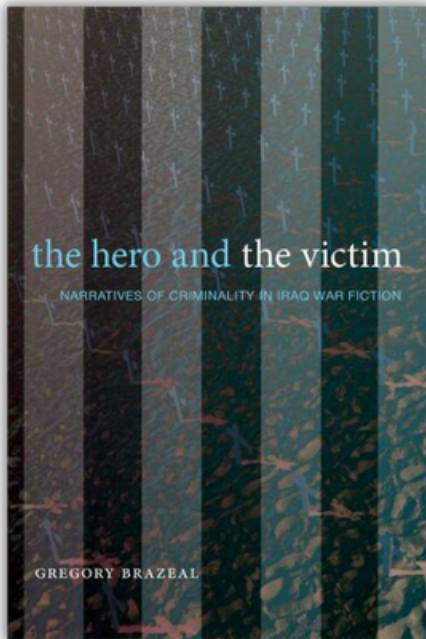




Lever Press



DOI: [10.3998/mpub.14467609](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14467609)

Paper | 2024 | \$24.99 U.S.
ISBN 9781643150666

Open Access
ISBN 9781643150673

Gregory Brazeal is a professor of criminal law and a former public defender. He served for nine years in the Army Reserve as a judge advocate and holds a JD from Harvard Law School and a PhD in English from Cornell University.



"*The Hero and the Victim* is a deft and thoughtful look at how contemporary war stories engage and complicate our understandings of criminality, wrongdoing, and righteous action. With careful attention to the literary and historical contexts at play, Gregory Brazeal reads authors like Kevin Powers, Helen Benedict, and Phil Klay in insightful and innovative ways. This will be a central volume for our consideration of the new canon of war literature."

—Stacy L. Peebles, Centre College

THE HERO AND THE VICTIM

Narratives of Criminality in Iraq War Fiction

By Gregory Brazeal

Two decades after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a canon of American literature about the war has begun to emerge. Gregory Brazeal's *The Hero and the Victim* situates Iraq War fiction in war literature's broader history. In contrast to the emphasis of most pre-modern war literature on the figure of the warrior-as-hero, and the growing modern emphasis on the figure of the soldier-as-victim, Iraq War fiction reflects the troubled emergence of a new narrative: the story of the ordinary soldier as a wrongdoer or even criminal. To a greater extent than earlier literature about American wars, Iraq War fiction is haunted by depictions of moral injury and expressions of unresolved guilt.

The emphasis on soldier criminality in Iraq War fiction can be partly explained by the rise of moral cosmopolitanism and its blurring of the traditional conceptual lines between war and crime. The anti-war literature of the twentieth century often presented fallen soldiers on both sides equally as victims and viewed the distinction between heroes and villains as part of the illusion that battlefield experience strips away. Written in the long shadow of Nuremberg, Iraq War fiction grapples with the possibility that the soldiers on one's own side may not be the heroes in the story, or even the victims, but participants in a wrong, and perhaps even complicit in crimes. *The Hero and the Victim* contributes to the ongoing, public reexamination of American traditions by confronting a topic that has, up to now, been largely untouched: the moral celebration of military service.

The Hero and the Victim explores the theme of soldier criminality through close readings of several works by American authors, including Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds*, Phil Klay's *Redeployment*, Helen Benedict's *Sand Queen*, Chris Kyle's *American Sniper*, and Roy Scranton's *War Porn*. This volume will be an essential text for students of American literature, historians of war culture, and any scholar interested in representations of the Iraq War.