

Making Love, Not War: The Soldier Male in Top Gun and Coming

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Source: Journal of Popular Film & Television; Spring90, Vol. 18

Issue 1, p18, 10p, 6bw



The Soldier Male in Top Gun and Coming Home

One of the most pervasive slogans of the 1960s was the exhortation to "Make love, not war." As a revolutionary agenda, this surely leaves much to be desired but not for the reactionary reasons usually offered. I suspect the world would be importantly transformed if our energies for combat could be directed into personal passions. The slogan's naivete lies, it seems to me, not so much in its statement of ends as in the behavioristic way it defines the two activities. Thus, a familiar variant of the peace symbol substitutes a heterosexual couple in the missionary position for the encircled figure. Such a substitution assumes that intercourse is an inherent example of cherishing rather than attacking someone. It fails to recognize that sex--especially in the male psyche--is often confused with battle.

Whatever one finally concludes about the wisdom of the 1960s slogan, it is important to understand the extent to which love and war are psychologically interrelated and the realistic possibilities for keeping them distinct. I want to examine two popular films dealing with these issues: Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* (1978) and Tony Scott's *Top Gun* (1986).

Both films are highly conscious of the way combat and romance, weapon and phallus, merge in the popular psyche. *Top Gun* glories in this merger and seeks to affirm the natural health of it. *Coming Home* struggles to demonstrate that the merger is neither inevitable nor desirable. I will begin with *Top Gun*, even though it is the more recent film, because its view seems to be more prevalent, both in film and in life.

Top Gun

Pete "Maverick" Mitchell (Tom Cruise) is a Navy fighter pilot. Although he has instinctive combat abilities, he also has a rebellious streak that disturbs his superiors. His best friend, "Goose" (Anthony Edwards), is also his "rear" gunner. They are sent as a team to a special aerial combat school, and the plot revolves around their quest for the school's "top gun" trophy. Maverick becomes romantically involved with one of his instructors, Charlotte "Charlie" Blackwood (Kelly McGillis), and is running a close second for the trophy when Goose is killed in a training exercise. Although the accident is judged as unavoidable, it totally shatters Maverick's confidence. He loses

interest in both the trophy and his relationship with Charlie. He does, however, manage to graduate and is selected for a dangerous mission. He behaves so heroically on this mission that his confidence is restored and he is reunited with Charlie.

Although the plot is thin, it is straight forwardly structured to establish an identity between male courting and military combat.

In the opening sequence, Maverick and Goose are on routine patrol over the Indian Ocean when they are confronted by two MIG fighters. (The time is identified only as "the present," and the nationality of the fighters is left unidentified--although Libya seems intended.) Although the planes do not fire on each other, they engage in a battle of maneuvers and nerves. Maverick "wins" this battle by flying upside down over the MIG, looking the amazed pilot in the eye and giving him "the finger."

The scene in which he first meets Charlie closely parallels this opening combat scene. Maverick and Goose are "on patrol" in a bar near the school. Seeing all the women present, Maverick describes the bar as a "target-rich environment." He picks out a particular woman, who happens to be Charlie, and bets Goose he can hit the target ("carnal knowledge on the premises") in twenty minutes. The playful banter of his come-on and Charlie's quick, evasive rejoinders verbally mirror the aerial maneuvers of the earlier scene. Also, what constitutes success in both enterprises is essentially the same. What Maverick gives the enemy pilot is a symbol for what he hopes to give Charlie--intercourse being, for him, a gesture of victory, a relishing of feminine defeat.

The scene that bridges Maverick's military and sexual exploits is a brief classroom scene. It can be said to provide Top Gun's "philosophy of engagement." The trainees are urged to see combat as an activity that has only two possible outcomes: winning and losing. Thus, their only chance for success involves besting another; their pride becomes intrinsically linked with someone else's humiliation. Lest anyone think that this philosophy applies only to military combat, one of the pilots remarks that he gets a "hard on" watching combat training films. The two modes of engagement aren't really distinct; warring is as erotic as loving is combative.

When Maverick picks Charlie as his target that first night in the bar, he stages a flamboyant come-on to attract her. Using a microphone and pointing directly at her, he begins to sing a popular song. His fellow pilots all seem to understand this tactical maneuver; they gather around Charlie and join in the song's accusing chorus: "You've lost that loving feeling." Although they do not realize it yet, Charlie is one of their instructors, a Ph.D. in astrophysics. The song is sung playfully, all in good fun, but there is no doubt that the film means its accusation to be taken quite seriously. Women have, by asserting intelligence and independence, by achieving leadership positions, lost what these men regard as the appropriately feminine "loving feeling"--the feeling of acquiescence in male superiority.

This theme is dramatized more sharply in the classroom scene the next day. Charlie strides before the male pilots with a sense of authority. She is confident that she knows more about the capabilities of aircraft than the men she is instructing. But if she is going to become romantically involved with Maverick, if "Charlie" is to recover the femininity she has lost, then her superior knowledge must be exposed as

illusory; she must be shown a woman's proper place. Goose and Maverick, relying on their firsthand experience with the MIG, proceed to do this. They teasingly correct her misconception of the plane's maneuverability but do not stop there. When Charlie asks why they were so close to the MIG, they explain about "the finger," condescendingly implying that she is as innocent about its meaning as she is about the MIG. Especially in sexual matters, women's knowledge must be established as secondary, as bequeathed to them by the superior experience of men.

The path of their romance follows the deepening way in which Charlie comes to accept Maverick as superior, as "pilot." She arranges their first date--on her terms and turf and under the rubric of her needs (the MIG information will help her with job advancement). But when Maverick realizes she is assuming the aggressive role, he frustrates her sexually by leaving early. Later, in a classroom simulation, she publicly criticizes his flying for being "too aggressive." He is angered at this refusal to acknowledge his prowess. Only after she chases him down and admits that she is no longer in control do they make love. Here he is definitely pilot. The background song is Berlin's feminine plea for male action: "Take My Breath Away." When Charlie awakens the next morning, Maverick is gone, but he has left a flower--and a paper airplane--to remember him by!

Maverick's blossoming love affair and his run for the "top gun" trophy both "crash and burn" when Goose is killed in an accident that occurs while Maverick is pilot. Because something about this event affects his desire to engage in both love and war, it is important to understand exactly what it does to his psyche.

Maverick's paralysis does not seem to result from guilt, at least not as normally understood. Guilt would arise only if there were actions within his power that would have prevented the accident but that he failed to perform. The review board, his superior, and Charlie assure him that this is not the case. There was absolutely nothing he could do, no way he could have prevented the disaster. But it is precisely this fact that seems to immobilize him: He is not omnipotent; there are things within his desire that he cannot control--death being the most significant of these. Because of Goose's death, he suddenly becomes frightened of dying himself. Rather, Goose's death destroys the illusion of omnipotence that undergirded all his actions. His traumatic loss of confidence is proportionate to the strength of his prior illusion. If, as proclaimed that first day in class, there is no room for second place, then impotence becomes the logical alternative, once omnipotence is disallowed.

It would seem the obvious therapy for Maverick's problem would be to expose the inadequacies of the "top gun" philosophy, to demonstrate that not all of life--or even very much of it--fits the combat metaphor. Certainly, there are other ways to relate to objects than by defeating them. The film is, however, too wedded to the metaphor to question it. It diagnoses the problem to be not the metaphor itself but Maverick's loss of faith in it. Thus, when Charlie tracks him down at the airport and tries to convince him to graduate, she reminds him how much "larger than life" he is, how he must embrace the responsibilities of his superior status and not be a "quitter." She works to restore his confidence, not by realistically assessing and accepting his powers, but by rekindling his drive to be number one, by re-establishing his illusion of omnipotence.

The film's ending seeks to confirm the correctness of Charlie's approach. Although Maverick manages to graduate, he does not win the trophy and still lacks his old self-confidence. He is assigned a dangerous patrol with "Ice Man," the pilot who finally did win the trophy. When Ice Man is attacked by MIGs, Maverick, at first, freezes. But then, calling on Goose's memory for inspiration, he shoots down three enemy planes and rescues Ice Man. These heroics get him "on the front page of every newspaper in the free world." More importantly, they put him back on top--he has bested the best.

Once his superiority in combat is reestablished, his confidence in love is revitalized as well. Essential to Maverick's masculine appeal is his cocky insistence that he is always in control. When Goose's death undermines this, it undermines the core of his male identity. Once Charlie learns that this core is revitalized, that "the best of the best" is back, then her own "loving feeling" returns as well. The film ends with them dancing to that song. I have argued that Top Gun's plot pushes the viewer toward an identification of combat and love. It presents the goals of each as the same: defeating, towering over, and besting the other. But Top Gun is much more than plot. What makes the film particularly effective is how well it integrates the moral of the plot with the film's other elements.

The dialogue, for example, is saturated with explicit and implicit references to the interchangeability of love and war. "Approach," "engage," "maneuver," "target," "hit," and "shoot" all do double duty. Likewise, the visuals bask in this type of double entendre. The camera emphasizes and lovingly dwells on the phallic qualities of the planes, their thrusting cones and fiery engines. When the camera assumes the first-person vision of the pilot, especially when zeroing in on the carrier, it is almost in a sexually hovering mode. And in a scene totally without plot significance, when Maverick and Goose play their trophy rivals in volleyball, the camera images the spiking, diving male flesh with the same loving gaze it gives to the soaring planes--as if it is primarily in attack that male flesh is most exciting.

Rock songs are another way the film drives home its central argument. They are a significant part of the soundtrack and are often related to the film's visuals in the style of music video (surely a factor in the film's immense commercial success). Kenny Loggins' "Danger Zone" deserves special comment in this regard because it opens the film and serves as the background for several of its scenes. The song's lyrics are a glorification of life lived "on the edge," "in overdrive," of life delighting in the risk of its own--and others'--destruction. This danger zone is clearly intended to beckon far more than to warn.

Given the parallels the film establishes, the danger zone the song glorifies is not merely the arena of aerial combat but the arena of heterosexual love. Women are the paradigmatic danger zone into which the male must venture, establish superiority, and exit from intact. Prowess in this primordial adventure is the basic means of confirming male identity and vitality.

This perception of women as the ultimate danger zone is, I think, the key to understanding the fusion of love and war in the male psyche. Obviously, if women do present a genuine threat to male life, status, or wealth, then a combative stance toward them would be appropriate and understandable. However, women have never been in

a socioeconomic position to offer such a threat, certainly not on a scale that would account for the prevalence and intensity of the stance throughout history. What is it, then, that women threaten, which elicits such martial attitudes and behavior on the part of men?

The Soldier Male

In his two-volume work *Male Fantasies*, [1] Klaus Theweleit offers a persuasive psychoanalytic answer to this question. His work is focused on an analysis of the writings of a particular group of men, officers in the Freikorps (a private, volunteer army that fought the revolutionary German working class in the years after World War I). The psychological model of the "soldierly ego" that he constructs, however, has wide applications and illuminates central aspects of the films and phenomena I am discussing. [2] Whereas Freud attempted to explain the extremes of male sadism by means of Oedipal castration anxiety, Theweleit relies more on theories of pre-Oedipal development, especially Margaret Mahler's theory of individuation.[3] Individuation is the process by which the pre-Oedipal child extricates itself from the oceanic, symbiotic fusion with the mother. The individuated child has achieved a basic sense of itself as an entity separate from the mother, recognized itself as an integrated object in a mirror, and accepted its separation without inordinate longing for reabsorption or inordinate fear of dissolution.

This process of individuation is an essential step on any normal journey toward ego integrity. Some people fail to take this step successfully, however, and these Theweleit labels as "soldier males" or "soldierly egos." They are "not-yet-fully-born" as integrated, secure selves able to sustain object relations with other selves.[4] This incompleteness necessitates a combative stance toward all objects. This stance Theweleit calls a "maintenance mechanism" (to distinguish it from the ego's "defense" mechanisms), and is formed to compensate for normal object relations.

The nature of this incompleteness explains much about the soldier male's ambiguous attitudes toward women. Perpetually trapped, as it were, in a birth canal, the soldierly ego struggles to free itself from a symbiotic union with the mother. He views the soft, fluid bodies of women as representing both an enticing call to the womb-like bliss of the past and, by the same token, as a harrowing attack on a fragile self-identity.

This attack, however, is not the frontal, castrating attack of the Oedipal stage; it is the dissolving, engulfing attack of a more primordial stage. As Theweleit puts it: "First comes la mer, then la mere." [5] This is the danger zone that women are perceived to represent, the danger of ego dissolution. It is a danger, however, only to an ego that has never really established itself as a securely bounded entity. To such an ego, any emotional feeling for, any sensual pleasure with, objects--no matter how temporary or partial--is envisioned as a flood ready to engulf its boundaries.

At the same time that this engulfment is feared as destructive, it is simultaneously longed for as bliss. This fundamental ambiguity creates the peculiar structure of the soldier male's stance toward women:

It's as if two male compulsions are tearing the women with equal strength. One is trying to push them away, to keep them at arm's length (defense); the other wants to

penetrate them, to have them very near. Both compulsions seem to find satisfaction in the act of killing, where the man pushes the woman far away (takes her life), and gets very close to her (penetrates her with a bullet, stab wound, club, etc.).[6]

Although brutal killing of women was the form the Freikorps used to gratify the ambivalent demands of their psyches, a less extreme form would be the compulsion to subjugate them, tower over them. This would be fueled by the same ambiguous desire because the subjugated woman (or object, or earth) would be "very close" and yet "kept at arm's length."

Besides explaining the soldier male's combative stance toward women, this inordinate fear of/desire for dissolution also explains his obsessive fascination with machinery. Bent on making himself impervious to dissolution, the soldierly ego works to surround itself with armor. The hard impenetrability of steel is an especially useful symbol in this task. The fragile ego hopes that a steel encasement can keep it together as a unified whole. This desperate hope takes the form of what Theweleit calls "the utopia of the body machine." [7] It is not just that the soldier male wants his body protected by steel, he unconsciously hopes that, by rigorous ascetic discipline and military drill, he can recreate himself as a "man of steel," totally unaffected by any dissipating emotions. This mechanistically armored unity is a substitute for an integrated human self:

The "new man" sired in the drill . . . owes allegiance only to the machine that bore him. He is a true child of the drill machine, created without the help of woman, parentless. His associations and relationships bind him instead to other specimens of the new man, with whom he allows himself to be united to form the macromachine troop. All others belong only "under him." . . . [8]

My intent in summarizing Theweleit's analysis here is not to brand Top Gun's Maverick as a Freikorps fascist but to use the concept of the soldier male--its fears, desires, and imagery--to illuminate his character and the meaning of the film.

It seems obvious that Maverick's behavior parallels, in milder form, the maintenance mechanisms of Theweleit's subjects. He has the same deepseated need to tower over others, to defeat them. His relationship with his superiors, his fellow students, and especially with women all become combative. The film's central and repeated image of male ecstasy seems tailor-made for the soldier male: Maverick, synthesized with his steel machine, soaring majestically above the undifferentiated sea.

The only challenge to this infantile image of self-fulfillment occurs during the accident when Maverick and Goose, ejected from their armor, plummet Icarus-like into the dissolving sea. Goose is killed. But, as we have seen, Top Gun does not seize this as an opportunity for questioning the image and encouraging a more complete birth. Rather, Maverick's combat achievements earn him the job of flight instructor. He will go on to teach students the same top gun philosophy that he learned. He is the model, a soldier male who identifies all relationships with combat, who cannot envision loving as anything separate from war.

Coming Home

Although *Top Gun* is atypical of Hollywood war films in its unabashedly clear portrait of the soldierly ego, it is thoroughly typical in its resounding endorsement of it. The movies have, by and large, failed to question the soldierly ego as a valid form of male self-integration. A notable exception to this is Hal Ashby's 1978 film *Coming Home*.

The plot of the film revolves around a classic wartime love triangle. Robert Heid (Bruce Dern) is a Marine officer excited by the possibilities Vietnam holds for career advancement. Because he does not want his wife, Sally (Jane Fonda), working while he is away, she volunteers in the local veterans hospital. Her patriotism is shaken when she sees the inadequate treatment of the wounded vets and the unwillingness of other officer wives to acknowledge this. She falls in love with a paraplegic vet, Luke Martin (Jon Voigt), who is increasingly involved in antiwar activities. Because of his activism, Luke--and Sally--are placed under surveillance by the F.B.I. When Bob returns from Vietnam, he is confronted with Sally's infidelity. Although she assures him of her love, he cannot handle the changes in her or the country. The film ends with Bob committing suicide by swimming into the ocean.

Because this was one of Hollywood's first serious treatments of the Vietnam war, and because activist Jane Fonda had such a hand in its production, much of the critical reflection on the film has focused on its pacifism and the accuracy of its account of the awakening of female consciousness. I believe the film's import lies in a different direction--its exploration of an alternative to the soldierly ego.

The film opens with a group of crippled vets playing pool and talking about whether they would, knowing what they know now, choose Vietnam again. The title and credits follow, superimposed over lengthy shots of Bob jogging. His is definitely not a recreational workout; rather, it is a regimen, what Theweleit analyzed as the asceticizing of the body into a military machine. The vets now know quite personally what Bob has yet to learn: the regimen inevitably fails. Even the Marine Corps cannot build men of steel.

These contrasting scenes effectively set the central problematic of the film. Both Luke and Bob go to Vietnam in the grip of the soldierly ego; both utilize its various maintenance mechanisms for their self-identity. The realities of the war expose the incompleteness of this ego to both men--and to Sally. Coming home, then, poses the question of what self--if any--is left to the male once the armored tower, "top gun" self has failed.

That Bob fits the profile of Theweleit's soldier male is embarrassingly obvious the night before he leaves for Vietnam. As subsequent scenes confirm, he is terrified of being alone with Sally. Thus, they spend most of their last night together in the officers club with friends. When they finally are alone, Bob is unable to voice--or even acknowledge--any tenderness toward her or fear of being separated from her. He jokingly plays at presenting her with "official" orders to proceed to bed, and he even sings the Marine Hymn over it, implying that here is just one more place where Marines "fight our country's battles." This scene would be terribly heavy handed if Dern played Bob as a one dimensional Rambo-type. However, the scene works

because he never lets Bob's bravado totally hide his terror--both of war and sex. As Sally holds him on top of her after his lovelornaking--and it is his--she seems to sense the extent to which it is actually a frightened boy whom she holds.

When Bob meets Sally in Hawaii for R & R, his soldierly ego has been profoundly shaken by his experience in Vietnam. He hesitantly admits to Sally that he is disturbed by the atrocities of some of his men who, like Theweleit's Freikorps, have exploded with sadistic violence across the native population. However, he has no alternate mode of self with which to critique their actions. His uncertainties about the validity of the soldiery ego necessarily affect his sexual desire. His time with Sally is sheer agony for both of them. She tries to get him to talk about what Vietnam is doing to him emotionally, but his armor will not allow it. It is as if any emotion, any conversation, would overpower the fragility of his incomplete ego. When Bob returns wounded to the States, his confusion has reached a critical point. The hero he envisioned in his military drill is painfully different from his limping self. Although he will be decorated as a hero, the truth is that he tripped and shot himself in the foot on his way to the latrine. Furthermore, the nation that is going to honor him is no longer thoroughly convinced of the validity of the soldierly heroics it has commissioned, as is evidenced by the peace demonstrators outside the base. As Bob himself says to Sally, "How can they give you a medal for a war they don't even want you to fight?" These questions directly affect his relationship with Sally. Rather than spend his first night home alone with her, he invites a group of soldier buddies over. As they are slumped drunkenly around the living room, one of them disdainfully jokes: "There's two things that smell like fish--and one of them's fish." The other is, of course, female genitals. What unites Bob to these men is not so much their shared experience of Vietnam as their shared fear of the feminine "sea."

The next day, the F.B.I. informs Bob about the affair between Luke and Sally. This is the final blow to his crumbling ego. The soldierly mechanisms he relied on to sustain an integrated self, to provide him with a place in the nation and a relationship with his wife, have failed. But the deeper failure is that, even in his desperation, he can envision no alternative ego. His culture has provided him with only one model. Masculinity is, for him, totally synonymous with these soldierly mechanisms.

Unsure of exactly what to do, he goes to Luke's apartment and finds him by the pool giving advice to a young diver. Although Bob himself is drowning, he cannot conceive of asking for help; the soldierly ego denies him the openness necessary for conversation. Combat also seems inappropriate, however, because Luke is in a wheelchair. Therefore, he simply informs Luke, in a matter-of-fact tone, about the surveillance. He acknowledges that the rest is really up to Sally. There is an awkward period of silence between the two men. Then Bob leaves.

Although Bob has returned to the States, he has certainly not come home. He has neither touched Sally nor talked with her in any intimate way. He desperately desires to do this, but he is also desperately afraid. Confused and in agony, he prepares to be alone with her in the only way he knows how--by arming himself. Carefully, mechanically, he loads his rifle, attaches its bayonet, and comes to her as he always has, as into battle.

To understand the force of this climactic "coming home" scene, it is crucial to understand the extent to which Luke and Bob are, as Luke says, "brothers." They both have the same set of parents: the allure of the soldierly ego and the shattering questions Vietnam posed for the adequacy of that ideal. Luke has been exactly where Bob is now.

In Luke's case, of course, the questions have been physiologically forced on him. His paralysis physically prevents him from constructing the towering phallus. Initially, however, he is in the same psychologically armored state as Bob. His first meeting with Sally occurs in the hospital when, using canes to propel his gurney aggressively down the hall, he bumps into her and spills his urine bag. Prefiguring Bob's rage, he explodes with verbal abuse and flails with his cane in an attempt to get the staff to respond to him. Like Bob, he seems unable to envision any option other than that of the fighter.

It is Sally who shows him--and herself--other possibilities. Because she has recognized him as a high school football hero, she goes to his room to introduce herself. Perhaps because he is still in restraints from his attack on the staff, he seems to have lost much of his combative stance. They talk, laugh some about Sally's high school nickname, and genuinely enjoy each other. Yet, in their subsequent meetings, Luke's demeanor is as assaultive as ever. Finally, after a partially cruel remark, Sally grabs his gurney, bangs it angrily and says: "What is the matter with you? Why do you have to be such a bastard?" The plain logic of her anger pushes the question far beyond Luke to masculinity itself: Why is masculinity so dependent on invasion? Why is it conceived to hinge on effrontery to others? Surely there are other ways to achieve identity than by assault.

Luke's realization that, indeed, he doesn't have to "be such a bastard," that there are alternatives to the soldierly ego, seems central to his developing intimacy with Sally. From his wheelchair he recognizes that identity doesn't depend on towering over others, that one can be soothed by emotional and physical care without being engulfed by it and, most essentially, that the tongue can be used for things other than commands and attacks.

This realization is complete when, in response to another vet's suicide, Luke no longer flails in frustration but thoughtfully chains himself to the closed gates of an induction center. His meticulous carrying out of this task is crosscut with a scene in which Sally and Vi (the suicide's despondent sister) are approached by two conventioners in a nightclub. The boorish sexual hunt of these males is contrasted with Luke's communicative action. His is a protest not merely against a particular war but against deep-seated male modes of behavior, against the soldierly ego in all its insidious forms--especially its relations to women.

Sally and Luke make love for the first time after she bails him out from this protest. It is as if his dramatic rejection of war, of the soldier male, prepares the stage for a different form of sexual intimacy. His physiological limitations become a liberating force, freeing him from the conception of sex as a combat maneuver he performs. He could not play top gun here, even if he chose to. He must solicit Sally's help; he must rely on her for actions other than passivity. Also, words become seminal. Because he must verbalize his desire, it cannot remain privately his. To possess it at all, he must

explain it to her, forcing communication on a level more complex than the merely physical. Such intimacy implies a male ego unthreatened by fears of dissolution, one well beyond the soldierly fear and loathing of the female sea. Because the intimacy between Luke and Sally is one without phallic dominance, it is a making of love that is genuinely alternative to, sharply separated from, the making of war.

Bob cannot conceive of this form of intimacy. When he finally does come home, alone, to Sally, it is with gun in hand, bayonet ready. This is not because he is convinced of the nobility of the soldierly ego, of its biological or theological destiny. That has already failed him. But he is coming apart, and he knows no other way of warding off this dissolution than these empty combat mechanisms.

As he enters the room, Sally goes to him gently and touches him, fist on the arm that holds the gun, then on his face. She wanted him to learn about Luke from her, but he would not let her close to him. His armored stance made talk impossible. Only an ego secure enough to let things out without fear of annihilating explosion, and whole enough to let things in without fear of inundation, can make genuine conversation. Bob's agony, his tragedy, is nowhere more clear than in this scene. He cannot achieve conversation; his ego is not complete enough. His tongue becomes just another form of weapon. His screamed curses neither explain nor request nor connect but savagely--sadly--penetrate with the same ambiguity as the bullets of the Freikorps. He wants Sally to be both near him and far away.

Luke enters the scene at this point. Realizing that Bob and Sally have not yet talked about the affair, he goes to their house to explain. Because he himself has experienced the phallic flailing of Bob's screamed curses, he goes to help him in the difficult task of conversation. He tries to assure Bob that there is another way, that Sally can help him achieve an integrity and intimacy beyond combat. But he does not succeed. Although he manages to empty Bob's gun of its bullets, he is unable to transform them into words.

The next day, Bob receives a medal for heroism, for actualizing the highest ideals of the soldier male, but the failure of these is obvious to him. After the ceremony, while Sally is shopping, he goes to the beach and, piece by piece, removes his uniform, his armor. Unable to envision any other means of defining and keeping a self together, he enters into the dissolving sea that he has feared and fought and desired for so long.

Bob's despairing choice is crosscut with a scene of Luke talking at a high school assembly. A Marine recruiting sergeant has preceded him on the program, but Luke is poignantly aware of what forces really precede him: the movies, *Top Gun*, the vast cultural and psychological heritage of the soldier male. He pleads with the eager male faces in the audience, our audience, to envision another alternative. If we must insist on an enemy, then the real one, as he tried to tell Bob, is "the fucking war." He does not mean just Vietnam but the combative stance that created it and structures the way males love. Luke's lesson on the soldierly ego is quite different from *Maverick's*. "It's a lousy thing, man.... And I'm just telling you that there's a choice to be made here," that selves don't have to be armored, males don't have to be soldierly, and love doesn't have to be hell.

NOTES

[1.] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), and *Male Fantasies, Vol. II: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[2.] In calling his model the "soldierly ego," Theweleit does not claim that it applies to all soldiers or only to soldiers. It is a model to explain patterns of behavior in a group of men deeply absorbed in their "soldierliness." How extensively the model can be applied to other men is best answered not a priori but in the process of trying to apply it.

[3.] Theweleit, I, p. 224.

[4.] Theweleit, II, p. 212.

[5.] Theweleit, I, p. 292.

[6.] Theweleit, I, p. 196.

[7.] Theweleit, II, p. 159.

[8.] Theweleit, II, p. 160.

[9.] Theweleit, II, p. xx.

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Source: *Journal of Popular Film & Television*, Spring 1990, Vol. 18 Issue 1, p18, 10p

Item: 9604164576