

The Warrior-Hero on the Stage

by

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Introduction: Defining the Warrior-Hero Model for the Stage

In his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell introduces his definition of the “monomyth¹”, a universal model of heroes’ journeys in world mythology. In this journey a single character that embodies the spirit and force of change advances through three distinct phases in order to tear down stale structures and reinvigorate society. Campbell describes these phases as “the *separation or departure*, [...] *the trials and victories of initiation*, [and] *the return and reintegration with society*” (34, emphasis his). Each phase may be comprised of five or six components that the hero encounters². These components function as general descriptions of the different paths the hero can take. The Departure prepares the hero for his “passage into the realm of night,” the transition into the unknown, dangerous world of myth. The Return functions as the “justification of the long retreat” and the difficulty of living in the changed world. It is in the middle segment, Initiation, where the potential for great storytelling appears: the protagonist is at his most active point and is faced with many obstacles that test his merit and worth. He encounters great trials, temptations, and it is at this phase’s end that the hero finally receives through victory what Campbell calls the Ultimate Boon, the reward or objective of the journey (227-8). The actions of the Initiation are where heroes like Prince Five-weapons or Saint Martha of Tarascon enact the deeds that transform them into legendary figures: the Prince attacks and subdues the ogre Sticky-hair with a thunderbolt, teaches him the Buddhist path, and transforms the ogre into a benevolent spirit (78-81), and Saint Martha throws holy water onto the dragon Tarasque, taming him into submission and ensuring his death at the hands of the villagers he had been

terrorizing (314-15). In short, this part of the journey makes for impressive drama with fantastically high stakes, exemplary action, and great feats. I have chosen to examine one specific kind of hero at this phase of the narrative, specifically as it has thrived in the theatre. I call this model the warrior-hero.

Warrior-heroes assume the heroic persona through an act of violence. The violent act functions as an important part of the Initiation phase of Campbell's cycle and occurs along the Road of Trials, "where he must survive a succession of trials, [...] miraculous tests, and ordeals" (89). The hero begins his Initiation and enters the Road of Trials in a pre-heroic state. The function of the Road of Trials is a simple question: "Can the ego put itself to death?"(100). The pre-heroic character must sacrifice his mundane life in order to succeed in his "difficult tasks" (89) and transform into a hero. He must cut himself off from the ordinary world—if he does not his super-human prowess cannot emerge. While many hero archetypes abound, it is the martial approach to problem-solving that dynamically separates warrior-heroes from other models, such as trickster or lover-heroes. The pre-heroic character's use of violence along the Road of Trials is the most significant crucible in becoming the full warrior-hero, for whom the martial attribute is of greater importance than the riddles, emotions, or moral dilemmas encountered by other heroic archetypes. The Blood Clot Boy from the mythology of the Blackfeet Native Americans³ provides a clear example of a mythic warrior-hero: Kut-o-yis, or "Blood Clot Boy," "[...] slew the murderous son-in-law of his foster parents, then proceeded against the ogres of the countryside. He exterminated a tribe of cruel bears, with the exception of one female who was about to become a mother" (312). The Blood Clot Boy kills to become

heroic, but it is important to note that he does not slaughter with abandon. Kut-o-yis spares the unborn cub because the child is innocent—the unborn does not fall under the category of “a tribe of cruel bears”. The dominance of the body over the mind/heart/spirit pinpoints the warrior-hero as an energetically physical character. It signifies a superhuman level of control over the surrounding world—the physical power to inflict death, and the willingness to exercise that power with authority to fulfill the heroic journey and purpose.

The warrior-hero onstage follows many of the paths that Campbell laid down for the monomythic archetype. However, due to the limited actions of live performance, it is difficult to present all of the hero’s aspects on stage. For the sake of theatrical clarity and expediency, different dramas make use of select portions of the monomyth cycle, or choose to focus on a particular aspect of the hero. Archetypes other than the warrior-hero, such as the lover and trickster, appear in the theatre as well. A lover archetype such as Ferdinand in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, or a trickster such as Viola in the same author’s *Twelfth Night*, may possess a narrative arc similar to that of the warrior-hero, but their defining attributes—love and wit/trickery—require different actions appropriate to those attributes. As heroes, Ferdinand serves Prospero to earn the right to love Miranda, while Viola deceives everyone to survive, leading to the reunion with her brother and winning Duke Orsino’s hand in marriage. Differently, the warrior-hero uses a specific act of violence instead of willing service or deception.

The warrior-hero, as it appears onstage, can be defined as a protagonist that uses a specific act of violence to complete the heroic arc of the play. The violence

these characters employ is one of the most consistently used theatrical conventions. The protagonist's heightened performance manifests by engaging in duels, battles, suicides, and other violent encounters to pass from the pre-heroic state to his new role as a warrior-hero. Depending on the theatrical tradition, these characters pursue superhuman actions for their cause, whether it is mandated by divine will, prompted by the need for personal fulfillment, or a pre-existing social obligation. In this thesis I examine three theatrical traditions that rely on the warrior-hero as their protagonists: Greek Tragedy, English Renaissance Tragedy, and Japanese Kabuki and Bunraku. In each of these traditions such characters use a specific violent act as the catalyst for the personal transformation from a pre-heroic state into a full-fledged warrior-hero. While each tradition's warrior-heroes manifest through the use of violence, they are each unique in the motive force that drives the protagonist to pursue the warrior-hero path.

My first chapter will focus on the warrior-heroes of Ancient Greek Tragedies. These divine heroes are used as tools by the Gods to carry out fate and justice; therefore, the violent actions of Greek warrior-heroes stem in response to a divine mandate. I have chosen to analyze Orestes and Œdipus as opposing examples of this kind of dramatic hero. Orestes' actions in Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* are direct and purposeful: he assassinates Aegisthus and kills Clytemnestra by the mandate of Apollo, thereby avenging the blasphemous killing of Agamemnon and restoring order to Argos. On the other hand, Œdipus acts as a divine instrument against his will: despite his attempt to flee, he unknowingly kills his own father and fulfills an Oracular prophecy.

The second chapter will examine the protagonists of the Renaissance English stage. The drive of the Renaissance warrior-hero is the conscious decision to pursue the heroic path. These warrior-heroes use violence as the catalyst to individuate themselves and become heroic. I will first examine Hamlet as a protagonist focused on the deliberate pursuit of the heroic path. Despite a series of decisions and remissions, Hamlet ultimately chooses to take action when he finally stabs and kills Claudius. I will contrast Hamlet's active path with Edgar's passive pursuit in *King Lear*. Unlike Hamlet, Edgar follows the hero's path because it is thrust upon him. Edgar is expelled from the pre-heroic life by his bastard brother and fails to pursue the heroic path for the majority of the play. It is not until he defeats Oswald, who is acting as the "threshold guardian" (Campbell 71), that Edgar actively chooses to become a warrior-hero and kills Edmund.

My last chapter will explore Bunraku and Kabuki warrior-heroes. These samurai of a peaceful and unified Japan reassert their superiority and uphold their warrior's code, *bushido*, with the sword. The warrior-heroes of this tradition are the exceptional samurai who demonstrate their loyalty and propriety through killing and suicide. In *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, or *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*, the young and low-ranking Kampei fights Bannai and his thugs to demonstrate his moral superiority through swordplay, and later commits suicide to prove his loyalty to his master, Enya Hangan. The second warrior-hero I will examine is Kampei's superior, Yuranosuke, who confronts and beheads the retainers' enemy, Kō no Moronao. Unlike Kampei, Yuranosuke is a prestigious, middle-age samurai, and instead of

displaying his heroism through suicide he swears to kill Moronao in retribution for causing Hangan's demise.

I have chosen to order my chapters chronologically for the sake of clarity. Each chapter will examine one theatrical tradition, using specific theatrical texts for character analysis and under the basis that the warrior-hero is thoroughly evident in each culture. The goal of this thesis is not to examine each culture's definition of heroism. Rather, by focusing on the dramatic texts this thesis will directly investigate the warrior-hero model as evident in the theatrical traditions themselves. Though the warrior-hero is defined by taking a specific violent action to fulfill his role, the motivational forces for the heroes vary among theatrical traditions. I will draw from Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and brief historical context to elucidate the different motive forces and patterns that the warrior-hero adopts. Lastly, I will discuss the relationship between the practical performance of the warrior-hero's journey—the staged combat—and the importance of creating spectacle for each tradition's audience. I will also discuss how each tradition employs or ignores realistic combat technique, necessitates or disregards a visual display of violence, and sets the scope of combat—the number of combatants—as tools for the manifestation of the warrior-hero model onstage.

Analysis of the Warrior-Hero in Theatrical Traditions

Chapter 1: Greek Tragedy

The mythological canon of Ancient Greece runs rife with gods and heroes whose feats continue to provide fuel for theatrical performance. Stories about Achilles' invulnerability and the cunning of Odysseus; the term "Herculean" has remained in modern usage with as much clarity of meaning as when told through the epic poetry, vase painting, and sculpture of fifth-century Athens. It is thus entirely unsurprising that the stories of these heroes found their way onto the Greek stage. Two particular heroes, Orestes and Œdipus, provide clear examples of how the warrior-hero model manifests in Greek Tragedy.

Stemming from the Athenian festival, the plays of ancient Greece had an inherent connection to the Greek divine. While it is difficult to pinpoint the beginning date of the Greek Tragedies, it is clear that the tragic play had been included into the City Dionysia festival by the mid fifth century BCE (Green 7). These events were "[...] religious festivals in honor of Dionysos" (8) and drew people from the surrounding areas to participate in social rituals. Green points out another feature of the festivals' divine nature, the fact that some attendees, "[...] who had left home and traveled some distance [...] may well have slept in the sanctuary overnight in the company of the god" (8). The connection to the divine was communal as well as personal: "The celebration of a divinity [...] was often a group activity in which everyone joined" (8). Added to this is the public's solicitation for the theatre that forges an even stronger link between the Gods and the theatrical Heroes (7). It was not the artist's initiative to become associated with the festivals that fostered the

growth of Greek Tragedy, but rather the public's desire to have theatre included. The creation and performance of Ancient Greek Tragedies developed from both the communities' impetus to gather and as its dramatic means of storytelling.

It is this deference to the Gods—who were linked to every hero in some manner, often as parents or patrons—that is what I believe to be the source of the theatrical warrior-hero in Greek Tragedy. The warrior-hero of Ancient Greece is a character driven by a divine purpose or mandate to commit an act of violence. His journey begins with some otherworldly information presented to the potential hero, such as the prophecies of Apollo's Oracle. It is his response to a divine command that spurs the Greek hero on his journey, until at last he must commit an act of violence to fulfill his heroic fate. There is no attempt to hide or apologize for the killing—it is declared as a presentation of purpose and prowess.

In Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*, the second part of the *Oresteia* trilogy, Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, presents a clear example of the Greek warrior-hero: the Oracle of Apollo commands Orestes to commit matricide and avenge Agamemnon's murder:

He spoke of many things in his warning voice,
of chill destruction under the warm heart,
if I should fail to pursue my father's murderers
in their own fashion;

“Kill them,” he said, “to match their killings.” (Greene, lines 272-6)

The decree of Apollo propels Orestes through his heroic journey. Orestes must tear down the existing corrupted order—the profane and corrupted rule of Clytemnestra

and her lover, Aegisthus—in order to implement the new social order. Orestes' violent action as a warrior-hero is the catalyst for Athena's new domestic society in the following play⁴.

Orestes is commanded to commit this killing by the Oracle at Delphi, which serves as an intermediary between gods and mortals. Failure to obey the mandate, he is warned, will result in damnation and a hellish life “[...] gripped by evil, and full of pain” (Meineck, line 277). For the Greeks, the very function of the hero is to be an instrument of divine will. Orestes chooses to take on the role of the warrior-hero to accomplish his task. His duty is to kill his mother and her lover, but it is not simply the act of killing that constitutes Orestes as a warrior-hero—the deed must be done honestly. However, openly announcing his intention to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra would give the usurpers warning, complicating the task. In order to get near his targets Orestes feigns ignorance and pretends to be a traveler, borrowing the tactics of the trickster-hero. This action appears as the inverse of Clytemnestra's treachery in the previous play, *Agamemnon*: where Clytemnestra is morally wrong for deceiving Agamemnon as his hostess, Orestes deceives his mother—with divine sanction—by pretending to be her guest. It is conceivable that he could have chosen a variety of ways to accomplish his goal with cunning, such as employing poison or rigging fatal accidents. Instead, Orestes surfaces as the warrior-hero, righteously confronting Clytemnestra before killing her. It is not the act of killing itself that determines the quality of heroism but the manner in which the killing is carried out. It is the choice to commit the murder through confrontational violence that turns Orestes into the warrior aspect of the hero. He does not waste time speaking of,

“[...] Aegisthus and his death;
 he had what is legally come to him,
 the justice due to an adulterer.” (Greene 987-9)

Instead, he chooses to reveal himself before his true target and announce her imminent death. Orestes instructs Clytemnestra to “Follow me, for I mean to kill you beside [Aegisthus]” (906). The warrior-hero is a hero of action. His openness and transparency about killing displays his honesty and correctness—his is a divine mandate and stems from a higher morality.

In addition to placing him within fatal proximity of Clytemnestra, Orestes’ pursuit of the “guest” disguise establishes another link to the divine. Orestes has chosen to align himself with Zeus, King of the Gods, and protector of guests⁵. His divine mandate from Apollo acts as justification for the deceit because it is directly aiding the warrior-hero’s mission. Orestes uses deception in the form of the “guest” disguise, aligning him with Zeus, in order to eliminate Aegisthus and draw Clytemnestra into the open before announcing his true and deadly purpose. Orestes is confident that his connection to the divine justifies his violent actions and that killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra will not turn him into a murderer. In response to Clytemnestra’s pleas for life, he responds “You are the killer, not I. You kill yourself” (Meineck 923). As a Greek warrior-hero, Orestes fulfills his role as a hero by executing the divine mandate. Orestes becomes a warrior-hero because he kills in a manner that is both violent and confrontational.

Orestes’ frequency as a character in the Tragedies also demonstrates the importance of the hero on the Greek stage. Orestes performs the heroic role in the

Electra plays of both Sophocles and Euripides in addition to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

While no longer the central figure, Orestes still appears as a hero in both plays:

Orestes is directed onto his violent path through the divine mandate of the Oracle and restores the line of Kings in Argos by killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Though Orestes is a recurrent character in Greek Tragedies, the emphasis on presenting him as a warrior-hero declined in these later plays. Both elements of the warrior-hero fall out of use: the divine mandate is de-emphasized in both plays, and neither version's killing of Clytemnestra demonstrates honest confrontation.

In Sophocles' version of *Electra*, Orestes does not specifically target Clytemnestra. Instead, his aim is to destroy both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, lessening the impact of the myth's mother-son focus. More importantly Aegisthus has become the primary antagonist because he is the father-replacement, whereas Clytemnestra is the father-betrayer. Clytemnestra is powerless without Aegisthus: "I swear, you'll be paying the consequences of this insolent behaviour when Aegisthus returns!" (Theodoridis 630). Clytemnestra is killed first, and Orestes does not reveal himself beforehand as he does in *The Libation Bearers*. The matricide acts as a prelude to the killing of Aegisthus—Orestes displays Clytemnestra's body to prove his identity and purpose since only son of Agamemnon could avenge his father. Sophocles' *Electra* also ends with an execution speech similar to the one in Aeschylus' play, but this time Orestes does not return to the stage after killing Aegisthus. Orestes' transformation is not included in the remaining action of the play—such a transformation is implied, but it is not the heart of the matter since *Electra* focuses on the daughter's revenge rather than on the son's apotheosis.

In Euripides' *Electra*, Orestes bears little resemblance to a warrior-hero. The presence of the divine mandate as a motive force has been almost entirely lost in Euripides' play, diverging away from the prophesy Orestes hears at the "god's mysterious shrine" (Johnston 115). The dramatic element of his divine mission remains present, but is most prevalent in the public sacrifice where Orestes kills Aegisthus. The emphasis shifts from the hero's divine mandate to the victim's divine punishment. Orestes joins Aegisthus at a sacrifice and decapitates him with a sacrificial axe while the usurper king is bent preparing the meat—an ironic inversion of Clytemnestra's line, "Quickly, bring me the man-killing axe," from *The Libation Bearers* (Meineck 889)⁵. The play's action is connected to the divine through the setting rather than the hero's task. As this story is clearly one of stealth and deception, the audience sees Orestes before and after the killing and not the moment of violence. The distinction between this version of killing and Clytemnestra's death in *The Libation Bearers* is that Orestes travels to another locale to assassinate Aegisthus; it is not simply that he commits the act offstage, but more that he kills in an entirely separate location.

Two elements of the play demonstrate that Euripides' Orestes is not a warrior-hero: the fact that he must rely on his sister Electra's courage, and the deceitful manner in which they carry out violent acts against their mother. Orestes is conflicted, unable to justify killing Clytemnestra; it is Electra who tells Orestes that "[...] if you don't defend your father, / you're a guilty man" (Johnston 1183-4). This Orestes lacks conviction and faith in his divine mandate. The moment before the killing, Orestes goes indoors to lie in wait:

I'm about to launch a terrible act
 and do dreadful things. Well, so be it,
 if the gods approve of this. But to me
 this contest is a bitter one, not sweet. (1195-8)

In contrast to earlier versions of the character, Euripides' Orestes is a hesitant killer. He never reveals himself to his targets, exploiting opportunities to make killing less personal. The Greek warrior-hero's motive force, the divine mandate, is still present, but functions more like a justification than a reason: Apollo's decree eases Orestes' fears rather than drives him to eliminate his corrupt mother. Orestes is unable to confront and openly kill Clytemnestra when presented with opportunity:

She clung onto my cheeks—
 the sword dropped from my hands
 [...]
 I threw my cloak over my eyes,
 then sacrificed her with the sword. (1474-80)

In Euripides' version of the story Orestes appears far less as a warrior-hero than in the plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus. The divine mandate is barely implied and never thoroughly defined, particularly in terms of punishment. Whereas the Aeschylus' Orestes is clearly warned of Apollo's wrath, the Orestes of Euripides' play is punished for killing Clytemnestra without any reference to god's threat. Apollo's mandate lingers, but only as a vestigial plot element rather than the character's active drive. Euripides' Orestes is far more of a trickster who elects to kill his targets with cunning and subterfuge rather than with self-righteous confrontation.

Orestes, it seems, remained a significant character and warranted attention throughout the span of Greek tragedy. However, once Aeschylus had portrayed him as a warrior-hero, later playwrights relied on their audience's knowledge of the story to imply the warrior facet rather than use it themselves. Orestes remained a theatrical character but over time lost his warrior-hero qualities. Sophocles' Orestes does not finish his violent action in the course of the play, and in Euripides' *Electra* the divine mandate is entirely unspecific.

The second warrior-hero of Greek Tragedy that I examine is Oedipus as he appears in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus satisfies many of the attributes associated with the Greek hero but often in a deformed manner. Despite his good intentions, Oedipus causes misfortune when he acts heroically. He uses his superhuman abilities to defeat the Sphinx prior to the staged action, thus freeing Thebes "From the Sphinx, that flinty singer, and the tribute / [the citizens] paid her so long" (Fitts 7). Unfortunately, Oedipus—as a savior—does not reinvigorate Thebes after being crowned king. In fact, crowning Oedipus is an affront to the Gods on grounds of patricide. Oedipus, albeit unknowingly, has killed his father Laios on the road to Thebes. Subsequently, the hero Oedipus becomes king and takes Jocasta as his queen, unaware that she is his mother. Plague and staleness infect Thebes as divine punishment for his action. Oedipus' journey through *Oedipus Rex* as a hero is tragic, although he will later find redemption by bringing the Ultimate Boon to Athens in *Oedipus At Colonus*⁶.

I argue that Oedipus can be defined as a warrior-hero due to his action when meeting Laios on the road. Similar to other Greek warrior-heroes, Oedipus' act of

violence is mandated by a divine entity, in his case Apollo's Oracle. Œdipus recalls that the Oracle "[...] said that I would kill my own father" (Dee 37). Œdipus, horrified by the God of Truth's prophecy, attempts to bypass his divine mandate. Unlike Orestes, Œdipus attempts to escape the god's decree and protect the man he believes is his father by leaving his home, Corinth. In a true example of the Greek's definition of fate, Apollo does not decree what is desired, but what is inevitable.

I argue that Œdipus is a warrior-hero because he tells the story of his violent act himself. In his flight from Corinth, the protagonist unintentionally fulfills his own destiny. This encounter, in which Œdipus kills his true father, the King of Thebes, is communicated as exposition and takes place prior to the staged action. The king relates his journey to the citizens of Thebes and tells them that after attending the Delphic Oracle and learning of his patricidal destiny,

I heard all this, and fled. And from that day

Corinth to me was only in the stars

[...]

There were three highways

Coming together at a place I passed;

And there a herald came towards me, and a chariot

Drawn by horses, with a man such as you describe

Seated in it. The groom leading the horses

Forced me off the road at his lord's command. (Fitts 43)

Œdipus tells his own story and in doing so focuses the audience's attention on his violent action. Unlike Orestes' act of violence—where the audience encounters the

hero before and after the deed—Œdipus' story is retold, having taken place before the dramatic action begins. However, the king's speech is not simply relaying the facts but a reliving of the crucial moment under more informed circumstances:

Swinging my club in this right hand I knocked him
 Out of his car, and he rolled on the ground. I killed him.
 I killed them all.
 Now, if that stranger and Laïos were—kin,
 Where is a man more miserable than I?
 [...]
 Think of it: I have touched you with these hands,
 These hands that killed your husband. What defilement! (Fitts 43)

This crucial event is different now: through Œdipus' re-telling the tale has become a new action, one which the King of Thebes experiences for the first time on stage. Œdipus' story is entirely different now because it includes the knowledge of his father's true identity—not Polybus, King of Corinth, as he believed, but Laïos, King of Thebes, the man he killed on the road. As much as the audience, the citizens of Thebes are now able to bear witness to the act of violence that both allows Œdipus to assume the warrior-hero role and dooms him. They are now directly affected by Œdipus' violent act and become targets of violence, as the death and folly of their kingly lineage displays its disastrous pattern. In killing Laïos, Œdipus unwittingly fulfills the Oracle' prophesy of patricide; he enables himself as the divine warrior-hero through reliving the incident with greater knowledge. Though his case is not imbued by voluntary action as that of Orestes⁷, Œdipus' lack of intent does not

hamper his ascent to heroic stature. In Greek Tragedy it is not heroic to make an informed decision freely. Instead, it is heroic to fulfill one's divine mission.

Of the three traditions being discussed, Greek Tragedy is the most spare when it comes to the actual dramatic representation of violence. Almost never is an act of physical violence carried out by the actors in view of the audience. There is incredibly little evidence of the kind of safely orchestrated combat as becomes common in later western traditions—no swordplay or spear duels despite the prominence of such events in Greek myths and epics. Instead, the warrior-hero's violent act takes place offstage: Orestes either cunningly assassinates Clytemnestra away from the audience's view or declares his intentions and leads her into the house. Ædipus lays the scene and proceeds to describe the encounter, going so far as to reference, and presumably indicate that with "[...] this right hand I knocked him [down]" (43). In a simple act of displaying his arm, the actor playing Ædipus brings the murder weapon onstage, recounting its use while never physically re-enacting the deed.

While combat is not directly used in performance, suicide appears in at least one occasion. In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the title character is unable to bear the shame of Athena's spell and buries his sword hilt in the ground. The sword was a gift of war, presented to him by the Trojan Hector, and with great ceremony Ajax throws himself upon it (Golder 732-8, 963-5). What else is clear about this action is that it must be partially hidden or obscured, as the actor playing Ajax could not actually impale himself. One translator notes that,

The actor playing Ajax would [...] have to take another part after this scene [...] Ajax's speech was almost certainly made on the *ekkyklēma* [a rolled cart], but there is no sure way of knowing whether he was wheeled off before or after killing himself (Dutta 63).

The Chorus enters immediately upon his death and is unable to locate their fallen leader until Tecmessa spots the body, which has likely remained onstage. It is clear that even this rare display of violence in Greek Tragedy has its limitations—the death is almost sacrificial in Ajax's manner and obscured in the act itself. While I recognize that the suicide may never have been witnessed by the original audience, it is necessary to identify the opportunity for observed violence, as presented in the surviving texts.

Despite the myths of bloody killings and plays that draw out the warrior-hero, very little violence takes place before the eyes of the audience. Staging the violence is ultimately unnecessary. The audience is already aware that Orestes will kill Clytemnestra, for as Green asserts, "The bulk of the audience knew the myths through hearing them in repeated poetry and to some extent seeing them on stage" (27). When telling the tale of warrior-heroes such as Orestes, Eteocles, or Hector to an audience for whom the oral tradition remains prominent, such as the ancient Greeks, the combat between two actors is superfluous—the playwright's words are all that is required.

Chapter 2: English Renaissance

Warrior-heroes on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages are decisive characters. As opposed to acting as divine instruments, the warrior-heroes of the English Renaissance are characters who fulfill their heroic qualities through self-actualization. These characters choose of their own volition to undergo their heroic trials instead of being forced through them. Renaissance warrior-heroes take it upon themselves to assume the heroic mantle—a choice borne of individual reason and will rather than out of fate from a divine decree.

The warrior-hero of the English Renaissance functions on the principle that the protagonist already has heroic potential. His journey is the pursuit of heroism rather than a heroic pursuit. The emphasis here is on the violent act's ability to transform protagonist into a warrior-hero rather than the heroic quality of the act itself. No longer are supernatural forces driving the character to extreme action, as in Greek Tragedy, but rather it is the character who chooses to assume the heroic mantle in order to confront his situation. The Renaissance warrior-hero is a hero by choice, not a "chosen one"—the choice for a warrior-hero being to pursue a specific violent action. In order to illustrate this thesis I have chosen to examine two well-known heroes of the English Renaissance stage: Shakespeare's Hamlet chooses to kill Claudius after a great deal of deliberation, and in the same author's *King Lear*, Edgar galvanizes his courage, challenging and killing the bastard Edmund.

Out of the three traditions I examine in this thesis only the English Renaissance pits the warrior-hero against equally powerful adversaries. These characters' violent acts are tests of mettle. This is different than the Greek warrior-

hero who has no difficulty committing the actual act; the Renaissance warrior-hero must overcome powerful opponents through determination and willpower. This pattern is similar to one proposed in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where the “[...] hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo” (Campbell 311). These characters are combating adversaries which they must slay so as to reinvigorate the world of the play and restore order. This tradition’s protagonist becomes the warrior-hero through his violent act, which clears the path for his society’s rebirth. The warrior-heroes of the English Renaissance each have one specific character that they must defeat through combat. I refer to this model as “dragon-slaying”. The warrior-heroes of the English Renaissance choose to fulfill their individual heroic potential by tearing down the corrupt powers around them, fighting and killing the “dragon”-characters of their respective plays.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and title character of the play, is introduced to the audience as an intellectual, rather than active, protagonist. He is, in fact, famously inactive and prone to eloquent speeches, as befitting his highly emphasized status as a student (I.ii.113). Hamlet constantly waits: his deliberation about whether or not to take any action fills the better part of the first three acts of the play. Yet despite his tendency to hesitate and analyze, the Prince of Denmark rises to become the very embodiment of the Renaissance warrior-hero. Hamlet’s own model revolves around thought—the byproduct of which shall eventually be his decision to pursue heroic action. As a warrior-hero, Hamlet’s decision is two-fold: first, upon seeing Claudius’

reaction to the “play-within-the-play”, “The Murder of Gonzago”, to kill the king, and second, to accept Laertes’ challenge to a duel.

At first, Hamlet decides to take revenge only after determining for sure that Claudius murdered King Hamlet. He initially swears vengeance after hearing the Ghost’s tale (I.v.109), but is unable to take action because he is unsure of the specter’s authenticity. As the Players arrive, Hamlet is filled with shame and declaims,

Yet I,
 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
 And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
 Upon whose property and most dear life
 A damn’d defeat was made. Am I a coward? (II.ii.576-81)

Hamlet has failed to take action, and lacks conviction to pursue his heroic course. His doubts, both in himself and in the Ghost’s authenticity, overcomplicate Hamlet’s thoughts to the point that he is unable to make a decision. Hamlet reaffirms his uncertainty by hinging his course on Claudius’ reaction to the Player’s performance (II.ii.609-10). It is only after the “play-within-a-play” scene that the Prince of Denmark believes he has proof of Claudius’ guilt. It is Ophelia’s simple remark, “The king rises” (III.ii.283), that enables Hamlet to finally take action. This clear and immediate choice to pursue violent action marks Hamlet’s transformation from reluctant Prince to potential warrior-hero. The title character no longer doubts that the

King is guilty of murder; thus, Hamlet will become a warrior-hero through a violent act of retribution.

Having remained inactive in the face of injustice until this moment, Hamlet has exhibited the “Refusal of the Call”⁸. However, with the newfound knowledge of Claudius’ guilt, the Prince is compelled; Hamlet decides to take action against the King—the “dragon” which he must slay—and restore righteousness to the throne. While there is an outside force driving Hamlet forward—in the form of his father’s ghost—he does not pursue his violent deed forthwith. The fact that the quest awaits is not reason enough—he must personally and independently come to the decision to proceed into heroism.

Having made his decision, Hamlet stands on the brink of becoming the Renaissance warrior-hero. Yet Hamlet fails. When the opportunity to kill Claudius arises, the Prince hesitates a final time, pondering the nature of the king’s soul:

[...] and am I, then, revenged,
 To take him in the purging of his soul,
 When he is fit and season’d for his passage?
 No.
 Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage;
 Or in th’incestuous pleasure of his bed;
 At gaming, swearing, or about some act
 That has no relish of salvation in’t—
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven. (III.iii.84-93)

Once again Hamlet finds reason to delay his course of action. His reasons may be sensible, but the potential warrior-hero has once again shown a lack of commitment. His decision to kill Claudius remains intellectual—Hamlet knows that he must do it but has not resolved to perform the deed. However, Hamlet receives a second chance to prove his mettle. When the Ghost reminds Hamlet that he has turned away from his heroic path, Hamlet rashly thrashes out and kills the hiding Polonius, whom he believes to be Claudius (III.iv.24-6). In doing so, the Prince conclusively shows that he is in possession of both necessary components of the warrior-hero: he has personally chosen to assume the heroic mantle and has demonstrated his physical ability and emotional willingness to pursue a violent course.

With all of the pieces poised to fall into place, Hamlet is finally able to emerge as the English Renaissance warrior-hero in his climactic duel with Laertes. Though Hamlet's intention is not quite as bloody as Laertes'—the Prince desires reconciliation while Laertes intends murder—the duel model remains a martial contest, a trial of physical combat that turns into a tragic bloodbath: Claudius' plotting causes both duelists and the queen to be poisoned. Hamlet enacts his violent deed when Laertes reveals the King's treachery. The Prince wastes no time rushing to the throne to plunge his poisoned rapier into Claudius crying "The point envenom'd too!—/ Then, venom, to thy work. [*Stabs the King*]" (V.ii.320-1). All at once the Prince of Denmark emerges heroic as he slays the "dragon" usurper.

The second Renaissance warrior-hero I discuss here is Edgar, the trueborn son of Gloucester and Champion opposing the forces of Regan and Goneril. Edgar is introduced in *King Lear* as a distinctly non-heroic character. The beginning of the

play does not give a lengthy introduction for him, or remark that he is heroic in any manner. Only a few scant lines describe Edgar's legitimacy and age over Edmund. The audience sees very little of Edgar's mundane, pre-heroic state—similar to Hamlet's introduction as an established melancholic. Edgar's introduction is when he “Crosses the First Threshold”⁹ onto the heroic path, and yet he has no aspirations of apotheosis or defeating evil. Instead, he feels only anger at the scandal and fear of his father's men. In essence, Edgar begins his heroic journey without making the decision to become a hero. It is not until the transformation into his alter ego, “Poor Tom,” that Edgar first exhibits the capability of committing violence, and the seeds of the warrior-hero begin to grow.

Unlike Hamlet, Edgar progresses into the warrior-hero model unexpectedly rather than deliberately. In Act I, Edgar is betrayed by Edmund through deception; the Bastard warns Edgar of danger, cautioning him to go armed (I.ii.159-186). Some productions, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2007 production, have Edmund give Edgar a blade. The actor playing Edmund in this production, Philip Winchester, drew a knife from his boot and placed it in the actor playing Edgar's hand. Edgar was played by Ben Meyjes. No symbol could be as clear and appropriate for warrior-heroism as the blade. This staging choice creates a circle of action: Edmund, the “dragon”-character of *King Lear*, sends Edgar away with a blade. Edgar later returns, sword in hand, to kill his “dragon”—Edmund. With sword, dagger, or knife in hand Edgar moves from a mundane nobleman's life to the life of a young man on the cusp of his heroic journey.

In his transformation to Poor Tom, Edgar exhibits the ability to choose violent action. He speaks of rending his clothes and abusing himself into an appearance in more accord with hardship and beggary:

I will preserve myself, and am bethought
 To take the basest and most poorest shape
 That ever penury in contempt of man
 Brought near to beast. My face I'll grime with filth,
 Blanket my loins, elf all my hairs in knots,
 And with presented nakedness outface
 The winds and persecutions of the sky.
 The country gives me proof and precedent
 Of Bedlam beggars who with roaring voices
 Strike in their numbed and mortified arms
 Pins, wooden pricks, nails, [and] sprigs of rosemary. (II.iii.6-16)

This speech exhibits several of the qualities of the warrior-hero, with one exception: the “dragon” is not involved. Edgar does not come any closer to killing the “dragon” by desecrating his own flesh. This act is more in line with the trickster-hero than the warrior-hero because the violence serves to hide Edgar—it is inherently non-confrontational. He commits the violence against himself as a tactic to survive—it is a means, not an end. Out of desperation, he makes the choice to mutilate his own body, but has no notion or intention of avenging himself upon anyone. Rather than serving as a crucible from which the warrior-hero emerges, this violent act purifies Edgar by severing him from his non-heroic sense of self. Edgar’s recourse to violence

foreshadows his warrior-hero transformation. By displaying the willingness to desecrate his body, Edgar demonstrates awareness of two heroic aspects: warrior as well as trickster. By disguising himself, Edgar chooses to flee and evade his enemies, and by beating his body he chooses a violent method of ensuring his success. In essence, Edgar is pursuing the path of the trickster through the means of the warrior. Although this instance is not in line with the ideals of the warrior-hero, Edgar's familiarity with violence proves useful when he chooses to reveal himself.

As Poor Tom, Edgar is finally forced to acknowledge his warrior-hero potential when the herald Oswald happens by blind Gloucester in Act IV. Edgar's intervention is natural, with no deliberation halting his defense of his father. With this act, Edgar nearly fulfills the warrior-hero model, but although his actions are admirable, one facet remains lacking: Edgar has yet to choose to become heroic. Whereas he made a conscious choice to become Poor Tom and violated himself, here Edgar reacts instinctively and uses violence to resolve the situation. In defending Gloucester, Edgar may be said to act heroically without becoming a warrior-hero. Furthermore, the blind Gloucester does not yet know Edgar's identity (IV.vi.245). Shakespeare exposes Edgar's warrior-hero potential in the fight with Oswald through Edgar's willingness to kill, but the act is spontaneous and reactive rather than decided and pursued, and therefore does not meet all standards of the Renaissance warrior-hero model. This incident is akin to Edgar's prior self-violence in the fact that killing Oswald proves Edgar's heroic potential. Edgar acts heroically, but these acts do not make him a warrior-hero.

Edgar's actual decision to pursue the warrior-hero's path does not occur until he reads Goneril's letter to Edmund, which is found on Oswald's person. The protagonist has been unable to make his choice to become a warrior-hero because he did not know about the Bastard's treachery despite traveling with Gloucester. Once blind, Gloucester's text expresses the character's desire to reconcile with his estranged son, Edgar—he does not mention Edmund's hand in causing his exile. Lear, however, bemoans that “[...] Gloucester's bastard son was kinder to his father than my daughters got 'tween lawful sheets” (IV.vi.133-34). Although Edgar is present to overhear this, Lear's words are vague and unspecific. It is only with full knowledge of Edmund's involvement between the armies of France and England that Edgar can become a warrior-hero. Again adopting trickster qualities, he prepares himself as a beggar to deliver his letter to Albany, telling the lord that,

If [Edmund's forces] have victory, let the trumpet sound
 For him that brought it. Wretched though I seem,
 I can produce a champion that will prove
 What is avouchèd there. If you miscarry,
 Your business of the world hath so an end,
 And machinations ceases. Fortune [love] you. (V.i.47-52)

Edgar chooses to become a warrior-hero and prepares the challenge. He appears fully armed to the blaze of trumpets, the last bastion for the forces loyal to Lear and familial morality. The duel is fierce and contains no breaks for dialogue, and ultimately Edmund falls (V.iii.179-80). Edgar has chosen to rise into the status of a

warrior-hero by issuing his challenge and fulfills the model by slaying Edmund, the “dragon”-character of the play.

The violence that occurs onstage represents the self-test: for warrior-heroes it is the crucible that allows the transformation into the heroic persona. After making his decision and preparing for combat the potential hero must put his test to the world. This violent action does not need to be the character’s first moment of combat, as in the case of Edgar and Oswald. The necessary distinction is that the crucible-violence must be voluntary—that is to say, not reactionary—and be aimed at the play’s “dragon”-character. The warrior-hero of the English Renaissance stage is not guaranteed victory like warrior-heroes of Greek Tragedy or Kabuki and Bunraku. He is alone in his trial—there is no god empowering him. This final test places the warrior-hero in physical conflict his equal. It is the culmination of the warrior-hero’s gambit, when everything is quite literally life-or-death.

For the audience, the test of combat pits the subject against his physical foil. Most often this is the “dragon”-character, as in the case of Edgar and Edmund, or Hal and Hotspur of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part I*; other times, though, this may be the character most closely matched to the warrior-hero’s skills, as occurs with Hamlet and Laertes in *Hamlet*. In performance, the tension created by their physical equality fulfills two key functions. First, the practicality of dueling onstage: a single fight between two actors is much easier to follow than a broad melee, and thus it is easier for the audience to be invested in its outcome. While a large-scale battle is spectacular, single-combat emphasizes the relationship between two competing forces over the chaos of fighting. Second, the duel between two physically similar characters

symbolizes the triumph of heroism over revenge, greed, etc. put into raw physical expression. The pursuit of physical becomes the plays climax because the characters involved have no alternative left to them. Storytelling conventions traditionally imply that the hero can fight lesser characters with relative assurance of victory—Oswald poses no threat to Edgar, despite being better armed. It is the “dragon”-character that is dangerous. The duel between Hamlet and Laertes is compelling because Laertes is an excellent fencer. The King wagers that Hamlet will compete so well that Laertes will defeat him by a margin of three or less, showing that everyone is sure Hamlet will be beaten (V.ii.164-6). Even Horatio, Hamlet’s greatest supporter, expresses doubts that Hamlet can do even this much, while Hamlet asserts that he “[...] shall win at the odds” (V.ii.209-210). This provides the audience with the most exciting visual display as well as the highest stakes that the heroic character must overcome.

Chapter 3: Japanese Bunraku & Kabuki

Warriors in Japanese Kabuki and Bunraku theatre use violence to prove their devotion to *bushido* and earn heroic status. Once again, an act of violence serves as the catalyst for the emergence of the warrior-hero. However, unlike in the plays of Ancient Greece or Renaissance England, the driving force for Bunraku and Kabuki warrior-heroes is social obligation rather than a divine mandate or personal choice. The term *samurai*, the socio-political position of warrior-heroes in Japanese theatre, translates as “those who serve”, and these characters pursue their heroic path in service to their lords and social codes.

I argue that *bushido*, “the way of the warrior”, is the primary source of the Kabuki and Bunraku warrior-hero’s dedication to loyalty and ethos. This codified set of ethics emerged at the dawn of the Edo period, after the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa family in 1600. This era of peace forced the professional warriors of that time, collectively referred to as *bushi*, to adapt to a new social order that no longer required their services as combatants (Totman 225). This shift displaced the samurai into clerical and administrative positions as a means of maintaining their social superiority, but in doing so provided them no means of executing their military faculties. *Bushido*, an extensive system of idealized relationships, duties, and privileges, provided the samurai with a defined method of asserting new, peacetime values that they could claim as their own.

The Kabuki and Bunraku warrior-hero’s motivation for heroism is *bushido* and its idealized loyalty and emphasis on decorum. It is the need to fulfill this social pact that drives the warrior-hero’s violent act. While *bushido* calls for the samurai’s

loyalty to be directed toward his master, I argue that the warrior-hero, as a dramatic figure, is more interested in proving his devotion to upholding the *bushido* code than being loyal to any one person. The warrior-hero pursues a path of violent actions influenced by the standards of *bushido* in order to demonstrate and prove his loyalty.

The *Kanadehon Chūshingura*, or *The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*, is based on an historical incident that occurred in the Akō province of Japan in 1703. Donald Keene summarizes the event:

[...] Forty-six former retainers of the late Lord Asano Naganori of Akō burst into the mansion of Lord Kira Yoshinaka in Edo and killed him. They immediately carried his head to [...] the Buddhist temple where Asano was buried, and offered it before his grave. With this act their vendetta was completed. (Keene 1)

The event very quickly became popularized and has been retold in many different plays¹⁰. The story of the *Loyal Retainers* is the fictionalized tale of forty-six (or perhaps forty-seven) *rōnin* and their year-long quest for vengeance for the unjust execution of their master¹¹. This version of *Chūshingura* was originally written in 1748 by Takeda Izumo, Miyoshi Shōraku, and Namiki Senryū for the Bunraku puppet theatre and was translated by Donald Keene. It is one of the oldest and most complete versions of the narrative. Despite its puppet origins, the play was quickly adapted for the Kabuki stage and is one of the most famous *gidayū kyōgen*¹² (Inoura 205).

The *Treasury* has many heroic characters that hold a variety of positions within the samurai hierarchy. I will be looking at two of these characters: Kampei, a young and virtuous retainer who redeems himself, and Yuranosuke, a loyal, high-

ranking samurai who leads the retainers on their quest for vengeance. Both of these characters exhibit warrior-hero attributes despite their differing positions within samurai hierarchy and consistency of virtue.

The first warrior-hero I examine is Hayano Kampei, a disgraced samurai who performs two acts of heroic violence. I argue, however, that Kampei does not become a warrior-hero until his second violent act—committing suicide. His position at the beginning of the narrative is as a low-ranking but well-respected retainer to Enya Hangan. His family “[...] has served Enya’s for many generations” (Keene 52), already implying a deep-seeded loyalty in Kampei’s blood. His devotion is exemplified through both of his violent acts: fending off the thug Bannai and his gang, and later by his violent suicide.

The fight with Bannai clearly establishes Kampei’s martial prowess but does not transform him into a warrior-hero. Having been locked out of the castle when his master attacked Lord Moronao, Kampei bangs at the gates and demands entrance. He had been distracted by the lovely Okaru, and was pursuing personal amours instead of tending to his lord. Bannai, a retainer of Hangan’s nemesis Moronao, arrives with four samurai and attempts to arrest Kampei declaring that “We’re going to take you back and torture you to death!” (63). Such an exaggerated show of force indicates Bannai’s fear of Kampei as an opponent. Bannai gives no reason as to why he brings so many men—the audience is left to assume that he either believes Kampei to be far stronger than him or that he intends to vastly overpower the young retainer. Both reasons hint at Bannai’s underlying fear—fighting Kampei alone would be a fatal mistake. When they attack, Kampei justifies Bannai’s fear—Kampei’s

swordsmanship is impeccable, and he fights off all four of Bannai's thugs with no trouble. Bannai rushes into the melee but is easily overpowered by Kampei, who hurls him to the ground and threatens to kill him (63-4). Kampei's fight with Bannai outside the gates does not serve to initiate him into the warrior-hero model; his actions are defensive instead of intentional, similar to Edgar's confrontation with Oswald. Kampei is not acting in order to prove his loyalty to Hangan and is therefore not yet a warrior-hero. Instead, the encounter allows Kampei to display his martial prowess—gained through morality and propriety—as a means of indicating his heroic potential to the audience.

The skirmish at the gates demonstrates how a character's morality and sense of propriety determines his capability in combat in Kabuki and Bunraku theatre. Kampei is virtuous and decorous, and therefore martially skilled; Bannai is vulgar, and therefore martially inept. The audience sees the difference between the hero and his assailant even before the fight begins: Bannai has been trying to seduce Okaru, Kampei's beloved, and just prior to the fight failed at becoming intimate with her (54). His behavior is buffoonish and crass: Bannai lures Kampei away with a fake summons and immediately begins to take liberties with Okaru. His behavior is inexcusable for a retainer "[...] from a household famed for its decorum" (54), and the virtuous Okaru shuns his advances. The morally proper Kampei, who has earned the love of Okaru, easily defeats Bannai as well as his thugs. Both samurai are loyal to their masters, but Kampei's sense of morality and etiquette extends outside of his professional relationship while Bannai's does not.

Hayano Kampei's second act of violence is his hasty suicide, which proves his devotion to duty. Two of Kampei's fellow *rōnin* arrive and Kampei offers them a purse of money as a means of repentance. The loyal retainers are collecting funds under the pretense of building a monument to Hangan's memory; they do not tell Kampei that their true goal is to kill Ko no Moronao. Kampei hopes that by helping financially he will be forgiven by Yuranosuke for not being with Hangan when the lord was arrested. The *rōnin* return after consulting with the other retainers and deliver Yuranosuke's message: "It would not please [Hangan's] spirit if we paid for the monument with money taken from a man who had proved disloyal and faithless" (97-8). The purse of money, whose seal has not been broken, is instantly recognized by Okaru's mother, who accuses Kampei of killing his father-in-law. The two *rōnin* are enraged and demean Kampei for such a terrible act. Horrified at the thought of accidentally killing his father-in-law and offering tainted gold, Kampei immediately "[...] slips his kimono from his shoulders, draws his dagger, and instantly plunges it into his abdomen" (99), mortally wounding himself. An inspection of the father's body causes all to realize that he was killed by a sword and not Kampei's gun, but at this point Kampei has only minutes to live. Impressed by Kampei's uninhibited display of devotion to the ideals of *bushido*, the *rōnin* reveal the true nature of their league—to kill Moronao and avenge Hangan. They ask Kampei to add his name to the list and become the 46th loyal retainer. By committing *seppuku* Kampei demonstrates that death is preferable to a dishonorable life.

Kampei's heroic qualities—propriety, morality, and loyalty—drive these two violent acts. Despite his shameful circumstances—not being at his master's side when

he was most needed—his display of martial prowess reinforces his moral correctness in the eyes of the spectator. Kampei’s duty to Hangan extends beyond his master’s death because it is the principle of duty that drives the samurai towards heroic deeds. If Kampei was loyal to Hangan on only an interpersonal level his loyalty would have dissolved upon Hangan’s death. The warrior-hero’s sense of loyalty is not simply temporal. Furthermore, Kampei’s suicide is his apotheosis: he refutes death, claiming, “My soul shall stay on earth and go with you when you attack [Moronao]” (102). Hayano Kampei willingly gives his life as the cost of proving his loyalty to the memory of Hangan and his duties as a samurai. In doing so, Kampei fulfills the Kabuki and Bunraku warrior-hero model through devotion to the ideal of duty expressed through an act of violence.

The second warrior-hero of *Chūshingura* is Ōboshi Yuranosuke, Enya Hangan’s chief retainer. Yuranosuke is almost entirely absent at the beginning of the play, although he is referenced in order to provide his son Rikiya with an outstanding pedigree (41). He is a samurai of high esteem and quality, and while not a *daimyo* (vassal lord) in his own right, Yuranosuke is a powerful administrator. Herwig comments in *Heroes of the Kabuki Stage* that some versions of the play portray Yuranosuke as a father-figure to Hangan (185), adding another layer of loyalty and trustworthiness to the character. Yuranosuke’s path towards becoming a warrior-hero is very carefully planned. Unlike Kampei, who fights when cornered and dies impulsively, Yuranosuke prepares his violence while avoiding all intervening obstacles. His loyalty and devotion to Hangan are unquestionable—every action he takes onstage furthers his goal of revenge in some manner.

Yuranosuke's absence in the beginning of the play makes his entrance in the fourth act incredibly powerful—he arrives immediately after Hangan, who has been waiting for Yuranosuke's arrival, commits *seppuku*, the ritual suicide of the samurai caste (71). Once he appears, Yuranosuke immediately begins his journey to become a warrior-hero founded on his devotion to the *bushido* relationship between *daimyo* and vassal. He comes to his master's aid as soon as he finds out about the trouble with Lord Moronao and arrives just in time to receive his final command: "Yuranosuke, I leave you this dagger as a memento of me. Avenge me!" (71). In a sign of respect and loyalty, Yuranosuke takes the dagger stained with his master's blood and touches it to his forehead. The Narrator articulates the intentions of Yuranosuke's gesture, saying "At this moment there takes root within Ōboshi [Yuranosuke] that noble purpose which will give him a name for loyalty and rectitude to resound through all the ages" (72). Hangan dies, leaving his vassals with next to nothing. As they go their separate ways, Ōboshi Yuranosuke immediately begins to plan the *rōnin*'s revenge.

After a year of planning and gathering resources, Yuranosuke and the other loyal retainers attack Lord Moronao's castle in the eleventh and final act. They strike at night using call-and-response passwords to communicate. After rigging a number of bamboo poles, the retainers throw the windows open and attack, surprising and overpowering the guards. Amidst the fighting, Yuranosuke directs the warriors from a camp stool, leading the group like a general on the battlefield. He commands his fellow *rōnin*, "Kill Moronao! Pay no attention to anyone else" (174). The target of their revenge is one man, and not to sow widespread death and destruction. Yuranosuke also replies to the shouts of the castle retainers, saying, "We have no

quarrel with Takauji or his brother. Nor do we bear any grudge against either Lord Nikki or Lord Ishidō, so we promise to do nothing irresponsible. I have ordered our men to take the strictest precautions against fire [...] We ask only that you peaceably refrain from interfering” (175). Thus, the revenge of the loyal retainers is honorable—only the specific household involved in the initial conflict is endangered for their actions.

Yuranosuke becomes a full warrior-hero by beheading the man responsible for Enya Hangan’s death. Yuranosuke does not fight in the melee, as noted above, but rather than detract from his warrior-hero aspirations his patience focuses his intentions towards the specific act: Yuranosuke is saving his sword for Moronao. The castle is captured and their enemy, who has been hiding in a woodshed, is dragged before Yuranosuke, who declares that they must not simply execute him, because, “After all, he served for a time as a high officer of the government. The proper decorum must be observed even when killing him” (176). Moronao’s position still elicits respect from his executioners. Their duty is not to kill the enemy in rage, but to kill him in accordance with the ideals of *bushido*. Yuranosuke goes so far as to sit his enemy down, explain the situation, and “[...] beg you to forgive this gross discourtesy,” (176) while asking Moronao to die nobly without further clash of arms. “Moronao, master of deceit that he is,” pretends to humbly accept his fate, only to draw his sword and slash at Yuranosuke (176-7). Hangan’s chief retainer easily defends himself and subdues his enemy, crying “[...] now is the moment to satisfy our long-accumulated hatred!” (177) while fatally stabbing Lord Moronao with Enya

Hangan's blood-stained dagger. Yuranosuke establishes himself as the warrior-hero with a single thrust, killing his enemy and loyally avenging his master.

The Japanese warrior-hero is an honorable samurai and an excellent swordsman. The protagonist is driven to use violence to execute his obligations, particularly the duty of expressing loyalty. The violent episodes punctuate his heroic journey. It is because of his virtue that the warrior-hero's power is so great: enemies must swarm them in great numbers or resort to other dishonorable tactics in order to gain equal footing in battle. The forty-five living loyal retainers of *Chūshingura* attack a castle with hundreds of guards, but their virtue and honor convinces many potential enemies to stand aside while they effortlessly defeat the troops of Lord Moronao. The loyal retainers' enemies do not stand a chance—their numbers dwindle as other vassal lords pledge to not impede the loyal retainers' vendetta. Kampei, although outnumbered, easily defeats Bannai and his thugs because of his superior morality and propriety. Yuranosuke vows to observe all of the proper rights when killing Moronao, but the treacherous lord launches a sneak attack. Yuranosuke is never in danger because he is a superior samurai—his dedication to *bushido* ideals and his loyalty to Hangan ensure that he will effortlessly evade Moronao's thrust. The warrior-hero's morality, loyalty, and propriety enable him as a superior combatant, which manifests as an impressive display of premium martial capability.

The physical representation of violence in Japanese Edo-period theatre is determined by the theatre's form. Violence in the Bunraku puppet tradition has the capability of being very graphic in its violence because of the puppets themselves. The puppets can be crafted to perform any number of brutal actions, including

stabbing and beheading (Keene 84-5, 177). Fight scenes in Kabuki Theatre, however, are limited to the physical capabilities of actors. Although I acknowledge that violence in the Bunraku theatre is very intricate and detailed, I will limit my analysis to violence in the Kabuki theatre because of my personal experience with stage combat. Given the physical reality of the theatre, combat in the Kabuki tradition incorporates a wide number of codified *kata* (set forms) as a means of training. These patterns are transmitted along the acting lineages once an actor “[...] creates an appropriate interpretation of the spirit of the play and his role in it” (Leiter 178). Though *kata* exist for all manner of acting on the Kabuki stage, the most easily recognizable are the *tachimawari*, or fight scenes.

The choreography is highly specific and can range from the measured imitation of realistic swordplay to a more stylized combative dance. *Tachimawari* usually involve one hero, though he may fight hordes of lesser men. Herwig notes that: “The hero always remains well composed. Without weapon or body contact, he easily fends off his assailants with graceful slow-motion movements of arms and legs” (49). The Kabuki warrior-hero is so powerful that he can use anything as a weapon—the traditional katana of the samurai are favored, but “[...] poles, water buckets, and even flowering branches may be used as weapons”. While never reaching the level of realism that the English Renaissance stage takes with combat, violence in Kabuki displays great versatility of storytelling—the fight can take place as a component in the scene or become a separate mode of storytelling by itself.

One of the most celebrated *tachimawari* of the Kabuki repertoire takes place in a portion of *Ukiyozuka Hiyoku no Inazuma* known as *The Execution Ground at*

Suzugamori (Brandon 102-117). The fight takes place at night and shifts between the heroic swordplay of Gonpachi and the comic blunders of the bandits attacking him. This fight uses *kata* based on actual swordplay as well as a comic acrobatics and dance to highlight the difference between the heroic Gonpachi and his foolish assailants. The use of props is extensive: in addition to Gonpachi's sword, sticks, trick masks, and a straw hat are used, as well as a variety of severed body parts, including a "[...] severed leg, which hops along after [a Robber]"(112-13). At one point the hero leaves the stage, and three of his enemies "[...] perform a comic dance". They foolishly grope and dance about the stage, tripping each other with a branch until they all bump heads and fall to their knees. Contrasting the comedy of the robbers is the hero, who defeats each of them in turn with a single, effortless slash of his sword. Once again, the hero's martial supremacy easily dispatches all challengers.

Movement is often set to drummed rhythms and emphasized by the striking of *tsuke* (wooden clappers striking a board) to accentuate *mie*, "A picturesque or striking pose [...] at a climactic moment in a play in order to make a powerful impression on the audience" (Leiter 232). The qualities of the violence performed in these stage pictures are highlighted by *mie*. The heroic youth Gonpachi mounts a plinth after killing a Robber, physically placing him above his enemies' bodies (Brandon 112). The three courier's comic "[...] hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil" pose appears even more foolish with Gonpachi triumphantly brandishing his sword behind them (113). Gorozō's brutal killing of the courtesan Ōshū in *Gorozō the Gallant* is "[...] a grotesque parody of a love scene" (Brandon 316), adding weight to her murder. The *mie* reinforce the story of the violence through pictures while pausing the story of the

fight. This change of tempo decreases realism of the physical display but allows for a great deal of expression and specificity in telling the story.

Conclusion

Warrior-heroes exist as paragons of protagonists who are physically powerful. Though their stories may be complex, the underlying pattern is simple: the warrior-hero is motivated to leave the pre-heroic state, and does so through an act of violence. Each of the three theatre traditions I considered uses the warrior-hero model to highlight an extra facet of heroism. The heroes of Greek Tragedy kill as mandated by divine prophesy—they are the servants of the gods, justly killing without becoming murderers. Protagonists of the English Renaissance stage spur themselves towards violent confrontation through definitive personal choice. The virtuous Kabuki and Bunraku samurai fights and dies in order to prove his devotion to and even embody the ideals of loyalty and decorum. I have focused on how the warrior-hero model was represented in different cultures to demonstrate its universality—the warrior-hero appears in all dramatic traditions that incorporate heroes and violence.

All three traditions that I have examined use the warrior-hero model to emphasize the deadly seriousness of their respective dramatic worlds. The worlds of these play is never light-hearted, and the warrior-hero's pursuit is bloody and deadly. The warrior-hero's solemn purpose is to kill his adversary. His confrontational, definitive act destroys his opponent while severing his pre-heroic self. The athletic actions of the warrior-hero endow the performance with the physical qualities of the real world. The audience understands the deadly action, often despite the fact that violence takes place offstage. By employing physically active heroes, these theatre traditions create a dramatic world that is linked to the mundane world.

Although this thesis examined the warrior-hero in historical theatre traditions, I do not believe this model to be an outdated phenomenon. Plays with warrior-heroes, particularly the ones examined in this thesis, continue to be performed: the American Repertory Theatre produced *The Libation Bearers* in 1994, with Thomas Derrah playing Orestes, and, as already mentioned, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced a critically acclaimed performance of *King Lear* in 2007. There are many reasons for performing non-contemporary plays—to maintain public awareness of old plays or to adapt a canonical work to raise the audience's awareness of modern social and political circumstances, for example. However, although I recognize it would be naïve to suggest that the warrior-hero's presence is the sole reason for success, I believe that the impact of the warrior-hero model is an important factor in making such plays accessible to modern audiences.

The fact that plays featuring warrior-heroes are produced today is evidence of the warrior-hero's unique place in theatre. The warrior-hero's violent actions have the capacity to engage with a modern audience on an intuitive level. Seeing physical violence played onstage can elicit a kinesthetic reaction from the spectator. The audience member who is drawn into the violence has no choice but to acknowledge the pain inflicted upon the characters. This makes the warrior-hero appear even stronger for accepting his wounds and continuing to fight. It does not matter that the spectator is aware of the artifice of stage combat—so long as the performance is engrossing, the audience accepts the action as being real within the world of the play.

This empathetic relationship between spectator and warrior-hero is dependant on the actor's energetic strength and precision. The quickness and skill of swordplay,

wrestling, of any other form of violence onstage easily overshadow the violence of most productions featuring firearms. The impossible-to-see trajectory of guns, coupled with the audience's knowledge that the bullets are fake, immediately disconnect the audience from the violence presented onstage. The modern spectator is likely to be more familiar with handguns and rifles than with swords and axes. Despite this obstacle, the intense interpersonal relationship of the historical warrior-hero's melee combat, combined with the precision and skill of the actor, allows the modern audience to understand and invest in swordfights and the like with greater ease than gunfights.

I explored the storytelling aspect of the warrior-hero in my performance, *Have at You Now: An Examination of Violent Encounters*, which played at Wesleyan University, March 26th-28th, 2009. I choreographed fights for scenes in which various warrior-heroes commit their violent acts. My actors performed two of the critical scenes discussed in this thesis—Orestes announcing the death of Clytemnestra (*The Libation Bearers*), and the duel between Edgar and Edmund (*King Lear*). Additionally, I choreographed fight scenes for non-warrior-heroes. While the warrior-hero consistently fights and kills by definition, not all characters that fight and/or kill are automatically warrior-heroes. By choreographing a wide range of scenes, I was able to bring into focus the differences between warrior-heroes, like Edgar, and non-warrior-heroes that fight, such as Viola. The inherent dramatic difference between these kinds of conflicts added an easily recognizable difference between mundane fighting onstage and the warrior-heroes' violent acts and narratives.

The warrior-hero onstage continues to be an active component of theatre today. Whether it appears through performances of plays from the past, or arises in new works, the warrior-hero model is a recurring narrative that modern audiences can instantly understand. It is my fear that the twentieth and twenty-first century theories that violent images are instructional will prohibit the full exploration of the warrior-hero model in the future. It is necessary to remember that the warrior-hero is a character driven to engage in violence only by an extreme cause. If the spectacle of violence onstage functions purely to instruct the *means* of inflicting violence rather than asking *when* violence is the appropriate and necessary action, then the failing lies not with the warrior-hero model but with the carelessness of the production. When the warrior-hero fights, kills, and dies onstage the actor must be at his best—both physically, as a combatant appropriate to the style of production, and intellectually, giving appropriate justification and thought to the violence he displays.

Notes

1. Campbell attributes the actual term “monomyth” to James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, Inc., 1939), p. 581
2. The six potential components of the Initiation, for example, are The Road of Trials, The Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, and the Ultimate Boon (Campbell vii-viii).
3. As described in Aeschylus’ *The Eumenides*, lines 850-69.
4. The Chorus of the first play of Aeschylus’ trilogy, *Agamemnon*, declare that Zeus is the “[...] god of guest-friends” (Green 64).
5. Meineck notes that “There was a tradition in art and myth that Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon with a large, double-headed sacrificial axe” (105).
6. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Scene III, the fallen king promises Theseus, King of Athens, a great gift for his land in exchange for support and protection from his sons and uncle.
7. It should be noted, however, that Orestes mentions divine punishment if he fails to take action, whereas Œdipus says nothing of this kind from his oracular prophesy.
8. “Refusal of the Call” is the second codified portion of the Departure phase in Campbell’s description of the monomyth. When the hero refuses the call, he “[...] converts the adventure into its negative [...] and becomes a victim to be saved” (Campbell 54).
9. “The Crossing of the First Threshold” is the fourth portion of the Departure phase in Campbell’s work. This signifies the hero’s movement out of their

familiar environment and into the “[...] darkness, the unknown, and danger” (Campbell 71).

10. There is mention of an earlier version being staged, entitled *Akebono Soga No Youchi*, a mere twelve days after deaths of the samurai on which the story is based. It was banned after three performances and the majority of versions in subsequent years take their cue from the puppet play of 1748. The oldest surviving dramatization of the incident is *Goban Taiheiki*, written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon in 1706, and though there are many important similarities between *Goban Taiheiki* and the *Chūshingura*, it is much shorter and much less detailed. Keene notes that the *Goban Taiheiki* “[...] provided the core of the later work” (Keene 6).
11. Donald Keene correctly points out that the Narrator reads the list of retainers attacking Moronao’s castle “[...] the names of only forty-five men are listed [...] Even adding the name of the dead Hayano Kampei, there is still one short of the forty-seven required” (172). The discrepancy is likely related to the name of play: *Kanadehon* means “[...] ‘a copybook of *kana*’, a penmanship book for writing the forty-seven symbols making up the Japanese syllabary” (xi). Keene suggests that the forty-seventh name might be Gihei, a merchant who appears in act ten and proves his worth despite not being a samurai. Choosing Gihei, the noble merchant who adopts samurai honor, to be included as the forty-seventh “loyal retainer” would likely be considered complimentary to the merchant-class audience for whom the play was originally staged.

12. “Plays written for the puppet theatre with a *gidayū bushi* style of chanting that have been adapted for Kabuki” (Leiter 93). The relationship between Kabuki and Bunraku is well established by scholars of their respective traditions. Yoshinobu Inoura writes that in the mid-eighteenth century “[...] Kabuki was subordinate to Bunraku, which was at its peak (masterpieces such as *Chūshingura* were being performed by the puppets). [...] The composed drama and production of Bunraku, as well as its musicality, were fully absorbed by Kabuki, which was fortified by the creation [...] of *gidayū kyōgen*” (219). Also, it should be noted that the use of *bushi* in this term is different than the *bushi* in *bushido*, which means “warrior”.

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