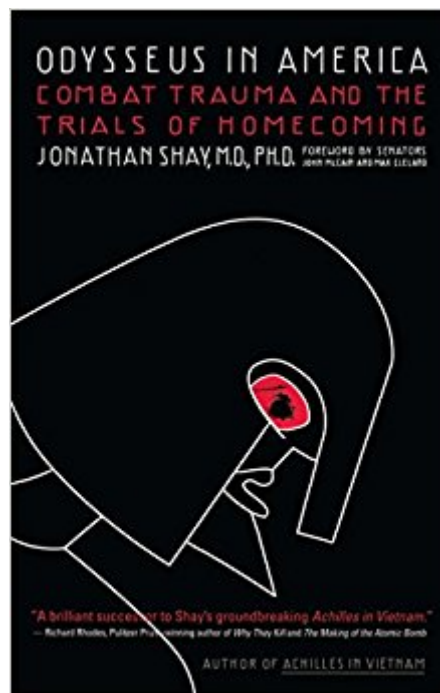




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# Odysseus In America: Combat Trauma And The Trials Of Homecoming



## Synopsis

In this ambitious follow-up to *Achilles in Vietnam*, Dr. Jonathan Shay uses the *Odyssey*, the story of a soldier's homecoming, to illuminate the pitfalls that trap many veterans on the road back to civilian life. Seamlessly combining important psychological work and brilliant literary interpretation with an impassioned plea to renovate American military institutions, Shay deepens our understanding of both the combat veteran's experience and one of the world's greatest classics.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's not exactly a secret that those returning from war often have difficulties adjusting to the peaceful life at home. Nor is it a secret that hundreds of thousands of Vietnam veterans have had emotionally rocky homecomings. The main reasons Vietnam veterans have suffered disproportionately have been identified in many books. Shay (*Achilles in Vietnam*), a Tufts Medical School faculty member, serves as a Veterans Administration psychiatrist administering to emotionally troubled Vietnam veterans and offers his second study engaging the Homeric epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, in order to describe and explain veterans' plight. Shay presents an amalgam of scholarly Homeric interpretation and case studies of maladjusted Vietnam veterans, arguing that leaders-from top policy makers to drill instructors-hold the key to preventing many psychological problems in the military. He advocates fostering a climate of community at the unit level by training and supporting competent, open-minded, ethical military leaders who have the full support of their superiors. While it's an intriguing argument, the case studies do not contribute to existing literature, and the tone of

the book-which contains countless italicized words and phrases-comes off too often as hectoring or stridently didactic. Readers with a working knowledge of The Odyssey and a familiarity with the effects of PTSD among Americans who served in the Vietnam War may get the most out of this book, which could affect policy if it finds its way to upper echelons of command. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Shay, a psychiatrist in the Department of Veteran Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Boston, has worked with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Vietnam veterans for many years. In his first book, *Achilles in Vietnam*, Shay explored the stresses and psychological injuries caused by armed combat, using the insight of Homer's *Iliad*. That book was warmly received in both the medical and the military professions. In the first third of the new book, Shay uses Odysseus's epic journey to explore the stresses faced by veterans who return home, still scarred by their intense experiences. In Shay's interpretation, Odysseus experienced nearly all of the symptoms he has observed in returned veterans of modern wars: fearfulness, inability to trust or be close to anyone, emotional outbursts, violence, criminal activity, sexual adventurism, and so forth. Clearly, Homer understood and appreciated what war really meant to the participants. The second section deals with healing techniques. The third contains Shay's suggested measures for prevention of such long-lasting injuries. Whether or not one agrees with Shay's prescriptive measures, this is a mandatory purchase for any library serving the military or their families, or where medical professionals deal with any kind of stress-related disorder. It is also a fresh take on a literary classic. Highly recommended. Edwin B. Burgess, U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Lib., Fort Leavenworth, KS  
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For insight into returning combat Veterans Dr. Shay is a wealth of insight. At times I got the feel that his reading of the Homer's classics moved toward isogesis (opposite of "exegesis"

Nothing changes-only the characters' names. Odysseus, or maybe Ulysses, is going to find his way home but damaged as are the soldiers coming home now-to their bewildered wives who have had to cope in their absence-Doctor Jonathan Shay knows his history as was shown in *ACHILLES IN VIETNAM*. In this analysis of the return of the soldier he shows he understands the human heart as well. It is better to weep over a story because you can close the book-more difficult to cry over real life because then you will never stop. And we have been crying over Penelope and the wandering Odysseus forever-

Great book that deals with a Veteran's return home and how it affects his relationships with his community and family. Very enlightening. Enjoyed it very much. Must read for those dealing with Veterans coming home.

When you begin to see how war damages the moral fabric of society by learning how warriors of long ago were affected, it is profoundly meaningful. Humans engage in war for political reasons first, then suffer for generations with spiritual conflict that requires healthy human connectedness for healing the emotional damage.

Anyone who works with veterans in any capacity - whether as a health care provider or simply as a coworker - should read this book for insights into why seemingly random, self-destructive behaviors actually make sense in the context of a person who has experienced military conflict.

I learned but I wanted more practical advice for me as a wife of a Vietnam Veteran ! Do you have recommendations for further reading for me?

Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming changed my life. This is my third copy. I've given the book to Veterans. Some copies come back to me other travel to other readers. It's all good...

Shay makes the Homeric epics sear and haunt through personal narrative of VietNam veterans. This second work, placed within the framework of the Odyssey, heightens the parallels: the long journey home-- wherever home is, and can one reintegrate back into family and society whole, if faith in the world is forever changed, and sense of self, forever altered. I have purchased 4 copies of this work as well as Shay's Achilles to share with friends. Enlightening, disturbing, unsettling....

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