

**Homer's *Iliad* ('The Tale of Ilios [i.e. Troy]') as a war-poem:** battle narrative is subordinate to war's human significance. Glory in battle can give meaning to a life that will inevitably end in death. See Griffin, 1989.

Achilles (9.410-16): My mother, the silver-footed goddess Thetis, says that I have two fates that could carry me to the end of death. If I stay here and fight on round the Trojans' city, then gone is my homecoming, but my glory will never die: and if I come back to my dear native land, then gone is my great glory, but my life will stretch long and the end of death will not overtake me quickly.

Sarpedon (12.322-8): Dear friend, if we were going to live for ever, ageless and immortal, if we survived this war, then I would not be fighting in the front ranks myself or urging you into the battle where men win glory. But as it is, whatever we do the fates of death stand over us in a thousand forms, and no mortal man can run from them or escape them – so let us go, and either give triumph to another man, or he to us.



**a. Rupert Brooke** (Oxford, classics), from his notebook, written shortly before his death two days before the landings at Cape Helles and Ari Burnu on 23rd April 1915 and *The Dead*.

They say Achilles in the darkness stirred  
And Priam and his fifty sons  
Wake all amazed, and hear the guns  
And shake for Troy again.

#### ***The Dead***

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!  
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,  
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.  
These laid the world away; poured out the red  
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be  
Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene,  
That men call age; and those who would have been,  
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.  
Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our death,  
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.  
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;  
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;  
And we have come into our heritage.

Cf. *Iliad* 16.855 ff. (of Patroclus, killed by Hector) and 22.365 ff. (of Hector, killed by Achilles) '[T]he end of death enfolded him: and his spirit flitted from his body and went on the way to Hades, weeping for its fate, and the youth and manhood it must leave.'

#### **Cf. *Iliad* 9.393-416: Achilles' choice**

**'If the gods preserve me and I reach home, Peleus himself will then marry me a wife.** There are many Achaian women across Hellas and Phthia, daughters of leading men and rulers of cities, and whichever of them I want I shall make my dear wife. **It is my proud heart's strong desire to take a wife in marriage over there, the partner of my liking, and live in enjoyment of the wealth that old Peleus has won. Because nothing equals the worth of my life – not even all the riches they say were held by the well-founded city of Ilios, in earlier times, in peace,** before the sons of the Achaians came, nor all that the Archer's stone threshold guards inside, in Phoibos Apollo's temple in rocky Pytho. **Men can raid cattle and sturdy sheep, and men can win tripods and bay horses by the head – but there is no winning a man's life back again, when once it has passed the guard of his teeth.** My mother, the silver-footed goddess Thetis, says that I have two fates that could carry me to the end of death. ... [cont. above, see first quotation]



Left: the beach at Troy today. Right: Landings at Anzac Cove at 8am, 25 April 1915 © IWM (Q 112876).

**b. A.P. Herbert** (Oxford, jurisprudence, transferred from classics), protested ‘against the distinction commonly made between “light” and “serious” poetry... For myself, I am for poetry that sings, that could, you feel, be set to music.’ ‘The Bathe’, 1915, first published in A.P. Herbert, *Half-hours at Helles* (1916), written after landing and making camp at Cape Helles on 27<sup>th</sup> May (a month after the original landings)

Come friend and swim. We may be better then,  
But here the dust blows ever in the eyes  
And wrangling round are the weary fevered men,  
Forever made with flies.  
I cannot sleep, nor even long lie still,  
And you have read your April paper twice;  
To-morrow we must stagger up the hill  
To man a trench and live among the lice.

But yonder, where the Indians have their goats,  
There is a rock stands sheer above the blue,  
Where one may sit and count the bustling boats  
And breathe the cool air through;  
May find it still is good to be alive,  
May look across and see the Trojan shore  
Twinkling and warm, may strip, and stretch, and dive.  
And for a space forget about the war.

Then will we sit and talk of happy things,  
Home and 'the high' and some far fighting friend,  
And gather strength for what the morrow brings,  
For that may be the end.  
It may be we shall never swim again,  
Never be clean and comely to the sight,  
May rot untombed and stink with all the slain.  
Come, then, and swim. Come and be clean to-night.

- Homer’s Troy is ‘windy’ and men’s deaths are described with the phrase ‘he fell/crashed in the dust’;
- book 2 has a catalogue of the invader’s ships;
- R&R:
  - Achilles sings tales of men’s glory to lyre accompaniment (9.185ff);
  - men turn their thoughts to supper and the enjoyment of sweet sleep but thoughts of Patroclus keep Achilles awake and moving (24.3-20);
- Rotting unburied is the worst fate, see, e.g. Hector’s plea (22. 38-43):

‘I beseech you by your life and knees and by your parents, do not let the dogs of the Achaean camp eat me by the ships, but take the ransom of bronze and gold in plenty that my father and honoured mother will offer you, and give my body back to my home, so that the Trojans and the wives of the Trojans can give me in death my due rite of burning.’



From left to right: Trench Warfare © IWM (Q 13447); Mateship © IWM (Q 13622); 44,000 dead © IWM (Q 13438).

**c. Patrick Shaw-Stewart** (Oxford classics graduate) on going to fight at Gallipoli: ‘It is the luckiest thing and the most romantic. Think of fighting in the Chersonese... or alternatively, if it’s the Asiatic side they want us on, on the plains of Troy itself! I am going to take my Herodotus as a guide-book.’

Written when leave on Imbros was cut short, on the back flyleaf of A.E. Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), ‘Achilles in the trench’/‘I saw a man this morning’ was published posthumously in *The London Mercury* (1.3 Jan. 1920, p. 256).

<p>I saw a man this morning  Who did not wish to die;  I ask, and cannot answer,  if otherwise wish I.  Fair broke the day this morning  Upon the Dardanelles:  The breeze blew soft, the morn's cheeks  Were cold as cold sea-shells.  But other shells are waiting  Across the Aegean Sea;  Shrapnel and high explosives,  Shells and hells for me.  Oh Hell of ships and cities,  Hell of men like me,  Fatal second Helen,  Why must I follow thee?  Achilles came to Troyland  And I to Chersonese;  He turned from wrath to battle,  And I from three days' peace.  Was it so hard, Achilles,  So very hard to die?  Thou knewest, and I know not;  So much the happier I.  I will go back this morning  From Imbros o'er the sea.  Stand in the trench, Achilles,  Flame-capped, and shout for me.</p>	<p>Cf. Homer's <i>Iliad</i> 18.203–33 in which a grief-stricken Achilles shows himself to the Trojans. He takes his stand beyond the wall in the trench built by the Greeks and Athena causes a blaze of flames to spin from his head; with her help he lets loose a deafening battle cry that sends panic through the Trojan troops, resulting in the death of twelve Trojans, enabling the rescue of Patroclus' corpse. '...close about his head the queen among goddesses set a golden cloud, and made a flame burn from it gleaming bright. As when the smoke rises up from a city to reach the sky, from an island in the distance, where enemies are attacking and the inhabitants run the trial of hateful Ares all day long, fighting for their city: and then with the setting of the sun the light from the line of beacons blazes out, and the glare shoots up high for the neighbouring islanders to see, in the hope that they will come across in their ships to protect them from disaster – such was the light that blazed from Achilleus' head up into the sky. He went out from the wall and stood at the ditch, but did not go further to join the Achaeans, respecting his mother's firm command. There he stood, and shouted, and away to one side Pallas Athene raised her cry: and his shout started a mighty terror in the Trojans. As when the voice of the trumpet cries out sharp and clear, when murderous enemies are surrounding the city...'</p>
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d. **Edward Shillito** 1916, 'A New *Iliad*' in E. Shillito, *The Omega and Other Poems*, p. 56

Deaf to the music, once a boy  
His Homer, crib in hand, has read;  
Now near the windy plains of Troy,  
He lives an *Iliad* instead.

e. **Anon.** 'The Dardanelles', the poem appeared by kind permission of M. Parkinson in E. R. Jaquet. ed. 1919. *These were Men: Poems of the War 1914-18*: Marshall Brothers Ltd, London, Edinburgh and New York

<p>Why do you grieve for us who lie  At our lordly ease by the Dardanelles?  We have no need for tears or sighs,  We who passed in the heat of fight  Into the soft Elysian light:  Proud of our part in the great emprise,  We are content. We had our day  Brief but splendid crowned with power  And brimming with action: every hour  Shone with a glory none gainsay.  How can you grieve? We are not lone,  There are other graves by the Dardanelles.  Men whom immortal Homer sang  Come to our ghostly camp fires' glow.  Greet us as brothers and tell us "Lo,  So to our deeds old Troy rang."  Thus will the ages beyond our ken  Turn to our story, and having read  Will say with proudly uncovered head  And reverent breath, "Oh, God, they were men."</p>	<p>Elysian light – the Elysian fields, a part of Hades where heroes enjoy their afterlife.  Heroes who have burial mounds on the plain at Troy are Hector, Ajax, Achilles and Patroclus. Only Patroclus' mound is constructed during the <i>Iliad</i> and he appears, as a ghost, to his comrade, Achilles, before his burial is completed.  Cf. the burial of the masses: '[M]any long-haired Achaeans have been killed, and their dark blood now lies shed by fierce Ares along the lovely stream of Scamander, and their souls gone down to Hades. Therefore at dawn you should put a stop to the Achaians' fighting, and we should gather together to wheel the bodies back here with oxen and mules, and then let us burn them a little way off from the ships, so that we can all take a man's bones back home to his children, when we return again to our native land. And let us pile <b>a single funeral mound by the pyre, a common grave for all</b> stretching back from the plain. (7.326-38)</p>
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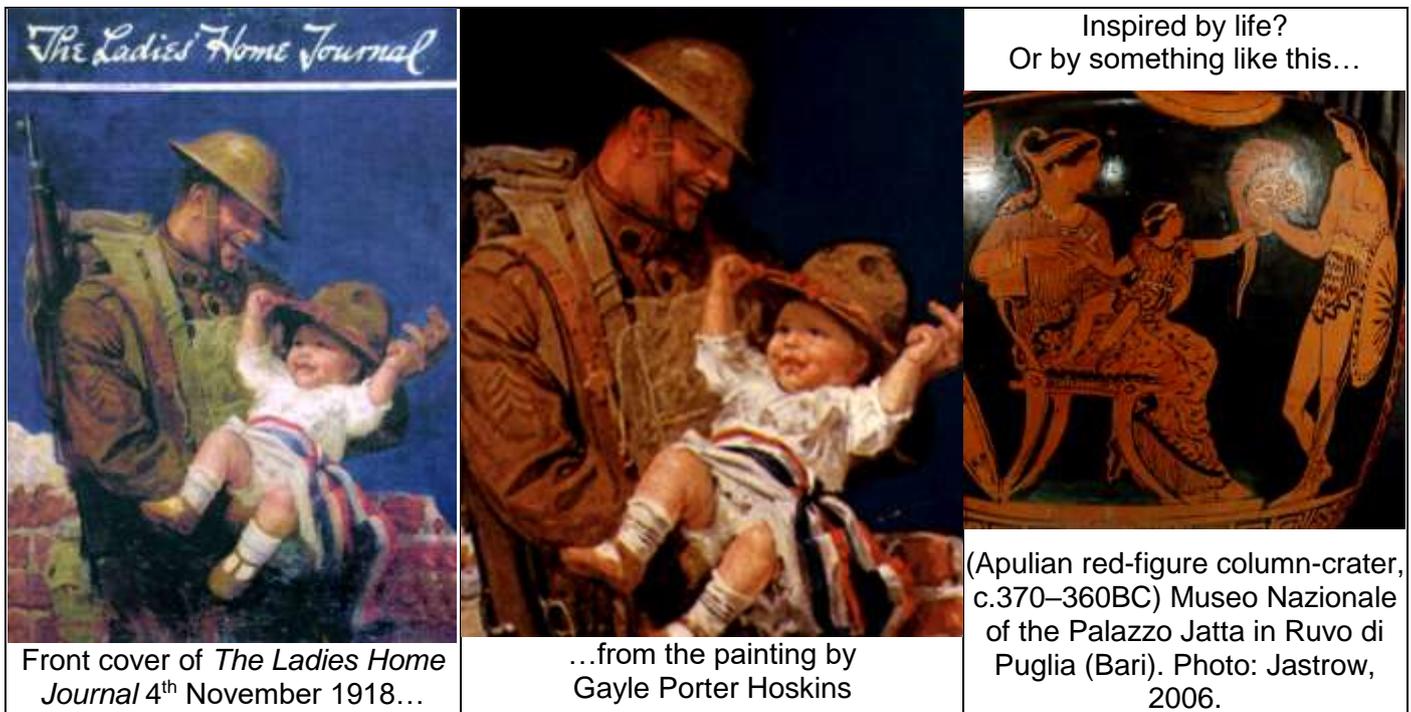
**f. Wilfred Owen (1893-1918): *Dulce et decorum est***

<p>Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,          Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through          sludge,          Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs          And towards our distant rest began to trudge.          Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots          But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;          Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots          Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.          Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,          Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;          But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,          And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .          Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,          As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.          In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,          He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.          If in some smothering dreams you too could pace          Behind the wagon that we flung him in,          And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,          His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;          If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood          Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,          Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud          Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,          My friend, you would not tell with such high zest.          To children ardent for some desperate glory,          The old Lie; <i>Dulce et Decorum est</i>  <i>Pro patria mori.</i></p>	<p><b>It is both sweet and right to die for your country</b> (Horace <i>Odes</i> 3.2.13), inspired by a C7<sup>th</sup> BC poem Tyrtaios: <b>'So let us fight with spirit for our land, / die for our sons, and spare our lives no more.'</b> Compare Hector's dismissal of omens/their interpretation: <b>'One omen is best of all – to fight for your country'</b> (12.243) and <b>'It is no shame for a man to die in defence of his country'</b> (15.497)</p> <p>Books 4 sets the tone for battle-field action: 'When they had advanced together to meet on common ground, then there was the clash of spears and the fury of men cased in bronze: bossed shields met each other, and the din rose loud. Then there were mingled the groaning and the crowing of men killed and killing, and the ground ran with blood. ....First with his cast he hit him on the ridge of his horse-plumed helmet, and the bronze point of the spear lodged in his forehead, driving in through the bone: darkness covered over his eyes, and he crashed, like a tower, in the battle's fury. .... Aias struck him in the chest, by the right nipple, and the bronze spear pushed straight through his shoulder. He fell to the ground in the dust like a [felled] poplar.... He crashed down on top of [the body of Anthemion] .... He fell with a crash and his armour clattered around him.</p>
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**g. Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967): *Remorse*** (written in February 1918), from S. Sassoon, 1918, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

<p>Lost in the swamp and welter of the pit,          He flounders off the duck-boards; only he knows          Each flash and spouting crash,—each instant lit          When gloom reveals the streaming rain. He goes          Heavily, blindly on. And, while he blunders,          'Could anything be worse than this?'—he wonders,          Remembering how he saw those Germans run,          Screaming for mercy among the stumps of trees:          Green-faced, they dodged and darted:          there was one          Livid with terror, clutching at his knees...          Our chaps were sticking 'em like pigs... 'O hell!          He thought—'there's things in war one dare not tell          Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads          Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds.'</p>	<p>See Andromache's lament over Hector 24.725-745:          'My husband, you are gone from life young, and you leave me behind a widow in your house. And our child is still only a baby ...and I do not think he will reach his manhood. Before that this city of ours will be sacked from top to bottom: because you, her guardian, are dead – you used to protect the city, and keep safe her loved wives and little children. ... And you, child, you will go where I go, where you will be put to shaming work, slaving for a cruel master. Or some Achaean will catch you by the arm and fling you from the walls to a miserable death, in his anger because Hector killed his brother, it may be, or his father or perhaps his son – there were very many of the Achaeans who sank their teeth in the broad earth, brought down at Hector's hands. <b>Your father was not a gentle man in the misery of battle.'</b></p>
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E.g. Hector & Patroclus, '[T]he vultures will eat you here.' (16.835); 'Hector had taken the glory of Patroclus' armour, and was pulling him away, to cut the head from his shoulders with the sharp bronze and drag off the body to give it to the dogs of Troy' (17.126 ff.); 'Hector called with a great shout to the Trojans: "Go fast for the ships, and leave the blood-stained spoils. Any man I find elsewhere, away from the ships, I shall see him killed on the spot, and the men and women of his family will not give him in death the due rite of burning, but the dogs will tear him in front of our city.'" (15.345-51).



**Iliad 6.440-500** Then great Hector of the glinting helmet answered her: 'Wife, all that you say is surely in my mind also. But I would feel terrible shame before the men of Troy and the women of Troy with their trailing dresses, if like a coward I skulk away from the fighting. Nor is that what my own heart urges, because I have learnt always to be brave and to fight in the forefront of the Trojans, winning great glory for my father and for myself. One thing I know well in my heart and in my mind: the day will come when sacred Ilios shall be destroyed, and Priam, and the people of Priam of the fine ash spear. .... But may I be dead and the earth heaped over me, before I hear your screams and the sound of you being dragged away.'

So speaking glorious Hector reached out to take his son. But the child shrank back crying against the breast of his girdled nurse, terrified at the sight of his own father, frightened by the bronze and the crest of horse-hair, as he saw it nodding dreadfully from the top of the helmet. His dear father and his honoured mother laughed aloud at this, and glorious Hector took the helmet straight from his head and laid it gleaming bright on the ground. Then he kissed his dear son and dandled him in his arms, and said in prayer to Zeus and the other gods: 'Zeus and you other gods, grant that this my son may become, as I have been, preeminent among the Trojans, as strong and as brave as I, and may he rule in strength over Ilios. And let people say, as he returns from the fighting: "This man is better by far than his father." May he carry home the bloody spoils of the enemy he has killed, and bring joy to his mother's heart.'

So speaking he placed his son in his dear wife's arms. She took him to her scented breast, smiling with tears in her eyes. Her husband saw the tears and was moved with pity. He stroked her with his hand, and spoke to her, saying: 'Poor wife, please do not let your heart be too distressed. No man will send me down to Hades before my fated time – and fate, I tell you, is something no man is ever freed from, whether brave man or coward, from the first moment of his birth. No, go back to the house and see to your own work, the loom and the distaff, and tell your maids to set about their tasks. War will be the men's concern, all the men whose homeland is Ilios, and mine above all.'

So speaking glorious Hector took up his helmet with the horse-hair crest. And his dear wife went back towards their home, turning often as she went, the heavy tears falling. Soon she came to the pleasant house of Hector the killer of men, and all the many servant-women she found inside she set to lamentation. So they mourned Hector, while he still lived, in his own house: because they thought he would never again return from the fighting, and escape the fury of the Achaians' hands.

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