

PIETÀ - IN THE VALLEY OF ELAH



PAUL HAGGIS

AMERICAN SOLDIER WEEPING OVER A MURDERED IRAQI
BABY

WHO IS HERE GOLIATH? NONE!
TWO COUNTRIES, USA & ISRAEL, HAVE JUST
DEMOCRATICALLY REELECTED HIS ALTER-EGOS!

http://www.progressive.org/mag_haggis0108

Q: The title comes from the valley where David fought Goliath.

Haggis: In that story, this young boy offers to fight a giant that all the king's bravest and strongest warriors won't fight. It's a story of incredible bravery. This kid was, like, fourteen years old, and he stepped up there with this stone and stood there as this giant charged. Incredibly

brave. When we hear these stories we think, "My God! I want to be like that."

So, these boys [American soldiers] go off wanting to be heroes, thinking that they're going there to support freedom. And then they find out they're doing the opposite. They realize that they're not the David, they're the Goliath. They end up doing things, seeing things, that they can't live with. They're killing civilians; they have to face that on a daily basis. They have to walk through that village and see that mother dead with her child in her arms.

Now if these were bad men, it wouldn't affect them. But these are good men. Even the ones who don't really know anything know that this shouldn't be happening. And so it affects them. Maybe we can see through their eyes and empathize. Maybe we can see how it's destroying them. Maybe we can see how it's destroying our society. And then maybe we'll change something. It's not a murder mystery, it's a moral mystery. It's not about who did it, it's about who's responsible.

But I also thought, what kind of king sends a boy to fight a monster that he won't fight himself? I mean, how cowardly, how corrupt, are the leaders sending those men over there unprepared for what they're going to face? This isn't just about Bush. It goes back a long time, if you look at the history of our wars. That's the way we solve disputes. By invading people. Somebody should stand up and say, "That's not American. That's not the America I love."

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Q: If your purpose though, is to have an impact, to change people's minds . . .

Haggis: Oh yeah, I'm very disappointed. But I am proud of the fact that it did best exactly where I wanted it to do best—in the Midwest and the South.

I think that's largely because their children are affected by this. Walk through Santa Monica and try to find somebody who knows a young man or woman who's in this war. Here, war is an intellectual concept. If you lose your son or daughter, it's no longer an intellectual matter.

I went to a screening of this film where we invited troops, veterans, family members. It was very emotional. A lot of people stood up and spoke afterwards about their experiences. I walked out to the lobby, and a woman came up to me and said, "This film was really hard to watch. My husband came home from the Iraq War and hung himself his first year back." I talked to her for a couple of minutes, and then another young woman comes up to me and she says, "It was heart breaking for me. My son was in the war, and he was stationed in Baghdad, and he came home and he shot himself." I walked outside, and another woman comes up to me, and says "I was in tears. Thank you so much for making it. My husband was in the Iraq War, and I hate myself for saying this, but when he came home I was terrified of him. I felt so awful about that, until he killed himself two weeks later."

Three women, within the course of seven or eight minutes, none of whom knew each other. That's what's happening in this war.