

S . G . T   G R A S M U C K

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## oral tradition

i'll tell you what dante didn't see  
as virgil led him through the battle  
that yields no glory and proclaims no victor  
he did not see me in the shadows  
field-stripping my rifle, again and again  
performing a function check, sighting in  
the slow, steady squeeze followed by  
a deafening clunk

he did not see me wince as achilles pierced  
my flesh, pushing the medals into my skin  
though what shame there is in collecting  
trinkets of glory i'll never know. i did  
not fill my treasure chest with fingers  
or ears, or heads as others have done

i'll tell you something else dante didn't see  
he didn't see the tears on achilles' face  
as he tortures me, yet again, with endless  
tales of how his glory would have endured  
forever if only he had made his way into  
the walls of troy

let me say one more thing the poet never will  
even now, achilles doesn't complain as i draw  
my bayonet across his tendon; he just falls  
to his knees, and crawling completes his task  
of mounting each shiny, new medal to my naked  
chest, all the while my war stories falling  
on deaf ears



**S.G.T. GRASMUCK** served as sergeant in the invasion of Iraq and in the Battle of Fallujah, all with 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines. He is currently a stay home dad raising five children while continuing his writing.