

YOU ARE NOT ALONE ACROSS TIME

Using Sophocles to treat PTSD

By Wyatt Mason

With its winding lanes and stands of cherry trees, Camp Zama, a U.S. Army base twenty-five miles outside Tokyo, feels more like a meditation retreat than a military facility. Until it was seized by the First Cavalry in September 1945, Zama was the West Point of the Imperial Japanese Army. Through the decades, the forest has been pushed back to accommodate a larger airstrip, a fire has taken out the old Japanese barracks, and most of the camp's remaining structures have been replaced with drab buildings set discreetly into the lush green prettiness. One structure from the Imperial era remains: a large theater. Its exterior is plain but grand; its cavernous interior is decorated like a wedding cake, white with yellow piping. The charm of the building is difficult to reconcile with what happened outside its walls, in 1945.

Wyatt Mason is a contributing editor of Harper's Magazine. He teaches at Bard College and, through the Bard Prison Initiative, at Eastern Correctional Facility.



When the few Japanese soldiers left at Zama learned of their country's surrender, some drew swords, cried, "Long live the emperor!" and stabbed one another to death or committed hara-kiri.

Early one clear morning in September 2012, this former Imperial theater was again filled with anguished cries, though there was no violence. Five

young actors, members of an unusual theater company called Outside the Wire, had flown in from New York City and been delivered bleary-eyed by Army escort through Tokyo sunset traffic to the base late the previous night. They had come to perform in an ongoing project called Theater of War. First funded by the Pentagon in 2009 to the strategically modest tune of \$3.7 million, Theater of War has staged more than 250 shows for 50,000 military personnel on bases from Guantánamo Bay to Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. In front of a full house of soldiers on Zama, the actors performed an ancient Greek play about war's costs—Sophocles' *Ajax*. In Zama's audience were many soldiers who had seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan on multiple deployments; many were still dealing with battle trauma and post-traumatic stress. The play that would unfold before them tells of a soldier's march toward madness and suicide—a

warrior falling onto his own sword. The audience understood the connection implicitly. Suicides by U.S. soldiers are at unprecedented levels: nearly one a day among active-duty personnel and one an hour among veterans—some 8,000 last year. As Zama's base commander, Colonel Vivian T. Hutson, told the crowd that spilled onto the theater floor, the play would address how "eleven years of continuous war" had left a legacy of "stress, sacrifice, and separation" on the nation's soldiers.

Despite Colonel Hutson's assurances that what would follow would be "gripping, emotional, and very effective," the soldiers on hand were not a vision of precurtain excitement. Some were already dozing; a few toward the rear quietly snored. The Army's weird, soon-to-be-phased-out pixilated camo blurred the room into one great body. As several soldiers had told me when we'd walked in, they'd been "voluntold" to attend this latest "stand-down"—a day when military business on bases around the world is halted to allow for presentations on hot-button topics: alcoholism, sexual health, suicide. Despite the novelty of the subject, the soldiers knew what they were in for: another well-intentioned but ham-handed attempt by the Army to edutain them on an issue getting bad civilian PR. Given what I'd witnessed earlier in the year, their collective pessimism was reasonable. I'd visited Marine Corps headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, during an alcohol stand-down, where, before the *Outside the Wire* performance began, 2,000 Marines sat through a PowerPoint slide show that had all the charm of an infomercial.

At Zama, it became rapidly clear that ancient Greek tragedy made for an improvement on bullet-pointed lists. Although the five actors sat side by side at a table in front of the stage in their street clothes throughout the performance—and although the "performance" turned out to be a table-read from bindered scripts—as soon as the actors began to deliver their lines, the energy in the room changed. Sleeping soldiers awoke. Others smiled unself-consciously. The actors—four men and one woman—weren't reading, not exact-



ly. It was more like they'd been chained to their chairs and were doing everything in their power to escape using words alone. Lines flew back and forth with mounting speed, each seeming to drive the next to a moment of greater desperation. From where I stood off to the side, I could see soldiers' faces registering the strangeness of this sudden tumult. I felt it, too. The actors' voices and their language seemed large, urgent. When the actor who occupied the table's central spot—the lone woman among them, her long blond hair regally braided—began to scream at the top of her lungs, the noise she made wasn't theatrical. If you were to hear it on the street, you would ei-

ther race toward it to help or run away from it to hide.

"Wretched!" she screamed. "I am wretched! Everything is lost."

We were at the point in the play where Ajax has killed himself, and his concubine, Tecmessa, has just found out. The hall of soldiers seemed to register each of her words like a blow.

One of the most celebrated Greek fighters of the Trojan War, Ajax was nicknamed the Shield. No enemy could get past him. But after nine years of active-duty combat on foreign soil, he'd lost his mind. Playing a soldier who had been in Ajax's battalion, one of the heretofore silent actors began to speak. You could see

whole rows of soldiers leaning forward now, elbows on knees, chins on balled fists.

“He has killed us with his death,” the man shouted, face reddening with feeling, the enormous room silent as he paused. “Where is he? Where is unbending Ajax whose name is now a sad song?”

The actors weren’t famous. They’d been on Broadway, in the odd commercial, in a guest spot on *Law & Order*. None had served in the military, but each was channeling grief and rage and loss that seemed pure. Certainly, the actors were capitalizing on the way the setting affected the material. And whoever cast them had a good eye and ear. But perhaps most unusual of all was the language in which they were delivering this ancient play: contemporary without being casual, emotional but not melodramatic.

Both the casting and the translation of the text were the work of Bryan Doerries, *Outside the Wire*’s thirty-eight-year-old cofounder and artistic director. Doerries was one of the five actors at the table in the Imperial theater that day; he tends to perform with his troupe but gives himself the fewest lines and sits at the table’s end. During the dozens of performances by his company I’ve attended over the past two years, Doerries has done as he did at Zama: as his actors went back and forth in rapid-fire dialogue, he rocked with manic energy in his seat. He chimed in now and then with one little part or another (the actors typically play multiple roles), almost always stepping on the end of another actor’s line—a deliberate tactic, a nip at the heels of the speaker. It had the effect of increasing the pace of all the actors, a way of directing them from inside the performance.

Part professor, part carnival barker, Doerries is a tireless evangelist for the Greeks and the gains that tragedy can provide to a community in pain. He studied Latin and Greek as an undergraduate, and since college he has been retranslating—in his spare time and initially only for himself—plays from the Greek canon as well as Latin plays by Seneca, tuning their language for modern performances that have found fans

in uncommon places. (Vintage will publish Doerries’s translations of Sophocles and Aeschylus next year as *All That You’ve Seen Here Is God*.)

“The ways we had been addressing post-traumatic stress disorder weren’t working,” Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton told me after an *Outside the Wire* performance in New York City. Sutton, who served in Iraq during the first Gulf War and was the highest-ranking psychiatrist in the Army at the time of her retirement, in 2010, was responsible for first bringing Doerries onto U.S. military bases. “Rather than trying to build out an additional layer of command bureaucracy,” she said, “we were trying to reach out to the wider world and integrate what *it* knew and what *we* knew. We’d learned that we could do everything right in conventional domains of recovery—training, education, medication—and newer modalities—yoga, meditation, Eastern approaches—and even make use of artificial intelligence from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. But beyond explicitly therapeutic approaches, we knew another vital role would be that of culture and the arts.”

After the show on Zama, Doerries walked me through the crowd that came to the front to talk to him and the other actors. Doerries took the hands of soldiers, listening intently to their stories. A retired lieutenant with deeply bagged eyes and a black bristle of mustache was brought to the performance that day by his wife, an active-duty colonel. Since he’d gotten back from his tours in Afghanistan, he had refused to get the help his wife said he needed. But he confessed he’d broken down while watching *Ajax* unfold.

“Because of you guys,” he told each of the actors afterward in an improbably explicit but nonetheless persuasive moment of frankness, “I’m going to seek help. I’ve been in denial for three years.”

Doerries also introduced me to Master Sergeant Chris Elliot, a Delta Force special-ops satellite engineer he had met the year before. Elliot had spent forty-two months in Iraq and Afghanistan over the course of eight deployments. Heavysset with a boyish face and the slicked hair of a

1940s movie star, Elliot said things had gotten “real raw over there.” He spoke of his wife of seventeen years, their two children, and the anger he began exhibiting once he had come back home. Small things made him crazy—a trash can that had been moved from where it was before he deployed. As he spoke, the fingers of his right hand fiddled with his wedding ring, spinning it as if trying to keep it screwed on.

“I lost combat friends,” he told me, “friends returning from combat who’ve committed suicide. Most people don’t realize that those wounds don’t heal in a year. A friend who was four years out stumbled. Couldn’t get his feet back under him.” A pause. “I’m combat wounded. I refused to say something was wrong with me. I wanted to see a scar. I wanted to see an X-ray. I didn’t want to believe that I, as a person, was wounded.”

I asked him what had changed.

He told me it was seeing *Ajax* last year. “The first thirty days after that performance ... it hurt. I just wasn’t right. Whatever that was ... catharsis.... People don’t understand. The Army uses the term ‘resilience’: we bounce back ...”

He spun his ring.

“... but even a ball, if you throw it, doesn’t bounce back all the way. I wasn’t the same guy. It was acknowledging that I wasn’t right. Looking in the mirror and realizing: That’s me?”

In the spring of 2013, Theater of War went to a shelter for homeless veterans in Queens for its 200th performance. “The thing that most people don’t know,” Doerries told me there, “is that Sophocles, this great artist, wasn’t only one of Athens’s most important dramatists. He was also a general in the Greek army. He was a soldier writing about soldiers for an audience that consisted almost entirely of soldiers.”

I looked out at the ragged assembly of veterans settling in on folding chairs beneath the fluorescent glow of the shelter’s multipurpose room. The plays of Sophocles were originally performed at the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. During Sophocles’ lifetime the theater

had room for about 6,000 people; later it was expanded to hold 17,000, roughly half the city's male citizens. Because military service was compulsory, all audience members would have been either active-duty or retired soldiers. Here in Queens, though, as Doerries shuttled about on the linoleum, greeting various city officials in attendance, expressing his gratitude to the shelter's director, I thought about other bits of information he'd been feeding me over the past few months. The best seats in the amphitheater in Athens, down in the front, would have been reserved for generals in command at the time. Only seven of what are understood to have been more than one hundred of Sophocles' plays have come down to us intact, and two of those—*Ajax* and *Philoctetes*—are explicitly about soldiers who, after years of combat, suffer grievous wounds that are not necessarily visible or easily understood. Doerries also stages *Philoctetes* for soldiers and veterans, rotating it in and out of performance. "It's about a much-decorated warrior," Doerries said, "who's abandoned for nine years on a desolate island by his own troops after contracting a mysterious illness from a 'wound that never heals.'"

Philoctetes was performed that day at the shelter with Reg E. Cathey (perhaps best known for his turn in *The Wire* as factotum to Mayor Tommy Carcetti) in the title role. He spent much of the play screaming, his deep voice beating at the walls of the small space like a bird wanting a window. Later Doerries speculated on what the play might have looked like in the Theater of Dionysus: "Imagine that. Half a city showing up to listen to a soldier scream in pain." Performances of the play can run as long as two hours; Doerries's version at the shelter was condensed to thirty minutes. Cathey, no more than a few yards from anyone in the room, was in such palpable agony I felt myself squirm, and guys in the back who'd been mumbling to one another were silenced by his screams.

Doerries founded what became *Outside the Wire* in 2009 with the lawyer and producer Phyllis Kaufman. Kaufman has helped Doerries expand the company's reach beyond the military. "We believe that these plays can help communities open up about suf-

fering that gets hidden from sight," Kaufman told me. They have piloted programs in maximum-security prisons, homeless shelters, and hospitals. A project called *End of Life*, featuring *Philoctetes* as well as Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, has been performed for doctors at Harvard Medical School, the Mayo Clinic, and various children's hospitals. Another project, called *Prometheus in Prison*, presents readings of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* to audiences of corrections officers, parole officers, social workers, and wardens. Some of their projects are now based around more contemporary texts—among them Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (performed by Dianne Wiest for an audience of 800 psychiatrists) and Conor McPherson's one-man *Rum and Vodka* (with Adam Driver of *Girls* as the alcoholic who has lost everything)—but most of the plays are from Greece and Rome, in Doerries's translations. The purpose of each project is the same: to reach communities where intense feelings have been suppressed, in hopes of bringing people closer to articulating their suffering.

Doerries grew up in Newport News, Virginia. He describes it as a working-class shipyard town surrounded on all sides by the military. His parents were carpetbaggers from the north, psychologists. His mother worked in the practical end of the field, counseling students with special needs at an elementary school and a high school and keeping a private practice. His father was an experimental psychologist and a follower of the behaviorist B. F. Skinner.

"We were never punished," Doerries, who has a younger brother who teaches music at Notre Dame, told me. "We were always positively reinforced. My parents never hit us. I don't think I was ever grounded. They believed that there's nothing more powerful than approval."

That approval was matched with a steadfast pessimism about human nature. "One of my father's theories that he took to the grave," Doerries said, "that he would constantly browbeat me about, invoking the Greeks and fate, was that, from his behaviorist perspective, there was no possi-

bility of meaningful change for human beings."

When Doerries was eight, a colleague of his father's from the community college, a German theater director (who, in Doerries's imitation, is somewhere between Erich von Stroheim and Gene Wilder, prone to ejaculations of "Now vee are cookink!"), needed to cast a few children in a production of Euripides' *Medea*. Doerries recalled with relish the line he got to deliver as one of Medea's sons, screaming it from offstage ("No, no, the sword is falling! Ahhhhhh!") as he and his brother were murdered by their mother.

At Kenyon College, he found a mentor in a retired religion professor named Eugen Kullmann. Doerries had been thriving in an intensive-Greek seminar, a class that met five days a week at eight A.M., taught by William McCulloh. Now he wanted to learn biblical Hebrew so he could read the Old Testament. Kullmann was said to know more than twenty languages and was a friend of Hermann Hesse's. After some initial resistance, Kullmann took Doerries on as an independent student. Doerries learned Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and German.

"What is the secret to the education of the human being, Dr. Bryan?" Doerries recalled Kullmann saying, imitating his midcentury German accent. "To give the human being that one little letter, the letter 'e' to make the human 'humane.'"

Doerries's senior thesis was a performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* based on his own translation. "Bryan put on the finest performance that I have ever seen of any ancient Greek drama," McCulloh told me by phone. "It was absolutely spectacular. It was on a hillside near the campus and in the forties every night. Bryan had blankets and coffee for everyone who attended. Three nights. Full crowd every night. I attended all three because it was so spectacular. Bryan's own translation. It was accurate. But he adapted it for maximum effectiveness."

Doerries's facility with translation is matched by an understanding of the pressures that performance places on a text. Consider Tecmessa's scream. The line has been translated variously as "Ah, me, ah, me!" "No! No!" and as the stage direction "*Off: short, sharp*

scream.” In Doerries’s text, we read a stage direction as well: “An inhuman cry.”

“The act of translation extends well past the page and into performance,” Doerries told me. “I see no difference between director and translator, for it’s in the staging of Tecmessa’s cry—the timing, intensity, duration, and pitch of the scream itself—that that translation occurs. When I work with an actress on this moment, I usually encourage her to surprise herself and the audience with the scream. I give her permission to sound horrifyingly ugly. And I challenge her to make the audience wish they never came. The result, if the actress is on her game, is a sound that travels straight from the lower depths of her throat directly into the audience member’s amygdala.”

At the end of his time at Kenyon, Doerries was put forward as the school’s candidate for a Rhodes Scholarship. He didn’t receive it. In retrospect, he has a sense why. The essay he wrote for it described his ambition to bring the classics to working-class people.

“It’s like saying, ‘I want to bring art to the proletariat!’” Doerries said, with a Russian accent. “It wasn’t well-formulated.” Doerries paused, serious now.

“I think at that time it was about entitlement. I *still* think that it’s about entitlement. Whose stories are these? To whom do they belong?”

Six months before traveling to Japan with Doerries, I met up with him and Kaufman in Hazard, Kentucky, as they debuted a new project. Pill mills—where unscrupulous doctors write prescriptions for drugs like oxycodone or hydrocodone—have proliferated in Kentucky, and the number of drug-overdose deaths in the state has quadrupled since 1999. Doerries chose *Bacchae* as his text.

The crowd that had gathered outside the Perry County Public Library auditorium (capacity: 200) seemed most excited about the prospect of seeing Jesse Eisenberg, who was acting alongside Adam Driver, Kathleen Chalfant, and Peter Francis James. A girl with wavy auburn hair wearing cutoff jeans rolled to mid-thigh fiddled with her charm brace-

let as she asked a friend if she’d seen Jesse yet. Behind her, one of two teens in matching T-shirts—THE COMMODORE PLAYERS ‘BREAK A LEG!’ NOT LITERALLY!—hadn’t seen him either . . . except in *Zombieland*, ha-ha, which was awesome!

As the auditorium began to fill, the actors took their seats at two banquet tables set end to end near the front of the stage. The kids who’d been abuzz outside filed into the front rows, murmuring and giggling, while families gathered at the rear. A representative from Operation UNITE (Unlawful Narcotics Investigations, Treatment, and Education), one of the regional sponsors of the event, related some statistics: although the United States was 3 percent of the world population, we consumed 97 percent of all hydrocodone; eighty-two Kentuckians died of overdoses every month; and over the first ninety days of 2012, five people a day were treated in Kentucky for opioid-related overdoses. Then Doerries picked up a wireless mic, fumbled with it momentarily, and, pacing the stage, began to speak.

He has done some version of the introduction that followed more than 300 times in the past five years. Of the actors who were there that day, Driver, who was a Marine before he went to Juilliard, had seen Doerries in this mode the most, having performed with the company since 2008. “The biggest change I’ve seen in Bryan during all this time,” Driver told me, “is that he’s more comfortable with the speech at the beginning. He’s done it so many times, and he’s figured out how to address the audience without condescension. He’s not some guy coming from New York to a community to tell them what it’s like in the military or whatever. He’s so good at keeping in contact with everyone, at starting the conversation.”

“There’s just one more thing you need to know,” Doerries said several times with a smile, feeding the crowd just enough information about the historical and dramatic context for the play. *Bacchae* tells the story of the coming of Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication, to Greece. When Dionysus arrives in the city of Thebes, he liberates the people from their homes, sending the

Turning Toward Home

REFLECTIONS ON THE FAMILY FROM HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Some of our most loving—and most difficult—relationships are with our parents, children, siblings, and extended families. These complicated relationships are the foundation of our society and our lives: they define our past, give us hope for the future, teach us to get along with others, and, often, provide excellent examples of how not to behave. The moving essays in *Turning Toward Home*, all of which were originally published in *Harper's Magazine*, gracefully explore these dynamics. Authors include David Mamet, Donna Tartt, Richard Ford, Sallie Tisdale, Louise Erdrich, and many more. Introduction by Verlyn Klinkenborg.

Order today through
store.harpers.org

Published by Franklin Square Press

ISBN 1-879957-08-6

Softcover \$14.95

FRANKLIN
SQUARE
PRESS



Distributed through
Midpoint Trade Books

citizens—including the king's mother—dancing and drinking into the hills. The young king, Pentheus, tries to subdue the revelry and restore order to his city, waging war against the god.

Over the next forty-five minutes, the actors sprinted through their lines, Doerries jabbing them along. He wants urgency in the delivery, for the exchanges of dialogue to feel not like tennis, he says, but ping-pong. No props, no scenery, no costumes, no stagecraft of any kind. And although I appreciate that you'll need to take this on faith, none of those absences were felt in that room. Eisenberg and Driver tore through their lines with pugilistic intensity. Eisenberg played Pentheus, bouncing up out of his seat and unspooling his lines in an I'm-much-smarter-than-you patter. Driver as Dionysus took on a fey lasciviousness that—given that Driver looks like he could kill Eisenberg with one punch—seemed like a lewd threat.

PENTHEUS: Do you dance at night or in the light of day?

DIONYSUS: At night, mostly. Darkness holds the most majesty.

PENTHEUS: Darkness is dangerous, and rotten for women.

DIONYSUS: You can find scandal in broad daylight, if it's what you're looking for.

Audience laughter, nervous and eager, punctuated every delivery. The scandalous plot unfolded: Dionysian drunkenness becomes general all over the kingdom and claims even Pentheus' mother, Agave. In her delusional, revelrous state, she and her fellow celebrants mistake her son for a lion, and Agave tears him apart with her bare hands. It's Agave's father, Cadmus, happening upon his drunken child, who awakens her to the reality of what she has done: she has decapitated Pentheus and taken his head in her lap, believing it a great prize. Playing the moment when Agave comes to, Chalfant shed real tears and released a terrible scream—yet another “inhuman cry”—into the small, silent room. It came as a relief to recall, as the sound subsided, that what I was watching was make-believe.

“I'd like to say that I primarily enjoy performing these plays because they are done in socially substantive

contexts that generate interesting discussions,” Eisenberg told me later, “but I actually mainly enjoy the acting part of it—the emotional and intellectual experience provided by these situations and characters. I think the more emotionally revealing we are onstage, the more comfortable the audience is in participating in personal and sensitive discussions, in revealing themselves afterward.”

Outside the Wire's projects always unfold in three parts—performance, panel, and conversation—and as the play ended, the panelists took the stage. Along with Doerries, there was a Hazard circuit-court judge, an educator, a former drug dealer turned youth pastor, and a clinical pharmacist from nearby Pikeville Medical Center.

Referring to Agave's intoxicated murder of her son, the pharmacist said, “I see that every single day. The babies in the NICU . . . it's so sad. Probably fifty percent are suffering withdrawals.”

The youth pastor addressed the audience directly. “How many of you have lost a close friend or family member to drugs?” A third of the hands rose. “Now, how many of you know somebody who's died of drugs?” Everyone.

During part three of the evening—the conversation—the girl I'd seen out front with the charm bracelet raised her hand and began speaking in a high, quavering voice.

“I have parents who have been on drugs and who have set a horrible example for my family, and my older brother has done the same thing, and I'm trying to set an example for him, but it's so hard and . . .” She began to cry. “I decided I want to be there for him and say: ‘Hey, I'm gonna help you struggle—since they don't.’ I'm more adult than my parents. They come to me for advice. I try to send them in the right way, but they want money from me, and I'm trying so hard but . . .” As she sobbed, two rows of kids' arms fell around her in an embrace.

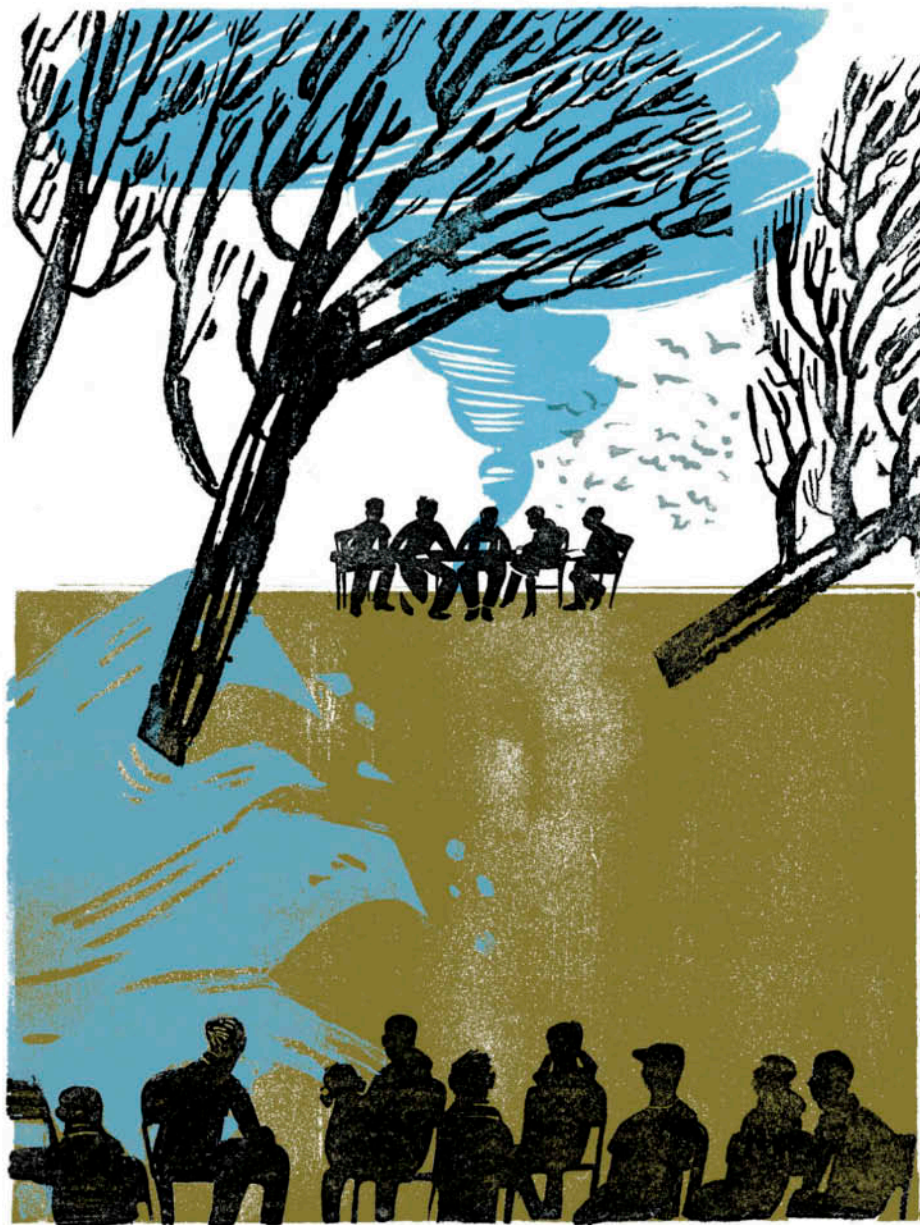
If any of this sounds like something you might have seen on *Oprah*, the comparison isn't unfair. For his part, Doerries tells his audiences he'll be roaming the rows with a mic “like

Phil Donahue.” He's using the familiar to deliver an experience that has become alien: the collective witness of suffering fashioned by an artist to unite a community in need.

“If we had one message to deliver to you,” Doerries said before bringing the evening to a close, releasing Eisenberg to sign autographs and chat with his fans, “if you've been in the position where you felt alone in this problem, you felt like you alone were facing it by yourself, then we have a message to deliver to you from Euripides. As the translator of this play—God knows I've taken enough liberties with his words tonight—it's this: You're not alone in this room, as evidenced by this amazing conversation, this bearing witness. You're not alone across this country and the world, for we're going to take this Dionysus Project all over the world, and what you've told us tonight will come with us. And as powerful as the Internet is, the experience of two hundred people in a room spending two hours together is a different way to combat isolation. Most importantly, if we had one message to deliver to you, two thousand four hundred years later, it's simply this: You are not alone across time.”

Doerries ends every performance with that line. After the alcohol-awareness stand-down in Virginia, one of the panelists, a staff sergeant, spoke frankly to his fellow jarheads about his alcoholism and his wife's suicide attempt while he was deployed. Afterward, Richard P. Mills, a towering three-star general in the audience, walked over to the staff sergeant, took his hand, punched him on the shoulder, told him he'd done a good job, and thanked him for his candor—candor that once would have ended careers, the general told me later. “In the old days,” Mills said, “the feeling was, ‘You're a Marine—suck it up. You don't have problems. . . .’ We won't let that happen again. We're going to take care of these problems: let a Marine recover and move forward in the Corps.”

At the Pentagon, Lieutenant Colonel Cathy Wilkinson explained that these changes in attitude aren't cosmetic. In prior decades, the military's security background questionnaire asked soldiers if they had ever



received psychological counseling. At the time, many were afraid their answers could be used as grounds for discharge; indeed, the question was probably there to filter out the mentally unstable. Now it comes with a disclaimer making clear that a service member's responses would not be held against him. I wondered who was responsible for the change.

"Senior leaders began stepping forward," Wilkinson told me. "They spoke publicly about having sought help, about how treatment works. They worked to get that message across." Carter Ham, for one, a four-star general who led operations in Libya, has spoken openly about his struggles with PTSD.

Doerries began his partnership with the military in 2008, after he read a *New York Times* article about veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan who were charged with murder after returning from their deployments. Of 121 cases, three quarters involved service members who were still serving when the murders took place.

The article quoted Captain William P. Nash, a combat- and operational-stress-control coordinator for the Marines, who was telling Stateside caregivers that, if they wanted to understand their new, ex-military patients, they needed to read *Ajax*.

Doerries tracked Nash down. Within a few weeks, Nash had invited Doerries to present his translations of *Ajax* and

Philoctetes to 400 Marines and their spouses at a military conference in San Diego. "I jumped at the opportunity, and what happened when I finally found the right audience for these plays rearranged my molecules."

Doerries's projects gained the support of high-ranking military officials, notably General Sutton. With her assistance, he was booked for a hundred performances on bases around the world in 2009 and 2010. But then changes in military postings, including Sutton's retirement, led to the expiration of his Pentagon contract at the end of its first year: other leaders, other ideas. A scramble began, for both new funds and new audiences. The performances that now take place on military bases are paid for through various base commanders' discretionary funds or through onetime grants. Even so, bringing his work to a nonmilitary audience has become, in part, a matter of necessity: without an umbrella contract from the Pentagon, Doerries has been partnering with private funding sources and organizations already seeking to reach at-risk groups.

"The key," Doerries told me, "lies in identifying a population struggling with a particular issue—chronic illness, addiction, the aftermath of a natural disaster—and then finding a play or text that will connect with its core values and, in turn, bring people together in powerful, unpredictable ways. When a tragedy works, it's like an external hard drive. You plug it into an audience and they know what to do."

Early one morning in May 2012, in a beige-on-beige conference room on the ground floor of the Joplin, Missouri, Hilton Garden Inn, I was part of an audience of three for a rehearsal of an adaptation of the Book of Job. To my right, at one end of an oval table, was George Lombardi, a man you wouldn't have a hard time believing is director of corrections for the state of Missouri, and Christine Bertelson, who worked for the governor. At the other end of the table, near Doerries, sat three actors: Arliss Howard, who played Red Sox owner John W. Henry in *Moneyball*; David Strathairn, best known as Edward R. Murrow in *Good Night, and*

Good Luck; and Paul Giamatti, who was screaming at the top of his lungs.

"Don't you have any sense?" Giamatti, as Job, exclaimed. Veins branched across his right temple as his face went embolismically red. "Will you never shut your mouths?" Pause. "Listen now to my arguments; hear out my accusations. Be quiet now—*let me speak*." He brandished a fist. "Whatever happens will happen. He may kill me, but I won't stop; I will speak the truth to his face." Pounding fist to chest: "Pay attention to what I say!"

The text that Giamatti and the others would perform twice that day—first in a megachurch, then in a high school auditorium—was drawn from Stephen Mitchell's verse translation of the Bible book. In the few minutes they had had to look at the script together before this first timed run-through at full volume, Giamatti had transformed from his exceedingly polite public persona to something very scary. Mouths had progressively fallen open as he spoke. At one point, there was even a high, brief, strange blurt of laughter from Howard. (I hadn't heard a laugh like that since eighth grade, when we were all brought into the music room and told that Joanna Mufson, a classmate who had leukemia, had passed away, whereupon Alex Berne blurted that same laugh.) It was the sound of a body unable to restrain its recognition of something too big to contain, too formless to articulate. A true human sound, complete in its ugliness, ugly in its truthfulness. One that typically would take news of a death to produce.

"These are certainly the most gratifying experiences I have had," Giamatti told me of his work with *Outside the Wire*. "I can't even think of them as jobs or gigs. To begin with, the material being presented is extraordinary, and it's a ballbuster to do, and when presented in context, the energy that is generated in those rooms with those amazing people is explosive. It's a pure experience for the actors. It is for me at least: stripped down, just words and the gigantic emotions they convey. And I love that Bryan does not remotely shy away from the size of the emotions. In fact he encourages us to be as big as these texts are: it's the Book

of Job, you know? It's not worth being precious or decorous. This is urgent stuff. It feels *useful* too."

"When an actor like Giamatti," Doerries told me later, "pushes the performance to its outer limits, blurring the boundaries between performed pain and experienced suffering, the audience—all of sudden—has something in common, an experience of profound discomfort which serves as a bridge to discovering other shared experiences, thoughts, and values."

The shared experience in question had happened a year earlier, to the day: Joplin had suffered the worst tornado strike in the United States in more than half a century. In about thirty minutes, along a six-mile path, it had erased everything, destroying the hospital, killing 158 people, injuring nearly a thousand, leveling thousands of homes. Lombardi had visited Joplin and called Doerries the day he got back home.

"I said to Bryan, 'You've got to do something here,'" Lombardi told me outside the rehearsal room. "I told him, 'Those people are going to need you.'"

Lombardi met Doerries in 2009 when *Outside the Wire* came to one of his facilities to do the Prometheus in Prison project. Correctional-staff morale, he explained, was always difficult to maintain: guards are paid low wages, face hostile environments, and have an ugly public profile—movies tend to paint them as dim-witted sadists. Lombardi was impressed by the project and had hoped to get it funded through the state so that it could go forward and reach his 11,000 employees, but that never happened. When the tornado hit, he saw another arena in which Doerries's work could be of use.

After rehearsal, Doerries, Lombardi, and the actors drove across town to College Heights Christian Church. A broad, empty corridor, a crude void, cut through the flat greenness on either side of the road. Along the way, we stopped at what used to be St. Mary's Catholic Church. A great iron cross some twenty feet tall stood on a hill, all that was left of a church that had been there for a century. St. Mary's seventy-one-year-old priest, Father Justin Monaghan, had been alone in the rectory when the storm hit, tak-

ing refuge facedown in his bathtub while the building was torn away around him. The bathtub and the remains of the building were long gone, but as we drove up, Father Monaghan was standing at the edge of what had been the church parking lot as if he'd never abandoned his post. He was being interviewed by a television reporter for a piece marking the anniversary of the storm. Behind him, at the very top of the swell, Doerries, Strathairn, and Howard roamed the emptiness. Giamatti was pacing some distance away, hands clasped behind his back.

A few hours later, the actors performed the Old Testament story of incomprehensible loss for several hundred people at College Heights Christian Church. Strathairn, with his white beard and grave solemnity, conjured an awesome creator, one who, once Giamatti exploded, lowered the boom, impressing on Job his minuteness, his ignorance, his ingratitude, his error. By the end, Giamatti was in real tears, as would be some of the panelists from the community, as would be some of the congregation's members. When Doerries posed his latest version of his perennial first questions ("Why do you think the author of Job wrote it? What do you think he was trying to say? What was he trying to accomplish? What was he *up to*?") an odd charge filled the church air.

"I personally believe the author was God," a woman stood and said. "And hearing it today, I decided that your question, of what God wanted, was for us to realize that though we live in a really burdened world . . . He's still there, He's always there. That was the author's intent: to convince us that He's really right here."

"I think that Job's friends sucked," said another woman, to great laughter from the stadium seats. As the Book of Job unfolds, after Job's losses, his friends sit with him for seven days in silence. But then they start to talk, and to a one begin to tell him that, well, it must be all his fault, he must be a sinner: Job must have done something wrong.

"It's blaming the victim," she continued. "There was a group a year ago that came to Joplin to say we must have been *evil*, needed to be *wiped*

out. But you know what? God gave us each other, to accept each other, to care for each other. And maybe if those friends of Job's had kept their mouths shut for more than seven days, things would have been fine."

One woman spoke directly to Doerries: "If you haven't noticed, Joplin is a town of churches. We have two Bible colleges and *hundreds* of churches. Job's friends who 'sucked,' as the other lady said, were the *religious* people. I think the real story of Joplin is that the church stopped being religious when the tornado hit—and became the church."

Applause.

"And that's the hope for the whole world," she went on. "When we stop being religious, and we start being the church, and we start letting people speak their pain in an honest fashion, and we don't try to give them our wisdom—which is nothing but a bunch of *poop* anyway—"

Roars.

"—and we just are *with them*. It didn't say it in the script, but it does say in Job that when his friends were just *with him* and were silent for seven days he was *comforted* by them, and it wasn't until they opened their mouths . . ." Laughter filled the church. "And that's what *this* community did. I really wish that a major newspaper or TV station would tell that story. Would tell the story of the churches during the tornado, because we came together and people just got down on their hands and knees and served."

It reminded me of what Doerries had told me about his father, whose work in psychology had led him to believe that change in human beings was simply not possible.

Doerries did not agree. "I think tragedy is a delivery system," he'd said, "that awakens us to the possibility for meaningful change." In the *Poetics*, Aristotle names the change "catharsis": a purification of one's emotions through vicarious experience, through drama designed to beat the drums of feeling, so that we might suffer openly, commonly, communally, and be done with it, for a time.

These dramas enact the rage and sorrow and fear that linger in wit-

nesses of tragedy, connecting stored emotion with the memory of the event that brought it about. Not diminution through repetition, tragedy is deliverance through intensification. It performs a magic act—the release of seized emotion—by giving suffering a form.

"Tragedy," Doerries told me on another occasion, "fills us with a sense of urgency that if we don't act immediately we're going to be bystanders to our own destruction. The stakes are that high, and that's the only way to break through the neurological, almost impenetrable armor of habitualized bad decisions. William James said that 'in most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again.' So it requires a shock to break through the hardened neurology of the pathways of our decisions over time. It requires a shock of discomfort that affects us physically and emotionally and spiritually."

Eighteen months later, Doerries was in the Rockaways, in Queens, on the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Sandy. Traffic through Manhattan and Brooklyn had been thick until the Belt Parkway, and thickly developed urbanness thinned within minutes to sparsely developed ruralness. Or so it seemed. Many of the voids one can see today had been houses. This part of the coast had been overcome by storm surges that were roof-high. Neighborhoods had been erased. So Doerries was performing Job again, this time with Eric Bogosian as the lead, Adam Driver as God, and Tate Donovan as the narrator. First they performed at a synagogue that had been flooded, its interior still a construction site, floors open and lumber piled beside the pews. And then they performed again, thirty minutes later, at a community theater on the beach. Doerries's time-honed three-part performance structure was unaltered. Bogosian's Job was more cerebral than Giamatti's; Driver's God was of a different venom than Strathairn's; but it hardly mattered. One middle-aged man rose afterward and talked about

how tired the world seemed to be of stories of loss.

"Most traumas you go through alone," he said. "We've been very fortunate to have each other . . . When you tell your Sandy story, someone, rather than saying, 'Yeah, I've heard it,' goes: 'I understand. Now here's my story.'"

A woman offered an epic of her attempts to save her twenty-five-pound cat as her home flooded and her neighborhood collapsed around her in the dark and the dawn. Surges of feeling rose in the room as she spoke. As more stories were told, it became clear that many of the members of the audience knew one another, each storyteller standing up and saying, "Well, what Leslie just said pretty much covers it, but . . ." or "I want to just add to what Rick said": a large room, full of first names.

Joshua Ellis, a reverend with the Disaster Chaplaincy Services, which is often deployed by the Red Cross during such upheavals, explained that "it's very hard to constantly listen and not say something. The miraculous thing about chaplaincy as I have experienced it is that more than once I have stayed absolutely silent as someone just keeps talking and talking . . . and then at a certain point they say: 'Thank you for the words that you've said: they really helped.'" Doerries stood at the front of the space, his mic tucked under an arm, his focus fully on Ellis. "So maybe I'm reading too much into it," Ellis said, "but at the end of the piece, when Job is hearing what God is saying, he's really just hearing himself. Grace is the fact that he hears it. Whether you want to call it God or higher power or magic . . . who cares. The message was delivered."

At evening's end, after Doerries had once again asked an audience to keep in mind that they were not alone across time, he retreated to the edge of the theater, into the shadows. From there he watched as members of the audience shook hands, hugged, and—those who hadn't known one another to begin with—introduced themselves and began to talk. ■