

Palama-Tritle

"Epilogue: The Legacy of War in the
Classical World" 726 - 742

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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THE CLASSICAL
WORLD

Edited by

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and

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EPILOGUE

THE LEGACY OF WAR IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

.....

THOMAS PALAIMA AND
LAWRENCE A. TRITLE

ROMAN legionaries advancing against a hillside of Germans chanting their famous *baritus* war cry (cf. Tac. *Germ.* 3) captivated audiences around the world in the opening scene of Ridley Scott's Hollywood blockbuster *Gladiator* (2000). Zack Snyder's animated (and cartoonish) *300* drew equally huge crowds that watched the heroic deaths of the Spartans at Thermopylae, inspiring too young American leathernecks, that is, Marines, to tattoo themselves with images of ancient Greek warriors (2006). Such is the continuing attraction of battle in the classical world. In this short discussion Tom Palaima explores the literary impact of classical war, warriors, and authors into the modern world, while L. Tritle traces more historical traditions.

THE NEW LITERATURE OF WAR

.....

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

—William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"

The sad truth is that human beings in Western culture have been telling stories about war for over three thousand five hundred years in oral and written traditions coming down from the Homeric epics.¹ Yet men, fully aware of the news these stories relate, have been dying miserably nonetheless.

Williams's poem, written in the 1950s when he was in his 70s, is an example of the grip that classical literature about war still has on modern writers when their thoughts turn to war, even, as here, within a beautifully complex love poem. Williams writes: "Always/when I think of the sea/there comes to mind/the *Iliad*/and Helen's public fault/that bred it./Were it not for that/there would have been/no poem but the world/if we had remembered, those crimson petals/spilled among the stones,/would have called it simply/murder./The sexual orchid that bloomed then/sending so many/disinterested/men to their graves/has left its memory/to a race of fools/or heroes/if silence is a virtue."

Williams plays with the asphodel as the "flower of hell," alluding to the asphodel meadow of the underworld in the *Odyssey*, and with the figure of Helen, without whom, in his view, the mayhem that took place during the ten years of fighting at Troy and that was looming over mankind in the form of the atomic bomb during the first years of the Cold War would simply be murder. Thus do writers confronting warfare in any period seek comfort in finding some causation, however senseless, for the organized and state-sponsored killing of large numbers of human beings, whether fools or heroes. The very first song of war by Homer offers as unconvincing a reason as any.

Aeschylus, too, in his great play the *Agamemnon*, partakes of the banquet of Homer. Positing Helen as the cause of the war made no sense to the grandest of Greek tragedians, himself a war veteran from the "greatest generation" of Classical Athens, the Marathon fighters who defeated the Persians.² Instead, he tends to focus specifically on Helen's role in destroying the Greek soldiers who went to Troy. He uses a Greek infinitive form *helein* "to take hold of" that puns on her name and her power to take men off to death. In Richmond Lattimore's translation, itself a product of World War II culture,³ the chorus (lines 681 and ff.) wonders whether "some mind unseen/in divination of your [Helen's] destiny/shap[ed] to the lips that name/for the bride of spears and blood,/Helen, which is death? Appropriately/death of ships, death of men and cities...."

1. The earliest lines in Homer were written in the sixteenth century b.c., as we can tell by converting particular "problem" lines linguistically to their original forms: Ruijgh 2004: 527–42. There is ample evidence of musical instruments in the archaeological record and of musical performance in the iconographical record from the Greek Bronze Age: Younger 1998.
2. Aeschylus's self-written epitaph says nothing about his work as a tragedian, focusing entirely on the prowess that he displayed as an Athenian soldier against the Persians on the plain of Marathon.
3. Lattimore 1953: 56. The translation was completed and copyrighted in 1947; sections had already appeared in Eberhart and Rodman's 1945 anthology of war poems.

War can also be seductive and exhilarating, especially for those who have never fought in it or who are lucky enough to survive it reasonably intact in their bodies and their souls (see Broyles 1984: 55–65). The *Iliad*, which psychiatrist and veterans' counselor Jonathan Shay correctly praises for its realistic presentation of how soldiers may be psychologically broken by a "betrayal of what is right" (Shay 1994), was read by British poet Rupert Brooke at the outset of World War I, in keeping with the romantic spirit of his age,⁴ as an invitation to ennobling glory.

As Brooke was departing to fight in the Dardanelles, he wrote to poet Herbert Asquith's sister what we might call patriotic gush, had such ideas not been so prevalent at the time: "Do you *think* perhaps the fort on the Asiatic corner will want *quelling*, and we'll land and come at it from behind and they'll make a sortie and meet us on the plains of Troy? ... I've never been quite so happy in my entire life, I think" (see Keynes 1968: 662–3; also Stallworthy 1984: xxvii). This is an extreme version of what Paul Fussell, arguably the greatest critic of the literary experience of war in the twentieth century, describes as the use of the canon based on the classics by a highly literate British soldiery whose "intercourse with literature... was instinctive and unapologetic—indeed, shameless" (Fussell 1975: 161).

Fussell cites a letter home of Alexander Gillespie still early in the war (May, 1915) in which he conveys his thoughts at night on the battlefield: "[A]fter Tom was killed I found myself thinking perpetually of all the men who had been killed in battle—Hector and Achilles and all the men of long ago, who were once so strong and active, and are now so quiet" (Fussell, *ibid.*, with Chapman 1937/1968: 160). Here we see the seeds of the introspection caused by personal loss that, combined with the relentless slaughter produced by mechanized warfare, will eventually lead thinking writers to deconstruct widely held and promoted romantic notions of classical warfare and even reject the classics altogether.

Prime examples are Wilfred Owen writing during the war (August 1917) and Ezra Pound writing not long after (1920). Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est," confronts imagined home-front readers, who, in their ignorance of the conditions of trench warfare, are susceptible to believing the Horatian tag line that gives the poem its title: "it is sweet (*dulce*) and becoming (*decorum*) to die for one's country (*pro patria mori*)."

The sentiments frozen in this line have a long history. They are Homeric and adjusted by the seventh-century b.c. poet Callinus to the new form of nonheroic combat known as hoplite warfare. Callinus writes that even in hoplite ranks, "it is a thing of public honor (*timēen*) and attractively resplendent (*aglaon*) for a man, fighting against the enemies, to die for his country, children and wife." Those who died in battle as hoplites (Callinus) or Roman legionaries (Horace) might end up looking okay, not grotesque or gruesome (see Tritle 2010: 101–04, for a graphic description of the gore and chaos at the battle of Delium). But the odds of looking noble after death in World War I were very long indeed.

4. See Fussell 1975: 17–29, on how innocent and steeped in chivalric notions the generation that fought in the trenches of World War I was at its start.

Owen proves this with a graphic image of the horror of soldiers attacked by gas. He intends for it to waken complacent readers to “western-front” reality:

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: dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori.

In modern mechanized warfare, the individual soldier has far less chance than his Greco-Roman counterparts to fight or die nobly. Worse still, in Pound’s post-war view, is the effect this kind of combat has on the moral behavior of soldiers and on what kinds of society can be reshaped after the war. Pound, too, riffs on Horace and Homer.

In the opening poem of his lengthy eighteen-poem collection “H.S. Mauberley (Life and Contacts),” Pound claims for his poet character an inspiration from the Sirens whose song Odysseus made sure to hear. Many first-time readers of the *Odyssey* are dumbfounded when they find out what the Siren song is. Their claim, in Pound’s phrase, “[c]aught in the unstopped ear” of Odysseus is to know all about the Trojan War. The classically educated Pound gives it in Homeric Greek (we here transliterate): “*Idmen gar toi panth’, hos’ eni Troiē*”: “For we know all things so many as at Troy.” The original Greek audiences, living in a culture where war was the norm and peace the short-term exception, would have thought this an important mystery to learn.⁵ And what did the modern Trojan War that saw 65,038,810 soldiers mobilized, 8,538,315 killed and died, and 21,219,452 wounded accomplish in the Siren-inspired poet’s opinion?

These fought, in any case,
 and some believing, pro domo, in any case...
 Some quick to arm,
 some for adventure,
 some from fear of weakness,
 some from fear of censure,
 some for love of slaughter, in imagination,
 learning later...
 some in fear, learning love of slaughter;
 Died some “pro patria, non dulce non et decor”...

5. See further Palaima 2007: 18–22, on the prevalence of ancient warfare and the impossibility that ancient Greek non-combatants would not understand better what their soldiers were going through when fighting wars.

walked eye-deep in hell
 believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving
 came home, home to a lie,
 home to many deceits,
 home to old lies and new infamy; . . .
 There died a myriad,
 And of the best, among them,
 For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
 For a botched civilization.

Still, after the “war to end all wars,” the classical tradition maintained its hold on those who went to or thought about the next war, the so-called “good war.” This was because education was still based on the classics. The eminent classical epigrapher and historian Arthur Geoffrey Woodhead (April 2, 1922–November 6, 2008) sums up what the classics taught about war to those who were growing up after the Great War (Woodhead 1990: 1–3). He recounts that after the basics of Latin, a student read Julius Caesar, learning

how he and his Roman legions slaughtered large numbers of Gauls, or, alternatively, how he and his legions slaughtered large numbers of fellow Romans. With this as his springboard, the student then proceeds to tackle Livy, where he reads how the Romans killed off large numbers of Carthaginians or vice versa—if not how they killed off more Gauls, or Samnites, or Aequi, or Volsci.

Woodhead follows the stream of his youthful education past war leaders like Caesar and Scipio and the battles of Pharsalus and Cannae to Homer's accounts of quarreling commanders at Troy and Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors. He then continues to Herodotus's grand story of the Homeric valor displayed by the warring Persians and Greeks, to Vergil's crystallization of all that war entails in the new Roman world, to the war motifs that invade the love poems of Ovid, and finally to what Thucydides offers those who want to understand the relations of states before and during wars.

Even with such a thorough vicarious knowledge of the ways of war, the educated men who went off to fight in World War II were still unprepared; and they were less inclined amid its even greater machine-generated destructive force, culminating in the atomic bombs, to use the classics as a reference point.

A notable exception that proves the rule is Keith Douglass. His “Aristocrats,” written in Tunisia during the North African campaign in 1943, uses as an ironic epigraph, “I think I am becoming a God,” the dying words of the emperor Vespasian, as reported by Cassius Dio. The poem describes the truly macabre translation of the *mores* of classically trained British gentlemen, their cricket, their hunting, their pipes, and their sangfroid, to shell blasts and maimings in the African sand:

Peter was unfortunately killed by an 88:
 it took his leg away, he died in the ambulance.
 I saw him crawling on the sand; he said
 it's most unfair, they've shot my foot off.
 How can I live among this gentle

obsolescent breed of heroes, and not weep?
 Unicorns, almost,
 for they are falling into two legends
 in which their stupidity and chivalry
 are celebrated. Each, fool and hero, will be an immortal.

Douglass's words make real Vespasian's words. These men are an un-Homeric "gentle obsolescent breed of heroes." They are also fools and heroes, just like the men for whose deaths Williams sought a classical answer in "Asphodel." They behave impeccably, as is required of gentlemen, no matter what the circumstances. They achieve an un-ironic apotheosis because Douglass is there to be their Homer and place their peculiar claims to *kleos* (Homeric praise of warriors) in a suitable classical context.

The classics still have some force. This is seen in anthologies compiled during the war. It was only natural that a war that really did encompass the world and even take it to the edge of extinction would produce collections that tried to distill a kind of universal wisdom by surveying all that Western human beings had ever written on the subject.

One such example is Eberhart and Rodman's *War and the poet: An anthology of poetry expressing man's attitudes to war from ancient times to the present* (1945). Eberhart explains in his introduction, "I have said elsewhere that the best war poetry achieves a universality of utterance transcending the particular: the best war poems are about Man. They express the poet's attitude to something beyond the immediacy of war. . . ." Rodman adds what he takes to be clearly defined feelings about the human condition, a kind of philosophical pathos that marks out classical war literature and explains why he has chosen the classical passages that appear in the volume: the epics of Homer, the martial lyrics of Tyrtaeus, Callinus, Alcaeus, and Simonides, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, passages from Sophocles and Euripides, from Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, from Vergil, Horace, and Propertius.

The focus in the Aeschylus selections, translated by G. M. Cookson, Richmond Lattimore and Louis MacNiece, is upon the suffering of men in battle. The messenger speech from Aeschylus's play *The Persians* is representative: "Many of ours capsized,/Until the very sea was hid from sight/Choked up with drifting wreckage and drowning men./The beaches and low rocks were stacked with corpses. . . ."

This concern for what common soldiers are going through, often because of the failings of civilian leaders and of their own commanders, is conveyed with frank honesty in the introduction to an anthology of war literature made by Ernest Hemingway for an American audience in 1942, when the United States had just gone to war. *Men at War*, a massive work of 1,072 pages, closes with a three-page account of a downed navy pilot's "fish eye view" of the battle of Midway. The first passage of its opening section, "War is Part of the Intercourse of the Human Race," is "The Invasion of Britain" (3–9) by Julius Caesar. The second section groups selections demonstrating that "War is the Province of Danger, and Therefore Courage Above All Things Is the First Quality of a Warrior." It includes a two-page version of Livy's account of "Horatius at the Bridge" (221–222) and Charlotte Yonge's "The Pass of Thermopylae 430 [sic for 480] b.c." excerpted from *The Book of Golden*

Deeds. Men at War also includes twenty-three pages taken from Xenophon's *Anabasis*, five pages giving Vergil's account of the Trojan Horse and six pages from Livy on the battle of Cannae.

Hemingway's emphasis in compiling these selections, including the classical passages just surveyed, is to get across the realities of war (xi):

This book will not tell you how to die. This book will tell you, though, how all men from the earliest times we know have fought and died. So when you read it you will know that there are no worse things to be gone through than men have gone through before. . . . And no thing that can happen to you from the air can ever be worse than the shelling men lived through on the Western Front in 1916 and 1917. The worst generals it would be possible to develop by a process of reverse selection of brains carried on over a period of a thousand years could never make a worse mess than Passchendaele and Gallipoli.

Hemingway discusses many of the eighty-two selections, but none of the six classical excerpts, thus signaling in a small way his own tastes for a modernist directness.

The Second World War was something of a watershed in the relevance of the classical tradition to contemporary war literature. What Samuel Hynes writes in *The soldiers' tale*, his study of war memoirs from the two world wars and the war in Vietnam, becomes truer and truer as the scale of mechanized war progresses and individual soldiers have less and less grasp of what is going on and believe less and less that their own actions and sacrifices will make an iota's difference: "In most war narratives there is nothing to suggest that the author is aware of any previous example: no quotations or allusions or imitations of earlier models, and no evident knowledge of previous wars" (1997: 4).

Another factor was the demise of the classics as the core of secondary and college-level education. This means that writers about war who refer to the classics in the 1960s and afterward are doing so without the deep familiarity that study of the works in their original languages brings.

One notable exception to these trends deserves highlighting. Joseph Heller in his *Catch-22* (published in November 1961) had Homer's *Iliad* firmly in mind for elements of plot and for parallels between his main character Yossarian and Homer's Achilles. This is so spectacular an anomaly that Heller's own explanation in a 1998 interview with Charlie Reilly is worth quoting in full (Reilly 1998: 507; cf. Golden 1995: 131–8):

Q. *Catch-22* doesn't end that way, and neither does Homer's *Iliad*. You've said there are connections.

A. Conscious ones. *Catch-22* was not an imitation of the *Iliad*—for example, there is so much fantasy and humor in my novel. But I was very conscious of Homer's epic when writing the novel, and at one point, late in the book, I directly compare Yossarian to Achilles. At the same time, I'd be the first to agree that, as a hero, Yossarian is different from most heroes of antiquity. From most heroes, period.

My ending had the same problem the Trojans had, that damned horse. Most people think the *Iliad* ends with the Trojan horse, but Homer's work, and mine, stop

long before. Just as the *Iliad* is ending, there's that magnificent scene when Achilles meets with Priam and his sympathy and emotions finally come pouring out. The ending of *Catch-22* shows Yossarian going through a similar experience.

Q. Were you thinking of Homer's ending when you wrote the conclusion to *Catch-22*?

A. Very much so. The *Iliad* was one of the first books I read and enjoyed as a child. The first version I read was a children's version, and it came "complete" with the horse and the fall of Troy. I recall that the first time I read the real *Iliad* I was shocked; I thought I had stumbled upon a corrupt edition. But the more I thought about "Homer's ending," the more I admired it.

The opening lines of an epic are so important. The *Iliad's* very first line talks about "the dreadful anger of Achilles"—not about the fall of Troy or the Trojan horse or anything else. And the final scene with Priam shows Achilles' nobler side overcoming that wrath. *Catch-22* went beyond that, of course; it was very much concerned with attitudes toward war, attitudes toward bureaucracy. It occurred to me at one point that I could draw an analogy between Yossarian and Colonel Cathcart, on one hand, and Achilles and Agamemnon on the other. But it wouldn't have worked. Agamemnon and Cathcart are completely different people.

There is another echo of the *Iliad* insofar as the hierarchy of power is concerned. At the beginning Homer makes it clear Achilles isn't interested in acquiring another concubine; he wants Agamemnon to return the priest's daughter. When Agamemnon returns the girl and then steals Briseis, Achilles finds himself powerless. He broods in his tent until Patroclus is killed and then he finally takes action. Yossarian is faced with a similar problem. He is powerless until, after Nately's death, he is driven to break the chain.

For the Vietnam War, Tim O'Brien's work is both a similar anomaly and confirmation of the trend we have been discussing. Only in his first work, *If I die in a combat zone, box me up and ship me home* (1973, with a second edition with author's revisions in 1979; hereafter *Combat zone* [1973] and *Combat zone* [1979]) does O'Brien use the thoughts and perspectives of classical authors to help him come to terms with his own disturbing experiences in Vietnam. In all his later writing, he focuses squarely on the actions, thoughts, and feelings of his characters in a way that conforms to Hynes's view of memoirs, or, in this case, fiction based on remembered experiences (Palaima 2000: 1–22).

In *Combat zone*, his main character, Tim O'Brien the soldier, quotes Plato's *Laches* on courage. He refers to Socrates's decision in the *Crito* to face certain death rather than renege on his agreement with the laws of his country (O'Brien talks about this while recounting his own decision about whether to evade the draft). He traces the tradition of guard duty back to "Thucydides and Polybius and Julius Caesar." After describing many cases of ghastly and pointless human suffering, O'Brien denies as forcefully as Wifred Owen and Ezra Pound any truth in the Horatian tag-line: "Horace's old do-or-die aphorism—'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'—was just

an epitaph for the insane” (*Combat zone* [1979]: 168); chapter two is entitled “Pro Patria”; chapter twelve “Mori”; chapter nineteen “Dulce et Decorum.”

Classical texts and themes help O’Brien understand his own experience in Vietnam. They provide the intellectual basis for the value system that guided him into and through Vietnam and shaped his first book. Despite his bitter assessment of Horace’s *dulce et decorum est*, O’Brien believes that some kinds of virtue operate even in Vietnam. He focuses on the courage that is defined as “wise endurance” in the *Laches* of Plato. But he is fully aware that “most soldiers in Alpha Company did not think about human courage” (*Combat zone* [1979]: 141). Nor did they aspire toward Homeric or Platonic forms of heroic behavior. Many had never even heard of Homer or Plato. After *Combat zone*, O’Brien is done with the classics.

As we come to writing about the most recent uses of armed forces by the United States in the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the impact of the classics on war literature is even more attenuated. Soldier-writers and writers about what soldiers now do are given to using certain themes, ideas, and figures in classical literature as touchstones, but they leave the impression of having no serious familiarity with the works they cite or use.

A strange use of a phantom citation proves this point. On May 12, 1962, General Douglas MacArthur gave a speech to cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on the occasion of accepting the Sylvanus Thayer Award. His remarks included the following classical allusion:

This does not mean that you are warmongers. On the contrary, the soldier above all other people prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. But always in our ears ring the ominous words of Plato, that wisest of all philosophers: “Only the dead have seen the end of war.”

MacArthur had made the reference once before in his equally famous, in military circles, Rainbow Division veterans’ speech in 1935. The quotation attributed to Plato, again without mention of any specific work, also shows up as an epigraph at the opening of Ridley Scott’s movie *Blackhawk Down* (2001) and in the book of the same name by Mark Bowden on which it is based.⁶ Both tell the story of a savage firefight in Somalia in October 1993. It is the epigraph of chapter 25 of Lt. Gen. H. G. Moore and J. L. Galloway’s 1992 book on the Vietnam War, *We were soldiers once . . . and young* (reference noted by Professor David Luper of the Classics Department of the University of Puget Sound).

The quotation, again attributed to Plato, is also inscribed on a wall of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London. In 2003, I investigated the matter with the director of the MacArthur Library and Dr. Neil Young, the historian of the Research and Information Department of the IWM. The problem is that the statement can be found nowhere in Plato’s works, and the lack of an attribution to a particular work makes it even more suspect.

6. Bowden 1999, based on a 1997 account in the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, <http://inquirer.philly.com/packages/somalia/nov16/default16.asp>.

In fact, the quotation derives from philosopher George Santayana. In a 1922 collection of essays, Santayana recalls being in Oxford near the end of World War I and looking with full human sympathy upon British soldiers celebrating their escape from trench warfare. He wrote (1922: 102 [= Soliloquy # 25, “Tipperary”]), “Yet the poor fellows think they are safe! They think that the war is over! Only the dead have seen the end of war.”

The quotation appears attributed to Plato in R. D. Heinl’s *Dictionary of military and naval quotations*. But, of course, that attribution must go directly to MacArthur. James Zobel, the archivist of the MacArthur library in Norfolk, Virginia, has himself been trying to track the source. Unfortunately MacArthur took his extensive library to the Philippines during the war and lost it when he had to withdraw ahead of the Japanese advance. Zobel reports that the works of Plato in MacArthur’s prewar library were *Dialogues of Plato*, vols. 1–5, and Grote’s *Plato*, vols. 1–3 (email, October 21, 2003).

The point here is that all of these war writers feel the need to use a classical author as a touchstone. They are seeking a universal truth, a clue to human behavior, an insight into the very nature of human beings and our predilection for organized state violence; they turn to the classics in the same way that the anthologists during World War II and the World War I poets did, only without any comparable depth of knowledge.

We should note here the fascination in the last dozen years with the severe Spartan form of military regimen reflected in the popularity of Steven Pressfield’s 1998 novel, *Gates of fire*, about Thermopylae and its aftermath, or Frank Miller’s graphic novel *300* (made into a film by Zack Snyder, 2006) on the same subject. Given the clear and strong identification during the Cold War of the United States with the freedoms and democratic values of Classical Athens and the demonizing of the Soviet Union as a Spartan culture, Halle (1955: 261–77 [“Appendix: A Message from Thucydides”]) the popularity of Sparta in the new millennium certainly reflects somehow the changes in the views that Americans have about their government, their country, and the abandonment of universal military service in favor of at least a notionally elite and well-trained small army.

Literature connected with Operation Desert Storm and with the presidential uses of armed force in Iraq and Afghanistan follows the same pattern. The socio-economic and educational profile of the all-volunteer army is one factor in reducing the use of classical literature by soldier writers. Anthony Swofford in *Jarhead*, his account of Desert Storm released in 2003 just ahead of the Iraq invasion, refers to his reading of Homer’s *Iliad* and Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, but he writes at much greater length about movies that he and his fellow soldiers watch and respond to communally. War is already moving into an electronic age of text messaging, emailing, blogging, and posting images on YouTube.

Nathaniel Fick, an undergraduate classics major at Dartmouth, served as a Marine officer in Afghanistan and Iraq. He was drawn into the Marines searching for a way to be “trained in the severest school,” a line taken from Thucydides, and to measure up as a “hard” man. He begins sections of his book with epigraphs

from Plutarch and Saint Augustine. But there is little use in his narrative of any deep thinking he might have done in reading the classical authors from whom he borrows phrases. He writes that in the process of becoming an infantry officer he underwent “a subtle change in my worldview. Instead of classes in philosophy and classical languages, I gravitated toward national security and current events.” He views the “grunt life” of an infantryman as “untainted,” sensing “a continuity with other infantrymen stretching back to Thermopylae.” The Spartans and their motto, “When you return from battle, you will either bear your shield or be borne upon it” become his ideals (Fick 2005: 33, 54).

Fick cannot even be categorized as an exception. He uses the classics superficially to create a mirage that will satisfy a brooding interest in self-fulfillment that falls in with the advertising slogan “Be All You Can Be” of a competing branch of the armed services, the United States Army. Yet his self-absorption in satisfying his own emotional needs surrounding self-identity just might give us real insight into the inner psychology of the individual ancient Spartans who lived their entire lives trying to live up to nearly impossible standards of what we still call Spartan personality.

In this, Fick is not so different from the gushing Rupert Brooke who in a dreamier, but no less self-indulgent way wanted to be not a Leonidas at Thermopylae, but a Hector or Achilles on the plains of Troy. Such is the power that classical stories of war still have on the young and undeveloped minds of men who bear arms and write about it.

CLASSICAL WARFARE’S MODERN LEGACY

No two responses to war are the same. After several early post–World War II short stories, a shaken J. D. Salinger, who had seen much in 1944–1945, never returned to the subject, believing that the best way forward was silence (cf. Slawenski 2010: 135–9). A generation later Tim O’Brien (1990: 68–9) would cynically condemn the telling of war stories, arguing that any glow of an “uplifting” war story was evidence only of its power as a lie: compare Wilfred Owen, “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” and his view on the “pity of war.” These modern responses to war find echoes in the “war” plays of Euripides (e.g., *Helen*, *Heracles*) and in Pindar’s oft-quoted reminder that “To those untried, war is sweet” (fr. 110; and above Millett, 00–00; also Croally 1994).

But if numbers matter, the view of the many is against Salinger and O’Brien, Euripides and Pindar. What long dominates are stories of great men, great commanders, and nowhere is this clearer than in the work of Plutarch, whose lives and moral tales of noble Greeks and Romans gave lessons of who (and who not) to emulate. These lessons and moral tales continued to influence young Europeans and Americans into the early twentieth century. Poems of the First World War

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celebrate the Spartan mother's admonition, "with this or on this," and the notion that a son belongs not to the mother who bore him but to the state (see further Plut. *Mor.* 242A, 240C and Vandiver 2010: 179, 182). Plutarch preserves an even earlier example of this in his account of Julius Caesar. While governing in far-off Spain, Caesar once found a moment of leisure to read about the great Alexander, which evoked a tearful outburst as he had as yet accomplished nothing comparable (Plut. *Caes.* 11.5–6). Alexander's accomplishments inspired other Romans: Pompey, styled "the Great," and even young Octavian, who paid homage to the Macedonian conqueror in Alexandria after defeating Antony and Cleopatra (Cass. Dio 51.16.5).

However stirring Alexander's victories were, their glamour and impact was not lasting. On the other hand, those of the Romans, and especially the Romans of the Republic, were durable and offered genuine lessons (as noted by Adcock 1957: 97, in the conclusion to his study of Greek and Macedonian warfare), which should call into question the notion of a Greek-inspired "western way of war," as advanced by Hanson 1989/1994.⁷ This too was recognized by none other than the Florentine humanist (and failed diplomat) Niccolò Machiavelli. Study of Livy and reading of other classical historians, including Polybius, taught him that the citizen soldier was superior to the mercenary, that a Prince versed in the art of war and who led his own men into battle, could control his own fate and the destiny of his state (*Prince* 12–14). While Machiavelli's princely advice may have fallen on deaf ears, his arguments for a citizen militia were more influential. These provided the seventeenth-century English political theorist James Harrington (and his work *Oceana* and other writings) with a rationale for the formation of a citizen militia, an argument that finally, and famously, found substance in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, though often confused as "the right to bear arms" (see further Pocock 1989: 80–147, especially 128–31, 97–103).

Machiavelli believed that the study of the past offered lessons for the present, a seductive view more at home in the Renaissance and early modern times than today. Yet famous commanders—Maurice of Saxe, Frederick the Great, Napoleon—studied the campaigns and leadership style of Alexander and Caesar, looking for, as Paul Millett puts it, "winning ways of war" (note the collection of their maxims and instructions in Phillips, *Roots of Strategy*, first appearing 1940 and still in print). Saxe's *Reveries* appeared posthumously and were perhaps written in retirement; Frederick composed his *Instructions* in 1747, and after the Austrian capture of a Prussian general, copies in German and English quickly appeared (1760); Napoleon never wrote

7. For discussion cf. Sidebottom 2004: preface, citing Lynn 2003 who challenges the concept, and Keegan 1993 who accepts it. The armies (i.e., the "terracotta warriors") of the first Qin emperor of China and the Zulu army that won at Isandhlwana give additional pause, as also the dictum of Confederate cavalry commander Nathan Bedford Forrest that the essence of battle is to hit hardest with the most (a tactic still embraced by the US Army). This is what the Greek phalanx was about, what any armed force seeks as well.

on war, but his maxims were collected and published in 1827, and appeared quickly in other European languages: Stonewall Jackson carried these on campaign.

Soldiers looking for models and exempla in older and successful soldiers characterize one dimension of the classical legacy of warfare. Maurice of Saxe, one of the more celebrated commanders of the seventeenth century, cites both Caesar and Polybius (the latter at length) as well as Vegetius, and took from his reading not only inspiration but essential soldierly practices: the conduct of drill, that of the march; his regiments, subdivided into centuries, carry unit standards similar to those used by the Romans (e.g., Phillips 1940: 242, 273–4 [= reference to Caesar], 276–83 [= citation of Polybius]). Napoleon further elaborated this, giving his regiments Roman legionary eagles and dressing his cavalry in classically inspired helmets (Goldsworthy 2000: 206). Frederick, an admirer of Saxe, does not refer to particular classical authors in his *Instructions*, while Napoleon, in Maxim 78 (Phillips 1940: 432) urges reading of the campaigns of Alexander, Caesar, and Hannibal (in addition to modern commanders including Eugene and Frederick). The press of war, diplomacy, and governing may explain the more succinct writings of these two warrior rulers.

The continued interest of soldiers in the writings and achievements of other soldiers appears late in the nineteenth century with the *Great Captain* surveys of the American colonel T. A. Dodge. Two volumes, dedicated “To the American Soldier,” focus on Alexander (1890) and Hannibal (1891) and continue the use and reliance on the same sources—for example, Arrian and Plutarch, Livy and Polybius—that lie at the heart of Machiavelli’s analysis of war and statecraft. Unlike Machiavelli, Dodge is plainly and clearly disinterested in politics; he cares only to investigate the conduct of campaigns in the belief that there are lessons to be learned: Alexander’s crossing of the Hydaspes in the face of the enemy provides an exemplary lesson (Dodge 1890: ix). Such soldierly interest continued in the work of J. F. C. Fuller, who as a staff officer on the Western Front in 1917, read Dodge’s Alexander and later wrote his own account, *The generalship of Alexander the Great* (1960). Unlike Dodge, Fuller (a general at the time of publication) was interested in politics, and his concluding discussion (“Epilogue: The Value of History”) reveals once more the idea that there are political lessons, no less than military, to be learned from Alexander’s campaigns.

Fuller’s younger, and perhaps better-known contemporary, B. H. Liddell Hart, like Fuller and Dodge a wartime soldier, also took up writing about war. Perhaps in response to Dodge’s study of Hannibal, and seeing in the wake of 1918 that war was not only about fighting but also politics and economics, Liddell Hart examined the military and political life of Hannibal’s nemesis, Scipio Africanus, in a work subtitled “greater than Napoleon” (Liddell Hart 1926/1992: x).

Between 1918 and a wartime essay on infantry training and a 1970 account of the Second World War, Liddell Hart studied many facets of war ranging from tactics and training to the great commanders, not only Scipio but also Sherman, Foch, and T. E. Lawrence (see Bond 1977: 277–8). This body of work, a soldier studying soldiers and the soldier’s life, itself represents a classical legacy no less than part of

the human response to war and violence. Soldiers see violent and frequently horrific things, occasionally committing them as well. Surviving soldiers, as others exposed to manifold forms of violence and abuse, often become consumed by war: thinking about it, preparing for it, trying to understand it. This is true whether one suppresses it, or lives it every day; one is the same as the other.

In this Liddell Hart seems little different from his predecessors and merits comparison with Xenophon, who also wrote a historical study of his time, the *Hellenica*; an account (among the best ever written) of men in war, the *Anabasis*; a biographical appraisal of a great commander (and friend), *Agesilaus*; and military-political-economic technical discussions, *Cavalry Commander, Ways and Means*. It could be argued no less that Thucydides and his Peloponnesian War account similarly represents a soldier appraising the realities of war (e.g., stasis in Corcyra: “war is a violent teacher”), its conduct (e.g., the Peloponnesian siege of Plataea and its defense), and the men who fought it (sketches: commanders, including Brasidas and Demosthenes; adversaries like Cleon; opportunists such as Alcibiades). Writers of the Roman era invite comparison: Ammianus Marellinus and his contemporary account of siege warfare against the Persians, battle with Germanic Franks and Alamanni; Arrian detailing tactics against the Alans as well as providing the basic account of Alexander’s life and conquests (and from accounts provided by eyewitnesses and in at least some instances, soldiers); Julius Caesar fighting the Gauls as well as other Romans; Frontinus, whose *Stratagems* reflect his experiences subduing the Welsh and the psychology of military command. These all represent soldiers writing about war and men in battle.

Wartime service is no precondition to writing about war and among both Greek and Roman writers such authors may be found. The consequences vary. Ephorus of Cyme wrote an account of the classical Greek world that survives, in part at least, in that of Diodorus of Sicily. Hidden as it is in Diodorus, Ephorus’s work provides a rich source of information for the modern historian, though its surviving military accounts are not well regarded. On the other hand, the account of the Roman Republic provided by Livy made extensive use of the Greek writer and one-time soldier and political figure, Polybius. As such Livy’s account assumes an important place in the historiography of ancient Rome, not only for its Polybian narrative of Roman politics and history, but also for the role it plays in mediating the Greek and Roman worlds.

Soldiers, princes, and political thinkers dominated the post-Renaissance writing of war. The classical legacy of battle became a resource that offered instruction in the art of leadership and command as well as tried-and-tested techniques that might assist in the development of current military practices. While writers like Fuller and Liddell Hart continued this pragmatic dimension to the study and writing of war into the twentieth century, the classical study of war and warriors increasingly became the domain of academic and professional study in universities, especially in Germany and Britain. Handbooks such as that of J. Kromayer (*Antike Schlachfelder*, beginning in 1903) appeared alongside specialized studies by G. B. Grundy (*The Great Persian War and its Preliminaries*, 1901) and these offered

detached and objective studies not only of war but of their sources. Studies such as these prepared the foundations for further academic treatments: C. Hignett's study of the Persian Wars (1963, but originating in 1919), appearing shortly after A. R. Burn's the previous year; H. H. Scullard offered an academic portrait of Scipio Africanus (1970) to put alongside Liddell Hart's and J. F. Lazenby followed this up with a study of the Hannibalic War (1978).

Increasingly in the twentieth century, the soldierly study of classical war and warriors encountered the academic and noncombatant, though among the latter there were those who saw wartime service, including Burn and N. G. L. Hammond, one of the pioneers of modern Alexander studies. In many cases, however, the academic persona trumped the soldierly and in the process valuable insights have been lost.

Those not so experienced sometimes have difficulty accepting the warrior's experience in understanding the realities of battle (cf. Dover 1987: 1, 195, on the power of imagination). Two examples may clarify. It is sometimes argued that classical Greek battle consisted of the clash of opposing phalanxes: armed men pushing, shoving, and fighting each other in close formation. However, in so picturing this style of warfare, insufficient attention has been paid to casualties and what happens when fighters go down, something that is reported by authors as far apart in time as Homer and Thucydides. Yet wounded men are removed from the fighting and carried off, which by necessity requires other men both to help carry the fallen and protect those carrying. What are the consequences of this battlefield reality to the idea of the close order phalanx? The answer would seem clear enough. No less important is the movement of the phalanx itself. Often it has been imagined as little more than a forward-moving juggernaut. Yet in his account of the battle of Mantinea (418), Thucydides suggests (5.71.1) that what the Spartans intended and achieved was essentially a flanking maneuver, an interpretation first advanced by former lieutenant A. W. Gomme (1937: 135). Two arguments suggest that Gomme is at least mostly right: the evolving nature of classical Greek battle from its Homeric origins and the readily made observation that soldiers facing forward are at a disadvantage from those coming at them from the flank.

Historian (and one-time soldier) Michael Howard argues that "at the centre of the history of war there must lie the study of military history—that is, the study of the central activity of the armed forces, that is *fighting*" (Howard 2006: 20). The classical world witnessed a lot of fighting, but it is hoped that this volume has also shown the importance of life beyond the battlefields, in the preparations for war, its aftermath, and the cost for society and the individuals who did the fighting.

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