

Arts & Ideas

***The Theater of War***

Featuring

Heather Goldenhersh, Alfred Molina, Brian F. O’Byrne and David Strathairn

Book by Bryan Doerries

Wednesday, October 7 at 8:00pm

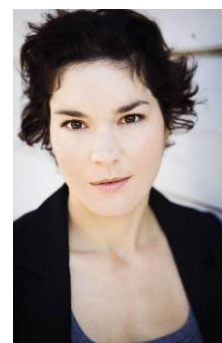
**Beverly Hills (October 2)** *The Theater of War*, featuring acclaimed stage and screen actors Heather Goldenhersh, Alfred Molina, Brian F. O’Byrne and David Strathairn, powerfully illustrates author Bryan Doerries’ experience engaging military personnel and veterans with the redemptive and therapeutic power of classic Greek plays. The event on Wednesday, October 7 is art of The Wallis’ Arts & Ideas series.

Doerrie’s recently released book, *The Theater of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach Us Today*, is published by Alfred A. Knopf along with a volume of his translations of ancient Greek tragedies, entitled *All That You’ve Seen Here is God*.

Theater of War’s mission is to present readings of Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* to military and civilian communities across the United States and Europe. By presenting these plays to military and civilian audiences, the organization hopes to de-stigmatize psychological injury, increase awareness of post-deployment psychological health issues, disseminate information regarding available resources, and foster greater family, community, and troop resilience. Using Sophocles’ plays to forge a common vocabulary for openly discussing the impact of war on individuals, families, and communities, these events will be aimed at generating compassion and understanding between diverse audiences.

It has been suggested that ancient Greek drama was a form of storytelling, communal therapy, and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans. Sophocles himself was a general. At the time Aeschylus wrote and produced his famous *Oresteia*, Athens was at war on six fronts. The audiences for whom these plays were performed were undoubtedly composed of citizen-soldiers. Also, the performers themselves were most likely veterans or cadets. Seen through this lens, ancient Greek drama appears to have been an elaborate ritual aimed at helping combat veterans return to civilian life after deployments during a century that saw 80 years of war.

Doerrie said, “One of the most powerful aspects of tragedy is its ability to move us out of our heads and into our guts. It’s not that the plays are meaningless, but they demand that we interpret them from within a heightened state of emotional awareness. People often say that they are “buzzing” after Theater of War performances. The plays are designed to do this, to move us from one cognitive state to another. And it’s only when people are vibrating and buzzing that the significance of Sophocles’ plays takes hold.”



The New York Times said, “I [was transfixed](#), as was everyone sitting in that auditorium. Sophocles might have come directly from rounds at the Veterans Affairs hospital down the street, challenging our professional smarts with his raw account of a grievously wounded veteran, rejected by his comrades and rejecting them in turn. Dorrie has moved on to engage many others, each with a collective experience of human suffering likely to be magnified and illuminated by the ancient Greeks. Prison guards in Missouri and staff at the military base at Guantánamo Bay have discussed discipline and power with the help of Aeschylus. Senior citizens have contemplated their own mortality with Sophocles by their side.”

Harper’s said that Theatre of War is “an overwhelmingly powerful performance that did not so much catalyze as properly traumatize an audience of undergrads and professors into having a conversation as a community that was unlike any experience I’d had of theater before—changed the next several years of my life.

Entertainment Weekly said, “Theater of War’ author Bryan Doerries explains how to make Greek tragedies relevant to vulnerable audiences.”

Andrew Solomon, author of *Far From The Tree* said, “Bryan Doerries’s ongoing staging of Greek tragedies before U.S. military personnel and others processing trauma is an act of courageous humanism: a tribute to vanished lives and a succor to current soldiers and citizens. In connecting the valiance and pathos of modern military life to a 2500-year tradition, Doerries has returned dignity to countless troops nearly destroyed by war. His capacious yet intimate book offers a privileged look into not only the psychological costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts and other proximate disasters, but also the larger meaning of inhabiting an unpredictable and militarized world.” -

First funded by the Pentagon in 2009, *Theater of War* has performed over 300 shows for more than 60,000 military personnel all over the world, from Guantanamo Bay to Tokyo, Japan.

### **About Theater of War**

Plays like Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* read like textbook descriptions of wounded warriors, struggling under the weight of psychological and physical injuries to maintain their dignity, identity, and honor. Given this context, it seemed natural that military audiences today might have something to teach us about the impulses behind these ancient stories. It also seemed like these ancient stories would have something important and relevant to say to military audiences today.

Theater of War Productions has presented over 300 performances of Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* for military and civilian audiences throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. We have performed at military sites as diverse as the Pentagon, Guantanamo Bay, Army posts throughout Germany, VA Hospitals, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, homeless shelters, high school auditoriums, theaters, and churches. Our audiences have included service members and veterans from the US Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Special Forces, National Guard, and Reserves, as well as high-ranking officials from the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Each reading has been followed by a town-hall style audience discussion, which has been facilitated with the help of military community members. These have been arresting, emotionally charged events, in which service members have spoken openly about their experiences in combat and at home. To date, over 60,000 service members, veterans, and their families have attended and participated in Theater of War performances and discussions.

Through a generous grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in collaboration with the USO, Theater of War expanded the scope of its programs to engage mixed civilian-military audiences in dialogue about the seen and unseen wounds of war at twelve prominent theaters across the U.S. Please click on our Theater Partners link for more information: <http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/theater-partners>

### **About Arts & Ideas at The Wallis**

Located in the heart of Beverly Hills, California, the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts (“The Wallis”) brings audiences world-class theater, dance and music, performed by many of the world’s most talented and sought-after artists. Mel Brooks and David Steinberg In Conversation is a part of The Wallis’ prestigious Arts & Ideas series, with its conversations with guests from the realms of culture, literature, and politics. This season’s

Arts & Ideas evenings included The Wallis' Artistic Advisor Denzel Washington in conversation with Todd Boyd, and Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer; upcoming are Ted Koppel and Paula Poundstone (November 1). [www.thewallis.org](http://www.thewallis.org).

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**What:** **Arts & Ideas**  
The Theater of War

**Where:** Bram Goldsmith Theater  
Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts  
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA 90210

**When:** Wednesday, October 7 at 8:00 pm

**How to get** **Prices:** \$25 - \$35

**Tickets:** **In Person** – Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Ticket Services  
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA 90210  
**By Phone** – 310-746-4000  
**Online** – [www.thewallis.org](http://www.thewallis.org)

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**Photo Captions:** 1 | Heather Goldenhersch  
2 | Alfred Molina  
3 | Brian F. O'Byrne  
4 | David Strathairn