearly the leader in the global coalition. It initiates the cooperation. It gives the instructions. It also faces the mother ship of the aliens, thus taking on the most crucial and formidable part of the fighting. To say that the Fourth of July is the world’s Independence Day is to say that the freedom of the United States is what allows and even defines the freedom of the world. Again, this is a standard part of U.S. nationalist ideology and its specification of universal national structures, including the heroic narrative.¹⁸

After a rocky start, Hiller and David set off in the captured pod as the pilots go to fight. Fortunately, Hiller is such an expert warrior that he can fly even this alien craft with enormous skill. They enter the alien mother ship and dock. David easily links his laptop to the alien mainframe and uploads the virus. As a result, our bombs work against the alien ships. But this is not solely the result of ingenuity. We learn that, deep in the underground confines of Area 51, David’s father has gathered a group of people to pray. He is wearing his yarmulke and saying prayers in Hebrew. Perhaps the absurd compatibility of David’s laptop and the alien mainframe is the result of divine intervention.

Despite all this, the battle is going badly. American weapons are not enough to destroy the great disk that hovers over Area 51. The disk is opening up to fire its death ray, the same weapon that destroyed Los Angeles. Russell is the last hope of the world. He has only one missile. It won’t

18. We saw a version of this specification in the Gettysburg Address. When Lincoln asserts that “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” he tacitly identifies the existence of the United States with the existence of democracy on “the earth.”

fire. He realizes that he can fly up into the disk, destroying it along with himself. What follows is, in part, a standard scene of self-sacrifice for the good of the nation. Russell radios back, "Tell my children I love them very much." Laughing in the face of death and mocking the aliens, he flies into the belly of the beast. Thus, he becomes a suicide bomber—though I suspect that few viewers recognize this fact, in part because our prototype for a suicide bomber is so different. His self-sacrifice destroys the disk. It is a case of pure, selfless devotion to the nation, in a standard heroic tragicomic episode. It is also another case of ingenuity, thus it is particularly American as well. As the disk explodes, the high command sees that the strategy is generalizable. The United States now can tell the rest of the world "how to bring those sons of bitches down."

Hiller and David are still inside the mother ship. They try to leave, but with no success. It seems that they, too, have no choice but to become suicide bombers. They fire their weapons. Fortunately, this manages to dislodge their pod, allowing them to escape before the explosion. They fly through the ship, barely squeezing out before it is destroyed. The explosion kills literally millions of aliens. One must assume that these millions include countless children and civilians.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it is only a cause for celebration. There is no epilogue of suffering in this film.

We now have another series of global scenes, showing the results of American leadership in freeing the world. We begin with a group of African tribal people brandishing spears and celebrating the fall of an alien disk. Since the Africans have only spears, we can infer that they did not destroy the disk themselves. Evidently this was the result of the destruction of the mother ship. I assume the move to Africa is an attempt to undermine black/white subnational divisions in the United States. First, the aliens are defeated by the cooperation of an African American and a (Jewish) European American; then, we see that Africans are themselves freed by America (not enslaved, as they were formerly). From here, we move to Egypt, arguably the major U.S. ally in the Muslim Middle East (along with Saudi Arabia). Finally, we see Australia, another important ally and a part of the larger English-speaking world. The film ends with the reunion of the main characters and their celebration of this Fourth of July.

19. Peter Rabinowitz has pointed out to me that the film does not show us any women and children. This is an important point. As already noted, it does give us the information that this is a nomadic civilization, moving from planet to planet. Thus, we must assume that the ships include the entire range of society. But it does not make the women and children or male civilians salient. The film does not encourage our indifference to the murder of enemy civilians by exposing and celebrating it. Rather, the film does this by showing us mass killing, but occluding the presence of noncombatants, a standard technique in real warfare.

The film has gone through, and extensively elaborated, the invasion/defense sequence of the heroic plot, specifying it in ways that are distinctively American. It has given us a survey of the national territory. It has brought together heroes from various subnational groups, joining them in common nationalist identification. It has rendered the national category more salient and emotionally powerful, connecting it with pride, anger, and awe. It has represented the nation as enduring, opposable, and highly functional. It has also reenforced the rightness of the hierarchy of authority in the United States. It has suggested the divine election of the nation as well as links between the national hierarchy and that divine election. Finally, it has done this in such a way as to represent the United States, not as an antagonist of other nations in the world, but rather as their natural leader and the source of their own freedom. It ends with a reference to fireworks, the traditional way of celebrating the Fourth of July, and a shot of what are evidently the alien pods streaming down from the sky, plummeting toward destruction. The final scene then turns the devastation of war into an object of aesthetic delight—not unlike what national poets and popular storytellers do in creating heroic tragicomedies.

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH AND SEPTEMBER 11

In many ways, *Independence Day* could be seen as preparing the way for the recent invasion of Iraq. To some very limited extent, I suppose, it did. However, most of the continuities between the film and subsequent historical events are the result of the universal principles of nationalism and heroic tragicomedy, on the one hand, and the standard specification of those principles in U.S. nationalism, on the other. Thus, the continuities are not a matter of the influence of this particular film. Rather, they are evidence of broader patterns—some universal, some national—that bear on both the film and the invasion. These more encompassing patterns are visible in Bush's speeches after the bombings of September 11, perhaps most clearly in the September 14 "Remarks" that incorporate and extend his briefer statements from the preceding three days. Because it manifests these patterns, this speech is valuable beyond what it tells us about Bush's thoughts at that moment. It is important for understanding the development of U.S. policy in subsequent years, including the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. For our purposes, the crucial point is that, like *Independence Day*, the analyses it puts forth and the policies it announces are tacitly organized by a heroic narrative—specifically, a heroic narrative particularized in the standard American ways.

September 14, 2001, was declared a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the victims of the September 11th bombings. Only three days after the event, President Bush's speech already shows a clear heroic emplotment of the bombings. The speech begins by stating that "we" are in "the middle hour of our grief." The phrasing is interesting from a narrative perspective. It is almost Aristotelian in suggesting a sequence of beginning, middle, and end. The beginning of the narrative, and thus the beginning of "our" grief, was of course the bombings. The end will be the resolution of our grief.²⁰ Though it is not clear yet, that resolution will come in our defeat of the enemy. Though brief, the passage is resonant. First, by tacitly starting the emplotment of events with the bombings, it indicates that there is an absolute, punctual beginning to the story. Bush's opening statement, then, already suggests what will become clear later on—that there is no prior story, nothing that explains the bombings. In contrast, the wars that will follow September 11 are implicitly characterized as an outcome, an end, the conclusion of a story. If we bomb Afghanistan, that is not the beginning of a story; that is not an unprovoked attack comparable to the September 11 bombings. Rather, our bombings are the end of the story, or of one part of the story that will lead to an ending. The September 11 bombings clearly had a series of precedents, as we discussed in chapter 4. However, those are set aside in this emplotment.

In the second sentence, Bush refers to "our nation's sorrow" and our concern "for the missing and the dead, and for those who love them." Note that this first of all defines a particular category for identification—the nation. Moreover, it links the personal, lived suffering of people who lost friends and family members with that identity category. The implication is that all Americans have been harmed in just the way those immediate victims have been harmed. The connection is crucial, for it bears directly on the affectivity of the national category, and on its specification in terms of "our" (national) response. If we are all harmed by the bombings, then we should all feel fear or anger. Moreover, if the pain of September 11 is the pain of a nation, then one should expect a national reaction. The obvious form of a national reaction is military. One can see this more clearly by imagining the difference it would have made if Bush construed the event in sub- or transnational terms. Suppose, for example, he had referred to

20. The phrase may mean either "the middle time, which is one of grief" or "the middle of our time of grieving." Either interpretation fits my analysis. By the first interpretation, the next hour is the one when we have overcome our grief. By the second interpretation, the next hour is the final stage of grief, prior to its resolution. In both cases, there was normalcy, then a trigger of grief, followed by grief (now), to be followed by resolution and overcoming of grief.

“the sorrow experienced in New York” or “this great human sorrow.” If we were to sympathize with all New Yorkers as the ones affected by this attack, we would probably not think primarily of a military response. Similarly, if we thought of the group harmed as humans, we would probably not think of attacking another nation. In both cases, we might, instead, imagine policing and/or judicial responses.

To some extent, these points imply the narrative ending. Again, the middle of our tragicomedy is “grief.” Given this, how do we reach the ending, the happy resolution? If the grief is national, thus social, then presumably we can achieve the happy resolution by achieving the prototype of social happiness—domination of the out-group, specifically the devastation of the group that engaged in the bombings. Clearly, this orients us toward war. The point is clearer if we do not follow Bush’s national generalization of the grief, but think of the victims primarily as the people whose lives were actually affected—those whose friends or relatives were killed, those who were injured or whose homes were destroyed, those whose businesses were ruined, and so forth. In this case, we would be more immediately inclined to offer financial support, medical services, job programs, counseling, or other sorts of human comfort. Here, too, we may be more likely to think of the bombings themselves as criminal acts, requiring some sort of law-enforcement response. War might not even occur to us as a way of responding to this grief.

In the third sentence of the speech, Bush introduces supernatural causality, thus the issue of divine preference. He explains that Americans have “come before God to pray.” The point is enhanced by Bush’s decision to deliver the speech in the National Cathedral. It clearly serves to align the nation with divinity, for if God approved of the bombings, there would be no point in appealing to him.²¹ Moreover, it suggests that the outcome of this developing narrative will indeed be comic—though, again, it can be comic only for the nation, not for those whose parents or children or husband or wife died.

Though very little is explicit in the opening paragraph, Bush has prepared us for a construal of the September 11 events as the tragic beginning of a national heroic tragicomedy. This becomes explicit in the second paragraph. “On Tuesday, our country was attacked with deliberate and massive cruelty.” The phrasing is, in a way, brilliant. The reference to the day of the week begins to suggest the utter normalcy from which the narrative

21. Of course, one might ask God’s forgiveness for whatever inspired His wrath. But that is obviously not what Bush has in mind.

emerges—again, the normalcy that tells us there was no preceding story. The rest of the sentence asserts that this was not any narrative beginning, but specifically the beginning of the threat/defense sequence of heroic tragicomedy. Again, it was not New York, or symbols of commerce and militarism (the World Trade Center and the Pentagon), or even a group of particular, innocent individuals that was attacked. Nor was it humanity, or principles of international law. Rather, it was “our country.” Moreover, the attack was deliberate and massively cruel. “Deliberate” here is crucial. One of the key differences between “us” and “them” concerns the killing of innocents. If we kill innocent people, it is unintentional. If they kill innocent people, it is deliberate. By this distinction, hundreds of thousands of innocents killed by U.S. policies in Iraq simply do not count. We did not kill them on purpose. In contrast, the three thousand people killed on September 11 do count, because the killing was intentional. In fact, it is very difficult to explain this distinction. The U.S. government knew that hundreds of thousands of people would die in Iraq if certain sanctions were imposed. It went ahead and imposed the sanctions. The leaders of al Qaeda knew that thousands of people would die in New York if the towers were bombed. They went ahead and organized the bombing. U.S. government officials could say that they did not want to kill those people. If the Iraqi government had simply behaved differently, they would have ended the sanctions. By the same token, al Qaeda could say that they would have aborted their bombing plans if the U.S. government had behaved differently—if it had ended the sanctions in Iraq and supported a genuine solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. But, of course, it is part of the emplotment, and part of the in-group/out-group division, that the actions of the out-group are malevolent while ours are not. The intentional harm of innocents is part of that malevolence.

The point is obviously reiterated in the idea of “cruelty.” The out-group is driven by an actual desire to harm us. It is not merely animated by the normal desires and ambitions that motivate everyone. Members of the out-group enjoy our pain. That, too, is part of their malevolence. We, of course, are cruelty-free, for we are benevolent. We attack only when provoked, when endangered by the cruelty of the enemy.

The qualification “massive” is in some ways peculiar. Certainly as a crime, the bombing of the towers was massive. But, in terms of war, few people would consider it massive at all. At least according to some estimates, the United States subsequently killed more than three thousand civilians in three months in Afghanistan (One estimate, in January 2002, put the number around four thousand [see Szabo]). Virtually no one seems

to have considered this an atrocity, or anything terribly serious. Again, this may be because four thousand civilian casualties do not seem massive in the context of war. But the whole point of the speech is that the September 11 bombers were engaging in war, not simple crime.²²

In fact, the significance of “massive” is never fully clarified in the speech. It is only after the invasion of Iraq that the meaning is evident. Bush prepared Americans for that invasion by invoking “weapons of mass destruction.” The crucial point in this early speech is that the enemy has massive powers that can cause massive destruction. One common development of heroic emplotment involves enhancing the power of the out-group, for that makes the story more tense, and the comic outcome more powerful. It suggests the true heroism of the national in-group. Moreover, if the enemy is not seen as adequately powerful, there is a risk that we may come to feel empathy with their sufferings. Bush does not go so far as to imply that we are David facing Goliath. But the suggestions of the word “massive” here—like those of the putative weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—are a less drastic version of the same basic idea.

In the next sentence, Bush reenforces the national/heroic emplotment of the bombings by his reference to “images of fire and ashes, and bent steel.” Though perfectly accurate, the phrasing is designed to prime associations with images of devastating aerial bombardment in times of war. What is crucial here is selecting and organizing information about this complex event so that the event is narratively comprehensible, and points us (narratively) toward certain goals. In this case, the selection and organization are a function of the opening of the threat/defense sequence in the heroic plot, and the goal is, of course, “defensive” war.

The third paragraph continues the imagery of war as it refers, not to those who died or were injured, but to “the list of casualties,” a phrase with clearly military resonances. The following sentence refers to the people themselves, “men and women who began their day at a desk or in an

22. Of course, there is the fact that the three thousand victims of the September 11 bombings were all killed in a day, not in the course of three months. But I find it hard to see how killing four thousand innocent people becomes morally acceptable if the killing is simply spread out over a few months, rather than confined to a single day. There is also the issue of deliberate versus accidental killing. But, again, it is not quite right to say that civilian casualties in war are accidents in the morally exculpatory sense. When a government decides to bomb another country, the officials who make the decision know that there will be civilian casualties. They choose to engage in the bombardment anyway. Given that such casualties are foreseeable, they form part of one’s decision to act and thus part of one’s moral responsibility. If I decide to race my car through a crowded marketplace, I can be fairly sure that I will kill people. The fact that I would prefer not to kill anyone does not make me innocent of the deaths that I cause.

airport.” The point is to foreground the normalcy of these people’s lives before the bombings. And that is right. These people were not involved in a causal sequence that led up to the bombings (except in the banal sense that we are all to some degree involved in the actions of our government). Thus, in their case, and in the case of their relatives and friends, the bombings were an absolute narrative beginning (and, in another way, an absolute ending). But the speech serves to obscure the difference between the absoluteness of the beginning in these individual cases and the (beginning-less) history that preceded the bombings at the national level. In this way, the speech repeats the elision performed by al Qaeda, who punished three thousand innocent people for the crimes of a government (which itself repeated the earlier U.S. elision when U.S. sanctions punished hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children for the actions of Saddam Hussein).

The paragraph ends with a reminder of some of the most heart-wrenching moments of the bombing, when husbands called their wives or mothers called their children just before they died. But the speech uses these terribly painful, personal moments to communicate a nationalist and heroic narrative. First, in emphasizing that the men and women called “home” (rather than, say, “relatives” “loved ones”), Bush’s phrasing may recall the link between home and homeland—a connection exploited soon after this speech in the institution of the Department of Homeland Security. Second, and more important, Bush tells us that these calls home communicated two messages. One was “I love you.” The other was “be brave.” The latter is particularly important for our purposes. Obviously, if a dying man calls his wife and says “be brave,” he means that she should not give in to despair, that she should not be overwhelmed by the personal loss. But by invoking the concept of bravery, Bush links the dying wish of those who were killed with the heroic imperative that the nation, the “home” or “homeland,” should be courageous in the military sense.

The last point is taken up in the next paragraph, where Bush names two categories of those who died in the bombings. The first category is “passengers who defied their murderers.” Clearly, these were genuinely brave people, and they did something admirable in trying to retake the plane. However, this is most obviously human bravery, bravery in attempting to save lives. I find it hard to imagine that these people would have behaved differently if the hijacking was a matter of some personal vendetta by a lunatic (e.g., a rival to the architect who designed the towers). Yet, the entire speech contextualizes this act as a specifically national response to an enemy attack. This is even clearer when Bush turns to the second group, a group that is presumably parallel to the first. This is the group of “men

and women who wore the uniform of the United States, and died at their posts.” Though very few of the “casualties” on September 11 were U.S. military personnel, Bush to some degree connects all the deaths with military deaths, thus reenforcing the link between the bombing and battle.

The following paragraph adds a third group, “rescuers.” Again, these were genuinely brave people. They should certainly be honored. But this is protective bravery. Even in the context of warfare, it is the bravery of the medic working his or her way across the battlefield to help the wounded. It is not the bravery of the soldier, crossing the battlefield in order to kill the enemy. Moreover, it is not clear that the rescuers acted bravely due to a categorial identification as American. It is at least possible that they died performing a human act, trying to save fellow human beings. But Bush says that, when we read the names of these men and women, “many Americans will weep.” It is crucial that he says Americans. It is not people with empathy or people with moral sense who will weep. It is Americans.

The next paragraph addresses the families and friends of those who have died, assuring them that “you are not alone.” One certainly cannot object to the act of trying to comfort the bereaved. However, there are many ways in which one could feel and assert such sympathy. Again, Bush does not assert that they are not alone because of human feeling. He suggests, rather, that they are not alone because all Americans are, in some sense, the bereaved family, because those who died were not, first of all, husbands, wives, children, parents, friends—they were, first of all, Americans.

The following paragraph begins by referring to Americans’ understanding of the events. This reenforces the sense that the victims’ families are not alone precisely because all Americans share this trauma. The second sentence in the paragraph again brings us to the heroic emplotment. Bush says that “our responsibility to history is . . . to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.” Answering the attacks is precisely following out the heroic plot. Identifying the out-group as evil is, of course, part of that plot. The rather grandiose claim about “our responsibility” to “rid the world of evil” is not so universal. It is, rather, bound up with the distinctive nationalism of the United States. It has been a crucial part of American self-definition that all history leads toward freedom and that (as I have stressed) our nation leads all other nations toward that freedom. Thus, what at first seemed like a very personal loss—the death of these particular people—is in fact a challenge to the historic role of the United States. That historic role is, of course, bound up with divine election. Indeed, it is messianic.

The United States will not merely defeat lawless attackers. Like Christ during his Second coming at the time of the apocalypse, the United States will actually do away with everything on earth that is evil.

In the following paragraph, Bush returns to the main heroic theme, “War has been waged against us.” He goes on to denounce this, somewhat redundantly, as involving “stealth and deceit and murder.” The crucial point here is that the enemy is not what he appears to be. His stealth and deceit suggest that we should guard ourselves against any empathy with him. Indeed, in the context of the speech as a whole, there is some suggestion that the enemy is not only satanically evil, but Satan himself, the Great Deceiver.

Bush goes on to make a statement about the American national character, implicitly using the standard metaphor of the nation as a person and drawing on the standard characterization of the in-group as benevolent. “This nation,” he claims, “is peaceful.” In keeping with standard in-group/out-group oppositions, we only wish to live harmoniously with everyone. But there is a potential problem with such benevolence. Nice guys, as they say, finish last. Thus, Bush adds that we are, however, “fierce when stirred to anger.” “Fierce” is an interesting choice. It suggests a sort of animal-like force and lethality. When attacked, we are unrestrained and deadly. Put differently, once the heroic plot begins, we fight with full heroic energy. The explicit invocation of anger is important as well. Bush has dwelled on the sorrow of the event. But sorrow is not a mobilizing emotion. Here, he begins to point toward anger as the most appropriate and productive response to the bombings.

Following this, Bush returns to the opening of the heroic plot, asserting that the enemy began this “conflict” (again, note how different it would be to say that someone committed this crime, rather than that “others” began this “conflict”). He then looks ahead to the conclusion of the narrative. Speaking more like the author of a story than the president of a nation, he claims portentously that, “It will end in a way, and at an hour, of our choosing.” The beginning of the heroic tragicomedy is always in the hands of the enemy. But how can anyone possibly predict that his or her in-group will be able to choose the precise resolution, the turn from tragedy to comedy? The assertion, I think, relies on the assumption of divine providence, which is, again, important in the heroic plot generally and crucial in Bush’s particularization of that plot. Bush in effect explains his certainty in the following paragraph, where he once again invokes prayer. Prayer is, presumably, the most important means by which we will be able to choose the ending of this conflict.

Bush goes on to state that “Our purpose as a nation is firm,” though we suffer “wounds.” Here, again, he employs the metaphor schema THE NATION IS A PERSON. He transfers the individual bravery mentioned in the preceding paragraphs to a collective firmness of purpose here. It is clear by now that this purpose is military. Of course, at this point, no one knows what the object of our military attack might be. But that is secondary. The only crucial thing is that the heroic, military response will begin; the only crucial thing is that we will fight. The reference to “wounds” here is particularly significant. This metaphorization translates the deaths of individual people into nonfatal harm experienced by the nation as a whole/the nation as a person. Among other things, this extends the idea that all Americans suffer because of the bombings (as it is our collective body that is wounded). It also fits with the appeal to the active, militant emotion of anger (as a response to these wounds), rather than the passive emotion of grief.

Of course, while firmness of purpose is a necessary condition for final triumph, it is not a sufficient condition. Rather, we need the help of God, His active supernatural support for His chosen nation. Thus, Bush quotes a woman in St. Patrick’s Cathedral: “I prayed to God to give us a sign that He is still here.” It is interesting that the transcript on the White House website capitalizes the first letter of “He.” When heard, the statement could mean that the woman was looking for a husband, father, or son who was missing. However, as written, it means that the woman wondered if God was still present “here.” Even this is ambiguous. There are several places she could mean by “here,” including New York or the world as a whole. But the suggestion of Bush’s speech is that “here” is America, the nation. This woman’s personal question, then, comes to suggest a grand, national question—whether or not we remain the chosen people, the divine country.

In the immediately following paragraph, Bush takes up the issue of “God’s signs,” explaining that they are difficult to identify. However, he asserts confidently that our prayers “are known and heard, and understood.” Bush’s complete confidence in God’s understanding suggests a special relation to the deity—which is, of course, what we would expect for the leader of the divinely preferred nation. It is precisely this divine relation that validates the national hierarchy—a hierarchy that was uncertain in Bush’s case due to the way in which he was declared winner of the 2000 election after losing the popular vote and possibly losing the electoral vote as well. Bush continues to discuss prayer, noting that it gives us “strength.” It is not accidental that he invokes strength, a martial virtue. After all, prayer,

if it can change our qualities and condition, could equally give us humility, honesty, compassion—or even peace. More important, Bush ends his paean to prayer with an invocation of hierarchy, and specifically the hierarchy of authority (not, say, a hierarchy of Christian love). The culminating prayers he discusses are “prayers that yield our will to a will greater than our own.” Bush takes up the importance of a strict hierarchy in authority, a hierarchy that is inseparable from divine authority. He implies his own special relation to God. He tacitly urges Americans to surrender their will to God. It is not difficult to infer what relation Americans should have to Bush’s administration as well—a relation of trust, fear, and awe in which citizens give up their “will to a will greater than [their] own.” That relation subsequently came to be codified in legislation such as the USA PATRIOT Act.

The next paragraph takes up the idea that the world “created” by God “is of moral design.” This is an indirect statement of the view that the world is ultimately just and that the good will triumph. Since we all know at this point that the national in-group, America, is “the good guy,” the implication is that we will triumph. Specifically, we will triumph because we are chosen by God, and we are chosen by God because we are moral.

The very idea of a “moral design” is a narrative idea. One almost wonders if Bush’s speechwriters had been reading Aristotle, who referred to a noncausal organizing principle in narrative, “design,” which is most often a sort of moral reequilibration. Aristotle’s example concerns a murderer who is in turn killed when he is crushed by a statue representing his victim (see Aristotle 39). In the following sentence, Bush continues the implicit reference to narrative. As if he had read my account of tragicomedy, he explains that “tragedy” is “only for a time.” Of course, he could not really say that “comedy” follows. He substitutes “Goodness” as what will always return. The choice makes perfect sense. The happy ending is, in this view, only for the good—which is to say, us. Of course, the obvious difficulty here is the group of actual victims. They are useful for establishing the tragedy, but something of a problem for asserting the ultimate comedy. It is far from clear that the lives of the bereaved, or of those who lost their jobs, will end in “goodness.” Thus, Bush concludes the paragraph with the rather vague claim that the people who died and the people who mourn are “held” by God. But even here the point is not that God will somehow restore them individually. By saying that God is holding these victims, Bush is primarily indicating, once again, that God is on our side.

Bush goes on to make the almost incomprehensible assertion that “adversity introduces us to ourselves.” The following sentences make

clear that he is returning to THE NATION IS A PERSON schema. Now, he explicitly addresses “our national character.” He says, “we have been reminded . . . that our fellow Americans are generous and kind, resourceful and brave,” citing, for example, “blood donors.” While “resourceful” may be a virtue of distinctive importance for American nationalism—a version of Yankee ingenuity—the others are universal. The reasons for the reemphasis on bravery are too obvious to require elaboration, as are the reasons for the example of “blood donors,” with their obvious bearing on war.²³ “Generous” and “kind” may seem more peculiar until one realizes that Bush is construing the benevolent acts that followed the bombings as benevolent acts within a national in-group. Generosity and kindness are not human virtues in this context. For example, they are not virtues when addressed to the enemy. They are, rather, a crucial part of mutual benevolence within the national in-group, that is, mutual benevolence among “our fellow Americans.”

Following this, Bush gives moving examples of what I would be inclined to call human compassion. However, in this context, they stand as examples of a specifically American character that is brave, resourceful, and so on. They are also examples of self-sacrifice—the precise virtue that one wants in the ideal soldier. Indeed, in the context of the speech, every example cited by Bush may be seen as having resonances of war. Thus, cognitively, every example probably does have such resonances for many listeners, even if they are not self-consciously aware of it.²⁴ One man stays with a quadriplegic. A priest gives someone last rites. Two people carry a disabled stranger down sixty-eight floors. Several men drive all night to deliver skin grafts. With only slight variations, each of these cases could have occurred on a battlefield. Indeed, they sound almost as if they were taken from war movies. One soldier stays with his buddy who cannot walk. A priest remains on the battlefield to give a soldier last rites. Two soldiers carry a third through a stretch of dangerous territory. Several soldiers drive all night to bring skin grafts to a medical unit near the front. In each case,

23. Of course, I am not claiming that, in a neutral context, people’s first association with blood donors would be with war. I am merely pointing out that war is undoubtedly linked cognitively with loss of blood and the need for blood. The entire speech “primes” or gives extra activation to all war-related associations. In that context, donating blood is likely to activate links with war more fully. Put differently, given the operation of ordinary cognitive processes, we would expect a blood donors/war link to be enhanced by the militaristic associations activated throughout the rest of the speech and, in turn, to contribute to those associations.

24. Our brains allow considerable breadth in the activation of associations. These associations then help to guide our subsequent thought and feeling, whether or not we are aware of them—indeed, perhaps particularly when we are not aware of them.

the examples contribute to the transition from personal miseries and personal acts of compassion to the larger national story of war.²⁵

Bush then explains what is going on in all these cases. These acts are not the result of broad human feeling. They do not follow from the spontaneous compassion that is produced by human empathic capacities and inclinations. Rather, they are examples of “Americans show[ing] a deep commitment to one another, and an abiding love for our country.” He then invokes Franklin Roosevelt, implicitly recalling the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the American entry into the Second World War. This, too, helps to emplot the event as part of an heroic tragicomedy by connecting it with a salient exemplum, a clear instance of enemy invasion, military response, and decisive American victory. Specifically, referring to the patriotic acts of rescue and aid listed above (again, they were not, in Bush’s account, human, compassionate acts, but specifically nationalistic acts), he cites Roosevelt on the “courage of national unity.”

Through this citation, Bush returns to the theme of bravery (“courage”). But a new aspect of the heroic plot, and of nationalism more generally, makes its appearance as well. This is subnationalism. Here, Bush takes the idea that national identity should subsume all rival identities. In keeping with the general American ideology of optimism, he does not appeal for such unity. He simply asserts it. Specifically, he goes on to state that there is “a unity of every faith, and every background.” Thus, religious, racial, ethnic, and class categories are all implicitly subordinated to the national category. Again, this is not a goal that we seek; it is part of our national character—if one that is enhanced by the bombings. Indeed, the bombings have “joined together political parties in both houses of Congress.” There is, then, no disagreement. To be American is, by the nature of the American character, to agree. Our unity is perfect. We all agree, across race, class, religion—even across political affiliations. Indeed, we all agree that we agree. But what is it that we all agree with? The speech leaves us with no other answer but—war. We agree with the idea that the bombings were an act of war. We agree with the plan to make a “fierce” military response to the bombings. Anyone who does not agree, anyone who dissents from

25. Peter Rabinowitz has pointed out that I may be giving Bush—or his speech writers—too much credit in suggesting that this transition is a matter of the way they selected examples. Catastrophes generally—floods, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, battles, anything that involves swift and widespread physical harm and death—require many of the same sorts of response. In that way, Bush’s task in selecting examples was not that difficult. All that he had to do was to provide a cognitive context in which associations with war would be primed. In such a context, most instances of emergency relief would probably have resonances related to war or even narrative parallels in war.

this view, is simply not American. To be American is to agree. Those who do not agree take up a standard character role in heroic tragicomedy—the role of the traitor.

From here, Bush turns to the sorts of public ceremonies that serve to make the national category salient. He begins with “services of prayer and candlelight vigils.” It is important that both are religious (necessarily in the first case, commonly in the second). This reenforces the nation’s special relation to God. It is no less important that these ceremonies are nonsectarian. Prayer services at the time tended to be explicitly “interfaith.” They were not necessarily nationalistic. However, it is clear that Bush is categorizing them as nationalistic. He is taking them up implicitly as instances of unity across potential subnational divisions. The nationalization of the prayer services and vigils is made clear by the third practice cited by Bush—displaying the American flag. One could imagine a response to the bombings whereby many people put up peace signs to oppose violence, or wore black armbands as a sign of mourning, or even displayed images of firefighters or the towers. But Americans saw the bombings in nationalist terms, thus displaying American flags. In part, this preceded Bush’s statements, due to the ubiquity of nationalization discussed in the preceding chapters. However, this tendency probably would have dwindled on its own. It was sustained and intensified by Bush’s emplotment of the events and a range of governmental actions and pronouncements.

Bush goes on to describe the attitude with which people displayed the flag—“in pride.” The choice of pride is important. It is precisely the attitude one is supposed to have regarding the in-group. Indeed, it defines in-group bias. Moreover, in this case, it also enhances the sense that the bombings had no precedent other than the malevolence of the out-group. Taking pride in one’s group works against self-examination or any even-handed attempt to understand the background of these events. Self-criticism is the opposite of pride. If I am critical of my behavior, then I am not proud of it. Moreover, if someone else is critical of my behavior, then my pride directly opposes that criticism. It is a commonplace of American ideology that any criticisms from abroad are the result of jealousy. Europeans do not have a reasoned opinion about our foreign policy, our environmental policy, or anything else. They just criticize us because they are jealous. Similarly, the malevolent bombers were not responding to anything we had done. They were simply acting out of gratuitous cruelty. Moreover, speaking of pride in this context fosters the idea that pride is not justified primarily by what one does as an individual. Rather, it is justified by what one is, in the sense of what national category defines one’s iden-

tity. Americans should feel proud not because they personally opposed or inhibited acts of cruelty or aided people who were suffering. They should feel proud precisely because they are American. Thus, they display the American flag with pride—pride simply that they are part of the in-group signaled by that flag.

The paragraph ends with a remarkable twist. A central part of the American specification of national character is rugged individualism. Our rejection of monarchy and our institution of democracy are bound up with a sense that Americans will not take orders. We refuse to be bossed around. A crucial part of our pride is that we follow our own paths; we buck the trends. Indeed, this is one reason why we are (in this view) the rightful leaders of the world, directing all other nations toward freedom. Thus, Bush concludes that our flags “wave in defiance.” Obviously, the bombing of the towers was a heinous act. But it was the act of people who resorted to this sort of attack precisely because they have no power over us. In this part of the speech, Bush implicitly identifies the bombers with tyrants who falsely claim authority over us. Thus, in keeping with the usual heroic plot, we must rebel against this false authority; we must be defiant of these invaders/usurpers. Of course, we must simultaneously remain loyal to the true authority, the authority designated by God. In short, there is nothing genuinely defiant in Bush’s ideal American. That ideal American is loyal and devoted to the national hierarchy. We have already seen that Bush urges us to give up our will to the will of God, a will implicitly manifest in the decisions of our national leaders (prominently, Bush himself). Thus, the speech does not characterize Americans (i.e., true or genuine Americans) as defiant generally, nor does it adjure them to be defiant generally. Rather, it affirms that Americans are defiant only against the out-group. This is, of course, a standard part of in-group conformity. However, Bush’s framing of the issue suggests that anyone who does not accept the internal hierarchy of the nation is not defiant, but rather is conforming to the dictates of the enemy. The result is that, in the terms of this speech, dissent is not only treachery; it does not even count as dissent. Moreover, Bush’s emphasis on defiance not only coopts American individualism for conformism. It also effectively urges anger and belligerence, both of which are central to the heroic plot and to Bush’s subsequent policies. Indeed, angry and belligerent defiance of the invaders/usurpers is crucial to the development of the heroic plot.

At this point, Bush takes up THE NATION IS A FAMILY schema, asserting that our “unity is a kinship.” He shifts to THE NATION IS A PERSON, saying that our unity is “a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies.”

After the reference to “defiance,” this is particularly striking. It is entirely clear that we are to “defy” the enemy, but maintain the strictest form of unity with our nation in thought and action.

From here, Bush turns briefly to the view that the United States is the leader of the free world, or indeed of the entire world. Just as the U.S. government is at the head of a hierarchy that defines internal American unity, the nation as a whole is at the head of a hierarchy that defines world unity. But what is the out-group for this in-group? Terrorism, which is to say, pure and unmotivated malevolence, what we might call “pure out-group-ness.” Terrorism is always the beginning of a story, just as our wars are always the middle and end of a story. Terrorism is never a response to prior incidents or policies, just as our wars are never unprovoked or unjustified. Thus, as if recalling the scene of global coalition from *Independence Day*, Bush explains that “unity against terror is now extending across the world.” However, this brief reference to the United States as an international leader is not elaborated on—a point that is unsurprising, given the subsequent development of Bush’s foreign policy. Following this, Bush takes up the issue of who the enemies are and why there are terrorists.

Clearly, the bombings have to be explained in some way. However, within the prototypical nationalist/heroic narrative structure, they cannot be explained by anything that we did. Again, that is what makes the bombings into the beginning of the story. Thus, the origin must simply be out-group malevolence. This is transcendentalized and dehumanized in cross-culturally standard ways. But it is also specified in terms particular to U.S. nationalism. Again, the United States is, in one common ideological characterization, the initiator and guarantor of the freedom of the entire world, thus of human freedom generally. In consequence, anyone who wishes to attack human freedom is likely to attack the United States. In keeping with this, Bush characterizes the enemies of the United States as the “enemies of human freedom.” Their Satanic character is suggested by the scope of their antagonism (all humanity) and their eternity (they arise in “every generation”). They have attacked us “because we are freedom’s home and defender.” The precise phrasing here is significant. The term “home” takes up the standard familial metaphor. In context, it calls to mind more particular nonmetaphorical images as well—the homes of families affected by the bombings, homes deprived of parents, spouses, children. But, here too, Bush extends these particular, human homes to the national homeland, tacitly coopting individual pain for the affirmation of group identity and, beyond that, the policies of the group leadership. The reference to the United States as “defender” reenforces the military aspect of

Bush's account, particularly its relation to the invasion/defense sequence of the heroic plot. The final sentence of the paragraph identifies the enduring, historical character of our defense of freedom by appeal to the standard THE NATION IS A FAMILY schema. Specifically, Bush explains that this defense was "the commitment of our fathers." That commitment, he says, is our "calling." The use of a term with religious associations is, of course, not accidental.

Those religious associations are taken up in the final paragraphs, which immediately follow. First, Bush reminds us that this is a "national day of prayer." Both the word "national" and the word "prayer" are crucial. He goes on to specify the nature of the prayer: "We ask almighty God to watch over our nation." The choice of "almighty" as an epithet is, of course, not accidental (contrast, say, "merciful," "all-loving," "all-embracing"). "Almighty" suggests that God should watch over our nation in a way that asserts His might, thus in a way that secures our victory. At this point, Bush returns to the actual suffering of the bereaved, at last indicating how their suffering may be resolved—through the "life to come." This leads Bush to an apocalyptic conclusion, where he explains that "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers . . . can separate us from God's love." The sequence does not make much sense. (Who raised the issue of principalities—an order of spiritual beings superior to archangels—separating us from God's love?) However, it suggests the most catastrophic events. Perhaps we are to understand that the "angels" are fallen, thus not angels at all, but devils. Perhaps the powers are those of the demonic Adversary himself. In any case, the suggestions of apocalyptic events recall the bombings. The implication seems to be that whatever chaos and devastation may rain down on humankind, we—that is, Americans and all those who follow our leadership—will always be protected by God. Bush then explains that God will "bless the souls of the departed." This idea, too, is bound up with war and nationalism. Specifically, the statement suggests the national version of martyrdom—for it is not a point of general Christian doctrine that being killed by a criminal act guarantees salvation for one's soul. It is, rather, a point of national ideology that someone killed in the service of the nation is a sort of martyr. Finally, God will give the bereaved "comfort," and, we pray, "always guide our country." The last point tells us almost explicitly that the ultimate leader of the nation is God, operating through the national hierarchy. By praying that he will "always guide our country," we imply that He has guided our country in the past and does guide our country currently. If God has guided our country in the past and does guide our country currently, this in turn suggests that the decisions of

the national leadership are and have been inspired by God. Moreover, the prayer for divine guidance in the future suggests that the national leadership will continue to be divinely inspired, for the prayer itself shows that they are devoted to following God's will.

Bush ends with a prayer, "God bless America." Though the phrase sounds innocuously pious, it is more than clear by this point that such a blessing constitutes divine support for military victory, the devastation of a demonic enemy. That alone will turn the story begun by the September 11 bombings into a full heroic tragicomedy.

THE EPILOGUE OF SUFFERING AND THE VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

The outcome of Bush's emplotment of the September 11 bombings was the War on Terror and the two more concrete wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. The killings of innocents have been extensive. Again, in Iraq alone, there were over one hundred thousand excess deaths by November 2004 (see Roberts et al.). These are precisely the type of events that one would expect to generate an epilogue of suffering. In fact, there are signs that this is occurring—prominently in the "Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan" hearings organized by Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). In these hearings, "US veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Iraqi and Afghan survivors" provided "first hand accounts of their experiences" of the occupations (Nichols 5; see also the website of IVAW, <http://ivaw.org/wintersoldier>). The title of the hearings refers to what is probably the most significant formalization of an epilogue of suffering in U.S. history—the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation. This hearing brought together Vietnam veterans and some others who had witnessed atrocities in Vietnam. It provided a forum for them to testify about the crimes they had witnessed. The impact of this investigation is suggested by the fact that it was a crucial issue in the 2004 presidential campaign; over thirty years after John Kerry testified at these hearings, self-proclaimed patriots continued to see him as a traitor. These hearings are now serving as a model for understanding and evaluating U.S. policies and practices in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider the tacit narrative structure of this exemplary investigation.

To a great extent, the speakers' testimonies at the 1971 Winter Soldier Investigation were responses to their own experiences, articulations of their own moral judgments, and expressions of their own feelings of

spontaneous human empathy with the victims. Similarly, the editors' selection for the published version was largely based on a desire to represent both the magnitude and the extent of criminal activities. However, as I have been arguing, we do not define and evaluate the broad trajectories of our actions in terms of strict causal analysis and the rational application of abstract moral standards. Rather, we emplot our projects, most commonly through the universal narrative structures. This is no less true in the case of the epilogue of suffering, though in this case, the plot is itself more limited.

In outline, the narrative structure is the following. The hero begins the war with a strong sense of commitment and with anger against the perfidious acts of the enemy. In the course of battle, however, he becomes involved in the killing of innocents—paradigmatically, a very young boy. The innocents often remind the hero of his own family. Filled with remorse, the hero goes through a period of isolation and atonement before he is able to return to society and take up his rightful place. Examples, involving different variations, range from Gilgamesh to Mwindo (of the Nyanga epic), from the story of Kumagae in the Japanese *Tale of Heike* to that of Yudhiṣṭhira in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.²⁶

In most nationally celebrated heroic tragicomedies, the epilogue of suffering operates to establish the ultimate goodness of the national in-group.²⁷ It indicates that we may commit errors in the prosecution of war, but we pay for them—we experience remorse; we undergo penance. Again, we are the benevolent ones and thus deeply unlike the malevolent enemy. In this way, the epilogue of suffering commonly allows us to reaffirm the heroic narrative.

However, there is always a tension in this development of the epilogue. It shows how moral we are, how willing to admit to and suffer for our mistakes. But, at the same time, it foregrounds the crimes of war, the wrongful killing. Indeed, it suggests something about war generally, and about our justifications for war. It suggests that war cannot avoid “mistakes.” Thus, we know, any time we enter a war, that innocents will be killed. Next time, we cannot pretend that only the wicked will suffer and the guiltless will be

26. See chapter 4 of my *The Mind and Its Stories* for a discussion of these and other examples.

27. I take it to be obvious that the Winter Soldier Investigation is not nationally celebrated. Thus, my comments here are not intended to apply to that investigation or the text that came out of it. There is a nationalist and militarist strain in the text. But there is also a very strong antinationalist and antimilitarist strain. Indeed, even mainstream epilogues are to some degree ambivalent. That ambivalence is even more pronounced in a nonmainstream work, such as the Winter Soldier Investigation.

spared. Worse still, the epilogue indicates that we commit the same crimes as the enemy. When the enemy kills an innocent person, we view it as justification for our war-making, even if it is a retrospective justification, for this crime shows us the perfidy of the enemy. But the epilogue emphasizes the fact that we too kill innocents. In these ways, the epilogue always threatens to undermine the heroic enterprise.

In the United States, there was a name for our collective sense that the heroic national narrative had been undermined—The Vietnam Syndrome. (Note how the name takes up the metaphor of the nation as a human mind, implying that pacifism is a disease and that national belligerence is a state of health.) The Winter Soldier Investigation contributed to this “syndrome,” which is the primary reason why prowar segments of the nation revile it along with all those who took part in it. One effect of the September 11 bombings—or, rather, one effect of what became the standard construal of those bombings—was to put an end to that syndrome by triggering the threat/defense sequence from the heroic plot.

The fact that the investigation was published by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) is already significant. The epilogue of suffering is not a matter of external investigators, foreign reporters, philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, activists such as Noam Chomsky. It is crucial that the testimonies came from the soldiers themselves. The power of the epilogue derives from the fact that it is the heroes who question what they have done. Indeed, this is why one aim of prowar activists has been to convince us that any opposition to a given war is an opposition to the troops. The accusation is almost incoherent. Suppose Jones says that soldiers should be sent to fight in Iraq and Smith says they should not. What sense does it make to claim that Jones is “supporting” the troops (by putting them in combat where they may be killed) while Smith is “opposing” the troops (by saying that they should not be put in combat)? But the reasonableness of the assertion is irrelevant. The crucial rhetorical point is to create a sense that there is a complete division between the “heroes” of the war and the opponents of the war. The crucial point is to foreclose the possibility of an epilogue of suffering (though, obviously, prowar activists would not put it this way). In relation to this, any troops who do question the war can only be understood as traitors to their comrades. (This characterization was clear in the campaign against John Kerry.)

The volume begins with a poem that refers to the killing of families. It is interesting that it begins with “would-be-fathers,” which is to say, young boys who are not yet fathers. This suggests the cross-cultural paradigm of the heroic crime—the killing of a young boy. It goes on to add a parallel

paradigmatic war crime—rape of young girls—through its reference to “daughters spread-eagled” (Vietnam Veterans v). The image of the family here is crucial. Again, our own nation is repeatedly assimilated to a family. In the epilogue of suffering, the hero commonly sees a reflection of his or her own son or daughter in the innocent person he or she kills. Alternatively, the hero recalls this victim’s parents. Either way, the scene evokes family ties without distinction between in-group and out-group. For example, in the Japanese *Tale of the Heike*, when Kumagae is about to kill Atsumori, he connects the boy with his own son and imagines the grief of Atsumori’s father (317). This leads to his own remorse, as represented in Zeami’s renowned drama, *Atsumori*. The function of these familial connections is to enhance our sense of empathy. This use of family relations is not a matter of extending the metaphor of the family to the in-group in the usual nationalist manner. Rather, this invocation of family leads us to recognize that literal family relations are the same everywhere, in all groups, including the national enemy.

Interestingly, this poetic call to empathy for the enemy is followed by an epigraph from Tom Paine. The epigraph explains the title of the investigation. Paine refers to some soldiers as “summer soldiers.” These are the equivalent of fair weather friends. They support the nation only in the good times. But they leave their post when the difficult fighting begins. The winter soldier, then, is the true hero, the true patriot, who does not abandon the fight when it is difficult. The suggestion is that those who are now testifying are the true patriots. In this way, the published text of the investigation manifests the usual ambivalence of the epilogue. On the one hand, it appears to condemn national war. On the other hand, it reasserts the national heroic plot by affirming the patriotism of the remorseful heroes—indeed, affirming even their commitment as soldiers.

The preface to the volume returns us to the first, broadly critical view. Specifically, Al Hubbard, the executive secretary of VVAW and author of the opening poem, stresses and condemns the dehumanization of the enemy. He insists that this dehumanization enables the commission of war crimes, as does our national conviction “that we are good and most other countries are inherently evil” (xiv). Hubbard overstates the case here. Americans, like everyone who accepts a heroic employment of conflict, tend to see the national in-group as good and the national enemy as evil. They are mostly indifferent to everyone else. But Hubbard does indicate precisely what happens with heroic employment: it focuses our attention on a binary opposition and identifies the enemy with evil. In this way, he tacitly takes up the critique of heroic employment.

The opening statement by Lt. William Crandell, however, restores the ambivalence, partially reasserting the heroic narrative. Crandell explains that, “In the bleak winter of 1776,” many summer recruits went home. But “the winter soldiers . . . stayed after they had served their time” (1). The parallel is suggestive. The winter soldiers of 1776 stayed to fight. In other words, they maintained their commitment to the heroic narrative. Insofar as the Vietnam veterans are comparable to the winter soldiers, Crandell implies, nothing in their testimonies undermines a commitment to the military or to warfare. Indeed, he suggests that, in testifying, they are continuing their duty as soldiers (not as, say, human beings or general moral agents). Crandell goes on to distinguish between the normal conduct of war and the commission of war crimes. The distinction is entirely reasonable. Yet it has the effect of securing the national heroic narrative for the future. The problem, this suggests, is not a matter of the heroic employment per se. It is, rather, a matter of the way the heroic narrative has been instantiated in this particular case. He goes on to say that, “We are here to bear witness not against America, but against those policymakers who are perverting America” (3). The phrasing of the alternatives is important. It leaves out the possibility that the soldiers might be testifying against nationalism and heroic employment generally. It isolates this particular war, so that the testimonies imply nothing larger. Indeed, at the conclusion of his opening statement, Crandell explicitly presents the testimonies, not as questioning heroic employment, but as allowing it. The problem with the current war is precisely that it makes us “a little troubled” about the military “uniform.” That uniform should be “one of our prides,” for it is “acquainted with honor” and “familiar with great deeds and noble.” We should “revere it.” The same point holds for “our flag,” which should be “worshiped” and should wave “in far lands” (3). This divinization of the in-group is, of course, at the root of the us/them dichotomy decried by Hubbard. Crandell, then, is taking up the nationalist and heroic use of the epilogue, reasserting in-group identity and heroic employment. He even goes so far as to affirm American global hegemony, asserting that the American flag should wave “in far lands.”

The following 160 pages of testimony give instance after instance of soldiers beginning the war with enthusiastic commitment, before they become involved in the killing of innocents, thus the sorts of crime that trigger the epilogue of suffering. This involvement is repeatedly followed by the soldier’s isolation, then return to society through the atonement brought about by this investigation itself.²⁸ For example, one sergeant

28. The testimonies also involve critical references to some of the central techniques of

explains that he was so fired up about fighting for his nation that he would have killed his own mother (157). But, once he arrived in Vietnam, his zeal “lasted for about one day. When I got there and saw the shit being beat out of a few children, you know. And from there on, it was all downhill and, man, like I was a great American” (158). There are numerous variations on this story throughout the book. Many, like this one, involve children. There is no point in going through all of them. However, it is worth noting the text’s first instance of deliberate killing of an innocent individualized person, a person with whom one should have empathic identification. It is the paradigmatic case of a young boy—or rather, in this case, two young boys: “there were two little boys playing on a dike and one sergeant just took his M-16 and shot one boy. . . . The other boy tried to run . . . when this other guy . . . shot this other little boy. . . . The little boy was like lying on the ground kicking, so he shot him again to make sure he was dead” (9).

A crucial part of the testimonies is the way in which they repeatedly emphasize empathy—not only ours, but that of the soldiers, the heroes trained to dehumanize the enemy. That empathy is, of course, precisely what triggers the epilogue of suffering. The murders of innocents seem brutal. They are brutal. The testimonies indicate again and again that many soldiers treated the Vietnamese as animals. But even the most hardened of the killers cannot entirely suppress his sense of human identification. Given the operation of the human brain, this is unsurprising. As Boyer explains, “the experience of other people’s pain, as handled by the brain’s dedicated systems, to some extent overlaps with that of one’s own pain” (105). Again, that is why there is an epilogue of suffering, manifest in these hearings. Part of this empathy is simply the result of seeing the human face, seeing its expression of pain and, as a result, experiencing that pain empathically.²⁹ That experience changes the way we emplot the surrounding events. This is brought out both horrifically and movingly in one testimony. The speaker explains that he came upon “a tiny little form, that of a child, lying out in the field with straw over its face. It had been clubbed to death.” After seeing the corpse, he learns that “the Marine that clubbed the child to death didn’t really want to look at the child’s face, so he put straw over it before he clubbed it” (30).

heroic emplotment, as one would expect. Most obviously, the dehumanization of the enemy is emphasized in the testimonies. The recruitment of religion to the national military cause also recurs. For example, one chaplain is reported to have advised soldiers to “do unto others before they do unto you” (8).

29. See Plantinga and citations on empathic experience and facial expression; see also Boyer 104–5, on imagination, imitation, and the brain.

Though the cases just recounted refer to other soldiers, it is important that the testimonies are not merely a matter of third-person observations, thus guilt by complicity. The witnesses repeatedly treat their own actions, their direct culpability. For example, referring to the officer blamed for the My Lai massacre, one speaker tells us, “It isn’t just Lieutenant Calley. I was involved” (12). One soldier recounts the practice of firing into a village, even when there was no fire coming from the village. He recalls a particular attack of this sort. When his unit stopped firing, “there was a big silence, and all of a sudden, just babies crying.” He goes on to explain, “you know, it just—everytime I hear a baby cry right now, I—that comes back to me” (24). Another soldier describes the way in which he and others tried to suppress empathic feelings. Again, the story concerns a young boy. In a game, this soldier and his companions used the blast from a helicopter to blow the child back into the road. He was killed by a passing truck. The soldier explains that “our first reaction was, I guess, you would call normal . . . horror, pain.” But he stopped the feeling immediately and began laughing, joking (40). Yet, even when suppressed, the human feeling was still there. Later, it haunted the soldiers.

This personal involvement, the associated shift from enthusiastic commitment to disillusion, even horror, and the subsequent sense of isolation and remorse define the narrative structure of the epilogue of suffering. But they do not complete that structure. The final resolution remains. In this case, the testimony itself is the culminating moment of the soldiers’ penance, the moment of somber wisdom, and the formal (though not always real) end of their isolation. One soldier explains, “The reason I came down here was because I’ve been living with this thing for two and a half years” (27). Another imagines that his victims, like Jesus, pray for him. He describes the napalming of a village, then explains that he and his fellow soldiers entered the village “after the fires burned down.” He saw “an old man on a cot, burned to death with his hands stiff in rigor mortis reaching for the sky as if in prayer or supplication forgiving us for what we had done” (31). He then takes up the familial parallelism that is so common in epilogues of suffering. He sees a group of dead children and recalls that it is his mother’s birthday. As a result, “I somehow seemed to feel that these were her children” (31). This is very much in keeping with the prototypical resolution of the epilogue, which is often spiritual, familial, or both. Consider, for example, Zeami’s famous play treating the resolution of Kumagae’s epilogue of suffering. Driven by remorse for killing Atsumori in battle, Kumagae wanders as a monk until he meets the ghost of Atsumori. For a moment, it seems that Atsumori will kill Kumagae. But

suddenly they both achieve salvation and “they shall be re-born together / On one lotus-seat” (Zeami 712).

Needless to say, things do not always work out so well in life as in fiction. Reality sometimes inhibits our ability to emplot events with a happy ending. The final testimony in the book is given by a lieutenant. He explains, “I’m here because, like, I have nightmares about things that happened to me and my friends. I’m here because my conscience will not let me forget what I want to forget” (163–64).

The closing statement of the book tries to resolve these feelings, in a sense, collectively, just as the (fictional) epilogue resolves them individually in the somber wisdom of the hero and his return to society. M/Sgt. Don Duncan explains that “I don’t want anybody here to carry away a feeling of guilt with them” (171). He recalls his own period of isolation. Five years earlier he had “testified to many of the things that have been testified to here.” But for him that was not a return to society, an end to exile. Rather, as a result of that testimony, he “was very lonely.” Only this investigation at last ends the isolation, the hero’s separation from society that defines the penultimate part of the epilogue of suffering. Duncan says that “I’m not lonely any more” (172). He indicates that this should be true for others who testified as well. One hopes his declaration was not overly optimistic.

This nearly concludes the book. But something else does follow. Unlike Crandell, Duncan does not seem to be interested in rehabilitating the heroic narrative. Indeed, he states that “We have to stop producing veterans” (172). The way to stop producing veterans is, of course, to stop producing wars. This view is, indeed, much closer to that implied by the witnesses in the preceding pages. Despite the heroic implications of the opening statement, the testimonies almost inexorably point toward a questioning of all nationalism and war. For example, one sergeant describes the brutal treatment of a Vietnamese woman, then explains, “We were conditioned to believe that this was for the good of the nation, the good of our country, and anything we did was okay” (14). Reading statements such as this, it is difficult not to see nationalism and its heroic emplotments as fundamentally inhumane. It is difficult to believe that the epilogue of suffering in any way justifies future stories of heroism and war.