Description

What happens to soldiers and to society when war is over and troops come home? How are soldiers and soldiering represented and understood by civilians? Do these views square with how soldiers see themselves? In this writing seminar we will explore the long and fraught history of military-civilian relations. We will begin by analyzing excerpts from literary works by Homer, Shakespeare, and First World War writers, in order to understand how our cultural perceptions of returning combatants are constructed, in terms either of heroism, adventure, sex appeal, and political authority, or of trauma, alienation, and victimization. We will then examine literary, journalistic, and filmic accounts of the return of American soldiers from Vietnam, in order to analyze the lasting impact of the war on U.S. culture and politics. Case studies will include the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, literature and films such as Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, as well as the role of veterans in 1960s anti-war and civil rights movements. You will write two short papers and a longer critical essay that investigates an issue relevant to the relationship between military and civilian society since Vietnam. For a final paper, you will review a recent artwork (in whatever medium) by a veteran.

Requirements

- This course requires both collaborative effort and individual commitment. You must come to class having completed all reading and writing assignments for that day.
- **Bring the relevant readings to class.**
- **Attendance** is required. An excused absence is an illness with a doctor’s note, a family emergency, or a religious holiday.
- Please let me know in advance if you are going to be absent for any of those reasons. More than two unexcused absences, and/or habitual lateness to class, will reduce your final grade.

Readings

- Homer, *The Odyssey* (excerpts)
- Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (excerpt)
- Dante, *Inferno* (excerpt)
- Shakespeare, *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (excerpts)
- World War One poetry packet
- Ernest Hemingway, *Soldier’s Home*
- * Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Mariner Books)
- Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (excerpts)
- Martin Scorsese, *Taxi Driver* (film)
- * Required texts at Shakespeare & Co.

All other readings will be made available on our Blackboard site.

Paper due dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 24th, October 1st</td>
<td>Paper #1 draft and revision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 22nd, October 29th</td>
<td>Paper #2 draft and revision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12th, November 28th</td>
<td>Paper #3 draft and revision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 10th, December 12th</td>
<td>Paper #4 draft and revision.</td>
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Evaluation

Grades are based on class participation, the quality of your essay drafts and revisions, and your responses to other students’ papers. Each draft of your essay is important and should conform to MLA style as well as to grammar, punctuation and spelling rules.

Percentage breakdown of grades:

- **Attendance & Participation** – 20%
- **Paper #1 (4-5pp)** – 20%
- **Paper #2 (4-5pp)** – 20%
- **Paper #3 (6-7pp)** – 25%
- **Paper #4 (3pp)** – 15%

Plagiarism

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Policy on electronics

No laptops or cellphones in class. If you would like to download readings onto a tablet rather than printing them, that’s OK, but you must turn off wifi access when in the classroom.

Classes are writing and discussion based. Please always bring a notebook and pen for in-class writing.
Course Calendar *(subject to revision)*

**Week One**

**W 9/5**  
Introduction to the course: What is a soldier?  
Reading: Homer, *Odyssey*. Book 9

**Week Two**

**M 9/10**  
Discussion and in-class analysis of *Odyssey* reading. Reading: Dante, *Inferno*

**W 9/12**  
Discussion of Dante and army recruiting techniques.  
Writing assignment: analysis of the soldier as adventurer, in Homer or Dante. (2pp)  
Reading: from *Odyssey* Books 11 & 13; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*

**Week Three**

**M 9/17**  
Odysseus's homecoming. Analysis and discussion.  
Writing assignment: Compare and contrast Homer's and Aeschylus's versions of Agamemnon's story.

**W 9/19**  
Writing assignment: **Paper #1 (first draft):** Find a contemporary representation (literature, film, photograph, article etc) of a soldier's return home, and analyze it in light of a classical archetype.  
Reading assignment: Shakespeare excerpts.

**Week Four**

**M 9/24**  
**Turn in Paper #1 (first draft).** Discussion of *Othello* and *Much Ado* excerpts.  
Workshop Paper #1 draft in class.

**W 9/26**  
**No class:** Instructor conferences (in class + office hours)  
Reading assignment: World War One Poetry  
Writing assignment: revise Paper #1 draft.

**Week Five**

**M 10/1**  
**Turn in Paper #1 (final).** In-class discussion and analysis of WWI poetry.

**W 10/3**  
WWI poetry cont'd.  
Reading assignment: *The Return of the Soldier*  
Writing assignment: Short (2pp) poetry analysis.

**Week Six**

**M 10/8**  
*The Return of the Soldier.*

**W 10/10**  
*The Return of the Soldier* cont'd.  
**Writing assignment: Paper #2 (first draft)**  
Reading assignment: From *The Things They Carried*

--- FALL BREAK. NO CLASS MONDAY OCTOBER 15 OR WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 17---
Week Seven

M 10/22  Turn in Paper #2 (first draft). In-class workshops: Paper #2

W 10/24  In-class workshops: Paper #2

Week Eight

M 10/29  Turn in Paper #2 (final). Discussion of The Things They Carried. Reading Assignment: Dispatches (excerpt)

W 10/31  Discussion of Dispatches. Writing assignment: How do these works represent the return of soldiers from Viet Nam? (3pp) Film assignments: Taxi Driver, Born on the Fourth of July

Week Nine

M 11/5  Discussion of Taxi Driver: The veteran as vigilante.

W 11/7  Discussion of Born on the Fourth of July: The veteran as activist. Writing Assignment: Paper #3 (first draft)

Week Ten

M 11/12  Turn in Paper #3 (first draft). The Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial and other commemorations.

W 11/14  No class: Instructor conferences (in class + office hours)

Week Eleven

M 11/19  Workshop Paper #3

W 11/21  No class: Thanksgiving break

Week Twelve

M 11/26  Discussion of Iraq and Afghanistan war literature/film; contemporary representations of soldiers.

W 11/28  Turn in Paper #3 (final). Contemporary war literature cont’d. Assignment: locate and read a (short) contemporary representation of war/soldiering. Prepare a five-minute in-class presentation on your chosen piece.

Week Thirteen

M 12/3  In-class presentations

W 12/5  In-class presentations. Writing assignment: Paper #4 (2-3pp)

Week Fourteen

M 12/10  Turn in Paper #4 (first draft). In-class workshop.

W 12/12  Turn in Paper #4 (final). Last day of class.