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Topic: A comparative analysis of the portrayal of war heroes and violence in war films during war and during modern time

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Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 General Background

This paper aims to analyse the evolution of war films and war heroes after WW2 via new historicism and film techniques

1.1.1 Hacksaw Ridge and Bataan

Hacksaw Ridge was aired in 2016 and has grossed over 175.3 million dollars worldwide winning countless awards and receiving a lot of positive reviews. Bataan was aired in 1943 during world war 2 and was a major hit when it was first released with a profit of \$1,140,000

1.2 Rationale

During the war, the people were desensitized to violence, as if it were a social norm. Media depictions can be a powerful third force that not only motivates young men and women to serve their country but also sways public support for lengthy military engagements (Chapin , 2017). Films made during war may have been propagated to suit the country's need by showing the ideal hero or treatment towards the enemies. However, in the modern era, people are more sensitive towards war and violence and thus the portrayal of war heroes and violence may have shifted to suit the current societal trends. In Hacksaw Ridge, the protagonist avoids violence amidst the ongoing war, which is against societal norms during war.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How has the societal and historical background affect the movies
2. How is the portrayal of violence and death different in the two movies
3. How different and/or similar are the heroic attributes found in the war heroes in the two different films

1.4 Thesis statement

Hacksaw Ridge shows more disdain towards violence and war while Bataan portrays death violence as a societal norm. Meanwhile, the war hero in modern war films will show more emotions of empathy towards the enemy and may be portrayed as more kind instead of in the past where the war hero is deemed heroic solely based on his patriotism or combat skill.

1.5 Methodology

This research paper focuses more on the main hero of the two films : Desmond Doss and Bill Dane, analysing the characteristics that deem them heroic, as well as their treatment towards enemies. By using film techniques and new historicism, significance of violence can be analysed and linked back to the current society in which the films were made.

1.6 Scope of Research

Research will be based of the two movies

This paper will only include specific scenes that are more significant and within the area of research.

1.7 Significance of Research

the demand for second world war movies appears unstoppable, the supply inexhaustible (Pulver, 2014). War films are undoubtedly popular but its purpose is not only for entertainment but rather to give us a historical context of world war 2. This paper will give more insight into the evolution of war films to give readers a better understanding of world war 2 so that they can form their own perspectives from the different films. It also highlights the change in societal perspectives towards war and violence to give us a better insight into how world war 2 has shaped literature and in war films.

1.8 Limitations

The paper only compares the two movies and does not entirely represent the entire war genre and time period.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Violence in literature (specifically violence in war)

The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War (Carroll, 2012) posits a few types of violence in literature. War puts exceptional stress on men's minds. Combat elicits instinctive fight-or-flight responses but channels them into disciplined patterns of behaviour regulated by rigidly hierarchical social structures (Carroll, 2012). In war, there is a mentality of survival of the fittest, resulting in relentless and merciless violence between armies. At the same time, war systematically dehumanizes the enemy in ways that make it easier to breach the psychological inhibition most people feel against doing bodily harm to other people (Carroll, 2012). Carroll identifies violence against enemy as a norm during war which can be seen in Bataan however, modern war films are shifting away from this theory of "dehumanization of the enemy". Treatments of war ... adopt emotionally simple stances: heroism and patriotism (Carroll, 2012) This theory can be successfully applied to the film "Bataan" to explain the acceptability of the hero's violence against the enemy.

2.2 New historicism

As for New Historicism, this framework looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected a work and how the work reflects the writer's times (Greenblatt, 1980). It declares that "all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past" (Bressler, 2003). New Historicism studies how a work of literature reflects its culture and societal needs or trends at that time, allowing us to understand how a literary work comments on and relates to its context. New Historicism studies how major events can shape the author's work. In this paper, the event of World War 2 is used to explain the evolution of war films. Questions New Historicism aim to answer include "How are societal trends reflected in the producer's work during that time of production?" and "How has constant conflict and war caused a fundamental shift in how war films are produced in modern time?"

2.3 Critical film theory

Films are an artistic form of self-expression. In their films, directors can choose to take on a certain attitude or convey certain themes (Jacobs, 2013). Directors can use different film techniques such as mise-en-scene and cinematography to convey these themes. This theory will help us identify how the director portrays the theme of violence and war heroes.

2.3.1 Mise-en-scene

Mise-en-scène is French for “placing on stage”, which directly refers to how objects and characters are placed on the screen. (Moura, 2014) It refers to how the set is designed, taking into consideration how space is represented through the placement of objects. Space mainly refers to the depth, size and proportions of objects throughout the scenes, which can be manipulated by different techniques (Yale University, 2002). This includes things such as lighting, setting, costume and the behaviour of the figures. Mise-en-Scene helps the director make choices on what he wants the scene to look like and what impact it has on the viewer. (Pooles, 2014) Elements like those are under the control of the director, who decides on the set design, lighting, etc. The different elements can come together to ultimately set a tone for the film or emphasize certain themes (Moura, 2014) Mise-en-scene can be used in this paper to identify how violence and enemies are portrayed in the two films. For example, we can analyse the difference in proportion of corpse in the screen to highlights the different emphasis on the horrors of violence and war

2.3.2 Cinematography

Cinematography refers to the ways cameras are manipulated to produce different forms of cinema. In cinematography, cameras are used to capture moving pictures, while other equipment and techniques are utilized to further improve the look of the film, to set a tone or emphasize certain themes (Moura, 2014). A cinematographer is ultimately in charge of deciding “anything that audiences can see” (Schoenberg, 2011). Based on “The Five C’s of Cinematography by Joseph V. Mascelli (1945)”, the 5 C’s of Cinematography are : camera angles, continuity, cutting, close-ups and composition. All these key factors come together, allowing filmmakers to associate

different scenes with different feelings and hidden connotations. For example, the cutting of certain scenes can serve to show the lack of importance on certain themes or can be used to conceal the final outcome of certain scenes to the viewers for the director's own purpose as seen in the end credits of Bataan.

2.4 Plot Summary

This section contains the summaries of each film to give the readers a clearer understanding of the films without having to watch all the episodes. It also gives an outline of the key characters, whose portrayal will be analyzed.

2.4.1 Hacksaw Ridge

This movie centres around the protagonist, Desmond Doss who suffers from post traumatic stress disorder in which he almost killed his brother. Thus, he vowed not to resort in violence, resulting in his refusal to carry a firearm during the war. Desmond Doss goes to military training where he is ostracised by the rest of his platoon. However, he eventually makes it through and becomes a medic.

Fastforwarding to the battle of Okinawa, Desmond is a medic tasked to relieve the 96th infantry division. In this battle, Desmond saves many lives, possibly sacrificing himself along the way. However, throughout the war, Desmond does not inflict any violence onto the enemy and does not dehumanize them. In the end, Desmond is awarded the medal of honour for his bravery and service in the war.

2.4.2 Bataan 1943

To give some historical context, The Battle of Bataan followed the Japanese December 1941 invasion of the Philippines and lasted from January 1 to April 9, 1942. The American and Filipino forces retreated from Manila to the nearby mountainous Bataan Peninsula for a desperate last stand, hoping for a relief force. The Allies, however, were being driven back on all fronts of the Pacific war and none could be sent. After three months of stubborn resistance, the starving and malaria-ridden defenders surrendered and were forced to undertake the infamous Bataan Death March. The movie itself centres around the protagonist Dane and his group of 11 soldiers. The US army were conducting a fighting retreat, Dane and his crew were tasked to delay the Japanese by bombing the bridge. Afterwards, the US soldiers engage in combat with the Japanese despite the obvious disadvantage in manpower. Dane leads his crew in the task and fights the losing battle to the very end where he is the last remaining soldier. In the end credits, Dane and his crew were acknowledged for their service and it was stated that without them the US army would not be able to win the overall battle

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

In the literature review, the key idea of violence in war through the perspective of Carroll has been brought out and also 2 different film techniques. A summary of both seasons also allows the reader to understand the key characters and context of the film without having to watch the film first.

In the discussion and analysis, key scenes from the two different films would be taken out and analysed using the the different film techniques. These scenes are then separated into different segments such as violence in war and vulnerability of the hero. Using Carroll's "violence in war", a deeper analysis can be done to compare the portrayal of violence in the two films with relation to her theory. Afterwards, this paper will draw a comparison of the two films under the specific segments, using new historicism as a basis of analysis.

The conclusion chapter will look at how the portrayal of violence and war heroes have changed in films made during the war and in modern time.

Chapter 4

Discussion, interpretation and analysis

4.1: Violence in war

In war films, violence is usually dismissed as a norm due to the extensive scale of deaths and injures which has desensitised the viewers towards violence. Combat elicits instinctive fight-or-flight responses but channels them into disciplined patterns of behaviour regulated by rigidly hierarchical social structures (Carroll, 2012). It is argues that violence has become instinctive in war and thus is justified. At the same time, war systematically dehumanizes the enemy in ways that make it easier to breach the psychological inhibition most people feel against doing bodily harm to

other people (Carroll, 2012) Carroll also states that treatments of war adopt emotionally simple stance such as heroism or patriotism as an excuse or justification to inflict violence onto the enemy. This theory is supported by Bataan in which there is no emphasis on the portrayal of violence and indeed shows the sense of no mercy between the two forces.. However, Although Hacksaw Ridge affirms this theory to a certain extent, it increasingly steers away from this theory, putting more emphasis on violence and the gruesome, cruel aspects of war through various film techniques. The film also increasingly humanizes the enemy ,especially through Desmond.

4.1.1: Portrayal of violence

Fig 1. Bataan : Barney Todd is walking through a field of dead Japanese soldiers, stabbing each and every one of them to check if they are alive.



War systematically dehumanizes the enemy in ways that make it easier to breach the psychological inhibition most people feel against doing bodily harm to other people. (Carroll, 2012) There is a lack of emphasis on the corpses which highlights the “ dehumanization of the enemy”, this is shown through how the directors puts it in a way that creates no sympathy towards the dead. Mise-En-Scene states that the set is designed with consideration of how the space is represented through the placement of objects(Yale University, 2002), which includes the proportion of certain objects to create the impact the director wants on the viewers. In this scene, there are countless corpse of Japanese soldiers littered around. However, by offering a wide shot of all the corpse together, it loses the individual expression and description of each corpse. The camera does not zoom in to any one of this corpse to perhaps to show how cruel and gruesome death is. Thus, there is no emphasis on the horrors of death and indeed highlights the “ dehumanization of the enemy” by making light on their deaths. The director puts more emphasis on Todd by manipulating space in

the scene and placing him in the middle whereas the corpse are at the side, with none of them standing out or making a huge impact on the audience. This portrayal of violence helps us understand that this film desensitizes violence and does not serve to elicit emotions of pity or sympathy towards the Japanese soldiers from the audience. The act of “stabbing the corpse” highlights Todd’s lack of empathy or sadness towards the dead Japanese soldier, the motive of this act is to ensure that they are indeed dead. The non-hesitant act to inflict pain on possibly alive soldiers only further proves the “dehumanization of the enemy” in which they see the Japanese as objects or animals, not seeing them as equal or being able to feel pain, thus allowing them to breach the psychological inhibition most people feel against doing bodily harm to other people

Fig2. Hacksaw Ridge: One of the soldier stares into the screen, referring to the enemies as “animals, stinking animals”



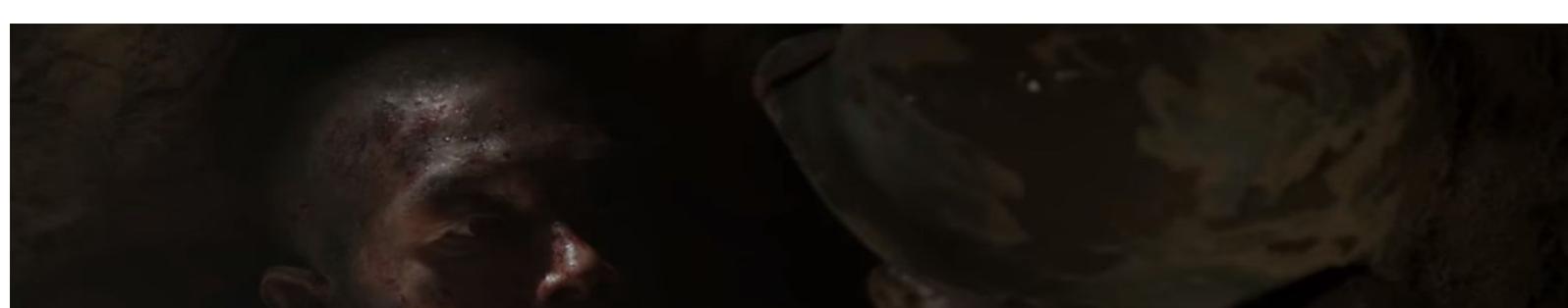
Although Hacksaw Ridge partly steers away from Carroll theory of violence, it affirms the fact that there is a sense of hatred towards the other army, causing one party to “dehumanize the other” as seen in this soldier’s dialogue. The camera zooms into his face to encapsulate the emotions of anger and annoyance towards the Japanese as seen on this soldier’s expression. The word “ animal “ is a connotation that directly highlights the “ dehumanization” of the enemy.

Fig 3. Hacksaw Ridge: one of the soldier tumbles into a horrendous and rotting corpse, getting eaten by both mice and maggots



This scene shows how the film emphasizes more on the horrors of violence, showing the gruesome side to war which was not or minimally shown in Bataan. Based on Mascelli's theory on the "5 C's of cinematography", one of it was close-ups. Close-ups are "up close and personal", detailed shots of a subject. Close-ups are used in order to zoom in and focus on a particular object in a scene or allow the viewer access to the intimate details of the subject, to create a larger impact and elicit stronger emotions in the viewers. By closing up to this Corpse, Mel Gibson creates a macabre scene, whereby the viewers are able to see every disgusting detail of the corpse to elicit not only disgust, but also a sense of pity towards the dead corpse. To further encapsulate the horror of war, Gibson manipulates space by including objects such as " mice " and " maggots" to add on to the level of disgust, so as to create a larger impact on the audience and eliciting stronger emotions of disdain towards war. It also gives the audience an understanding of the cruelty of war and how each individual soldier has to suffer as a result. Unlike Bataan where Japanese corpse are given short screen times and no close-ups, there is continuity in this scene whereby it is undistracted for a good few seconds. This shows Mel Gibson has place more emphasis on the cruel and gruesome portrayal of violence. This makes the viewers more sensitive towards death and violence.

Fig 4. Hacksaw Ridge : Desmond gives a wounded Japanese soldier Morphin, in which the Japanese soldier , although not understanding the language Desmond



spoke, puts trust in Desmond and nods his head, giving Desmond permission to carry out first aid.

This scene highlights how *Hacksaw Ridge* steers away from the idea of “dehumanizing the enemy” and how there is no feeling of sympathy for the other army. This scene shows the bond between the two individuals, a relationship built on trust and care. This scene puts the 2 sides on the same level, highlighting the alternative of peace and love in comparison to the gruesome side of war. This serves as a reminder to the audience, how the Japanese soldiers are able to feel and act out of the stereotypes of war in which combat elicits instinctive fight-or-flight response and how a soldier will instinctively look to inflict violence onto the other army. By doing so, it helps highlight the fact that the Japanese are more “humanized” in the film especially through Desmond.

Carroll’s theory of violence in war of the “dehumanization of the enemy” and how violence has become a norm can be applied and seen in both films. *Bataan* dehumanizes the Japanese, thus justifying how the American soldiers treat the Japanese soldiers violently and without emotions of guilt or sympathy in the film. It does so by placing minimum emphasis on corpses and violence which creates a smaller impact on the audience, desensitizing them towards death. However, *Hacksaw Ridge* is made to be a more macabre film, which uses various film techniques to show the gruesome and cruel side of war and death which allows readers to sympathise with the soldiers on both sides. Although the “dehumanization of the enemy” can still be seen throughout this film in most soldiers,

the film steers away from this theory by putting the Japanese on the same level as the Americans, highlighting how a bond can form between the two. Hacksaw Ridge paints a horrible light on violence, which in turn increases our respect towards the hero Desmond since his ideals are to not kill. By showing the gruesome side of war, viewers show more disdain towards violence and thus increases their positive perspective on Desmond, allowing him to seem more heroic since he does not believe in what the films portrays as disgusting and horrible.

. 4.2 Portrayal of the hero

New Historicism argues that major events can shape the way literature is made. In this case the portrayal of war heroes have been shaped along with the societal trends during and after the war. The United States military recognized the importance of motion pictures: Films could reach out to potential recruits, train troops, and disseminate information to the folks at home and soldiers spread across the planet (Amidon , 2014) Audrey Amidon highlighted the theory in which war films were made to encourage enlistment and also spread hate towards the enemies. This purpose can be met through the portrayal of heroism. Thus, new historicism serves to highlight how Bataan may portray the hero in a way which would benefit the US army while Hacksaw Ridge has no need to do so.

4.2.1 Vulnerability of the hero

Fig 5.Hacksaw Ridge : Due to conflicting ideals, Desmond Doss is beaten up by the rest of his platoon. This scenes show him cowering against the wall after he is beaten up.



First of all, the character of Desmond Doss is scrawny in nature, being referred to many times as a “ corn stalk “. This characteristics do not meet the usual idea that war heroes are physically huge and strong. This scene in particular highlights the vulnerability of the hero, one of the 5 C’s of cinematography is camera angle which is used in this example, Desmond Doss is cowering along the wall while the camera angle is tilted downwards towards him. This implies a sense of inferiority towards the rest of the platoon as this scenes portrays him as helpless towards the attacks of the other fellow soldiers. By portraying a more pathetic and helpless side to the hero, some argue that it reduces his heroic image. However, it also shows that hero is more humanized, revealing more emotions and flaws. This helps relate to the everyday man better. This scene also portrays a more realistic aspect in which the hero can be physically hurt to a large extent. As seen in this scene, Desmond has many cuts and bruises while blood is covering his whole face. His hand is clutching his stomach which also signifies the pain he feels.

Fig6. Hacksaw Ridge : At the end of the play, Desmond is seen to be brought down Hacksaw Ridge by a stretcher after the fight.



Cinematography comes into play here, space is manipulated as his upper body is zoomed in while the background is blurred out to attract the attention of the audience on this specific scene. This scene again highlight the vulnerability of the hero, from the dirt to the countless injuries, this scene shows Desmond in a very terrible state which also highlights how he has been humanized to be susceptible to harm. However, this portrayal of him makes him appear more heroic. In this scene, Desmond is clutching on to his bible which from the start symbolizes his belief in which he does not kill. The idea that Desmond holds on to his belief despite the hardship as seen in the portrayal of his injuries and state after the war paints him in a resilient and brave light which in turn makes him appear more heroic. This scene in particular was to represent his service to the US military while not sugarcoating the fact that he experienced hardship and was not perfect. However, by showing him in a terrible state, it only helps humanize him to be more relatable to the audience while at the same time make him seem more heroic.

Fig7. Bataan : in the last scene, Dane is the last remaining defender. Till the very end, he fires at the Japanese who clearly outnumbered him. Although historical context tells us that the crew were wiped out and we as readers know that Dane will eventually die. However, the scene is cut while Dane is firing the machine gun, leading to the end credit scene



In "The Five C's of Cinematography by Joseph V. Mascelli", one of the C's is cutting, which is used in this scene. The scene is cut to the end credits, removing the part in which Dames dies and fails to defend Bataan. Tay Garnett does so to preserve the ideal image of heroism he has in mind for the hero, in which he is more perfect and does not meet defeat. This scene is significant as the last scene since Tay Garnett ends off with an act of bravery and patriotism, with Dames defending Bataan with all his got. By doing so, he appeals to the audience due to his patriotism which was highly valued during war time. Also, while portraying him as invulnerable, it also tells us the ideal soldier in the eyes of the director. From this, it can be seen that Bataan has a different perspective on heroism in which heroes are more perfect and invulnerable, at the same time highly capable in killing the enemy thus being seen as patriotic.

Using New Historicism, during war time, war heroes were looked upon to be more skilled, capable in killing enemies and patriotic since they were important and valued characteristics towards the war. Since this is an American film made during the war, it cannot be neglected that there was some propaganda motive behind the film, mainly to encourage people to enlist. Thus, the hero in this case does not incur as much physical harm as seen in Desmond Doss to prevent eliciting the emotion of fear towards war in the people. However, since Hacksaw Ridge was made in a time period where war is looked back upon as devastating, it does not fear to portray the hero to be more humanizes, showing more emotions and flaws. The ideals of a hero follow a wider variety as compared to Bataan. In Hacksaw Ridge, the hero was anti-violent which differs from the capable Dame in killing his enemy. The portrayal of heroism has changed over time because of the event of WW2, allowing heroism to take up a wider range of values as seen in Desmond Doss

4.3 Relationships

4.3.1 Relationships with comrades

Figure 1: In this scene, Desmond can be seen reading the bible that his fiance gave ti to him as a sign of good luck. However, his bunkmate, Smitty Ryker, due to his hatred for Desmond's cowardice, decides to confront him. In the end, Smitty would

snatch the bible away from Desmond before returning it back after hearing Desmond's pleas



In this scene, the hatred for Desmond can be very clearly seen, through the brute snatching of the bible to Smitty's taunting. In "The Five C's of Cinematography by Joseph V. Mascelli", one on the C is continuity. Continuity is being utilised in this scene in such a way that it is able to capture the audience's attention on the hate that Desmond receives from his fellow bunkmates. This would help evoke sympathy among the audiences who would feel pity for Desmond since he is being portrayed as an innocent character who is powerless against his much stronger bunkmate. The scene does not have any interruptions, which would thus allow the audience to truly see how Desmond is being constantly taunted and bullied in his own bunk. This would help portray Desmond as a very powerless character and would help the audience understand the plight of Desmond as the only soldier who does not have the desire to kill unlike the rest. This would help emphasise on the fact that Desmond is a unique soldier, a soldier who does not kill but save. The audience through such cinematography would thus be able to see the true moral and heroic intentions of Desmond, of one that is to save people. When Desmond starts to plead with Smitty

to return the bible to him, another form of Cinematography is used, which would be the close-up. Through the close-up, we are able to see the resigned face of Desmond who knows that he is unable to stop such abuse that he is receiving due to his supposed "cowardice". However, even though he seemed like he is resigned to his fate, he still holds through to his faith of not harming anyone even though Smitty can be seen taunting him to punch him in the face. Desmond's moral desires is exemplified in this scene in the way he deals with Smitty's taunting. Instead of succumbing to his taunts, Desmond remains firm and does not act violently. This is a clear indication to us that Desmond is staying true to his word and is non-violent even though he is facing danger itself, which is what makes him such a unique hero. This will evoke a sense of sympathy in the audience as the director of the film may have wanted the audience to truly understand the struggles Desmond has to go through in order to pursue his desires of saving others. The endurance of such abuse by his own bunkmates would result in the audience being more respectful towards Desmond and would cement Desmond as a true and unique character that is not a "cowards" as previously portrayed.

Fig 2: After throwing a grenade in the Japanese trench, Smitty is ambushed by a lone Japanese soldier with the intention of stabbing Smitty in the back. However, Desmond sees this and charges at him, knocking the Japanese soldier over as well as alerting Smitty to the danger, thus successfully saving Smitty from almost certain death



Through this scene, Desmond is able to reconcile with Smitty as he is able to break the stereotype of him being a “coward” for not wanting to kill an enemy. Even though Desmond himself is not equipped with any weapon of sort, he is still brave enough to put his life on the line by rushing at the Japanese soldier who was armed. He breaks his own stereotype of being a “coward” by putting his own life at the line. Even though he does not kill anyone, he still goes through dangerous and potentially fatal situations like all the other soldiers do, and this is what makes him such a special soldier. In this particular scene, a close-up shot is used on Smitty’s face when he realises that the person who saves him is none other than the person he thought was the “coward”, Desmond Doss. Through the close-up, Smitty can obviously be seen suddenly having a dawn of realization that Desmond is not such a “coward” as he previously thought. Smitty is now suddenly deep in conflict as he had just seen a new side of Desmond. This can be seen as the start of Desmond’s heroics in risking his life for others, and is also significant as it shows how these heroics manages to improve his relationships with others and break the preconceptions about him. The audience can also see the struggle Desmond had to go through in order to save

Smitty. The addition of blood, sweat and grime after the fight exemplifies the ferocity of the fight as it shows the physical and mental harm that Desmond has to go through just in order to stay true to his faith. This would thus make the audience respect Desmond even more as an unique soldier who serves the country through the saving of lives.

Chapter 4

Research Conclusion

Due to the change in societal and culture trends, the portrayal of violence and war hero have shifted away from the idea of “ dehumanization of the enemy” and how violence has become desensitised towards violence as seen in Hacksaw Ridge. Taking into consideration the timeline in which Bataan is produced, the portrayal of the hero is more perfect in the sense that he is more invulnerable and more capable in taking out enemies since at that time violence against the enemy was celebrated behind the facade of heroism and patriotism. In Hacksaw Ridge, there is a larger emphasis on the horrors of war which in turn makes Desmond appear more heroic since his ideals of not inflicting violence appeals to the audience due to the gruesome and cruel side of war. The event of world war 2 has showed the horrors of war and violence, thus making Hacksaw Ridge more appealing with its anti-war approach.

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Chapter 24