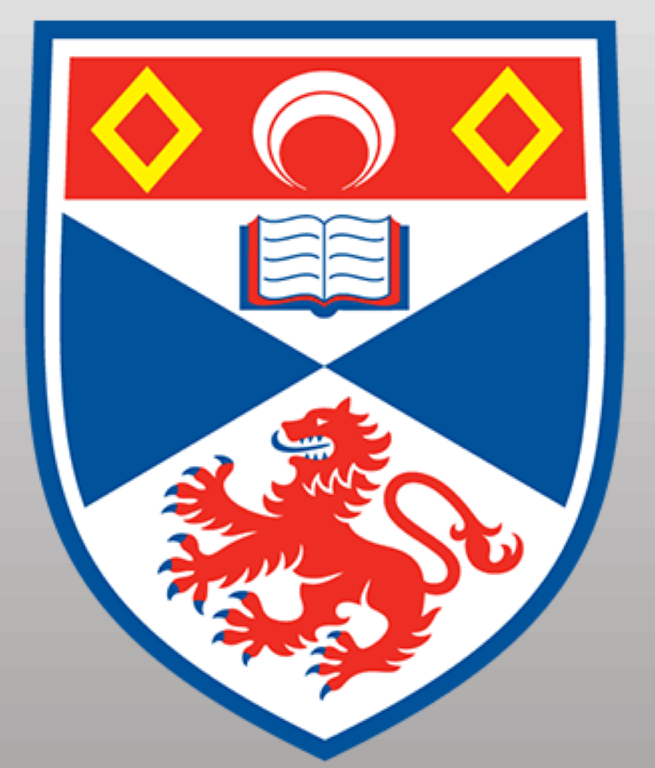


Visualising War: Interplay between Battle Narratives in Ancient and Modern Cultures

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Introduction

The prominence and predominance of war in human history cannot be overstated. The way in which different societies in different periods have celebrated, criticized, recorded, and narrated battles operate in dynamic relation to one another. While these battle narratives are susceptible to political, religious, and geographical divisions, there exist striking patterns of interplay between how we tell the story of war across periods, genres, and cultures.*

RESEARCH AIM: To diagram and interpret political interplay between battle narratives in antiquity and modern societies.

My research role consisted of exploring the connections between battle narratives as a part of the wider project, *Visualising War*, headed by Classics professors Dr. König and Dr. Wiater at the University of St. Andrews. Recognizing the inseparability between war and politics, I focused on untangling relationships between

stories of war through an analysis of their political effects.¹ In my first summer, I focused on the **politics of leadership in liberal democracies** and how this manifests in battle narratives. In my second summer, I refined my research to compare **representations of civil wars** in the Roman Republic and the United States of America (USA).

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION: How a battle narrative is told and made visible is dependent on the political structure in which it arises. The unique nature of liberal democracies demands and prioritizes certain narrative themes.

The first summer, I focused on the connections between stories of military leadership. The specific assumptions for my analyses derive from International Relations (IR) theory; as laid out below, I synthesized analytical liberalism's concentration on individual leaders and the character of domestic society with post-structuralism's emphasis on the political nature of representations.

In my second year, I continued to draw connections between

modern and ancient liberal democracies, and I specifically interpreted how they perceived civil war. More importantly, I sought to understand the political consequences of how the war was narrated both during and after the war.

PROCESSES: Interdisciplinary Interpretivism

1. **Interdisciplinary:** The integration of different theories and departments.
 - a) Leadership theory+Democratic theory+Military History
 - b) IR + Classics
1. **Interpretivism:** I as the researcher recognize my role in interpreting battle narratives and that the connections I draw result from my own lived experience and knowledge background.

CONCLUSIONS: (read reflections)

Below I outline why and how I sought to make connections in the material I read. Notice the final section reads 'Reflections' and not 'Conclusions.' This is purposeful, as the goal of my research was always to stimulate thought rather than to find scientific conclusions.

The Use of International Relations (IR) in *Visualising War*

IR seeks to explain, understand, and interpret how power is distributed, valued, and exploited globally. In my first summer of research, I expanded the dialogue between the interdisciplinary theories of IR with my Classics research in *Visualising War*. Below I summarize the assumptions of those IR theories that most add value to the *Visualising War* project.

Positivist Paradigms

Classical Realism

- **Assumption:** international politics is defined by an unchanging human nature laden with egoism (hubris), fear, and vulnerability²
 - **Conflict is inevitable**
- **Importance:** Battle narratives containing themes of glory, justice, and moderation can act as historical evidence for the insatiable desire for power in human nature
- **Example:** Battle in Lucan's *The Civil War* III.307-762 is portrayed as motivated by Caesar's lust for war rather than serving any larger strategic purpose.³

Analytical Liberalism

- **Assumption:** Domestic politics (public opinion, electoral/decision-making processes, values) affect a state's foreign policy.⁴
- **Importance:** States may engage in wars differently and report (narrate) wars differently dependent upon the domestic nature of that state.

Interpretivist Paradigms

Post-Structuralism

- **Assumption:** The social world of global politics is made meaningful through the dynamics of representation/discourse. Dominant images come to define concepts.⁵
 - **To construct a representation is an act of power.**
- **Importance:** Post-structuralist methodologies, like *Deconstruction*, dismantle dichotomies and reveal the binary pairs of inside/outside relationships produced in warfare. Narratives representing triumph / failure, bravery / cowardice, foresight / misunderstanding, team / other, and moderation / greed rely on politically constructed opposites. *Visualising War* must confront how representations have been 'framed' in political ways to contain and determine what is seen.

Battle Narratives in Civil War

I expanded the battle narratives that I identified in my first summer to reveal insights into the political deployment of battle narratives for different types of war. I continued to utilize an interpretive methodology as I compared how Romans understood civil wars with how the US Civil War has been represented.

Assumptions:

- 1) The narration of civil war has political and military consequences during and after the conflict.
- 2) Civil war narratives become especially powerful in liberal democracies, where the **legitimacy/justifications** of the war have real implications.
 - a) Soldiers are often volunteers who must identify with the cause
 - b) A center of gravity for democracies is the citizen/public will to bear the costs of war
 - c) Civil war is particularly horrific to the concept of democracy, which relies on compromise through discussion and diplomacy



(Above): I visit Appomattox Court House, where Gen. Lee (CSA) surrendered to Gen. Grant (USA) to see how the site narrates the American Civil War

Hypothesis: More so than other wars, civil wars in democracies will employ "Team" and "Moderation" narratives.
Findings: While "Team" and "Moderation" were present, these narratives were not only used to promote unity, but also to delegitimize adversaries. "History" was an important narrative mechanism. An unexpected theme I found I labeled: "Tragedy of Civil Wars."

Narratives of Military Leadership in Liberal Democracies

"To an extent difficult to measure but impossible to ignore, the viability of liberal society depends on its ability to engender a virtuous citizenry." – William Galston, 1991⁶

Macro-narrative: Moderation

Micronarratives: lover of peace, appropriate motivations, moderate in victory

Example: Vologeses' speech in Tacitus' *Annals* 15.2.1-3: "I should have preferred to retain by fairness rather than by bloodshed, by reason rather than by arms, the acquisitions of our ancestors. If I have failed through hesitation, I shall rectify it through courage. At least your strength and glory remain intact, with the addition of a reputation for modesty which is not to be spurned by the highest of mortals and is valued by the gods."⁵

Analysis: Moderation is essential in democracy. In democracies, ruling is not the product of heritage, but political ambition. Appropriate motivations distinguish those pursuing political office to benefit others from those who are corrupt. Further, democracy is meant to solve problems via discussions, with violence as a last resort.

Assumption: The political nature of a liberal democracy necessitates its citizens foster values different from citizens in other types of political organization. The success of the government relies upon the citizens having these traits:

- **Courage, Law-abidingness and Loyalty** for the functioning of any society
- **Steadiness / Predictability** for trust
- **Independence, Responsibility, and Self-Restraint** for individualism
- **Tolerance** for diversity
- **Transparency** for a presumption of publicity
- **NOT apathetic, passive, cynical or uninvolved**

Question: How has military leadership been portrayed and politically deployed in modern liberal democracies, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Republic?

Hypothesis: The battle narratives that arise in democracies serve political purposes to teach citizens certain liberal, democratic values.

Findings: I categorized macro and micronarratives of war in liberal democracies and interpreted how these themes relate to the politics of leadership. I present two macro narratives here, but others, such as "Patriotism," "Fog of War," "Team," and "Concern for Reputation," remain important.

Macro-narrative: Clash of Cultures / Micro-narratives: Civilizing Missions, Othering

Example: The Arch for Septimius Severus displays Roman soldiers in a triumphal procession. The reliefs differentiate strongly between the Romans and the 'barbarians' who are shorter and submissive, being led as slaves.
Analysis: At the price of tolerance, a "Clash of Cultures" narrative increases loyalty in the citizenry. Othering those outside the state motivates war and induces fear-based patriotism. The narrative creates an insider identity; the inferiority of others legitimizes the state and bolsters the regime.



(Above) A Roman soldier with three prisoners on the Arch for Septimius Severus⁸

"I would be disgraced if I staid at home, and unworthy of my revolutionary ancestor... There is no one bearing my name left to fight for our freedom. The honor of our family is involved... A man who will not offer up his life does dishonor to his wife and children."
Private Samuel D. Sanders (CSA, 6th South Carolina Infantry)⁹

Narrative Analysis Example: "History"

When battles are told as 'Making History,' with 'Nostalgia,' or through 'Historical Metaphor,' the interplay between narratives is obvious. Historical metaphors attach the battle to a previous event, and therefore frame and define the new battle within the context of the old. Demarcating an event as historical (i.e. unprecedented) grants it an importance immediately. Themes of nostalgia force the reader to come to terms with their own merits. Do they deserve to identify with this story/nation?

With narrating civil wars, history is of utmost importance. A specific sub-narrative I have identified is 'Civil War Amnesia': the discussion/action of purposefully making known or letting fall into oblivion the true story of civil war. Is civil war so terrible an event that an author can choose to leave its memory in the past? Or is it so societally important that it must be described, and its history known? Do we need to change the history to make it more palatable/justifiable? Romans understood civil war as their own 'Perennial Curse.'

"Leave to Rome no hand / 'To raise against herself in civil strife. / ' Or, if Italia by the gods be doomed, / ' Let all the sky, fierce Parent, be dissolved / ' And falling on the earth in flaming bolts, / ' Their hands still bloodless, strike both leaders down, / ' With both their hosts! Why plunge in novel crime / ' To settle which of them shall rule in Rome? / ' Scarce were it worth the price of civil war / ' To hinder either. Thus the patriot voice / Still found an utterance, soon to speak no more. / Meantime, the aged fathers o'er their fates / In anguish grieved, detesting life prolonged / That brought with it another civil war."
Lucan's *Pharsalia* Book II, 53-66¹⁰

Reflections

My Laidlaw experience has reminded me of the importance of the narratives we read and subsequently forward as researcher-leaders. As researchers and leaders, we have the responsibility and opportunity to narrate the processes of the world. In knowledge production, we advance one story to the forefront and push another to the background. We must recognize the positionality in any source we use and think critically to separate and identify the 'truth.' To think critically is the cornerstone of research. A researcher must never take anything for granted and must always be cognizant of the impacts of her/his additions to the literature. To the *Visualising War* project, I have stimulated new research areas based on my perspective. My interest in democracies, leaders, and civil warfare resulted in a mapping of specific battle narratives. My interpretations of these narratives' political use in ancient and modern representations of war offer a new approach to tracing interplay between battle narratives. My additions to the literature are reflective of me as the researcher, and it is my hope that my work can stimulate those who come into contact with my research to form their own connections in how we speak of war.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Alice König and Dr. Nicolas Wiater, for their unwavering support, encouragement, and ideas. I would further like to thank Lord Laidlaw for providing all of us the opportunity to develop as researcher-leaders and to take action to produce influential knowledge.

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