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**The Warrior’s Seduction**

Joanna Sofaer

*Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton*

In his novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* Richard Flanagan describes the attitude to virtue of his central character, war hero Dorrigo Evans:

‘Dorrigo Evans hated virtue, hated virtue being admired, hated people who pretended he had virtue or pretended to virtue themselves. And the more he was accused of virtue as he grew older, the more he hated it. He did not believe in virtue. Virtue was vanity dressed up and waiting for applause.’ (Flanagan 2013: 53)

Virtue then is not a matter of *self*-identity, which, as Dorrigo Evans’s story unfolds, is full of complexity and doubt borne of self-knowledge and introspection. Instead, virtue in relation to self does not really exist, or at most is shallow and showy. It emerges primarily from the desire of people to attribute qualities to others, as if to give themselves hope in a world where honour and heroism seem in short supply.

As I write, the news is full of refugees fleeing conflict, stories of soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and terrorist atrocities. Perhaps it is precisely because of the lack of virtue in the modern world that the romantic vision of a warrior golden age offered by Treherne is so appealing. Yet it is both striking and disturbing that the combination of heroic traits identified by Treherne — a focus on hair and grooming as a marker of identity and lifestyle, the search for glory, eternal remembrance, and heroic death — are hallmarks of a range of modern military and terrorist groups, albeit in different ways. One thinks of the ‘buzz-cut’ in the US military, the immaculately groomed and uniformed soldiers of the North Korean regime, and the propaganda promulgated by the self-styled warriors of Daesh. In each of these cases the individual male body is linked to the body politic (Brod & Kaufman, 1994: 8). There seems very little of beauty here.

I do not doubt the importance of social categories in the Bronze Age, that ‘the warrior’ may have been one such category, or that the body, its display, and adornment played a significant role in the mediation of Bronze Age social relations. However, *The Warrior’s Beauty* proffers a highly sanitised and hegemonic view of Bronze Age masculinity that does little justice to the complexity of human identity (see Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994). Asserting that there was a ‘coherent warrior lifestyle’ does not mean that all eligible men conformed to it. The evidence for how regularly masculine ideals were enacted and sustained, or how individuals entered the warrior ‘class’ is thin — to what extent was it ‘action-based’ or inherited? Similarly, the extent to which warrior values can be exclusively equated with social status, or whether status might be expressed or achieved in a variety of other ways, is unclear. One might also ask to whom the performance of beauty was directed and whether it took place in public or in private. In an age before mirrors did men groom themselves or was this done for them? In the case of the latter, was identity, therefore, a co-creation? How might modifications to the body aim to meet the expectations of others rather than of self? Furthermore, the Homeric epic poems (a key strand in Treherne's argument) post-date the Bronze Age (Finkelberg, 1998). Thus, they cannot be understood to represent a Bronze Age reality but are likely to represent an amalgam (Snodgrass, 1974) or ‘unhistorical composite’ relevant to the values of the intended audience (Osborne, 1996: 153). Yet these unresolved questions, tensions, and deficiencies often seem to be willingly overlooked, such is the draw of Treherne’s narrative.

*The Warrior’s Beauty* remains one of the few unambiguous discussions of masculine identity in the prehistory literature and here too lies some of its allure. It is useful to recognise that the articlewas written in the early days of gender archaeology. The potential of mortuary contexts for gendered analyses in terms of the relationship between the physical body and grave goods had recently been highlighted in a range of publications (e.g. Bertelsen, et al., 1987; Gero & Conkey, 1991; see also Sofaer & Sørensen, 2013). While these and many other subsequent works aimed to rectify the ‘invisibility’ of women and other social groups, on the whole men have remained visible but ‘unmarked’ (Alberti, 2006: 401). Treherne’s article, therefore, offers a form of analysis that remains largely unavailable elsewhere. It may also provide a potential point of self-identification for modern men, something noticeable in responses to *The Warrior’s Beauty* in my own teaching practice: a delight (and relief) that the study of social identity and gender has a place for men and is not just about women! However, whether the enduring popularity of the article is due to the particular nature of the insights it provides into the Bronze Age and the nature of masculinity, or whether it results from disciplinary failure to develop a range of recognisable narratives about men (and thus a lack of alternative points of contact with the past for young men in particular), is unclear. In claiming that the origins of feudalism lie with the Bronze Age warrior, Treherne positions the Bronze Age in a particular way with regard to the construction of modernity and creates a seductive legacy for modern masculine identity. However, this apparent legacy deserves scrutiny since the elision of two distant and entirely different periods is awkward. There is, therefore, potential for a vibrant, more contextually specific discussion that enriches archaeology by recognizing dynamics, complexity, and nuances in the interwoven histories of women and men.

Though presented through the lens of theoretical debates surrounding various Marxist and post-processualist understandings of the expression of ideology that took root in the 1980s and 1990s, much of the article reads as if it could have been written more recently. Re-reading *The Warrior’s Beauty* twenty-one years after its publication, it is striking how current some of the terminology is. Terms such as ‘embodiment’, ‘performance’, ‘subjectivity’, and ‘personhood’, along with an explicit focus on the physicality of the body as a source for the construction and mediation of identity, resonate with contemporary concerns regarding the nature of past human experience. The article, therefore, retains disciplinary relevance, although it is notable that in contrast to the extended discussion of ideology in the first part of the publication, the theoretical vocabulary that may be of most interest today is comparatively under-referenced and used relatively loosely. A lack of explicit ‘positioning’ in terms of the shades of meaning that accompany some of these theoretical strands may be an additional reason for the article’s continuing appeal. In other words, it is easier to agree with generalities rather than specifics. A number of highly relevant volumes arguing both for and against Treherne’s position in relation to the body had already been published prior to 1995 but are not cited by him (e.g. Butler, 1990, 1993; Featherstone, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994; Moore 1994). It is, therefore, interesting to consider whether the impact and continued relevance of the publication reflects its original aims and intentions. Rather than continuing to use the article in order to understand masculine identity, it may be profitable to return to, and critically engage with, Treherne’s broader initial goals and arguments regarding the lived experience of ideology. Today, when it seems that ideology is everywhere, a critical re-reading of Treherne's text has particular poignancy in reflecting upon the potential role of ideology in the development of human experiences. It challenges us to consider how the expression of individual and group action is tied to beliefs about the world and one’s place within it.

Though Treherne’s article retains its popularity twenty-one years after its original publication, this is not necessarily due to its complete veracity or the bullet-proof nature of its arguments and evidence base. Instead, it appeals to the all too human desire for his narrative in our own turbulent world. It speaks to the pressing need for particular kinds of histories and thereby highlights both missed opportunities and constructive disciplinary developments. It will doubtless continue to be widely read as new generations of archaeologists find inspiration in its pages.

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