

THE ILIAD



HOMER

TRANSLATED BY ENNIS REES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY BRUCE M. KING

GEORGE STADE
CONSULTING EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS
NEW YORK

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FROM THE PAGES OF THE ILIAD

Sing, O Goddess, the ruinous wrath
of Achilles,

Son of Peleus, the terrible curse that
brought

Unnumbered woes upon the Achaeans
and hurled

To Hades so many heroic souls, leaving
Their bodies the prey of dogs and
carrion birds.

(page 1)

Then Hector spoke between the two

armies: “From me, O Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans, hear the proposal Of Paris, who began this miserable war. He says For all other Trojans and men of Achaea to lay Their excellent arms on the bountiful earth, and that he, Out here in the middle, will fight with fierce Menelaus For Helen and all her treasures.”

(page 45)

“Think!

O son of Tydeus, think—and shrink!
Don’t try
To equal the gods in spirit and valor, for
the race

Of immortal gods is by no means the
same as that

Of earth-treading men! ”

(page 83)

“Oh god-nourished Prince,
Our eyes can see nothing but total
destruction, and we
Are afraid.”

(page 146)

And Cronos’ son roused in their hearts
an evil

Lust for the din and confusion of war,
and down

From the upper air he sent dark dew-
drops of blood,
For he was about to hurl down to Hades
many
Heroic heads.

(page 177)

“On, you horse-taming Trojans, smash
the wall
Of the Argives and hurl on the ships your
god-blazing fire!”

(page 210)

The spear went in beneath Ilioneus’
brow At the base of his eye, forced the
eyeball out, passed on Through the
socket and out at the nape of his neck,

and Ilioneus Sank to the ground,
stretching out both of his hands.

(page 249)

“What fills my heart
And soul with so much bitter resentment
is simply
That one whose equal I am should want
to rob me
And take my prize of prestige for no
better reason
Than this, that he has more power.”

(page 273)

“Then soon let me die! since I was not
there to help My friend when he died.”

(page 320)

“O Father Zeus, how total is that cruel
blindness

You cast upon men!”

(page 342)

“Hector, I beg you, dear child,
Don’t stand there alone and wait for the
charge of that man,
Or death at his hands may soon be yours,
since he

Is far stronger than you—and a savage!”

(page 379)

“Show me my bed, now, Achilles,
O nobleman nurtured of Zeus, that we

may enjoy

A night of sweet sleep. For never once
have my lids

Come together in sleep since my son lost
his life at your hands.”

(page 435)

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NEW YORK

Published by Barnes & Noble Books

122 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10011

www barnesandnoble.com/classics

It is believed that the *Iliad* was first set down in writing during the eighth century B.C.E. Ennis Rees's translation first appeared in 1963.

Published in 2005 by Barnes & Noble Classics with new Introduction,
Notes, Biography, Chronology, Inspired By, Comments
& Questions,
and For Further Reading.

Introduction, Notes, and For Further Reading

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Translation of the *Iliad*

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Note on Homer, The World of the *Iliad*,

Inspired by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and Comments
& Questions

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The Iliad

ISBN-13: 978-1-59308-232-1 ISBN-10: 1-59308-232-0

eISBN : 978-1-411-43237-6

LC Control Number 2005929206

Produced and published in conjunction with:
Fine Creative Media, Inc.
322 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10001

Michael J. Fine, President and Publisher

Printed in the United States of America

QM
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

FIRST PRINTING

“HOMER”

Scholarly study of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has been shaped by recurring versions of the Homeric Question: Who composed the two epics, and how? Were the two epics composed by a single poet whose comprehensive vision organized the whole, or are they the product of generations of poets working within an oral tradition? Does “Homer” denote an individual, or rather a tradition of bards and a form of poetry that attained prominence throughout Greece? Though the debate has been vituperative and long-lived (its modern formulation dates from F. R. Wolf’s

Prolegomena to Homer of 1795), it has flourished especially in the absence of historical evidence that definitively locates Homer or his poems within a specific time or place. Though there is a profuse and fascinating body of ancient lore about “Homer” and his career, the accounts are multiple and competitive; few cities could resist claiming Homer as their own. Within this vacuum of historical certainty and profusion of lore, scholars and readers have often found a “Homer” who snugly conforms to their interpretation of the poems themselves.

Within contemporary Homeric studies, the researches of Milman Parry and

Albert B. Lord have transformed our understanding of the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Parry confirmed and furthered his initial, text-based studies of Homeric composition (of the late 1920s) by his field research (1933—1935) among the performing oral poets of Yugoslavia. Parry's immersion in the performance culture of practicing bards permitted him to develop a comparative account of Homeric composition-in-performance; recording and analyzing the performances of actual bards allowed him to see how these working singers used the given components of their tradition—repeated epithets, type-scenes, narrative patterns—to improvise a new poem, uniquely

fitted to the immediate conditions of its performance and the demands of its particular audience. Parry's work was continued and extended by his student Albert Lord, whose researches in a great variety of performing song cultures broadened and deepened the comparative context within which the Homeric poems might be studied and appreciated. The research of Parry and Lord has offered a model for the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that can account for the entirety of each poem in its present form (there is no need to differentiate between "early" and "late" strata, between interpolation and original—all are equally part of the

performance tradition). But their work also decisively challenges the idea that there was a single poet to whose genius each poem (or both poems) can be attributed; in place of a poet of genius, it is an ingenious tradition that emerges.

If we set aside the quest for the one true Homer, we might speak instead of historical stages in the transmission of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in which the poems moved from a relatively fluid state to an increasingly fixed, textualized form. In this model (brilliantly and controversially developed by Gregory Nagy), the first stage spanned from the early second millennium to the middle of the eighth century B.C.E.—a period of

oral transmission and composition-in-performance wholly without written texts. A final stage of Homeric transmission can be dated to about 150 B.C.E., when the scholar Aristarchus of Samothrace, the head of the great library of Alexandria, completed his edition of the Homeric poems, at which point something like a fixed “library edition” of Homer appeared; such an edition no longer presupposes performance. In the 700 years between these two poles, the poems moved from a state of relative fluidity to one of increasing fixity; so, too, the role of the singer moved from one who composed in performance to one who re-performed a poem that was increasingly fixed and that finally, in a

late stage, was simply learned by rote and available in written, if not yet authoritative, form.

THE WORLD OF THE ILIAD

The Mycenaean period takes its name from Mycenae, a city on mainland Greece that was excavated by Heinrich Schliemann in 1876 (other great palace-centers have been excavated in Thebes, Tiryns, and Pylos). While the *Iliad* preserves some fossilized memories of Mycenaean culture, the poem is not a reliable historical account of the

**1575-
1200
B.C.E.**

Mycenaean realm; four and a half centuries separate the formation of our *Iliad* and the legendary past that is the poem's setting.

1200-
1100

The Mycenaean palace kingdoms decline and collapse for reasons that remain elusive to contemporary historians; according to recent research, the kingdoms may have fallen from strains within Mycenaean society itself, rather than from invaders. The Fall of Troy is traditionally dated to

1184.

This period, between the Mycenaean collapse and the first Olympic Games, is traditionally regarded as the “Dark Age” of Greece.

Though some areas—
notably Lefkandi on the
island of Euboea—recover
and prosper, most

**1100—
776**

Mycenaean centers are
abandoned or greatly
diminished in population;
trade routes are destroyed,
and material culture reverts
to a pre-Mycenaean level.
Linear B, the Mycenaean
script, is lost; the heroic

poetry that will become our *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is transmitted orally.

In the early eighth century, the Greeks adopt a modified Phoenician alphabet. During this period the city-state emerges and prospers, and a sense of Panhellenic identity takes hold across the separate Greek states. The existence of the alphabet means the Homeric poems can be written down, but they are still composed and

776-179

transmitted orally.

180- Aristarchus of Samothrace,
144 while head of the library of
Alexandria, produces
recensions of the text of the
Iliad and the *Odyssey*, as
well as commentaries upon
those texts. Aristarchus
uses a variety of symbols to
query the genuineness of
particular verses and the
transmitted order of verses;
his goal is to remove
corruption and
interpolation from the texts.
His versions of the *Iliad*
and the *Odyssey*, which

build upon and modify the work of his teacher Aristophanes of Byzantium, will be considered by some to be the first critical editions of Homer.

30-19 The Roman poet Virgil writes the *Aeneid*, with Homer as a model for emulation and transformation

450 With the decline of the Roman Empire, interest in Greek texts and

in Homer becomes dormant in the West until learning

C.E. resurges in the Middle Ages.

7th century Homeric figures begin to appear in the Arabic tales of Sinbad.

1488 The first printed edition of the Greek text of Homer appears.

1598 George Chapman publishes English translations of the *Iliad* and

1615 the *Odyssey*.

Alexander Pope publishes

1715 translations of the *Iliad* and the

1726 *Odyssey*.

J. B. G. d'Ansse de
Villoison publishes ancient
scholarship on the Venetus
1788 A manuscript of Homer that
remains our richest source
for the working methods of
ancient Homeric scholars.

Friedrich August Wolf
publishes *Prolegomena to*
1795 *Homer*, which inaugurates
modern textual scholarship
of Homer.

Heinrich Schliemann, a
retired German

1870 businessman with a passion
for the Homeric epics,
begins excavations at Troy
(Hisarlik) .

on observations of
contemporary verse
composition-inperformance
in the Balkans, American
scholars Milman Parry and
Albert B. Lord present
comparative evidence that
the Homeric poems were
transmitted for many
generations by oral bards.

**1933-
Based
1935**

INTRODUCTION

And as when gusts
Come many and fast on a day when
shrill winds are blowing
And raising the thick dust on roads up
into a swirling
Huge cloud, so now they clashed in one
fierce throng,
Each man eager to use his sharp bronze
on another.
And the man-wasting battle bristled with
lengthy, flesh-rending
Spears, and eyes were blinded by the
blazing of bronze
From gleaming helmets, new-burnished
breastplates, and flashing,
Resplendent shields, as chaotically on
the men came.

(Homer Iliad XIII.379-387)

Among the wildly various ancient biographies of Homer—which divergently account for the poet's home-city and date of birth, his poetic works, his blindness or sightedness, his death—the anecdotal compendium entitled *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod* (the bulk of which dates from the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E.) presents an itinerant Homer who wanders from town to town performing his verse. At the funeral games of a Euboean king named Amphidamas, so the story goes, Homer is lured by the promise of a great prize into a contest with the poet Hesiod, who composes in the same verse form as Homer (the dactylic hexameter), but who

sings—in his *Works* and *Days*—not of the hero's battles, but of the farmer's life. At every turn of the ensuing competition in the composition and performance of poetry, Homer decisively bests Hesiod; he is the people's favorite. As a final test of the poets, King Panedes, the arbiter of the contest, asks each to sing his finest passage: Hesiod sings of the farmer's year (*Works and Days* 383-392), while Homer sings—in the passage cited above—of the dazzle of “man-wasting battle,” which gleams so bright as to blind the combatants. Upon the completion of Hesiod's and Homer's recitations, the people once again acclaim Homer, but the decisive word

belongs to King Panedes (*Contest of Homer and Hesiod* 205-210):

Full of wonder, the Greeks praised Homer also in this case, and asked that he should be granted victory, because his verses were even better than expected. But the king crowned Hesiod, saying that it was just that the poet who recommended agriculture and peace, rather than the one who described wars and slaughter, should win.

Homer is the favorite of the Greeks, Hesiod of the king; Homer's verses provoke "wonder," Hesiod's provoke considerations of what is "just." King

Panedes opts to reward the just, rather than the popular and wondrous. The judgment of King Panedes surely registers the ruler's maxim that if political order is to be maintained, his subjects are better encouraged to hone their farming skills, rather than their acuity in spear-throwing and hand-to-hand combat. But the king's vote—in favor of political concord rather than wonder—perhaps also intimates the unsettling force and appeal of a Homeric poetry that makes vivid not that which is seasonably predictable or politically stable, but that which compels for its very combustibility, for its evocation of desires that might elude the restraints of political order.

In the *Iliad* generally—and in the very verses that the Homer of the Contest sings—the wondrous is often a spectacle of violent, chaotic death. Such carnage is scarcely bearable (as the Iliadic passage that Homer sings again exemplifies), especially as it is also a topic of wonder, for the risk and venture of violent death seem also to contain the possibility of a self-making apart from the necessities and regularities of politics and the cultivable fields. Homer's audience—in the Contest—wonders at a song that is violent, even transgressive, but that also seems to promise a completion, a fulfillment, greater than what the farmer's life—or

the life of the king's subject—can offer. Held in wonder by a poetry that depicts a life apart from, even at odds with, the civilizing, pacifying labor of the fields, Homer's auditors might, indeed, make for restless royal subjects. King Panedes' crowning of Hesiod is neither poetically undiscerning nor politically disinterested (though Homer's advocates might take consolation in the knowledge that Panedes' name was to become proverbial for a powerful man who makes a foolish decision).

In a bravura conclusion to his (losing) performance, Homer imagines a spectator of the very scene he has just narrated: Such an onlooker would be

very “hard-hearted” who could look “on that slaughter with joy instead of lament” (XIII.388-389). This is no simple endorsement of the hero’s life: The battlefield is a potential site of self-creation through martial strife, but it is also an arena of carnage, within which the combatants themselves can be blinded. Homer’s imagined observer of the battle provokes reflection about the “wonder” experienced by his audience—which now includes us as well: The wonder that we experience in listening to Homer would not be possible—or would be possible only for the most hard-hearted of us—if we were “actually” there; it is only when the chaos of battle is shaped and formed by

the poet's art that the unbearable becomes a source of pleasure, a wonder. The king would tell us that our unsettled and unsettling desires—which, in Homer, are most manifest on the battlefield—can be assuaged within the political order, by the satisfactions of the ordered, productive life, as exemplified by Hesiod's farmer. The *Iliad*, I would suggest, regards such claims with an astringent skepticism; the wonder that the poet provokes arises from his making into a unity, into a source of pleasure, that which is, in life, fractured, contested, and sometimes unbearable. Our wonder comes from the glimpse of a singularity, a unity of

power, a full articulation of desire greater than that permitted in life—or, to put it in somewhat different terms, from a full vision of the unbearable that is consubstantial with death.

Homers

Some say, “there never was such a person as Homer.” “No such person as Homer! On the contrary,” say others, “there were scores.”

—*Thomas De Quincey,*
“Homer and the Homeridae”
(1841)

No Homer or many Homers: Both

possibilities arise from the difficulty—even the impossibility—of locating a single historical Homer. The texts of the *Iliad* (and the *Odyssey*) that we now read (and translate) have been transmitted to us with none of the signs by which we now recognize an author: There is no self-referential mention of a “Homer” within the epics themselves; there is no single or uncontested account of the occasion and means of first production and transmission; there is no sign or seal that might indicate an “autograph copy” or descent from a singularly privileged source. The ancients themselves attest a discrepant multitude of Homers, born in different cities, traveling to different lands in

different eras, even singing different poems (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not unanimously deemed to be the two sole works of Homer alone until the fourth century B.C.E.—that is, not until after the two poems had been transmitted for some 300 years in a form roughly akin to what we have today and among a multitude of other titles also attributed to Homer) . Even Homer's name is a topic of variant and disputatious accounts: One of the ancient lives of Homer, for example, accounts Homer's "real" name to have been Melesigenes and his hometown to have been Cyme, where the local word for "blind" is *homeros*: "Hence, the name Homer gradually

replaced Melesigenes on account of his misfortune” (Vita *Herodotea* 162-165)-blindness being one of the few near constants in early accounts of Homer. Melesigenes reappears in another biography of Homer, this time as a citizen of Smyrna, who is sent as a hostage to the rival city of Chios; in this version (recorded by Proclus in the fifth century C.E.), the pun that produces the name plays on the Greek word for “hostage,” which is (also) *homeros*: “When he was given as a hostage [homereian] to the Chians, he was called Homer” (Proclus, p. 99). And thus in the ancient lives of Homer do etymologies and biographies multiply.

Contemporary scholars have offered an etymology of the Greek *Homer* that derives the name from an Indo-European (thus pre-Greek) verbal root (*ar-) that means “to fit” or “to join,” in the manner that a carpenter (a “joiner,” in older English) fits together beams—and especially the beams of a chariot (as discussed in Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*; see “For Further Reading”). The name “Homer”—comprised of the elements “together” (Greek *homo-*) and “to fit”—means, then, “he who fits [the song] together.” From this perspective, the name “Homer” is generic for the poet’s labor, which—like the carpenter’s—is a joining together, a

crafting, of multiple parts into a single unity, into a single confluence. The English word “harmony” (after the Greek goddess Harmonie) derives from the same root as “Homer”; and the goal of both carpenter and poet is “art,” which likewise derives (via Latin *ars*) from the very stem (*ar-) that generates the name “Homer.” Indeed, we might finally understand “Homer” to denote the paradigmatic, mythical poet; “Homer” names not an individual singer, but the very idea of the poet.

The traditional semantics that underlie the name of Homer are activated in the poet’s description, toward the end of book IV of the *Iliad*, of the death of

Simoeisius. This hero, a son of the Trojan river-god, is cut down in battle by the Achaean Ajax; upon Simoeisius' death, the poet offers a startling and haunting simile (IV.557-562):

... [Simoeisius] fell

To earth in the dust like a smooth
black poplar whose branchy top
Falls in the low grassland of a
mighty marsh To the gleaming ax
of some chariot-maker, who leaves
it To dry by the banks of a river
that he may bend him A rim for a
beautiful chariot.

Simoeisius, struck down and killed by Ajax' spear, is compared to a felled tree, which will itself be hewed and

worked into a chariot-wheel. The unifying craft of the “chariot-maker”—a Greek word derived, again, from the same root as “Homer”—transforms the body of the slain hero into a work of great art. Though Simoeisius is killed in the prime of his youth and upon his very first appearance on the battlefield, his name and fate are now pressed into memory. The simile upon Simoeisius’ death presents a visual icon of the poet’s work: the transformation of the hero’s death into verbal art, the immortalization of the name in poetry (I will return to this theme below). We might also be reminded of the final lines of Homer’s recitation in the *Contest*, for the death of Simoeisius, brutally cut down in his

youth, before he might repay his parents' care, is a sight that we could scarcely, if at all, bear, were we its literal onlookers, but that the poet's art transforms into an object—a wheel and a chariot—of splendor and beauty (if also an object that remains, for all its potentially dazzling, even blinding wonder, a vehicle of war) .

The multiple Homers of the ancient biographical tradition and the Homer whose name is paradigmatic for the poet and his labor converge upon one fundamental point: Homer belongs to no single city (nor even to one single historical generation), but to many; his art is not local, but—as the etymology of

the name Homer intimates—synthetic and, finally, synoptic. Within the *Iliad* (and the *Odyssey*), there are few traces of story-traditions of purely local interest; rather, the *Iliad*'s hero-songs, while they provoke intense interest within the widely dispersed cities of Greece, overarch and elude the particularities of local space and time. In this crucial regard, the Homeric poems are Panhellenic; and, as such, the poems, which reach something close to their definitive form in the late eighth and early seventh centuries B.C.E., participate in—and are themselves shaped by—their larger historical moment. For the Greek historical experience of this period is marked by a

new and intensified communication among the emergent Greek cities themselves; by the foundation of the Olympic Games, which were open to competitors from throughout the Greek-speaking regions; by the establishment of the great cult site of Apollo at Delphi, whose oracle was open to all and was consulted in matters of dispute between cities; and by the gradual proliferation of the alphabet, itself a technology that might foster further communication within and beyond the walls of a single city. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in their synthesis—their crafty “joining”—of a set of heroic myths and themes that eludes local or simply aetiological

meanings, are themselves preeminent, catalytic signs of this same burgeoning Panhellenism. (See Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* and Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece*, for discussions of the centrality of Panhellenism.)

The artful chariot of the simile that follows upon the death of Simoeisius might itself be an emblem of Panhellenism: The story—the fame—of the hero, even of a hero as poignantly short-lived as Simoeisius, is not fixed to a single spot, like a felled tree, but rather, through the craft of the poet-joiner, is set in motion, capable of travel to the borders—and beyond—of a newly expansive Greek culture. And so, too,

“Homer,” the poet’s paradigmatic name, remains open to new etymologies, which will take him far from his place—or places—of origin. The contemporary poet Derek Walcott in his *Omeros*, an epic that relocates the characters and themes of the *Iliad* to the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, offers one of the loveliest of etymologies for the name of Homer:

And O was the conch-shell’s
invocation, mer was
both mother and sea in our
Antillean patois,
os, a grey bone, and the white surf
as it crashes
and spreads its sibilant collar on a

lace shore.

Omeros was the crunch of dry
leaves, and the washes
that echoed from a cave-mouth
when the tide has ebbed.

Walcott's etymological play with the name of Homer revivifies the poet by rehearing and rearticulating the syllables of his name within the local language—the “patois”—of St. Lucia, though those syllables are themselves long-lived descendants (first by way of Latin, then of French) of the Greek of Homer. As Walcott's mer washes Homer ashore upon St. Lucia, ancient meanings are recovered and renewed, even as they are given contemporary form. And in that

sense, the chariot of Simoeisius remains in motion, as the *Iliad*—*the* first work within the Western literary canon—becomes not only Panhellenic but pancultural, inasmuch as its meanings remain recoverable for present and future poets and readers. This is the ongoing work of the many Homers, as well as of the poetry for which the name “Homer” is synecdoche: the recovery of the meaning—ancient and other—of the word.

Poetic Tradition and Its Critique

This book is about Homer. He is our

Singer of Tales. Yet, in a larger sense, he represents all singers of tales from time immemorial and unrecorded to the present. Our book is about these other singers as well. Each of them, even the most mediocre, is as much a part of the tradition of oral epic singing as is Homer, its most talented representative.

—A. B. Lord, “*Forward*” to
The Singer of Tales (1960)

No Homer or many Homers? In contemporary Homeric studies, the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord provides an answer: There is no one Homer because there were generations of Homers who had continuously sung heroic songs for perhaps a thousand years prior to the time when the *Iliad*

was first stabilized—around the final quarter of the eighth century B.C.E.—in a version close to the written form that we now have. Parry's textual studies in the late 1920s began with the familiar repetition of noun-epithet phrases—for example, “grey-eyed Athene”—and proceeded to demonstrate that those repetitions were not random, but systematic. Moreover, such systems of repetition—of formulae, of phrases, of lines, of typical scenes, of episodes—are characteristic of oral poetics in general; the oral poet, as he performs, works with the given and repeated building-blocks, small and large, of his tradition. Parry then confirmed and expanded his text-based studies by

fieldwork, conducted with his student and collaborator Lord, among the performing oral poets—the guslars—of Yugoslavia in between 1933 and 1935. Among these still active singers, Parry and Lord recorded—on paper and on an extraordinary half-ton of aluminum sound discs—their heroic songs, newly performed for the occasion, newly composed without a written text. Each performing bard invokes, reenacts, and distills those performances that have come before, even as he creates a unique and present song, shaped by the particulars of the moment and the occasion—particularly by his keen awareness of his audience and their

responses. The bard improvises among the elements of his tradition in the sense that he might reassemble or modify the fixed elements of that tradition in especially skillful, often surprising ways. But before the bard can display such heights of skill, he must first master the language of his tradition, as well as its characteristic scenes and story-patterns. So, too, in contemplating the *Iliad*, we should speak first of the genius of the tradition that produced it, then—if we wish—of the virtuosity of a poet.

Attention to the traditional language of the bard is crucial not only for the insight that it offers into the workings and transmission of the poetic tradition,

but for the access it provides to the poet's generative themes. The formulae, imagery, and type-scenes that recur in Homeric poetry are themselves articulations of the conceptual and thematic well-springs of the bard's song. Repetition—and variation in repetition—is itself a sign of thematic centrality; these are the themes and ideas that the epic has preserved and has, over generations of transmission, distilled to a remarkable degree of concentration. One such recurring image in the *Iliad* is that of the “spring bloom” of the hero, an image both of the hero's exultant battle-strength and of his memorial representation in the bard's song. The *Iliad*'s account of the Trojan warrior

Gorgythion presents an especially vivid example of the concentrating power of the poet's traditional language, as the "spring bloom" becomes a synopsis of the warrior's death and his recompense. Gorgythion makes his entrance upon the battlefield only to be immediately struck down by an arrow from the bow of Teucer—who was, at any rate, aiming for Hector. We hear of Gorgythion's lineage—he is a son of Priam; then we hear of his death and its poetic transfiguration (VIII.344-345 and 347-350):

... [Teucer] lodged his arrow deep
in the breast
Of peerless Gorgythion ...

... And now to one side
Gorgythion drooped his head and
heavy helmet:
He let it fall over like the bloom of
a garden poppy
Heavy with seed and the rains of
spring.

Gorgythion steps upon the battlefield only so as to be killed, and of his death the poet makes a simile. The violence of an arrow wound to the neck is elided by an image of unexpected and unsettling beauty: The warrior's severed head is like the bloom of a poppy that has tumbled over because it is overfull of its own life-force. The gore of the battlefield is displaced by an image that

precisely articulates the exchange that governs the career of the traditional hero: life for art—and especially, youthful life for epic poetry, for the immortality of the name that is preserved by the poet. It is the defining claim of the epic bard—indeed, the very premise of his traditional genre—that he will preserve the hero's name and deeds through the medium of epic song, transmitting that name to succeeding generations of singers. But the bard does not immortalize the hero's deeds from any point within his life-course, but only from the period of youth that is “spring-bloom,” which Homeric Greek calls *hebe*. Though *hebe* can denote the first physical signs of the male transition

from youth to maturity, *hebe* is, for the hero, less a specific chronological period of life than it is an attained state of near-divine intensity in which individual superiority, an integrity of body and of action, is visible to all: *Hebe* is that brief moment when the warrior has “the flower of youth, when the might / Of a man is strongest” (XIII.559-560). And it is precisely this superiority, this force in bloom, that the Homeric hero most possesses at the very moment of his death: The moment of fullest self-creation and self-display is also the moment of death, and it is that same perfection of the hero in an irrepeatable instant of spectacular, self-

consuming force that the bard immortalizes. The simile on Gorgythion's death is a concentrated image and enactment of the "Beautiful Death" and of the logic of heroic commemoration : Life is exchanged for art; life is perfected in an instant that exhausts mortal life's possibility, but that receives recompense in the immortalizing verses of the bard. (See Loraux, *The Experiences of Tiresias* and Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, for discussions of the "Beautiful Death.")

Both Patroclus and Hector die under the sign of *hebe*; it is, for each, the last word: "His soul flew forth from his

body ... bewailing her lot as one too soon bereft of youth and manly vigor [*hebe*]” (XVI. 992-994 and XXII. 424-427). Moreover, it is the deaths of Patroclus and Hector (preceded by that of Sarpedon) that structure the final third of the *Iliad* and that make necessary the death of Achilles, which is beyond the end of the *Iliad* but insistently foreshadowed within it. The early death of Achilles is thematic from the *Iliad*’s very first book, where Achilles himself laments to his mother Thetis that she bore him “only to live for a few short years” (I.411). If it is a general description of the epic hero of Homeric tradition that he is to die young for the sake of future fame, Achilles—

immediately upon his insulted withdrawal from the Achaean camp and upon suffering the abduction of Briseis—invokes that definition, but now self-consciously, as an explicit conundrum of life and topic for thought. In a sense, his mother's prophecy only makes explicit for Achilles the early death that is the generic requirement of the hero's life; but Achilles, in his rage and disorientation consequent upon the loss of Briseis, now has impulse to think about—and kick against—the fatality that would govern his life. In this thematization of the very stakes of the traditional hero's life (and death), the poet of the *Iliad* reveals the fullest

possibilities of his art, which is a preeminently critical art, capable of testing, from the very beginning of the poem, its own generative premises.

This critical exploration of the hero's death-bound fate—of the exchange of youthful life for art—culminates in the passage from book IX that is often called “the choice of Achilles.” At this juncture of the plot, Achilles' rage has deepened; the insult of book I has precipitated a general questioning of just what it is that would satisfy heroic desire, if not the gifts, women, and kingships of the world—which Achilles has just declared to be worth no more than “sand and dust” (IX.443). Achilles now elaborates upon

his mother's prophecy (IX.471-478):

My goddess mother, Thetis
Of the silver feet, tells me I bear
two fates
With me on my way to the grave. If
I stay here
And fight about Troy, I'll never
return to my home,
But men will remember my glory
forever. On the other hand,
If I go back to the precious land of
my fathers,
No glory at all will be mine, but
life, long life,
Will be, and no early death shall
ever come on me.

One of the most extraordinary aspects

of this speech (as G. Nagy has shown in his *Best of the Achaeans*) is the specificity with which Achilles invokes the epic tradition itself. The phrase “glory forever” translates a formulaic phrase of Indo-European provenance—*aphthiton kleos*—that names the very genre of traditional heroic poetry itself, and that we might translate more literally as “unwithering fame.” If the flower in spring bloom, full—and overfull—of its own seed, is a traditional poetic icon of the hero’s apotheosis, the bard’s work is to make that culminating moment of full bloom and of death—the moment of *hebe*—into verse that is itself “unwithering.” The underlying metaphor from nature—the flower that can only, of its own,

wither—is transfigured by the cultural work of poetry, such that the evanescence of the bloom is forever captured within the tradition of *apthiton kleos*, “unwithering fame.” Achilles, in contemplating his two choices, explicitly invokes by proper name the epic tradition within which he is himself the central figure; and, in positing an alternative (the long life without glory), he speaks as if he might launch himself out of the very logic and generic requirements of that tradition. Such a rejection will turn out to be, in practice, impossible, but the questions now posed about the recompense offered by the heroic exchange and by the epic’s

insistent and necessary conjunction of beauty and death remain in motion: If the immortalization promised by epic poetry is insufficient, if the culture's highest achievement is so explicitly bound to death, is this then a cultural order worthy of defense, or within which life itself might flourish? While the Iliadic heroes—Achilles preeminent among them—are doers of ferocious deeds of strength and fortitude upon the battlefield, they also show themselves to be heroes of extraordinarily articulate consciousness; indeed, perhaps the single brake against the blinding ferocity of the battlefield resides in that very consciousness, which the *Iliad* will likewise immortalize in the culminating,

contesting, renunciant figure of Achilles.

Homer and the Polis

Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, it seems that Homer lived in a time in which the right of the hero no longer ruled in Greece, and the people's freedom began to be honored ...

—*Giambattista Vico, “On the
Discovery of the True Homer”
(1744)*

Though the *Iliad* does not valorize simply the strength and physical feats of its heroes, the poem does encourage its listeners to imagine the passage from the era of the heroes to that of “present men”

as an irreversible loss of vitality, as a fall from exemplarity (XII.481—485):

And Hector picked up a stone in
front of the gate

And carried it with him, a broad-
based, pointed boulder

That not even two of this
generation's strongest

Could manage to heave on a
wagon. Yet Hector easily

Held it ...

Compared to the mighty Hector or to any of the other famous heroes arrayed at Troy, the audience of the poet's present, even as it understands itself to be descended from the heroes, is acutely reminded that its descent is a diminution:

The ancestors were creators and adventurers; men “such as mortals are now” are but imitators, weak of force and spirit. The era of the heroes is one of origins, of first inventions, of self-creation through adventure, of an ever-regenerative vitalism; the present age is one of insubstantial imitation, of repetition unto exhaustion. And yet, when we turn to the historical record itself, the claims of the epic’s mythical history are reversed—or, at least, sharply contested: The culture of the late eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., the period in which the form and content of the *Iliad* stabilized, is one of remarkable demographic and geographic expansion, as well as of intellectual, artistic, and

political experiment and consolidation.

In the last third of the eighth century, the Greeks took effective control, to their west, of the near coast of Sicily and of the region around the Bay of Naples; to the east (where our literary and archaeological evidence is comparatively meager), colonial settlements were founded along what is now the coast of Turkey and north from the Bosphorus as far as the Danube and the Crimea; in North Africa, the colony of Cyrene was founded around 630 B.C.E., which is also the approximate date for the foundation of Naucratis in the Nile Delta. Within the span of roughly one century, Greeks had come to

inhabit the primary points of connection and exchange within the Mediterranean world then known to them as well as those points that connected them to the cultures across their borders. Among these colonies and emporia—to the west, east, and south—a newly flourishing mercantile class plied trade routes along which they offered oil, wine, and luxury goods in return for grain, metals, and slaves. Conjointly with these overseas ventures, a free peasantry was created and strengthened within the city and its territory—a development fostered by the opening of markets abroad and by the spread of chattel slavery. Juridical and economic institutions consonant with the

peasantry's interests followed—primarily, the emergence of private alienable property in land and enforceable contracts.

Upon this material foundation, a novel form of political life emerged, characterized by a new inclusivity and relying upon a rotation of political offices among full citizens. The textbook name for these developments is “the rise of the polis”—the coming-to-be and flourishing of the Greek city-state. The great scholar J.-P Vernant has taught us (in his *Origins of Greek Thought*; and see, too, M. Detienne's *Masters of Truth*) to understand the political phenomenon of the polis primarily in

terms of a transformed relation to speech and its authority. In the palace-kingdoms of the Mycenaean period (c.1450-1200 B.C.E.), rule was held by a divine king—a sovereign who embodied each of the functional classes (priestly, military, and economic) of the society that he ruled and who, in encompassing those different classes, transcended them; the king was thus the principle of social unity, harmoniously conjoining—in his one, divine body—the disparate classes of his society among themselves, as well as within the natural and cosmic realms. As the king orders his society, so too he is himself the juncture of mediation between that society and the transcendent orders. Both nature and the

gods respond to the rule of the good king; the king's subjects reap the rewards of their ruler's access to the beneficent regularities of nature and to the favors of the divine. Some remnant of this conception of kingship is evoked in the *Odyssey* in its praise of a king who, "with fear of the gods in his heart ... upholds justice"; for this king, "the black earth bears barley and wheat, the trees are laden with fruit, the flocks bring forth their young unceasingly, the sea yields fish... and the people prosper" (*Odyssey* 19.109-114). Within this order, the speech of the king, sacralized by the king's own proximity to god, is an absolute instrument of power. The

commanding word of the king can bear only one, immutable meaning, insusceptible to mortal dispute or human complication. In the word of the divine king, sign and signified are one; the power of the king's word is absolute.

The history of the *polis*, by contrast, can be understood as one of the demystification of speech. As the prerogative of authoritative speech is loosed from the sovereign king, the shape of power is no longer a triangle at the apex of which is god and king, with successive classes (first priests, then warriors) ranged within descending cross-segments, each beneath the other, each further from the divine source of

power, and with the great majority (primarily of agricultural laborers) ever subjugated at the triangle's base; rather, in the polis the shape of power is the circle, at the center of which is the agora, the place of public meeting and adjudication. It is to that center that the members of the community (women and slaves excepted, as usual) convene so as to advocate and mediate their particular claims. Disparate social interests and classes are no longer harmonized in the body of the king, but within a politics of mutual accommodation. Thus, sovereign power came to be the business of each who ventured to the center, where decisions were openly arrived at by public debate among equals; each

contestant within the agora might experience victory and defeat, but those remain opposite sides of the same relation; neither dominance nor submission is permanent; rather, both are reversible within the deliberative contests of the day to come. In this model, the speech that commands is no longer the ritual word pronounced by the divine king, but an account shaped by a human demand for persuasion and ratified into truth (at least for the day) by the collective assent of the community.

The Future of Achilles

Chaque époque rêve la suivante. [Each

era dreams the next.]

—*Michelet*. “*Avenir! Avenir!*”

In the first line of the *Iliad*—“Sing, O Goddess”—we learn that speech of divine origin belongs not, or not exclusively, to the king, but to the poet, who begins his monumental work by invoking his goddess, the Muse, whose voice will now merge with his own. In the song that immediately follows upon the invocation, the poet presents the spectacle of kings acting badly—and acting especially badly is Agamemnon, the king who assembled the vast Achaean coalition at Troy and who bears responsibility for the success or

failure of the expedition. Within the first few moments of the poem, Agamemnon has insulted a priest of Apollo (by refusing to accept ransom for his daughter) and, in consequence, has brought upon his army a deadly pestilence. In an inversion of the model of the good king, the divine and natural orders punish the impious deeds of Agamemnon, and for the king's outrages, his subjects pay with their lives. At the instigation of Hera, Achilles steps into this breach that Agamemnon has opened within the mutually responsive order of divine and human. Achilles, like Agamemnon, is a "king," as are all the principal Achaean heroes, each of whom leads a contingent of warriors from his

home territory. Among these many kings, Agamemnon is *primus inter pares*—"first among equals." The basis of that preeminence is his superior storehouse of gifts for giving and his greater number of ships. Yet, while a rather crude calculation of material goods serves to confer Agamemnon's superior position, his decisions are yet made in consultation with his fellow kings—in a public assembly (as in book I), or in the more restrictive council of peers (as in the beginning of book IX)—and he can be influenced by, even rebuked by, those other kings. Agamemnon's job is to hear and carry out the will of the group; his authority is, in that sense, representative:

As a “good king,” his actions should embody and unite the will of the collective, but higher than the king is the principle of community itself. Agamemnon’s preference for Chryseis to Clytemnestra (I.129-130) is not without a certain poignancy (kingly power, it seems, circumscribes the fulfillment of the king’s personal desire), but it can also risk the unity and well-being of the collectivity that he leads.

When Achilles first steps forward, then, he would recall Agamemnon to his proper role as the unifying principle and agent of the martial camp. And Agamemnon does, if grudgingly, assent to the return of the priest’s daughter, “if

that is the thing to do. / I prefer the men
safe and well, not sick and dying”
(I.133-134). Thus he acknowledges that
the good of the camp supersedes his own
preference for the priest’s daughter. But
Agamemnon then goes one sentence too
far: “But you must prepare a prize for
me at once. / For me to be the only
Argive here / Without some gift of honor
would hardly be right!” (I.135-137). As
Achilles swiftly points out, there are no
undistributed prizes tucked away in
storage nor can prizes once distributed
be recalled and reapportioned. The
dispute now centers upon evaluations of
honor: Within the martial camp,
“prizes”—the tripods, cauldrons, hunks
of metal, and livestock that fill the

capacious tents of the Achaeans—are visible signs of a warrior's social standing; and among those prizes, women captured in raids or city-sackings are the topmost signs of a warrior's status among his comrades. Agamemnon's threat to take Briseis from Achilles as a recompense for his loss of Chryseis registers the dilemmatic fact that, within the social economy of the warriors' camp, honor is a finite resource and the totality of the system is zero-sum. In other words, as one man's social standing increases, another's diminishes. In the case of Agamemnon, because he is the king (who is, ideally, representative), a diminution of personal

honor is also a threat to the order of the group as a whole; hence, his immediate demand for a compensatory prize upon his acquiescence to the return of Chryseis registers, in addition to personal pique, an assertion of his kingly position. But Achilles immediately and angrily understands that Agamemnon's desire for another token of honor is inevitably a threat to him, as the leading warrior within the camp. The restoration of Agamemnon's honor, if it is to be immediate (as Agamemnon desires), requires a concordant attack upon Achilles' honor and social identity. Though it was Achilles who first spoke forth in defense of the Achaean camp, it is Achilles who will suffer a diminution

in social prestige on account of Agamemnon's retaliatory abduction of Briseis; indeed, in Achilles' understanding of what has befallen him that diminution of public standing is absolute, as he will say in book IX, recalling Agamemnon's behavior, he "insulted / Me ... as though I were some despised / And dishonored outsider" (IX. 750-752). It is characteristic of Achilles, here and throughout the *Iliad*, that he is unable to draw limiting distinctions: He is either the greatest of warriors within the camp or he is a disgraced outsider, reduced to the status of a wandering refugee.

The astounding, breakneck speed with

which Agamemnon and Achilles take mutual offense, their escalating volleys of insult and contempt, reflect a competitive dynamic within which martial honor is a finite good, but the very volatility of the opening fight also suggests an underlying and ultimately irreconcilable difference between the two men. Agamemnon's claims to authority derive, as previously noted, from his great store of "gifts" (which are never freely given, but always serve to bind recipient to donor), as well as from the number of his ships and, perhaps, from the political centrality of the city of Mycenae, of which Agamemnon seems to have hereditary rule (see the description of his scepter at II.119-128)

. The inherited status of Agamemnon's rule might be especially suggested by the weakness of his abilities: He is neither the best warrior nor the best leader of men (as will be vividly dramatized for a second time by the episode of the dream, at the opening of book II); thus, in the absence of any apparent qualifications, Agamemnon seems likely to have attained his rule simply by being his father's eldest son. Achilles, on the other hand, is the greatest warrior of the Achaean camp—a claim that no one within (or outside) the camp contests. His superiority as a warrior is three times attributed to the gods in Book I (1.204, 1.329. and I.341),and especially

to his goddess mother Thetis, who belongs to the Titanic generation that preceded the Olympians. Thus, while Agamemnon's claims are those of (hereditary) position, Achilles' are those of (inborn) prowess; the former has political authority, the latter martial power (we might compare the relation of Hrothgar to Beowulf, Richard II to Bolingbroke, or King Arthur to Lancelot). The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, considered at its most general and as it is consistently dramatized over the course of the *Iliad*, is between the necessities of cultural order and the excitations and imperatives of natural ability and desire.

The judgment of King Panedes (in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*) is, again, telling: A peaceable—sometimes even a just—political order requires subjects who work within the rhythms and boundaries that are established and emblemized by the seasonal regularity of nature; in contrast, the *Iliad*, with Achilles at its center, provokes within an audience a “wonder” at the spectacle of a particular, irregular, violent, and mortal nature that asserts its own individual claims to justice. Such claims can well devastate the community (as Achilles’ withdrawal in book I will devastate the Achaean camp, no less than Apollo’s plague did) and so surely

fail any test of a justice for which the criterion is a collective equilibrium overseen by the king. Yet, as devastating as Achilles' assertion of his nature will come to be, his rage is initially provoked by a political order that is itself no longer sustaining the life of the community. The rule of the weak king is itself, as has been noted above, a breach of the politico-religious order. Achilles' subsequent assertion of his own primacy, of a nature no longer reconciled to the king's rule, though itself of questionable or unsustainable justice, might well be necessary, if the preference is, in extremis, for change rather than death, or, as Achilles says in his first words of the poem, if the

Achaeans are to be neither “baffled” in their intent nor killed (1.69). The deadening ossification of traditional social form that leads—as in the case of Agamemnon’s hereditary rule—to the divorce of ability from position provokes a response necessarily unjust from the vantage of collective equilibrium, but no less necessary for that. Just as the ruler’s reason is evident in Panedes’ preference for Hesiod’s verses, so too there is reason in the people’s vote for the *Iliad*.

The thematic division between Agamemnon and Achilles over the respective claims of political standing and natural prowess sets the *Iliad* in

motion. The quarrel between king and warrior, in its immediate combustibility and headlong acceleration nearly to the point of regicide, is dramatized as a fissure within the Achaean camp that is, from the start, ready to crack—and, crucially, a schism after which the former unities will be irrecoverable. In his description of the staff that confers the right of public speech within the Achaean camp, the poet presents an image of a prior mediation between the claims of the natural and the cultural; it is one mark of the Iliad-poet's genius to present that image of unity just as it is being irrevocably destroyed (I.273-278):

... [the staff] which no longer has
bud

Or leaf since it left its stump in the
mountains, nor ever

Grows green again and blooms
since the sharp bronze stripped it
Of foliage and bark, but which
now the sons of Achaeans

Bear in their hands, they who are
judges among us

And uphold the laws of [Zeus] ...

The icon of the staff presents a
foundation story, an aetiology, of
political authority within the Achaean
camp. The wood of the living, sprouting
tree is cut and transformed by human
craft into the staff, the possession of

which confers the right to authoritative speech—which is to say, to judgment. An ideal relation between the natural and political orders is maintained by the single, balanced staff: The tempering of nature by human skill—and in the service of human ends—becomes the means of political judgment. A foundation for that judgment is preserved through an origin in nature, even as nature is shaped by human craft, becoming itself a work of craft. This idealized concord between nature and culture—a human mediation of an underlying opposition—is permanently sundered in the break between Achilles and Agamemnon. When Achilles simultaneously swears his departure

from the Achaean camp and casts down and shatters “the staff with its studs of bright gold” (I.287), the break is irreparable.

The action of the *Iliad* takes place, in a sense, within the disordered space that is created by the casting down of the staff, by the dramatized breakup of an older order of society, with its particular relation between individual and political regime. While the *Iliad* is, at once, a monumental song of praise to the “unwithering fame” of the heroes at Troy—itself a perdurable “proof” of the immortality of the heroes’ names—the poem also dramatizes a heroic order that is no longer able to quell the strife that is

intrinsic to it. Social contradictions that were previously mediated by the representative rule of the king come now—under the rule of the weak king—to the fore and to the point of permanent rupture. The *Iliad*, then, even as it sings the immortality of its heroes, suggests an end to their imagined era and to the political order that is located there. Indeed, one of the great feats of the *Iliad* is to pose a critique—centered upon the withdrawals and speeches of Achilles—of the heroic order and the possibilities that it offers for mortal happiness. From this point of view, the essential work of the *Iliad* is one of negation—again, the epic is unjust with respect to the old, but potentially beneficent with respect to the

future. The old heroic order—for all its blinding beauties and exaltations, for all its aspirant motion toward the realm of the aesthetic—is also revealed as unable to quell strife and its attendant violence, as conducive to no just stability and, finally, as a desolation to its own greatest heroes (as the complaints and career of Achilles will dramatize) . To the extent that it thematizes the obsolescence of the old heroic order, the Iliad reveals an orientation toward the future; the poem cannot invent the forms that will govern the future, but it can present to the future a kind of *tabula rasa*, upon which the poet's audience might reinscribe new meanings out of the

wreckage of the old, upon which the heroes might be reassembled and once again directed toward human ends.

If the warrior order is permanently unmade over the course of the *Iliad*, it is upon the Shield of Achilles (XVIII.540-681) that the poet depicts a collective way of life closer to the historical experience and communal ethos of his late eighth- or seventh-century audience. The Shield is forged by Hephaestus, the god of craft, at the request of Thetis, Achilles' mother. This new and immortal shield replaces Achilles' prior shield, which he had given to his beloved Patroclus, who lost it—along with his life—in combat with Hector,

the Trojan prince and defender. In a distillation of pure fury following the death of Patroclus, Achilles has resolved to return to battle to avenge the death of Patroclus, with the full knowledge that his return will necessitate his death at Troy. When the Dawn-goddess delivers the gift of the Shield down from Olympus to Achilles' camp, his companions, upon seeing the images worked upon the Shield, are struck with fear and avert their gaze (XIX.16-18). They cannot look upon the "splendor" of the Shield, for in the depiction of the way of life there—which is that of the poet's own audience—the heroes see their own obsolescence. Achilles, however, gazes

long upon the brilliance of the Shield with a combination of adrenal anger and deep pleasure; his eyes gleam back in response, as if themselves afire. The vision that he sees upon the Shield—of a world without heroes, of a world without the relentless martial strife of the *Iliad* itself—is the source of a renewed, visceral anger for Achilles because it is a world whose possibilities are not meant for him. Yet the vision is also a source of pleasure to him because it is of a world that his own great paroxysm of killing rage in the final quarter of the poem will usher in. In his pleasure at the sight of the Shield, Achilles can, as it were, acknowledge

his own role in the foundation of the world to come, even if his role is preeminently one of extraordinary negation: Achilles is the hero whose discontent fully lays bare the failures of the heroic order from the point of view of mortal happiness, while his surpassing strength permits him to make that discontent murderously actual, as he devastates much of the heroic order itself in the final books of the poem. His perfection is such that he is both the culmination and the destruction of the traditional form.

Among the images upon the Shield, it is the depiction of the wedding procession and, in the passage

immediately following, of a communal process of adjudication in a case of murder that are foundational for the city-state (XVIII.554-560 and 560-574); both images appear on the second ring of the Shield, in the city at peace. In the wedding procession, the “high-blazing” torches illumine a scene of music and revelry; the sight provokes wonder. The promise of the wedding—which we do not see concluded, but always in motion—is one of social unity, the joining together and mutual strengthening of families within the city. In the *Iliad* itself, such unity is always in pieces, defended in speech even as it is sundered in action. The Achaean cause at Troy is, of course, the recovery of

Helen, whose wedding to Menelaus is overturned by her flight, whether compelled or voluntary, to Troy. The martial expedition to Troy presents itself as a defense of the conjugal union and, by extension, of the social work that the wedding accomplishes—primarily, the joining together of families and the establishment of a new social unit that might, in turn, offer guest-friendship to others and to outsiders, thus creating further links of social exchange and comity. And yet, as Achilles complains with great and piercing sarcasm in book IX, the larger social principle epitomized by the defense of Helen and her marriage has been granted no general

applicability, but seems to apply only to Agamemnon and Menelaus (IX.381-388):

“But why should Argives battle the
Trojans? And why
Has this miserable son of Atreus
gathered and led
This great army here? Wasn't it all
for lovely
Blonde Helen? Can it be that of all
mortal men, only
The sons of Atreus love their
wives? Not so,
For any real man of good sense
both loves and cares for
His own, as I loved her with all of
my heart,

Though she was won by my spear.”

As it holds for Helen, so too—asserts Achilles—must it hold for Briseis: If the defense of Helen, the daughter of Zeus and the fairest of women, registers a principle that is true for any “man of good sense,” that same principle must also be applicable to Briseis, however much her status as captive places her among the lowest ranks of the Achaean camp. Briseis is, as Achilles remorselessly puts it, “won by [his] spear,” yet she has come, asserts Achilles, to be one who is beloved, “with all of my heart”—to be, as it were, Achilles’ Helen, and so worthy of

the same defense. By his own assertion, Achilles' love is transformational: Briseis, who began her captivity in the Achaean camp as a "prize," a sign of the social prestige of Achilles, has become a beloved, no less worthy of defense than Helen, the most illustrious of wives. Indeed, Achilles' defense of Briseis might be a greater defense of the principle of the "man of good sense," in that Achilles fights for the beloved of lowest status rather than of highest. (Achilles' sarcasm surely redoubles in his attribution of this principle befitting men of "good sense" to the sons of Atreus; for we have already seen, in Agamemnon's preference for Chryseis in book I, the extent of his regard for

Clytemnestra, while Helen, though not “won by [the] spear” is won by the gift and is accordingly valued by Menelaus.) For Achilles, the abduction of Briseis by Agamemnon is equivalent to the abduction of Helen by Paris; but while Paris shanghaied Helen by stealth (though perhaps with Helen’s aid), Agamemnon abducted an unwilling Briseis in public in the very center of the warriors’ camp. Moreover, not a single one of Achilles’ comrades arose in his defense. The Achaeans thus become, to Achilles in his rage, not men “of good sense,” but “worthless” (1.270; literally, “nobodies” in the Greek), no longer deserving of Achilles’ protection, no

longer entitled to any claims of mutual obligation, which include those of communal defense.

This collective failure to acknowledge Achilles' own claims for Briseis (the refusal to grant that Briseis is as worthy of defense as Helen) is Achilles' initial rationale for his otherwise traitorous desertion of the Achaeans. The Achaeans themselves might well respond that Achilles has not, in fact, married Briseis; her social status is not that of wife, but of concubine. Yet, it bears repeating that, from Achilles' point of view, his own love for Briseis is transformational: The wedding is lacking, but the intensity of his emotion

stands and comes to supersede collectively conferred attributions of status. Because Achilles' words are—throughout the *Iliad*—invested with such extraordinary immediacy and because he claims for his words an absolute truth, there is a world-making quality about his speeches—if of a world that would be made to Achilles' desire. The manifesto with which Achilles begins his great speech of rejection in book IX is diagnostic: “The gates of Hades are not more hateful to me / Than a man who hides one thing in his heart and says / Something else” (*Iliad* IX.3 51-353) ; as abhorred as death is to life, so the false word is to the true. The truth that Achilles tells is not always—perhaps

not even often—the truth that his community acknowledges, but it does concord with his own intertwining of principle and emotion; indeed, the very emotiveness of Achilles' speech becomes itself revelatory of the principles—the truth-claims, the values—that have been lost or covered over in the ceaseless hurly-burly of social exchange and accommodation to power.

Achilles' dilemma, as well as a primary source of the *Iliad's* thematic force, is that the claims of emotional truth—claims of love or of the values that might underlie all the necessary social transactions—are not those that the Achaean camp (or any political

community) has much capacity to acknowledge or formalize. Indeed, to the Achaeans, Achilles has become as unapproachable and as incomprehensible as a wild beast. So protests Ajax, in a passionate burst of frustration at Achilles' refusal of Agamemnon's eventual proffers of reconciliation and, most cuttingly, of the appeals of his comrades: " 'Achilles has filled his proud heart / With savage, inhuman hatred. He has become / A cruel and ruthless man, who cannot remember / The love of his friends and how we idolized him ... and all / Because of one girl' " (*Iliad* IX.728-731 and 738-739). Ajax' words are as poignant as they are, finally,

uncomprehending of his former comrade: Ajax appeals to the paramount value of the warrior camp, the “love”—in Homeric Greek, the *philotes*—of his comrades; it is this love, this masculine camaraderie, that should—on Ajax’ account—persist and that should still obligate, even in the face of Agamemnon’s outrageousness. For it is *philotes* that not only joins comrade to comrade within the camp, but that, finally, makes the warrior’s life worth living. *Philotes* is an active principle of social unity that is both necessary and good.

And Achilles was himself once motivated—prior to his casting down of

the staff—by that same ideal of a collective *philotes* to which Ajax now appeals (indeed, of the three speeches of the book IX mission to Achilles, it is Ajax' alone that affects Achilles and that elicits the ultimately fatal concession from Achilles that he will remain at Troy beyond the following morning). For Achilles, with his absolutist turn of mind, the principle, once disgraced, is no longer salvageable: The Achaeans remain “nobodies” ; he himself has become an “outsider” (IX.752). Likewise, Briseis is not, for Achilles, “just one girl” (as Ajax proclaims her). That is, she is not interchangeable with any other sign of male honor (in this regard, Ajax thinks no differently than

Agamemnon). Around Briseis—who is, as I’ve argued above, proclaimed by Achilles to be a beloved, worthy of the same defense as Helen—an alternative pole to that of the warrior’s life (and the warrior’s “beautiful death”) takes imagined form. For Achilles, the return to Phthia, the counter-heroic choice of the long and inglorious life, is conceived in book IX in terms of a marriage and though Achilles speaks of a marriage that his father Peleus will arrange, his own thoughts return repeatedly to Briseis (see again, IX.381-388, cited above). Briseis herself, in one of the most startling and poignant of Homeric speeches, refers to a promised wedding

to Achilles in Phthia (XIX.333-339); returning to book I, we see that Achilles forsakes his initial plan simply to return to Phthia (I.193-195) once Agamemnon threatens the abduction of Briseis (I.210-211)—he remains at Troy, then, for her. A marriage with Briseis crystallizes in imagination the life that might await if Achilles were to abandon Troy, if he were to opt for the counter-heroic life. As not “just one girl,” but as one who is, by Achilles’ account, “fitted to the heart,” Briseis—if she were to wed Achilles—augurs the possibility that the social exchanges of the heroic order might yet be working beneficently, that the heroic order itself might be responsive to the desires of its members,

perhaps even remediative of the misfortunes of those who, like Briseis, have suffered because of it.

But the wedding of Achilles and Briseis is, of course, a fantasy, persistently articulated even as it is dramatized as impossible. Likewise fantasy is the “choice of Achilles,” as he himself formulates it in the central passage from book IX (lines 471-478, discussed above): As the consummate traditional hero, Achilles must eventually find himself back upon the path of “unwithering fame.” Yet, the persistent desire to marry Briseis and lead an unheroic life, coupled with the very joylessness (indeed, the

extraordinary murderousness) of Achilles' eventual return to battle, suggests a certain vastation of the Homeric hero and of the warrior community he inhabits. Though the form—the necessary plot—of the hero remains, that form has been emptied of choice-worthy content, from the vantage both of individual desire and of communal well-being. Though the possibility of Achilles' returning to Phthia was never a “real” choice within the generic requirements of the epic, the opposite pole of immortal fame surely becomes no more choice-worthy for being compulsory. It is, again, a defining quality of the Iliad-poet's art to thematize critically—not simply to

transmit—the premises of his tradition, and foremost the heroic exchange of life for poetry. As the necessities of the traditional form are dramatized as at increasing odds with the projects of human desire, the inevitable death of the hero comes to seem bound less to the exaltations of art than to the desolations of the spirit. For Achilles, first the loss of Briseis, then the sacrifice of Patroclus: In each case, what is destroyed is the possibility of a love that might be sustained, that might make the heroic world once again meaningful. Such losses might well be reason for abandoning the heroic world.

Just as the wedding procession on the

Shield is captured in mid-motion, if joyously directed toward completion, so too the following scene of adjudication is depicted in mid-trial, the outcome of the contention left pointedly unresolved. It is the value of a life that is now debated:

The men, though, had gone
To the place of assembly, where
two of their number were striving
To settle a case concerning a
murdered man's blood-price.
The defendant declared his cause
to the people and vowed
He was willing to pay the whole
price, but the other refused
To accept it, and each was eager to

have a judge's
Decision in his behalf The people
were cheering
Both men, some favoring one and
some the other,
But heralds held all of them back
from where in the sacred
Circle the elders sat on the
polished stones,
Each taking the great-lunged
herald's staff when it came
To him in his turn. With this each
elder would come
To the fore and give his opinion.
And in the center
Two talents of gold were lying, the
fee to be given
To him who uttered the straightest

and truest judgment. (XVIII. 560-574)

The murderer is claiming that if the judge were to rule in his favor, he would pay a blood-price to the relatives of the deceased; comparative Near-Eastern texts suggest that in instances where blood-price is a possibility, the murderer is claiming that there were mitigating circumstances. On the other side, the relatives of the murdered man are refusing to accept any blood-price; they are claiming that the murder was aggravated and that they are entitled to blood revenge. In the proposal of the defendant, the payment of the blood-price would serve to save his own life,

as well as to maintain the peace of the city as a whole; the kin of the murdered man, in opposition, are claiming that the life of the dead man can be recompensed only by the shedding of the murderer's blood—the honor of the family is preeminent. For the community, the intransigence of the kin raises the destabilizing possibility of the vendetta, in which the collective peace is overmatched by the private, self-perpetuating feuds of particular extended families. The community thus has a pressing, constitutive interest that the kin of the murdered man should accept the blood-price; that is, the kin should accept a form of symbolic substitution—a price-for the person lost. The good that

is thus purchased—and the final measure of value—is the unity of the community. The adjudication of murder is, of course, a limit case, but it also crystallizes a version of the social contract, in which each member of the community—like the kin of the murdered man—is asked to accept recompense, denominated in the coin of the community, for the loss of those immediate personal desires—whether for vengeance or for other forms of self-assertion—that are potentially disruptive.

The very inclusion upon the Shield of the trial-scene attests to the historical presence of an institution—the court—that is foundational for the emergent city-

state: A place of adjudication is now present, in which conflicting claims might be heard and deliberated upon. Contention need not always end in irremediable, bloody division. In a sense, the staff that was cast down and shattered by Achilles in book I has been re-crafted and is now carried by the civic elders, as each in his turn takes hold of the staff and rises to speak to an approving or disapproving citizenry, who stand arrayed as an audience in an outer circle that surrounds the inner. This image of adjudication concords with the historical shift that I outlined above from the authority of the king to that of the collective citizenry. The speaker's staff has been reassembled out

of the pieces of its shattered predecessor, but—in the re-crafting-it has been given new, humanized content, emblematic of a polity that now locates authoritative speech within a communal center rather than upon a single, divinized apex. It is the circle within which the speakers meet that is now “sacred.”

We might again, then, propose that the action of the *Iliad* finds dramatic form between the shattered speaker's staff of book I and the reconstituted staff upon the Shield of book XVIII: Achilles' initial casting down of a prior icon of the collective mediation of nature and culture—of the individual and his

community—creates the chaotic, charged space (a battlefield real and metaphoric) within which the poem explores the values ascribed to a mortal life: the exchange values (the blood-prices) set by the community, the absolute values set by the self. Upon the Shield itself, the outcome of the trial remains untold: We never learn if the rage of the aggrieved kin of the murdered man is assuaged by acceptance of the blood-price, if the collective good of the community is, thus, acknowledged and the pacifying potential of the court realized. This incompleteness perhaps reflects the very newness in the early archaic period of the court as an institution—its still uncertain powers, its potential rather

than its fulfillment as yet. But the incompleteness of the scene surely also registers the extraordinary emotional and psychological difficulty of subordinating the imperatives of individual principle and desire to the claims of the collectivity. The very intransigence of the desire for revenge, the persistence of the mourner's grief that cannot be assuaged by any blood-price, the crude tyranny of the (necessary) social fiction that one person's life can be recompensed by the substitution of another's—all attest to the difficulty and psychic cost of the subordination of individual aspiration and grief to the collective weal. Human social life is, of

course, constituted by ceaseless negotiations of individual passions and communal goods; exchange values are ever determined to better or worse ends. These exchanges can be more or less coercive, more or less devaluing, more or less responsive to the notion that human lives are, finally, neither interchangeable nor mute.

Yet it is in this ceaseless negotiation of value, whether to the better or to the worse end, that a community maintains its equilibrium. The decisive and tragic break arises when one refuses to enter any longer into such exchanges, when such constant re-articulations of value are only a murder of spirit—or are, as

Achilles says, as hateful as the gates of Hades (IX.351-353). This is a point about politics but also a point about consciousness. Upon the Shield, the depiction of the scene of adjudication is a wondrous sign of a potentially more humane system of social exchanges, where the collective peace is negotiated by means that offer greater freedom to human speech and reason; the passing of the heroic order makes such a humanized political realm possible. But the incompleteness of the adjudication scene might also suggest that even such humane communal advances might not be finally adequate to the consciousness of the individual. The question of the blood-price will always persist, as will those

who, to their grief and to our fascination,
find the price impossible to set and the
loss of value unconscionable:

For I put a much
Higher value on life than on all the
treasures men say
Were contained in the rich and
populous city of Troy
Before we sons of the Achaeans
came, or,
For that matter, all the wealth laid
up behind
The marble threshold of the archer
god Phoebus Apollo
In rocky Pytho. For raiding can get
a man cattle
And splendid fat sheep, and barter

can get him tripods
And sorrel horses. But once his
soul goes out
Through the barrier of his teeth,
neither raiding nor barter
Can make it return. (IX.461-471)

Achilles asserts that his own life is beyond value, greater than all the abductable prizes of the world, greater even than the promised compensation of epic poetry. Achilles' assertion of a life beyond value is, from one vantage, a great arrogance and a great delusion: Human beings are social animals and society is comprised not of the sum of individuals, but of the exchanges that transpire between them. The fascination

of non-participation can itself be blinding to the values that might be found and made among the speeches and loves of others. But Achilles, for all his arrogance, might remind us that speech is also the private means of constructing an ego, of exploring a consciousness, of determining the values that might underlie the network of signs.

We are ourselves, in the West, the distant heirs of the court and city-state that is prefigured on the Shield of Achilles. And this remains a descent worth reclaiming, if it might still inspire efforts to expand the circle of political speech beyond that which is depicted upon the Shield. But Achilles, in his

assertion of the life beyond value and of the uncompensated absoluteness of death, reminds us of the prices and limits of culture itself. And in that sense, Achilles is also akin to the poet, for it is one of the characteristic works of poetry to recover, impossibly, the values that precede signs and the ways in which individual consciousness is ultimately irremediable, untamable by culture and all its signifying systems.

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Recently a fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies, King focuses on archaic and classical Greek literature and philosophy. He is currently a Blegen Research Fellow at Vassar College.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ennis Rees was born in Newport News, Virginia, in 1925. He graduated from William and Mary and took his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at Harvard. Before joining the faculty of the University of South Carolina, where he is a Professor of English, he taught at Duke and Princeton. His study, *The Tragedies of George Chapman: Renaissance Ethics in Action*, was published in 1954 by the Harvard University Press, and his verse translation of the *Odyssey* by Random House in 1960. This was followed by the *Iliad* in 1963. Both poems are

reprinted in the Library of Liberal Arts published by Bobbs-Merrill. Among the record albums Mr. Rees has made for Spoken Arts are two of selections from his Homer. His *Fables from Aesop* was published by the Oxford University Press in 1966. A book of his poems was published by the University of South Carolina Press in 1964 and his *Selected Poems* in 1973. He has written a number of books of verse especially for children, including *Riddles, Riddles Everywhere, The Songs of Paul Bunyan and Tony Beaver, Tiny Tall Tales, Brer Rabbit and His Tricks, The Little Greek Alphabet Book*, and *Potato Talk*. He and his wife live in Columbia and have three children.

BOOK I

The Quarrel

Sing, O Goddess, the ruinous wrath of
Achilles,
Son of Peleus, the terrible curse that
brought
Unnumbered woes upon the Achaeans
and hurled
To Hades so many heroic souls, leaving
Their bodies the prey of dogs and
carrion birds.
The will of Zeus was done from the
moment they quarreled,
Agamemnon, son of Atreus, and godlike

Achilles.^{[1](#)}

Which of the gods caused two such men to contend?

The son of Zeus and Leto. Deeply incensed

With King Agamemnon for failing to honor Chryses^{[a](#)}

His priest, Apollo sent a plague on the soldiers,

And many people were dying. Chryses had come

To the swift Achaean ships to ransom his daughter,

And the ransom he bore was boundless. In suppliant hands

On a staff of gold he held the sacred fillet

Of far-darting Apollo, and he made his
plea to all
The Achaeans, especially to the two
sons of Atreus,²
Marshalers of many:

“O Atreus’ sons and you other
Well-greaved Achaeans, may the gods
who live on Olympus
Allow you to sack the city of Priam† and
reach
Your homes in safety. But reverence the
son of Zeus,
Apollo who strikes from afar—take this
ransom
And return my precious daughter.”

All the other Achaeans
Supported the priest and shouted to

reverence him

And accept the splendid ransom. But
Atreus' son

Agamemnon was far from pleased.

Roughly he sent him

Away with these harsh words:

“Don't let me find you,

Old man, by the hollow ships, neither
loitering now

Nor coming back later, or you will find
small protection

In the sacred staff and fillet. The girl I
will not

Let go! Before that she'll grow old in
Argos, far from

Her own native land, working at the
loom and sharing

My bed. Now go, old man! and you'll go

much safer

If you don't provoke me."

At this the old priest was afraid
And did as the King bade him do.
Without a word
He walked off along the shore of the
loud-booming sea,
But when he had gone some distance he
fervently prayed
To his lord Apollo, whom lovely-haired
Leto bore:

"Hear me, O god of the silver bow, you
That bestride in your power Chryse and
sacred Cilla
And mightily rule in Tenedos—O
Smintheus, if ever
I built a temple that pleased you, or

made burnt-offering
To you of rich thigh-pieces from bulls or
goats,
Fulfill this prayer of mine by using your
arrows
To make the Danaans^b pay for the tears I
have shed.”³

Thus he prayed, and Phoebus Apollo
heard him.
Down from the peaks of Olympus he
came with a heart
Full of wrath and his bow and closed
quiver about his shoulders.
The arrows rattled on the back of the
angry god
As he moved, and like night he arrived.
Then he sat down

Some distance away from the ships and
shot the first arrow,
And the silver bow's twang was
awesome and chilling indeed.
At first he shot at the mules and flashing-
swift dogs,
But then he aimed his bitter shafts at the
men
Themselves, and struck! And pyres of
the dead were everywhere
Constantly burning.

For nine days the deadly shafts
Of the god sped through the army, but on
the tenth day
The white-armed goddess Hera put into
the heart
Of Achilles to call the men to the place

of assembly,
For it distressed her to see the Danaans
dying.

When they were assembled and seated,
fleet-footed Achilles
Stood up in their midst, and spoke:

“Now, O son
Of Atreus, it seems that we shall be
baffled and driven
Back home, if indeed we escape with
our lives from the war
And pestilence too that plague the
Achaeans. But come,
Let us consult some prophet or priest, or
some reader
Of dreams—for even a dream is from
Zeus—someone

Who may be able to tell us why Phoebus
Apollo

Rages so fiercely. If it be because of a
hecatomb^c

Or vow unperformed, perhaps the god
will accept

The savor of sacrificed lambs and goats
without blemish

And change his mind about plaguing us
all this way.”

When he had spoken and sat down
again, up stood

Calchas, son of Thestor, he who was far
The best reader of ominous birds, who
knew what was

And had been and things that were to be,
and who had

By means of the keen prophetic vision
given

To him by Apollo guided the Achaean
ships

To Ilium. Now, with all good intentions,
he addressed

The assembly:

“Zeus-loved Achilles, you bid me
explain

The wrath of far-smiting Apollo.
Therefore I will.

But first you must make up your mind
and swear to defend me,

Swear that you'll be both willing and
quick with word

And hand. For I fear I am going to anger
a man

Who rules with might over all the
Argives, and from whom
The Achaeans take orders. A king, you
know, is always
More lordly when angry at a low-
ranking man. Even
If he swallows his wrath at the time, in
his heart he nurses it
Still, till he has his revenge. So decide
whether you
Will protect me.”

Then swift Achilles answered him
thus:

“Be bold, and tell us what you can of the
god’s mind and will,
For by Zeus-loved Apollo I swear to
you that so long

As I live on earth and have my sight, no
one
Shall hurt you here by the hollow ships,
no one
In the Danaan host, though you mean
Agamemnon himself,
Who claims to be far the best of all the
Achaeans.”

At this the peerless prophet took heart,
and spoke:
“It’s not for a hecatomb or broken vow
that he blames us,
But because Agamemnon insulted his
priest by not
Accepting the ransom and giving the man
his daughter.
Thus the far-smiting god has given us

woes,
And will continue to give them. He will
not remove
This loathsome plague till we return to
her father
His wide-eyed daughter—nor can we
accept any ransom—
And we must carry to Chryse a holy
hecatomb.
Only then can we hope to change the
mind of Apollo.”

When he had spoken and sat down
again, the son
Of Atreus, the wide-ruling wager of war
Agamemnon,
Stood up in a rage among them. His
black heart boiled

With wrath and his eyes were like fire
when it blazes. Fixing
Calchas with an evil scowl, he railed at
him thus:

“Prophet of misery! you’ve still got your
first good thing

To foretell for me. Unhappy events you
always

Enjoy predicting, but never yet have you
prophesied

Anything pleasant, much less brought it
to pass.

And now in the midst of this Danaan
meeting you go on

Spouting your oracles, telling the men
it’s because

Of me that the far-darting god is
inflicting these woes

Upon them, because I refused the royal
ransom

For the darling daughter of Chryses,
since I much prefer

To have her at home with me. I would
rather have her,

In fact, than Clytemnestra, my wife. For
this girl is quite

Her equal, just as tall and good looking,
just as

Smart and clever with her hands. Even
so, I want

To give the girl back, if that is the thing
to do.

I prefer the men safe and well, not sick
and dying.

But you must prepare a prize for me at

once.

For me to be the only Argive here
Without some gift of honor would hardly
be right!

As you can see, my prize is going
elsewhere.”

Then Achilles, noble and strong,
answered him thus:

“Renowned son of Atreus, most
covetous of men, how

Can the gallant Achaeans give you a
prize? If there

Is some large public treasure, we’ve yet
to learn where it is,

And the plunder we took from the cities
we sacked has already

Been divided. Nor can we rightly take

these things back
From the people. But you, give up the
girl as the god
Demands. We Achaeans will
recompense you three
And four times over, if Zeus ever wills
that we sack
The well-walled city of Troy.”

And lordly Agamemnon
Spoke in reply: “Though you be, O
godlike Achilles,
A man of great valor, don’t try to outwit
me like that,
For I’ll not be persuaded or gotten the
best of by you!
Do you tell me to give the girl back so
that you can keep

What you've got while I sit here with
nothing? If the gallant
Achaean give me a prize to my liking,
and equal
To the one I am losing, all right—but if
they do not,
Then I myself will come and take your
gift
Of honor, or that of Ajax, or I'll seize
and bear off
The prize of Odysseus. Wrathful indeed
will be
The man to whom I make that visit! But
this
We can think about later. Right now let
us launch a black ship
On the sacred sea, get enough rowers
together,

And put on board a hecatomb along with
the girl,
The lovely Chryseis herself And let one
of our leaders
Take charge, either Ajax, or Idomeneus,
or godly Odysseus,
Or, son of Peleus, you yourself, most
dreaded
Of men, that so you may offer gifts and
appease
The far-working god.”

Then swift Achilles, scowling
At him, replied: “You greedy-minded
shamelessness
Incarnate! how can any decent Achaean
want to
Take orders from you, to go where you

tell him to go

Or battle his best with hostile men? I
didn't

Come here to fight because of the Trojan
spearmen.⁴

They've never done me any harm, never
rustled my cattle

Or horses, or plundered in fertile Phthia
a harvest

Of mine, for between here and there lie a
great many things—

Shadowy mountains and crashing sea.

But we

Came here with you, the incredibly
shameless, in an effort

To gratify you! to get satisfaction for
Menelaus

And you! covetous cur that you are. All
this

You turn your back on and choose to
forget, and now

You threaten to take my prize of
prestige, the gift

I got from the sons of Achaeans and for
which I labored

So much. Whenever we warriors sack a
populous

Trojan city, my share of the booty is
never

Equal to yours. True, I get more, much
more,

Than my share of chaotic battle, but
when it comes

To dividing the loot, your portion is
always far larger

Than mine. Worn out with fighting, I go
back to my ships
And with me take some pitiful little
prize
Allotted to me—little, but mine. Now,
though,
I'll go back to Phthia, for I would much
rather take all
My beaked ships and go home than stay
on here in disgrace
To heap up wealth for you!"

And the king of men
Agamemnon answered him thus: "Go on
and run,
If you feel the urge so strongly. I do not
beg you
To stay on my account. I've others here

Who honor and respect me, including the
best of all counselors,
Zeus himself. Of all the god-nurtured
leaders,
You are most hateful to me, for strife is
always
Dear to your heart, and battles and
fighting. And if
You're so full of valor, that's the gift of
a god.
So take your ships and your men and go
lord it over
The Myrmidons at home. I have no
regard for you,
Nor do I care how angry you are. But
see now
How you like this. Since Phoebus
Apollo is taking

Chryseis from me, I'm returning her with
a ship

And men of mine—but I myself will
come

To your lodge and take your prize, the
lovely Briseis,⁵

That once and for all you may know how
greatly I

Exceed you in power and excellence,
and another man

Will think twice before calling himself
my equal and right

In my presence comparing himself with
me!”

He spoke,
And the pain from his words went deep
in the son of Peleus,

Rending the heart in his shaggy breast
two ways

As to what he should do, whether to
draw the sharp sword

By his thigh, break up the meeting, and
kill the son

Of Atreus, or swallow his rage and
control his temper,

While he was thus divided in mind and
heart,

With that huge sword of his half drawn
from the scabbard,

Pallas Athena came down from the sky,
sent

By white-armed Hera, the goddess
whose heart held equal

Love and concern for both of the angry
men.

Standing behind him, she caught the son
of Peleus

By a handful of tawny hair and made
herself visible

To him alone, nor could any of the others
see her.

Astonished, Achilles turned, and as he
looked

In the blazing blue eyes of the goddess
he knew her at once

For Pallas Athena, and his words came
winged with surprise:

“Why, O daughter of aegis-bearing
Zeus, do you come again

Now? Can it be that you wanted to
witness the hubris^d

And gross overreaching of Atreus’ son

Agamemnon?

Well let me say this, and believe me I mean what I say.

That arrogant pride of his may shortly cost him

His life!”

And the bright-eyed goddess Athena replied:

“I came down from the sky to help you control

Your wrath, if only you will obey, and the goddess

White-armed Hera sent me, for her heart holds equal

Love and concern for both of you. So come,

No fighting, and don't draw your sword.

Wound him with words
Instead, and tell him just how it will be.
And now
I say this to you, and I too mean what I
say.
On account of this arrogant insult,
splendid gifts
Worth three times as much as what you
may lose will one day
Be given to you. So hold yourself back,
and obey us.”

Then Achilles, swift of foot, answered
her thus:
“No man, O goddess, can ignore the
word of two
Such powers, no matter how wrathful his
heart may be.

To obey is surely better. The gods hear
all

The prayers of him who heeds them.”

He spoke, and restrained
His mighty hand on the silver hilt. Then
obeying

The word of Athena he thrust the long
blade back into

The scabbard. And the goddess left for
Olympus and the palace

Of aegis-bearing Zeus, to mingle with
the other gods there.

And again Achilles, wrathful as ever,
spoke violent

Words to the son of Atreus: “You
drunken sot!

With the greedy eyes of a dog and the

heart of a deer!

You never have courage enough to arm
yourself

For battle along with the rest of us, or go
With the best Achaeans on a crafty
ambush. You'd rather

Die than do either! You much prefer to
go

Through this huge camp and seize for
yourself the gift

Of anyone here who disagrees with you,
you wretched

Devourer of what we win! And truly, the
men

Your rule are also worthless, or this, O
son

Of Atreus, would be the last of your
arrogant insults.

But I'll make something clear right now,
and swear a great oath.

I swear by this staff I hold—which no
longer has bud

Or leaf since it left its stump in the
mountains, nor ever

Grows green again and blooms since the
sharp bronze stripped it

Of foliage and bark, but which now the
sons of Achaeans

Bear in their hands, they who are judges
among us

And uphold the laws of God—by this
staff I swear

A great oath that surely someday a
desperate need

For Achilles shall come upon all the

sons of Achaeans,
Nor will you be able to help them at all,
no matter
How grieved you are, when man-killing
Hector is cutting them
Down by the dozen. Then, I say, you'll
rend
Your heart with wrath and remorse for
failing to honor
The best Achaean of all!"

So saying, Achilles
Dashed to the ground the staff with its
studs of bright gold,
And sat down, while opposite him the
son of Atreus
Went on venting his rage. Then among
them up stood

Nestor, the silver-tongued speaker of
Pylos, from whose
Lips the words flowed sweeter than
honey. Since he
First saw the light, two generations of
mortal
Men had come and gone in sacred Pylos,
And now among the third he was the
King.

In an effort to help, he addressed the
assembly:

“For shame!

Surely now great grief comes on the land
Of Achaea. But think how glad it would
make King Priam
And all of his sons along with the other
Trojans

To learn of this wrangling between you
—you that among
The Danaans stand first in counsel and
warfare. But listen
To me. Both of you are younger than I,
And in other days I have campaigned
with mightier
Men than you, nor did they ever belittle
Or disregard me. Never since have I
seen such warriors,
Nor ever again shall I see such heroes as
Peirithous
Was and Dryas, marshaler of men, and
Caeneus
And Exadius and Polyphemus, godlike in
his might, and that equal
Of the immortal gods, Theseus, son of
Aegeus.

Of all men reared on earth, these were
the strongest.

The strongest, I say, and with the
strongest they fought—

With the monstrous mountain Centaurs,
and the slaughter they there

Performed was terrible indeed.⁶ I came
a long way

From distant Pylos and mingled with
those very men,

For I came at their summons. And in the
war I did

My personal share of the fighting. There
are today

No mortals alive on earth who would be
fit

To fight with those men. Still, they

listened to me

And took my advice. And you too would
do better to hearken

And heed. You, Agamemnon, are a man
of great power,

But don't try taking that girl away. Leave
her

Alone, the prize of him to whom the
Achaeans

Gave her. And you, O son of Peleus, do
not

Presume to pit your might in strife
against

A sceptered King, who derives his
power from Zeus

And therefore has no common glory.
You

Are the son of a goddess and valiant

indeed, yet he

Is the mightier man, since he rules over
more people.

Check your rage, Atrides—in fact, I beg
you

To extinguish this wrath of yours against
Achilles,

Who in the moil of horrible war is the
mightiest

Mainstay we Achaeans have.”

And ruling Agamemnon

Replied: “All that you say, O aged one,
Is just and wise enough, but this man
wants

To be higher than anyone else. He wants
to rule

Over all—to be King, I tell you, and

give orders to all.

Well I know one, at least, who won't
take orders

From him! So the immortal gods made
him

A mighty spearman—does that give him
the right

To go around spouting insults?"

Then the gifted Achilles
Interrupted, saying: "Indeed, for if I
yielded

To you in all things, no matter what you
commanded,

I would be called a coward and good for
nothing.

So boss the others about, but give no
more orders

To me! I'm through with doing what you
say. And here

Is something else that you will do well
to remember.

I will not fight with you or anyone else
For the girl, since you do but take what
you gave. But of all

That I'll have left by that swift black
ship of mine,

I warn you not to take away anything
else!

Go on and try, if you like, so that all may
learn

I mean business—and see how soon
your black blood covers

My spear!”

When the violent words had all been

spoken,

The two men arose and broke up the
meeting beside

The Achaean ships. Achilles strode off
to his shelters

And well-balanced ships along with
Patroclus and all

The rest of his comrades. But the son of
Atreus ordered

Others to drag a swift ship down into the
sea

And he picked out twenty oarsmen. Then
they drove on board

For the god the hecatomb of cattle and
brought Chryseis

Of the lovely cheeks and put her aboard.
And Odysseus,

Resourceful as ever, mounted the deck

and took charge.

When all were embarked and sailing
the foamy sea-lanes,
Atreus' son commanded the army to
wash,
And they purified themselves in the salt
sea-water and offered
To Apollo appeasing hecatombs of bulls
and goats
By the shore of the unresting sea. And
the plentiful smoke
Curled up in the sky and eddying with it
the savor.

While the men were busy with
offerings throughout the camp,
Agamemnon proceeded to fulfill his
threat to Achilles.

He called his heralds and nimble
squires, Talthybius
And Eurybates, and spoke to them thus:
“Go to the lodge
Of Peleus’ son Achilles, take the hand
Of the beautiful-cheeked Briseis, and
bring her to me.
And if he refuses to give her, I myself
will go
With more men and take her, which will
be far more painful for
him.”

With this harsh order he sent them
away on their mission,
And they, reluctant, walked off along the
beach
Of the desolate sea till they came to the

shelters and ships

Of the Myrmidons.^e They found Achilles
sitting by his lodge

And black ship, nor was he glad to see
them. Frozen

With fear and embarrassment, they stood
in awe of the Prince,

Unable to speak a word or ask a
question.

But he knew very well what they
wanted, and spoke to them, saying:

“Come here, good heralds, and
welcome. You bear the words

Of God and men, and my quarrel is not
with you,

But Agamemnon, who sent you here for
the girl Briseis.

So come, god-sprung Patroclus, bring
out the girl
And give her to these men to take back
with them. And in
That day when I shall be desperately
needed to save
The Achaeans from shameful destruction
these two shall witness
For me before blissful gods and mortal
men
And the stupid King himself. For surely
his rage
Will be the ruin of him yet. If he wants
his Achaeans to fight
With both success and survivors, he had
better try looking
Before as well as behind!”

He spoke, and Patroclus
Obeyed his dear friend. He led from the
lodge Briseis,
Lovely of face, and gave her to go with
the men.

And back they went down the line of
Achaean ships

And with them the unwilling girl. Now
Achilles, weeping,

Withdrew from his comrades, and sitting
down by himself

On the beach by the silvery surf he
looked out over

The wine-dark sea, stretched out his
arms, and fervently

Prayed to his own dear mother:

“Since, O Mother,

You bore me, though only to live for a
few short years,
Surely Olympian Zeus should have given
me honor,
But now that high-thundering god has
given me quite
The reverse. For truly the son of Atreus,
imperial
Agamemnon, has grossly insulted me. He
has robbed me
Of my gift of honor and now he keeps
her himself!”

Thus in tears he spoke, and far down
in the sea,
Sitting by her ancient father, his goddess
mother
Heard him.⁷ And quickly she left the

gray sea like a mist
And sank down in front of her weeping
son, gently
Caressed him, called him by name, and
said:

“My child,
Why are you crying? What sorrow has
entered your heart?
Keep it in no longer. Speak out, and
share it with me.”

Then moaning, swift-footed Achilles
spoke to her thus:
“You know. Why should I tell it to one
who already
Knows all about it? We went out to
Thebe, the sacred
City of Eëtion, destroyed and plundered

it all,
And brought the booty back here. This
the sons
Of Achaeans divided fairly among them,
and they chose
For the son of Atreus the fair-cheeked
daughter of Chryses.
But he, as a priest of far-smiting Apollo,
came
To the speedy ships of the gallant
bronze-clad Achaeans
To ransom his daughter, and the ransom
he bore was boundless.
In suppliant hands on a staff of gold he
carried
The fillets of far-darting Apollo, and he
pleaded with all
The Achaeans, especially with the two

sons of Atreus,
Marshalers of many:

“O sons of Atreus and you other
Well-greaved Achaeans, may the gods
who live on Olympus
Allow you to sack the city of Priam and
reach
Your homes in safety. But reverence the
son of Zeus,
Apollo who strikes from afar—take this
ransom
And return my precious daughter.’

“All the other Achaeans
Supported the priest and shouted to
reverence him
And accept the splendid ransom. But
Atreus’ son

Agamemnon was far from pleased.
Roughly he sent him
Away, threatening him harshly. And
back he went,
A very angry old man, and Apollo, who
loves him dearly,
Sent a shaft of sickness against the
Argives.
His arrows flew through the wide
Achaean camp,
And more and more people were dying.
Then a prophet whom we
Could depend on told us the mind and
will of the god
Who smites from afar, and I was the first
to suggest
That we try to appease him. At this a
great rage gripped

Agamemnon, and he uttered a threat that
has now been fulfilled.

For already the quick-eyed Achaeans are
taking one girl

To Chryse aboard a swift ship along
with gifts

For the god, and heralds have come to
my lodge and taken

The other, Briseis, my gift from the sons
of Achaeans.

But if you really have power, protect
your own son.

If you ever did or said anything that
gladdened

The heart of Zeus, go now to Olympus
and plead

With him. Many times in the halls of my

father I have heard you
Glory in telling how you were the only
immortal
To help lord Zeus of the dark and
lowering sky
And rescue him from shame when other
Olympians—
Hera, Poseidon, and Pallas Athena—
plotted
To bind him fast. Then, O goddess, you
came
And untied him, but first with all speed
you summoned to lofty
Olympus him of the hundred hands,
known as
Briareus to the gods, but Aegaeon to all
mankind,
A monster even more powerful than his

father Poseidon.

He crouched by the side of Cronos' son,
exulting

In his reputation, and the blessed gods
were afraid

Of him and made no attempt to bind Zeus
again.

Go sit by his side and remind him of
this, and embrace

His knees in earnest prayer for him to
support

The Trojans, but as for their foes, the
Achaeans, may he trap them

Between the sterns of their ships and
litter the beach

With dead and dying men, that all may
share

The reward of their King, and that
Atreus' son, imperial
Agamemnon, may know how blind he
was to give
No honor at all to the bravest and best of
Achaeans! ”

Then Thetis, weeping, replied: “My
child, my child,
Why did I raise you to all this misery? I
only
Wish that you might have stayed by your
ships and escaped
All grief and tears, for the life allotted to
you
Is short, not long at all. And now not
only
Will you die young, but you have to

suffer as well,
And more than anyone else. Hence, back
home
In our halls, I bore you to a fate most
miserable. But I
Will go in person to snowy Olympus and
tell
This grievance of yours to Zeus, the
lover of lightning,
In hope of his help. Meanwhile, you
remain
By the swift seagoing ships, and go on in
your wrath
Against the Achaeans and your utter
refusal to fight.
For yesterday Zeus departed for the
stream of Oceanus^f

To attend a feast of the excellent
Ethiopians, and all
The other gods went with him. In twelve
days he
Will be back on Olympus, and then to
the brazen-floored palace
Of Zeus I will go, and embrace his knees
in prayer.
I believe I shall win him over.”

With this she left him
There on the beach, resentful and
brooding on account of
The fair-gowned woman they had
forcefully, spitefully
Taken from him. But Odysseus came to
Chryse
With the holy hecatomb. Once they were

in the deep harbor
They furled the sail and stowed it within
the black ship
And lowered the mast by the forestays
till quickly they brought it
To rest in the crutch. Then with oars they
went on and backed her
Into the moorings, threw the anchor-
stones from the bow,
Tied her up from the stern, and stepped
out themselves
On the shore of the sea. And out of the
ship they led
Far-smiting Apollo's hecatomb, and also
out
Of the seagoing ship stepped the
beautiful daughter of Chryses.
Then able Odysseus led her to the altar

And into the arms of her dear father,
saying:

“O Chryses,
Agamemnon, king of men, sent me to
bring you
Your daughter, and to offer to Phoebus
in behalf of the Danaans
A sacred hecatomb, that we may
appease the god
Who has brought upon the Argives great
wailing and sorrow.”

With these words he placed her in the
arms of her father, and he
With much rejoicing embraced his dear
child. For the god
They quickly stood the holy hecatomb in
order

About the well-built altar, washed their
hands,
And took up the grains of barley. Then
Chryses raised
His arms and prayed aloud this prayer
for them:

“Hear me, O god of the silver bow, you
That bestride in your power Chryse and
sacred Cilla
And mightily rule in Tenedos—hear as
you heard me
Before when I prayed. You honored me
then, and woefully
Smote the Achaean host. Grant me now
Another prayer and dispel the deadly
disease
That plagues the Danaans.”

Thus he earnestly prayed
And Phoebus Apollo heard him. Then,
when all
Had prayed, they sprinkled the grains of
barley, drew back
The heads of the victims, cut their
throats, flayed them,
And sliced out the thigh-pieces. These
they wrapped in thick layers
Of fat and on them laid still more raw
meat.
All this the old priest burned on the
flaming wood,
And over the meat he sprinkled the
sparkling wine,
While around him the young men held
their forks of five tines.

Now when the thigh-pieces were wholly
consumed and all
Had tasted of the vital parts, they cut up
the rest,
Spitted and roasted it well, and drew it
all
From the spits. Having eaten and drunk
as much as they wanted,
The young men filled the bowls brimful
of wine,
And then the goblets, first pouring
libation drops
In the goblets of all. Then, for the rest of
the day,
They sang to the god in melodious
propitiation,
The sons of Achaeans hymning far-
working Apollo

With a beautiful paeon of praise, and he
heard their singing
With a heart full of joy.

When the sun went down and darkness
Came on, they lay down to sleep by the
hawsers at the stern
Of the ship, but as soon as Dawn of the
rosy fingers
Arrived they put out to sea for the huge
Achaean
Camp. Apollo sent a fast-following
wind,
And when they had set up the mast and
spread the white sail,
The sheet soon bellied before that wind,
and the dark waves
Moaned and hissed about the bow, as the

ship

Cut swiftly through them ever closer to
her destination.

When they came to the huge
encampment, they dragged the black ship
Well up on the beach, forced the large
props beneath her,
And scattered for shelters and ships of
their own.

Meanwhile,
Fast Achilles, the god-sprung son of
Peleus,
Remained as wrathful as ever beside his
swift ships
Without once going to the man-enhancing
place
Of assembly or into the fighting. He

stayed where he was,
Eating his heart out with longing for the
battle and war-cry.

When the twelfth dawn came, the gods
everlasting returned
To Olympus, all together with Zeus in
the lead.
Nor did Thetis forget the plea of her son.
In the early
Morning she rose from the waves, into
the great sky,
And up to Olympus, where she found
far-seeing Zeus,
Sitting apart from the others on the
highest peak
Of the craggy mountain. She sank down
before him and took hold

Of his knees with her left hand while
with her right she held
His chin, and spoke in supplication to
her lord God,
The son of Cronos:

“O Father Zeus, if ever
Among the immortals any word or deed
of mine
Was helpful to you, grant this prayer for
me:
Honor my son, who is doomed beyond
all others
To an early death. But now the
commander-in-chief
Agamemnon has insulted him grossly by
taking and keeping
His prize of prestige—an act of arrogant

pride!

You at least, O lord of all wisdom,
Olympian Zeus,

Give him honor and glory. Increase the
might

Of the Trojans and give them the upper
hand until

The Achaeans honor my son and glorify
him

With repayment.”

She spoke, but Zeus the cloud-gatherer
sat

A long time without one word of reply,
while Thetis

Kept on as before, clinging close to his
knees, and again

She put her plea: “Tell me now that

you'll do this

For me, and promise with a nod of your
head, or else,

Since you have nothing to fear, go on and
say no.

Then I will be sure how much among all
the immortals

I am respected the least.”

Then greatly disturbed,
Cloud-gathering Zeus replied: “Sorry
stuff

When you do anything to cause trouble
between Hera and me

And start her to nagging and making me
lose my temper.

Already she is constantly making
reproaches

In the presence of the other immortals
and accusing me
Of helping the Trojans in battle. But now
you'd better
Go, before Hera gets suspicious, and I
Will think these things over and bring
them to pass. Therefore
I will nod my head to you, that you may
be certain,
For of all immortal pledges a nod from
me
Is the surest. No word of mine to which I
bow
My head may be recalled, or false, or
unaccomplished."

So spoke the son of Cronos, and the
King's ambrosial

Locks fell forward as he nodded,
bowing
His iron-dark brows, and huge Olympus
quaked.

When these two had made their plans,
they parted. The goddess
Sprang from gleaming Olympus into the
depths
Of the sea, and Zeus went to his palace.
When they saw
The face of their Father, the other gods
rose from their seats,
Nor was there one who dared to wait in
his chair,
But all stood up before him. Thus there
he sat down
On his throne. Then Hera took one look

and knew

That he and a goddess had had their
heads together—

He and silver-shod Thetis, daughter of
the briny

Old man of the sea. So at once she spoke
these words,

Taunting and sharp, to Zeus, the son of
Cronos:

“Now which of the gods, my trickster,
has again been plotting

With you? You always enjoy keeping
things from me,

Pondering matters in secret and
pronouncing upon them,

And you never willingly tell me what
you’re planning.”

Then the Father of gods and men
answered her thus:

“Hera, don’t ever hope to know all my
thoughts.

Many of them you would find very hard
and unpleasant,

Even though you are my wife. What it is
right

For you to hear, no god or man shall
know

Before you. But what I plan apart from
the gods—

About all such matters you are not to ask
or inquire!”

To which the heifer-eyed queenly
Hera: “Most dreadful

Son of Cronos, what kind of talk is that!

Truly too often in time gone by I have
failed
To ask or inquire, while you went on at
your leisure
Plotting whatever you pleased. Now,
though, I
Am awfully afraid that the briny old sea-
ancient's daughter,
Thetis of the silver feet, has taken you in.
For right early this morning she sat with
you and embraced
Your knees. And to her, I think, you
nodded your head
In a solemn promise to honor Achilles
and to slaughter
Many Achaeans beside their ships."

Then Zeus,

God of the storm clouds, replied:
“Mysterious goddess!
You think altogether too much! Nor does
anything I do
Escape you. But let me assure you there
is nothing at all
You can do, except put even more
distance between us,
And that will make your existence
colder than ever,
Believe me! If what you say is so, then
that
Must be my will. So quietly take your
seat
And do as I tell you, or all the gods on
Olympus
Will not be able to help you when I
come up

And lay hold of you with my irresistible hands!”

He spoke, and heifer-eyed queenly
Hera sat down,
Quietly controlling her temper. But all
the heavenly
Gods in the palace of Zeus were
troubled. Hephaestus,
The famous artificer, was the first to
speak, hoping
To please his mother, Hera of the lovely
white arms:

“Truly we’ll have a sorry, unbearable
life here
If you two are going to quarrel on
account of mortals
And cause a disturbance among us.

There can be no joy
In the splendid feast when such bad
things prevail.
So I hereby advise my mother, wise
though she is
To try to please our dear Father Zeus,
that he
May not rebuke her again and create
more chaos
Here at our feast. Why what if the mighty
Olympian,
Hurler of lightning, the mightiest god by
far,
Should take a notion to strike us all from
our seats!
But meekly ask his pardon, and soon the
Olympian
Will be gracious to us again.”

With this he sprang up
And placing the two-handled cup in his
dear mother's hand
He spoke to her thus: "Bear up, my
mother, and swallow
Your grief, or dear though you are to me
I may
Have to watch you beaten and be
completely unable,
In spite of my sorrow, to help or console
you. For it
Is hard indeed to oppose the Olympian.
Once
Before, when I was anxious to help you,
he snatched me
Up by the foot and flung me headlong
down

From the heavenly threshold. All day
long I fell
And sank with the setting sun—what
little was left
Of me—in Lemnos, where the Sintian
people were quick
To come to my aid and take care of me
after my fall.”⁸

At this the goddess, white-armed Hera,
smiled,
And smiling received the cup from her
son. Then
He went on from left to right, dipping
sweet nectar
From the mixing bowl and pouring for
all the others.
And unquenchable laughter broke out

mid the blessed gods

As they watched Hephaestus puffing his
way through the palace.

Thus all day long till the sun went
down they feasted,

Nor was there any lack of delight in the
banquet

Before them, nor in the gorgeous lyre
that Apollo

Played, nor yet in the dulcet Muses, who
Entertained them all with sweet
antiphonal song.

But when the bright sun was gone, they
all went home

And to bed, for famous Hephaestus, the
great ambidextrous

God, had built with all of his knowledge

and art

A palace for each of them. But Olympian
Zeus,

Lord of the lightning, went up to bed
where he always

Lay when delicious sleep was
approaching. He lay down

And slept, and beside him Hera of the
golden throne.

BOOK II

Trial of the Army and the Catalogue of Ships

All other gods and mortal wearers of
helmets

Plumed with horsehair slept soundly all
through the night,

But sweet sleep could not hold Zeus, for
in his heart

He was pondering how he might honor
Achilles and destroy

Beside the swift ships many other
Achaeans. Then

He thought of a plan he preferred, to

send a false Dream^g

To Atreus' son Agamemnon. So he
addressed him

With these winged words:

“Go quickly, baneful Dream,
To the swift Achaean ships, and when
you reach

The lodge of Atreus' son Agamemnon
tell him

Exactly what I tell you. Tell him to hurry
And arm the long-haired Achaeans,
since now he may take

The city of Troy and fill the wide streets
with his soldiers.

The immortals who live on Olympus no
longer take sides,

For with her pleading Hera has bent

them all

To her way of thinking, and now disaster
is hanging

Over the Trojans.”

He spoke, the Dream listened, then left
And quickly arrived at the swift
Achaean ships.

He found Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
asleep

In his lodge, deep in ambrosial slumber.

The Dream

Stood over his head in the form of
Neleus’ son Nestor,

Whom Agamemnon respected above all
the other

Leading elders. Then, in the likeness of
him,

The Dream from heaven spoke thus:

“You’re asleep, O son
Of fiery Atreus, breaker of horses. But to
sleep
All night is not good for a man in charge
of an army
And laden with so many cares. Quick,
then, pay attention
To me, for I have a message from Zeus,
who far
Away still has immense concern and pity
For you. He says that you must go with
all speed
And arm the long-haired Achaeans,
since now you may take
The city of Troy and fill the wide streets
with your soldiers.

The immortals who live on Olympus no longer take sides,
For with her pleading Hera has bent them all
To her way of thinking, and now by the will of Zeus
Disaster is hanging over the Trojans.
Keep this
In your mind, and when honey-hearted sleep releases you
Fight forgetfulness off.”

So saying, the Dream
Departed and left him pondering there on things
That were not to be. For he really thought he would take
The city of Priam on that very day,

childish

Fool that he was! completely ignorant of
the plan

And purpose of Zeus, who throughout the
terrible battles

Ahead was yet to bring plenty of pain
and groaning

On Trojans and Danaans both. Then the
King awoke

With the heavenly voice still sounding
around him and sat up

In bed. Quickly he dressed in a
handsome new tunic,

Threw on his great cloak and beneath his
shining feet

Bound beautiful sandals. Then slinging
about his shoulders

His sword with the studs of bright

silver, he grasped the immortal
Scepter of his fathers and strode out
down the line
Of ships of the bronze-clad Achaeans.

Just as the light
Of sacred Dawn appeared to Zeus and
the other
Immortals on lofty Olympus,
Agamemnon ordered
The heralds to employ their powerful
voices and call
The long-haired Achaeans to the place
of assembly. So they gave
The call, and the men were quick to
gather.

But first
The commander-in-chief called a

meeting of the great-souled elders
To sit by the ship of Nestor, the Pylos-
born King.

And when they were gathered he spoke
and unfolded the definite

Plan he had formed: “Your attention,
friends. To me

In my sleep a heavenly Dream came
through the immortal

Night, most closely resembling godly
Nestor

In appearance and stature and build, and
standing over

My head he spoke to me thus:

““You’re asleep, O son
Of fiery Atreus, breaker of horses. But to
sleep

All night is not good for a man in charge
of an army
And laden with so many cares. Quick,
then, pay attention
To me, for I have a message from Zeus,
who far
Away still has immense concern and pity
For you. He says that you must go with
all speed
And arm the long-haired Achaeans,
since now you may take
The city of Troy and fill the wide streets
with your soldiers.
The immortals who live on Olympus no
longer take sides,
For with her pleading Hera has bent
them all
To her way of thinking, and now by the

will of Zeus

Disaster is hanging over the Trojans.

Hold this

In your heart.’

“Then he flew off, and sweet sleep released me.

So come, let us prepare as best we can

The sons of Achaeans for battle. But first it is right

That I should try them with words and bid them flee¹

With their many-oared ships, though on every side I want all

Of you to try to restrain them with words.”

With this

He sat down, and among them up stood

Nestor, the King
Of sandy Pylos. He, with all good
intentions,
Addressed the elders: "My friends,
captains and counselors
Of the Argives, had any of the other
Achaeans
Told us this dream, we might have
considered it false
And thus ignored it completely. But the
man who saw it
Is he who claims first place and greatest
worth
By far among the Achaeans. So come, let
us do
All we can to arm and muster the men."

He spoke,

And left the council, leading the way,
and the other
Sceptered kings got up and followed,
obeying
The people's shepherd. The men,
meanwhile, were flocking
To the place of assembly. Like thronging
bees that pour
From a hollow rock in swarm after
swarm, flying
In every direction to cluster on the
flowers of spring,
So the numerous companies of men came
from the ships
And shelters along the broad beach,
troop on troop of them
Headed for the place of assembly. And
Rumor, the servant

Of Zeus, went blazing among them
urging them on.

They met, and their gathering place was
filled with confusion.

As the army sat down they made the
earth groan beneath them,

And a mighty din went up. Nine shouting
heralds

Tried to restrain them, to make them be
quiet and listen

To the god-fed kings. At last they got
them all seated

And still and quiet in their places. Then
King Agamemnon

Stood up among them, holding the
scepter which Hephaestus

Had made with much labor. Hephaestus

gave it to Zeus,
The lordly son of Cronos. Zeus gave it to
Hermes,
The speedy slayer of Argus. Lord
Hermes gave it
To Pelops, lasher of horses, and Pelops
gave it
To Atreus, shepherd of the people.
Atreus, dying,
Left it to wealthy Thyestes, owner of
many
Flocks, and Thyestes left it to King
Agamemnon
To bear throughout his rule over many
islands
And all of Argos. He leaned on it now,
as he spoke
Among the Argives:

“My friends, Danaan heroes
And comrades of Ares, great Zeus, the
son of Cronos,
Has bound me now in woeful blindness
of spirit, [2](#)
Heartless god that he is! For long ago
He made me a promise and vowed with
a nod of his head
That I should sack the well-walled city
of Ilium
Before I went home, but now a vile
deceit
Appears in his plans, and he bids me go
back in disgrace
To Argos, having lost a great many men.
Such,
I suppose, is the pleasure of Zeus,

almighty God,
Who has toppled the towers of numerous
cities and who
Shall continue to topple, since his is the
greatest power.
But this is a shameful thing, and shall be
so
Even to our children's children, for so
large an Achaean
Army to fight a futile war with men
Far fewer than they and still no end in
sight!
For if both Achaeans and Trojans should
take a notion
To number themselves, and swear a
truce with solemn
Oaths and offerings, and if all the
householders in Troy

Were then assembled and we Achaeans
split up
In groups of ten with a single Trojan per
group
To pour our wine, then many a squadron
of ten
Would lack a Trojan to pour. By even so
many,
I think, do we, the sons of Achaeans,
outnumber
The natives of Troy. But they have allies
from numerous
Cities, spear-brandishing men who
greatly frustrate
My earnest desire to sack the fair-lying
fortress
Of Ilium. Nine years of mighty Zeus have

already

Gone by. Our ships' timbers have rotted
and the ropes

Broken, and, I dare say, our wives and
young children

Sit home in our halls waiting for us. Yet
that

Which we came here to do remains
completely undone.

But come, all of you do as I say Let us
flee

With our ships to the precious land of
our fathers. For we

Can no longer hope to plunder the wide
streets of Troy.”

These words caused great commotion
throughout the army

In all who were not at the council. And
the meeting was moved
Like the rolling high waves of the broad
Icarian sea
When down from the lowering clouds of
Father Zeus
Wind from the East or South rushes to
raise them.
And as tall grain in a field waves wildly
under
A blast of the hard West Wind and the
ears bow down
Before it, so all their great gathering
stirred. Then,
With a mighty yell, they broke for the
ships in a cloud
Of dust that rose high overhead. They
called to each other

To lay hold of the ships and drag them
into the bright sea,
And as they cleared the launching-ways
and took

The props from under the ships, the huge
uproar

Of those home-hungry men went up to
heaven itself.

Then indeed the Argives might have
returned in spite of

What fate had ordained, if the goddess
Hera had not

Had a word with Athena, saying:

“O invincible child
Of Zeus who bears the aegis, alas! Is it
thus

That the Argive forces are really going

to flee

Over the sea's broad back to the
precious land of their fathers?

Flee and leave to Priam and the other
Trojans

Their insolent boast, no other than
Argive Helen

Herself, for whom so many Achaeans
died

Before Troy far from their own dear
country? But go now

Throughout the mob of bronze-clad
Achaeans and quiet them

One and all with your gentle words, and
do not

Allow them to launch those curving
ships of theirs."

She spoke, and the blue-eyed goddess
Athena did not
Disobey. Down she went darting from
the peaks of Olympus
And quickly came to the swift Achaean
ships.

There, standing beside his benched
black ship,
She found Odysseus, making no effort at
all

To lay hands on the vessel, for grief
abounding had come
On his heart and soul. Bright-eyed
Athena stood close
And spoke to him thus:

“O god-sprung son of Laertes,
Resourceful Odysseus, do all of you

really intend

To scramble aboard your many-oared
ships and flee

Over the sea's broad back to the
precious land of your fathers?

Flee and leave to Priam and the other
Trojans

Their insolent boast, no other than
Argive Helen

Herself, for whom so many Achaeans
died

Before Troy far from their own dear
country? But now

Hold back no longer. Go through the
Achaean host

And quiet them all with your gentle
words, and do not

Allow them to launch those curving

ships of theirs.”

She spoke, and he knew the voice of
the goddess, and set out
At a run, throwing off his cloak, which
Eurybates, his Ithacan
Herald and attendant, picked up for him.
But he
Went straight to Atreus’ son Agamemnon
and received
From him the rod of authority, the
immortal scepter
Of the great King’s royal line, and with
this in his hand
He went down the line of ships where
the bronze-clad Achaeans
Were thronging.

Whenever he met a chieftain or any

Outstanding man, he would come up
beside him and try
To calm him with these gentle words:
“You’re not yourself, sir,
Nor would it become me to threaten you
like a coward.
But take your seat, and see that your
people are seated,
For you have no idea what Atreus’ son
Is thinking. He’s only testing us now, but
soon
He is likely to smite the sons of
Achaeans. Did not
All of us hear what he said at the
council? Take care
That he doesn’t get angry and punish the
sons of Achaeans.
Haughty indeed is the spirit of god-

nurtured kings.

The honor they have is from Zeus, and
Zeus, the lord

Of all wisdom, dearly loves them.”

But whenever he saw
Some man of the people, yelling and
screaming for all

He was worth, he would strike him a
blow with the scepter and call him

To order thus: “You’re out of your
senses, man!

Sit down and be still, and pay some
attention to the words

Of your betters, you weak, unwarlike
fellow, of no

Account in battle or council either! We
cannot

By any means all be kings here. A host
of kings
Is no good at all. So let there be one king
only,
One lord and ruler, who has his scepter
and right
Of decree from the almighty son of
devious Cronos
And so is true king of his people.”

Thus king-like himself
He went through the crowd, and the
soldiers left their shelters
And ships and hurried back to the place
of assembly
With a huge uproar like the rush of surf
on a beach
When a wave of the loud-crashing sea

breaks and thunders
On a long stretch of shore.

Then all the others sat down
And kept quiet. Babbling Thersites³
alone continued
To raise a racket, he whose mind was
full
Of vulgar, disordered words which he
used in railing
At kings, not with any good purpose or
reason,
But simply to get a laugh from the
Argive soldiers.
Of all the men who came to Ilium, he
was
By far the ugliest. Bowlegged and lame
in one foot,

His shoulders drooped so round that they almost met

In front, and on his head, which came at the top

To a rather sharp point, grew a thin and mangy stubble.

Most hateful was he to Achilles and to Odysseus,

For they were the two he usually railed at. But now

He screamed his insults at the man most out of favor,

King Agamemnon, toward whom the indignant Achaeans

Felt wrath and resentment. At him, then, he yelled his abuse:

“Atrides, now what again are you

gripping about?

And what new demands are you making?

Your shelters are bulging

With bronze, and whenever we sack a
city you always

Get the choicest booty, including whole
bevvies

Of beautiful women. Can it be that you
still want gold,

The ransom some horse-taming Trojan
brings out of Troy

To pay for his captured son whom I or
some other

Achaean bound and led away? Or would
you

Prefer a ripe young lady to sleep with
and keep

Shut up somewhere for yourself? Truly,

it hardly

Becomes their commander to burden
with so many troubles

The sons of Achaeans. O you effeminate
fools

And cowards! women, not men, of
Achaëa! let us

Go home with our ships and leave this
fellow to rot

With his precious prizes here in the land
of Troy,

That he may know once and for all
whether we will help him

Or not. And now he has grossly insulted
Achilles,

A much better man than himself, by
taking and keeping

His prize of prestige—an act of arrogant pride!

But surely the heart of Achilles is not even angry,

Nor does he care one bit, or this, O son Of Atreus, would be the last of your arrogant insults!”

Even so Thersites railed at King Agamemnon,

Commander-in-chief of the army But at once the worthy

Odysseus went up to the fellow and scowling fiercely

Gave him this harsh reprimand: “Vile Thersites,

Of words both vulgar and endless, a clear-voiced speaker

You are, but don't try to argue all by
yourself

With kings. For I think that no more
incapable man

Than you came here with the sons of
Atreus under

The high walls of Troy. I would not
advise you, then,

To take in vain the names of kings in
casting

Insults upon them, nor to always be
looking for a chance

To go home. None of us here really
knows what is going

To happen, whether the sons of
Achaeans shall go back

In triumph or not. Still you insist on
abusing

Our commander-in-chief Agamemnon,
cutting him deeply

With words on account of the many gifts
the Danaan

Heroes see fit to give him. But I'll tell
you this,

And believe me I mean what I say. If I
find you this way

Again, making a fool of yourself, then

May the head of Odysseus remain on his
shoulders no more,

Nor may I be called any longer
Telemachus' father,

If I don't take and strip you, ripping
away

The cloak and tunic that hide your
wretched body,

And send you bawling to the speedy
ships, beaten
From the place of assembly with hard,
disgraceful blows!”

He spoke, and with the scepter struck
the man’s back
And shoulders. Thersites cringed and
started to cry,
While a bloody welt swelled up on his
back beneath
The golden scepter. Then he sat down,
afraid
And in pain, and on his face as he wiped
his tears
Was a foolish, forced expression. The
Achaeans, vexed
Though they were, laughed at him loud

and long, and thus

Would one of them say, with a glance at
the man next to him:

“Good enough! truly Odysseus has
done a great many
Fine things, both as the author of
countless good plans
And as a leader in battle. But of all the
deeds
He has done among the Argives, this is
the best
By far—to squelch this slanderous
slinger of insults
And hush his haranguing! Surely his
insolent spirit
Will never again be stupid enough to
make him

Rail at and criticize kings.”

So spoke the crowd.

Then city-sacking Odysseus stood up
among them

With the scepter still in his hand and
beside him, disguised

As a herald, bright-eyed Athena called
to the men

For silence, that near and far alike might
hear

And take to heart the words of Odysseus,
who now,

In an effort to help, addressed the
assembly: “O son

Of Atreus, now surely the Achaeans are
determined to make

Their King the most despised of all

mortal men,
For they refuse to honor the promise they
gave you
On the voyage from horse-grazing
Argos, that you should not
Return until you had sacked the well-
walled city
Of Ilium. Now they whine to each other
and wail
For home like little children or
widowed women.
And truly there's toil enough here to
send any man home
Worn out and discouraged. A man will
grow impatient
When kept from his wife for only one
month, when the storms
Of winter and swollen seas prevent his

benched ship

From traveling. But we have been here
for nine long years.

Hence, I cannot blame the Achaeans for
fretting

Beside their beaked ships. Yet what a
disgraceful thing

It would be to stay so long and still go
home

Empty-handed! Bear up, my friends, and
try to hold out

Awhile longer, that we may learn
whether Calchas prophesies

Truly or not. For this we well
remember,

And all of you whom the fates of death
have not

Yet claimed are witnesses still to what
happened at Aulis.^{[h](#)}

Why now it seems but a day or so ago
That the ships were gathering there,
loaded with evils
For Priam and all the Trojans, and
around a spring
Of bright water that flowed from the foot
of a beautiful plane tree
We soldiers were offering on holy altars
whole hecatombs
To the immortals. Then all at once a
great omen
Appeared—a snake with markings
blood-red on his back,
A terrible serpent that Zeus himself sent
forth

In the light, glided from under an altar
and shot
For the plane tree. Now up on the
highest branch, huddled
Beneath the leaves, were the tender, tiny
fledglings
Of a mother sparrow, eight of them, and
the mother
Made nine. These babies, pitifully
cheeping, the snake
Devoured, while the mother fluttered
around them screaming
For her precious young. Then coiling
himself, the snake
Caught her by the wing as she wheeled
and screamed in the air.
But when the beast had swallowed them

all, the babies

Along with the mother, God, who
brought him to light,

Fixed him where all could see, for the
son of Cronos

Turned him to stone right there, and all
of us

Stood gaping at what had happened.

Then, when that awesome

Portent had thus interrupted the offering
of hecatombs

To the immortals, Calchas addressed us
and tried

To explain the omen, saying:

““ Why, O long-haired

Achaean, are you now so quiet? All-
knowing Zeus

Has shown a great sign to us, an omen
late

In appearance and later still in
fulfillment, but a glorious

Omen famous forever. Just as this snake
Swallowed the baby sparrows along
with their mother,

Eight of them in all and nine counting
her,

Even for so many years we shall fight in
the land

Of Troy, but at last in the tenth year we
shall take

The wide-wayed city.'

“These were the words of Calchas,
And now all that he foretold is surely
Being brought to pass. So come, you

well-greaved Achaeans,
All of you remain here until we take
The great city of Priam.”

At this the Argives raised
A great shout, and about the ships the
sound of the shouting
Achaeans loudly resounded as their
voices went up
In praise of what sacred Odysseus had
said. And then
Horse-driving Gerenian Nestor spoke to
them thus:
“Incredible! you act like so many
squabbling little boys
With no real interest at all in works of
war.
What is to become of all our oaths and

promises?

Very well, the counsels and plans that
we made together

With trusted libations of unmixed wine
and faithful

Clasping of hands—let us throw all that
in the fire!

For now we do nothing but talk, which
does us no good

At all, regardless of how long we
wrangle. Therefore,

Son of Atreus, do as you've always
done:

Hold your purpose firm and unyielding,
and lead

The Argives through the heavy fighting
ahead. And if

There are one or two plotting traitors

among us—men

Who want to see Argos again before we
have learned

Whether aegis-great Zeus has promised
us truly or not—

Let them die now and plot to no end! For
I

Say this, that on the day when the
Argives boarded

Their swift-sailing ships to bear death
and doom to the Trojans,

Cronos' almighty son gave his word and
nod

To us: his lightning flashed on our right,
and the signs

He showed were good ones. So let there
be no rush

To go home, not until every man here has
slept

With the wife of some Trojan and been
repaid in full

For the struggles and groans endured on
Helen's account.

If, however, there be one terribly eager
To set out for home, let him lay hold of
his sturdy

Black ship, that here and now with an
army for audience

He may meet his death and his doom.

But you,

O King, plan wisely yourself and pay
some heed

To another. Do not disregard what now I
am going

To say. Split up your men, Agamemnon,

divide them

By tribes and by clans, that clan may
succor clan

And tribe bear aid to tribe. If this you
do,

And if the Achaeans obey your
commands, you will soon

Know the brave from the cowards,
which is which among your captains

And in the rank and file, for each
company then

Will be on its own in the fight for honor
and glory.

And then you will know whether it is
divine decree

That prevents you from sacking the city,
or the cowardly hearts

Of your men and their ignorance in battle.”

And King Agamemnon
Answered him thus: “Once again, old
sire, you outspoke
The other sons of Achaeans. O Father
Zeus,
Athena, and Apollo, if I had but ten
So truly wise! then the towers of King
Priam’s city
Would soon be toppled and all laid
waste and leveled
Beneath our hands. But Cronos’ son
Zeus, who bears
The aegis, involves me in futile
wranglings and quarrels.
Achilles and I fought over a girl with

violent

Words, and I was the one who got angry first.

But if the day ever comes when we two see

Eye to eye, then the Trojans' ruin will be delayed

No longer, not for so much as a moment!
But for now,

Go eat your meal before we join battle.
Sharpen

Your spears and adjust your shields,
feed well your fast horses

And thoroughly check your chariots, that
throughout the day

We may measure our might in hateful
war. Nor will there

Be any let-up at all till night comes on

And parts the furious fighters. The
baldric of many
A man-guarding shield shall be wet with
sweat on the breast
Of its wearer, and about the spear the
warrior's hand
Shall grow weary, and the horse of many
a driver shall sweat
In streams as he pulls and strains at the
polished car.
But whomever I see disposed to loiter
beside
The beaked ships apart from the battle,
that man shall have
No hope at all of escaping the dogs and
the birds!"

He spoke, and the Argives roared like

a mighty wave

That the South Wind drives to break on a
craggy high coast,

A jutting cliff forever pounded by waves

No matter what wind is blowing. And
the men got up

And moved out in a hurry, lit fires in
their shelters and ate.

Each of them made an offering to one or
another

Of the everliving gods and prayed to
come out alive

From the toil and moil of Ares. The
commander-in-chief

Agamemnon slew a sleek bull of five
years to the high

And powerful son of Cronos and sent for
the leading

Senior chiefs of all the Achaeans to join him—

Nestor first and King Idomeneus, then both

Ajaxes and Tydeus' son Diomedes, with Odysseus,

Godlike in wisdom, the sixth to be called. Menelaus,

Good at the war-cry, needed no call. He knew

The cares his brother bore and came on his own.

They stood round the bull and took up the grains of barley,

And King Agamemnon spoke thus in prayer among them:

“Most great and glorious Zeus, sky-

dwelling god

Of the lowering storm clouds, may the
sun not set till I

With streaming and furious fire have
burned the doors

Of Priam's great hall and reduced his
palace to a heap

Of charred and sooty beams, nor may
darkness come on

Till I have torn with bronze the tunic on
the breast

Of Hector, and may his comrades round
about him

Fall in the dust and bite the earth by the
score!"

Such was his prayer, though Zeus was
not ready to grant it.

He accepted the offering but caused an
increase of toil

That no man in the world would envy

When the leaders there
Had prayed, they sprinkled the grains of
barley, drew back

The heads of the victims, cut their
throats, flayed them,

And sliced out the thigh-pieces. These
they wrapped in thick layers

Of fat and on them laid still more raw
meat.

All this they burned on split and leafless
logs,

And piercing with spits heart, liver, and
lungs they held them

Over the fire of Hephaestus. Now when

the thigh-pieces

Were burned and all had tasted of the
vital parts,

They cut up the rest, spitted and roasted
it well,

And drew it all from the spits. Then, the
work done

And the meal ready, they feasted on the
plentiful meat

Abundantly portioned to each. When
they had eaten

And drunk as much as they wished,
horse-driving Gerenian

Nestor was the first to speak:

“Most famous son
Of Atreus, Agamemnon, king of men, let
us

No longer stay here nor put off the work
which God
Has laid on our hands. Come then, have
the heralds of the bronze-clad
Achaeans go out and give the cry all
down
The long lines of ships and call the army
together,
And let us go in a body throughout the
great camp
Of Achaeans, that we may the sooner stir
up in the men
The spirit of blade-keen, furious Ares.”

He spoke,
And his words the commander-in-chief
Agamemnon did not
Disregard. At once he ordered the

heralds to employ
Their powerful voices and call the long-
haired Achaeans
To the place of assembly. So they gave
the call, and the troops
Were quick to gather. The god-nurtured
kings in the council
Of Atreus' son went swiftly marshaling
the men,
And among them bright-eyed Athena
bearing the priceless
Aegis, immortal and ageless forever,
from which
Fluttered a hundred golden tassels, each
of them
Perfectly plaited and worth a hundred
oxen.
With this she flashed through the host of

Achaeans, urging
Them on, and in the heart of every man
there
She stirred up strength to fight without
flagging throughout
The battle. And at once they felt war to
be sweeter than any
Return to their dear native land.

As a great fire flames
On the peaks of a mountain, consuming a
boundless forest
And giving a glare one sees from miles
away,
So as they came the flash and gleam
from their dazzling
And countless bronze went up through
the sky to heaven.

And as the many flocks of winged
fowl,
Wild geese or cranes or long-necked
swans in the Asian
Meadow by the streams of Caystriusⁱ fly
wheeling about
Exulting in strength of wing and settle
always
Onward with clangor and honk, one in
front of
Another, making the meadow resound,
so out
From the shelters and ships and onto the
plain of Scamander
Their many companies poured, and
beneath the beat
Of the feet of the men and the horses the

earth tremendously
Echoed. And they took their stand in the
flowery field
Of Scamander, numerous as the leaves
and flowers of spring.

And as the buzzing flies that swarm
through the shed
Of a herdsman when spring has come
and fresh milk drenches
The pails, even so many were the long-
haired Achaeans
Mustering there on the plain for battle
against
The people of Troy, all eager to tear
them apart.

And as when goatherds easily single
out

Their wide-roaming flocks when they
have come in a pasture
Together, so now the leaders on every
side
Marshaled their men for battle, and King
Agamemnon
Among them, his head and eyes like
those of Zeus,
The lover of lightning, his waist like the
waist of Ares,
His breast like the breast of Poseidon.
As a bull stands out
In a herd above all the other cattle, the
obvious
Leader of the grazing beeves, so that day
Zeus
Made Atreus' son stand out, the one pre-
eminent

Man in the forces, the first mid many warriors.

Tell me now, O Muses,⁴ you that have homes
On Olympus—for you are goddesses and in command
Of all knowledge, while all we hear is rumor and we
Know nothing at all—say who were the Danaan lords
And leaders. But as for the rest of the army, I could not
Possibly count or name them, not if I had
Ten tongues in as many mouths, an unbreakable voice
And a heart of bronze, unless you Olympian Muses,

Daughters of Zeus of the aegis, chose to
help me
Remember all those who came to Ilium.
Here, then,
Are the ships' commanders and how
many ships there were.

Peneleos and Leitus led the Boeotians,
along with
Arcesilaus, Clonius, and Prothoënor.
Their homes
Were in Hyria and stony Aulis, in
Schoenus and Scolus
And hilly Eteonus, in broad-lawned
Mycalessus, Thespeia,
And Graea, and some were from Harma,
Eilesium, and Erythrae,
While others held Eleon and Hyle,

Peteon, Ocalea,
The well-walled fortress Medeon,
Copae, Eutresis,
And dove-haunted Thisbe, Coroneia and
grassy Haliartus,
And others held Plataea and the well-
built fortress
Of Lower Thebes, Glisas and holy
Onchestus
With its splendid grove of Poseidon,
Arne of grapes
Rich-clustering, Mideia, sacred Nisa,
and Anthedon
The border town. Of these there were
fifty ships,
And on each came a hundred and twenty
young men of Boeotia.

And those who lived in Aspledon and
Orchomenus of the Minyae
Were led by sons of Ares, Ascalaphus
and Ialmenus,
Whom the gentle and honored maiden
Astyoche bore,
Having gone upstairs in the palace of
Azeus' son Actor
And secretly slept with the mighty War-
god. With these
The hollow ships drawn up there were
thirty in all.

Schedius and Epistrophus, sons of
great-hearted Iphitus
And Naubolus' grandsons, captained the
Phocians, who held
Cyparissus and rocky Pytho, sacred

Crisa,
Daulis, and Panopeus, Hyampolis and
Anemoreia,
While others lived by the lovely river
Cephisus
And in Lilaea by the springs of
Cephisus. Of these
There were forty black ships. And now
their leaders were busy
Marshaling the Phocian ranks and
preparing the men
For battle hard on the Boeotians' left.

The leader
Of the Locrian forces was the fleet-
footed son of Olleus,
The lesser Ajax, by no means so much
man

As Telamonian Ajax, but the lesser by
far. He was slight
Of build and the corselet he wore was of
linen, but with
The spear he surpassed all Hellenes and
Achaeans. His followers
Lived in Cynus, Calliarus, and Opus, in
Bessa
And Scarphe and delightful Augeiae,
Tarphe and Thronium
And about the waters of Boagrius. With
Ajax came forty
Black ships of the Locrians, who live
just over the straits
From holy Euboea.

The fury-breathing Abantes
Came from Euboea itself, where they

held Eretria,
Chalcis, and vineyard-rich Histiaea,
Cerinthus
By the sea and the steep fortress of Dios,
and some
Had homes in Carystus and others lived
in Styra.
Leader of all was the chief Elephenor,
that scion
Of Ares, son of Chalcodon, and
commander of the doughty
Abantes, those spirited eager spearmen
with hair long
In back, fast men on their feet and quick
to thrust
Their good ashen spears through the
corselets and breasts of their foes.
They came with their chief Elephenor in

forty black ships.

And there were men from the strong
citadel of Athens
In the realm of great-hearted Erechtheus,
whom long ago
The bountiful earth had borne and Zeus's
daughter
Athena reared. She established him in
Athens
In her own resplendent shrine, and there,
as the years
Roll on, the young Athenians pray for his
grace
And favor with sacrificed bulls and
rams. Their leader
Was Peteos' son Menestheus, than whom
no man

On earth was better when it came to the
marshaling of chariots

And shield-bearing men. Nestor alone
could rival him

There, since he had been at it for so
much longer.

And Menestheus came with a company
of fifty black ships.

Ajax led twelve ships from Salamis,
and had them

Drawn up on the beach where the forces
from Athens were stationed.

Those who held Argos and high-
walled Tiryns were there

And men from Hermione and Asine,
towns that embrace

A deep bay, and others from Troezen,

vinyl Epidauros,
And Eïonae, with young Achaeans from
Aegina and Mases—
All led by battle-roaring Diomedes and
Sthenelus,
The dear son of renowned Capaneus.
And with them as third
In command came godlike Euryalus,
King Mecisteus' son
And Talaus' grandson. But battle-
roaring Diomedes
Was in charge of them all. And of these
there were eighty black ships.

Troops were there from the strong
citadel of Mycenae,
Wealthy Corinth, and staunch Cleonae,
men

From Orneia, lovely Araethyrea, and
Sicyon, where Adrastus
Used to be king, and others who held
Hyperesia,
Pellene and high Gonoessa, and who
lived around Aegium,
Large Helice, and all up and down
Aegialus. Of these
With a hundred ships the commander
was King Agamemnon,
Son of Atreus. His men were by far the
best
And most numerous of all. And as he
armed himself
In the gleaming bronze, he stood out
among them, the most
World-famous of kings and the most
distinguished of warriors,

For he outranked all others, and the unit
he led
Was largest by far.

And there were those with homes
In the rolling country of fair
Lacedaemon, in Pharis,
Sparta, and dove-haunted Messe, and
those who lived
In Bryseiae and charming Augeiae, and
others who held
Amyclae, Laas, and Helus, a citadel
close by
The sea, while others lived about
Oetylus. All these
Were led by King Agamemnon's
brother, Menelaus
Of the loud war-cry, with sixty ships, but

his forces

Were marshaled and armed as a separate
division. And he,

Menelaus the King, went among them,
sure of himself

And zealous, stirring up fight in his men,
for above

All others he longed to exact full
payment for the many

Struggles and groans he had suffered on
Helen's account.

Next came natives of Pylos, delightful
Arene,

And Thryum, where Alpheiis is forded,
men with homes

In firm-founded Aepy and Cyparisseis,
Pteleos,

Amphigeneia, Helus, and Dorium, where
the Muses

Met Thamyris the Thracian⁵ as he came
from Oechalia and the
house

Of Oechalian Eurytus and put an end to
his singing.

For he had made the extravagant claim
that he

In a singing-match with even the Muses
themselves,

Daughters of Zeus of the aegis, would be
the winner,

And they in their wrath took from him
the gift of song

And made him forget the art of harping.
All these

Were led by horse-driving Gerenian
Nestor. And ninety
Black ships were drawn up in line on his
section of beach.

And there were the men of Arcadia,
from below the mountain
Of steep Cyllene by Aepytus' tomb.
Some of these
Hand-to-hand fighters had homes in
Pheneos and pastoral
Orchomenus, in Rhipse, Stratia, and
windy Enispe,
While others lived in Tegea and fair
Mantineia,
Stymphalus and Parrhasia. Lord
Agapenor, son
Of Ancaeus, was leader of these with

sixty ships,
On each of which came many Arcadian
warriors,
Skillful in battle. The commander-in-
chief himself,
Agamemnon, son of Atreus, had given
them
The well-decked ships wherein to
cleave and cross over
The wine-dark sea, for with nautical
matters they had
No concern.

And there were troops from
Buprasium and all
Of beautiful Elis that lies between
Hyrmine,
The border town Myrsinus, Alesium,

and the looming
Olenian Rock. Four men had charge of
these,
And with each came ten swift ships full
of Epeans.
Two of the companies were led by
Amphimachus and Thalpius,
One the son of Cteatus, the other of
Eurytus,
And both of the blood of Actor. A third
was led
By the son of Amarynceus, the mighty
Diores,
And chief of the fourth contingent was
godlike Polyxeinus,
King Agasthenes' son and grandson of
Augeas.

Those from Dulichium and the
hallowed Echinean Islands
Across the water from Elis were all
commanded
By Meges, peer of the War-god and son
of the horseman
Phyleus, a god-loved man who quarreled
with his father
And went over to live in Dulichium.
With Meges came forty
Black ships.

Odysseus commanded the proud
Cephalenians,
Holders of Ithaca and Mount Neriton,
trembling
With leaves, natives of Crocyleia and
rugged Aegilips,

Of Zacynthus and Samos and the
mainland across from these islands.

Odysseus, godlike in wisdom, led all of
these

And with him came twelve vermillion-
cheeked ships.

And Thoas,
Son of Andraemon, led the Aetolians,
soldiers

From Pleuron, Olenus, Pylene, rocky
Calydon,

And Chalcis close by the sea. For the
sons of Oeneus

Were no longer alive, nor was great-
hearted Oeneus himself,

And dead was blond Meleager, to whom
the Aetolian

Kingship had come. So with Thoas came
forty black ships.

The soldiers from Crete were
captained by spear-famed Idomeneus
And came from their homes in Knossos
and the well-walled town
Of Gortyn, from the populous cities of
Lyctus, Miletus,
Phaestus, Rhytium, and chalk-white
gleaming Lycastus,
And the others came from in and around
the hundred
Cities of Crete. The entire contingent
was led
By the famous spearman Idomeneus
along with Meriones,
Peer of the slaughtering god of battle.

With these
Followed eighty black ships.

And Tlepolemus, the tall and valiant
Son of Heracles, had come with nine full
ships
Of the spirited Rhodians, dwellers in
three different parts
Of the island of Rhodes, in Lindos,
Ialysus, and chalk-white
Gleaming Cameirus. Spear-famous
Tlepolemus led them,
He whom mighty Heracles sired and
whose mother
Was Astyocheia, whom Heracles
brought from Ephyre
And the river Selleis after laying waste
many cities

Of Zeus-fed warrior kings. But
Tlepolemus was no sooner
Grown in the fortified palace than he
killed his father's s
Dear uncle, a scion of Ares, the aging
Licymnius.
Then with all speed he built ships,
gathered a great host
Of people, and fled overseas, for he was
threatened
By the other sons and grandsons of
mighty Heracles.
At last in his painful wandering the exile
came
To Rhodes, and there in three sections
by tribes his people
Settled. And they were loved by Zeus,
the ruler

Of gods and men, and prodigious indeed
were the riches
Cronos' son poured on them.

Nireus too
Was there with three trim ships from the
island of Syme,
Nireus the son of Aglaia and Charopus
the King,
Nireus the handsomest man in the
Danaan forces
At Troy excepting only the peerless son
Of Peleus. But he was a weakling, and
those who came with him
Were few.

And there were natives of Nisyrus and
Crapathus,
Of Casus, the Calydnian Islands, and

Eurypylus' city
Of Cos—all under Pheidippus and
Antiphus, the two sons
Of King Thessalus, whom Heracles
sired. And drawn up in the line
With them were thirty hollow ships.

And now for those
From Pelasgian Argos, men from Alope,
Alos,
And Trachis, and those who held Phthia
and Hellas, land
Of glamorous women—they were called
Myrmidons, Hellenes,
And Achaeans, and fifty full ships of
them came with Achilles
As captain. But now they gave no
thought to the din

And horror of war, since they had no one
to lead them
Into the ranks. For the brave, swift-
footed Achilles
Lay by his ships in a fit of wrath and
resentment
Because of a girl, Briseis of the
beautiful hair,
Whom he had won at Lyrnessus when he
with much toil
Leveled that city and wasted the walls of
Thebe
And struck spear-raging Mynes down,
and Epistrophus
Equally fierce, sons of King Euenus,
The son of Selepus. Sorely grieving for
her,
Achilles lay idle. But soon he would

rise again.

And there were troops from Phylace
and flowery Pyrasus
Where Demeter has a grove and temple,
from Iton,
Mother of flocks, Antron close by the
sea,
And grassy Pteleos. These had been led
by warlike
Protesilaus⁶ while he was alive, but now
The black earth held him, and his wife
was left in Phylace,
Her two cheeks torn in mourning, her
husband's house
Half finished. For he had been far the
first Achaean
Ashore, but as he leaped from his ship

he fell

To a doughty Dardanian. Still, though
they longed for their leader,

His men were not without a commander.

Podarces,

Scion of Ares, marshaled them now, he

The son of Iphiclus, Phylacus' son and
the owner

Of many flocks. Podarces was the
younger brother

Of magnanimous Protesilaus, who was
not only older

But also the better man, warlike and
valiant.

So the troops did not lack a commander,
though they longed for the
gifted

Man they had lost. And with him came

forty black ships.

Those who lived by the Boebeian lake
in Pherae

And in Boebe, Glaphyrae, and well-
settled Iolcus came

In eleven ships under Admetus' dear son
Eumelus, whom queenly Alcestis, the
loveliest daughter

Of Pelias, bore to her lord.

The men from Methone
And Thaumacia, from Meliboea and
craggy Olizon were led

In seven ships by the skillful bowman
Philoctetes,

And fifty oarsmen had come in each
ship, all

Fierce men with the bow. But

Philoctetes lay in pain
On the island of sacred Lemnos, where
the sons of Achaeans
Had left him in anguish from a vicious
water-snake's bite.
He lay in agony there, nor was it long
Before the Argives beside their ships
had cause
To remember King Philoctetes. Still,
though they longed
For their leader, his men were not
without a commander.
Now they were marshaled by Medon,
the bastard son
Whom Rhene bore to Oileus, taker of
towns.

Those who held Tricca and Ithome of

the terraced crags
And Oechalia, the city of Oechalian
Eurytus, followed
Two sons of Asclepius, the able
physicians Podaleirius
And Machaon. And drawn up with them
were thirty hollow ships.
And the men from Ormenius and the
spring Hypereia, from Asterium
And the gleaming towers of Titanus
were led by Eurypylus,
The brilliant son of Euaemon. And forty
black ships
Followed him.

Those with homes in Argissa, Gyrtone,
and Orthe,
In Elone and the gleaming town

Oloösson had
As their leader the furious fighter
Polypoetes, son
Of Peirithous, who was sired by
immortal Zeus himself
Glorious Hippodameia bore him to
Peirithous
On the very day he got his revenge on the
shaggy
Centaurs and drove them from Pelion to
the Aethices.
But Polypoetes was not their only
leader.
He had as his helper Leonteus, scion of
Ares
And son of high-hearted Coronus, son of
Caenus.
And with them came forty black ships.

And Gouneus led
From Cyphus two and twenty vessels,
and with him
Came the Enienes and the battle-staunch
Peraebi,
Who had built their homes round wintry
Dodona and lived
On the land about the beautiful stream
Titaessus, which pours
Its clear water into the Peneius, but
flows on through
The darker water of silvery-swirling
Peneius
Like so much unmingling oil, for the
stream Titaessus
Is a branch of dread Styx, the river of
awesome oath.

Prothous, son of Tenthredon, led the
Magnetes,
Who lived about the Peneius and Pelion,
trembling
With leaves. Fast Prothous captained
them all. And with him
Were forty black ships.⁷

These were the Danaan lords
And leaders. But tell me, O Muse, who
was by far
The best man and which horses were
best in the army that followed
The sons of Atreus.

The finest horses by far
Were the mares of Pheres' son Admetus,
that his son
Eumelus drove, horses swift as birds,

Of the same color and age, and so equal
in height

That a line would be quite level across
their backs.

Both of these mares had been reared in
Pereia by silver-bowed
Phoebus Apollo, and into battle they
carried

The panic of Ares. Much the best of the
warriors

Was Telamonian Ajax, but only so long
As Achilles continued his wrath. For
Achilles was strongest

By far, as were the horses that drew him,
the matchless

Son of Peleus. But now he lay mid his
beaked

Seagoing ships, withdrawn and full of

wrath

For the people's shepherd, Atreus' son
Agamemnon,

While along the beach the men of angry
Achilles

Amused themselves with the discus,
javelin, and bow.

Their horses stood each by his car,
munching clover

And marsh-grown parsley, but the
officers' chariots stood

In their shelters well covered up. And
these men longed

For their leader, dear to Ares, and they
wandered throughout

The camp and did no fighting.

But the others marched on

Like a great fire sweeping the plain, and
beneath their feet
The earth groaned as it does when raging
Zeus hurls lightning
And lashes the land about Typhoeus in
the mountains
Of Arima, where they say Typhoeus is
sleeping. So now
The earth loudly resounded beneath the
beat of their feet
As they went on the double across the
groaning plain.

Then a messenger came to the Trojans,
wind-footed swift Iris,
With a fearful message from Zeus who
bears the aegis.
Young men and old alike were gathered

in the court
Of King Priam holding assembly when
swift-footed Iris
Approached them and spoke. She took
the voice of Priam's
Son Polites, who sat on watch for the
Trojans
On top of the tomb of old Aesyetes,
relying
On speed of foot to bear word whenever
the Achaeans
Made a move from the ships. In the
likeness of him, fleet Iris
Spoke thus to Priam:

“Old sire, you always dote
On endless words come peace or war,
but this

Is war unyielding and total! Surely I've
been

In a good many battles, but never yet
have I seen

So large and splendid an army. And here
they come,

Marching across the plain against the
city

Like the numberless leaves of the forest
or sands of the sea.

Now you most of all, Hector, I urge to
do

As I say Since in this great city of Priam
there are many

Allies who come from all over and
speak different tongues,

Let each of their captains marshal the
men of his city

And lead them forth to battle.”

She spoke, and Hector
Knew the voice of the goddess. Quickly
he broke up
The meeting, and the men rushed to
arms. All the gates were thrown
open
And with a tremendous din the army
poured out,
Both infantry and horse.

In front of the city well out
In the open plain is a high mound that
men call Thorn Hill,
But immortals call it the tomb of dancing
Myrine.
Here both Trojans and allies ordered
their ranks.

Bright-helmeted Hector led the
Trojans,⁸ he
The son of King Priam, and the
companies of spear-raging warriors
Marshaled with him were by far the
largest and best.

The Dardanians were led by Anchises'
brave son Aeneas,⁹
Whom under Anchises sweet Aphrodite
conceived
When the goddess and mortal man made
love and slept
Mid the ridges of Ida. Not alone in
command, Aeneas
Had help from Antenor's two sons, the
very versatile
Fighters Acamas and Archelochus.

And there were those
Who lived in Zeleia below the last
foothill of Ida,
A thriving clan of Trojans that drink
Aesepeus'
Dark water. These were captained by
the splendid son
Of Lycaon, Pandarus, whose skill with
the bow was a gift
From Apollo himself.

And those who held Adrasteia
And the land of Apaesus, and the troops
from Pityeia and towering
Mount Tereia were led by Adrastus and
Amphius,
With corselet of linen, two sons of
Percotian Merops,

The world's most skillful prophet, who
would not allow
His sons to enter the man-wasting war.
But they
Would pay no attention, for doom and
dark death were leading
Them on.

And the men who lived round Percote
and Practius
And those who held Sestos and Abydos
and sacred Arisbe
Were all commanded by Asius,
Hyrtacus' son,
A chieftain of warriors—Asius
Hyrtacides, whom his glossy
Huge horses had drawn from Arisbe and
the river Selleïs.

Hippothous led the spear-fierce
Pelasgian tribes
From the fertile soil of Larissa, he and
that offshoot
Of Ares, his brother Pylaeus, both sons
of Pelasgian
Lethus, son of Teutamus.

Leading the Thracians
From all along the swift Hellespont
were Acamas and heroic
Peirous.

And the spear-hurling Cicones had as
their chief
Euphemus, son of Zeus-nurtured
Troezenus and grandson
Of Ceas.

But Pyraechmes led men of bent bows,

the Paeonians

From distant Amydon and the wide-
rippling Axius River—

Axius, the loveliest river that flows on
the face

Of the earth.

From the Eneti country, home of wild
mules,

Came the Paphlagonians with
Pylaemenes of the shaggy heart

As leader. These held Cytorus, lived
about Sesamon,

And had fine homes by the river
Parthenius, and in Cromna,
Aegialus, and high Erythini.

Odius and Epistrophus
Captained the Halizones from distant

Alybe, the source
And home of silver.

Leading the Mysians came Chromis
And Ennomus the augur, who for all his
reading of ominous
Birds could not avoid dark doom. He
fell
At the hands of Aeacus' grandson, the
swift Achilles,
When he in the bed of the river cut down
Trojans
And allies alike.

Phorcys and godlike Ascanius
Commanded the Phrygians, hungry for
battle, and led them
To Troy from distant Ascania.

And the men of Maeonia

Had two leaders, Mesthles and
Antiphus, sons
Of Talaemenes, born of the lake Gygaea.
They led
The Maeonians, men from the foot of
Mount Tmolus.

Nastes commanded the Carians,
barbarous of speech,^j
Men from Miletus and leafy Mount
Phthires,
From about the streams of Maeander and
the craggy steeps
Of Mycale. These also had two leaders,
Amphimachus
And Nastes—Nastes and Amphimachus,
the illustrious sons
Of Nomion—but Nastes, childish fool

that he was,
Went into battle decked out in gold like
a girl,
But gold could not help him escape a
horrible death
At the hands of Aeacus' grandson, the
swift Achilles,
In the bed of the river, and Achilles,
fierce and fiery,
Took care of all his gold.

And the Lycian chiefs
Were Sarpedon and peerless Glaucus,
who led their men
From distant Lycia, where the Xanthus
eddies and flows.

BOOK III

The Duel of Paris and Menelaus

When each battalion had been drawn
up with its captain,
The Trojans advanced with clamor and
clang like the noise
Of birds, the clangor of cranes that rises
toward heaven
When they flee the storms of winter and
floods of beating
Rain and fly with loud cries toward the
stream of Oceanus
To offer in battle at dawn terrible

slaughter

And death to men of the Pygmies. The
Achaeans, however,
Came on with no cries at all, but
breathing might
And full of resolve to aid and defend
one another.

As when the South Wind covers the
peaks of a mountain
With a mist no shepherd loves but that
thieves prefer
To night, since through it a man can see
but a stone's throw
Ahead, so now from beneath their feet a
thick
Dust-cloud arose as swiftly they went on
the double

Across the plain.

When the two advancing armies
Drew near each other, out from the
Trojan ranks
Stepped godlike Paris, also called
Alexander,^k
With a leopard skin on his shoulders
along with his sword
And bent bow. Then shaking two
bronze-headed spears he challenged
The best of the Argives to come out and
meet him in grim
And single combat.

And no sooner did King Menelaus,
The favorite of Ares, catch sight of him
there, coming out
Of the crowd and swaggering along with

great strides, than he
Was as glad as a starving lion that
happens upon
The large carcass of an antlered stag or
wild goat and greedily
Gulps away, despite the frantic efforts
Of darting dogs and lusty young hunters.
So now
Menelaus rejoiced when first his eyes
fell on Prince
Alexander, for he thought that vengeance
on the sinner was finally
His. And at once he leaped in full armor
from his car
To the ground.

But when Prince Alexander saw who
it was

Who appeared to accept his challenge,
his spirit collapsed
And back he shrank mid a crowd of
comrades, seeking
To save his life. Like a man who comes
on a snake
In a mountain ravine and springs back
pale and trembling
And gives the snake plenty of room, so
Prince Alexander
Feared Atreus' son, and cringing shrank
back in the ranks
Of lordly Trojans.

But Hector saw and tried
To shame him with words of reproach:
“Despicable Paris,
Handsome, deceitful, and crazy for

women, would you
Had never been born, or had died
unmarried! Indeed,
I really wish that you had, since such
would have been
Much better than what you are now—an
object of scorn
Looked down on by others. Surely the
long-haired Achaeans
Will laugh loud and long, saying that a
Prince is our champion
Because he's good looking, though he be
both woefully gutless
And weak. Aren't you the one who
rounded up
Your trusty cronies and took off in your
seagoing ships
Across the deep to mingle with strangers

and bring back
From a distant country a comely,
voluptuous woman,
The daughter-in-law of a nation of
spear-wielding warriors,
But a cause of terrible harm to your
father and city
And all the people—aren't you the
strong man who took her,
A joy to your foes and an utter disgrace
to yourself?
And can it be that now you refuse to
stand up
To the fighting Menelaus? You would
soon find out what kind
Of fighter he is whose glamorous wife
you have.

When you're lying down there in the dust
you won't be helped
By that lyre of yours nor the gifts
Aphrodite gave you,
Your handsome face and pretty hair. But
truly
The Trojans are just as afraid, or you
would already
Have paid for all the evil you've done—
paid
By donning that tunic of stone which
rocks from their hands
Would have furnished!"

And godlike Alexander replied:
"Hector,
You chide me no more than is right and
not a bit more

Than you should. Yours is a tireless
heart, and unyielding,
Like an ax that serves the blow of a
skillful shipwright
As he sends it down through a log to
shape a ship's timber.
So the heart in your breast bears all
before it, but do not
Reproach me for the winsome gifts of
golden Aphrodite.
The gods give wonderful gifts no man
can choose
For himself, and such are not to be
scorned or discarded.
But now, if you really insist on my doing
battle
With Ares-loved Menelaus, have all
other Trojans

And men of Achaea sit down, and put us
together
Out there in the middle to fight for Helen
and all
Her treasures. And whoever is stronger
and wins, let him take
Both wealth and woman and carry them
home, while you others
Swear oaths of faith and friendship and
solemnize all
With sacrifice, that you may remain in
the fertile land
Of Troy, and they return to their
thoroughbred horses
And beautiful women in Achaea and
grassy Argos.”

Then Hector rejoiced, and stepping out

between

The two armies he gripped his spear by
the middle and held

The Trojan line back till all were
seated. Meanwhile,

The long-haired Achaeans kept trying to
strike him with arrows

And stones, but now the king of men
Agamemnon

Raised his voice in command:

“Enough, Argives!

No more shooting, you men of Achaea!
for it seems

That bright-helmeted Hector has
something to say.”

He spoke,

And they ceased their shooting and

hurling and quickly grew quiet.
Then Hector spoke between the two
armies: "From me,
O Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans,
hear the proposal
Of Paris, who began this miserable war.
He says
For all other Trojans and men of Achaea
to lay
Their excellent arms on the bountiful
earth, and that he,
Out here in the middle, will fight with
fierce Menelaus
For Helen and all her treasures. And
whoever is stronger
And wins, let him take both wealth and
woman and carry them
Home, while we others swear oaths of

faith and friendship
And solemnize all with sacrifice.”

So Hector, and no one
Answered a word till among them out
spoke Menelaus
Of the fierce battle-scream: “Hear also
me, as one
Whose heart has borne more pain than
any of yours.
Now I think that Trojans and Argives
should part,
Since you have already suffered sorrows
enough
Because of my quarrel, which Alexander
began.
For one of us two, death and doom are
allotted.

So let one of us die, and you others part
With all speed. But first bring two
lambs, a white ram and black ewe
For Earth and the Sun, and we'll bring
another for Zeus.

And some of you go for the powerful
Priam, that he too
May swear and sacrifice, for he has
haughty, unscrupulous
Sons, and we do not want any proud
overreacher
To spoil the oaths we swear in God's
name. The hearts
Of young men are often unstable, but
whenever an old man
Is present, he thinks of the future as well
as the past,
And so both parties benefit greatly."

He spoke,
And both sides rejoiced, hoping to cease
their miserable
Fighting. They reined their chariots back
in the ranks,
Stepped down, and took off their armor,
which they laid on the
ground
Beside them with not much space
between. And Hector
Sent two heralds to bring the lambs from
the city
As fast as they could and to summon
King Priam, while ruling
Agamemnon dispatched Talthybius to the
hollow ships
With orders to bring a lamb, and he did

not ignore
His royal commander.

Meanwhile Iris arrived
With a message for white-armed Helen,
and she came in the likeness
Of her sister-in-law Laodice, the
loveliest daughter
Of Priam and the wife of lord Helicaon,
son
Of Antenor. Helen she found in the hall,
weaving
A web of double width and of iridescent
Purple. And in it she wove not a few of
the battles
That the horse-breaking Trojans and
bronze-clad Achaeans had suffered
At the hands of Ares on her account.¹

Standing

Close by her side, nimble Iris spoke to her, saying:

“Come, my dear, that you may see an incredible

Thing that the horse-breaking Trojans and bronze-clad Achaeans

Have done. They who but lately were eager to clash

On the plain and tearfully tear each other to pieces

Have now called off the battle and are sitting quietly

Out there, leaning back on their shields, with their long spears fixed

In the ground beside them. But Paris and fierce Menelaus

Are to use their long spears to fight each other for you,
And you will be called the dear wife of whichever one wins.”

These words of the goddess aroused in the heart of Helen
An irresistible yearning for her former husband,
Her city, and parents. Quickly she veiled herself
In shining white linen, and softly crying hurriedly
Left her chamber, not by herself but attended
By two of her handmaids, Aethra, daughter of Pittheus,
And heifer-eyed Clymene. And quickly

they came in sight
Of the Scaean Gates.

There in the council of Priam
Sat the elders of Priam's people,
Panthous and Thymoetes,
Clytius, Lampus, and Hicetaon, scion of
Ares,
And two other men of wisdom, Ucalegon
and Antenor.
Too old for battle, these elders were
excellent speakers,
And now they sat on the wall like forest
cicadas
That sit on a tree and sing with their lily
voices.
Even so, the leaders of Troy sat on the
turreted

Wall, and when they saw Helen
approaching spoke softly
One to another in these words winged
with wonder:

“Surely no one could blame either side
for suffering
So much and so long for such a woman,
for she
In appearance is terribly like an
immortal goddess!
But still, though lovely she is, let her go
home
With the ships and not be left here as a
curse to both us
And our children.”

So they, but Priam spoke to her,
saying:

“Come here, dear child, and sit before
me, that you
May see your former husband, your
kinsfolk and friends.
I certainly don’t blame you. The gods
alone
Are to blame for hurling upon me this
tearful war
With Achaeans. But tell me the name of
yonder huge
Achaean, that chieftain so valiant and
tall. To be sure
There are others at least a head taller
than he, but never
Have I laid eyes on a man so truly
handsome
And regal. That man has the look of a
ruler, of one

Who is King indeed.”

And glamorous Helen replied:

“You I regard with respect and
reverence, you

My own dear father-in-law But now I
wish

It had been my good fortune to die when
I came here

With your son, deserting my marriage
chamber and daughter

So precious, my blood relations and
circle of charming

Friends. But that wasn't to be. Instead, I
weep out

My life little by little. Now though, I
will answer

Your question. Yonder Achaean is

Atreus' son, [2](#)

Great Agamemnon, a high-ranking King
and mighty

Spearman. And as sure as ever there
was such a man

He was once the brother-in-law of bitch-
hearted me.”

She spoke, and the old man marveled,
saying: “O happy

Son of Atreus, born lucky, god-blessed
man,

How very many young men of Achaea
are under

Your rule! I journeyed once to the viny
land

Of Phrygia where I saw huge hosts of
Phrygian warriors

With their glancing-swift horses, the
armies of Otreus and royal
Mygdon, encamped along the banks of
the river Sangarius.

And I was an ally of theirs and
numbered among them
That day when the man-matching
Amazons came. But not even
They were so numerous as are the quick-
eyed Achaeans.”

Next the old man noticed Odysseus,
and said:

“Come, dear child, tell me who that man
is too.

He’s a good head shorter than Atreus’
son Agamemnon
But broader through shoulders and chest.

His armor lies
On the bountiful earth while he goes up
and down
Through the ranks like the leading ram in
a herd. To me
That's what he is like, a wooly ram that
paces
His way through a truly large flock of
silvery-white sheep."

And Zeus-born Helen answered again:
"That
Is the son of Laertes, resourceful
Odysseus, who was raised
In rocky Ithaca. He's a cunning and
clever man,
Both wily and wise."

Then the grave Antenor answered

Her thus: “What you say, my lady, is true indeed.

For some time ago the brilliant Odysseus was here

With Ares’ own Menelaus to confer about you,

And I was their host.¹ I welcomed them in my halls

And got to know what they look like and how they think.

Whenever they mixed in a meeting with Trojans, Menelaus

Stood head and shoulders above Odysseus, but when

They were seated Odysseus was the more majestic. And when

They stood before all to weave the

words of wise counsel,
Menelaus' words were few, but fluently
uttered,
Clear, and to the point. Though the
younger man,
He was surely no rambler or bungler
with words. But whenever
Resourceful Odysseus got up, he would
stand looking down,
His eyes fixed hard on the ground, nor
would he gesture
At all with the staff he held. He would
hold it rigid,
Like a man who wasn't all there. You
would, in fact,
Have thought him a sullen and foolish
fellow. But when
He spoke, that great voice of his poured

out of his chest

In words like the snowflakes of winter,
and then no other

Mortal could in debate contend with
Odysseus.

Nor did we care any longer how he
looked.”

Then the old man, noticing Ajax,
asked: “And who

Is that other manly Achaean, the one so
tall

And knightly, whose head and broad
shoulders tower above

The Argives?”

And exquisite Helen of the flowing
gowns:

“That’s the enormous Ajax, a very

fortress

Of Achaean valor. And over there
Idomeneus

Stands like a god mid the men and
captains of Crete.

Many times, on journeys from Crete, he
stayed at our house,

And my warrior lord, Menelaus,
welcomed him warmly.

And now I see many other quick-eyed
Achaeans

Whom I know well enough and could
name, but two of their
martial

Commanders I cannot see, horse-
mastering Castor

And Pollux, good in a fist-fight, my own
blood brothers,

For all of us had the same mother. Either
they didn't come
With the men from dear Lacedaemon, or
else they came
All the way in their seagoing ships but
are now too ashamed
To mingle with others in battle on
account of the vile
And insulting things the soldiers say
about me.”

Thus Helen, but they already lay in the
close
Embrace of the life-giving earth back
home in Lacedaemon,
Their own dear country.

Meanwhile, the heralds were bringing
Through town the holy offerings

whereby to swear

The faithful oaths of a truce—two lambs
and a goatskin

Bottle of heart-warming wine, fruit of
the soil.

And the herald Idaeus, bearing a
gleaming bowl

And golden cups, came up and aroused
old Priam,

Saying:

“Come, O son of Laomedon, the chiefs
Of the horse-breaking Trojans and
bronze-clad Achaeans want you
Down on the plain to join with them in
sacrifice

And in swearing the faithful oaths of a
truce. Prince Paris,

Though, and fierce Menelaus are to take
their long spears
And fight a duel for the woman, and to
the winner
Will go both woman and wealth, while
the rest of us
Swear oaths of faith and friendship and
solemnize all
With sacrifice, that we may remain in the
fertile land
Of Troy, and they return to their
thoroughbred horses
And beautiful women in Achaea and
grassy Argos.”

At this the old King shuddered, but
told his companions
To yoke the horses, which quickly they

did. Then Priam
Mounted the ornate car and drew back
on the reins
While Antenor got up beside him, and
off they drove
The fast horses through the Scaean Gates
and on to the plain.

When they reached the waiting armies,
they stepped from the car
To the bountiful earth and strode out to a
spot midway
Between the Trojan and Achaean hosts.
At once
The king of men Agamemnon and
resourceful Odysseus
Arose, and the stately heralds brought
out the offerings

For the holy oaths of peace, mixed wine
in the bowl,
And over the hands of the kings poured
water. And the son
Of Atreus drew the knife that always
hung
Beside his great scabbard and from the
heads of the lambs
He cut hair, which the heralds gave out
to the chieftains of the Trojans
And Achaeans alike. Then there in the
midst of all
Agamemnon lifted his arms and prayed
aloud:

“O Father Zeus, ruling from Ida, most
great
And glorious lord, and you, all-hearing,

all-seeing

Sun, and you, O Earth and Rivers, and
you

Infernal powers that punish the shades of
men

Who here swear falsely, I pray to all of
you now

To witness and then watch over these
faithful oaths.

If Menelaus goes down before
Alexander,

Let him keep Helen and all her treasures,
and we

Will depart in our seagoing vessels. But
if Menelaus

Of the tawny hair shall slay Alexander,
then let

The Trojans return both Helen and all of

her wealth

And make to the Argives whatever
further repayment

Seems adequate and right, some ample
repayment that men

Yet to be will remember. However, if
Priam and the sons

Of Priam should refuse this repayment,
then I will fight on

To win it and remain in this land till I
see the end

Of our war.”

He spoke, and drawing the ruthless
bronze

Across the throats of the lambs he laid
them down

On the ground, jerking and gasping for

breath, the bronze
Having taken their strength. Then from
the bowl they took wine
In the cups and poured it out in libation
with prayers
To the gods everlasting. And thus would
some Achaean
Or one of the Trojans pray:

“Most great and glorious
Zeus and you other immortal gods, may
the brains
Of those who first violate these oaths be
poured out
On earth as now this wine is poured,
theirs
And their children’s too, and may others
possess their wives.”

So they prayed, but Zeus was not yet
ready
To give them the peace they desired.
Then ancient Priam,
Descended of Dardanus, spoke thus
among them: "Hear me,
You Trojans and well-greaved
Achaeans. I am now going back
To windy Ilium, since I'm certain I
could not endure
The sight of my own dear son in battle
with fierce
Menelaus. But Zeus, I think, and the
other immortals
Already know which one is to die and
meet
His end in the duel."

So spoke the sacred King.
Then, having put the lambs in his chariot,
he mounted
The ornate car and drew back on the
reins while Antenor
Got up beside him. And back to Troy
they went.
But Hector, son of Priam, and godly
Odysseus
Marked off a space for the duel, then
shook a couple
Of pebbles in a bronze and leather
helmet to see
Which man would be first to hurl his
bronze spear. And the people,
Praying, lifted their hands to the gods,
and thus

Would some Achaean or one of the
Trojans say:

“O Father Zeus, ruling from Ida, most
great
And glorious lord, grant that he who
brought
These troubles upon us—whichever one
of these two—
May die and go down to the house of
Hades, but to us
Grant peace and faithful oaths of
friendship.”

So they,
And the huge bright-helmeted Hector,
turning his own eyes
Away, shook the lots, and quickly the
pebble of Paris

Leaped out of the helmet. Then the
soldiers sat down in rows
Close to their inlaid armor and high-
stepping horses,
While handsome Paris, lord of the
lovely blonde Helen,
Put on his beautiful armor.³ First he
covered
His shins with greaves, fair greaves with
ankle-clasps of silver.
Next, about his chest he put the
breastplate
Of his brother Lycaon and adjusted the
straps of it well,
And from his shoulders he slung his
bronze sword with the studs
Of bright silver along with his large and

solid shield.

Then on his noble head he put a strong
helmet

With horsehair plume defiantly waving
above him,

And in his hand he took a doughty spear
That fitted his grip to perfection. And the
grim Menelaus

Likewise donned his equipment.

Having armed themselves
On either side of the throng, they stalked
out into

The space between the two armies, and
as they glared

At each other with terrible fierceness,
amazement fell

On horse-taming Trojans and well-

greaved Achaeans alike.

And they came to a halt not far apart in
the marked-off

Space and stood there angrily shaking
their spears

At each other. First Paris hurled his
long-shadowing spear

And struck the round shield of Atreus'
son. But instead

Of the bronze tearing on through, the
point was turned

By the sturdy buckler. Then Atreus' son
Menelaus

Got ready to throw, praying thus to
Father Zeus:

“Lord God, help me to punish Prince
Alexander,

Him who wronged me in the beginning.
Slay him
By means of me, that many a man as yet
Unborn may shudder to wrong a host
who has offered
Him friendship.”

With this he drew back his long-
shadowing spear
And hurled it, and he struck the round
shield of Priam's son.
The great spear tore through the
gleaming shield and on
Through the beautiful breastplate and
tunic too, but Paris
Twisted in time to avoid dark death as
the spear
Went by at his side. Then Atreus' son

whipped out

His sword with the studs of bright
silver, and raising it high

Overhead he brought it down hard on the
metal horn

Of his enemy's helmet. But on it his
bright sword shattered

Into three or four pieces and flew from
his hand. Menelaus

Groaned, and glancing up at broad
heaven he cried:

“O Father Zeus, no other god is more
ruthless

Than you! Here I thought I had surely got
Full payment from foul Alexander, but
now my sword

Is broken and gone and I've thrown my

spear and missed.”

So saying, he sprang upon him and
grabbed his helmet
By the horsehair crest. Then flinging him
down and whirling him
Round, he started to drag Paris off
toward the line
Of well-greaved Achaeans, and the
tightly-drawn strap of his helmet,
The thong of richly wrought ox-hide,
began to crease
His soft throat and choke him. And now
Menelaus would surely
Have dragged him off and won
unspeakable glory,
If Zeus’s daughter, fair Aphrodite, had
not been

Sharply watching. She broke the strap,
though cut
From the hide of a slaughtered ox, and
the powerful hand
Of the hero shot forward with an empty
helmet. Spinning,
He tossed it among the well-greaved
Achaeans, and his loyal
Friends retrieved it. And he charged his
foe once again,
Eager to pierce him through with a sharp
bronze spear.
But then Aphrodite whirled Paris away
with the ease
Of deity working, enclosed him in cloud,
and set him
Down in his own high-vaulted and
perfumed bedroom.

Then she went to get Helen, whom she
found on the lofty
Turreted wall in a crowd of Trojan
women.

Taking the likeness of a very old
woman, a worker
In wool and a long-time favorite of
Helen's who had carded
Fine fleece for her before she left
Lacedaemon,
Bright Aphrodite took hold of her
nectar-sweet gown,
Pulled it gently, and spoke:

“Let's go. Paris
Says to come home. For he is there in the
bedroom,
Stretched out on the inlaid bed, a man

well dressed

And radiantly handsome. So far from
thinking him one

Just back from a duel, you'd think he
was on his way

To a dance, or already there and
resting."

These words
Stirred Helen's heart, but when she
noticed the graceful
Neck, delectable breasts, and sparkling
eyes

Of the goddess, she answered her in
amazement, saying:

"Mysterious deity! why are you trying to
trick me?

Now that King Menelaus has gotten the

best

Of royal Paris and is ready to take
despicable

Me back home again, now doubtless you
want

To lead me further on to some populous
city

Of Phrygia or pleasant Maeonia where
lives another

Masculine favorite of yours. So now you
come here

With your slyness. But you, go sit by his
side yourself.

Forget you're a goddess and never again
go back

To Olympus, but stay and make yourself
utterly wretched

Caring for him till he makes you his wife

—or slave!

But I won't be shameless enough to
return to his bed.

All the women in Troy would blame me,
and my misery
Is already boundless.”

Then fair Aphrodite got angry
And spoke to her thus: “Don't provoke
me, you obstinate wretch,
Or I might become spiteful and leave
you, and come to despise you
As much as I now exceedingly love you.
I might even
Create in Trojans and Danaans both a
hatred
So grievous that you would die in the
conflict between them,

A terrible fate!”

She spoke, and Zeus-born Helen
Was afraid. Quietly she gathered her
shining white gown
About her and left unnoticed by the
Trojan women.
She followed where the goddess led.

Now when they reached
Alexander’s richly wrought home, the
handmaids turned
To their chores, but their lovely mistress
went straight to the highceilinged
Bedroom, where Aphrodite, adorer of
smiles,
Got a seat for her and set it before
Alexander.
Then Helen, the daughter of aegis-

bearing Zeus, sat down,
And looking off to one side she began to
rebuke
Her husband:

“So, you are back from the battle.
Would you
Had died there, slain by that powerful
man, my former
Lord! And you are the one who used to
brag
About how much stronger you were than
fierce Menelaus,
Stronger with your hands and better than
he with your spear.
Well go ahead and call him back out to
fight you
Again. But no, I wouldn't really advise

you

To be so mad as to fight with tawny
Menelaus,

Lest you find yourself down and his
sharp spear clean through you!”

And Paris replied: “This, my dear, is
no time

For nagging. Menelaus, with the help of
Athena, has won

This bout, that’s true, but another time
I’ll conquer

Him. For we have gods on our side too!

But come, let’s enjoy ourselves in bed,
making love

With each other, for never before have I
felt so full

Of desire—not even when I first took

you from fair
Lacedaemon, and sailing away in my
seagoing ships
Made love with you in bed on the island
of Cranaë.
But now even more I love you and feel
myself
In the grip of sweet desire.”

So saying, he drew her
To him, and she unresisting joined him
in bed.
But while those two lay making love at
home
On the inlaid corded bed, Menelaus
raged
Through the ranks like some wild beast,
searching all over

For Prince Alexander. Nor could the
Trojans nor any
Of their famous allies point out to fierce
Menelaus
Where handsome Alexander was, and no
man there
Would have hid him for reasons of
friendship, since dark death itself
Was not more hateful than he to all of
those warriors.
Then the king of men Agamemnon spoke
out among them:

“Hear me, O Trojans, Dardanians,
allies. It appears
Without question that victory has gone to
the favorite of Ares,
King Menelaus. So relinquish Argive

Helen

And all that goes with her by way of
treasure, and make
Some ample repayment that men yet to
be will remember.”

So spoke Atrides, and all the
Achaeans applauded.

BOOK IV

Agamemnon's Inspection of the Army

Meanwhile, the gods were enthroned
on the golden floor

In council with Zeus. Graceful Hebe^m
poured nectar

For them, and as they looked out on the
city of Troy

They drank to each other from goblets of
gold. But Zeus

At once began trying to irritate Hera,
sarcastically

Saying:

“Menelaus has two divine helpers, a couple
Of goddesses, Argive Hera and mighty
Athena,
The defender of many But both of them
sit up here
Enjoying themselves, while light-o’-love
Aphrodite,
That hustling, giggling goddess, goes
constantly
To the side of her favorite and makes the
fates keep their distance.
Just now she saved him again, when he
thought sure
He was done for. Even so, the victory
has gone to the favorite
Of Ares, King Menelaus, and now we

must make

A decision, whether again to renew evil
war

And the blood-chilling din of battle, or
to bring the armies

Together in friendship. If we all agree
on peace,

King Priam's city survives as a town
still fit

To live in, and fierce Menelaus takes
Argive Helen

Home.”

At first his words got murmurs only
From Athena and Hera, who sat by each
other contriving

Disasters for Trojans. Then Athena kept
quiet and said nothing,

Though seized by savage anger at Father Zeus.

But the breast of Hera could not contain her rage,

And she railed at him thus:

“Most dreadful son of Cronos,
What kind of talk is that! Just how do you plan

To ruin all I’ve done and utterly waste the sweating

Toil I suffered when I exhausted my horses

In gathering those Achaeans to ruin both Priam

And all of his sons? Do as you like, but don’t

Suppose for one moment that all of us

like what you do!”

Then angry indeed, cloud-gathering
Zeus replied:

“Strange, implacable goddess! how
many horrible

Wrongs can Priam and his sons have
done you to make you

So frantically fierce in your rage to
destroy and level

Their mighty stronghold?¹ Perhaps if you
went within

The gates and high walls and ate old
Priam raw

Along with his sons and all the rest of
the Trojans,

Your wrath might find some relief. Well
do as you please

About Troy, but don't bring this point up
again to cause
More quarreling between us. And here's
something else you'll do well
To remember. When it comes my turn to
be eager for the ruin
Of some city where favorites of yours
are living, don't make
A move to stand in the path of my anger!
Give me
My way, since now of my own accord I
am giving
You yours, though still with an unwilling
heart. For under
The sun and starry sky there is no earthly
city
I care for more than holy Troy, nor any
Mortals whom I regard with more

pleasure than Priam

And the people of Priam, him of the
good ashen spear.

Never yet has my altar in Troy been bare
of an ample

Feast, libations of wine and savory
burnt-offerings,

The gifts we claim as our due.”

Then the heifer-eyed Queen

Of the gods replied: “The cities I care
for most

Are three—Argos, Sparta, and wide-
wayed Mycenae.^{[n](#)}

But whenever you come to hate them,
destroy away

At your pleasure. I'll not stand up for
them, nor will I

Resent or begrudge what you do. And
what good would it do
If I did get resentful and tried to prevent
their destruction,
Since you are so very much stronger?
But surely the work
I do should also amount to something. I
too
Am divine and from the same stock as
yourself. For I
In two respects am the most honored
daughter of Cronos,
Crooked in counsel, in that I am the
eldest and also
Your wife, you being King of all the
immortals.
But now let us yield to each other, me to
you

And you to me, and the other immortal
gods
Will do as we do. And now tell Athena
to enter
The noisy throng of Achaeans and
Trojans and find
Some way of making the Trojans break
their oaths
Of truce by an act of violence against the
triumphant,
Exulting Achaeans.”

So she, and the Father of gods
And men by no means ignored her.² At
once he spoke
To Athena with these winged words:
“Hurry on into
The gathered hosts of Achaeans and

Trojans and find
Some way of making the Trojans break
their oaths
Of truce by an act of violence against the
triumphant,
Exulting Achaeans.”

So saying, he started Athena,
Who needed no urging, and down she
went darting from the peaks
Of Olympus. Like a shooting star that the
son of crooked
Cronos sends with a long trail of fire as
a sign
To sailors at sea or a huge encampment
of soldiers,
So Pallas Athena shot down to earth
right into

The midst of innumerable men, and all
who saw
Were astonished, both horse-breaking
Trojans and bronze-clad

Achaean.

Then one would glance at the man next
to him, and say:

“Surely again, now, horrible war and
the screaming
Chaos of battle are coming upon us,
either that,
Or peace is ours by decree of Zeus, who
has
All wars in his keeping and decides
when men will fight.”

Thus Achaeans and Trojans spoke to
each other. Athena,

Meanwhile, entered the Trojan host as a man,

The powerful spearman Laodocus, son of Antenor,

To find the princely Pandarus if she could.

And she found that son of Lycaon, the matchless and mighty

Pandarus, standing amid the stalwart ranks

Of shield-bearing men who had followed him there from the streams

Of Aesepus. She approached and spoke with these winged words:

“Shrewd son of Lycaon, listen to me. I dare you

To shoot a quick arrow at yonder fierce

Menelaus!

Think what fame and favor you'd win
from the whole

Trojan army, but especially from Prince
Paris. When it came

To the giving of splendid gifts, he would
surely be far

More generous to you than to anyone
else, if now

He should see Menelaus, the warlike son
of Atreus,

Brought down by an arrow of yours and
then laid out

On a grievous funeral pyre. So come, let
fly

At yonder illustrious King and promise
Apollo,

Your light-born Lycian god, the famous

archer,
That when you return to your own
hometown of sacred
Zeleia you will offer to him a glorious
hecatomb
Of first-born, excellent lambs.”

So spoke Athena,
And persuaded the mind of a mindless
fool. He quickly
Unwrapped his burnished bow, made
from the horns
Of a leaping wild antelope that he
himself had shot
From a place of ambush as the beast
stepped down from a rock,
Striking it full in the chest and sending it
back

In a heap on the slab. Its horns grew
sixteen hands high,
And these a craftsman had worked and
fitted together,
Burnished well, and tipped with curving
gold.
Resting one end on the ground, he strung
the great weapon
And laid it carefully down, while his
valiant companions
Held up their shields before him so that
the warlike
Sons of Achaeans would not interfere
with the shooting
Of fierce Menelaus, Atreus' battling son.
Next he lifted the lid of his quiver and
drew out
A feathered arrow fraught with dark

pains, a new one
That had never been shot. Deftly he
fitted this bitter
Shaft to the ox-hide string and promised
Apollo,
His light-born Lycian god, the famous
archer,
That when he returned to his own
hometown of sacred
Zeleia he would offer to him a glorious
hecatomb
Of first-born, excellent lambs. And he
drew the notched arrow
And ox-hide string all the way back to
his chest
Till the iron head touched the bow and
the bow itself

Was bent in a circle. Then he shot with a
clanging twang
Of the mighty weapon as the resonant
string sang out
And the sharp-headed shaft went
winging its way, eager
To fly mid the enemy ranks.

But ah, Menelaus,
The blissful immortal gods did not forget
you,
And especially mindful was Zeus's
daughter Athena,
The bringer of booty, who stood before
you and quickly
Deflected the sharp-pointed shaft. She
brushed it away
From the flesh of the King as a mother

brushes a fly
From her baby sweetly sleeping, and the
goddess herself
Guided it where his golden belt buckles
joined
And the halves of his breastplate met. So
the keen arrow struck
Where the richly wrought belt was
buckled and cut right through
And on through the beautiful breastplate
and heavily armored
Kilt, which he wore for just such
protection and which did
The most to help him, yet even through
this the arrow
Pierced, wounding him slightly, and the
cloud-black blood
Ran out from the shallow cut.

As when some Maeonian
Or Carian woman stains with crimson
dye
A horse's ivory cheek-piece, that later
lies
In store and though many a horseman
covets it keenly
Remains where it is to enhance the horse
of a king
And thrill his driver, so now, Menelaus,
your thighs
Were stained with the flowing blood,
your handsome huge thighs,
Your calves, and ankles beneath.

When he saw the dark blood
Running down from the wound, the
commander-in-chief

Agamemnon

Shuddered, as also shuddered Ares'
own

Menelaus. But when he saw that the
arrowhead's barbs

And binding of sinew were still outside
the flesh,

The spirit returned to his breast. But
King Agamemnon,

Loudly moaning and holding Menelaus's
hand,

Spoke thus among his men, who all
around him

Re-echoed his moans:

“O my dear brother, it seems
I've accomplished only your death in
swearing this solemn

Oath and setting you out before the
Achaeans

To fight the Trojans alone, since now
they have managed

To shoot you and so have insulted our
sacred swearing!

Even so, an oath is an oath, and by no
means taken

In vain with the blood of lambs, holy
libations

Of unmixed wine, and the faithful
clasping of hands.

For even though the Olympian fulfills it
not

At the moment, still he fulfills it sooner
or later.

And then the price of atonement is heavy
indeed,

For then men pay with their heads, their
wives, and their children.

And this my heart and soul are utterly
sure of—

That sooner or later the day of
destruction shall come

For holy Troy and Priam and all the
people

Of Priam of the good ashen spear. Then
high-throned Zeus,

The sky-dwelling son of Cronos, shall
rise in wrath

At this treacherous deed and shake his
dark and terrible

Aegis over the Trojans. Don't think all
this

Won't happen. But O Menelaus, what

awful misery

Will surely be mine if you die and fulfill
your destiny

Now! For then the Achaeans will
immediately want

To go home, back to thirsty Argos,
where I

Should return in utter disgrace, and
leave to Priam

And the other Trojans their insolent
boast, no other

Than Argive Helen herself. And here in
the dirt

Of Troy your bones shall rot while the
task undertaken

By you remains unfinished. Then some
Trojan,

Proud and triumphant, will dance on the

tomb of great

Menelaus, and shout:

” ‘May such be the way Agamemnon
Always wreaks his wrath, as now he
came here

With a host of Achaeans only to leave in
defeat

And go back to his own precious country
with empty ships

And no superb Menelaus!’

“But on the day

When any man shall so vaunt, may the
wide earth then

Engulf me!”

But tawny Menelaus reassured him,
saying:

“Don’t worry, and whatever you do

don't alarm the army.

The head of the shaft is fixed in nothing vital.

It was all but stopped by my flashing belt and leather

Protector and the armored kilt beneath them, the one

Well plated by workers in bronze.”

And King Agamemnon

Answered him thus: “May it be as you say, my dear

Menelaus. But a surgeon shall search the wound and treat it

With proper ointments to take away the dark pains.”

Then he spoke thus to the high-born herald Talthybius:

“Go, Talthybius, as fast as you can, and
fetch
Machaon, son of the peerless physician
Asclepius,
To see warlike Menelaus, whom some
skillful archer,
Some Trojan or Lycian bowman, has
struck with an arrow,
Covering himself with glory, but us with
nothing
But sorrow.”

This order the herald was quick to
obey,
And he ran through the ranks looking this
way and that for the
martial
Machaon, whom he found on his feet mid

the stalwart ranks
Of shield-bearing soldiers who had
followed him there from the
grassy
Fields of Tricca, land of fine horses. He
approached him
And spoke with these winged words:

“Come, O son
Of Asclepius. Great Agamemnon calls
you to see
The warlike King Menelaus, whom
some skillful archer,
Some Trojan or Lycian bowman, has
struck with an arrow,
Covering himself with glory, but us with
nothing
But sorrow.”

These words startled Machaon, and
the two of them
Hurried through the huge crowd of
Achaeans. When they reached
The spot where tawny Menelaus lay
wounded, surrounded
By all the chieftains, the divinely able
Machaon
Stepped into their midst and quickly
extracted the arrow
From where the belt was buckled,
breaking back
The keen barbs as he drew out the head.
He loosened the flashing
Belt and leather protector and the
armored kilt
Beneath them, the one well plated by

workers in bronze,
And examined the wound which the
bitter arrow had made.
Then he sucked out the blood and ably
applied
Soothing ointments which once the
affable Cheiron had given
His father.

But while they were busy with King
Menelaus
Of the great battle-scream, the shield-
bearing Trojan forces
Began to advance, and again the
Achaean warriors
Put on their armor and did their best to
recover
Some stomach for fighting.

You would not then have found
The great Agamemnon napping,³ or
cringing with fear
And reluctance to fight, but still
exceedingly eager
For the man-enhancing battle. He left his
horses
And bronze-bright car in the care of his
squire Eurymedon,
Ptolemy's son, Peiraeus's grandson,
who held
In check his snorting charges. But first he
gave him
Strict orders to have the chariot near in
case
His legs should grow tired as he toured
and re-ordered the ranks.

Then off through the host he strode, and
whenever he saw
Any swiftly-drawn Danaans up and
eager for action
He would stop and encourage them thus:

“Argives, don’t relax
Your impetuous valor one whit, for
Father Zeus
Will be no helper of liars! Vultures shall
surely
Devour the tender flesh of those who
first
Went back on their word and violently
broke the truce,
And when we have plundered their city,
their beloved wives
And little children shall go with us in

our ships!”

But whenever he saw any hesitant men,
shrinking

From horrible war, he would stop and
fiercely rebuke them:

“Disgraceful Argives! brave with the
bow alone,

Have you no shame? Why are you
standing here

In a daze, like fawns that exhaust
themselves by running

Across a wide plain and then just stand
there, stupid

And still, too lacking in spirit to move?
So here

You stand in a trance instead of
preparing to fight!

Can it be that you're waiting for Trojans
to threaten your ships
Where their sterns are drawn up on the
beach of the foaming sea,
That then you may know whether Zeus
will stretch out his hand
And save you?"

Thus, as he ranged through the
crowded ranks
Issuing orders, he came to where the
Cretans
Were arming themselves about their
excellent leader
Idomeneus, who stood formidable as any
wild boar
Mid the foremost champions, while
Meriones speeded the arming

Of ranks in the rear. The commander-in-
chief Agamemnon
Rejoiced at their zeal, and spoke at once
to their leader
With these friendly words:

“Idomeneus, you I respect
Above all other swiftly-drawn Danaans,
in war
And works of peace, and at the royal
feast
When a bowl of the elders’ flaming wine
is mixed
For the Argive chiefs. Then the other
long-haired Achaeans
Drink their allotted share, but your cup
stands
Ever full, like mine, that you may drink

whenever

You have a mind to. But on into battle,
fully

The man you've always claimed to be!"

And Idomeneus,

Leader of Cretans, replied: "Atrides,
surely

To you I will be a loyal comrade, as in
The beginning I gave my promise and
pledge I would be.

But urge on the rest of the long-haired
Achaeans, that quickly

We may join battle now that the Trojans
have broken

Their oath. Death and mourning shall
surely be theirs

Who first went back on their word and

promise of peace!”

He spoke, and Atreus' son, now
greatly pleased,
Strode on through the host till he came to
where the two Ajaxes
Stood armed, with an ominous cloud of
infantrymen
Behind them. As when from some high
crag a goatherd
Sees a far cloud blowing in from over
the deep
Before the roaring West Wind, a cloud
that brings
The huge hurricane and seems to him
blacker than pitch
As he shudders and drives his herd in a
cave, so now

The crowded ranks of god-fed, lusty
young fighters
Moved with the two Ajaxes into the fury
Of war—dark battalions, and
everywhere bristling
With shields and spears. As he looked at
them, the heart
Of King Agamemnon grew gladder still,
and the words
He spoke to their leaders came winged
with hearty praise:

“I give no orders to you, my brave
Ajaxes,
Commanders of Argives clad in bronze.
It would hardly
Be right to do so. For you yourselves do
all

That is needed to fire up your men and fill them with fight.

O Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, if only

I found such spirit in the hearts of all my men!

Then the towers of King Priam's city would soon be toppled

And all laid waste and leveled beneath our hands."

With this he left them there and went on to others.

And he came to where Nestor, the eloquent speaker from Pylos,

Was haranguing his men and marshaling them under their leaders—

The powerful Pelagon, Alastor, and

Chromius, lordly
Haemon and the people's shepherd Bias.
First came
His charioteers, and to the rear, as a
wall
Of defense, he had stationed crack
troops of infantrymen.
And between these contingents he had
driven the weaklings and cowards,
That they might be forced to fight in spite
of themselves.
At the moment he was instructing his
charioteers,
Bidding them hold their horses in check
and not
To go rushing ahead in the mob, old
Nestor saying:

“May no man here allow his own good
opinion
Of his horsemanship and manly prowess
to send him charging
Out front apart from the others to fight
the Trojans
Alone, nor will any giving of ground
make a one
Of you any stronger! Wait till we all get
close,
Then engage the car of a foe and swiftly
thrust home
With your spear. These tactics are much
the best. Such
Was the disciplined spirit that enabled
the heroes of old
To lay waste walls and cities!”

Thus the old one
Drew on his knowledge of battles fought
long ago
To advise and inspire his men.
Agamemnon rejoiced
As he watched him in action, and to him
spoke these winged words:
“Old sire, I only wish that your limbs
and bodily
Vigor might still keep pace with your
wonderful spirit!
But evil old age that comes to all lies
heavy
Upon you. Would that you might change
years with one
Of our lusty young spearmen!”

To which replied horse-driving

Gerenian Nestor: “Son of Atreus, I too
Am tempted to wish that I were the man I
was

On the day I cut down huge Ereuthalion.

But the gods

Never grant men all things at once. As
then I was young,

So now old age is upon me. Even so, I
shall stay

With my charioteers, rightly fulfilling the
office

Of age by giving them orders and good
advice.

I’ll leave the wielding of spears to
younger men

Who trust the might of their brawn.”

He spoke, and Atrides

Moved on as confidence grew within
him. Then
He saw Peteos' son, horse-lashing
Menestheus, standing
Mid the Athenians, masters at raising the
war-cry,
And not far away resourceful Odysseus,
standing
Mid the strong Cephalenians. None of
them made any move
To advance, since Achaean battalions
and horse-breaking Trojans
Had just begun to get under way and no
one
There with Odysseus had heard the war-
cry. So they stood
Where they were and waited for some
other thick wall of

Achaeans

To charge on the Trojans and start the
battle. This calmness
Of theirs made a poor impression on
King Agamemnon,
And now his words came winged with
bitter harshness:

“O son of royal Peteos, nurtured of
Zeus,
And you the champion of treacherous
tricks who first
Looks out for himself, why are you
cringing back here,
Fearful and waiting for others? It would
seem that you two
Should fight in the very front rank and
throw yourselves

In the midst of blazing battle. For surely
you're always
The first to respond when I send out a
call to the feast
And we Achaeans prepare a fine meal
for the chiefs.
I've noticed that then you sit and eat
roast meat
With a wonderful zest and drink
uncounted cups
Of honey-sweet wine. But now you
would gladly loiter
Back here and look on though ten great
Achaean battalions
Fought with the ruthless bronze in front
of you!"

Then, with an angry scowl, resourceful

Odysseus

Replied: "Son of Atreus, what words
are these that just

Got by the barrier of your teeth! What

Do you mean by saying that we don't do
our part

In waging keen war with the horse-
taming Trojans? You'll see,

If you bother to look, the father of Prince
Telemachus

Mixing it up with the front-rank fighters
of Troy.

The words you speak are nothing but so
much wind!"

When he saw how angry Odysseus
was, great

Agamemnon smiled and took back all he

had said:

“O god-sprung son of Laertes,
resourceful Odysseus,
I did not mean to overly criticize you
Or give you commands, for I know your
heart is full
Of gentle wisdom, since surely you and I
Think very much alike. So come now, all
this
We'll make up to each other later, and if
any hard words
Have been spoken, may the gods
themselves see to it that nothing
Ever comes of them.”

With this he left them there
And went on to others, till he found the
son of Tydeus,

Bold Diomedes, standing among the
horses

And sturdy chariots, and by him stood
Capaneus' son

Sthenelus. The sight of Diomedes also
just standing

Angered Agamemnon again, and the
words he spoke

Came winged with reproach:

“Confound it! You son of the fiery
Horse-taming Tydeus, why are you
cringing back here

Staring at the other brave companies,
true bulwarks of battle?

Surely Tydeus never did any cringing,
But fought in the blaze of war well out in
front

Of his friends, as all who saw him
toiling in battle

Will tell you. He, they say, was the best
of warriors.

I never met him myself, nor even so
much as

Saw him, though it's true he came to
Mycenae once—

As a guest, not a foe—and with him
came Prince Polyneices.⁴

They were looking for strong
reinforcements, since they at that time
Were laying siege to the holy walls of
Thebes.

They made their plea for famous allies,
and the men

Of Mycenae were going to give them

what they required
When Zeus changed their minds by
causing unfavorable signs
To appear. They left and went on their
way till they came
To the grassy meadows of the reedy
river Asopus.
From there the Achaeans sent Tydeus
forth on a mission
To Thebes. Upon his arrival he found the
many
Descendants of Cadmus feasting together
in the palace
Of Prince Eteocles. Your father was a
stranger there
And all alone mid many Cadmeans, but
the gallant
Horseman Tydeus was so far from being

afraid

That he challenged them all to athletic games, and there,

With the gracious help of Athena, he beat them all—

A defeat which did not set well with the horse-racing Cadmeans.

So as he returned from their city they laid an ambush

Of fifty strong men commanded by Maeon, son

Of Haemon, and Autophonus' son, battle-staunch Polyphontes.

But they all came to grief and a shameful end at the hands

Of Tydeus, who slew them all—all but Maeon.

Him he sent home, obeying signs from
the gods.

Even such was Aetolian Tydeus. But the
son he sired

Is not like his father in battle, though
more than his equal

When it comes to the making of speeches
in the place of assembly!”

Strong Diomedes said nothing at all in
reply,

Respecting reproof from the honored
King. But Sthenelus,

Son of illustrious Capaneus, answered
him thus:

“Atides, don’t lie! You know very well
what the truth is.

We claim to be much better men than our

fathers,
For we were the ones who succeeded in
taking Thebes
Of the seven gates, and we did it with
fewer men
And against a more strongly fortified
city. We put
Our trust in the heavenly portents and the
help of Zeus,
Whereas our fathers died on account of
their own
Presumption and folly! So don't
compare our merits
With theirs.”⁵

At this the strong Diomedes, glaring
At Sthenelus, said: “Quiet, my friend,
and do

As I say. I surely don't blame our
commander-in-chief
Agamemnon for stirring up fight in the
well-greaved Achaeans,
For he is the one who stands to win the
most glory
If we Achaeans destroy the Trojans and
sacred
Ilium falls, just as he stands to suffer
The most if we go down in defeat.
Come, man,
Concentrate now on nothing but furious
fighting!"

So saying, he leaped in full armor from
his car to the ground,
And the startling ringing and clashing of
bronze on the breast

Of the agile chief was enough to give
pause and trembling
To any man however brave.

As when a great surf
Of the sea pounds and resounds on an
echoing beach,
Wave after wave coming in with the
driving West Wind,
Waves that gather and swell far out on
the deep
To break at last and thunder on the
shore, curling
And rising around the big rocks and
abundantly spewing
Their briny foam, so now the Danaans
moved
Rank after rank into battle, and the

captains did

All the shouting, commanding their
disciplined men, who might

Have been dumb for all the talking they
did, as fearing

Their leaders they went ahead by the
thousands in their inlaid

Flashing armor. But as for the Trojans,
they sounded

Like a vast flock of ewes that stand and
wait in the yard

Of a wealthy man to give their white
milk and incessantly

Bleat as they hear the cries of their
lambs. Even such

Was the clamor that rose throughout the
Trojans' great host,

For they shouted their orders in no one

language, but men

From many lands cried out in a jangling
of tongues.

These were impelled by Ares, the
Achaeans by bright-eyed

Athena, and all were driven by Panic
and Rout

And raging Hatred, implacable comrade
and sister

Of murdering Ares. She comes to little at
first,

But continues to rise till though her feet
tread earth

Her head knocks very heaven. It was she
who now

Spread dire discord among them as she
went throughout

Both armies augmenting the groans of
men.

For now

The two forces met with a fearful din of
spears

And bossed shields clashing in a fierce
and furious melee

Of bronze-breasted fighters. And there
the screams of the dying

Were mingled with cries of triumph as
blood flowed over

The earth. As when two winter torrents
flow down

From great mountain springs to mingle
their turbulent floods

Where the two streams meet and thunder
on down a deep gorge,

And the shepherd far off in the mountains
hears the roar,
So now as the two armies clashed in the
fury of battle
A terrible roar of toil and shouting
arose.

Then Antilochus first took care of one
of the Trojans,
A valiant man fully armed mid the
foremost fighters,
Echepolus, son of Thalysius. Him he
caught
With his spear on the horn of his helmet
crested with horsehair
And drove the bronze point through the
bone of his forehead.
Darkness enveloped his eyes, and he fell

as a tower
Falls in the raging conflict. Then lord
Elephenor,
Chalcodon's son and chief of the
doughty Abantes,
Seized his feet as he fell and started to
drag him
From under the hurtling spears, eager to
strip off
His armor. But soon indeed his effort
ended.
For as he was dragging the body, a
Trojan chief,
High-hearted Agenor, saw him and
drove the bronze point
Of his spear in his enemy's side, which
as he stooped
Was uncovered by shield. His limbs

relaxed as spirit

Left him, and over his body Achaeans
and Trojans

Savagely battled each other. Like so
many wolves

They sprang, and man staggered man as
they fought for the corpse.

Then Telamonian Ajax killed the son
Of Anthemion, the manly youth
Simoeisius,^o born

By the banks of Simoeis on a day when
his mother was journeying

Down from Mount Ida, where she had
gone with her parents

To take a look at their flocks, which is
why they called him

Simoeisius. But for his upbringing he

never repaid

His dear parents, since now his life was
cut short by the spear

Of spirited Ajax. As the youth came on
in front

Of the others he got the bronze in his
chest beside

The right nipple. On through his shoulder
it went, and he fell

To earth in the dust like a smooth black
poplar whose branchy top

Falls in the low grassland of a mighty
marsh

To the gleaming ax of some chariot-
maker, who leaves it

To dry by the banks of a river that he
may bend him

A rim for a beautiful chariot. Even such

was the fall
Of Anthemion's son Simoeisius, brought
down by Zeus-born
Ajax, who now became the target of
Antiphus,
Son of Priam. He, his breastplate
flashing,
Hurled his sharp spear through the
crowd, and missing Ajax
Struck in the groin Odysseus' good
friend Leucus
As he was dragging the body away to
one side—
He lost his grip and fell face down on
the corpse.

The killing of Leucus greatly enraged
Odysseus.

Clad in flaming bronze, he plunged
through his own
Front ranks and coming up close to the
enemy line
Glared fiercely about him and hurled his
bright spear, and before him
The Trojans fell back. And not in vain
he threw,
For he hit King Priam's bastard son
Democoön,
Who had come from Abydos, leaving his
string of swift horses.
Enraged at the death of his comrade,
Odysseus sent
The keen bronze point of his spear in at
one temple
And out at the other, and darkness
enveloped his eyes

As he fell with a thud and his armor
clanged about him.

Then the foremost Trojan fighters and
glorious Hector

Gave ground, and the yelling Argives
dragged off the bodies

And charged much further on.

Now Apollo, indignant,
Looked down from Pergamus,^p
stronghold of Troy, and shouted

Thus to the Trojans: “Hold fast! you
horse-taming Trojans.

In lust for battle don't be outdone by the
Argives.

Their bodies aren't made of stone or
iron, nor can they

Resist the flesh-cleaving bronze. And

besides, Achilles
Is no longer fighting. The son of fair-
haired Thetis
Is back at the ships coddling his soul-
searing wrath!”

So spoke the dread god from the
fortified hill of Troy.
But Athena Tritogeneia, the glorious
daughter
Of Zeus, was at work among the
Achaeans, constantly
Urging them on and increasing their
courage wherever
She saw them yielding.

Then Amarynceus’ son,
The Epean Diores, was caught in the
toils of fate.

For the Thracian leader Peiros, Imbrasmus
son

From Aenus, struck him a blow with a
cruel and jagged

Stone on the right leg over the ankle,
tearing

The sinews and utterly crushing the
bones. And he fell

On his back in the dust, stretching out
both of his hands

To his dear comrades and gasping his
life away.

Then Peiros, who threw the stone, ran in
with his spear

And ripped him across the navel, and all
his guts

Gushed out on the ground as darkness
came over his eyes.

But as that ally of Troy sprang back
from the corpse,
Aetolian Thoas threw his spear and
caught him
In the chest just over the nipple, lodging
the bronze
In his lung. Then he ran up and pulled the
great spear
From his chest, and drawing his sword
slashed open his belly
In turn, leaving him lifeless. But Thoas
got
No bronze from the corpse at his feet,
for around him the comrades
Of Peiros, Thracian fighters who wear
their hair tufted
On top, stood firm with long spears in

their hands, and though
He was huge and mighty and fearful, they
made him reel
And fall back before them. Thus the two
captains lay stretched
In the dust together, Peiros, the leader of
Thracians,
And Diores of bronze-clad Epeans, and
about their bodies
Numerous others were slain.

It was hardly a battle
For any man to make light of, though he
entered it fresh
And hand in hand with Athena whirled
through it all
Unwounded by flying spear or thrust of
keen blade,

Protected by her from the hail of hurtling
bronze.

That day a tremendous mass of Achaeans
and Trojans

Alike were stretched side by side face
down in the dust.

BOOK V

The Valiant Deeds of Diomedes

Now Pallas Athena gave courage and
manly prowess
To Tydeus' son Diomedes, that he might
distinguish
Himself mid all the Argives and win
great glory.
She caused his helmet and shield to
blaze with tireless
Flame, like that bright star of late
summer that rises
From bathing in the stream of Oceanus

and outshines all
The others. Such was the fire she made
flame out
From this man's head and shoulders, and
she sent him into
The thickest part of the battle.¹

Among the Trojans
Lived one by the name of Dares, a
wealthy and worthy
Priest of Hephaestus, and he had two
warrior sons,
Phegeus and Idaeus, skillful in battle.
Now these
Drove out from the rest of the host to
meet Diomedes,
Who charged along on foot. As soon as
they

Were well within range of the oncoming
chief, Phegeus
Flung his long-shadowing spear, and the
point of it narrowly
Missed the left shoulder of Tydeus's
son, who came on
With the bronze as before. And not in
vain did his spear
Fly from his hand. For he landed it
square in the chest
Of Phegeus between the nipples and
knocked him from the chariot.
And Idaeus sprang back, leaving the
ornate car,
But did not dare bestride the corpse of
his brother.
In fact, he himself would not have
evaded black fate

If Hephaestus had not been his guard and
wrapped him in night
To save him, that his old priest their
father might not
Be utterly wretched with grief. Then the
stout-hearted son
Of Tydeus drove off their horses and
gave them to comrades
Of his to lead back to the hollow ships.

When the Trojans
Saw the two sons of Dares, one running
away,
The other dead by his car, their hearts
recoiled.
And bright-eyed Athena, taking the hand
of rash Ares,
Spoke to him thus: “Ares, Ares, ruiner

Of men, you blood-stained stormer of
walls, may we not
Leave the Achaeans and Trojans to fight
this out
For themselves? Father Zeus will grant
glory to whichever side
He wishes, but let us avoid his wrath by
removing
Ourselves right now.”
So saying, she led the fierce War-god
From battle and made him sit down on
the sandy bank
Of Scamander. Then the Trojans were
routed by the Danaan fighters,
And each of their captains killed his
man. First,
The king of men Agamemnon tumbled
great Odysseus,

Chief of the Halizones, out of his
chariot.

He had been first to wheel in retreat, but
just

As he turned, Agamemnon planted a
spear in his back

Between the shoulders and drove it out
through his chest.

And he fell to the ground with a thud and
a clashing of armor.

And Idomeneus slew the son of
Maeonian Borus,

The warrior Phaestus from fertile Tarne.
Idomeneus,

Famed as a spearman, thrust his long
lance clean through

His right shoulder just as he mounted his

car. Phaestus

Fell to the ground, as hateful darkness
seized him,

And the squires of Idomeneus stripped
the corpse of its armor.

Then Atreus' son Menelaus with his
sharp spear

Took care of Scamandrius, Strophius'
son, the skillful

Hunter whom Artemis herself had taught
to hit

All the wild creatures that feed in the
mountain forest.

But arrow-scattering Artemis was no
good at all

To her protégé now, nor was his
exceptional skill

At long-distance shooting. For Atreus'
son Menelaus
Struck him in the back as he fled, and
drove his spear in
Between the shoulders and out through
his chest. And

Scamandrius
Fell on his face, as on him his armor
rang.

And Meriones killed the son of Tecton
and grandson
Of Harmon, the builder Phereclus, who
could make all manner
Of intricate things with his hands. It was
he who had built
For Paris those shapely ships, the
beginning of ills,

That became a curse to all Trojans
including himself,
Who had no idea what the immortal gods
had decreed.

When Meriones, giving chase, caught up
with him,
He lunged with his spear, and the point
went in the right buttock,
Under the bone, and into the bladder
beneath.

Then Phereclus fell to his knees with a
scream, and death
Came over him there.

Then Meges slew Pedaeus,
Antenor's bastard son, whom, to please
Her husband, his godly wife Theano had
reared

Like one of her own. Phyleus' son
Meges, renowned
As a spearman, drew near and hurled his
sharp lance through the nape
Of this man's neck. The point cut off his
tongue
At the root and lodged between his teeth,
and Pedaeus
Fell in the dust and bit the cold bronze.

And Eurypylus,
Son of Euaemon, killed the splendid
Hypsenor,
Son of high-hearted Dolopion, who was
made priest
Of the river Scamander and honored like
a god by the people
Of Troy. As Hypsenor fled before him,

Eurypylus,
Glorious son of Euaemon, slashed with
his sword
And lopped his heavy arm off. Streaming
blood
It fell to the ground, and purple death
came down
On the eyes of Hypsenor as powerful
fate embraced him.

So they toiled in the huge confusion of
battle.

But as for Diomedes, you could not have
told which side
He was on, Achaean or Trojan. For
across the plain
He raged like a swollen winter torrent
that swiftly

Sweeps the embankments away, tight
dikes and the walls
Of fruitful vineyards, as the rain of Zeus
drives it on,
And many a man's fine work goes down
in destruction
Before it. So now the thick Trojan
battalions were routed
By Tydeus' son, nor could they for all
their great numbers
Stand up to him.

But the son of Lycaon, Prince
Pandarus,
No sooner caught sight of him raging
across the plain
With the Trojan battalions running in
rout than he bent

His curved bow, took careful aim, and
sent a sharp shaft
Through the right shoulder-guard of his
armor, spattering blood
On his breastplate. Then the glorious son
of Lycaon loudly,
Triumphantly shouted:

“About! you spirited Trojans,
You charioteers. The best Achaean
they’ve got
Is badly hit, nor will he last long with
that
Grim shaft in his shoulder, if God’s own
son Apollo
Truly blessed my setting forth from
Lycia!”

So Pandarus boasted, but strong

Diomedes was not
Undone by the flying arrow. Falling back
To his horses and car, he spoke to
Sthenelus thus:
“Quick! good son of Capaneus. Get
down from that car
And pull this keen shaft from my
shoulder.”

And Sthenelus leaped
To the ground beside him and pulled the
swift arrow point-first
Through his shoulder, and blood spurted
up through the weave of his
tunic.

Then battle-roaring Diomedes prayed:
“Hear me,
O unwearied child of Zeus who bears

the aegis.

If ever you cared for my father and stood
by his side

In the blaze of battle, care now, Athena,
no less

For me. Bring within range of my spear
the wretch

Who shot me before I saw him and now
loudly brags

That I haven't much longer to live in the
sun's bright light."

Hearing his earnest prayer, Pallas
Athena

Quickly renewed his vigor, and once
again

He felt light on his feet and strong. Then
standing beside him

She spoke these winged words: "You're
ready now,
Diomedes, and eager to battle the
Trojans, for I
Have filled your heart with the
untrembling might of your father,
The great shield-wielding warrior,
Tydeus the horseman.
And I have removed the mist with which
your eyes
Were darkened, that now with ease you
may distinguish
The god from the man. Do not, then, fight
with any
Immortal power that may come here to
try you,
Save only Zeus's daughter, fair
Aphrodite.

If she should enter the battle, give her a thrust

With your keen-cutting bronze!”

So saying, blue-eyed Athena
Went her way, and Tydeus’ son returned
To the fight mid the foremost champions.
And though before
His heart had been eager for battle with
Trojans, now
He was seized with fury three times as
great, like that
Which comes on a lion some shepherd
has wounded but failed
To kill while guarding his fleecy sheep
on an outlying
Farm: he hurts the beast just enough to
enrage him

As he leaps over the wall of the yard,
then hides
Amid the buildings instead of pursuing
him further,
While the frantic sheep are driven pell-
mell about
And huddled together in clumps and the
furious lion
Takes the high fence at a bound and is
back in the fields.
Even such was the rage of strong
Diomedes as now
He clashed with the Trojans.

He first took on Astynous
And the people's shepherd Hypeiron.
Hurling his spear
He struck the one just over the nipple.

Then bringing
His huge sword down on the collarbone
of the other
He sheared his shoulder clean off from
the neck and back.
Their bodies he left where they fell and
rushed in pursuit
Of Abas and Polyidus, sons of
Eurydamas,
An aged reader of dreams. But those two
never
Again brought dreams for their old sire
to interpret,
For strong Diomedes slew them. Then he
charged
The cherished sons of Phaenops,
Xanthus and Thoön.
Their father was old and feeble, and he

begot

No other son to leave his property to.

There Diomedes cut both of them down,
taking

Their sweet lives away and leaving their
father with nothing

But grief and pain. For never again did
he welcome them

Home from battle, and their kinsmen
divided his wealth.

Next he encountered two sons of
Dardanian Priam,

Echemmon and Chromius, riding in a
chariot together.

As a lion springs in among cattle and
breaks the neck

Of an ox or heifer grazing in a glade of

the forest,
So Tydeus' son knocked both of these
from their chariot,
Which they were loath to leave, and
stripping off
Their armor he gave the horses to
comrades of his
To drive to the ships.

But Aeneas saw him ruining
The ranks and made his way through the
fight mid a tumult
Of hurtling spears to find the princely
Pandarus
If he could. When he found that
matchless and mighty
Son of Lycaon, he went up to him and
said:

“Pandarus, where now are your bow and
winged arrows
For which you’re so famous? We have
no archer to equal you
Here, nor is there any in Lycia who
claims
To be better. So come, lift up your hands
and pray
To Zeus, then take a shaft and let it fly
At yonder man, whoever he is, that has
brought
Not a few of our best men down and
done much harm
To the Trojans. I fear he may be some
wrathful god,
Angry with Trojans because of neglected
offerings.
The wrath of a god is hard for mortals to

bear.”

Then the glorious son of Lycaon
answered him thus:

“Aeneas, wise counselor of bronze-clad
Trojans, to me

He looks very like Diomedes, for I know
his shield

And crested helmet, and those are his
horses too.

Still, I don't really know: he may be a
god!

And even if he's the man I think he is,
The fiery son of Tydeus, he doesn't rage
Through the ranks that way without the
help of a god.

Surely some cloud-wrapped immortal
stood by him today

And deflected the flying shaft with
which I hit him.

For hit him I did, upon the right
shoulder, with a shaft

That went right through the plate of his
armor. I thought

At the time I had sent him to Hades for
sure, but I

Was wrong—truly he must be some
wrathful god!

And here I am with neither horses nor
car,

Though at home in the care of my father
Lycaon are eleven

Lovely new chariots covered with
robes, and standing

By each, a pair of fine horses munch
wheat and white barley.

Back in the palace, before I left for the war,

The aged spearman, my father Lycaon, told me

Again and again to take a car and horses,
That I might mount and so lead the Trojan fighters

In mighty battles. But I like a fool wouldn't listen.

I wanted to spare the horses, afraid that here

In a crowd so large, there wouldn't be fodder enough,

And they had always had more than enough to eat.

So I came on foot to Ilium, relying on my bow,

Which hasn't, however, been very much
help. For today
I have shot at two Kings, Diomedes and
Menelaus, and on both
I scored hits and drew blood. But all I
really accomplished
Was to make them fight more fiercely
than ever. So that
Was a sad day for me when I took my
bent bow from its peg
And set out with my men for beautiful
Ilium, bringing
Much joy to the brilliant Hector. But if I
ever
Get back and lay eyes once again on my
own native land,
My dear wife, and lofty huge palace,
then any man

Who wishes may cut my head clean off if
I,
With my own hands, don't break this
bow in two
And throw it all in the blazing fire. For it
To me is worthless as wind!"

Then Aeneas, leader
Of Trojans, answered him thus: "Don't
talk that way.
But surely it's true that things won't
really improve
Till we take horses and car and confront
the man
With other weapons. So come, get up in
my chariot,
That you may see what the horses of
Tros are like.^{[2](#)}

They're equally fast pursuing or fleeing,
and should Zeus

Again grant victory to Tydeus' son
Diomedes

They'll get the two of us safely back to
the city.

Come then, you take the lash and glossy
reins

And I'll be the one to dismount and do
the fighting,

Or you can do that and I will handle the
horses."

And the glorious son of Lycaon
replied: "You manage

The reins yourself, Aeneas, and drive
your own horses.

In case we do have to flee Diomedes

they'll surely
Run better before the curved car with
someone they know
At the reins. I wouldn't want them to
panic and balk
And refuse to take us out of the battle for
lack of
Your voice to urge them. For then the
son of spirited
Tydeus would charge and kill us both
and drive off
Your solid-hoofed horses. No, you drive
your own chariot
And pair, and I'll take him on with a
sharp-pointed spear."

So saying, they mounted the ornate car
and fiercely

Drove the swift horses against
Diomedes. And Sthenelus,
Son of Capaneus, saw them and quickly
spoke

To the son of Tydeus these words
winged with warning:

“Diomedes, dear friend, here come two
mighty men

Of measureless strength bearing down at
a gallop upon us

And eager to fight you! One is the
skillful bowman

Pandarus, who says he's the son of
Lycaon, and with him

Rides Aeneas, who claims Anchises for
father

And Aphrodite for mother. But come, let
us

Fall back in the chariot. I beg you to stop
this raging
Mid front-line fighters before you too
fall a victim.”

Then strong Diomedes, darkly
scowling, replied:

“Don’t talk to me of retreating, since you
haven’t, I think,

A chance to persuade me. It’s not in my
blood to skulk

And run from a fight—my spirit remains
unshaken!

I haven’t the slightest desire to get in that
chariot,

But just as I am, on foot, I’ll go to meet
them:

Pallas Athena will not allow me to

quail!

And as for those two, one of them may
get away,

But their swift horses will never take
both of them back!

And another thing I'll say for you to
remember.

If fertile-minded Athena grants me the
glory

Of slaying them both, hold our swift
horses here,

Drawing the reins back taut and making
them fast

To the chariot's handrail. Then put all
you've got in a dash

For Aeneas's horses and drive them
away from the Trojans

And into the host of well-greaved

Achaeans. For they
Are descended from those very horses
that far-seeing Zeus
Gave Tros by way of repayment for
carrying off
His dear son Ganymede, since of all
horses on whom
The dawn broke and the bright sun
shone, they were the best.
Later when King Laomedon owned the
breed,
His royal kinsman Anchises stole a
strain
By putting his mares to them without
permission.
And by those mares six colts were
foaled in his stables,

Four of which he kept himself and
reared

At the manger, but the other two he gave
Aeneas,

The same two masters of rout he's
driving now!

Could we but capture those two, great
indeed

Would be our glory.”

While they were talking thus,
Their attackers came up at a gallop, and
Pandarus

Loudly called out: “You fiery, stout-
hearted son

Of lordly Tydeus, I see you survived that
bitter

Swift arrow of mine. Well now I intend

to try

My luck with a spear!”

So saying, he drew back and hurled
His long-shadowing lance and struck
Diomedes’ shield.

All the way through it the bronze point
tore, but stopped

At his breastplate. Then Pandarus, son of
Lycaon, shouted

In triumph: “Right through the belly! Nor
can you last long

After that—but to me you have given
tremendous glory!”

And strong Diomedes, fearless as
ever, replied:

“No hit at all! You missed me
completely. But the two

Of you will not, I think, get out of this
fight
Till one or the other has fallen and
glutted with blood
The battling Ares, him of the tough hide
shield!”

With this he let fly, and Athena guided
his spear.
The stubborn bronze went in between the
man's nose
And eye, then tore through his teeth, cut
off his tongue
At the root, and came out at the base of
his chin. He crashed
From the car, as his armor all bright and
flashing rang
About him and the nimble horses shied.

And there

His strength was undone, and the spirit
of Pandarus left him.

But Aeneas leaped down with shield
and long spear, afraid

The Achaeans might drag off the body,
which now he bestrode

With the confident spirit and strength of
a lion. Yelling

His terrible war-cry, he gripped his
spear and round shield,

Ready to kill whoever might come
against him.

But Diomedes picked up a huge stone,
one

That no two men of today could even lift

But that he picked up with one hand and

easily threw.

The rugged boulder struck the hip of
Aeneas

Where the thigh-bone turns in its socket,
which men call the cup,

Ripping the skin and tendons away and
crushing

The cup completely. The hero then
dropped to one knee,

Supporting himself with one great hand
on the ground

Till darkness enveloped his eyes.

And now Aeneas,
King of men, would surely have died, if
the daughter
Of Zeus had not been sharply watching,
Aphrodite

His mother, who lay with his father
Anchises while he
Was out with the cattle. She threw her
white arms about
Her dear son and drew over him for
protection a fold
Of her radiant gown, lest one of the
swiftly-drawn Danaans
Rob him of life by hurling a spear
through his chest.

Now while she was bearing her
darling son from the battle,
Sthenelus did not forget the careful
instructions
That Diomedes of the great war-cry had
given
To him. He held their solid-hoofed

horses apart

From the crashing waves of conflict,
drawing the reins back

Taut and making them fast to the
chariot's handrail.

Then he dashed for Aeneas's mane-
tossing horses

And drove them away from the Trojans
and into the host

Of well-greaved Achaeans, where he
gave them to his dear friend

Deïpylus, the man he respected and
cared for most

Among men his age, since the two of
them thought alike.

Bidding him drive the horses to the
hollow ships,

He leaped in his chariot, seized the

glossy reins,
And galloped their hard-hoofed horses
in search of Diomedes.

He, meanwhile, had gone with the
ruthless bronze
In hot pursuit of Cyprian Aphrodite,
Knowing that she was a cowardly
goddess and not
One of those like Athena, or Enyo,
sacker of cities,
Who turn the tide of mortal conflict.
Chasing her
Through the huge crowd, the son of
spirited Tydeus
Caught up with her and lunged with his
spear, slightly
Wounding her tender hand. The keen

bronze pierced

Her ambrosial gown, woven for her by
the Graces

Themselves, and went into her flesh at
the lower part

Of her palm. And out flowed the
goddess's immortal blood,

The ichor that flows in such divine
beings as she,

For they eat no bread and drink no
flaming wine:

Hence they are bloodless and called
immortals. She screamed

And dropped her son, whom Phoebus
Apollo took

In his arms and wrapped in a cloud of
darkness, lest one

Of the swiftly-drawn Danaans rob him

of life by hurling
A spear through his chest. Then battle-
roaring Diomedes
Shouted in triumph:

“Keep your distance, O daughter
Of Zeus, from war and the blaze of
battle! Aren’t you
Content with seducing feeble women? If
you
Insist on frequenting the fight, believe
me you’ll learn
To shudder at the very name of war, no
matter
How far from battle you may be when
you hear it!”

At this, Aphrodite withdrew, deeply
distraught

And frantic with pain, her fair skin
stained with blood.

But wind-footed Iris guided her out of
the tumult

To where, on the left of the fighting, the
impetuous Ares

Sat, his sharp spear propped on a cloud
and his pair

Of swift horses at hand. And she fell on
her knees and begged

For her dear brother's horses with
halters of gold:

“Help me,

Sweet brother, and give me your horses,
that I may get home

To those on Olympus, for I am in terrible
pain

Where the son of Tydeus struck me—a
mortal man,
Who now would fight Father Zeus
himself! ”

She pleaded,
And Ares gave her the horses with
halters of gold.
She got in the chariot, her heart still
greatly distressed,
And Iris, mounting beside her, caught up
the reins
And lashed the horses, who not
unwilling took off
At a gallop. Quickly they came to steep
Olympus,
Home of the gods, and there wind-footed
swift Iris

Stopped and unharnessed the horses,
then threw down before them
Ambrosial fodder. But fair Aphrodite
sank down

At the knees of her mother Dione, who
put her arms
Around her daughter and tenderly
stroked her, saying:

“Who of the heavenly gods, dear child,
has badly
Mistreated you now, as though you had
done something wrong
Where everybody could see?”

To which Aphrodite,
Adorer of smiles, replied: “High-
hearted Diomedes,
The son of Tydeus—he struck me! and

all because

I was bearing from battle my own dear
son Aeneas,

By far the most precious of mortals to
me. For that

Dreadful war is no longer between just
Achaeans and Trojans.

O no, now the Danaans fight with
immortals too!”

And the gracious goddess Dione
answered her thus:

“Bear up, my child, and endure your
suffering bravely.

Many of us with homes on Olympus have
also

Suffered from men in the course of our
mutual efforts

To hurt one another. So Ares suffered
greatly
When those young giants, Otus and
strong Ephialtes,⁹
The sons of Aloeus, bound him in
painful, unbreakable
Chains and kept him tied up for thirteen
months
In a great bronze jar. And bloodthirsty
Ares would surely
Have died there if the lovely Eëriboea,
stepmother
To the sons of Aloeus, had not brought
word to Hermes,
Who managed by stealth to free the War-
god, though he
By this time was all but undone by his

torturing chains.

And Hera certainly suffered when the
brutal Heracles,

Whom some thought the son of
Amphitryon, pierced her right breast
With a three-barbed arrow. For a while
her pain was unquenchable!

And even huge Hades has suffered no
less than the others,

He too from a bitter arrow, when the
same irreverent

Heracles—who was really the son of
aegis-great Zeus—

Shot him there mid the dead at his own
grim gate

And left him in anguish. Full of misery
and darting

Pains, he journeyed up here to lofty

Olympus,
For the shaft had gone deep in his solid
shoulder, and his might
Was ebbing away. But Paeëon, our
skillful physician,
Applied some pain-killing ointments and
healed his wound,
For Hades, of course, has nothing mortal
about him—
A rash and violent man that Heracles,
one
Who cared so little what evil he wrought
that he
Didn't scruple to vex the Olympian gods
with his arrows!
And now, my child, the bright-eyed
goddess Athena

Has enabled this man to injure you—
fool

That the son of Tydeus most certainly is,
since he

Doesn't know in his heart that one who
contends with immortals

Lives a very short life, nor does he
return from the sad

Conflagration of war to gather his little
children

About his knees and hear them call him
father.

So Tydeus' son had better be careful, no
matter

How mighty he is, or some immortal
more able

Than you may enter the fight against him!
Let him

Beware, if he doesn't want his own
gallant wife,
Adrastus' thoughtful daughter Aegialeia,
To waken her household with wails for
her dear but missing
Husband, the best of Achaeans, horse-
taming Diomedes!"³

So saying, she wiped the ichor from
the goddess's hand
With both of hers. The wound was
healed, and the pains
So burdensome left her. Now Athena
and Hera, who sat
Looking on, took the occasion to irritate
Zeus,
The son of Cronos, and the bright-eyed
goddess Athena

Spoke up among them with these
sarcastic words:

“Father Zeus, I hope what I say won’t
make you too angry,
But surely your Cyprian daughter has
been persuading
Some other Achaean woman to run off
with one
Of her darling Trojans. I guess it was
while caressing
That very same fair-gowned female that
she scratched her dainty
Hand—no doubt on the lady’s golden
brooch-pin.”

These words got a smile from the
Father of gods and men,
And calling golden Aphrodite he spoke

to her thus:

“Warfare, my child, is not your concern.

So mind

Your own affairs and the sweet love-
making of marriage,

And leave all these things to Athena and
rushing Ares.”

Such was their talk, but meanwhile
Diomedes, screaming

His war-cry, charged on the stricken
Aeneas, knowing

Quite well that Apollo himself was
holding his arms

Above him. Still, he had no awe, not
even

Of that great god, but was just as eager
as ever

To kill Aeneas and strip off his splendid armor.

Thrice he charged him, raging to kill,
and thrice

Apollo beat back his bright shield. But
when like a demon

He charged a fourth time, then with a
terrible cry

Far-working Apollo spoke to him thus:

“Think!

O son of Tydeus, think—and shrink!
Don’t try

To equal the gods in spirit and valor, for
the race

Of immortal gods is by no means the
same as that

Of earth-treading men!”

At this, Diomedes fell back
A little, avoiding the wrath of far-darting
Apollo,
Who then took Aeneas up out of the
crowd and into
His temple on sacred Pergamus,
stronghold of Troy.
There, in that great holy of holies, Leto
And the archer Artemis healed his
wound and restored
His strength completely. Meanwhile,
Apollo of the silver
Bow fashioned a phantom in Aeneas's
likeness,
Armor and all, and over this ghostly
deception
The Trojans and valiant Achaeans struck

out at the breasts
Of each other, belaboring the circular
bull's-hide bucklers
And the lighter fluttering shields. Then
Phoebus Apollo
Spoke thus to the violent War-god:

“Ares, Ares,
Ruiner of men, you blood-stained
stormer of walls,
Won't you go into the battle and
withdraw this man
Diomedes, who now would fight Father
Zeus himself?
He's already wounded Cyprian
Aphrodite
On the lower part of her palm and
charged down on me

Like a demon!”

So saying, Apollo sat down on the top
Of Troy's fortified hill, and the
murderous Ares
Entered the ranks of the Trojans and
urged them on
In the form of swift Acamas, leader of
Thracians, calling out
Thus to the god-fed sons of Priam: “O
sons
Of a god-gifted King, how long will you
let the Achaeans
Go on slaying your men, till they actually
storm
The sturdy gates of your city? There lies
a man
Whom we honored like godly Hector

himself—Aeneas,
The son of great-hearted Anchises. But
come, let us save
Our noble comrade from out the roaring
tumult!”

At this they all became bolder, and
Sarpedon harshly
Rebuked godly Hector, saying: “Hector,
where now
Is the courage that used to be yours? And
you said you could hold
This city alone, with no other help than
that
Of your brothers and brothers-in-law,
that you didn’t need
Any troops or allies. Well where are
your brothers now?

Cringing and cowering like dogs round a
lion! And we
Are the ones who do the fighting, we, the
allies
Among you. Even such am I, from far-off
Lycia
By the eddying waters of Xanthus, where
I left my dear wife
And baby boy, and the countless
possessions that many
A covetous fellow would like to have
for his own.
Still I encourage the Lycians, and always
I'm willing
To take on my man, though here there is
nothing of mine
That Achaeans might drive or carry
away. But you

Just stand around, not even urging your
men

To buckle down and defend their own
wives. Look out,

My friend, or you and yours will soon be
caught

Like so many fish in an all-ensnaring net
And become the prey and booty of those
who hate you,

Who very soon now will sack your
teeming city!

All this should be your concern both
night and day,

And you above all should plead with the
leaders of these

Your world-famous allies to hold their
ground without flinching.

Then no one would ever harshly rebuke
you this way.”

Sarpedon's taunt bit deep in the heart
of Hector.

At once he leaped fully armed from his
car to the ground,

And brandishing two sharp spears he
ranged through the ranks

Arousing new spirit in the routed men.

They spun

And faced the Achaeans, a solid wall of
steadfast

Argive resistance. And even as the
winnowing wind

Whitens with chaff all those on the
strong threshing-floors

When golden-haired Demeter separates

grain from chaff

And the chaff piles up in heaps of white,
so now

The Achaeans grew white in the
swirling dust that went up

From the beating feet of the horses and
men, clouding

The all-bronze sky as they clashed in
battle again

And the drivers wheeled in their cars.

Then the Trojan warriors
Struck out straight ahead with all of their
might, and Ares,

Everywhere raging, enveloped the battle
in darkness

To help the Trojans. Thus he fulfilled the
command

Of Apollo, Phoebus of the golden
sword, who seeing
Athena leave the battle bade him repair
The Trojan morale, for it was she who
had made
The Achaeans so mighty And Apollo
himself sent down
From his opulent temple the people's
shepherd Aeneas,
Filling his heart with strength. So
Aeneas rejoined
His comrades, and they rejoiced to see
him returning
Alive and well and as splendidly valiant
as ever,
Though then they were far too busy to
ask any questions,
One and all embroiled in the battle

stirred up

By him of the silver bow with the eager
help

Of man-maiming Ares and raging,
implacable Hatred.

And the two Ajaxes, Odysseus, and
strong Diomedes

Sparked the fight of the Danaans, though
they of themselves

Refused to give way before the Trojans'
violent

Assaults. They held their own like the
motionless clouds

That on a still day Zeus stands on the
mountain peaks

When the North Wind sleeps along with
all other hard blasts

That scatter the shadowy clouds with
their shrill blowing.

So the Danaan troops steadfastly
resisted the Trojans

With no retreating. And King
Agamemnon strode up

And down in the melee bawling these
words of command:

“Be men, my friends, and stout of
heart! Fear nothing

In this great clash but dishonor before
each other.

Of men who shun dishonor, more are
saved

Than slain, but flight is a poor defense
and wins

No glory of any kind!”

He spoke, and mightily
Hurling his spear he struck a front-line
fighter,
A comrade of noble Aeneas, Pergasus'
son
Deïcoön, whom the Trojans regarded as
highly as the royal
Sons of Priam, since he was always
quick
To fight his man in the foremost rank of
battle.
The spear of King Agamemnon struck
his shield,
And the keen bronze cut its way through,
went on through his belt
And deep in his belly Deïcoön thudded
to earth,

And on him his armor rang.

Then Aeneas slew
Two Danaan champions, Crethon and
Orsilochus, the sons
Of Diocles, a man of very great
substance who lived in
Well-fortified Pherae and claimed
descent from the river
Alpheius, whose wide stream rolls
through the Pylian country.
The first Orsilochus, King over
thousands, was sired
By this River, and he begot
magnanimous Diocles,
Whose sons were the twins Crethon and
the second Orsilochus,
Trained and versatile warriors. In the

prime of young manhood
Both of them went with the black Argive
ships to Ilium,
Known for its horses, seeking to win
satisfaction
For Atreus' sons Menelaus and King
Agamemnon,
But now enshrouding death put an end to
their lives.
Like them two lions grow up on the
peaks of a mountain,
Reared by their dam in the bush of a
tangled forest,
Cubs that mature to be killers of cattle
and wooly
Plump sheep, farm-wrecking marauders
till they themselves
Fall victims to men's piercing bronze.

Even so these two
Lost their lives at the hands of Aeneas
and crashed to the ground
Like lofty pines.

Warlike King Menelaus
Pitied their fall, and through the front-
line fighters
He rushed, armored in gleaming bronze
and shaking
His lance. For Ares himself had aroused
his spirit,
That he too might fall at the hands of
Aeneas. But Antilochus,
Son of great-hearted Nestor, saw him,
and deeply
Afraid that the people's shepherd might
come to grief

And so destroy all they had toiled for, he
rushed
Through the front-line fighters to join
him. When Antilochus
reached

Menelaus, he and Aeneas were squaring
off
With their whetted spears, spoiling to
battle each other.

But Aeneas, though fast on his feet, when
staunchly confronted
By two such attackers, did not attempt to
hold out.

So together they dragged off their dead,
rich Diocles' sons,
And laid the unfortunate pair in the arms
of Achaeans.

Then turning back, they fought once again at the front.

Together they took on Pylaemenes,
peer of Ares
And chief of the bold Paphlagonian
troops. Menelaus,
Renowned as a spearman, caught the
man standing still
And in at the collarbone hurled his
lance, while Antilochus
Threw at his driver and squire, the
valiant Mydon,
Atymnius' son, and struck him hard with
a stone
On the point of his elbow just as he
turned the solid-hoofed
Horses. The ivory-decked reins fell in

the dust,
And Antilochus sprang and drove his
sword through the temple
Of Mydon, who gasping lurched from the
well-made car
And pitched headfirst to the ground in a
place of deep sand.
He went in past head and shoulders and
stuck where he was
Till his horses trampled him down and
into the dust.
Then Antilochus whipped them away, an
Achaean prize.

Across the ranks this action caught
Hector's attention,
And fiercely he charged down upon them
with a terrible scream

And whole battalions of Trojans behind
him, all
Led on by Ares and powerful Enyo,
mistress
Of misery and the shameless turmoil of
battle. Wielding
A monstrous spear, grim Ares charged
with Hector,
Now pulling ahead, now dropping
behind.

When he saw
The ferocious War-god, Diomedes'
blood ran cold,
And even that great battle-roarer felt
suddenly helpless,
As that man feels who crossing wide
country stops

In dismay at a river rushing seaward,
takes

One look at the seething white water,
and quickly steps back

Quite hopeless. So now Diomedes gave
ground, shouting thus

To the men around him:

“Look there! my friends. It’s very
Clear why we’ve always marveled at
the great Hector’s valor

And skill with a spear, for always
beside him a god goes,

Warding off death, as Ares yonder runs
By his side in the form of a mortal man.

But all of

You now, fall back! keeping your faces
turned

Toward the Trojans. Don't be so mad in
your rage as to fight
Against gods!"

But the Trojans by now were upon
them, and Hector
Cut down a couple of trained and
aggressive fighters,
Menesthes and Anchialus, both in one
car. But the huge
Telamonian Ajax pitied their fall, and
coming up
Close to their bodies he hurled his spear
into Amphius,
Selagus' son, a wealthy chief from
Paesus,
A man of many rich harvests. But fate
had made him

An ally of Priam and the sons of Priam.
And now
Telamonian Ajax hurled his long-
shadowing lance
Through the belt of this leader and
lodged it deep in his belly.
He fell with a thud, and the fiery Ajax
rushed in
To strip off the armor, his great shield
catching many
Of the gleaming sharp spears that the
Trojans rained upon him.
Bracing one foot on the body, he pulled
out his spear,
But the Trojan bronze was flying so
thick that he
Was unable to strip the fine armor off the
man's shoulders,

And he feared the stubborn defense of
the spirited warriors,
Who many and brave closed in with
their lances. Though Ajax
Was tall and burly and lordly, they made
him reel back
And retreat.

Thus they labored in the terrible
struggle,
And now irresistible fate sent Heracles'
son
Tlepolemus, valiant and huge, against
Sarpedon,
Son of Zeus. And when they had come
within range
Of each other—the son and grandson of
sky-clouding Zeus—

Tlepolemus shouted:

“Sarpedon, counselor of Lycians,
What is it that drives so unwarlike a man
as yourself
To skulk about in a battle? They’re liars
indeed
Who say you’re the son of aegis-great
Zeus, since you
Are no man at all compared with his
genuine sons
Of the good old days! You take, for
instance, bold Heracles,
My own staunch lion-hearted father. He
came here to Troy
One time for the mares of Laomedon,
with only six ships
And a force much smaller than ours to

say the least.

Even so, he leveled the city of Troy and
plundered

Her streets.⁴ But you have the heart of a
coward, and daily

Your people diminish. And now, believe
me, your coming

From Lycia will never be any defense
for the Trojans,

No matter how mighty you are, for I
myself

Will conquer you once and for all and
send you down

Through the gates of Hades!”

And Sarpedon, leader of Lycians,
Answered him thus: “Tlepolemus, truly
your father

Did sack this holy city, but only because
Of the folly of haughty Laomedon, who
insulted Heracles
In return for well-doing and refused to
give him the mares
For which he had journeyed so far. But
you, I think,
Shall meet your death and dark fate right
here at my hands.
Sprawling beneath my spear, you shall
give glory
To me, and your miserable soul to
horse-famous Hades!”

Sarpedon had no sooner spoken than
Tlepolemus drew back
His spear, and both the long lances shot
at one time

From their hands. Sarpedon's caught him
full in the neck

And the hard point passed clean through,
as the blackness of night

Came down, eclipsing his eyes. And the
lance of Tlepolemus

Pierced the left thigh of Sarpedon, and
the point tore madly

Through, grazing the bone. But still his
Father

Kept death at a distance.

Then the noble comrades of godlike
Sarpedon bore him away from the
fighting, heavily

Trailing the long ashen spear from his
thigh, for such

Was their haste and toil as they labored

in battle to help him
That no man thought to draw out the
lance and get him
Up on his feet.

On their side the well-greaved
Achaeans
Carried Tlepolemus out of the fighting,
and the spirit
Of brilliant, enduring Odysseus was
filled with rage
At the sight. In heart and soul he
pondered whether he
Should pursue Sarpedon, son of loud-
thundering Zeus,
Or go on killing his Lycian subjects. But
since
It was not the lot of gallant Odysseus to

kill

With keen bronze the god-sprung King,
Athena turned

His attention to Lycians more lowly.
And there his bronze

Took fatal hold of Coeranus, Alastor,
and Chromius,

Alcandrus and Halius, Noëmon and
Prytanis. Nor would

The worthy Odysseus have ceased very
soon his killing

Of Lycians if great bright-helmeted
Hector had not

Been quick to notice the slaughter. Fully
armed

In flaming bronze, he rushed through the
foremost ranks,

His strong hands loaded with panic for

Danaan troops.

Sarpedon, son of Zeus, was more than
glad

At his coming, and pitifully spoke to him
thus:

“O Hector,
Don’t allow me to lie here and become a
prey
Of the Danaans. Do what you can to
keep them off
Since it isn’t likely I’ll ever return to
delight
My dear wife and baby boy in my own
native land,
At least let me die in your city instead of
out here
On the plain!”

Bright-helmeted Hector made no reply
But flashed on by him, determined to
thrust back the Argives
And kill as many as possible. But the
loyal comrades
Of godlike Sarpedon laid him beneath a
beautiful
Oak tree, sacred to Zeus who bears the
aegis,
And powerful Pelagon, a good friend of
his, pushed
The ashen spear from his thigh. Then all
grew misty
And consciousness left him. But soon he
revived, as the North Wind
Breathed upon him and brought to life
again

The spirit he had so painfully gasped
away

Now before the onset of Ares and
bronze-clad Hector

The Argives neither turned and made a
break for the ships

Nor could they hold out in the fight, but
kept backing back,

Once they had heard that Ares was
helping the Trojans.

Then who was the first and who was the
last to be slain

And stripped by Priam's son Hector and
brazen Ares?

Prince Teuthras was first, and then
horse-lashing Orestes,

The Aetolian spearman Trechus,

Oenomaus, and Helenus,
Son of Oenops, and rich bright-belted
Oresbius,
Who back at his home in Hyle by Lake
Cephisus
Had carefully watched his wealth, while
close around him
Lived other Boeotians on land
exceedingly rich.

When the white-armed goddess Hera
noticed this slaughter
Of Argives in the furious struggle, at
once she spoke
To Athena with these winged words: “O
invincible child
Of Zeus who bears the aegis, ⁵ surely our
promise

To King Menelaus, that Troy's thick
walls should fall
To him before he went home, will
amount to nothing
If we let murderous Ares go on raging
This way But come, let the two of us
also make up
Our minds to show our spirit and valor!"

She spoke,
And the blue-eyed goddess Athena was
equally willing.
So honored Hera, daughter of mighty
Cronos,
Began to harness the horses with bridles
of gold.
And Hebe, without hesitation, knocked
the wheels

Of eight bronze spokes about the iron
axle, projecting
On either side of the car. These wheels
are of gold
Everlasting, with bronze outer rims, a
wonder to see,
Their silver hubs on either side
revolving.
The body is plaited with straps of gold
and silver,
And running around above it is a double
railing.
Now on the end of the chariot's silver
shaft
Queen Hera bound the beautiful yoke of
gold
And to it attached the golden breast-
bands. Then eager

For war and the cries of battle, she led
the fleet horses
Beneath the fair yoke.

And Athena, daughter of aegis-great
Zeus, on the floor of her Father's palace,
shed
The soft robe that she herself had made
and embroidered,
Put on instead the tunic of stormy Zeus,
And armed herself for tearful war.
About
Her shoulders she slung the terrible
tasseled aegis
Encircled with Fear, inwrought with
Hatred and Force
And the chilling War-charge, and
crowned with the head of that

horrible

Monster the Gorgon, most dread and
awful emblem

Of aegis-great Zeus. And about her
temples she put

Her golden helmet, four-horned and
double-crested,

And richly engraved with figures of
fighting men

From a hundred cities. Then she, the
child of an almighty

Father, mounted the flaming car,
gripping

The heavy huge spear with which she
conquers whole armies

That have enraged her.

Hera gave the horses a flick

With the lash, and the gates of heaven
groaned on their hinges,
The self-opening gates which are kept by
the Seasons, who have
In their keeping Olympus and all the
wide sky, and who open
Or close the thick clouds as they see fit.
On
Through the gates they drove their
impatient horses, and found
Great Zeus sitting aloof from the other
gods
On the highest peak of many-ridged
Mount Olympus.
Then the white-armed goddess Hera
pulled up the horses
And questioned Cronos' son thus, the
lord most exalted:

“O Father Zeus, aren’t you indignant at
Ares

For this wanton violence of his, killing
so many

Splendid Achaeans for no good reason
at all?

I grieve for them greatly, but Cyprian
Aphrodite

And silver-bowed Phoebus Apollo just
loll around

Amusing themselves, having set this
maniac on,

This raging monster completely
oblivious of rules!

But Father Zeus, will you be angry at me
If I beat all the fight out of Ares and
chase him from battle?”

And Zeus of the gathering storm made
this reply:

“No, be off But send spoil-driving
Athena

Against him. She’s had the most practice
at making him twinge!”

He spoke, and the white-armed
goddess Hera was glad

To obey She lashed the horses, and they
not at all

Unwilling, flew on between earth and
the starry sky

As far as a man can see who sits on a
crag

And looks out over the wine-blue water
and into

The hazy distance, so far at every bound

Gallop the gods' high-whinnying horses.
But when
They reached the rivers of Troy, where
the Simoeis joins
The Scamander, the white-armed
goddess Hera pulled up
And unharnessed the horses and hid them
both in thick mist,
While Simoeis caused to grow up
ambrosia for them
To graze on. Then the goddesses made
for the battle, quick stepping
Like two running doves, so eager were
they to aid
The fighting men of Argos.

When they reached the spot
Where most of the leaders were milling

around horse-breaking
Strong Diomedes, pacing about like so
many
Ravenous lions or wild inexhaustible
boars,
The white-armed goddess Hera shouted
thus,
Assuming the form of stout-hearted
Stentor, whose great
Brazen voice has all the volume of fifty
men shouting:

“For shame, you miserable Argives,
men only outwardly
Brave! While valiant Achilles took part
in the fighting,
The men of Troy would not so much as
come out

The Dardanian Gates, so deathly afraid
were they
Of his heavy spear, but now far out from
the city
They fight well-nigh at the hollow
ships!”

Her words
Encouraged them all. And the goddess
Athena, her blue eyes
Blazing, sprang to the side of King
Diomedes.
She found him beside his horses and car,
cooling
The shoulder wound he had got from
Pandarus’ arrow,
For beneath the wide strap of his
circular shield, the sweat

Was making it sting, and his throbbing
arm was all

But worn out. So now he was lifting the
baldric and wiping

Away the dark and clotted blood. Then
laying

A hand on the yoke of his horses, the
goddess spoke thus:

“Not much like Tydeus is the son he
begot! For Tydeus

Was little in build, but very large in
battle.

Why even when I would not let him fight
and show off

His prowess—that time he went on a
mission to Thebes,

Alone mid many Cadmeans, and I

explicitly

Told him to peacefully feast in their
halls—even then

His old unquenchable spirit inspired him
to challenge

And easily beat in every event the young
athletes

Of Thebes, with me ever present and
helping of course.

And surely no less I stand by you and
protect you,

And urge you to battle the Trojans with
all the spirit

You have. But now you're either
exhausted from too many

Charges, or heartless terror has hold of
you.

In that case, you are no son of Tydeus,

the flame-hearted
Son of Oeneus!”

Then strong Diomedes replied:
“I know you, goddess, the daughter of
aegis-great Zeus.
Hence I’ll speak to you gladly and cover
up nothing.
No heartless terror has hold of me, nor
shrinking
Of any kind. I’m merely mindful of
orders
From you, not to contend with any
immortal
Save only Zeus’s daughter Aphrodite.
You said
If she should enter the battle to give her
a thrust

With my keen-cutting bronze! That's why
I've now retreated
And ordered the other Argives to
congregate here.
For that is Ares out there, I'm very sure,
Dominating the fighting!"

And blue-eyed Athena:
"Tydeus' son Diomedes, delight of my
heart,
Forget what I said and put your faith in
my presence.
Have no fear of Ares or any immortal,
But drive at him now with your solid-
hoofed horses. Close in
And strike him hard. You need not have
awe of Ares,
That raving double-dealer, that curse

made only

For evil! Why lately he talked with Hera
and me

And promised us both he would fight the
Trojans and help

The Argives. But now he's forgotten all
that and falsely

Supports the Trojans!"

So saying, she reached out her hand
And jerked Sthenelus from the car to the
ground. He quickly

Got out of the way as the eager goddess
and brave

Diomedes stepped up in the car, and
beneath the weight

Of that grim goddess and the prince of
fighters the axle

Of oak creaked loudly. Then Pallas
Athena caught up
The lash and the reins and galloped the
solid-hoofed horses
At Ares, who spattered with blood was
busy stripping
The bronze from gigantic Periphas, best
of Aetolians
And glorious son of Ochesius.

Athena put on
Her helmet of darkness, that brawny
Ares might not
Be able to see her. But now he saw
Diomedes,
And ruinous Ares left the gigantic
Periphas
Lying where he had undone him and

fiercely charged
Diomedes, breaker of horses. When they
closed with each other,
Ares lunged over yoke and reins to plant
His bronze spear in the foe, but the
bright-eyed goddess Athena
Deflected the spear with her hand and
flipped it away
From the car. Then strong Diomedes
drove his spear
At the War-god, and Pallas Athena
caused it to pierce
His armored kilt and tear the white flesh
of his belly.
There he made his blow tell, and drew
out the spear.
Then brazen Ares bellowed as loud as
nine

Or ten thousand men who scream as they
clash in battle.

And Achaeans and Trojans all trembled
with fear, so terribly

Bellowed the bloodthirsty War-god.

And as a tornado

Turns in the darkening sky when late on
a hot

Summer day a gusty wind comes up, so
now

To Tydeus' son Diomedes brazen Ares

Appeared, as upward he went through
the clouds on his way

To broad heaven.

Quickly he came to steep Olympus,
Home of the gods, and bitter at heart he
sat down

By Zeus, displaying the immortal blood
that poured

From his wound, and wailing out these
words winged with resentment:

“O Father Zeus, aren’t you indignant at
all that

Wanton violence? Whenever we gods
try helping

Men, we always end by hurting each
other.

And now we are all at odds with you,
for you

Are the Father of that insane and cursed
virgin

Who cares for nothing but evil! All other
gods

On Olympus obey and bow down to you,
every one

Of us. But at her you never lash out with
word

Or deed. Instead, you set her on, and just
Because the pestilent wretch is a child
of yours.

Now she's encouraged proud Diomedes
to take out

His rage on immortal gods. He's already
wounded

Cyprian Aphrodite on the lower part
Of her palm and charged down on me
like a demon! If I

Weren't fast on my feet, I'd have been
there no telling how long,

All tangled up in the heaps of gory
corpses.

Either that, or the blows I'd have got

from his bronze would have
left me
A weakling forever!”

Then fiercely scowling, Zeus
Of the gathering storm spoke thus:
“Don’t whine at me,
You renegade! To me you’re the most
despicable god
On Olympus, since always you’re eager
for strife and fighting
And war. You have the same
overbearing spirit,
Hard and unyielding, as your mother
Hera, and her
I can scarcely control with words alone.
She,
I dare say, is the cause of your present

pain. But I
Can't let you suffer this way any longer,
for you too
Are my child, offspring of my wife. But
had you been born
To some other immortal and become the
plague you are now,
Long since you'd have found yourself
lower than the battered sons
Of Uranus!"¹

He spoke, and told Paeëon to help him.
So the gods' physician applied some
pain-killing ointments
And healed the wound, for Ares, of
course, has nothing
Mortal about him. As fast as juice of the
fig

Curdles the thin white milk a man mixes
and stirs,
Even so quickly Paeëon closed up the
wound
Of impetuous Ares. And Hebe bathed
him, and dressed him
In pleasing and comfortable clothes.
Then Ares sat down
By Cronos' son Zeus, his same old
vainglorious self

Now Argive Hera and Athena,
defender of many,
Returned to the palace of almighty Zeus,
having forced
Man-murdering Ares to stop his
slaughter of mortals.

BOOK VI

Hector and Andromache

Thus the Achaeans and Trojans were
left to themselves
In the awesome confusion of war, and
the tumult surged
Now here, now there on the plain as the
warriors hurled
At each other their bronze-headed
spears, between the waters
Of Simoeis and the holy river
Scamander.

Telamonian Ajax, bulwark of
Achaeans, was first

To break the Trojan ranks and bring new
light
To his comrades. This he did by
downing the chief
Of Thracians, the tall brave Acamas,
Eussorus' son.
His spear went in at the horn of his
helmet, thickly
Crested with horsehair, and pierced the
bone of his forehead,
And darkness enveloped his eyes.

Then Diomedes,
Roaring his chilling war-cry, killed
Teuthras' son Axylus,
A rich and lovable man from splendid
Arisbe,
Where he lived in a house by the road

and welcomed all comers.

But now not one of his many friends was there

To meet his assailant and keep off
dismal destruction.

Instead, Diomedes robbed him of life,
along with

His squire Calesius, then at the reins of
his car.

Together they entered the subterranean
halls.

Dresus and Opheltius fell to the bronze
of Euryalus,

Who then went on in pursuit of Aesepeus
and Pedasus.

These were the sons of the Naiad nymph
Abarbarea

And peerless Bucolion, haughty
Laomedon's first-born
Son, the child of a dark and secret affair.
While out with his sheep, Bucolion lay
with the nymph,
Who conceived and bore twin sons.
These now fell
To Mecisteus' son Euryalus, who undid
the might
Of their marvelous limbs and stripped
their shoulders of armor.

And battle-staunch Polypoetes brought
Astyalus
Down, while Odysseus felled Percotian
Pidytes,
And Teucer the brave Aretaon. And
Ablerus died

On the gleaming spear of Nestor's son
Antilochus,
And the king of men Agamemnon
accounted for Elatus,
Whose home was in hilly Pedasus near
the banks
Of the rolling river Satnioeis. And
battling Leïtus
Laid fleeing Phylacus low, and
Eurypylus killed
Melanthius.

Meanwhile, battle-roaring Menelaus
Took Adrastus alive. For his two horses,
panicking
Over the plain, ran foul of a tamarisk
bush,
Broke off the shaft at the curving car,

and continued

Their bolt for the city as part of the
general stampede.

But their master spun from the car and
fell on his face

In the dust by one of the wheels. And
there above him

Stood King Menelaus, his long spear
casting a shadow.

Then clutching the knees of his captor,¹
Adrastus pleaded:

“Alive! O son of Atreus, take me alive!
And an ample ransom is yours. Stored in
the mansion

Of my rich father are many treasures,
bronze

And gold and highly wrought iron. Of

these my father
Would gladly give you a ransom past
counting, if he
Should hear that I am alive at the ships
of Achaea.”

Thus he tried to persuade Menelaus,
and he
Was just on the point of letting his squire
lead
The man off to the swift Argive ships,
when King Agamemnon
Ran up with this loud rebuke: “Soft
Menelaus!
What do you care for the Trojans? Did
they do you
Any favors that time they stayed in your
home? Let none

Of them escape unholy destruction from
us—

Not even the baby in his mother's belly!

No,

Not even him, but let all Trojans utterly
Perish, unmourned, unburied, and
leaving no trace!”

These words made sense to his
brother, so fierce Menelaus,

With a thrust of his hand, shoved the
hero Adrastus away,

And powerful King Agamemnon jabbed
a spear

In his side and flopped him down on his
back, then planted

A heel on his chest and jerked the ashen
spear out.

Now Nestor yelled to the Argive
soldiers: “My friends,
Danaan heroes and comrades of Ares,
let no man
Drop behind, greedy to pounce on the
spoils
And go to the ships with the heaviest
load of loot!
But keep on killing men. Then at your
ease
You can strip the armor from a whole
plain full of corpses!”

At this they fought even harder. And
now the fiery
Achaeans would surely have driven the
terrified Trojans
Back up into Troy, if Priam's son

Helenus, much
Their best reader of ominous birds, had
not found Aeneas
And Hector and said to them; “You two
are the best men
We have, and always bear the brunt of
the fighting
And do far more than your share of the
thinking, which is why
I plead with you now to make a stand
right here!
Go through the ranks and rally the men
and keep them
Away from the gates, or believe me they
won’t stop running
Till they give their pursuers the pleasure
of seeing them drop
In the arms of their women. But once you

have rallied the army,
I'm sure we'll be able to hold out here
against
The Danaan forces. No matter how
worn-out and weary
We are, we have to hold out and we
will! But Hector,
You go to the city and speak to our
mother. Tell her
To gather the noble women and go to the
temple
Of bright-eyed Athena high on the
fortified hill.
And let her take with her the finest, most
flowing robe
In the palace, the one she prefers to all
others. Then,

When the holy doors have been opened
by means of the key,
Let her lay the robe on the knees of fair-
haired Athena
And promise to sacrifice there in her
temple twelve yearling
Heifers untouched by the goad, if only
the goddess
Will pity our town, our wives and little
children,
And keep Diomedes away from holy
Troy,
Tydeus' son Diomedes, that brutal
spearman
And powerful master of rout who has, I
think,
Shown clearly that he is the strongest
Achaean of all.

We were never so much afraid of
Achilles himself,
Though he is a leader of fighting men
and the son,
They say, of a goddess. But this
Diomedes raves
With a furious vengeance! When it
comes to brute force, he has
No real competition.”

He spoke, and Hector was glad
To accept the advice of his brother, the
gifted seer.
At once he leaped fully armed from his
car to the ground,
And brandishing two sharp spears he
ranged through the ranks
Arousing new spirit in the horrible rout.

They spun
And faced the Achaeans, who soon fell
back before them
And ceased their killing. They thought
some immortal had come
From the starry sky and enabled the
fighting Trojans
Thus to rally. Then Hector called out to
the host:

“You gallant Trojans and famous
allies, be men,
My friends, and show the stuff you’re
made of, while I
Go into Ilium and bid Our wives and
counseling
Elders pray to the gods and promise
them hecatombs.”

So saying, bright-helmeted Hector left
for the city,
And the black hide rim of his center-
bossed shield knocked neck
And ankles as swiftly he strode.

Now Glaucus, son
Of Hippolochus, and Tydeus' son
Diomedes rode out
In the middle between the two armies,
both men eager
To fight. When they came within range
Diomedes, loud
At the war-cry, shouted first: "Who are
you, big man,
Who among mortals? Never before have
I seen you
In man-enhancing battle, but now you

dare

To come out so far beyond all the others
and await

My long-shadowing spear, though they
are unhappy indeed

Whose children oppose me! But if you
are some immortal

Come down from the sky, I will not fight
you, nor

Any other heavenly god. Not even the
son

Of Dryas, brawny Lycurgus,² lived long
after strife

With celestials—he who drove the
Maenad nurses

Of mad Dionysus running down holy
Mount Nysa.

He took an ox-goad to them, and beneath
his flailing
They dropped their ivy wands, and
Dionysus himself
Fled and plunged in the sea, where he
with the waves
Far above him cringed in the bosom of
Thetis, trembling
With dread at the threatening screams of
Lycurgus. For this
The leisurely gods all hated that man,
and Zeus
Struck him blind, nor did he live long
after that, so fiercely
Despised was he by all the immortals. I,
then,
Have no desire to fight with the blessed
gods.

But if you're a man, sustained by fruit of
the earth,
Keep coming on, that you may be caught
all the sooner
In the terrible toils of death!"

Then Hippolochus' son,
Great Glaucus, answered him thus:
"Magnanimous Diomedes,
Why do you ask who I am? The frail
generations
Of men have scarcely more lineage than
leaves. Wind blows
The leaves to earth in the fall, but
springtime comes
And the forest blooms: so one generation
of men
Gives way to another.³ But if you really

would hear

Who I am, listen and learn what many
know

Already. In the heart of horse-pasturing
Argos is the city

Ephyre, where Sisyphus ruled, Sisyphus,
son

Of Aeolus and the slyest of men. He
begot

The first Glaucus, whose son was the
flawless Bellerophon. Him

The gods made handsome and showered
with masculine charm.

But Proetus the King plotted evil against
him, and since

His might was much greater, drove him
from the Argive country.

For Zeus had brought all Argos under the

scepter

Of Proetus, whose wrath began this way
Anteia,

His beautiful wife, lusted madly to lie
with Bellerophon⁴

In secret love, but she could in no way
seduce

That princely, prudent young man.
Hence, she made up

A lie and told it thus to her husband the
King:

‘If you don’t want to die, O Proetus, kill
Bellerophon.

Though I wouldn’t let him, he did his
best to seduce me.’

At this the King was seized with rage,
but since

His soul recoiled from murdering a
guest, he sent him
To Lycia instead, where Anteia's father
was King.
And grievous credentials he gave the
young man to take with him,
A folded tablet wherein lord Proetus had
written
Many pernicious and fatal signs, which
he bade
Bellerophon show to the Lycian King—
who would then
Contrive his death.

“So he, with the gods' unfailing
Protection, journeyed to Lycia, and when
he reached
That wide land and the flowing Xanthus,

the King made him welcome
And heartily entertained him for all of
nine days
With as many sacrificed oxen. But when,
on the tenth
Dim morning, rose-fingered Dawn
appeared, the King
At last got around to asking about the
credentials
His guest may have brought from Proetus
his son-in-law
Then, having seen the murderous signs,
he began
By bidding Bellerophon kill the
ferocious Chimaera,
A female demoniac monster of strictly
inhuman
Descent, with the head of a lion, the tail

of a serpent,
And the body of a monstrous goat, and
blasting forth flame
At every terrible breath. But putting his
faith
In the portents of heaven, Bellerophon
killed her. Next
He fought the redoubtable Solymi, who
according to him
Were the roughest fighters he ever
encountered. And thirdly
He slew the man-matching Amazons. But
around him, as he
Returned, the King wove another thick
plot. He sent
The best troops in all Lycia to lay an
ambush for him,

But not one man returned to his home,
for all
Were destroyed by flawless
Bellerophon. Then, when at last
The King knew that his guest was of
godly descent, he prevailed
Upon him to stay in Lycia, gave him his
daughter
In marriage, and equally shared all royal
honor
With him. And the Lycians laid out an
estate for him
Greater than any other, acres of orchard
And plowland for him to enjoy.

“And the Princess bore
To honored Bellerophon three children
in all: Isander,

Hippolochus, and Laodameia, who lay
with Zeus

The contriver and became the mother of
godlike Sarpedon,

Our bronze-clad leader of Lycians. But
when Bellerophon,

Even he, found all the gods in hatred

Against him, he roamed alone the Aleian
Plain,

Consuming his soul and avoiding all
human tracks.^{[5](#)}

His son Isander was killed by war-
hungry Ares

While fighting the powerful Solymi, and
Artemis, she

Of the golden reins, wrathfully slew his
daughter.

That left Hippolochus, who fathered me,
and from him
I claim to be sprung. He sent me to Troy
with many
Stern reminders to always be bravest
and best
Above all others, and not to disgrace the
house
Of my fathers, by far the noblest in
Ephyre
Or the ample land of Lycia. Such is my
lineage
And the blood I claim to be of.”

This speech delighted
Diomedes, the great battle-roarer.
Planting his spear
In the bountiful earth, he spoke these

friendly words

To the people's shepherd Glaucus:

“Surely our families

Have an old tradition of friendship. For
once my grandfather

Oeneus entertained yours, the flawless
Bellerophon,

And kept him a guest in his palace for
twenty days.

And they gave each other exquisite gifts
of friendship.

Oeneus gave a brilliant red war-belt,
and Bellerophon

A golden two-handled cup, which I left
at home

When I came here. But I don't remember
my father Tydeus,

Since I was too small when he set out

for Thebes,
Where he died with the other fighting
Achaeans. So now
You have a good friend in the middle of
Argos, and I one
In Lycia, if ever I visit your people's
country.
Let us, then, strictly avoid the spears of
each other,
No matter how thick the melee. For me
there are plenty
Of Trojans and famous allies to slay,
whomever
God grants and I overtake, and for you
there are all
The Achaeans you can manage to kill.
Therefore, my friend,

Let us exchange our armor, that both
sides may know
Of the old family friendship we claim
from the time our grandfathers
Feasted together.”

Having so spoken, they leaped
From their chariots, shook hands, and
swore their faith to each other.
But Cronos’ son Zeus took the wits from
Glaucus completely,
For to Tydeus’ son Diomedes he gave
golden armor
For bronze, or a hundred oxen for nine.⁶

When Hector
Got to the Scaean Gates^s and the oak
tree, the daughters
And wives of the Trojans came flocking

about him, anxiously

Asking of sons and brothers, friends and
husbands.

But Hector bade them go pray to the
gods, to each

Of the gods in turn, for mourning hung
over many.

On he strode to the gorgeous palace of
Priam

With gleaming stone colonnades. Within
the court

Were fifty adjoining chambers of
polished stone,

Wherein the sons of Priam slept with the
wives

They had courted and won. And for his
daughters, across

From these were twelve more chambers
adjoining and built
Of well-polished stone, wherein the
sons-in-law
Of Priam slept with their honored,
desirable wives.

Now Hector's mother, the gracious
Hecuba, came out
To meet him, and with her Laodice, her
loveliest daughter.
She took her son by the hand and spoke
to him thus:
“My child, why have you left the hard
fighting and come here
To us? Surely the sons of the cursed
Achaeans
Have worn you out in this battle around

our city

And you have decided to lift your hands
to Zeus

In earnest prayer from high on top of the
citadel.

But wait till I bring you honey-sweet
wine, that first

You may pour a libation to Zeus and the
other immortals

And refresh yourself too, if you will.

Wine greatly increases

The strength of a weary man, as you now
are weary

From defending your friends.”

But the tall bright-helmeted Hector
Answered her thus: “Bring me no heart-
soothing wine,

Good mother. It might unnerve me and
make me forget
My spirit and strength. And besides,
with hands unwashed
I stand in awe of pouring to Zeus a
libation
Of flaming wine, nor should a man ever
pray
To the stormy son of Cronos when all
bespattered
With blood and gore. But gather the
noble women
And go to the temple of victory-bringing
Athena.
Go with offerings to burn on her altar
and the finest,
Most flowing robe you have in the
palace, the one

You prefer to all others. Lay this on the
knees of Athena,
The lovely-haired goddess, and promise
to sacrifice there
In her temple twelve yearling heifers
untouched by the goad,
If only she will pity our town, our wives
And little children, and keep Diomedes
away
From holy Troy, Tydeus' son Diomedes,
That brutal spearman and powerful
master of rout.
Go, then, to the shrine of the spoil-
driving goddess Athena,
And I will go to call Paris, if the man
will listen
To me. Would earth might open and

swallow him now,
For he was reared by the mighty
Olympian to bring
Great pain to magnanimous Priam, to the
sons of Priam,
And to all the other Trojans. The sight of
Paris
Headed for Hades might make me think
my heart
Had forgotten its misery.”

He spoke and Hecuba went
To the hall and told her handmaids to go
through the city
And gather the noble women. But she
herself
Went down to the fragrant chamber
wherein she kept

Her richly wrought robes, made and
embroidered by women
Of Sidon whom royal Paris brought in
his ships
To Troy on the same sea-voyage from
which he returned
With high-born Helen.^t Now Hecuba
took the most flowing
And richly embroidered of all and
carried it with her,
A gift for Athena. It lay beneath all the
others,
But now like a star it glittered. Then off
she went,
And many were the noble women who
hurried along
In her train.

When they reached Athena's temple on
top
Of the fortified hill, the doors were
opened for them
By Theano, lovely of face, the daughter
of Cisseus
And wife of Antenor. For she was
Athena's priestess,
Made such by will of the Trojans. Then
all of them raised
The sacred cry and lifted their hands to
Athena,
And lovely Theano laid the robe on the
knees
Of the fair-haired goddess and made
their vows in prayer
To almighty Zeus's daughter:

“O saver of cities,
Great Athena, of goddesses most
resplendent,
Splinter the spear of fierce Diomedes
and grant
That he himself may fall face down in
the dust
Well out from the Scaean Gates, and we
will sacrifice
Here and now in your temple twelve
yearling heifers
Untouched by the goad, praying for you
to take pity
On Troy and the Trojans’ wives and
little children.”

Thus she prayed to Zeus’s unheeding
daughter,

Pallas Athena deaf to their plea. But
Hector,
Meanwhile, went to the house of
handsome Paris,
The beautiful palace that he himself had
built
With the most skillful craftsmen in the
fertile land of Troy.
These had made him a bedroom, a hall,
and a courtyard
High in the citadel close to the mansions
of Priam
And Hector, the valiant god-cherished
Hector, who swinging
A sixteen-foot spear now entered the
house of his brother,
And always before him the spearhead of
bronze shone brightly

And the ring of gold that held it. Paris he found

In the bedroom, shuffling his gorgeous armor, handling

His breastplate, shield, and bent bow, while Helen of Argos

Sat in the midst of her maids instructing them all

In their marvelous handwork. Then Hector spoke to him roughly,

Shaming him thus:

“Unaccountable man! your sulking
This way is not very pretty, believe me!
Your people
Are fighting and dying about the steep
wall of the city,
And it is solely on your unhappy account

That the roaring battle blazes. Why you
yourself
Would quarrel with any shirker you saw
holding back
From the horrible fighting. But up! Or
the city itself
Will soon be fiercely blazing!”

And Prince Alexander
Replied: “Hector, you chide me no more
than is right,
And not a bit more than you should. But
do calm down
And listen to me. It’s not on account of
resentment
Against the Trojans that I sit here in my
chamber,
Not really. It’s just that I felt like

indulging my sorrow.

Already my wife, in her own winsome way, has endeavored

To change my mind and talk me back out on the field.

And I myself have decided to go: a man
Can't always lose. But have a seat. I'm putting

My armor on now. Or go ahead if you wish

And I will follow. I think I'll be able to catch up

With you."

Since now bright-helmeted Hector said nothing,

Helen spoke to him sweetly: "Believe me, dear brother,

Cold and troublesome bitch that I am, I
heartily
Wish that some malevolent storm had
whirled me
Away on the very same day my mother
bore me,
Far away to some wild mountain or into
The waves of the loud-booming sea,
where I might have died
Before any of this ever happened. But
since the gods
Ordained these horrors, I also wish I had
been
The wife of a better man, one who was
sensitive
To insult and blame from his fellows.
The heart of my husband
Is wavering and weak, nor will it ever

be firm—

A fault, I think, for which he will pay!

But now,

My brother, come here and sit down in
this chair, for you

Above all others have burdened your
spirit with toil

Because of bitch-hearted me and the
willful blindness

Of Paris, whom Zeus decreed a
miserable doom for,

That men in days to come might have a
song.”

Then tall bright-helmeted Hector:
“You’re kind

To ask me to sit, Helen, but don’t. I
cannot accept.

Already my spirit is spoiling to fight for
the Trojans,
Who always miss me keenly when I am
not
On the field. But try to hurry this
husband of yours,
And may he himself make haste and
catch up with me
Before I leave the city Meanwhile, I
want
To go home and briefly look in on my
servants and family,
The wife I love and my baby son, whom
I
May never, for all I know, come back to
again,
Since any time the gods may hurl me
down

Beneath the hands of Achaeans.”

So saying, Hector
Left them, his helmet flashing, and
quickly arrived
At his comfortable home. But there he
did not find
His white-armed wife Andromache. She,
with the baby
And one of her pretty-robed women, had
gone to stand
On the wall, and there she was now,
weeping and frantically
Anxious. When Hector saw that his
excellent wife
Was out, he stopped on the threshold and
spoke to the maids:

“Tell me truly, women. Where did

Andromache go
When she left the house? Is she visiting
one of my elegant
Sisters or sisters-in-law, or has she gone
To the shrine of Athena, where the other
fair-braided women
Of Troy are making their vows to the
awesome goddess?"

Then the busy housekeeper answered
him thus: "Hector,
To tell the truth you so urgently ask for,
your wife
Has not gone to see any one of your
elegant sisters
Or sisters-in-law, nor has she gone to
the shrine
Of Athena, where the other fair-braided

women of Troy

Are making their vows to the awesome
goddess. She heard

The Trojans were yielding to the
powerful men of Achaea

And ran from the house toward the great
city wall like a woman

Half out of her senses, and the nurse took
the baby and followed.”

The housekeeper spoke, and Hector
rushed from the palace

And back through the well-laid streets
the way he had come,

Striding down through the great city But
just as he got

To the Scaean Gates, through which he
intended to pass

On his way to the plain, his wife came
running to meet him,
His gifted wife Andromache, daughter of
hearty
Eëtion, who lived at the foot of wooded
Mount Placus
In Hypoplacian Thebe and ruled the men
Of Cilicia. His daughter it was whom
Hector had married,
And now she met her helmeted husband,
and with her
The nurse came holding the child, great
Hector's dear son,
A laughing baby fair as any bright star.
His father called him Scamandrius, u but
others Astyanax,
Or Lord of the City, with reference to his

tall father

On whom alone the safety of all
depended.

Hector smiled at the sight of his son, but
Andromache

Fairly grew to his arm, and weeping
spoke thus:

“Ah, Hector, possessed by a demon,
your might as a fighter

Will be the death of you yet. Nor do you
pity

Your baby boy and my unfortunate self,
So soon to be your widow, for any time
now

The Achaeans will gang up and kill you,
I know But I

Would be better off in my grave, were I

to lose you,
For once you have met your fate, never
again
Can there be any warmth in my life, nor
anything else
But pain. I have no father, no lady
mother.
My father was killed by fierce Achilles
when he
So utterly sacked the Cilicians' teeming
city,
High-gated Thebe. He killed Eëtion, yes,
But even his spirit recoiled at stripping
that King
Of his armor. So him he burned in his
richly wrought bronze
And heaped a high barrow above him,
and all about it

The mountain nymphs, daughters of Zeus
of the aegis,
Planted elm trees. And the seven
brothers I had
At home went down to Hades the very
same day,
For right in the midst of their shuffling
cattle and silvery
White sheep, quick-footed Achilles
killed them all.
But here he brought my mother the
Queen, torn
From below our wooded Mount Placus
along with the rest
Of the spoils. Then having extorted a
ransom past counting,
He let her go to her father's house where

she died

A victim of arrow-scattering Artemis.

So you,

My Hector, are father and mother to me,
and brother

And manly husband. Have pity, then, and
stay

Right here on the wall, or truly your son
will soon

Be an orphan, your wife a miserable
widow. And order

The army to make a stand at the fig tree,
where the city

Is best assaulted and the wall most
easily scaled.⁷

Three times already their bravest men
have charged there,

Led by the two Ajaxes, world-famous
Idomeneus,
Atreus' sons, and strong Diomedes—all
Kept trying to get at us there, as if some
knowing
Seer had told them our weakness, or they
themselves
Had guessed it.”

Then great bright-helmeted Hector
replied:
“I too, my dear, have all these things on
my mind.
But how could I face the men of Troy, or
their wives
Of the trailing gowns, if I were to skulk
like a coward⁸
And stay away from the battle? Nor does

my own spirit

Urge me to do so, since I have learned to
be valiant

Always and fight mid the foremost
champions of Troy,

To win and uphold the King my father's
glory

As well as my own. For this one thing in
heart

And soul I know: the day of ruin shall
surely

Come for holy Troy, for Priam and all

The people of Priam, who wielded the
good ashen spear.

But when I think of the suffering the
Trojans will have to

Endure, of Hecuba's grief and that of
King Priam,

And of my many brave brothers who
shall on that day
Go down in the dust, slain by those who
hate them,
I am not troubled so deeply as at the
thought
Of your grief when some bronze-clad
Achaean leads you off
Weeping and puts an end to your
freedom. Then
In Argos you'll weave at the loom of
somebody else
And carry water for her from the spring
Messeïs
Or Hypereia, unwillingly always, but
forced
To do as you're told. Then someone,

seeing your tears,
Will say: 'Look there at the wife of
Hector, the best
In battle of all the horse-taming Trojans
in the war
We fought about Ilium!' So then will
someone remark.
And stabbing new grief will surely be
yours to think
Of losing that man who could have held
off the day
Of your bondage. But I'd much rather be
dead, with earth
Heaped high above me, than hear your
screams as warriors
Drag you away to a life of slavery! ”

So saying,

Resplendent Hector reached out to take
his son,
But the baby cried and clung to the fair-
belted nurse,
Afraid of the way his own father looked,
with all
That bronze and the horsehair crest
dreadfully waving
On top of his helmet. This made them
both laugh, his father
And lady mother, and quickly
resplendent Hector
Took off his helmet and laid the dazzling
thing down.
Then he took the baby and kissed him,
bounced him a bit
In his arms, and prayed this prayer to all
of the gods:

“O Zeus and you other immortals,
grant that my son
May be, like myself, outstanding among
the Trojans,
As strong as I and as brave, and a mighty
ruler
Of Ilium. And may it be said of him
someday, as home
He comes from battle, ‘There goes a
much better man
Than his father.’ Let him be bearing the
blood-stained bronze
Of an enemy slain, and may he rejoice
the heart
Of his mother.”

He prayed, and placed the child in the
arms

Of his wife, and she held him close in
her fragrant bosom,
Laughing and crying at once. Seeing her
so,
Her husband felt deep compassion, and
gently caressed her,
Saying: "Poor haunted one, do not be
overly
Anxious. No man in the world can hurl
me to Hades
Before my appointed time comes. And
no man, valiant
Or vile, can escape his fate ordained,
once he's been
Born. So go to the house and keep
yourself busy
With the loom and spindle, and see that
your maids are busy.

War is for men, my dear, for all men
here

In Ilium, but most of all for me.”

So saying,

Resplendent Hector picked up his helmet
with the horsehair

Plume, and his dear wife started for
home, shedding

Big tears and often looking behind her.

But soon

She arrived at the comfortable home of
man-killing Hector

And found her numerous maids inside.

Her coming

Made all of them join her in wailing
lament for Hector.

So there in his house they mourned for

Hector still living,
For none of them thought he would ever
return, once
He fell into the violent hands of
Achaeans.

Now Paris
Did not linger long in his palace, but
trusting his swiftness
Of foot he donned his elaborate bronze
and set out.
As when a horse at the manger eats his
fill
Of barley, breaks his halter, and
thunders away
On the plain, eager to splash in the
rippling river—
He throws back his head, and his mane

streams over his shoulders

As he exults in his splendor and gallops
full speed

For the grazing grounds of mares—so
Priam's son Paris

Strode down from the citadel heights,
laughing aloud

To himself and bright as the sun in his
glittering armor.

Rapidly walking, he quickly caught up
with his brother,

Brave Hector, just on the point of turning
away

From where he had talked with his wife.

Then handsome Paris

Spoke first:

“Surely, old fellow, I've held you

back,
And you so anxious to get there. I took
too long,
I know, and wasn't as fast as you told
me to be."

And Hector, his helmet flashing, made
this reply:
"My playful brother, no right-thinking
man would belittle
Your prowess in battle. You're brave
enough when you want
To be, but only too often you let yourself
go
And don't seem to care. That attitude
pains me deeply,
Nor does it help when I hear the Trojan
fighters

Insulting you right and left, the men who
suffer

Hard battle on your account. But come,
let us go.

We'll make all this up to each other yet,
if only

Zeus grants us the power to rid our
Trojan land

Of the well-greaved Achaeans. Then we
shall mix in our halls

The bowl of deliverance to the heavenly
gods everlasting.”

BOOK VII

The Duel of Hector and Ajax

So saying, resplendent Hector rushed
out through the gates
And with him his brother Paris, both of
them eager
At heart for fighting and war. As a god-
sent wind
Is welcome to longing seamen,
exhausted from beating
The deep with their oars of polished
pine, their limbs
Already leaden, so now to the longing
Trojans

These two appeared.

Then Paris cut down Menesthus,
King Areïthous' son, whose home was
in Arne,
Where he had been born to Areïthous
surnamed the Maceman
And heifer-eyed Phylomedusa. And
Hector's sharp spear
Loosened the limbs of Eïoneus, striking
the man
On the neck right under the rim of his
strong bronze helmet.
And Glaucus, leader of Lycians and son
of Hippolochus,
Hurled his spear through the furious moil
at Iphinous,
Dexius' son, and caught him deep in the

shoulder

Just as he sprang on the car behind his
fast horses.

He fell to the ground, his strength
completely destroyed.

But when the goddess Athena noticed
this slaughter

Of Argives there in the thick of the
struggle, her blue eyes

Blazed, and down she went darting from
the peaks of Olympus

To holy Troy. Then Apollo on Pergamus
looked down

And saw her, and eager for Trojans to
win he sprang down

To meet her. The deities met at the oak
tree, and the son

Of Zeus, lord Apollo, spoke first:

“Why, O daughter

Of almighty God, does your great spirit
impel you

Once more in such hot haste from
Olympus? Is it

To throw your power on the Danaan side
and give

The victory to them? since surely you
have no compassion

At all for dying Trojans. But if you will
let yourself

Listen to me, all will turn out for the
best.

Let us now put an end to this day's fiery
battle.

Later the war will go on till you

deathless goddesses

Get the dear wish of your hearts and
Ilium falls

For your favorites to plunder and waste.

And the blue-eyed goddess
Athena answered him thus: “Far-worker,
so be it.

With this very thought in mind I came
down here

From Olympus to the midst of Achaeans
and Trojans. But tell me,

How do you intend to stop these fighting
men?”

And Zeus’s son, lord Apollo, replied:
“Let us rouse

The bold heart of horse-breaking Hector
on the very good chance

That he will then challenge the Danaan
chiefs for a man
To meet him in the awesome grim fire of
single combat.
That challenge the bronze-greaved
Achaeans will be too proud
To ignore. They'll send out a man to
fight noble Hector.”

He spoke, and the bright-eyed goddess
Athena approved.
And Helenus, dear son of Priam, knew
in his heart
This favored plan of the plotting gods.
So he came up
To Hector and said: “O son of Priam,
Hector
Divinely wise, consider these words

from your brother.

Make all other Trojans sit down and all
the Achaeans,

Then challenge the best man they've got
to come out and fight

With you in the awesome grim fire of
single combat.

As yet it isn't your fate to overtake doom
And die. This I heard from the gods
everlasting."

At these words Hector rejoiced, and
going into

The midst of the battle he gripped his
spear by the middle

And held the Trojan line back till all
were seated.

And King Agamemnon seated the well-

greaved Achaeans.

Athena and bright-bowed Apollo in the
likeness of vultures

Sat high on the oak of aegis-great Zeus,
their Father,

Delightedly watching the men sitting
close in their ranks,

The battalions bristling with spears and
helmets and shields.

And as the West Wind rises and darkens
the deep

With ripples, so stirred on the plain the
seated ranks

Of Achaeans and Trojans. Then Hector
walked out between

The two armies, and spoke:

“Your attention, O Trojans and well-

greaved

Achaean, that I may say what now my heart urges.

Zeus who looks down from on high has not seen fit

To fulfill the oaths we so earnestly swore. He cruelly

Postpones the final decision till either you Argives

Conquer the high walls of Troy or fall in defeat

By your seagoing ships. But you that are champions and chieftains

Among the united Achaeans, whichever one

Whose heart now urges him on to fight with Prince Hector,

Let him come out of the crowd and be

your champion.

And these conditions I hereby proclaim
with Zeus

As our witness. If your man slays me
with the long sharp point

Of his bronze, let him strip off my armor
and carry it back

To the hollow ships, but let him give up
my body

To be taken home, that the men and
women of Troy

May duly burn it. And if Apollo gives
me

The glory of slaying the man you send
out, I'll strip off

His armor, carry it into the city, and hang
it

Up on the temple of lord far-smiting
Apollo,
But I will release his corpse to be taken
back
To the well-decked ships, that you, the
long-haired Achaeans,
May give him all due funeral rites and
build a high barrow
For him beside the wide Hellespont.
Then one of these days
Somebody, as he goes by in his many-
oared ship
On the wine-blue sea, will point toward
shore and say:
‘There rises the barrow of one who died
long ago,
A champion whom glorious Hector
battled and slew.’

Thus indeed somebody will say, and so
men's memory
Of me and my glory will not be
destroyed.”¹

He spoke,
And an awful hush fell on the Achaeans,
one
And all ashamed to refuse, but afraid to
accept.
At last Menelaus stood up and spoke,
harshly
Rebuking the men and inwardly
groaning: “Well now,
You braggarts, women, not men, of
Achaea! surely
We'll have a disgrace on our heads to
end all disgraces

If now no Danaan goes to meet Hector!
May all
Of you rot and go back to mud, you that
just sit here
Utterly gutless and infamous! I'll arm
and go
Against him myself. The immortal gods
on high
Hold all the strings of victory.”

So saying, he started
To don his fine armor. And now,
Menelaus, life
For you would have ended out there at
the hands of Hector,
A mightier man by far, had not the kings
Of Achaea leaped to their feet and held
you back.

And great Agamemnon himself seized
the right hand
Of his brother, and said:

“You’re mad! Zeus-fed Menelaus.
This folly of yours is completely
uncalled for. Swallow
Your pride and back down. Why should
you want to fight
A match with one so much better than
you? Nor are you
Alone in dreading Priam’s son Hector.
Why this
Is one chief whom even Achilles
shudders to meet
In the hero-enhancing battle, and he is
far stronger
Than you. So go sit down with your

people and friends.

The Achaeans shall find someone else to
be their champion

Today. Fearless though Hector may be
and greedy

For battle, he will I assure you be glad
to sit down,

That is if he ever escapes the awesome
grim fire

Of this hard fight he has asked for.”

So spoke Agamemnon,
And changed the mind of his brother.

Menelaus obeyed,
For he knew the truth when he heard it,
and happy squires

Were quick to remove the bronze from
his shoulders. Then Nestor

Arose and spoke to the Argives:

“What a disgrace!

Now indeed great grief has come on
Achaëa. Think how

The knightly old Peleus would groan,
that worthy counselor

Of Myrmidons, that eloquent speaker,
who questioned me once

In his palace and asked with great
pleasure concerning the birth

And lineage of all the Argives. If he
should hear

That now those very same men, one and
all, were cringing

At Hector, surely he'd lift his arms many
times

In fervent pleas to the immortal gods that

his soul
Might leave his limbs and enter the
house of Hades.
O Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, if
only
I were as young as when² the Pylians
met
The Arcadians, fierce with their spears,
by the rapid waters
Of Celadon and fought with them in front
of the walls
Of Pheia about the streams of Iardanus.
Then out strode
Their godlike champion, huge
Ereuthalion, wearing
The armor of King Areïthous, brave
Areïthous

Surnamed the Maceman and so referred
to by others,
Both men and their fair-belted wives.
For he did not fight
With bow or long spear, but broke up the
ranks with an iron
Battle-mace. And it was by cunning, not
might, that Lycurgus
Killed him, in a narrow pass where
there wasn't room
To swing his iron mace with the usual
speed. Before
He was ready, Lycurgus was on him, and
thrusting his spear
Through the Maceman's belly he hurled
him backwards to earth.
And Lycurgus stripped off the armor
which the fallen man

Had been given by brazen Ares, and he
himself wore it
Thereafter amid the turmoil of battle. But
when
Lycurgus grew old in his halls, he gave
the armor
To Ereuthalion, his comrade and squire.
And he
Had it on that day when he challenged
our bravest and best.
But all of them shook with terror, nor
would anyone go
Against him. But my perdurable spirit
gave me
The daring to fight him, though I was the
youngest man there.
So fight him I did, and Athena gave me

the glory.

He was the hugest and mightiest man that
I

Ever slew, and seemed to sprawl all
over the field.

If only I were that young again and as
sure

Of my brawn, then soon enough bright-
helmeted Hector

Would have a fight on his hands. But you
the chieftains

Of all the Achaeans, not one of you has
spirit enough

To go against Hector and meet him in
single combat!”

The old man’s rebuke brought nine
men in all to their feet.

Far the first to arise was the king of men
Agamemnon,
Followed by strong Diomedes, son of
Tydeus,
And both Ajaxes, furious valor
incarnate,
And after these Idomeneus and
Idomeneus' comrade
Meriones, peer of the slaughtering god
of battles,
And after these Eurypylus, splendid son
Of Euaemon, Andraemon's son Thoas,
and keen Odysseus.
All were willing to fight great Hector.
But now
Horse-driving Gerenian Nestor
addressed them again:

“You’ll have to cast lots to see who
the chosen will be.
For he shall profit the well-greaved
Achaeans and greatly
Enhance his own soul as well, if indeed
he survives
The awesome grim fire of single
combat.”

He spoke,
And each of them put his mark on a
pebble and dropped
The lot in the helmet of Atreus’ son
Agamemnon.
Meanwhile the army all prayed, lifting
their hands
To the gods. And thus would one say,
looking up to broad heaven:

“O Father Zeus, let it be Ajax, please,
Or Tydeus’ son Diomedes, or the great
commander
Himself, Agamemnon, lord of golden
Mycenae.”

So prayed the men, and when horse-
driving Gerenian
Nestor shook the helmet, out leaped the
lot
They wanted most, that of the greater
Ajax.
This a herald took round through the host
from left
To right and showed it to all the
Achaean chieftains.
None of them knew it, and each of them
said so. But when

He reached the man who had marked it
and dropped it in,
Then glorious Ajax held out his hand and
the herald
Gave him the lot. One look at the mark
and Ajax
Knew it was his. Then heartily glad, he
dropped
The pebble and said:

“My friends, the lot is surely
Mine, and glad I am that it is, for I
Believe I shall conquer excellent
Hector. But come,
While I am donning my war-gear, spend
the time praying
To Cronos’ son Zeus, silently now to
yourselves,

So that the Trojans won't know what
you're doing—or pray
Aloud if you like, since we are afraid of
no one!
Not by force shall any man beat and rout
me,
Nor for that matter by skill, since surely
not
For nothing was I in Salamis born and
brought up.”

He spoke, and again the Achaeans
prayed to Lord Zeus,
The son of Cronos. And thus, looking up
to broad heaven,
Would one of them say: “O Father Zeus,
most great,
Most glorious lord, give victory to Ajax

and splendid
Renown, but if you also love Hector, if
You care for him too, grant equal power
and glory
To both.”

While they were praying, Ajax put on
His glittering bronze. Then fully armed,
he charged
To the fight as fiercely as monstrous
Ares enters
A battle of armies that Zeus has made
clash in the fury
Of heart-eating hatred. So now gigantic
Ajax,
Bulwark of Achaeans, charged out with
the grimmest of smiles
On his face, and shaking his lance that

cast the long shadow
He rushed to meet his opponent. And the
Argives thrilled
With joy at the sight, but there was no
Trojan whose legs
Did not tremble, and Hector's own heart
began to leap
In his breast. But he who had issued that
confident challenge
Had no hope at all of running, or losing
himself
In the crowd behind him. So on Ajax
came, bearing
His shield like a tower, his seven layers
of bull's-hide
Fronted with bronze, made with much
labor for him
By Tychius, best of workers in leather.

At home

In Hyle he had made that flashing shield,
using

The hides of seven great bulls and
hammering on

An eighth strong layer of bronze. This
shield Telamonian

Ajax held before him as he came up
close

To Hector and threatened him thus:

“Now, Hector, you’ll know

Face to face what sort of Danaan leaders
there are

Besides lion-hearted, man-mauling
Achilles. He lies

Mid his beaked seagoing ships
withdrawn in his wrath

Against our commander-in-chief
Agamemnon. But still
There is no lack of men to stand up
against you. Many
Were eager to do so. But go ahead and
begin!”

Then tall bright-helmeted Hector
answered him thus:
“Zeus-sprung Telamonian Ajax, I know
that you captain
Your company, but do not treat me like
some puny boy
Or some unwarlike woman. My
knowledge of fighting
And slaughter is great, and I am skillful
indeed
At wielding to left and to right my

seasoned hide shield,
At handling tough hide as only a good
warrior can.
And I am expert at darting in deep
among
The fast horses and cars, and surely in
hand-to-hand fighting
You'll find me agile as any at dancing
the dance
Of fiery Ares. But I have no wish to
strike
Such a man as yourself without a fair
warning. All out
In the open, then, I'll cut you down if I
can!"

With this he poised his long-
shadowing spear and hurled it,

Striking Ajax's dread seven-hide shield
on the single
Layer of bronze, the eighth and
outermost thickness.
On through six layers of leather the
stubborn bronze cut,
But stopped in the seventh. Then kingly
Ajax hurled
His long-shadowing spear and struck the
round shield of Hector.
The great spear cut through the gleaming
buckler and on
Through the beautiful breastplate and
tunic too, but Hector
Twisted in time to avoid black death as
the spear
Went by at his side. Then both at once
drew out

Their long spears and fell on each other
like ravenous lions
Or wild inexhaustible boars. And Hector
lunged
With his spear, hitting the center of
Ajax's shield,
But instead of piercing it through, the
point turned back
On the bronze. And Ajax ended the
charge with one
Of his own, but his spear pierced clean
through Hector's shield
And went on to cut a considerable gash
in his neck,
From which the dark blood gushed. Even
so, bright-helmeted
Hector did not give up in the fight, but

stepping

Back he seized with his powerful hand a
nearby

Stone, black, jagged, and huge, and
bounced it hard

Off the boss of Ajax's dread seven-hide
shield with a clang

Of the bronze. But Ajax, lifting a much
larger stone,

Swung it and hurled it with measureless
might, and the boulder,

Big as a mill-stone, crumpled the
buckler of Hector

And stretched him out on the ground with
the shield crushed in

On his chest. But Apollo raised him at
once. And now

The two would have closed and cut at

each other with swords,
If two wise heralds, word-bearers for
God and men,
Had not put a stop to the fight. They
came from each side,
From the Trojans, Idaeus, from the
bronze-clad Achaeans,

Talthybius,
And held their staves between the two
fighters. Then
The herald Idaeus, a man of ample
discretion,
Spoke to them thus:

“No more, brave sons. Let the match
Be over. Zeus of the gathering storm
loves both
Of you, and all of us know what

splendid spearmen

You are. Moreover, night is already upon us,

And men do well to heed the demands of darkness.”

To which Telamonian Ajax replied:

“Idaeus,

Tell Hector to say these things, for he was the one

Who so proudly challenged all our best men. Let us first

Hear from him. Whatever he says is all right with me.”

And tall bright-helmeted Hector spoke to him thus:

“Ajax, since God gave you stature and strength and shrewdness

As well, and since you are far the best
spearman among
The Achaeans, let us call off this blazing
hot battle
And fight no more today. Another day
We'll go at each other till God says who
wins and gives
The victory to whichever side he
chooses. Now night
Is already upon us, and men do well to
heed
The demands of darkness. Then all the
Achaeans will surely
Rejoice at their ships, your comrades
and kin most of all,
And the Trojan men and their wives of
the trailing gowns
Will surely be glad on my account

throughout

King Priam's great city, and they will
enter the presence

Of the holy gods to offer thanksgiving for
me.

But now let us each give the other some
glorious gift,

That Achaeans and Trojans alike may
say: 'They fought

A fierce match in heart-eating hatred, but
then made up

With each other and parted friends.' "

He spoke, and stepping
Forward he gave him his sword with the
studs of silver

Along with the scabbard and well-cut
baldric, and Ajax

Gave his brilliant red war-belt. So they
turned back,³

One to the host of Achaeans, the other to
the thankful

Trojans, happy indeed at the sight of
Hector

Returning alive and whole, surviving the
fury

Of Ajax and his invincible hands. Back
To the city they escorted their leader,
scarcely believing

That he was still safe. The well-greaved
Achaeans, meanwhile,

Exulting in Ajax's victory, conducted
their hero

To King Agamemnon.

When they arrived at the lodges

Of Atreus' son, the commander-in-chief
Agamemnon

Slaughtered a bull of five years to
almighty Zeus.

This offering they flayed and dressed
and skillfully butchered,

Cutting the carcass into small pieces,
which meat

They spitted and roasted well, and drew
it all

From the spits. When they had done what
was needed and the meal

Was ready, they feasted, nor was there a
man who lacked

A fair portion. And Atreus' son, wide-
ruling Agamemnon,

Honored Ajax with cuts from the choice
long chine.

When they had eaten and drunk as much
as they wanted,
The old one stood up and wove wise
counsel for them,
The ancient Nestor, whose wisdom had
won out before.
Now he, in an effort to help, spoke out
among them:

“Atreus’ son and you other Achaean
leaders,
A woeful number of long-haired
Achaeans lie dead
On the plain. Slashing Ares has
darkened the earth
With their blood all about fair-flowing
Scamander, and their souls
Have descended to Hades. Hence, at

dawn tomorrow,
Let a truce be called, and we will go
with our oxen
And mules and cart the corpses back
here, that we
May burn them not far from the ships and
see that the bones
Of the dead are kept to be given their
children at home
By those of us who return to the land of
our fathers.^{[4](#)}
Then over the pyre let us build a huge
barrow, a single
Tomb for all, heaping it up from the
plain
And quickly extending it out into turreted
walls,

Lofty ramparts for us and our ships. And
let us
Build strong-locking gates through which
to drive chariots, and all
Along outside we must dig a deep ditch
as another
Defense against troops and chariots of
the lordly Trojans
If ever they storm us here at the camp.”

He spoke,
And the kings all agreed. Meanwhile, the
Trojans were gathered
High on the fortified hill of Troy in an
awesomely
Turbulent throng before the doors of
King Priam.
And first to get their attention was grave

Antenor,
Saying: “Hear me, you Trojans,
Dardanians, allies,
Hear what my heart commands me to
speak. Come now,
Let us give Helen of Argos and all the
wealth
That goes with her back to the sons of
Atreus, trusting
They’ll take her and go. For now we
fight after breaking
The oaths we so faithfully swore. Hence,
I have
No hope that anything good will happen
to us
So long as we do not return her.”

Antenor no sooner

Sat down than up rose the handsome
Prince Paris, lord
Of lovely blonde Helen, and the words
of his answer came winged
With displeasure: “Antenor, that speech
was not to my liking.
You certainly know how to give better
counsel than that.
But if you are really in earnest, then
surely the gods
Have addled your brains. But now I will
speak my mind
To this meeting of horse-taming Trojans
and make myself perfectly
Clear: my wife I will not give up! But
the treasure
I brought home from Argos, all that I
would like to give back,

And to it I'll add some costly things of my own."

When he had spoken and taken his seat, Dardanian Priam, godlike in wisdom, stood up among them.

Then, with benevolent purpose, he spoke to them all:

"Hear me, you Trojans, Dardanians, allies, hear

What my heart commands me to speak.

Go take your supper

Throughout the city as usual, still mounting guard

And every man sharply alert. But tomorrow at dawn

Let Idaeus go down to the hollow ships

and announce

To Atreus' sons, Agamemnon and
Menelaus, the decision

Of royal Paris, who started this quarrel
between us.

And furthermore let him inquire, in
accord with good sense,

Whether they are willing to stop high-
screaming war

Till we have burned our dead. Then the
fight shall continue

Till God says who wins and gives the
victory to whichever

Side he chooses.”

He spoke, and they gladly obeyed him,
Taking their supper by companies
throughout the host,

And at dawn Idaeus went down to the
hollow ships,
Where he found the Danaan comrades of
Ares assembled
Around the stern of King Agamemnon's
ship.
And the mighty-lunged herald strode into
their midst and spoke:

“Atrides, and all other princes of
peoples Achaean,
Priam and all of his high-ranking leaders
have sent me
To tell you—if it pleases you, sirs, to
hear my message—
The decision of royal Paris, who started
this quarrel
Between us. The shiploads of treasure

he brought home to Troy—
Would he had died first!—all that he
wants to give back
And says he will add some costly things
of his own.
But the wedded wife of illustrious King
Menelaus
He will not give up, though the other
Trojans urge him
To do so. And further they bade me
inquire whether you
Are willing to stop high-screaming war
till we
Have burned our dead. Then the fight
shall continue till God says
Who wins and gives the victory to
whichever side
He chooses.”

At this a long hush fell over them all.
But at last battle-roaring Diomedes
spoke out among them:
“Let no man now accept such treasure
from Paris,
Nor take Helen back. The merest baby
can see
That the Trojans are already caught in
the net of destruction!”

He spoke, and the sons of Achaeans all
shouted approval
Of what Diomedes, master of horses,
had said.
Then King Agamemnon spoke thus to the
Trojan herald:
“Idaeus, you’ve already heard the
Achaeans’ decision

And how they answer your speech, and
their good pleasure
Is also mine. But concerning the dead, of
course
I will not refuse your request to burn the
bodies:
No man should begrudge dead bodies
the swift consolation
Of fire. So to this burial truce of ours
Let Zeus be witness, Hera's loud-
thundering lord."

So saying, he lifted his scepter to all of
the gods,
And Idaeus went back to sacred Ilium.
There
The men of Troy and Dardania too had
met

In one body to wait for Idaeus, who
came and stood
In their midst and told them his message.
Then quickly they got
themselves
Ready, some to bring in the dead, others
To go after wood. And across the plain
the Argives
Hurried from the well-timbered ships,
some to bring in
The dead, others to go after wood.

Now the Sun
Was just striking the fields, as he rose
from the gliding deep stream
Of Oceanus and into the sky, when the
two parties met
On the plain. And hard indeed it was to

know

Their own dead. But they with water
washed blood and gore

Away and lifted the bodies into the
wagons,

Shedding hot tears as they worked—but
quietly, since Priam

Would not permit any wailing. Silently,
then,

But grieving inside, they piled the
corpses high

On the pyre, and having burned them in
flaming fire

Returned to holy Troy. And across from
them

The well-greaved Achaeans, heart-
stricken, piled corpses high

On the pyre, and having burned them in

flaming fire

Returned to the hollow ships.

The next day, just

Before light, as darkness began to give
way to dawn,

A picked working force of Achaeans met
at the pyre

And over it built a huge barrow, a single
tomb

For all, heaping it up from the plain and
extending

It out into turreted walls, lofty ramparts

For them and their ships. And then they
built strong-locking gates

Through which to drive chariots. And all
along outside

They dug a trench both wide and deep,

and in it

They planted sharp stakes.

While thus the long-haired Achaeans
Were toiling, the gods were sitting with
lightning-lord Zeus
And marveling at the great effort of
bronze-clad Achaeans.
Earth-shaking Poseidon spoke first: “O
Father Zeus,
What mortal now on the boundless earth
will still
Declare to the gods his mind and
purpose? Don’t
You see that the long-haired Achaeans
have built a wall
In front of their ships with a trench all
along outside it,

But to the gods have offered no glorious
hecatombs?

Surely word of that wall will spread as
far

As young Dawn scatters her light, and
all will forget

The wall that I and Phoebus Apollo
labored

To build for the warrior Laomedon,
King of Troy.”

Then greatly vexed, cloud-gathering
Zeus replied:

“Ah me, you mighty embracer and shaker
of earth,

What have you said! Some other god far
weaker

Than you in hand and spirit might

possibly fear

This notion of theirs. But you—why it's
your renown

That shall spread as far as young Dawn
scatters her light.

So come, when the long-haired
Achaeans have gone with their ships

To their own dear country, break up the
wall with your waves

And sweep it all far out in the brine.
Leave nothing

Behind on that wide beach but the
covering sand.

Thus you may surely demolish the
Achaeans' great wall."

While they were talking, the Achaeans
worked on, and the sun

Went down on the finished ramparts.
Then the weary men
Slew oxen and ate by their lodges. And
many ships
With cargoes of wine were drawn up
there from Lemnos,
Ships dispatched by Jason's son Euneus,
Borne by Hypsipyle to Jason, the
people's shepherd.
For Atreus' sons, Agamemnon and
Menelaus, Euneus
Had sent as a gift a thousand measures of
wine.
And the other long-haired Achaeans
bought wine from the ships
In exchange for bronze and gleaming
iron, for hides,
Live cattle, and slaves, and they made a

rich feast for themselves.

Through most of the night the long-haired
Achaeans caroused,

As did the Trojans and their allies in the
city.

And all through the night contriving Zeus
planned evil

For them, awesomely crashing his
thunder. And each of them

Turned a pale olive with fear and from
their cups

Poured wine on the ground, nor was
there a man who dared

To drink without a libation to almighty
Zeus,

The son of Cronos. At last they went to
bed,

And each of them received the gift of sleep.

BOOK VIII

The Weakening Achaeans

As crocus-clad Dawn was scattering
light over earth,
Zeus who exults in the thunder gathered
the gods
On the highest peak of craggy Olympus
and spoke
To them thus, with all the immortals
keenly attentive:
“Hear me, you gods and goddesses too,
that I
May say what now my spirit desires. Let
none

Of you deities, male or female, cross me
in this

I command, but all of you gladly obey
me, that I

May quickly conclude these works of
war. Whichever

Of you I see apart from the others, trying
To give your support to Trojans or
Danaans either,

Him I shall smite and disgrace, and back
he shall come

To Olympus, or I shall seize and hurl
him down deep

In the gloomy abyss of Tartarus, the
deepest pit

In all the earth, far down to the iron
gates

And threshold of bronze, as deep below

Hades as sky

Is high above earth!^v Then he will know
how far

My power surpasses the power of all
other gods.

But come, divinities, try for yourselves,
that all

Of you may know. Hang a golden chain
from the sky

And all of you gods and goddesses too
take hold

Of that chain and pull. Even so, you
would not be able

To drag great Zeus, the powerful
wisdom most high,

From heaven to earth, no matter how
hard you pulled.

But if I should take a good notion to pull
on that chain,
Then up would come all of you along
with the earth
And sea, whereupon I would make the
chain fast to a crag
Of Olympus and leave you all hanging
high in the air!
That's how much stronger I am than you
gods and all
mortals.”¹

He spoke, and the others sat utterly
silent, in awe
At his words, for he had spoken with
masterful force.
But finally blue-eyed Athena answered
him thus:

“Our Father, son of Cronos, ruling high
Above all other rulers, we know very
well
How strong and unyielding you are.
Even so, we feel sorry
For the Danaan spearmen, who now
shall die and come
To a miserable end. Of course we’ll do
as you say
And stay out of the fighting, but still we
will help the Argives
With good advice, that all may not
perish because of
Your wrath.”

Then Zeus, god of gales, smiled at his
daughter
And said: “Why so grim, my

Tritogeneia?

Dear child, I was not altogether in earnest in what I said, and surely I want to be gentle with you.”

So saying, he harnessed his brazen-hoofed horses, fast-flying
Steeds with manes of streaming gold.
And the garments
He wore were of gold, as was the well-wrought whip
He held in his hand as he mounted the car and lashed
The horses ahead. And they, not at all unwilling,
Flew on between earth and the starry sky. He went

To well-watered Mount Ida, mother of
wilderness creatures,
To Gargarus peak, where he has a grove
and temple
And altar fragrant with incense. There
the Father
Of men and gods pulled up and
unharnessed his horses
And hid them both in thick mist, but he
himself
Sat mid the beetling crags looking out on
the city
Of Troy and the long dark line of
Achaean ships.

And now the long-haired Achaeans ate
quickly and put on
Their armor, and opposite them the men

of Troy

Dressed for battle throughout the city.

Fewer

They were than the Argives, but in their
pressing need

All the more eager to fight for their
children and wives.

Then all the gates were thrown open,
and with a tremendous

Din the army poured out, both infantry
and horse.

And now the two forces met with a
knocking of spears

And bossed shields clashing in a fierce
and furious uproar

Of bronze-breasted fighters. And there
the screams of the dying

Were mingled with cries of triumph, and
blood flowed over
The earth.

Now all morning long, as the sacred
daylight
Grew brighter, the missiles of both sides
struck home, and the
warriors
Fell. But when the Sun-god bestrode
mid-heaven,
The Father lifted his golden scales and
in them
Placed two lots of grievous and leveling
death,
One for the horse-taming Trojans, for the
bronze-clad Achaeans
The other. Then he took hold of the

middle and lifted

The scales, and the fatal day for
Achaeans sank down

And their fates rested on all-feeding
earth, while those

Of the Trojans were raised toward
heaven's expanse. And now

Zeus uttered a great crash of thunder and
hurled a huge bolt

Of lightning down into the host of
Achaeans. At this

They were stricken with awe, and olive-
pale panic gripped all of them

Hard.

Then neither Idomeneus nor
Agamemnon

Had heart enough to hold his ground, nor

did

Those comrades of Ares, the two
Ajaxes. Only

Gerenian Nestor, Achaea's old sentinel,
stayed

Where he was, not at all that he wanted
to, but a trace-horse

Of his was badly wounded. Handsome
Prince Paris,

Lord of lovely blonde Helen, had driven
an arrow

Deep in the horse's brain, striking him
right

Where the mane begins on top of the
head, the deadliest

Spot of all. In agony, lunging and leaping
And rearing high with the bronze, the
horse had entangled

The team, and the old one had leaped
from the car with his sword
And was hacking away at the traces. But
now the fast horses
Of Hector came on through the rout with
a very bold man
Behind them, brave Hector himself. And
now the old one's
Life would have ended if battle-roaring
Diomedes
Had not been sharply alert. He saw the
trouble
And shouted with all of his might to
Odysseus for help:

“Zeus-sprung son of Laertes,
resourceful Odysseus,
Where are you going so fast with your

back to the battle

Mid all the rest of the cowards? Watch
out as you run,

Or someone will plant a spear in your
back. But stop

And hold your ground, that we may
thrust this wild man

Away from old Nestor!”

Diomedes yelled, but the worthy
Long-suffering Odysseus paid him no
heed as he

Shot past toward the hollow ships. Thus
all alone

Diomedes confronted the foremost
fighters, taking

His stand in front of the horses of
Neleus’ son Nestor

And speaking thus to the old one in these winged words:

“Old sire, surely young warriors strain your endurance.

Your strength is not what it was now that old age

Lies heavy upon you, your squire is a puny fellow,

And surely your horses are out of the running. So come,

Get up in my chariot here, that you may see

What the horses of Tros are like. They're equally fast

Pursuing or fleeing, these mighty masters of rout

I lately took from Aeneas. Let both of

our squires

Look after your horses, while we go
galloping on

Against the horse-taming Trojans, that
Hector too

May learn how madly this spear of mine
leaps from my hand!”

Such were his words, and horse-
driving Gerenian Nestor

Agreed. So the squires, brave Sthenelus
and gentle Eurymedon,

Took charge of the horses, and the old
King mounted the car

With Diomedes.² Then Nestor took hold
of the glossy reins

And lashed the horses ahead, and on they
went

At a gallop directly for Hector, whose
chariot came
Straight at them. In close, Diomedes
threw, missed Hector,
But struck his squire on the breast by the
nipple, Eniopeus,
Holding the reins, the son of high-
hearted Thebaeus.
He plunged from the chariot, causing the
quick-footed horses
To shy, and there his spirit and strength
were undone.
And the heart of Hector was crowded
with terrible pain
For his charioteer. Even so, he left him
stretched out
Where he fell, and went off, greatly
grieved for his comrade, in search

Of another bold driver. Nor were his
horses for long
Without such a master, for quickly he
came on the brave
Archeptolemus, Iphitus' son, and making
him mount
Behind the fast horses he put the reins in
his hands.

Then ruinous, irreparable damage
would soon have been done
To the Trojans, and they would all have
been penned up in Troy
Like so many lambs, if the Father of
gods and men
Had not been sharply watching. He
thundered with a terrible
Crashing and hurled a dazzling white

lightning-bolt,
Hurled it to earth before Diomedes' team,
Where it burst in an awesome flare of fuming sulphur,
Terrifying the horses and making them balk and back up
The car. And the heart of Nestor was also afraid
As he dropped the reins and spoke thus to Diomedes:
"Come now,
Turn your solid-hoofed horses and flee. Don't
You see that power from God is not yours today?
Zeus has given that glory to Hector there,
But another day great Cronos' son will

give it

To us, if he pleases. No man can thwart
God's will

In any way. No matter how mighty the
man,

God is stronger by far.”

Then Diomedes,
The fierce battle-roarer, answered him
thus: “Surely,

Old sire, all that you say is true enough.
But terrible pain torments my soul when
I think

How Hector will someday say in a
gathering of Trojans:

‘Diomedes, driven before me, fled to the
ships.’

So someday he'll boast—but first let the

wide earth open
For me!”

To which horse-driving Gerenian
Nestor:

“Ah now, you son of flame-hearted
Tydeus, what
Are you saying! Hector may call you
coward and weakling,
But who of the Trojans or their
Dardanian allies
Will ever believe him? Certainly not the
wives
Of the spirited, shield-bearing fighters of
Troy, women
Whose lusty young husbands you have
hurled in the dust.”

So saying, he turned the solid-hoofed

horses and joined
The general rout, and now the Trojans
and Hector,
Awesomely screaming, rained their
groan-fraught missiles
Upon them, and tall bright-helmeted
Hector loudly
Shouted in triumph:

“You above all, Diomedes,
The swiftly-drawn Danaans honored
with a special seat
At the feast, choice cuts, and an ever-full
cup. But now
They will surely despise you as a man
more woman than warrior!
Run, you pampered doll! You’ll never
scale

Our city walls through any yielding of
mine,
Nor carry our women away in your
ships. I'll make you
A feeble ghost long before that ever
happens!"

He spoke, and Tydeus' son was torn
two ways,
Whether to wheel his horses and meet
him head on,
Or not. Three times he hovered in heart
and soul
On the point of turning, and three times
Zeus the planner
Thundered from the range of Ida, giving
a sign
To the Trojans that he was on their side

and victory was theirs.

Then Hector loudly encouraged his fighting comrades:

“You Trojans and Lycians and dueling
Dardanians, now,
My friends, be men, and filled with
furious boldness!
I know that Zeus has willingly nodded
assent
And given the victory and very great
glory to me,
But death and defeat to the Danaans,
fools that they are
To have built those miserable walls,
weak and scarcely
Worth noticing. Those ramparts will
never withstand our onslaught,

Believe me, and lightly our horses shall
leap the dug ditch.
But when at last I stand mid the hollow
ships,
Make sure that we are provided with
blazing fire,
That I may burn the ships and slay the
men
Beside them, that I may slaughter, I say,
the Argives,
All of them choking and falling around in
the smoke!”

So saying, he shouted these words to
his horses: “Xanthus,
And you Podargus, and Aethon, and
glossy Lampus,
Now is your time to repay me for all the

good care

You've had at the hands of Andromache,
great-hearted Eëtion's

Daughter, who fed you so often on
sweet-hearted wheat

And poured good wine in your water for
you to drink

Whenever your spirits bade—fed you, in
fact,

Before she did me, and I am her own
loving husband.

So gallop ahead in pursuit, that we may
take

Nestor's shield, that solid gold buckler,
gold arm-rods and all,

Famous from earth to heaven, and that
we may strip

Horse-breaking Diomedes' richly

wrought breastplate off,
A piece laboriously fashioned by
Hephaestus himself.
If we could only account for those two,
then
I might hope to drive the Achaeans away
in their ships
This very night!”

His vaunting aroused the resentment
Of queenly Hera, who made all lofty
Olympus
Quake as she stirred on her throne. Then
she spoke thus
To the great god Poseidon: “Ah me, you
far-reaching shaker
Of shores, not even the heart in your
breast has pity

For the Danaans dying. Yet they honor
you with many
Delightful gifts at Helice and at Aegae.
Grant, then, the victory to them. For if all
of us
Who support the Danaans willed to hurl
back the Trojans
And hold back loud-thundering Zeus,
then surely he'd sit
In a miserable mood down there all
alone on Mount Ida!"

Greatly disturbed, earth-shaking
Poseidon replied:
"Heedless, word-slinging Hera, what
are you saying!
Surely I would not be willing to join
with the others

And fight against Cronos' son Zeus,
since he is so very much
Stronger than we are."

While thus the two of them talked,
Priam's son Hector, now that Zeus gave
him glory,
Pinned up the Achaeans, shield-bearing
warriors, horses
And all, in the space from the deep-
ditched wall to the ships
Drawn up on the beach. And now would
Hector have put
The torch to their shapely vessels, if
queenly Hera
Had not inspired Agamemnon to try with
all speed
To rally the jostling Achaeans. Bearing

his great
Crimson cloak over one thick arm, he
went past lodges
And ships to the huge black hull of
Odysseus' vessel,
Which stood drawn up in the middle
within shouting distance
Of both ends of the line, where Ajax,
Telaamon's son,
And Achilles had their lodges, for such
was their trust
In manly valor and the strength of their
hands that they
Had drawn up their ships at the
furthest ends. From the deck
Agamemnon shouted as loud as he could,
calling out
Thus to the Danaans:

“For shame, you miserable Argives,
Men only outwardly brave, where now
are your brags
That we are the men most valiant, the
hollow vaunts
You made in Lemnos^w while gorging
yourselves with meat
Of high-horned cattle and guzzling great
bowls brimful
Of wine, each of you boasting that you
would stand up
In battle to a hundred, no two hundred,
Trojans! But now
We’re no match for even one Hector,
who very soon
Will put his bright torch to our ships. O
Father Zeus,

Was there ever another of high-ruling
kings whose soul,
Like mine, you blinded with folly and
whose great glory
You seized? Still I am sure that I passed
in my ship
No exquisite altar of yours on my
lamentable
Way here without a burnt-offering to you
of the fat
And thighs of bulls, so eager was I to
sack
The thick-walled city of Troy. But
please grant this
I ask of you now, O Zeus, and let us at
least
Escape with our lives. Do not allow the
Trojans

Thus to destroy us all.”

He prayed, and the Father
Had pity on the weeping King and,
nodding, gave him
A sign that his people should live and
not be destroyed.

At that very moment he sent an eagle,
surest

Of winged omens, his talons clutching a
fawn,

The young of a swift-running doe. And
beside the exquisite

Altar of Zeus he let the fawn fall, right
where

The Achaeans sacrificed offerings to the
almighty Father,

Source of all omens. Then they, when

they saw that the bird
Was from Zeus, sprang once again at the
Trojans and quickly
Regained their lust for battle.

But no man there
Of the Danaans, though they were many,
could claim he beat
Diomedes across the trench in his
swiftly-drawn car
To clash in close fighting. For Tydeus'
son was far
The first to bring down a helmeted
Trojan warrior,
Phradmon's son Agelaus. He was just
reining
His horses around getting ready to run,
but as

He wheeled, Diomedes planted a spear
in his back

Midway of the shoulders and drove it on
out through his chest.

He pitched from the car, and on him his
armor rang.

Behind Diomedes came Atreus' sons,
Agamemnon

And Menelaus, and both Ajaxes, furious
valor

Incarnate, Idomeneus next and
Idomeneus' comrade

Meriones, peer of the slaughtering god
of battles,

And after these Eurypylus, splendid son
Of Euaemon, and Teucer came ninth,
stringing his supple

Bent bow, and took his position behind
the huge shield
Of Ajax, son of Telamon. And Ajax
would move
His shield to one side while Teucer
looked for a target
In the enemy throng, shot, and brought
his man down
No longer alive. Then Teucer would
quickly take cover
With Ajax again, like a child that runs to
his mother,
And Ajax would hide him completely
behind his bright shield.

Who then was first of the Trojans that
matchless Teucer
Laid low? Orsilochus first, Ormenus

next,

Then Ophelestes and Daetor, Chromius
and Prince Lycophontes,
Polyaemon's son Amopaon and
Melanippus.

All these in quick succession Teucer
stretched out

On the all-feeding earth. And the king of
men Agamemnon

Rejoiced to see him wrecking the Trojan
battalions

With that mighty bow of his, and coming
up to him

He said:

“Beloved Telamonian Teucer, captain
Of many, keep up the good shooting and
surely you'll be

A light to the Danaans and to your father
Telamon,
Who brought you up from a baby, and
though you were
A bastard son cherished you dearly and
gave you
The best of care at home in his palace.
Now
Give him great glory through you, far
away though he is.
And this I will promise to you and surely
perform:
If aegis-great Zeus and Athena grant me
the sacking
Of firm-founded Ilium, I will hand over
to you,
First after myself, some splendid prize
of prestige,

A tripod, perhaps, or a chariot and pair,
or a woman
To share your bed.”

Then matchless Teucer replied:
“Most famous Atrides, why urge me on
when I
Am already so eager? Believe me, I fight
as long as
I’m able, and ever since we turned them
toward Ilium,
Ever since then I have crouched here and
brought men down
With my bow. Eight of my long-barbed
arrows are fixed
In the flesh of fast and lusty young
fighters, though yonder
Mad dog I cannot hit.”

But he was determined
To bring Hector down, and so let
another shaft fly
From the string directly at him. Again,
however,
He missed, but lodged his arrow deep in
the breast
Of peerless Gorgythion, Priam's brave
son, borne
By a wife from Aesyne, the beautiful
Castianeira,
A woman made like a goddess. And now
to one side
Gorgythion drooped his head and heavy
helmet:
He let it fall over like the bloom of a
garden poppy

Heavy with seed and the rains of spring.

But Teucer,
Determined to bring Hector down, let
another shaft fly
From the string directly at him. Again,
however,
He missed, for Apollo himself deflected
the arrow.

But Hector's bold driver
Archeptolemus, eagerly charging,
Received the shaft in his breast by the
nipple and plunged
From the chariot, causing the quick-
footed horses to shy,
And there his spirit and strength were
undone. And the heart
Of Hector was crowded with terrible

pain at the death
Of his driver. But he, though greatly
grieved for his friend,
Bade his brother Cebriones, close at
hand,
To take the reins of the horses, and
Cebriones heard him
And did what he said. But Hector
himself, wildly screaming,
Leaped from his gleaming car to the
ground, and seizing
A hand-filling stone rushed straight at
Teucer, determined
To strike him. Now Teucer had taken a
bitter shaft
From the quiver and laid it upon the
bowstring, and had just
Drawn it back to his shoulder when

charging bright-helmeted

Hector

Came down hard with the stone on that
most mortal spot

Where the collarbone separates neck and
chest. There

He dealt him a furious blow with the
jagged stone,

Breaking the bowstring and numbing his
hand to the wrist.

And Teucer, dropping the bow, fell to
his knees.

But Ajax saw his brother fall and ran

And stood over him, using his shield as
a cover.

Then two loyal comrades, Echius' son
Mecisteus

And noble Alastor, lifted their friend
and carried him,
Heavily groaning, back to the hollow
ships.

Now again the Olympian roused the
Trojans to rally,
And fiercely they hurled the Achaeans
straight back to their own
Deep trench. And Hector, reveling in
martial prowess,
Led the hard charge. As a quick-footed
hound pursues
A wild boar or a lion, snapping at him
from behind
At buttock or flank and warily watching
for the beast
To turn, so Hector pressed hard on the

long-haired Achaeans,
Constantly killing the hindmost as all of
them fled
In the general rout. But when they had
scrambled through trench
And sharp stakes and many had died at
the hands of the Trojans,
They came to a halt beside their ships,
and calling
For help to one another each of them
lifted
His arms in loud and fervent prayer to
all
Of the gods. But Hector kept wheeling
his mane-tossing horses
This way and that, and surely his eyes
were as fierce
As those of the Gorgon or man-maiming

Ares himself.

Watching them die, the white-armed
goddess Hera
Pitied her favorites and spoke at once to
Athena
In these words winged with compassion:
“Ah me, you daughter
Of Zeus of the aegis, shall we two lack
all concern
For Danaans dying in this late hour of
pain?
Now they’ll surely fulfill a miserable
fate
And fatally fall before the charge of one
man,
Priam’s son Hector, who rages beyond
their control

And who has already done many quite horrible things.”

And the bright-eyed goddess Athena answered her, saying:

“I heartily wish the spirit and strength of this man

Would be destroyed there in the land of his fathers

Beneath the hands of the Argives! But my own Father

Also rages with evil intent, that cruel

And constant old sinner who thwarts my deepest desires.

Now he doesn't remember how I on many

Occasions rescued his son when he was worn out

By the labors Eurystheus had him
perform.^x All Heracles
Had to do was cry out to heaven, and
Zeus
Would send me down to help and defend
him. But if
My heart had only foreseen all this the
time
Eurytheus sent him to gate-guarding
Hades to bring
Out of Erebus the loathed Death-god's
hound,^y then never
Would he have recrossed the high-
banked waters of Styx.
Surely Zeus hates me now, but he has
fulfilled
The wishes of Thetis, who kissed his

knees and took hold of
His chin with her hand, pleading with
him to honor
Town-taking Achilles. But just as surely
the day
Will come when again he will call me
his blue-eyed darling.
So harness our solid-hoofed horses
while I go into
The palace of aegis-bearing Zeus and
put on my armor,
That I may find out how glad bright-
helmeted Hector
Will be when he sees me appear in the
fighting ranks
Of battle. Truly the muscle and fat of
many
A Trojan will glut the dogs and carrion

birds

Beside the Achaean ships!”

So she spoke,
And the white-armed Queen of the gods
was equally willing.
So honored Hera, daughter of mighty
Cronos,
Harnessed the gold-bridled horses. And
Athena, daughter
Of Zeus, on the floor of her Father's
palace, shed
The soft robe that she herself had made
and embroidered,
Put on instead the tunic of stormy Zeus,
And armed herself for tearful war. Then
she,
God's daughter, mounted the flaming

car, gripping

The heavy huge spear with which she
conquers whole armies

That have enraged her. Hera gave the
horses a flick

With the lash, and the gates of heaven
groaned on their hinges,

The self-opening gates which are kept by
the Seasons, who have

In their keeping Olympus and all the
wide sky, and who open

And close the thick clouds as they see
fit. So on

Through the gates they drove their now
impatient horses.

But Father Zeus caught sight of them
from Ida

And terrible rage welled up within him.
At once
He sent golden-winged Iris to bear the
two goddesses word:
“Fly swiftly, quick Iris, and turn those
two back. Don’t let them
Encounter me face to face, for the sequel
of such
A conflict would not be very pleasant.
And this
I declare, and truly I’ll do what I say.
I’ll cripple
Their horses and knock both goddesses
out of their chariot,
Which car I will smash into pieces. Nor
will they recover
For ten circling years from the wounds
my lightning will give them.

Then she of the blazing blue eyes will
know what it is
To fight her own Father. With Hera I'm
not so indignant
And angry, since I am quite used to her
opposition
In everything I say do."

So spoke the Father,
And storm-footed Iris swiftly flew off
with the message,
Leaving the range of Ida for lofty
Olympus.
There at the marvelous gates of the
deep-creviced mountain
She met the two goddesses, stopped
them, and thus delivered
The message of Zeus:

“Where to in such a hurry?

How can the hearts within you so
foolishly rage?

Cronos’ son Zeus will not allow you to
help

The Argives. Now he threatens you thus,
and surely

He’ll do what he says. He says he will
cripple your horses

And knock the two of you out of your
chariot, which car

He will smash into pieces. Nor will you
recover for ten

Circling years from the wounds his
lightning will give you. Then you,

Blue-eyes, will know what it is to fight
your own Father.

With Hera he's not so indignant and
angry, since he
Is quite used to her opposition in
everything
He says do. But you are most brazen,
Athena, bitch-hearted
And shameless, if you really dare to
raise your great spear
Against Zeus."

Having so spoken, quick-footed Iris
Flew off. And Hera turned to Athena,
saying:
"O child of aegis-great Zeus, no longer
will I
Allow us to go against God in battle for
the sake
Of mere mortals. Let mortals live and

die as they will,
And now let Zeus ponder those plans of
his and judge
Between Trojans and Danaans wholly as
he sees fit.”

With this she turned back her solid-
hoofed horses. And the Seasons
Unyoked the mane-tossing steeds, tied
them at mangers
Filled with ambrosia, and tilted the car
against
The gleaming wall by the gates. Then the
goddesses, hurt
And resentful, took their places on
golden thrones
Mid the other immortal powers.

Father Zeus, meanwhile,

Mounted his well-running car and
hurried his horses
From Ida to Mount Olympus, where he
entered the session
Of gods. Poseidon, famed shaker of
shores, unharnessed
His brother's horses, put his car on its
stand, and covered it
All with a cloth. And far-seeing Zeus sat
down
On his golden throne, while beneath his
feet huge Olympus
Quaked. Only Athena and Hera sat apart
From the Father, and only they said
nothing at all
By way of greeting or question. But the
heart of Zeus
Knew very well what the goddesses

thought, and he spoke
To them thus:

“Why so unhappy, Athena and Hera?
Surely you haven’t exhausted yourselves
in battle,
Where men win glory, ruining the
Trojans whom you
So dreadfully hate. No matter what I
undertake,
All the gods on Olympus could never
dissuade me,
For such is my spirit and such my
invincible hands.
But trembling seized the glorious limbs
of you two
Before you had even so much as a
glimpse of the fighting

And horrors of war. But let me remind
you of what
Would surely have happened if the two
of you hadn't turned back.
I would have blasted you both with a
charge of lightning
So great that you would have had no
chariot left
In which to come back to Olympus,
where the immortal gods
Abide."

At first his words got murmurs only
From Athena and Hera, who sat by each
other contriving
Disasters for Trojans. Then Athena kept
quiet and said nothing,
Though seized by savage anger at Father

Zeus.

But the breast of Hera could not contain
her rage,

And she railed at him thus:

“Most dreadful son of Cronos,
What kind of talk is that! We know very
well

How almighty strong you are. Even so,
we feel sorry

For the Danaan spearmen, who now
shall die and come

To a miserable end. Of course we'll do
as you say

And stay out of the fighting, but still we
will help the Argives

With good advice, that all may not
perish because of

Your wrath.”

Then Zeus of the gathering gale
replied:

“Tomorrow at dawn, O heifer-eyed
mighty Hera,

You’ll see, if you deign to behold, the
truly mighty

Son of Cronos wrecking still further the
ample

Ranks of Argive spearmen. For massive
Hector

Shall not stop fighting till swift Achilles
himself

Arises beside his ships, and that will not
be

Till all are fiercely contending in deadly
close quarters

At the sterns of the ships about the
corpse of Patroclus.³

Such is heaven's decree. And I don't
care

At all how angry you get, nor how far
away

You go in your sulking. Go to the bottom
of earth

And sea for all I care, down where
Iapetus

And Cronos sit in the depths of gloomy
Tartarus,

Unrelieved by light from the Sun-god
Hyperion

And unrefreshed by any breeze that
blows.⁴

Go on, if you wish, and see how much

I'm disturbed
By your miserable wrath and resentment.
For nothing that lives
Is more bitch-hearted than you!"

So spoke great Zeus,
But white-armed Hera had nothing to say
in reply.

Then the smoldering sun dropped into
the stream of Oceanus
And drew black night across the grain-
giving earth.

Unhappy indeed were the Trojans to see
the light sink,

But to the frantic Achaeans the darkness
was welcome,

The night thrice earnestly prayed for.

Then glorious Hector

Called the Trojans together and led them
apart
From the ships, assembling them all by
the swirling river
In an open space clear of corpses. Down
they stepped
From their cars to the ground to hear
what god-loved Prince

Hector

Wanted to tell them. He held a sixteen-
foot spear
In his hand, while over his head the
bronze point blazed
And the ring of gold that held it. And
now he leaned
On the spear and spoke these words to
the Trojans:

“Your attention,
Trojans, Dardanians, allies. Just now I
thought
That we would destroy the ships and all
the Achaeans
Before going back to windy Ilium. But
darkness
Fell too soon. That most of all has now
Saved the Argives along with their ships
on the surf-beaten shore.
So let us give in to black night and make
preparations
For supper. Loose from the cars your
mane-tossing horses
And throw some fodder before them.
Then go with all speed
To the city for oxen and splendid fat

sheep. Get sweet-hearted
Wine and bread from your houses, and
gather much wood,
That all through the night till early dawn
we may
Have fires sufficient to light up heaven
itself.
That way we'll prevent the long-haired
Achaeans from making
A try by night to run for home in their
ships
Over the sea's broad back. Let them not
at their leisure
Board the ships, nor leave without a
battle.
See to it that many a man takes home a
shaft
To remember us by, an arrow or keen-

headed spear

Lodged in his back as he makes a leap
for the deck

Of his ship. So others may live in terror
of bringing

Sad war on the horse-breaking Trojans.

And let our heralds,

Beloved of Zeus, call out through the
city for all

The young lads and gray-templed elders
to spend this night

On the god-built walls, and tell our
wives to kindle

Great fires at home in their halls, that
careful watch

May be kept to prevent a raid on the city
while we

Are out here. So be it, my great-hearted
friends, as I have
Just said. But enough of good counsel for
now. Tomorrow
At dawn I'll have more to say to you, the
horse-breaking
Trojans. And now I hopefully pray to
Zeus
And the other gods that we may drive
from our land
Those fate-driven dogs, who came in
their death-borne black hulls
Long ago. And we too must keep a close
watch tonight,
Guarding ourselves, but just before
dawn let us put on
Our armor and throw our whole strength
into keen-bladed war

At the hollow ships. Then I'll find out
whether Tydeus'

Son, the strong Diomedes, will force me
back

From the ships to the wall, or whether
I'll bring him down

With the bronze and bear off his blood-
stained armor. Tomorrow

He'll know how able his valor is to
withstand

The chilling onrush of my spear. He'll
lie, I dare say,

Mid the fallen foremost fighters, undone
by a thrust

Of the bronze, and many a comrade of
his will lie

Stretched out around him at sunrise

tomorrow. I only
Wish that I were as sure of being
immortal
And ageless throughout all days to come,
like Athena
And Phoebus Apollo, as I am certain that
daylight
Tomorrow will bring disaster on all of
the Argives!”

So Hector harangued them, and all of
them shouted approval.
Then they unharnessed their sweating
horses and tethered
Them with the reins, each man beside
his own car.
And with all speed they led from the city
oxen

And splendid fat sheep, brought sweet-
hearted wine and bread
From their houses, and gathered great
heaps of wood. Then
To the gods they offered complete
hecatombs, and the breezes
Wafted the savor up from the plain into
heaven,
But from that fragrance the blissful gods
abstained.
They would not partake at all, so hateful
to them
Were sacred Ilium, Priam, and the
people of Priam,
Great King of the good ashen spear.

So the confident Trojans
Waited all night in their companies, and

many indeed
Were the watchfires burning. As when
the stars shine out
Round the gleaming moon on a fair, still
night when all
The high peaks and headlands and forest
glades are easy
To see, so open then is the sky, so clear
The infinite air, and the shepherd's heart
is made glad
By the countless stars overhead—even
so many
That night seemed the fires of the
Trojans bivouacked before Troy
Between the ships and the river Xanthus.
The plain
Was lit with a thousand fires, and in the
light

Of each blaze sat fifty men, while by
their chariots
Stood their fine horses, munching a
mixture of wheat
And white barley and waiting for Dawn
of the beautiful throne.

BOOK IX

Agamemnon's Offers to Achilles

While thus the Trojans kept watch, the
Achaeans were gripped
With awesome Panic, companion of
freezing Fear,
And all their leaders were filled with
unbearable grief.
As the fish-full sea is stirred by a storm
when hard winds
Quickly arise and blow from the North
and West
Directly from Thrace, raising dark foam-

crested billows
And strewing the beaches with seaweed,
so now the hearts
Of Achaeans were stirred.

But Atreus' son Agamemnon,
Deeply despairing, went up and down
through the host
Commanding the clear-voiced heralds to
call each man
By name to the place of assembly, to call
without shouting,
And he himself worked with the heralds.
At last they sat
In assembly, troubled and grieving, and
King Agamemnon
Stood up to speak, weeping like a spring
whose dark streams

Trickle down the rocky face of a cliff.
Even so,
And heavily sighing, he addressed the
Argives thus:

“My friends, captains and counselors
of the Argives,
Almighty Zeus, the son of crooked
Cronos,
Has bound me now in woeful blindness
of spirit,
Heartless god that he is! For long ago
He made me a promise and vowed with
a nod of his head
That I should sack the well-walled city
of Ilium
Before I went home, but now a vile
deceit

Appears in his plans, and he bids me go
back in disgrace
To Argos, having lost a great many men.
Such,
I suppose, is the pleasure of Zeus,
almighty God,
Who has toppled the towers of numerous
cities and who
Shall continue to topple, since his is the
greatest power.¹
So come, all of you do as I say. Let us
flee
With our ships to the precious land of
our fathers. For we
Can no longer hope to plunder the wide
streets of Troy.”

He spoke, and the grieving sons of

Achaeans sat
A long time in silence, till finally strong
Diomedes,
He of the fierce battle-scream, spoke out
among them:
“Son of Atreus, with you and your folly,
O King,
I’ll be the first to contend in the
privileged place
Of assembly, here where speech is
respected. Do not, then,
Be angry at me and my words. You, after
all,
Amid the Danaans slandered my valor
first,
Saying that I was weak and unwarlike.[aa](#)
Nor is there

A single Argive, young or old, who isn't
Aware that you spoke so to me. But you
are the one
Whom the son of Cronos, crooked in
counsel, uncertainly
Endowed: he gave you the scepter, yes,
and with it
The highest honor, but courage he did
not grant you,
And courage is far the most kingly virtue
of all.
Strange man, do you really believe that
the sons of Achaeans
Have hearts as weak and unwarlike as
you imply?
But if your own heart is anxious to go,
go on!
You know the way, and the whole huge

fleet that followed you
Here from Mycenae still stands drawn
up by the sea.
But the other long-haired Achaeans will
stay till Ilium
Falls. And if they also should flee in
their ships
To the precious land of their fathers, we
two, Sthenelus
And I, will surely fight on till Troy is
ours,
For we came here with the blessing of
almighty God.”

He spoke, and all the sons of Achaeans
shouted
Approval, applauding the words of
brave Diomedes,

Breaker of horses. Then knightly old
Nestor stood up
And spoke out among them: "Son of
Tydeus, you
Are the strongest of men in battle and
surely the best
Of all our young men in council. No
Achaean would scorn
The speech you just made or contradict
what you said.
Even so, there is more that badly needs
saying. It's true
That you're still a young man, quite
young enough to be
My youngest son. Still your words of
reproof
To the kings of Argos were prudent and
utterly right.

But now let an older man speak and
complete your good counsel.

Nor is there a man who will scorn what
I say, not even

King Agamemnon. Friendless, lawless,
and homeless

Is he who enjoys the horror of blood-
chilling strife

Among his own people. But now let us
yield to black night

And make preparations for supper. Let
sentinels take

Their positions beyond the wall along
the deep ditch.

This I say to the young men only. Then
you,

Agamemnon, make the first move, since

you are highest

In royal rank, and give a feast for the
chieftains,

As is but fitting and right. Your lodges
are full

Of wine brought daily to you in Achaean
ships

From Thrace across the wide water, and
you, as ruler

Of many, have means to receive us as
only a great king

Can. Then you may take his advice who
speaks

Most wisely in our discussion. And
surely all

The Achaeans are sorely in need of
advice, of practical

Good advice, now that our foes are

lighting

Their many fires so close to the ships.

Who

Among us rejoices in that? Believe me,
this night

Will determine the ruin or salvation of
all our great army!”

He spoke, and they, quite attentive, did
as he said.

The armor-clad sentries went out on the
double, commanded

By Nestor’s son Thrasymedes, shepherd
of the people,

Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, sons of Ares,
and Meriones,

Aphareus, Deïpyrus, and able
Lycomedes, son

Of Creon. These captains of the guard
were seven in all,
And with each of them marched a
hundred young warriors armed
With long spears. They all went out and
took their posts
Midway between trench and wall, and
there they lit fires
And each prepared his own supper.

But King Agamemnon
Led the whole body of chieftains to a
royal feast
In his lodge, where all their hearts could
wish for was theirs.
They fell to feasting and enjoyed the
good things before them.
But when they had eaten and drunk as

much as they wanted,
The old one stood up and wove wise
counsel for them,
The ancient Nestor, whose wisdom had
won out before.
Now he, in an effort to help, spoke out
among them:

“Renowned Atrides, king of men
Agamemnon,
From beginning to end my remarks are
especially for you.
For you are King over many, and Zeus
himself
Has given the scepter to you and
entrusted you
With the laws, that you might rule wisely
and well. Hence you

Above all should speak your counsel
and listen to that

Of others, listen and also abide by the
good

Advice you get. You, of course, will
finally

Have to decide on anything we may
suggest.

So now I will speak what seems to me
best, nor will

Another find any better suggestion than
this

I have had in my mind for some time,
since the day when you,

O Zeus-sprung mighty chief, took the girl
Briseis

From the lodge of angry Achilles and
went your own

Heedless way completely against our
will. I myself
Did all I could to change your mind, but
you
Gave in to your pride and insulted our
mightiest man,
Whom even the gods do not fail to
honor. You took
And kept his prize of prestige. But still it
is not
Too late for us to consider how we may
make up
For all that and how we may win his
good will again
With friendly gifts and gentle words of
entreaty.”

And thus the commander-in-chief

Agamemnon replied:

“Old sire, you speak of my folly with perfect truth.

I acted blindly,² and I don't for a moment deny it.

A man whom Zeus loves in his heart and honors, as surely

He honors this man, while beating the rest of us down,

Is worth any number of regular uninspired armies.

But since I did give in to my miserable pride,

And since I did act with such folly and lack of foresight,

I now would like very much to make amends

And give the man gifts of limitless value.
Here
In the midst of you all I will name the
glorious tokens:
Seven tripods untouched by the fire, ten
talents
Of gold and twenty bright cauldrons,
along with twelve
Strong prize-taking horses, swift
winners of many a race.
By no means lacking in treasure or
precious gold
Would be that man whose wealth was as
great as the prizes
These solid-hoofed horses have won me.
And I will give him
Seven fair women of Lesbos, skillful
weavers

Of matchless work, women I personally
chose

From the spoil when he himself took
well-fortified Lesbos,

The loveliest women the world has to
offer. I'll give him

These seven, and with them the daughter
of Briseus, the girl

I took away. And I will swear a great
oath

That never once have I slept or made
love with her,

As men and women so naturally do. All
Of these things shall be his at once, and
if the immortals

Grant us the sack of Priam's great city,
let him

Be present when we Achaeans are
dividing the spoil,
That he may fill his ship full of gold and
bronze,
And let him choose twenty women, the
fairest in Troy
After Argive Helen herself. And if we
return
To Achaean Argos, rich udder of earth,
he
Shall be my own son-in-law, nor will I
treat
My beloved and richly reared son
Orestes any better.
I have at home in my solid-built palace
three daughters:
Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa.
Of these

He may take the bride of his choice to
the house of Peleus,
And I will not only forego all wedding
gifts
From him, but will myself give a dowry
far larger
Than any man yet has sent with a
daughter. And I
Will give seven populous cities to him:
Cardamyle,
Enope, grassy Hire, and hallowed
Pherae,
Antheia, deep in meadows, lovely
Aepeia,
And Pedasus, rich in vineyards. They're
all near the sea
On the lower coast of sandy Pylos, and

those

Who live there are wealthy in cattle and
sheep, men

Who will honor him like a god and give
him fine gifts,

And under his scepter they'll do as he
says and prosper

Immensely. All of these gifts are his, if
only

He'll stop being angry. And let him stop
—Hades,

You know, is hard and implacable, and
so he's the god

All mortals hate most! Let him give in to
me,

For I am higher in royal rank, and
besides

I'm an older man.”

Then the horseman, Gerenian Nestor,
Answered him thus: "Most famous son
of Atreus,
King of men Agamemnon, no man would
despise
These gifts of yours to kingly Achilles.
So come,
Let us choose men and send them at once
to the lodge
Of Peleus' great son. Or rather, let those
I select
Be willing to go. First, then, I single out
Phoenix,
Dear to Zeus, and with him the powerful
Ajax
And brilliant Odysseus, and let these
three be attended

By two of our heralds, Odius and
Eurybates. But first
Bring water for the washing of hands,
and call for holy
Silence, that we may pray to Cronos'
son Zeus
For mercy in this our trouble.”

He spoke, and his words
Were pleasing to all. Quickly the heralds
poured water
Over their hands, and the young men
filled the bowls
Brimful of wine, and then the goblets,
first pouring
Libation drops in the goblets of all. But
when
They had made libations and drunk as

much as they wished,
They left the lodge of Atreus' son
Agamemnon.
And the horseman, Gerenian Nestor,
with an earnest glance
At each, but especially at Odysseus,
urgently
Ordered them all to do their best in
persuading
The peerless son of Peleus.

So off they went
Along the beach of the surf-booming sea,
with many
A prayer to Poseidon, god who holds
and shakes
The earth, that they might easily change
the great heart

Of Aeacus' grandson Achilles. Now
when they came
To the lodges and ships of the
Myrmidons, there they found him
Soothing his soul with a resonant lyre,
exquisitely
Wrought and carved, with a bridge of
solid silver,
Part of the loot he had taken when he
himself sacked
Eëtion's city.³ With this he was
pleasantly passing
The time, as to it he sang of warriors'
fame,
Alone but for Patroclus, who sat across
From his friend quietly awaiting the end
of his song.

But now the envoys approached with
shrewd Odysseus

Leading the way, and stood in the great
man's presence.

And he, astonished, leaped up with the
lyre in his hand,

And also Patroclus, seeing the men, got
up

From his seat. Then swift Achilles
greeted them, saying:

“Welcome, my friends, for such you
truly are.

Very great is our need of each other.
Even in anger

You are to me the dearest of all the
Achaeans.”

So saying, noble Achilles led them in

And gave them all chairs with coverings
of purple, and at once
He spoke thus to Patroclus: "Set out a
larger bowl,
You son of Menoetius, and mix us a
livelier drink.
Then fill a cup for each of these men, for
these
Are my dearest friends who sit here
under my roof."

At this Patroclus got busy. He moved a
great block
Out into the firelight, and on it he laid
the chines
Of a sheep and fat goat along with that of
a huge,
Well-larded hog. And the driver

Automedon held them
While noble Achilles carved. Expertly
he cut up
The meat and put it on spits, and godlike
Patroclus
Built up the fire. Then, when the flame
had died down,
He spread the hot coals and laid the
meat above them,
Resting the spits in holders and
sprinkling the cuts
With holy salt. And when he had roasted
the meat
And heaped it on platters, Patroclus put
beautiful baskets
Of bread on the table, while Achilles
gave helpings of meat.
Then he sat down by the wall across

from Odysseus

And told his comrade Patroclus to
sacrifice meat

To the gods, and Patroclus threw the
gods' share in the fire.

And they all helped themselves to the
good things before them, eating

And drinking as much as they wanted.

Then Ajax nodded

To Phoenix. But Odysseus caught the
signal, and filling

A cup with wine he pledged Achilles
thus:

“Here's to you, Achilles. We have no
lack of fine food,

Either in the lodge of Atreus' son
Agamemnon

Or here in yours. This has indeed been a
wonderful
Meal. But we are not really concerned
with food,
However delicious, for now, O god-
nourished Prince,
Our eyes can see nothing but total
destruction, and we
Are afraid. Unless you come back in all
of your might,
We can as easily lose the benched ships
as save them.
Not far from the ships and wall the
confident Trojans
And their far-famous allies have made
their camp
And kindled innumerable fires
throughout the battalions.

They no longer think that we can keep
them from falling
Upon our black ships. Great Zeus
encourages them
With lightning-bolts on the right, and
Hector exulting
In martial prowess rages like mad,
trusting
In Zeus, but quite regardless of all other
gods
To say nothing of men. Irresistible
madness has made him
Her own. He prays for the speedy
arrival of sacred
Young Dawn, and swears he will hew
the high horns from the sterns
Of our ships and burn the hulls with

ravenous fire,
Killing Achaeans reeling around in the
smoke.
Such is the terrible fear in my heart, that
the gods
May make his threats good and our fate
be to die in the land
Of Troy so far from rich Argos where
thoroughbreds graze.
But up, if now at last you are willing to
enter
The horrible din of battling Trojans and
save
The hard-pressed Achaeans. Otherwise,
you too will suffer,
Nor is there any real help for evil done.
But come, before it's too late, and think
how you

May help the Danaans and ward the evil
day off.

Surely, old friend, your father Peleus
was talking

To you the day he sent you from Phthia
and home

To King Agamemnon, saying:

““My son, if it be
Their wish, Athena and Hera will make
you strong,
But you will have to restrain your own
proud spirit.

Good will is always best. And should
you find yourself
Caught in a ruinous quarrel, be
reconciled quickly,
That Argives young and old may respect

you still more.’⁴

“Even so the old one bade you, but you have forgotten.

Still, though, it isn’t too late for you to renounce

Your heart-eating wrath. And if you will, Agamemnon

Offers these adequate gifts, which I will enumerate

Now, if you will but listen. Here then are the tokens

That in his lodge Agamemnon promised to give you:

Seven tripods untouched by the fire, ten talents

Of gold and twenty bright cauldrons, along with twelve

Strong prize-taking horses, swift
winners of many a race.

By no means lacking in treasure or
precious gold

Would be that man whose wealth was as
great as the prizes

These solid-hoofed horses have won
him. And he will give you

Seven fair women of Lesbos, skillful
weavers

Of matchless work, women he
personally chose

From the spoil when you yourself took
well-fortified Lesbos,

The loveliest women the world has to
offer. He'll give you

These seven, and with them the daughter
of Briseus, the girl

He took away. And he will swear a
great oath
That never once has he slept or made
love with her,
As men and women so naturally do. All
Of these things shall be yours at once,
and if the immortals
Grant us the sack of Priam's great city,
then you
Be present when we Achaeans are
dividing the spoil,
That you may fill your ships full of gold
and bronze,
And you may choose twenty women, the
fairest in Troy
After Argive Helen herself. And if we
return

To Achaean Argos, rich udder of earth,
you
Shall be his own son-in-law, nor will he
treat
His beloved and richly reared son
Orestes any better.
He has at home in his solid-built palace
three daughters:
Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa.
Of these
You may take the bride of your choice to
the house of Peleus,
And he will not only forego all wedding
gifts
From you, but will himself give a dowry
far larger
Than any man yet has sent with a
daughter. And he

Will give seven populous cities to you:
Cardamyle,
Enope, grassy Hire, and hallowed
Pherae,
Antheia, deep in meadows, lovely
Aepeia,
And Pedasus, rich in vineyards. They're
all near the sea
On the lower coast of sandy Pylos, and
those
Who live there are wealthy in cattle and
sheep, men
Who will honor you like a god and give
you fine gifts,
And under your scepter they'll do as you
say and prosper
Immensely. All of these gifts are yours,

if only

You'll stop being angry.⁵ But if your heart is still full

Of hatred for Atreus' son, for him and his gifts,

Then at least have pity on the other united Achaeans

Now on the verge of total defeat. They will surely

Hold you in highest honor and glorify you

Like a god. For now you may take great Hector himself,

Since he in his self-destroying rage would come

Right up to you. He no longer thinks that our ships

Brought any man here to equal his prowess in war.”

Then Achilles, swift of foot, answered him thus:

“O god-sprung son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus,

Regardless of persons, I have to say what I think

And what shall indeed come to pass.

Don't sit here with me,

Coaxing and wheedling, first one and then the other.

For the gates of Hades are not more hateful to me

Than a man who hides one thing in his heart and says

Something else. I, then, will say what

seems to me best.⁶

Atreus' son Agamemnon will not, I think,

Persuade me, nor the other Danaans either, since now

I know there were never to be any thanks at all

For my ceaseless efforts against the foe. He

Who lolls in his lodge has equal reward with him

Who fights on the field, coward and hero are honored

Alike, and death comes just as surely to the soldier

Who labors much as it does to the unmanly sluggard.

And what do I have to show for the
pains my heart suffered,
Forever risking my life in battle?
You've seen
A bird that brings in her bill whatever
food
She can find to sustain her unfledged
babies, while she
Herself most miserably goes without.
Even so,
I've watched through many a sleepless
night and fought
My way through many a bloody day, and
all
For the sake of a woman. I've sailed in
my ships to twelve
Well-garrisoned cities and plundered
them all, and eleven

Others, I say, I've stormed and taken by
land

Throughout the fertile Troad. Much
marvelous booty

I took from them all, treasure I brought
and gave

To Atreus' son Agamemnon. And he,
having stayed

In camp beside his swift ships, would
take what I won

And dole out a little, but most he would
keep for himself.

Some he gave as prizes to princes and
kings,

And they still have them untouched. But
from me—and only

From me—he has taken and kept the

bride I adored.

“Well let him sleep with her now and enjoy himself.

But why should Argives battle the Trojans? And why

Has this miserable son of Atreus gathered and led

This great army here? Wasn't it all for lovely

Blonde Helen? Can it be that of all mortal men, only

The sons of Atreus love their wives? Not so,

For any real man of good sense both loves and cares for

His own, as I loved her with all of my heart,

Though she was won by my spear. So
now that he's played
Me false and taken my prize from my
arms, let him
Not try me again. I know him too well,
and now
He shall not persuade me.

“But you, Odysseus, let him
Make plans with you and the other
chieftains to keep
The ruinous fire away from the ships.
Surely
He's done a great deal without
assistance from me.
He's built a wall and dug a ditch all
around it,
A deep wide ditch bristling with sharp-

pointed stakes.

Still, though, he hasn't been able to cope
with the strength

Of man-killing Hector, who had no
stomach for fighting

Out from the wall so long as I was in
battle

Among the Achaeans. Then he would
venture only

So far as the Scaean Gates and the oak
tree. There

He awaited me once in single combat,
and there

He just barely escaped my charge with
his life. But now

That I am no longer inclined to battle
great Hector,

Tomorrow I'll make an offering to Zeus

and all

Of the gods, then launch my ships on the
sea and load them

Down with treasure. Tomorrow at
daybreak, then,

If you care to look out on the fish-full
Hellespont water,

You'll see my ships pulling out from
shore and in them

Men eager to row. Then, if the mighty
Earthshaker

Grants me good sailing, I'll reach the
rich soil of Phthia

On the third day out. Treasures
uncounted I left there

To make my unfortunate way to this land,
and still

More treasure I'll take home from here,
gold, red bronze,
And fair-belted women, along with a
plentiful store
Of gray iron—all wealth allotted to me.
Even so,
My prize has been taken from me by the
arrogant lord
Who gave it, King Agamemnon, son of
Atreus.
So go and tell him all I've told you, and
say it
Out loud in assembly before all the other
Achaeans,
That they may also be angry, and
warned. For he
In his utter meanness of spirit may even
now

Be planning to cheat someone else of the
Danaan fighters.

Yet he lacks the courage to so much as
look at me

Face to face, greedy and shameless dog
that he is!

I'll take no counsel with him, nor will I
assist him

In fighting. For he has been utterly unfair
to me,

Grievously sinning against me. Not again
will I let him

Trick me with words. Of that he has
done quite enough.

So let him be damned as he himself
wishes, for Zeus

The contriver has robbed him of all

good sense.

“I hate

And despise his proffered gifts, nor do I
value

The man himself worth a straw. Not if he
gave me

Ten times all he has now, or twenty
times,

And added to that every bit of the wealth
that enters

Orchomenus or Egyptian Thebes—and
in that city

Of a hundred gates, through each of
which two hundred men

With horses and cars sally forth, more
treasure is stored

In the houses of men than anywhere else

in the world—

Not if he gave me gifts as numberless
quite

As sand and dust, still Agamemnon
could not

Prevail any more on my soul till he
himself

Has personally paid for all of the insult
and pain

That gnaws at my heart.

“Nor will I take as my bride

Any daughter of Atreus’ son
Agamemnon, not

If she rivaled in beauty golden
Aphrodite herself,

Or bright-eyed Athena in skill at
handwork. Still

I would not marry any daughter of his.
Let
The man choose some other Achaean,
someone more
Like himself and more kingly than I. For
if the gods keep me
And see me home safely, Peleus himself,
I dare say,
Will find me a suitable wife. There is no
shortage
Of Achaean girls throughout both Hellas
and Phthia,
Daughters of chieftains in charge of
protecting the cities.
From these I can have the beloved wife
of my choice.
At home my proud heart very often
desired to woo

And win some excellent wife, and enjoy
life

With the wealth old Peleus won me. For
I put a much

Higher value on life than on all the
treasures men say

Were contained in the rich and populous
city of Troy

Before we sons of Achaeans came, or,
For that matter, all the wealth laid up
behind

The marble threshold of the archer god
Phoebus Apollo

In rocky Pytho. For raiding can get a man
cattle

And splendid fat sheep, and barter can
get him tripods

And sorrel horses. But once his soul
goes out
Through the barrier of his teeth, neither
raiding nor barter
Can make it return. My goddess mother,
Thetis
Of the silver feet, tells me I bear two
fates
With me on my way to the grave. If I stay
here
And fight about Troy, I'll never return to
my home,
But men will remember my glory
forever. On the other hand,
If I go back to the precious land of my
fathers,
No glory at all will be mine, but life,
long life,

Will be, and no early death shall ever
come on me.

“Yes, and I would advise you others
also

To set sail for home, since now you no
longer have hopes

Of taking steep Ilium. For loud-
thundering Zeus holds out

A mighty arm above her and greatly
inspires

Her people. So go and perform the
honored office

Of senior chiefs by giving my answer to
all

The kings of Achaea, that they may
devise some better

Plan than this to save the Achaeans army

And hollow ships, for now their appeal
to me
Has done them no good, because of the
wrath I still have.
Phoenix, though, can spend the night here
with us,
That he may go in the morning with me
and the ships
Back to my own dear country, that is if
he wants to.
I'll surely not force him to go."

Such was his answer,
And all of them sat in silence, stunned by
the force
Of his bitter refusal. At last, old
Phoenix, driver
Of horses, spoke out among them, the

tears streaming down

His face, so deeply he feared for the
ships of Achaea:

“Resplendent Achilles, if you really
mean to return,

And are so wrathful at heart that you
have no wish

At all to keep the fierce fire away from
the ships,

How could I stay here without you, dear
child? The knightly

Old Peleus made me your guardian,⁷
then sent us both

From Phthia to King Agamemnon, you a
mere child

With no experience then of horrible war
Or of speaking in council where men

win distinction. So Peleus
Sent me along to be your instructor in all
Of these things, that you might be an
effective speaker
As well as a man of action. Hence, dear
child,
I have no wish at all to stay here without
you,
Not even if God himself should promise
to strip me
Of age and make me as strong as I was
on the day
I first left Hellas, land of glamorous
women.
I fled from a quarrel with Ormenus' son,
my father
Amyntor, who hated me on account of a
fair-haired

Mistress whom he adored, thereby
disgracing

His wife, my mother. So she was always
begging me

Close at my knees to lie with the girl
myself

And make her despise the old man. But I
had no sooner

Done what my mother wished, than my
father knew

What had happened and fearfully cursed
me, calling out

On the dreaded Furies^{ab} for them to
prevent my ever

Having a son of my own to take on my
lap.

And the underworld powers, Hades and

awesome Persephone,
Made his curse good, whereat I decided
to use
My keen bronze and kill the old man, but
some immortal
Restrained my rage, reminding me of
public
Opinion and what the Achaeans would
say of a man
Who killed his own father. But then my
heart was too restless
To stay any longer at home with my
hostile sire,
Though friends and kinsfolk did all they
could to keep me
There in the palace. Daily they
slaughtered many
Fine sheep and shuffling sleek cattle, and

many fat swine

They singed and stretched out above the
flame of Hephaestus,

Feasting and drinking much wine from
the old man's jars.

All night long for nine nights they
camped about me,

Taking turns at standing watch and
feeding

The fires, one out in the front colonnade
of the well-walled

Courtyard, the other up in the portico,
right

In front of my bedroom door. But during
the tenth

Dark night, I burst through the tightly
closed doors of my chamber

And easily leaped the wall of the
courtyard, nor was I
Seen by any of the guards or women
servants.

Then I fled far away through the open
fields

Of Hellas to fertile Phthia, mother of
flocks,

And the house of King Peleus. And
warmly he took me in

And loved me quite as a wealthy father
loves

His only son and heir. He made me rich

And the ruler of many subjects, and I
went to live

On the furthest border of Phthia as lord
over all

The Dolopians.

“Since that time, O godlike Achilles,
I’ve loved you deeply and done all I
could to make you
What you are. For you would go in to
meals
With no one else but me, nor would you
eat
Even then until I had taken you up on my
lap
And cut you your fill of juicy meat and
held
The wine to your lips. Many indeed
were the times
When you, like the difficult baby you
were, spluttered
The wine right back all over my tunic.
Thus

I worked very hard for you and put up
with a lot,
Since I knew very well that the gods
were never to give me
A son of my own. So you, O godlike
Achilles,
I tried to raise as my son, that someday
you
Might save me from ruin and a sad,
unseemly end.

“Therefore, Achilles, master your
pride. Relentlessness
Doesn't become you. Even the gods can
yield,^{[8](#)}
And theirs is surely superior majesty,
honor,
And power. Yet they are appeased by

offerings burned

On their altars, by humble prayers,
reverent libations,

And the savory smoke that goes up to
them when some

Poor suppliant sinner has foolishly
broken their laws.

For Prayers are the daughters of
almighty Zeus, and they always

Come limping along behind Sin, sad
creatures with wrinkled

Skin and downcast eyes. Sin, however,
Is lusty and swift, and so outdistances
them,

Arriving first all over the world and
doing

Her damage to men, while Prayers come
halting after

And try to heal the wounds of Sin. Now
he

Who reveres these daughters of Zeus
when they approach,

That man they greatly bless, and when he
prays

They heed him. But if a man stubbornly
turns from them

In refusal and sends them away, they go
and pray

To Cronos' son Zeus that Sin may
follow that man

Till he too falls and pays the full price
for his pride.

So you, Achilles, be careful to reverence
these daughters

Of God, who continue to bend the wills

of all
Right-thinking men. For if Atreus' son
were still
In his furious rage instead of offering
you gifts
With promises of still more, I surely
would not
Advise you to throw off your wrath and
help the Argives,
No matter how desperate they were. But
now he offers you
Many fine gifts with a pledge of more
hereafter,
And besides he sends these envoys,
choosing the most
Outstanding men in the whole Achaean
army
And those whom you hold dearest of all

the Argives.

Do not, then, scorn their coming to you
and what

They have said, though before they came
here no man could blame

Your wrath and resentment.

“We’ve all heard similar stories
About the old heroes,⁹ men who allowed
fierce anger

To come upon them, but yielded to gifts
and entreaty.

I’m thinking now of something that
happened a long time

Ago, a crucial event of no recent
occurrence,

And I will tell you, since we are all
friends, how it was.

The Curetes once were fighting the
staunch Aetolians
Around the walls of their city, beautiful
Calydon,
And men on both sides were dying, the
Aetolians bravely
Defending their town, the Curetes
striving to sack it.
For on the Aetolians golden-throned
Artemis had sent
A great evil, she being angry at Oeneus
their King
For neglecting to offer her harvest first-
fruits from his orchard.
All the other gods reveled on whole
hecatombs from him,
While she alone, great Zeus's own
daughter, got no

Sacrifice at all. He either forgot her
completely,
Or thought he had done what he had not:
great blindness of soul
Was surely upon him. So the goddess of
flying arrows,
Deeply offended, sent against Oeneus a
huge
And ferocious wild boar that flashed his
white tusks and tore up
The King's great orchard, doing much
damage, as fiercely
He rooted up many a large apple tree
and laid it
Out on the ground—roots, sweet
blossoms, and all.
But Oeneus' son Meleager killed the

great boar,
Though not without gathering hunters and
hounds from many
Strong cities. No meager force of
mortals could ever
Have cut the beast down, so truly
enormous he was,
And many were the men he heaped on
the sad funeral pyre.
Then Artemis caused a savage and noisy
quarrel
Over the spoils, a fight between the
Curetes
And great-souled Aetolians, both sides
eager to take
The huge head and shaggy hide as
trophies.

“Now just
So long as Prince Meleager, dear to the
War-god,
Fought for his people, the Curetes
steadily lost,
Unable to hold their own outside the
walls
Of the city, though many the men they
had brought there. But then
Wrath seized Meleager, wrath that
swells the hearts
Of others too, no matter how wise they
may be.
Meleager quarreled with his own dear
mother Althaea,
Daughter of Thestius, King of the brave
Curetes,

And sullenly lay at home beside his
young wife,
The fair Cleopatra, child of Euenus'
daughter,
Trim-ankled Marpessa, and Idas, the
strongest man
Of his time, Idas who drew his powerful
bow
Against lord Phoebus Apollo himself,
when fighting
The god for the trim-ankled maid
Marpessa. Later,
At home, he and Marpessa called their
daughter
Halcyone, thinking of how like the
halcyon bird
Her mother had mournfully cried when
the far-working god

Snatched her away—their daughter
whom all others called
Cleopatra.

“And now by her side Meleager lay,
Indulging his wrath and resentment
because of the curses
His mother called down upon him out of
fierce grief
For her brother Meleager had slain. She
fell on her knees
And beat with her hands on the all-
feeding earth, streaking
Her bosom with tears and praying to the
infernal powers,
To Hades and awesome Persephone,
begging them both
To kill her son. And the Fury that stalks

through the mist,
She of the ruthless heart, heard her from
Erebus.

“Soon the Curetes were raising a din
at the gates
And storming the walls with a battering,
thunderous noise.
Then the Aetolian elders besought
Meleager
To come out and ward off the foe. They
sent as envoys
To him the godly high priests of the city
and promised
To give him a splendid reward. He
could take, they said,
His choice of fifty acres from the richest
part

Of the fair Calydonian plain, half to be
In vineyard land, half in land for
plowing.

And often his knightly old father begged
him to help.

He stood outside the high-roofed room
of his son

And shook the well-bolted doors,
fervently pleading.

His sisters and queenly mother kept after
him too,

But to them his refusal was firmer than
ever. Even

His friends, those who were dearest and
truest of all,

Even they could not change his mind. But
when the Curetes

Were scaling the walls, firing the city,

and raining

Their missiles down hard on the room of
Prince Meleager,

At last his fair-belted wife came to him
in tears

And vividly pictured for him the horrors
that people

Suffer when enemies take their town,
reminding

Him of the men all slaughtered, of the
city reduced

To ashes, of children and fair-belted
women dragged off

By the foe. Her lurid account stirred
Meleager's

Soul to the point where he went out and
donned

His flashing armor.¹⁰ Thus he did what
his own heart
Wanted and kept the Aetolians safe from
the evil
Day. But they thereafter gave him none
Of the many and gracious gifts they had
earlier offered.
He saved the people, but late, and so got
nothing
For what he did.

“But you, my friend, don’t let
This happen to you. Think otherwise,
and don’t allow
Some demon to harden your heart as his
was. To save
The ships already burning will surely be
Much harder. Come then, while gifts and

honor are yours

For the mere accepting, and then you'll
live as a god

Among the Achaeans. But if, too late for
gifts,

You enter the man-ruining war, you may
indeed

Drive our enemies back, but the honor
we offer you now

Will be no longer the same.”

Then swift Achilles

Answered: “Phoenix, my god-sprung
good old father,

What do I care for this honor you offer?
I'm honored

Enough, I think, by Zeus himself, and the
favor

He shows me will keep me here by the
curving ships

So long as there's breath in my body and
strength in my limbs.

And here's something else I'll say for
you to remember.

Don't try to confuse me with grieving
and weeping, hoping

That I'll do the pleasure of Atreus' son
Agamemnon.

It hardly becomes you to care for that
man at all,

Lest my love for you be changed into
hatred. It would be

Much better, I think, for you to oppose
whoever

Hurts me. Take half of my kingdom,
Phoenix, and half

Of my royal prestige, but the message
I've given these others
To bear shall surely remain unchanged.
Meanwhile,
Stay here with me and sleep on an
excellent bed.
Then tomorrow at dawn we'll make up
our minds whether we
Should go back to our own or stay where
we are.”[11](#)

So saying,
He nodded his brow at Patroclus to start
making up
A well-covered bed for Phoenix, that all
of the others
Might quickly decide to leave. But Ajax,
the godlike

Son of Telamon, spoke out among them,
saying:

“God-sprung son of Laertes, resourceful
Odysseus,

Let us go now, since surely our mission
has failed

And we are obliged to tell the results,
however

Unpleasant, to the Danaan chiefs, who
must be sitting up

Waiting for us. Achilles has filled his
proud heart

With savage, inhuman hatred. He has
become

A cruel and ruthless man, who cannot
remember

The love of his friends and how we
idolized him

Like nobody else among the black ships.
Incredibly
Pitiless man! Why others accept
recompense
From one who has murdered a brother or
even a son,
And the killer who pays the blood-price
in full stays on
In his land, while the kinsman's
revengeful proud spirit is checked
By the wealth he receives. But to you,
Achilles, the gods
Have given a heart both evil and
changeless, and all
Because of one girl. And here we have
offered you seven
Of the loveliest girls there are, and a

great deal more
Besides. So come, be gracious and
remember that we
Are your guests. And here beneath your
roof we have come
Representing all of the Danaans, and
still we would like
Very much to remain your nearest and
dearest friends
Among the whole host of Achaeans.”

And swift Achilles
Answered him thus: “O god-sprung ruler
of many,
Telamonian Ajax, I almost agree with all
That you say, but my heart swells with
bitter rage
Whenever I think how Atreus’ son

insulted

Me mid the Argives, as though I were
some despised

And dishonored outsider. So go and
deliver my message,

For I will not fight again in any man's
bloody

War till wise-hearted Priam's son, great
Hector,

Reaches the Myrmidon lodges and ships,
killing

Argives all the way, and puts his torch to
the hulls.

But Hector, however hungry for war he
may be,

Will stop his advance, I think, when he
reaches my lodge

And looming black vessel!”[12](#)

He spoke, and each of them took
A two-handled cup, poured a libation,
and left,
Walking back down the long line of
ships with Odysseus striding
Ahead. But Patroclus at once instructed
his men
And the women servants to make up a
well-covered bed
For Phoenix and quickly they did as he
said, spreading
The frame with fleeces and blanket and
smooth linen sheet.
On this the old one lay down and waited
for bright Dawn
To come. But Achilles slept in one

corner of the spacious,
Strongly built lodge and with him a
woman, one
Whom he had brought from Lesbos, the
pretty Diomeda,
Daughter of Phorbas. And Patroclus lay
down on a bed
In the opposite corner with fair-gowned
Iphis beside him,
A girl given him by kingly Achilles
when he
Laid Scyrus waste, Enyeus' steep
citadel.

Now when the envoys got back and
entered the lodge
Of Atreus' son, the kings of Achaea
stood up

All around them, raising their cups of
gold and asking them
Questions. But surely most urgent of all
was the king
Of men Agamemnon, asking: “Come
now, most worthy
Odysseus, great glory of all the
Achaeans, tell me
If he is willing to ward off fierce fire
from the ships,
Or did he refuse you because his great
heart still seethes
With bitter resentment?”

And noble, long-suffering Odysseus:
“Most famous Atrides, commander-in-
chief Agamemnon,
Achilles has no intentions at all of

quenching

His wrath and resentment. Now, in fact,
he is filled

With more rage than ever, and says he
will have no part

Of you or your gifts. And you he advises
to meet

With the Argives and make some plan
for saving the ships

And Achaea's army. As for himself, he
threatens

To launch at dawn his well-benched,
graceful ships.

And he says he would counsel the other
Achaeans also

To set sail for home, since now you no
longer have hopes

Of taking steep Ilium. For loud-

thundering Zeus holds out
A mighty arm above her and greatly
inspirits
Her people. These were his very words,
and here
Are the men who went with me, Ajax
and two wise heralds,
To confirm what I say. But the old man
Phoenix will spend the night
There. Achilles urged him to stay, that
tomorrow
The old one may go with him and his
ships back to
His own dear country, that is if he wants
to. He says
He'll not force him to go."

Thus bluntly Odysseus reported,

And the grieving kings of Achaea sat a
long time,
Stunned and silent, till finally strong
Diomedes,
He of the great battle-scream, spoke out
among them:
“Most famous Atrides, commander-in-
chief Agamemnon,
Would you had never pleaded at all with
Peleus’
Peerless son, or offered him all those
gifts.
He’s haughty enough with no help from
us, but now
You have made him more haughty than
ever. Hence we’ve no choice
But to leave him alone, to go or stay as
he wishes.

He'll not fight again till the heart in his
breast says fight,
Or until some god sets him on. But come,
let all of us
Do as I say and go to our beds, now that
We've taken our fill of the meat and
wine men need
To keep up their strength and courage.
But you, O King,
As soon as fair Dawn of the rosy fingers
appears,
Marshal your soldiers and horses in
front of the ships
And urge them to battle. Then fight in the
front rank yourself."

The kings all had praise for these
words from brave Diomedes,

Breaker of horses. They poured their
libations and went
To their lodges, where each received the
sweet gift of sleep.

BOOK X

The Night Adventure

Beside their ships all other kings of
Achaëa
Slumbered throughout the night, fast in
the soft bonds
Of sleep, but no sweet sleep held the
people's shepherd,
Atreus' son Agamemnon, so worried
was he
By the many problems of war.¹ As when
the husband
Of lovely-haired Hera splits the sky with
his lightning,

Foretelling some storm of rain
unspeakably heavy,
Or hail, or snow that covers the
plowlands, or else
Foretelling the start of ravenous wide-
gaping war,
Even so, from deep in his breast, groans
tore the trembling
And fearful heart of King Agamemnon.
Whenever
He looked toward the Trojan plain, he
marveled at all
The many fires that burned before Troy,
and at
The sound of flutes and pipes and the
hubbub of men.
But then, when he looked toward the
ships and troops of Achaea,

He pulled his hair out by the roots in
fervent pleas

To high-dwelling Zeus, and greatly his
proud heart groaned.

At last he thought of a plan he preferred,
to go first

Of all to Neleus' son Nestor and work
out some scheme

With him for warding off ruin from the
Danaan army.

So he got up and put on his tunic, and on
His shining feet bound beautiful sandals,
then threw

Round his shoulders the tawny-red skin
of a lion, a fiery

Huge pelt that reached all the way to his
feet. So clad,

He picked up his spear and went out.

And King Menelaus

Likewise lay wakeful, fearful and
trembling lest ruin

Should come on the Argives who for his
sake had crossed

The wide water, their hearts resolved on
making fierce war.

About his broad shoulders he slung the
spotted skin

Of a leopard, put on his helmet of
bronze, and took up

A spear in his powerful hand. Then he
went out

To rouse his brother, the mighty
commander-in-chief

Of all the Argives, honored by them like

a god.

He found him covering his shoulders
with exquisite armor

Close by the stern of his ship, and glad
indeed

Was King Agamemnon to see him. But
the first to speak

Was he of the great battle-scream,
Menelaus, saying:

“Why, my brother, why are you arming
now?

Are you going to wake up some comrade
of yours to spy

On the Trojans? I very much fear you’ll
find nobody

Willing to undertake that, to go out alone
Through the dead of night and spy on

hostile warriors.

Such work requires an extremely brave-hearted man!”

And powerful King Agamemnon answered him thus:

“You and I both, my god-nurtured brother, have need

Of advice sufficiently shrewd to deliver the Argives

And save the ships, now that Zeus has changed

His mind and looks with far greater favor on offerings

From Hector than he does on any from us. For I

Have never seen, nor heard another man tell of,

A warrior doing in only one day so much
Sheer damage as god-loved Hector
alone has done

To the sons of Achaeans, he that was
born of neither

Goddess nor god. Still the huge
devastation

That man has wrought on the Argives
will live in the minds

Of Achaeans for many generations to
come. But go now

And run with all speed down the line of
ships and call to us

Ajax and kingly Idomeneus. Meanwhile,
I'll go

And rouse Nestor to see if he will be
willing to go out

And speak to the stalwart company of

sentries and put them
More on the alert. They'll pay more
attention to him
Than to anyone else, for his own son
Thrasymedes
Captains the guard with Idomeneus'
squire Meriones.
We put those two in command of the
whole detachment."

And battle-roaring Menelaus answered
by asking:
"But what do you have in mind for me to
do then,
After I give them your message? Shall I
wait for you there
With them, or fully give them your word
and run back

To rejoin you?”

Then the king of men Agamemnon
replied:

“Stay there, or as we go we might
possibly miss

Each other, for paths through the camp
are many. But call out

Loudly wherever you go and wake up
the men,

Being careful to call each man by the
lineage and name

Of his father. Don't be too proud to
labor and give

Each man his due of respect. We too
must toil—

Especially we. For from the time we
were born

Zeus laid out for us a heavy allotment of sorrow.”

He spoke, and dispatched his brother
with these explicit
Instructions. But he himself went off
after Nestor,
The people’s shepherd, and found him
lying outside
His lodge on a comfortable bed by the
stern of his ship
With richly wrought armor beside him—
his shield, two spears,
And a gleaming helmet. And there lay
the glinting war-belt
With which the old one girded himself
whenever,
Unyielding to painful old age, he put on

his armor

And led his troops into man-eating
battle. Now

He lifted his head, and raising himself
on an elbow

Questioned Atrides thus:

“Who goes there alone
By the ships, roaming the camp through
the darkness of night

While other people are sleeping? What
are you looking for,

Man—some mule of yours, or one of
your friends?

Don't come any closer until you declare
who you are

And what it is you're after!”

Then great Agamemnon

Answered: “Neleus’ son Nestor, pride
of all

The Achaeans, surely you know
Agamemnon, son

Of Atreus, me whom Zeus gives painful
labor

Beyond all others, constant suffering and
toil

So long as I’m able to breathe and move
my limbs.

I’m up and abroad because sweet sleep
refuses

To come on my lids, so worried am I
about

The war and woes of Achaeans. I’m
terrified now

At the danger we face, nor can I make up
my mind

What to do, as sadly I waver. My heart
pounds so hard
It almost leaps from my breast, and my
powerful legs
Tremble and knock beneath me. But if
you are willing
To help, since you too are sleepless,
come, let us go
To the sentries and see that they have not
forgotten their guard
And yielded to drowsy fatigue. We can
brook no sleeping
Out there. The enemy camps hard by,
and for all
We know they are planning a night attack
right now!”

Then horse-handling Gerenian Nestor

replied:

“Most famous Atrides, commander-in-chief Agamemnon,
Zeus the contriver will surely not fulfill
for Hector

All that he hopes for. In fact, if Achilles
changes

His mind and rids himself of miserable
rage,

I dare say Hector will find himself
caught in toils

More grievous than ours. Of course I'll
go with you, but let us

Get others up too—Diomedes, famed as
a spearman,

Odysseus and Ajax the swift, and sturdy
Meges,

Son of Phyleus. And it would be well

for someone

To go for the godlike Ajax, Telamon's
son,

And King Idomeneus, whose ships are
furthest away

And not at all close. But much as I love
and respect

Menelaus, and though you'll probably be
angry with me,

I will not conceal what I think about his
sleeping

And leaving this labor to you. He should
be up

And working among the leaders, urging
them on

To do their best. For the need is
desperate that now

Has come on us all!”

And the king of men Agamemnon
Answered him thus: “Old sire, some
other time
I’ll tell you myself to chide him. He’s
often remiss
And idle, not that he’s lazy or fearful or
foolish,
But simply because he’s always looking
to me
And waiting to follow my lead. But
tonight he was up
Before even I was, and came to me.
Hence
I’ve already sent him for those you just
mentioned. So come,
Let us go. We shall find them outside the

gates of the camp

Among the sentries, for there I told them
to gather.”

And knightly Gerenian Nestor
answered him, saying:

“If Menelaus keeps that up, no man of
the Argives

Will ever resent his urging him on, or
refuse

To obey his orders.”

So saying, he put on his tunic
And on his shining feet bound beautiful
sandals,

And around him he buckled a large
crimson cloak, downy soft

And of double thickness. Then he took
up a sturdy

Bronze-pointed spear and strode off
down through the ships
Of the bronze-clad Achaeans.

Now first to be wakened by him
Was Odysseus, godlike in wisdom. The
old one's voice
Rang in his ears and out from his lodge
he came,
Answering thus: "Why do you roam our
encampment
Of ships through the dead of night by
yourselves? What urgent
Need is upon you?"

And knightly old Nestor replied:
"Zeus-born son of Laertes, resourceful
Odysseus,
Don't blame us for this. You know what

unspeakable grief
Overwhelms the Achaeans. But come on
with us, that we
May wake someone else, whoever can
help us most
In deciding this night on whether to fight
as before
Or board our ships and flee.”

At this the shrewd
Odysseus went back in his lodge, slung
round his shoulders
A richly wrought shield, and followed
his friends. Soon
They came to Tydeus’ son Diomedes.
They found him
Outside his lodge lying beside his war-
gear,

While all around him his comrades were
sleeping, their heads
On their shields and the butt-end spikes
of their spears driven into
The ground. Thus the bronze points
reflected the firelight
And shone far out through the night like
the lightning-flashes
Of Father Zeus. The heroic Diomedes
was also
Asleep, with his head resting on a
lustrous soft rug
And the hide of a field-ranging ox
beneath him.

The knightly
Old Nestor approached, and rousing the
chief with a touch

Of his foot, berated him thus to his face:
“Wake up,
You son of Tydeus. Are you going to lie
there snoring
All night? Or haven’t you heard that the
Trojans are camped
Just up the plain from us and the ships.
Believe me,
The space between us is far too small
for comfort!”

At this, Diomedes sprang up from his
sleep and answered
In these winged words: “You’re a hard
one, old sire, and never
Rest from your toiling. But are there no
younger sons
Of Achaeans who might be up and

rousing the kings

Throughout our sleeping host? Truly, old
sire,

There is no keeping up with you!”

And knightly old Nestor

Replied: “You speak as you should, my
friend. I have

Matchless sons myself, and there are
many others, any one

Of whom could go and rouse the
chieftains. But now

Without doubt a desperate need
overwhelms the Achaeans,

Whose fate uncertainly stands on a
razor’s edge,

Balanced between a chance to go on
living

And sheer, most miserable ruin! But go,
if you really
Feel sorry for me, and rouse up Ajax the
swift
And Phyleus' son Meges, for indeed you
are younger than I am."

So brave Diomedes threw round his
shoulders the skin
Of a lion, a fiery huge pelt that reached
all the way
To his feet, then seized his spear and
took off. Having roused
The two leaders, he brought them back
where the others were
waiting.

Now when they came to the sentries
outside the walls,

They caught no chief of the guard asleep
at his post,
But all were armed and alert. As dogs
keep restless
Watch about a yard full of sheep,
sleepless
Indeed when they hear some ferocious
wild beast come crashing
His way through the wooded hills with
baying hounds
And shouting men at his back, so no
sweet sleep
Came on the lids of the sentries as they
kept watch
Throughout that evil night. They kept
their faces
Turned toward the plain, awake to the
slightest sound

Of advancing Trojans.

Seeing them so, old Nestor
Was glad, and spoke these words
winged with encouragement:
“Continue, dear sons, thus sharply on the
alert,
Unless you would like to make our
enemies happy.”

So saying, he quickly strode out
through the trench, followed
By all the Argive chieftains who had
been called
To the council and by Meriones and
Nestor's staunch son
Thrasymedes, whom they had invited to
join in their planning.
They left the deep trench and sat down

together on ground

That was open and clear of corpses, the
very spot

Huge Hector had been when night came
upon him and he

Had turned back from his slaughter of
Argives. There they sat

Discussing their plight till Nestor
addressed them, saying:

“My friends, is there no one here with
sufficient faith

In his own bold spirit to go mid the
arrogant Trojans,

Thus to catch and cut down some
straggler of theirs?

Or he might even hear what the Trojans
are planning, whether they

Want to stay where they are so close to
the ships, or would rather
Go back to the city again now that
they've won
Their victory. If any man found out all
this and returned
To us unharmed, his fame would be
great among men
All over the sky-covered world. For
each of the kings
Who captain the ships will give to him,
as a mark
Of matchless distinction, a solid black
ewe and suckling
Lamb, and he will always be honored at
feasts
And royal banquets.”

He spoke, but no one else
Said a word till battle-roaring Diomedes
spoke
To them thus: “Nestor, my heart and
proud spirit urge me
To enter the camp of the hostile,
hovering Trojans.
However, if some other man would go
with me, there would be
More comfort and confident strength.
When two go together,
One at least can look forward and see
the advantage,
Whereas if a man by himself discerns
anything,
Still he is likely to hesitate sadly and
make

Disastrous mistakes.”

So spoke Diomedes, and many
Volunteered to go with him. The two
Ajaxes, comrades
Of Ares, said they would go, as did
Meriones
And Nestor’s son Thrasymedes. Spear-
famed Menelaus,
Son of Atreus, also was willing, and
Odysseus,
He of the patient but ever-adventuring
heart,
Was eager to slip in among the huge host
of Trojans.
Then the king of men Agamemnon spoke
to them thus:

“My dear Diomedes, choose whom

you will to go with you,
But choose the best of these who so
eagerly offer
Themselves. Don't let your respect for
person and rank
Influence your choice so that you leave
the better man
Here and go with one not so good. Now
is
No time to consider one's lineage or
more royal station."

This he spoke out of fear, terrified lest
His tawny-haired brother Menelaus be
chosen. Then again
Diomedes spoke out among them: "If you
really want me
To choose a companion myself, how

could I forget
Godlike Odysseus, whose heart and
manly spirit
Are eager and ready beyond the daring
of others
When it comes to dangerous toil of any
kind—
And Pallas Athena adores him. If he will
go with me,
The two of us might go through flaming
fire
And come back alive, for no one else
can think
So quickly and well.”

To which long-suffering Odysseus:
“Diomedes, don’t overly praise or
blame me. You’re talking

To Argives, and they know well what I
am. But come,
Let us start, for now it is late and dawn
is already
Near. See, the stars have moved on in
their courses
And the night is more than two-thirds
gone. All
We have left is the waning third watch.”

He spoke, and both men
Received their dread weapons. Battle-
staunch Thrasymedes
Gave a two-edged sword to Tydeus’ son
—since his own
He had left at the ship—and with it a
shield. Then he put
On his head a helmet of bull’s-hide,

hornless and crestless,
A leather casque of the sort often worn
by lusty
Young fighters. Meanwhile, Meriones
gave Odysseus
A bow, quiver, and sword, and set on
his head
A helmet of hide, reinforced inside with
tightly
Stretched thongs and a lining of felt,
while around it outside
Were skillfully fixed the white teeth of a
tusk-flashing boar.
This helmet Autolycus^{[ac](#)} stole in Eleon,
he
Having broken into the thick-walled
wealthy palace

Of Ormenus' son Amyntor, the father of
Phoenix.

And Autolycus gave it to strong
Amphidamas, King

Of Cythera, who took it into Scandeia,
his harbor

At home, and King Amphidamas gave
the toothed helmet

As a guest-gift to Molus, and Molus
passed it on

To his son Meriones to take with him
and wear.

And now it protected the head of
brilliant Odysseus.

When the two had received their dread
weapons, they left the
kings

And went on their way. And Pallas
Athena sent an omen
For them, a heron hard by on the right,
and though
The night was too dark for the bird to be
seen, they heard
Its cry, and Odysseus, glad at the bird-
sign, offered
This prayer to Athena: "Hear me, O
child of aegis-great
Zeus, you that stand by me in all of my
labors
And constantly watch over me, love me
now
As never before, and grant that we may
return
To the ships, having covered ourselves
with glory by some

Great work of war to fill the Trojans
with sorrow.”

Then battle-roaring Diomedes prayed
his prayer

To Athena, saying: “Now, O unwearied
child

Of Zeus, hear also me, and go with me
now

As once you went with glorious Tydeus
my father

Into the city of Thebes, where he had
been sent

By the bronze-clad Achaeans with a
message of honeyed words

For the Theban descendants of Cadmus.
But on his way back,

He and you, fair goddess, did fearfully

bloody work

Against that ambush of Thebans, for you
were eager

To stand by his side. [ad](#) So now be
equally willing,

I pray, to go by my side and guard me.
And I

Will offer to you a sleek yearling heifer,
broad-browed

And unbroken, never yet in any man's
yoke. Such a beast,

With horns wrapped in gold, will I
sacrifice to you."

Such were their prayers, and Pallas
Athena heard them.

Then, having prayed to great Zeus's
daughter, they paced

Along through the blackness of night like
two mighty lions,
Picking their way through the carnage
and gore, through the bloodstained
Corpses and weapons of war.

Nor did Hector allow
The lordly Trojans much sleep. He
called a meeting
Of all the leaders, those who were
captains and counselors
Of the Trojans, and when they had
gathered he spoke
To them and unfolded the plan he had
made, saying:
“Who now will take on and do, for a
very great gift,
This work I want done? Truly that man’s

reward

Shall be ample and sure. For I will give
him a chariot

Drawn by the best two neck-arching
horses we capture

Tomorrow among the swift ships of
Achaëa. These

Shall be his in addition to all the glory
he'll win,

Whoever is daring enough to go in close
To the fast-faring ships and find out
whether they have

The usual guard, or whether our beaten
foes

Are far too terribly weary to watch
through the night

And already are planning to flee.”

For a time his words
Got no response. But among the Trojans
there
Was a man called Dolon, [ae](#) the son of a
sacred herald,
Eumedes, and rich in bronze and gold.
Now Dolon
Was not at all handsome, but he was an
excellent runner,
And the only brother to sisters five in
all.
These are the words he spoke in the
midst of the gathering:

“Hector, my heart and proud spirit
impel me to go
In close to the fast-faring ships and learn
all I can.

But first I would like you to take this
staff, lift it up
And swear to me that you really will
make me a present
Of Achilles' ornate bronze-bright car
and the horses
That draw that matchless man. And I
will not
Be useless to you as a scout, nor will I
disappoint you.
For I will go straight through the enemy
camp to the vessel
Of King Agamemnon, where, I dare say,
the leaders
Will be in council, deciding on whether
to fight
Or board their ships and flee."

He spoke, and Hector,
Receiving the speaker's staff, swore to
Dolon
This oath: "Now may Hera's bolt-
crashing lord, great Zeus
Himself, be my witness that no other
Trojan shall mount
Behind those horses. You alone, I say,
shall glory
In them from tomorrow on."

Even such was his oath,
Empty and vain, but enough to get Dolon
started.
Quickly he slung his curved bow round
his shoulders along with
The pelt of a great gray wolf Then he put
on his head

A ferret-skin cap,² seized a sharp spear,
and left

His own camp for the enemy ships, but
from those ships

He was never to come with any tidings
for Hector.

Once out beyond the huge crowd of
horses and men,

He ran swiftly on, but Zeus-sprung
Odysseus saw him

Approaching and spoke these words to
the friend at his side:

“There, Diomedes, some Trojan is
coming from camp,

Either to spy on our ships or to strip a
few corpses—

I do not know which. Let’s let him get by

us a little

And then we'll rush out and seize him.

And if he outruns us,

Be sure to give chase, threatening him
with your spear,

And drive him in toward the ships, away
from his camp.

Thus he'll not escape us and break for
the city."

At once they lay down mid the corpses
just off the place

Where Dolon would pass, and he
unsuspecting ran swiftly

By them. But when he had gone about the
length

Of a mule-plowed furrow—and mules
are better than oxen

At drawing the jointed plow through
deep new ground—

Then the two gave chase, and he, when
he heard their footsteps

Pounding behind him, stopped still in his
tracks, hoping

With all of his heart that they were
friends whom Hector

Had sent from the Trojans to call him
back from his mission.

But when they got a spear-cast away and
closer,

He knew they were hostile and set out
again, this time

At top speed, with his enemies swiftly,
fiercely pursuing.

And as when a brace of razor-fanged
good hunting hounds

Race through the woods, pressing hard
on a doe or hare

That flees and screams before them, so
now Diomedes

And city-sacking Odysseus cut Dolon off
From the Trojan host and pursued him
relentlessly hard.

But when, as he sped toward the ships,
he had come almost

To the sentries, Athena gave Tydeus'
son a new

Burst of strength, that none of the other
bronze-clad Achaeans

Might strike Dolon down and boast to
have dealt the first blow.

So powerful lord Diomedes, poising his
spear,

Drew close to him, and shouted:

“Halt! or I
Will bring you down with my spear, nor
will you live long,
I think, once I get hold of you!”

So saying,
He hurled his spear, but purposely
missed, throwing
The gleaming shaft sufficiently high for
the point
To pass above his right shoulder and fix
itself
In the ground. The terrified Dolon froze
in his tracks
And turned a pale olive with fear, and
there he stood
With gibbering tongue and chattering

teeth till both

Of his mighty pursuers came panting up
and caught

His hands. Then starting to weep he
spoke to them thus:

“Alive, take me alive! and I will
ransom

Myself, for at home I have great stores
of bronze

And gold and highly wrought iron. Of
these my father

Would gladly give you a ransom past
counting, if he

Should hear that I am alive at the Argive
ships.”

And shrewd Odysseus answered:
“Cheer up, and don’t even

Think about dying. But answer my
questions, and tell me
The truth. Where were you going,
headed away
From your camp and toward the ships,
running along
Through the darkness of night when other
mortals are sleeping?
Did you intend to strip a few corpses, or
did Hector
Send you down to the hollow ships as a
spy?
Or could it be that you came at your own
heart's urging?"

Then Dolon, with legs that shook
beneath him, replied:
"Hector beguiled me with foolhardy

hopes. He promised
To give me the solid-hoofed horses and
bronze-bright car
Of proud Achilles, son of Peleus, if I
Would go as he bade, close to the
enemy, through
The blackness of quick-coming night and
spy on the ships,
To see if they have the usual guard, or
whether
Our beaten foes are far too terribly
weary
To watch through the night and already
are planning to flee.”

Then smiling at him, resourceful
Odysseus answered:
“Surely your heart was set on a very

great prize,
The horses of fire-souled Achilles. But
no mere mortal
Can well control those horses. Only
Achilles
Can, for he is the son of an immortal
mother.
But come, answer my questions, and tell
me the truth.
Where, when you left camp, was the
army's commander
Hector? Where is his war-gear lying,
and where
Are his horses? How are all the sentries
disposed,
And where are the companies sleeping?
And what are the Trojans

Planning among themselves—to stay
where they are,
So close to the ships, or to go back into
the city
Now that they've won their victory?"

Then Dolon, son
Of Eumedes, spoke to him thus:
“Believe me, I'll answer
Your questions truly. Hector, with all his
advisers,
Is holding a council of war out by the
tomb
Of sacred Ilus, away from all the
confusion.
And as for the sentries you ask about, my
lord,
No special detail has been posted to

guard and protect
The camp. But by each fire of the
sleeping Trojans,
Those who must are up and alert, and
they
Call others to guard when the watches
change. But all
Our many and far-called allies are
asleep, for they leave
Guard-duty to Trojans, since none of
their children or wives
Is here and in danger.”

And wily Odysseus replied:
“How, then, do the allies sleep, right in
among
The horse-breaking Trojans or
somewhere apart? Tell me

Exactly, since I want to know in full detail.”

And Eumedes’ son answered him thus:

“Again

I will tell you the truth. There toward the sea he the Carians

And crook-bowed Paeonian archers, and near them the Leleges,

Caucones, and the valiant Pelasgians, whereas the Lycians

And hard-charging Mysians, the horse-borne Phrygian fighters

And chariot-armed Maeonians lie on the ground

Allotted to them over there toward Thymbra.

But why do you ask me all these details?

If you're
Really eager to raid the Trojan host,
there
On the very verge of the camp, apart
from the others,
Sleep the Thracians, newly arrived, and
among them
Their King, Rhesus,³ son of Eioneus. His
Are the biggest and best-looking horses
that I've ever seen,
Whiter than snow and swift as the wind.
And his chariot
Gleams with inlaid silver and gold, and
he brought
With him huge pieces of golden armor, a
truly
Incredible sight. No mortal man should

ever

Wear such stuff, fit only for immortal gods.

But take me now to the fast-faring ships, or tie me

Up tight and leave me here. Then go and see

For yourselves whether I have spoken the truth or not.”

But scowling at him, fierce Diomedes replied:

“Now that you, Dolon, are in our hands, don’t set

Your heart on escape, though the information you’ve brought us

Is good. For if we let you go now, you’ll surely

Come back to our swift ships, either to
spy
On us or fight man to man. But if at my
hands
You lose your life now, you'll never be
any trouble
To Argives again!"

He spoke, and Dolon reached up
To take hold of his beard and plead, [af](#)
but huge Diomedes
Lashed out with his sword and brought it
down on the neck
Of the Trojan, severing both of the
sinews, and right
In the midst of a word his head rolled
down in the dust.
Then they took off his ferret-skin cap and

the gray wolf-skin
And stripped him of supple curved bow
and long spear, and royal
Odysseus took these in his hand, held
them up high
To booty-bringing Athena, and prayed to
her, saying:

“Rejoice, O goddess, in these, for you
are the first,
Of all the Olympian immortals, to whom
we will offer.
Now guide us on to the horses and
sleeping soldiers
Of Thrace.”

So saying, Odysseus hung up the spoils
On a tamarisk bush and marked it well
with handfuls

Of reeds and leafy tamarisk branches,
that they
Might not miss the place as they returned
through the darkness
Of fast-falling night. Then on they went
through the blood-stained
Corpses and war-gear, till soon they
reached the contingent
Of Thracian fighters. All were sleeping,
overcome
By fatigue, and their excellent armor lay
by them there
On the ground, neatly stacked in three
rows, and each man's yoke
Of horses stood beside him. Rhesus the
King
Slept in the midst, and close beside him
stood

His fast horses, tied by the reins to the
front handrail

Of his chariot. Him Odysseus was first
to see,

And pointing him out to strong
Diomedes, he said:

“There, Diomedes, that’s the man, and
there

Are the horses that Dolon, whom we just
killed, referred to.

But come, give all you’ve got! It isn’t
like you

To stand there armed and idle. Untie the
horses—

Or start killing men, and I will take care
of the horses.”

He spoke, and into the heart of King

Diomedes

Bright-eyed Athena breathed might, and
he laid about him,

Killing men right and left, and from them
came grim sounds

Of groaning as they were struck with the
sword, and the ground

Ran red with their blood. Like a lion that
comes on an unguarded

Flock of sheep or goats and springs in
among them

With heart set on slaughter, so now the
son of Tydeus

Slashed about mid the Thracian troops
till twelve

Of them lay dead. And those whom
Tydeus' son smote

With the sword, Odysseus, coming

behind, would seize
By the foot and drag aside, endeavoring
to clear
The way for the silver-maned horses,
that as yet were unused to
War and might easily panic at treading
on corpses.
Rhesus the King was the thirteenth man
whom Tydeus' son
Robbed of honey-sweet life. He lay
there dreaming
And breathing hard, for his dream had
taken the form
Of stern Diomedes, grandson of Oeneus,
such being
The will of Athena.

Meanwhile, steady Odysseus

Untied the solid-hoofed horses and used
the reins
To bind them together, then drove them
clear of the crowd,
Using his bow for a whip, for he had not
thought
To take the bright lash from its place in
the colorful car.
Once clear, he whistled to let Diomedes
know.

But that grim King was lingering amid
the carnage,
Pondering what deed would be most
dog-daring to do,
Whether he should take the chariot,
wherein the inlaid
Armor lay, and draw it off by the shaft,

Or pick it up high and carry it off that way,

Or whether it might be still more audacious to go on

And kill more Thracians. But while he debated thus

With himself, the goddess Athena stood by him and said:

“You great-hearted son of Tydeus, concentrate now

On getting back to the hollow ships, or you may

Go there pursued by the wrathful Trojans, whom another

God may very soon arouse!”

She spoke,

And he knew the goddess's voice. Then

quickly he left
And leaped on one of the horses that
now Odysseus
Whipped with his bow, and off they
went at a gallop
Toward the fast-faring ships of Achaea.

Now Apollo, armed
With the silver bow, was not unaware of
Athena's
Attention to Tydeus' son Diomedes, and
the god,
In rage against her, entered the huge
Trojan camp
And awakened a prominent Thracian, the
counselor Hippocoön,
A valiant kinsman of Rhesus. He sprang
up from sleep,

And seeing the empty place where the
King's fast horses
Had stood and the dying men still
gasping and choking
Amid the hideous carnage, he groaned
and called
His dear royal kinsman by name. And
the Trojans rushed up
With unspeakable noise and confusion,
and there they stood staring
At the gruesome sight, the terrible work
that the two spies
Had done before they went back to the
hollow ships.

Now when the two Argives came to
the spot where they
Had killed Hector's spy, Zeus-loved

Odysseus pulled up
The galloping horses, and Tydeus' son
leaped down
And handed up to his friend the bloody
spoils
Of Dolon, then mounted once more. And
Odysseus whipped
The horses, and off they flew at a gallop
again
Toward the hollow ships of Achaea,
willingly bearing
The two eager men. And Nestor, the first
to hear hoof-beats,
Spoke to his comrades, saying:

“My friends, captains
And counselors of the Argives, I may be
mistaken,

But still my heart would swear that I
hear the hoof-beats
Of galloping horses. If only Odysseus
and brave
Diomedes have already driven away
from the Trojans
Some solid-hoofed chargers! But I am
terribly fearful
That now our two best men have got
themselves
Into perilous trouble with a pack of war-
screaming Trojans.”

The old one was still speaking when
up rode the two men in
question.
They leaped to the ground, and joyfully
all of the others

Welcomed them warmly with hand-clasps and words of praise.

Horse-driving Gerenian Nestor
questioned them first:

“Come now, O much-praised Odysseus,
great glory of all

The Achaeans, tell me how you two took
these horses.

Did they really come from among the
great throng of Trojans,

Or did you get them from some god you
met? Believe me,

They’re wonderfully like two rays of
brilliant sunlight!

Old Warrior though I am, I constantly
mix

With the Trojans in battle, nor do I loiter
at all

By the hollow ships. Even so, I've yet to see

Or even so much as imagine such horses as these!

I do think they came to you from a god you met.

After all, you're both beloved by stormy Zeus

And the daughter of that strong aegis-great God, the maidenly

Blue-eyed Athena.”

To which resourceful Odysseus:

“Neleus’ son Nestor, great glory of all the Achaeans,

A god that willed it might easily give still better

Horses than these, for the gods are far

abler than men.

But these, old friend, about which you ask, are horses

Just in from Thrace, and brave
Diomedes killed

Their master the King and twelve of his
greatest warriors.

All told, we accounted for fourteen men,
including

A scout we killed near the ships, a man
sent out

By Hector and the other insolent Trojans
to spy

On our camp.”

So saying, Odysseus drove the fine
horses

On through the trench, and he, exultantly

laughing,
Came on behind, and with him followed
the other
Rejoicing Achaeans. When they reached
the strongly-built lodge
Of Diomedes, they used the well-cut
reins to tie
The horses beside Diomedes' own swift
steeds
That stood at the manger munching the
honey-sweet grain.
But Odysseus stowed in the stern of the
ship the bloody
Equipment of Dolon, till they could
make ready a gift
For Athena. Then both of them waded
out into the sea
And washed all the sweat from their

shins and necks and thighs.

And when the surf had cleansed their
skin and greatly

Refreshed their spirits, they stepped into
well-polished baths.

Then, having bathed and rubbed
themselves richly with oil,

They sat down to supper, and dipping
sweet wine from a full

Mixing-bowl, they poured to Athena
their sacred libations.

BOOK XI

The Valiant Deeds of Agamemnon

As Dawn arose from beside her lord
Tithonus
That she might bring light to gods and
mortal men,
Zeus sent the harsh goddess Strife down
to the swift ships
Of the battered Achaeans, holding in
both of her hands
The banner of war. She took a strategic
stand
High on the huge black hull of Odysseus'

vessel,
Which stood drawn up in the middle
within shouting distance
Of both ends of the line, where Ajax,
Telamon's son,
And Achilles had their lodges, for such
was their trust
In manly valor and the strength of their
hands that they
Had drawn up their ships at the
furthest ends. From here
Strife shouted a loud and terrible war-
scream, which stirred
The hearts of all the Achaeans to
struggle and fight
Without ceasing.¹ And at once they felt
war to be sweeter than any

Return to their dear native land.

And King Agamemnon
Shouted commands for the Argives to
dress for battle,
And he himself put on the gleaming
bronze.
First he covered his shins with greaves,
fair greaves
With ankle-clasps of silver. Next, about
his chest,
He put the breastplate given to him by
Cinyras,
King of Cyprus. For he had heard the
wide-spread
News that Achaeans were soon to set
sail for Troy,
And so had graciously sent the

breastplate for King
Agamemnon to wear and enjoy. Inlaid
upon it
Were ten dark bands of blue lapis,
twelve of gold,
And twenty of shining tin, and three
blue-lapis
Serpents arched up toward the neck on
either side,
Like the rainbows that Cronos' son
hangs in the clouds as signs
For mortal men. And about his shoulders
he slung
His sword, flashing with studs and
straps of gold
And sheathed in a silver scabbard. Then
he took up
His warlike, richly wrought shield, man-

covering and splendid
To see. For inlaid upon it were ten
bright circles
Of bronze and twenty bosses of shining
tin
Surrounding a central boss of blue lapis.
And set
In the lapis, the awesome head of the
Gorgon glared grimly
Forth, flanked by the figures of Panic
and Rout.
From this great shield hung a baldric of
glittering silver
Whereon a blue-lapis, three-headed
serpent writhed.
And on his head he put a helmet, four-
horned

And double-crested, with plume of
horsehair defiantly
Waving above him. He also took up two
sturdy
Spears, keenly pointed with bronze, and
far up into
The sky the bright bronze flashed. And
now, to honor
The King of golden Mycenae, Athena
and Hera
Thundered.

Then each of the charioteers ordered
His driver to draw his team up in an
orderly line
At the trench, but they themselves in full
armor went swiftly
Forward on foot, and their wild,

unquenchable cry

Went up in the dawn. Thus they formed
their line

At the trench, and behind them at some
little distance their drivers

Followed. And Cronos' son roused in
their hearts an evil

Lust for the din and confusion of war,
and down

From the upper air he sent dark dew-
drops of blood,

For he was about to hurl down to Hades
many

Heroic heads.

And up the plain from them,
The Trojans fell in about great Hector
and peerless

Polydamas, Aeneas, whom Trojans
honored quite
Like a god, and the three brave sons of
Antenor—Polybus,
Noble Agenor, and the youthful Acamas,
handsome
As any immortal. And Hector, round
shield on his arm,
Stood out mid the foremost fighters. Like
a baleful star
That brilliantly gleams through a break
in the overcast sky,
Only to vanish soon behind the dark
clouds,
So Hector would now appear in the front
rank of champions,
Then amid the last lines, giving them
orders.

And all in brilliant bronze, he flashed
like the lightning
Of Father Zeus of the aegis.

And as when reapers
Start from opposite sides of a wealthy
man's field
Of wheat or barley and work in toward
each other
Cutting their swathes, so that thick and
fast fall the handfuls
Of grain, so now Achaeans and Trojans
charged
And cut each other down, nor did either
side think
Of ruinous retreat, equally matched as
they were
And ferocious as so many wolves. And

Hatred, fierce goddess
Of groans, rejoiced as she watched
them, for she alone
Of the gods was with them there in the
slaughter. The others
Were quietly relaxing at home on
Olympus, where each
Has a beautiful mansion built mid the
mountain crags.
And most of them were incensed with
Cronos' son Zeus,
God of the lowering sky, because he
willed
To give the victory to Trojans. But the
Father, unperturbed,
Sat aloof from the others, glorying in his
power
As he looked down on the city of Troy

and the ships
Of Achaea, on the lightning-like flashes
of bronze, and on
The killers and killed.

Now while it was morning and sacred
Daylight grew brighter, the missiles of
both sides struck home,
And the warriors fell. But at that hour
when a woodcutter
Takes his meal in the shady glen of a
mountain,
When his arms are tired from felling tall
trees and desire
For food and sweet wine comes over his
weary spirit,
Right then the valorous Danaans, hailing
each other

Throughout the ranks, broke the Trojan
battalions.

And first Agamemnon charged through
and cut down the fighter

Bienor, marshaler of men, and after
Bienor

His comrade horse-lashing Oileus. That
warrior sprang

From his car and faced Agamemnon, but
as he rushed straight

At the King, Agamemnon's keen spear
caught him full in the forehead,

Nor was the point stopped by his
bronze-heavy helmet. Straight
through

Both bronze and bone it tore and
spattered his brains

About the helmet's inside. Thus he

overcame the furious
Charge of Oïleus.

Then the king of men Agamemnon
Stripped these two of their tunics and
left them lying
With their bare chests white in the sun,
and on he went
To kill two children of Priam, Isus and
Antiphus,
One a bastard and one a legitimate son,
Both riding now in the same bright car,
with Isus
The bastard handling the reins and
illustrious Antiphus
Standing beside him. Once, as these two
were watching
Their sheep on the lower slopes of

Mount Ida, Achilles
Had captured them both and bound them
fast with pliant
Branches of willow, and then set them
free for a ransom.
But now the son of Atreus, wide-ruling
Agamemnon,
Speared Isus full in the chest above the
nipple
And toppled Antiphus out of the car with
a fierce
Sword-blow by the ear. Then quickly he
stripped them both
Of their beautiful armor, and recognized
both, for he
Had seen them before, when Achilles,
fast on his feet,
Brought them from Ida. And as a lion

comes

On the bed of a swift-running doe and
easily crushes

The tender life from her fawns, tearing at
them

With strong teeth, and the mother, though
near, can do nothing to
help them,

Since she too is seized with terrible
trembling and swiftly

Goes bounding away through the dense
brushwood of the forest,

Running and sweating before the much-
dreaded force

Of the powerful beast: even so, not one
of the Trojans

Was able to save these two, Isus and

Antiphus,
Since they themselves were fleeing
before the Argives.

Next he killed Peisander and the
resolute Hippolochus.

They were the sons of cunning
Antimachus, whose lust
For splendid gifts of Paris's gold made
him

Most fervent of all in opposing the
movement to give

Helen back to tawny-haired Menelaus.
Now powerful

Agamemnon caught his two sons in one
car, which both

Were vainly trying to manage, for the
glossy reins

Had slipped from their hands, and their
two-horse team was panicking
Over the plain. Like a lion Agamemnon
rushed them,
And they, while still in the chariot,
pleaded thus:

“Alive, O son of Atreus, take us alive!
And an ample ransom is yours. Stored in
the mansion
Of wealthy Antimachus are many
treasures, bronze
And gold and highly wrought iron. Of
these our father
Would gladly give you a ransom past
counting, if he
Should hear that we are alive at the
ships of Achaea.”

Such were their tearful, pitiful words,
but not
At all pleasing were those they heard in
reply: “If you
Are really the sons of cunning
Antimachus, the man
Who once in a Trojan assembly, when
King Menelaus
And godlike Odysseus had come to Troy
on a mission,
Suggested they kill Menelaus right there,
rather than
Let him go back among the Achaeans,
now surely
You both shall pay in full for the
infamous act
Of your father!”[ag](#)

Then jabbing his spear in the chest of
Peisander,
He hurled him down on his back in the
dirt. But Hippolochus
Leaped from the car, and the King killed
him on foot.
Then lopping off arms and head, he
rolled him away
Like a log through the jostling ranks.

Leaving these two
Where they lay, he rushed with other
well-greaved Achaeans
To where the Trojan battalions were
now in full
Retreat. And as they helplessly fled,
footmen
Killed footmen and horsemen killed

horsemen, and dust rose up
From the plain as their chargers
thundered along and Argives
Killed with the bronze. And powerful
Agamemnon, constantly
Killing, rushed on in pursuit, calling out
to his men.

As dense brushwood in a forest
collapses at once
Before the onslaught of furious fire that a
whirling
Wind spreads quickly throughout the
timber, so now
Fell Trojan heads before the fierce
charge of King
Agamemnon, and many were the neck-
arching horses that rattled
Their riderless cars through the blood-

wet lanes of battle,
Leaving their masterful drivers stretched
out on the ground,
Far dearer now to vultures than to their
wives.

Zeus drew Hector out of that cloud of
missiles
And dust, away from the blood and
killing and turmoil,
But powerful Agamemnon kept on in
pursuit, screaming
His cry to the Danaans. And the Trojan
host fled fast
On the open plain, thundering past the
wild fig tree,
Frantically trying to reach the city, with
the screaming

Son of Atreus always pursuing and
constantly
Fouling his huge, invincible hands with
carnage
And gore. But when they reached the
Scaean Gates
And the oak tree, the Trojans halted to
wait for their comrades
Who still remained on the open plain,
where they
Were driven in rout like cattle attacked
by a lion—
The beast comes on them in the dead of
night and scatters
Them all, but one of them he marks for
certain
Death, and seizing her neck in his
powerful jaws

He snaps it, then gulps her entrails and
laps his fill
Of her blood. So King Agamemnon
scattered the Trojans,
Constantly killing the hindmost as they
fled.
Thus, as he raged with his spear around
and before him,
Many a Trojan fell from his car face
down
In the dust or flat on his back beneath the
hands
Of Atrides. But when he had almost
reached the steep wall
Of the city, then at last the Father of men
and gods,
With thunderbolt firmly in hand, came

down from the sky
And sat on the heights of well-watered
Ida. And now
He dispatched with a message golden-
winged Iris, saying:

“Fly swiftly, quick Iris, and speak
these words to Hector.
So long as he sees the commander-in-
chief Agamemnon
Raging amid the foremost and mowing
men down
By the dozen, so long let him give
ground with orders
For all the others to keep the enemy
busy,
Fiercely resisting. But when
Agamemnon, wounded

By spear or arrow, leaps on his car, then
I
Will grant Hector might to cut men down
till he comes
To the well-timbered ships, steadily
killing till the sun
Goes down and powerful darkness
arrives.”

He spoke,
And wind-footed Iris did not disobey,
but swiftly
Flew down from the range of Ida to
sacred Ilium.
She found wise Priam's noble son
Hector standing
Mid horses and cars in his own well-
jointed chariot,

And swift-footed Iris stood by him, and
said:

“Hector,
Son of Priam and peer of Zeus in
counsel,
Zeus, our Father, has sent me to you with
these words.
So long as you see the commander-in-
chief Agamemnon
Raging amid the foremost and mowing
men down
By the dozen, so long you are to give
ground with orders
For all the others to keep the enemy
busy,
Fiercely resisting. But when
Agamemnon, wounded

By Spear or arrow, leaps on his car,
then Zeus
Will grant you might to cut men down till
you come
To the well-timbered ships, steadily
killing till the sun
Goes down and powerful darkness
arrives.”

When Iris
Had spoken the message, she flew
swiftly off. But Hector,
Fully armed, leaped from his car to the
ground,
And brandishing two sharp spears he
ranged through the ranks
Arousing new spirit in the routed men.
They spun

And faced the Achaeans, who now re-
formed their ranks
To oppose them. Thus the armies
clashed, and still
Agamemnon rushed forward in front of
them all, eager
To fight the first man.

Now tell me, O Muses, you
That have homes on Olympus, who first
came against Agamemnon,
Whether one of the Trojans or one of
their famous allies.
It was Antenor's son Iphidamas, a man
Both brawny and brave. He had been
raised in fertile
Thrace, mother of flocks, at the home of
his grandfather

Cisseus, sire of his pretty mother
Theano.

And when he grew up a splendid young
man, Cisseus

Attempted to keep him there by giving
him one

Of his daughters to marry. But he was no
sooner a bridegroom

Than word reached him of Achaeans at
Troy, and off

He went with a company of twelve
beaked ships. These graceful

Vessels he left at Percote and came on
by land

To Troy, where now he faced in single
combat

Atreus' son Agamemnon. And as they
charged

Each other, the spear of Atrides glanced
off to one side,
But Iphidamas, putting his trust in the
might of his beefy
Arm, landed his hard-lunging thrust on
the war-belt
Just beneath the King's breastplate. Still
he failed
To pierce the all-glinting belt, for the
point of his spear
No sooner struck the silver than it was
bent back
Like lead. Then the wide-ruling lord
Agamemnon, fierce
As a lion enraged, seized the spear of
Iphidamas
And jerked it out of his hand, then

loosed his limbs

With a sword-blow deep in the neck.

Even so, Iphidamas

Fell and slept the bronze sleep, a
hapless young man,

Aiding his people far away from his
bride,

The girl for whom he had given so much
but never

Enjoyed at all. And truly he had given
much:

A hundred head of fine cattle with a
promise of one thousand

Sheep and goats to come, for such were
herded

For him in tremendous numbers. Now
Agamemnon

Stripped him and strode off toward the

Achaean ranks
Bearing his exquisite armor.

But when the outstanding
Warrior Coon, eldest son of Antenor,
Saw his dear brother fall, great sorrow
dimmed
His eyes, and coming up from the side,
unseen
By King Agamemnon, he jabbed the
point of his gleaming
Spear clean through the commander's
forearm, just
Below the elbow. At this the high King
shuddered,
But so far from quitting the fight, he
gripped his spear
Of wind-toughened wood and fiercely

sprang upon Coon.

Now Coon had seized the foot of his
father's son

Iphidamas, and frantically he was
dragging his brother

Away and calling for help to all the
bravest.

But as he was dragging him into the
throng, Agamemnon

Unstrung the man with a thrust of
smooth-shafted bronze

Beneath his bossed shield. Then standing
beside him he lopped off

His head right over the corpse of
Iphidamas. There then,

At the hands of royal Atrides, the sons of
Antenor

Filled up their measure of fate and

journeyed down
To the house of Hades.

Now just so long as the blood
Welled warm from his wound,
Agamemnon raged through the enemy
Ranks, hacking and thrusting and
throwing huge rocks.
But when the blood stopped and the
wound got dry, keen pangs
Of anguish came on the mighty Atrides.
Like the searing
Arrows of pain that shoot through a
woman in labor,
The piercing pangs sent on by the
Eileithyiae,
The labor-inducing daughters of Hera,
who have

Such pain in their keeping, even such
were the sharp and bitter
Pangs that racked Agamemnon now.²
Heavyhearted,
He leaped on his car and bade his driver
make
For the hollow ships, but as he left he
yelled
A far-carrying cry, and shouted these
words to the Danaans:

“O friends, captains and counselors of
the Argives,
Ward off from our seagoing ships the
grievous turmoil
Of battle, for Zeus in his wisdom has not
allowed me
To fight throughout this day against the

Trojans.”

His driver lashed the mane-tossing
horses, and they,
Not at all unwilling, galloped away
toward the ships.

With breasts foam-flecked and bellies
sprinkled with dust,
They bore from battle the weary and
wounded King.

When Hector saw Agamemnon
leaving, he shouted
As loud as he could to the Trojans and
their Lycian allies:

“You Trojans and Lycians and dueling
Dardanians, now,
My friends, be men, and filled with
furious boldness!

Their best man is gone, and Cronos' son
Zeus has given
Great glory to me. But drive your solid-
hoofed horses
Straight and hard at the powerful Danaan
host,
That you may win the higher glory yet!"

These words encouraged and
strengthened all of his men.
For with all the heart of a hunter who
sets his snarling,
Gleaming-toothed hounds on a savage
wild boar or a lion,
Priam's son Hector, the peer of man-
maiming Ares,
Urged on the spirited Trojans. And he
himself,

Greatly courageous, charged out from
the foremost rank
And fell on the fight like a high-howling
gale that rushes
Down from the heights and lashes the
violet sea.

Then who was the first and who was
the last to be slain
And stripped by Priam's son Hector,
now that Zeus
Gave victory to him? Asaeus was first,
then Autonous,
Opites, Opheltius, and Dolops, son of
Clytius,
Agelaus, Aesymnus, Orus, and the
resolute Hipponous.
These were the Danaan leaders he slew.

Then
He fell on the rank and file with all the
force
Of a hurricane gale that blows from the
West, clearing
The sky of white clouds which the rapid
South Wind has collected,
A baffling blow that drives on many a
swollen,
Rolling billow and fills the air with
droplets
Of spray—even so very numerous now
Were the Argive heads laid low by
raging Hector.

And now irreparable ruin would have
wrecked the Achaeans
And they in full flight would have flung

themselves on the ships,
If Odysseus had not called out to strong
Diomedes:
“O Tydeus’ son, what causes us thus to
forget
Our furious valor? But come, my friend,
and make
A stand by my side, for it would surely
disgrace us
If now bright-helmeted Hector captured
the ships!”

And mighty Diomedes replied: “Of
course I will stand
And resist, but I don’t think we’ll do a
great deal of good,
Since cloud-gathering Zeus has
obviously willed to give

The victory to Trojans.”

So saying, he knocked Thymbraeus
Out of his chariot, striking him with his
spear

Beneath the left nipple, and Odysseus
took care of that

Great chieftain's driver, the godlike
Molion. These

They left where they fell, having put an
end to their fighting.

And now they turned and fought their
way through the ranks,

Wreaking much ruin all around them,
quite like a couple

Of vicious wild boars that whirl on the
hounds behind them.

So now they turned on the Trojans again

and fiercely

Cut them down, thus giving their fellow
Achaeans

Some chance to catch their breath in
their flight before Hector.

The first car taken by strong Diomedes
held

Two lords in their land, the sons of
Percotian Merops,

The world's most skillful prophet, who
would not allow

His sons to enter the man-wasting war.

But they

Would pay no attention, for doom and
dark death were leading

Them on. Now Tydeus' son, famed as a
spearman, robbed them

Of spirit and life and stripped off their
marvelous war-gear,
While Odysseus slaughtered and
stripped Hippodamas and
Hypeirochus.

Then Cronos' son Zeus, as he looked
down from Ida,
Evened the killing between the straining
forces.

King Diomedes thrust his spear in the
hip

Of Paeon's heroic son, the raging
Agastrophus,

On whom great blindness of soul had
surely come,

For he had no horses nearby behind
which to flee.

He had left them far back with his squire
and plunged on ahead

Mid the foremost fighters till now he lost
his dear life.

But across the ranks keen Hector saw
what had happened,

And fiercely he charged down upon them
with a terrible scream

And whole battalions of Trojans behind
him. Diomedes,

The great battle-roarer, shuddered to see
him coming,

And immediately spoke to Odysseus
close by:

“Much trouble,
Odysseus, is rolling our way in the
person of yonder

Huge Hector! But come, let us stand
where we are and beat
The man back.”

With this he poised his long-
shadowing spear
And hurled it, and so far from missing
his mark, he struck
Hector hard on top of his triple-thick
helmet, where bronze
Turned bronze aside, leaving his
handsome head whole,
The spear-point foiled by the crested,
glittering helmet,
A gift from Phoebus Apollo. Quickly
Hector
Reeled back a long way in the crowd,
then dropped to one knee,

Supporting himself with one great hand
on the ground
Till darkness enveloped his eyes. But
while Diomedes
Went after his spear far through the
foremost fighters
To where it had fallen to earth, Hector
revived,
And springing up on his car drove
further back
In the battling throng, thus escaping
black fate.
And strong Diomedes charged up with
his spear, and shouted
After him thus:

“Again, you dog, you’ve managed
To get away with your life, though this

time just barely!

Once more you have Phoebus Apollo to
thank, to whom

You must be careful to pray before you
come

Within even the sound of hurtling spears.

Well,

Believe me, I'll finish you yet—the next
time we meet,

If only some god will also look out for
me.

Right now I'll take my rage out on your
friends, whomever

I happen to come on!"

He shouted, and went back to strip
The man he last slew, spear-famous
Agastrophus, son

Of Paeon. But Paris, the lord of lovely
blonde Helen,
Drew his bow against Diomedes, half
hid
As he aimed by the pillar on the man-
made barrow of Ilus,
The descendant of Dardanus and ancient
elder. Diomedes
The King was busily stripping the all-
glinting breastplate
From mighty Agastrophus, taking the
shield from his shoulders
And removing his heavy helmet, when
Paris drew back
The string and shot. Nor did the arrow
fly
From his hand in vain, for it cleanly
pierced the sole

Of Diomedes' right foot, and pinned him
fast to the ground.

Then gleefully laughing, Paris sprang out
from the pillar

And boastingly yelled:

“Aha! you're hit! That surely
Was no idle shot. I only wish I had sunk
A shaft in the pit of your belly and
stopped you for good!
Then the Trojans could all have relaxed
a bit, since now
They tremble before you like bleating
goats at a lion.”

And strong Diomedes, fearless as
ever, replied:

“You foul-fighting cowardly bowman
and gaper at girls,

With your pretty hair fresh out of
curlers! if only you'd come out
In armor and fight like a man, you'd see
how worthless
To you that bow and fistful of arrows
would be!
Now there you are bragging at scratching
the sole of my foot.
I think no more of it than if some woman
or silly
Child had slapped me, for the dart of a
no-good weakling
Is puny and dull. But the man I so much
as touch
With the weapon I wield knows very
well, as he dies,
How keen it is! His fatherless children
grieve,

And the cheeks of his wife are torn in
her weeping and wailing,
While he but reddens the earth with his
blood, and rots,
With far fewer women than vultures
flocking around him!”

He spoke, and spear-famed Odysseus
came up and stood
Before him, while Diomedes sat down
and painfully
Pulled from his foot the swift-flying
arrow. Heavyhearted,
He leaped on his car and bade his driver
make
For the hollow ships.

Now that renowned spearman
Odysseus

Faced the foe all alone, since no other
Argive
Had courage enough to stay by his side.
Deeply troubled,
He spoke to his own great heart:³ “Ah
miserable me,
What is to become of me now! To run in
fear
Of that mob would be a great evil, but to
stay here and let them
Catch me alone would be even worse,
now that Zeus
Has utterly routed all of the other
Danaans.
But why do I argue thus with myself? I
know
All too well that those who run from a

fight are cowards

And that whoever does best in a battle
must firmly

Stand his ground, whether he be the one
who is struck

Or whether he strike another.”

While he so pondered

In mind and heart, the companies of
shield-bearing Trojans

Hemmed him in, surrounding their own
destruction.

And just as hounds and lusty young
hunters close in

On a boar, and then withstand his blood-
chilling charge

From the depths of his thicket-lair,
noisily whetting

His tusches and gnashing his crooked
jaws, so now
The Trojans rushed in on Zeus-loved
Odysseus. And first
He stabbed flawless Deïopites, lunging
at him
With his well-sharpened spear and
coming down with it deep
Into the man's shoulder. Then he killed
Thoön and Ennomus.
And as Chersidamas sprang from his
car, he thrust
His spear beneath his bossed shield and
into his navel,
Stretching him out in the dust, where he
clawed the dirt
With his hand. Leaving these where they
fell, he jabbed

His bronze into Charops, Hippasus' son
and full brother
Of wealthy Socus, a godlike man, who
now
Rushed in to defend his own. He came
right up
To Odysseus, took his stand, and spoke
to him thus:

“Much-praised Odysseus, insatiably
wily and eager
For toilsome action, today you'll either
kill two
Of Hippasus' sons and boast how you
cut down and stripped
Such a pair, or else beneath my spear
you yourself
Shall give up the ghost and die!”

So saying, he plunged
His ponderous spear clean through the
shining round shield
Of Odysseus, and on through his richly
wrought breastplate it tore
To rip all the flesh away from the great
fighter's side,
Though Pallas Athena did not allow it to
puncture
His entrails. Odysseus knew the wound
was not mortal,
But now he gave ground, and spoke
these words to Socus:

“You wretch, surely sheer ruin is
rushing upon you!
You've ended this action of mine against
the Trojans,

But here and now, believe me, you'll be
overtaken
By death and dark fate. Sprawling
beneath my spear,
You shall give glory to me, and your
miserable soul
To horse-famous Hades!"

He spoke, and just as Socus
Turned to run, he planted a spear in his
back
Between the shoulders and drove it out
through his chest.
He fell to the ground with a thud, and
worthy Odysseus
Exulted over him, saying: "Ah Socus,
son
Of flame-hearted Hippasus, breaker of

horses, death

After all was too quick for you, nor
could you writhe out

From beneath it. Poor wretch, your
father and lady mother

Shall never close those corpse's eyes of
yours,

But carrion birds shall pick the flesh
from your bones,

Flocking and flapping about you.

Whereas, if I die,

The noble Achaeans will surely bury me

With all due funeral rites.”⁴

So saying, he pulled

From his flesh and bossed shield keen
Socus's ponderous spear,

And the blood gushed out, whereat his

heart grew sick.

But when the spirited Trojans saw the
blood

Of Odysseus, a cry went up throughout
the throng,

And all together they rushed him. And
now he gave ground

And called to his comrades for help.
Three times he called

As loud as he could, and three times
warlike Menelaus

Heard him. Then at once he spoke thus to
Ajax nearby:

“O god-sprung Ajax, Telamon’s son
and ruler

Of many, just then there rang in my ears
the cry

Of steadfast Odysseus. He sounded as
though the Trojans
Had cut him off alone in the huge
confusion
And so were getting the best of him. But
come,
Let us make our way through the toiling
tangle of men,
For surely we had better help him. I fear
that he
All alone, great warrior though he is,
may suffer
Some harm from the Trojans. The
Danaans then would miss
The man greatly.”

With this he led the way, and godlike
Ajax followed. Then soon they found

Zeus-loved Odysseus,
And Trojans fiercely beset him on every
side
Like so many tawny jackals that dart in
about
A high-horned stag in the mountains, one
that some hunter
Has struck with an arrow—swiftly he
bounds away,
So long as the blood flows warm and his
knees remain nimble,
But when at last the deeply lodged
arrow subdues him,
The ravenous jackals tear him apart in a
shadowy
Glen of the mountains, till God sends
against them a murderous,
Plundering lion that scatters the jackals

and tears

At the prey himself So now the Trojans,
many

And strong, charged fiercely in on
Odysseus, wily

And wise. And he, lunging desperately
out with his spear,

Kept off the ruthless day of his doom, till
Ajax

Came up, bearing his shield like a
tower, and stood

By his side, thus quickly scattering
Trojans in every

Direction. And warlike King Menelaus
led Odysseus

Out through the crowd, supporting him
by the arm,

Till a squire drove up Menelaus's
horses and car.

But Ajax sprang at the Trojans and
soon accounted for
Doryclus, bastard son of King Priam,
then felled
With rapid spear-thrusts Pandocus and
Lysander,
Pyrasus and Pylartes. And as when a
river
In winter flood, swollen by rain from
Zeus,
Rushes down from mountains to plain,
bearing on
In its course to the sea innumerable dead
oaks and pines
Along with tons of mud and debris, so

now

Resplendent Ajax stormed recklessly
over the plain,
Demolishing horses and men.

Hector, meanwhile,
Knew nothing of this, for he was fighting
on the far
Left fringe of battle by the banks of the
river Scamander,
Where most thickly men's heads were
falling and the cries
Of warring men went up in one constant
roar
About the great Nestor and martial
Idomeneus. With these
Hector was dallying somewhat roughly
and wrecking

Their youthful battalions. But the noble
Achaean would still
Not at all have given way, if Paris, the
lord
Of lovely-haired Helen, had not put an
end to the valiant
Deeds of the leader and surgeon
Machaon, sinking
A three-barbed arrow deep in the
chieftain's right shoulder.
Then the fury-breathing Achaeans were
greatly afraid,
Lest Trojans should cut him down in the
fickle turns
Of battle. And quickly Idomeneus spoke
to King Nestor:

“Neleus’ son Nestor, great glory of all

the Achaeans,
Up on your chariot, quick! and with you
take wounded
Machaon. Then drive your solid-hoofed
horses as fast as
You can to the ships. For one good
physician is worth
A battalion when it comes to cutting out
arrows and spreading on
Healing ointments.”

He spoke, and the aged horseman,
Gerenian Nestor, did as he said. At once
He mounted his car, and Machaon
stepped up beside him.
Then Nestor lashed the horses, and off at
a gallop
They flew to the hollow ships, willing to

go

And eager to get there.

Now Cebriones, driving for Hector,
Noticed the Trojans retreating, and
spoke to his brother,
Saying: "Hector, while we two are
dallying here
On the fringe of hateful battle, other
Trojans
Are there being routed and ruined, both
horses and men.
And the cause of all that chaos is Ajax,
son
Of Telamon. I know him surely by that
wide shield
About his shoulders. But come, let us
drive our horses

And car over there, where most of all
both horsemen
And footmen, clashing in evil strife, are
cutting
Each other down and filling the air with
their loud,
Unquenchable cries.”

So saying, he raised the lash
And brought it down on the mane-tossing
horses, that swiftly
Took off at the very first sound of the
whistling whip
And rapidly drew the light car through
fighting Achaeans
And Trojans, trampling on corpses and
shields. And the axle
Below and handrails above were all

splashed and bespattered
With blood from the hooves of the
horses and metal rims
Of the wheels. And Hector, hotly eager
to crash
Through the man-mingling throng and
break the Trojan retreat,
Brought evil confusion into the Danaan
ranks,
And little indeed was the rest he gave
his great lance.
Hacking and thrusting and throwing huge
rocks, he raged
Through the enemy host, but avoided a
clash with huge
Telamonian Ajax.

Finally, Father Zeus,

Looking down from on high, made Ajax
afraid. He stood
Bewildered, then swung his sevenfold
bull's-hide shield
On his back and turned to retreat, like a
wild beast at bay
Anxiously glancing at all those about
him and slowly,
Step by step, giving way—like a tawny
lion
That dogs and farmhands, watching all
night to protect
Their fat oxen, drive from a cattle-yard.
The flesh-hungry lion
Charges right in, only to be driven back
By a rain of spears and blazing torches,
hurled
At him by brawny bold arms. Still eager,

he has to

Retreat, and slinks off at dawn
disappointed. So Ajax,

Sullen at heart, gave way to the Trojans,
greatly

Reluctant, since much he feared for the
ships of Achaea.

He went, in fact, like a balky and
stubborn ass

That gets the better of boys and enters a
field

Of tall grain, where staunchly he eats his
fill regardless

Of countless cudgels the puny boys
break on his back

Before, at last, they drive him forth.
Even so,

The spirited Trojans and their far-
called, many allies
Hung on the heels of Telamonian Ajax,
constantly
Smiting his shield with their spears. And
he would resummon
His furious valor, wheel, and beat back
the ranks
Of horse-breaking Trojans, then turn
again and resume
His deliberate retreat. Thus he
contended, and barred
Them all from the ships, making himself
a bulwark
Between the Achaeans and Trojans. And
some of the spears
That brawny bold arms hurled at him
rushed eagerly on

To embed themselves in the great shield
of Ajax, but many
Failed and fell short and fixed
themselves in the earth,
Unable to gain their glut of the warrior's
flesh.

But now Eurypylus, glorious son of
Euaemon,
Saw how Ajax labored beneath a skyful
Of spears, and coming up he took a stand
By his side and hurled his own bright
lance, striking
A chieftain, Phausius' son Apisaon, in
the liver
Under the midriff, thus suddenly causing
his knees
To buckle. Quickly Eurypylus leaped

upon him

And started to strip his shoulders of armor, but handsome

Prince Paris saw what he was doing and sank an arrow

Into the right thigh of Eurypylus. The shaft broke off

In the wound, and his leg dragged heavy with pain, as he,

Avoiding death, shrank back to take cover with men

Of his company, but shouting thus to the Danaan host:

“Turn! my friends, you that lead and counsel

The Argives. Then hold your ground, that you may ward off

The ruthless day from our spear-
belabored Ajax!
He has small chance, I think, of escaping
alive
From out the screaming tumult. So come
now, face
The Trojans and make a stand about
great Ajax,
Son of Telamon.”

So spoke the stricken Eurypylus,
And those about him crouched low, with
shields sloping back
To their shoulders and spears held high
and ready. Ajax
Came to them, turned, and staunchly
faced the foe.

The deadly fighting raged on like a

roaring conflagration.

But meanwhile the sweat-lathered mares
of Neleus' breed

Drew Nestor off the field, and with him
Machaon,

The people's shepherd. And foot-
flashing, noble Achilles

Saw them leave, for he was watching the
grievous

Toil and tearful rout of battle from high
On the stern of his sea-monster ship.

At once he called down
To his comrade Patroclus, who heard,
and looking like Ares
Came out of the lodge—thus marking the
start of evil

For him.⁵ Then the valiant son of

Menoetius spoke first:

“Why do you call me, Achilles? What is it you want?”

And swift Achilles replied: “Great son of Menoetius,

You so dear to my heart, now I believe

The Achaeans will really abase themselves at my knees,

Praying for me to help them, for truly their need

Is desperate and not to be borne. But go now, my god-loved

Patroclus, and find out from Nestor what man he brings wounded

From battle. From behind he looks just like Machaon, son

Of Asclepius, but the eager horses shot

by me so fast
I didn't see the man's face."

He spoke, and Patroclus
Obeyed his dear friend. Off he went at a
run
Past the lodges and ships of Achaeans.

When Nestor arrived
At his lodge with the wounded Machaon,
they both stepped down
On the all-feeding earth, and the old
one's squire Eurymedon
Unhitched the horses, while the warriors
stood on the beach
In the breeze to dry the sweat from their
tunics. Then
They went into the lodge and sat down
on reclining chairs,

And skilled Hecamede, she of the
beautiful braids,
Mixed them a drink. Old Nestor had
gotten the girl,
Daughter of hearty Arsinous, when
Tenedos fell
To Achilles. The Achaeans had picked
her for him as reward
For his always superior counsel. First
she drew up
A table before them, a polished and
beautiful piece
With feet of blue lapis, and on it she set
a bronze saucer
Whereon was an onion to go with their
drink, and beside it
She put yellow honey and meal of sacred
white barley.

By these she placed an exquisite cup that
the old one
Had brought from home. Studded with
rivets of gold,
It had two handles on either side, about
which
Two pairs of golden doves were
sipping, while below
Were circular bases at bottom and top of
the stem.
And though it was no small thing to raise
that full cup
From the table, old Nestor could lift it
with ease. Now in it
The girl like a goddess mixed them a
drink, with honey
And Pramnian wine, on which with a

grater of bronze

She grated some goat's-milk cheese and
lastly sprinkled

White barley. Then, when the mixing
was done, she asked them

To drink. And having quenched their
burning thirst,

They fell to amusing each other with
stories, when suddenly

There in the door stood the godlike man
Patroclus.

At sight of him the old one quickly got
up

From his gleaming chair, led him in by
the hand, and told him

To sit. But Patroclus firmly refused to,
saying:

“I cannot, O god-fed ancient, nor will
you persuade me.
Respected and feared is the man who
sent me to learn
Who it is you bring here wounded. But
since I now see
For myself that it is my lord Machaon,
I’ll take
The word back to Achilles. You know
very well, O godlike
Ancient sir, how irritable he is,
A man who might quickly blame even
one who is blameless.”

Then horse-driving Gerenian Nestor
spoke thus:
“Why this concern on the part of
Achilles for wounded

Sons of Achaeans? He has no idea what
grief

The whole army is in. For now our
bravest men,

Stricken by arrows or spear-thrusts, lie
at the ships.

Strong Diomedes, Tydeus' son, has been
hit,

And both spear-famous Odysseus and
King Agamemnon

Have suffered disabling spear-wounds.
And now Machaon,

Whom, I've just brought from the field,
has also been hit

By a painful bolt from the bowstring. But
Achilles, great man

That he is, neither cares for nor pities
the Danaan people.

Can it be that he'll wait till our swift
ships here on the beach

Go up in smoke and we ourselves die by
the dozen?

For I no longer have limbs so supple and
strong

As surely I did in the old days. If only I
were

As young and my strength as unyielding
as once⁶ when trouble

Arose between the Epeans and us
concerning

The rustling of cattle, when I by way of
reprisal

Was taking cattle in Elis and slew
Itymoneus,

Valorous son of Hypeirochus. While he

fought

Mid the foremost, defending his cattle, a
spear from my hand

Laid him low, and the rustics around him
all fled for their lives.

Great indeed was the booty we rounded
up there on the plain:

Some fifty herds of cattle with as many
sheepflocks,

As many droves of swine and as many
herds

Of wide-roaming goats, along with a
hundred and fifty

Sorrel horses, all mares, and many of
them

With colts at the teat. All these we drove
by night

To Neleian Pylos and into the city, and

Neleus

Rejoiced at the great success such an
untried stripling

As I had had on the raid. And at dawn
the heralds

Proclaimed loud and clear for all those
to gather who then

From sacred Elis had anything coming to
them.

And the Pylian leaders all came and
divided the spoils,

For to many of us in Pylos the Epeans
owed wealth,

Since we were at that time both few and
downtrodden. The brutish

And powerful Heracles had come in the
years before

And cruelly oppressed us, killing our
bravest and best.

Twelve were the sons of Neleus the
blameless, but of these

Only I was still alive. Hence the Epeans,
Bronze-clad and presumptuous of heart,
were wickedly plotting

And working evil against us. But now
old Neleus

Selected a whole herd of cattle along
with a huge flock

Of sheep, three hundred in all and their
shepherds with them.

For great was the debt owed him in
sacred Elis—

Especially for four fine horses, prize-
winning steeds

That had gone to the games with a car to

race for the tripod.

But King Augeas had kept them there and
sent back

Their vexed and horseless driver with
words of insult

For Neleus. Both act and insult had
angered the old one

Greatly, and now he chose reprisal past
telling.

And what was left he gave to the people,
that none

Might go without a just share.

“Thus we divided

The spoils, and then throughout the city
made offerings

To the gods. But on the third day the
Epeans gathered

Their forces of many men and solid-
hoofed horses,
And among them the two Moliones^{ah} put
on their armor,
Though they as yet were little more than
boys
With no great knowledge of furious
fighting. Quickly
They came and laid siege to the citadel
Thryoessa,
An outlying hilltop town on the river
Alpheius
Down near the coast of sandy Pylos.
This town
They were eager to pillage and plunder,
and about the hill
They filled the plain with their men. But

Athena shot down
From Olympus by night and alerted our
forces for battle,
And those she gathered in sandy Pylos
were not
Loath to fight. They were indeed eager,
and I among them,
But Neleus had hidden my horses, since
he thought I
Had not yet acquired much prowess in
serious warfare.
Even so, with the help of Athena, I on
foot
Proved first in the fight, even among the
horsemen.

“Our forces formed where the river
Minyeius flows into

The sea at Arene. There the Pylian
horsemen
Awaited bright Dawn while many
companies of infantry
Poured in behind them. Pushing on in full
armor, we reached
By noon the next day the hallowed
stream of Alpheius.
There we sacrificed splendid victims to
Zeus,
The exalted and mighty, a bull apiece to
Poseidon
And Alpheius, god of the river, but a
herd-fattened heifer
To blue-eyed Athena. Then we ate
supper in companies
Throughout the host and lay down on the
banks of the river

To sleep, each man still clad in his war-gear.

“Meanwhile,
The great-souled Epeans, encircling the
city, stood ready
And eager to sack it. But now intervened
a mighty
Work of the War-god, for when the
bright Sun arose
Over earth, we made our prayers to Zeus
and Athena
And moved to attack. And in the great
clash of Epeans
And Pyliaus, I was the first to kill a man
And take his solid-hoofed horses—the
spearman Mulius.
He was the son-in-law of Augeas, the

husband

Of his eldest daughter, tawny-tressed
Agamede,

Whose knowledge of herbs and potions
was truly world-wide.

With a cast of my bronze-headed spear I
broke his charge

And toppled him down in the dust, then
leaped on his chariot

And fought mid the foremost champions.

But when the haughty

Epeans saw the man fall, their captain of
horse

And bravest in battle, they scattered on
every side,

As I swept down like a black hurricane
and overtook

Fifty chariots, and two men from each

took the dirt
In their teeth, all spear-victims of mine!
And now
I'd have wrecked the careers of the two
Moliones, supposedly
Sons of Actor, had not their real father,
Poseidon,
The wide-ruling shaker of shores, saved
them from battle
By hiding them both in a thick cloud of
mist. Then Zeus
Gave great power to the Pylian fighters,
and far across
The wide plain we pursued the Epeans,
constantly killing
Their men and collecting the armor, till
at last we came

To the fertile wheat fields of Buprasium,
the Olenian Rock,
And a place called Alesium Hill. There
Athena turned back
Our forces, and leaving I slew the last
man. The Pylians
Drove their fast horses from Buprasium
back to Pylos,
And all gave thanks and great glory to
Zeus among gods
And to Nestor bravest of men.

“That was the kind
Of warrior I was, just as sure as I ever
was one!
But Achilles would like to enjoy his
valor alone,
Though surely the man will later most

terribly grieve

For his own people destroyed. Ah, my
boy,

How well I remember the charge
Menoetius laid on you

The day he sent you from Phthia to King
Agamemnon.

We two were there with you, I and
worthy Odysseus,

And there in the house we heard his
instructions to you.

For we had come to the fair-lying palace
of Peleus

Recruiting soldiers throughout many-
feeding Achaea.

Inside with Achilles we found your
father Menoetius,

And you, while out in the courtyard the

knightly old Peleus
Was burning to bolt-hurling Zeus the fat
thigh-slabs
Of a bull, and from a gold cup in his
hand he was pouring
Libations of sparkling wine to go with
the sacred
And flaming meat. Menoetius and you
were busily
Carving the beef when we two appeared
in the porch.
The surprised Achilles sprang up, led us
in by the hand,
And told us to sit, then set before us
refreshment
Befitting strangers. And when we had
greatly enjoyed

The food and drink he served us, I spoke
out first,
Inviting Achilles and you to come with
us.

And since you were both quite willing to
do so, your fathers
Gave much instruction to you. Old
Peleus urged
His son Achilles to always be bravest
and best,
But Menoetius, son of Actor, counseled
you thus:

““My son, Achilles is nobler in birth
than you are
And far more gifted with martial
prowess, but you
Are the elder, and so should instruct,

counsel, and guide him.

And he will do well to heed the advice
you give him.’[ai](#)

“Thus your old father gave you a
charge—but one

That you have forgotten. Even now,
though, go speak

To the fiery Achilles and see if he’ll
listen. Who knows

But that with God’s help your persuasion
may still prevail?

The advice of a friend is frequently most
effective.

But if his heart is set on escaping some
dire word

From Zeus, revealed to him by his
goddess mother,

Let him send you at the head of the
Myrmidon host,⁷

That you may be a light of hope to the
Danaans.

And let him give you his splendid armor
to wear

Into war, that the Trojans may take you
for him and quickly

Withdraw from the fighting. Then the
battling, war-worn sons

Of Achaeans may have a chance to catch
their breath—

Such chances in battle are few—and you
that are fresh

May easily drive, with little more than
your war-screams,

The exhausted Trojans away from the

ships and the shelters
And back toward the city.”

He spoke, and his words stirred the
heart

In the breast of Patroclus, who left now
to run down the long
line

Of ships to Achilles, Aeacus’ grandson.
But when

He came at a run to the ships of godlike
Odysseus,

Where he and his men had their place of
assembly and judgment

And where they had built the gods’
altars, there he was met

By Eurypylus, Zeus-sprung son of
Euaemon, pierced

In the thigh by an arrow and painfully limping from battle.

The sweat streamed down from his head and shoulders, and from

His deep wound the dark blood oozed, but still his mind

Remained clear. Seeing him so, the gallant Patroclus

Felt pity for him, and his words came winged with foreboding:

“O miserable leaders and lords of the Danaan people,

Were you, then, doomed to fall so far from home

And loved ones, here where the swift dogs of Troy may gulp

Their glut of your glistening fat? But

come, tell me this,
O god-nurtured hero Eurypylus. Have
the Achaeans
A chance to somehow hold back
monstrous Hector, or will they
Now die beneath his great spear?"

Then the stricken Eurypylus:
"No longer, O Zeus-sprung Patroclus,
will there be any
Defense of Achaeans, who soon will be
frantically climbing
Aboard the black ships. For surely all
those who have been
Our bravest lie at the ships disabled by
Trojan
Arrows or spear-thrusts, while the
enemy's strength continues

To grow. But me at least you can help.
Lead me
Now to my black ship, cut the keen
bronze
From my thigh, and wash the dark blood
away with warm water.
Then put some soothing salve on the
wound, some healing
Excellent thing men say you learned
from Achilles,
Who had it from Cheiron, most civil and
righteous of Centaurs.
For of our physicians, Machaon and
Podaleirius,
One I believe lies mid the lodges
wounded
And in need of a skillful surgeon
himself, while the other

Is out on the plain withstanding the
Trojans' hard charge."

And the stalwart son of Menoetius
answered him thus:

"How can these things be? But what
shall we do, Eurypylus?

I'm on my way to fiery Achilles with
word

From Gerenian Nestor, Achaea's old
sentinel. Still,

I will not desert you so nearly
exhausted."

So saying,

He put his arm round the great leader's
waist and helped him

Back to his lodge, where his squire at
sight of them

Piled oxhides thick on the earthen floor.
On these
Patroclus stretched the man out, and with
a knife
Removed the keen-cutting bronze from
his thigh, and washed
The dark blood away with warm water.
And when he had crushed
A root in his hands he applied it well to
the wound—
A pungent, pain-killing root that ended
his pangs.
Then the bleeding stopped and the
wound began to dry.

BOOK XII

The Storming of the Wall

While valiant Patroclus was tending
the stricken Eurypylus
There in the shelter, the Argives and
Trojans were clashing
In furious melee, nor were die Danaan
ditch
And the wide wall behind it long
destined to keep off the foe.
They had built the wall and trenched all
along it to keep
In safety their swift-sailing ships and
enormous spoils,

But they had neglected to sacrifice
glorious hecatombs
To the immortals. Hence it was built
without
The good will of the gods, and so could
not long endure.
So long as life lasted in Hector and
wrath in Achilles,
And royal Priam's city remained
unsacked,
The Achaeans' great wall stood firm.
But when all the best
Of the Trojans were dead and many of
the Argives too—
Though some of their bravest survived—
and the city of Priam
Was sacked in the tenth long year, and
the Argives had left

In their ships for their own dear country,
then Poseidon

In counsel with lord Apollo decided to
wreck

The great wall by bringing against it the
united force

Of all the rivers that flow from the range
of Ida

Seaward—the waters of Rhesus,
Caresus, Heptaporus,

Rhodius, Granicus, Aesepus, along with
the streams

Of sacred Scamander and Simoeis, by
whose banks

Many a bull's-hide shield and helmet
had splashed

In the mud along with many a half-divine

mortal

Of that renowned generation—all of
these rivers

Apollo made to flow out at one mouth
and drove

For nine days their churning torrent
against the great wall,

While Zeus continued to rain, that he
might all the sooner

Flood the wall with salt sea. And
Poseidon, creator

Of earthquakes, holding his trident,
directed the onrush

Of waters and washed out to sea the log
and stone

Foundations laid by the laboring
Achaeans, then smoothly

Leveled all beside the strong Hellespont

stream.

When the wall was demolished, again he
covered the wide beach

With sand and turned the rivers back into
the channels

Where they before had poured their
bright-flowing streams.¹

These things Poseidon and Apollo
were someday to do.

But now a roaring battle blazed at the
well-built

Wall, and the wooden beams of the
towers resounded

Beneath the missiles, as the Argives
were cowed by the lash

Of Zeus and penned up and held by the
hollow ships.

There they huddled in terror of Hector,
that mighty
Master of rout, who raged like a howling
gale.
As a wild boar or lion, exulting in
strength, wheels
On hounds and hunters, who form a wall
against him
And rain their javelins down, while
onward his stout heart
Comes, unafraid and persistent until his
own courage
Kills him—again and again he wheels
about
And tries the line of spearmen, and
wherever he charges
The line gives way—so Hector raged
through the throng

Urging his comrades to cross the
Achaean trench.

But the quick-hoofed horses balked
there, frightened and shrilly

Neighing on the very lip of the trench,
for it

Was too wide to leap or easily drive
across,

Since the banks overhung on either side,
and along

The top toward the wall the sons of
Achaeans had planted

A row of sharp stakes, close-set and tall,
to keep off

The foe. No horse could easily drag a
car,

However well-rolling, through those

defenses. The footmen,
Though, were eager to try them, and
Polydamas came up
To daring Hector and spoke to him and
the others:²

“O leaders of Trojans and Trojan
allies, any
Attempt to drive our fast horses across
this deep ditch
Would surely be senseless. The crossing
would be indeed hard,
For the ditch is bristling with sharp-
pointed stakes and not far
Beyond them looms the Achaean wall.
That space
Over there is so narrow that horsemen
could wage no war

Without great hurt to themselves. But if
high-crashing Zeus
Is really determined to aid the Trojans
and ruin
Our foes in his wrath, then I too of
course would like
Nothing more than that the Achaeans,
unsung and nameless,
Might perish here far from Argos. But if
they should rally
And drive us back from the ships and
into the ditch,
Then not one of us would ever get out
alive,
Not even a man to tell our story in Troy.
But come, let all of us do as I say. Let us
leave
Our horses here at the trench with our

squires, while we

In full armor cross over on foot with
Hector before us.

Then the Achaeans will not be able to
stem

Our advance, if they are truly bound fast
in the fatal

Bonds of destruction.”

Such was the prudent advice

Of Polydamas, a plan well pleasing to
Hector, who clad

In his bronze leaped down at once from
his car to the ground.

And the other Trojans, seeing Prince
Hector afoot,

Broke their chariot ranks and likewise
leaped down.

Then each of them ordered his driver to
hold back the horses
Quietly there at the trench, but they
themselves
Split up and formed five ordered
battalions, marshaled
Behind their chieftains.

The largest and bravest battalion
Fell in behind Hector and peerless
Polydamas, all men
Most eager to breach the wall and fight
their way
To the hollow ships, and with them
Cebriones went
As third in command, for Hector had left
with his car
A less able man. The second battalion

was led

By Paris along with Agenor and
Alcathous,

And the third by two sons of Priam,
Helenus and godlike

Deïphobus, with the warrior Asius third
in command—

Asius, Hyrtacus' son, whom his glossy
huge horses

Had drawn from Arisbe where flows the
river Selleïs.

And leading the fourth battalion was the
valorous son

Of Anchises, Aeneas himself, and with
him served

Two versatile fighting men, Antenor's
sons Acamas

And Archelochus. And Troy's renowned

allies were led

By Sarpedon, who chose as his captains
Glaucus and battle-fierce

Asteropaeus, whom next to himself he
deemed

The best men, for he was the finest
soldier among them.

When all had been marshaled with
shield touching bull's-hide shield,

They ferociously made for the Danaan
troops, nor did

They feel that they could be kept from
hurling themselves

Upon the black ships.

Then all the Trojans and all

Their far-famed allies adopted the plan
of peerless

Polydamas—all but Asius, Hyrtacus' son.

That leader of men had no intention of leaving

His horses there with his rein-holding squire. But still

In his chariot he approached the swift ships, childish

Fool that he was! for never would he escape

The dire fates and go back from the ships to windy Troy

Triumphant, exulting in horses and car. Instead,

Cursed fate enshrouded the man by the spear of lordly

Idomeneus, son of Deucalion. On he drove

Toward the long left flank of the ships,
heading his horses
And car for a bridge over which the
Achaeans were accustomed
To drive as they returned from the plain.
Asius
Got across and found that the doors were
not shut
Nor the long bar yet in its place. The
Achaeans were holding
Them open, hoping to save some
comrade of theirs
Who might still be fleeing from battle
and trying to make
The ships. Right over the bridge he
drove with his screaming
Squadron behind him, nor did they feel

that Achaeans
Could keep them from hurling
themselves upon the black ships—
Fools one and all! For there at the gates
they found
Two men of superlative prowess,
spirited sons
Of spear-hurling Lapithae, Peirithous'
son Polypoetes
The strong and Leonteus, the peer of
man-maiming Ares.
These two were planted in front of the
gaping high gate
As firmly fixed in their stance as a
couple of oaks
In the mountains, high-crested giants
with ground-gripping roots
Great and long, abiding both wind and

rain throughout
Innumerable days. So now these two,
with faith
In their powerful arms, awaited, firm
and unflinching,
The fierce onslaught of mighty Asius.
And on
He came with his followers straight for
the well-built gate,
All of them screaming their terrible war-
cries and raising
Their hard leather shields about their
leaders—King Asius,
Iamenus and Orestes, and Adamas,
Asius' son,
And Thoön and Oenomaus. The Lapithae
inside the wall

Had been urging the well-greaved
Achaean to fight in defense
Of the ships, but when they saw troops
charging down on the wall
And the panicking Danaans fleeing with
screams of terror,
These two rushed out in front of the gate
like a pair
Of wild boars in the mountains,
ferocious beasts that await
The clamorous onset of men and dogs,
charging out
To either side, crushing and rooting up
saplings
And vines with a gnashing and clashing
and grinding of tusks,
Till finally spears deprive them of spirit.
Even so

The bright bronze grated and clanged on
the breasts of these two
As they were struck hard glancing blows
while facing the foe
And keenly contending, trusting their
strength and the army
Of comrades above them. For men on the
well-built ramparts
Kept hurling down stones in defense of
their lives, their shelters,
And fast-faring ships. And the stones
came down like flakes
Of snow when a blizzard wind buffets
the lowering clouds
And drifts the snow deep on the all-
feeding earth, the huge stones
Hurling through air from the powerful

hands of Achaeans

And Trojans too, and harsh was the
grating and clanging

As rocks big as millstones struck
helmets and studded shields.

Then Asius, Hyrtacus' son, smote his
thighs

And spoke thus, painfully groaning in
great consternation:

“So you, Father Zeus, have also
become an utterly

Lie-loving god! For surely you led roe to
think

The Achaeans would be no match for
our mighty strength

And invincible hands. But they are like
quick-waisted wasps

Or bees that build their nest in a hollow
close by
A rocky path, and that stay and fight
against hunters
In stubborn defense of their young. So
now these men,
Though only two, will not give ground at
the gate
Nor cease their slaying till they
themselves be slain!”

He spoke, but his words left the mind
of Zeus unchanged,
For still he willed to give the glory to
Hector.

Meanwhile, others at other gates were
battling,
And hard indeed it would be for me,

even though
I were a god, to tell the tale of what
happened,
For all along the great wall the god-
inspired fire
Of stones kept up, as the sore-beset
Argives were forced
To defend their ships. And all the gods
who supported
The struggling Danaans deeply grieved
in their hearts.

And the two Lapithae fought on in the
blazing battle.
Strong Polypoetes, Peirithous' son, let
fly
His spear and struck the bronze-cheeked
helmet of Damasus.

On through the bronze and bone beneath
went the point
And spattered the helmet inside with the
warrior's brains,
Thus stopping Damasus' furious charge.
Then
Polypoetes went on to account for Pylon
and Ormenus.
Meanwhile Leonteus, scion of Ares,
aimed
His spear at Hippomachus, son of
Antimachus, hurled it
And brought the man down, striking him
full on the war-belt.
Next he drew his sharp sword from its
sheath and sprang
Through the crowd to kill in close fight
Antiphates, thrusting him

Back on the ground, after which
Leonteus went on
To Iamenus, Menon, Orestes, all of
whom
He stretched out on the bountiful earth.

While the Lapithae stripped
From the dead their glittering armor, the
young men who followed
Polydamas and Hector, they who formed
the largest
And bravest battalion and were most
eager to breach
The wall and put their fire to the ships,
these
Still stood in conflict and doubt at the
brink of the trench.
For as they were going to cross, an

ominous bird

Had appeared to them, a high-haunting
eagle that flew

By the host on the left with a blood-
crimson snake in his talons,

A monstrous serpent alive and writhing,
with plenty

Of fight left in him. Doubling up he
struck

At his captor's breast and neck till the
burning pangs

Forced the eagle to let the snake go, and
it fell in the midst

Of the troops at the trench. Then with a
scream the eagle

Flew down the wind and away, while
the Trojans shuddered

At sight of the writhing snake, a

glistening omen
From Zeus of the aegis. Then again
Polydamas came up
To bold Hector and offered advice:

“Hector, somehow
You always rebuke me when I in
assembly say
What I think, no matter how good my
counsel may be,
Since never never should any man of the
people
Contradict you in council or on the field,
Or do anything but uphold and increase
your command.
But now once again I intend to speak my
mind,
As it seems to me I should. Let us, then,

not

Advance to fight for the Danaan ships.

For now

I know what will happen to us, if this is
a truly

Ominous bird, this high-haunting eagle
that came

Just as we were eager to cross, flying by
on the left

With a blood-crimson snake in his
talons, a monstrous, writhing

Serpent that he let fall before he could
reach

His own nest and ravenous young. Thus
it shall happen

To us, though we do by our great
strength break through

The Achaean gates and wall and force

the foe back—

Even so we ourselves shall return from
the ships, retracing

Our steps in no very orderly fashion, and
leaving

Innumerable Trojans behind, killed by
the bronze

Of Achaeans defending their ships. Such
would any

Good soothsayer say who knew the truth
about omens

And so had the people's trust.”

With an angry scowl

Bright-helmeted Hector replied:

“Polydamas, truly

This last speech of yours I do not find
very pleasing.

You certainly know how to give better
counsel than that.

But if you are really in earnest, then
surely the gods

Have addled your brains, since now you
bid us forget

The message of mightily-thundering
Zeus, who made me

A promise which he confirmed with a
nod of his head. [aj](#)

But you would have us obey these long-
winged birds,

About which I could not care less,
regardless of whether

They fly to the right toward morning and
sunrise, or

To the left toward the murky gloom of

twilight. Let us

Obey the counsels of almighty God, of
Zeus

Who is King over all, mortals and
immortals too.

One omen only is best—to fight for
one's homeland!

But why are you so afraid of blazing
battle

And warfare? For even if all the rest of
us fell

At the ships of the Argives, still there
would be no danger

Of death for you, since you have no
battle-staunch heart

Or warlike spirit at all. However, if
now

You hold back from the fiery struggle or

try to persuade

Any other Trojan to do so, quickly you'll
die

Beneath the force of my spear!"

So saying, brave Hector
Led the advance and all his men
followed, screaming
Their unearthly war-cries. And bolt-
hurling Zeus stirred up
From the mountains of Ida a blasting
hard wind that bore
The dust in billows straight at the ships.
Thus
He confused the Achaeans still more,
and guaranteed glory
To Trojans and Hector. Trusting in such
signs from Zeus

And in their own might, they did their
best to break
The Achaean's great wall. They tore
down towers and breastworks
And pried up beams that buttressed the
battlements—all
In their efforts to breach the Achaean
wall. But not
Even now did the Danaans give way
before them, but quickly
They closed the gaps with barriers made
of bull's-hide
And threw from behind them at those
who came at the wall.

The two Ajaxes ranged all along the
ramparts
Arousing the strength of Achaeans and

urging them on.

They harshly berated whomever they
saw disposed

To give up and retreat, but others they
cheered with words

Of encouragement, saying: "O friends,
you Argive princes,

Officers, commoners, all are by no
means equal

In war, but now there is plenty of work
for all,

As surely you already know. Therefore
let no man

Turn toward the ships away from the
cries of the foe,

But keep facing forward and urging each
other on,

That Olympian Zeus, lord and lover of

lightning,
May give us the power to stem this
assault and drive
Our foes back to the city.”

So shouted the two Ajaxes,
Arousing Achaean resistance. And as
snowflakes fall thick
On a winter day when all-planning Zeus
displays
His missiles to men, as he lulls every
wind and continues
To snow until he has covered the high
mountain peaks
And jutting lofty headlands, the clover
fields
And fertile plowlands of men, and all
the harbors

And shores of the gray sea are white, as
the heavy snowstorm
From Zeus wraps all but the beating
waves: even so
The stones from both sides flew thick,
many falling on Trojans,
Many upon the Achaeans, and as they
hurled
At each other, the screaming and
thudding resounded all up
And down the great wall.

But not even now would the Trojans
And glorious Hector have broken
through gate and long bar
If Zeus the contriver had not sent his son
Sarpedon
Against the Argive troops, like a lion

against

Fat cattle. Quickly he swung his round shield to the front—

His gorgeous buckler of beaten bronze that a smith

Had hammered out and backed with many a bull's-hide,

All fastened together with stitches of golden wire

Running around the circumference. With this before him

And brandishing two long lances, he charged like a lion

Of the mountains, a meat-starved beast whose ferocious spirit

Sends him right into the close-barred fold for a try

At the sheep. And though he lands amid

shepherds with spears
And dogs watching over the sheep, still
he is loath
To leave the pens before he has made
his attack,
And either he springs on the flock and
seizes a victim,
Or he himself is struck mid the foremost
defenders
By a spear from someone's quick hand.
Even so the spirit
Of godlike Sarpedon made him feel
eager to charge
Full speed at the wall and break his way
through the battlements.
Hence he spoke thus to Glaucus, son of
Hippolochus:

“Glaucus, why is it that we above all
are honored
With royal seats, choice cuts, and ever-
full cups
In Lycia, and gazed on by all as though
we were gods?³
And why do we hold and enjoy that huge
estate
On the banks of Xanthus, those acres of
excellent orchard
And fertile wheat-bearing fields? Surely
it best
Becomes us to fight mid the foremost
and throw ourselves
In the blaze of battle, that many a bronze-
breasted Lycian
May say:

“‘Surely the lords of Lycia are no
Inglorious men, our Kings, who feast on
fat sheep
And drink the choice mellow wine. But
they are truly
Powerful warriors, men who always
fight
Up front with the foremost champions of
Lycia.’

“Ah,
My friend, if we had only to turn from
this battle
To make ourselves deathless and ageless
forever, neither
Would I myself fight mid the foremost,
nor would I urge you
To take part in the man-enhancing

struggle. But now,
Since countless fates of inescapable
death surround us
Here and always, let us go forward and
fight,
That we may give glory to someone, or
win it ourselves.”

He spoke, and Glaucus did not turn
heedless away,
But both of them charged straight
onward, heading the great host
Of Lycians. At sight of them coming,
Menestheus, son
Of Peteos, shuddered, for they were
directing all
Their destruction at his high part of the
wall. Hoping

To see some chief who might save his
comrades from ruin,
Menestheus looked up and down the
Achaean wall,
And not far off he saw the two Ajaxes,
Hungry for battle, and standing there
with them, just back
From his lodge, was Teucer. But it was
impossible now
For him to make himself heard, so great
was the din
That went up to heaven of hard-beaten
shields and helmets,
Crested with horsehair, and battered
gates, for all
The doors had been closed and now the
foe fought before them
To crash their way through and enter.

Quickly Menestheus

Dispatched the herald Thoötes:

“Go, my noble

Thoötes, run call Telamonian Ajax, or
rather

Call both Ajaxes, for that would be far
best of all

In our present desperate condition. Here,
bearing down

On us hard, come the fierce Lycian
leaders, men who have always

Proved themselves mighty in battle. But
if there too

The toil and tumult of war have arisen,
at least

Let the brave Telamonian Ajax come,
and with him

Teucer, the expert bowman.”

So he spoke,
And the listening herald did not disobey
him, but went
At a run by the wall of the bronze-clad
Achaeans till soon
He approached the two Ajaxes and thus
delivered
His message: “O leaders of bronze-
breasted Argives, Menestheus,
Fostered of Zeus, appeals for your help
—though it be
But briefly given—to stem a terrible
onslaught.
Both of you now would surely be far
best of all
In our present desperate condition.

There, bearing down
On them hard, come the fierce Lycian
leaders, men who have always
Proved themselves mighty in battle. But
if here too
The toil and tumult of war have arisen,
at least
Let the brave Telamonian Ajax come,
and with him
Teucer, the expert bowman.”

Thoötes spoke thus,
And huge Telamonian Ajax did not
ignore him.
At once he spoke winged words to the
son of Oïleus:
“Ajax, you and strong Lycomedes stand
Your ground firmly and urge the

Danaans here to fight fiercely.
I will go and face the foe with
Menestheus,
And come back here as soon as I've
done what I can.”

With this Telamonian Ajax went on his
way,
And with him his half-brother Teucer,
both of them sons
Of one father, and with them Pandion
carried the curved bow
Of Teucer. Rushing along within the
wall,
They came to the bastion of great-souled
Menestheus. To men
Under pressure they came, for the enemy
now were swarming

Upon the battlements, warriors like a
black whirlwind,
The powerful Lycian counselors and
kings. They clashed
Head on in the tumult, and the screams of
battle rose high.

Ajax, Telamon's son, was first to kill
His man, the intrepid Epicles, a friend of
Sarpedon,
Striking him down with a craggy huge
rock that lay
On top of the wall within the
battlements. Not
Without great effort could a man of our
generation,
No matter how young or strong, so much
as lift it

With both of his hands, but Ajax raised it
up high
And hurled it down, smashing the four-
horned helmet
And crushing the skull of Epicles, who
pitched from the wall
Like a diver, as spirit took leave of his
bones. And Teucer
Struck Glaucus, the stalwart son of
Hippolochus, wounding
His uncovered arm with an arrow as
hotly he rushed up
The ramparts and Teucer shot from the
top. His shaft
Took the fight out of Glaucus, and
furtively he leaped down
From the wall, that no Achaean might
see he was wounded

And make a brag over him. But
Sarpedon soon knew,
And great was his grief at the absence of
Glaucus, though still
He fought hard as ever. With a well-
aimed thrust he embedded
His spear in Alcmaon, son of Thestor,
and when
He withdrew it Alcmaon came with it,
falling face down
With a ringing of ornate bronze. Then
Sarpedon laid hold
Of the breastwork with both of his
powerful hands, and pulled,
And a long length of battlement fell. He
thus bared the top
Of the Argive wall and made a passage

for many.

But now both Ajax and Teucer came at him at once.

Teucer glanced a shaft hard off the gleaming baldric

That crossed his chest and held his man-guarding shield,

As Zeus kept death from his son Sarpedon, that he

Might not fall by the sterns of the ships.

And Ajax sprang

At him and lunged with his spear, but the point did not pierce

His shield, though he made him reel in his charge. And now

He fell back a bit from the top, but not altogether,

Since still his heart had hopes of glory.
Turning,
He called to his godlike people:

“O Lycians, where now
Is your furious war-charge? No matter
how strong I may be,
I can’t very well break through the wall
all alone
And beat a path to the ships. After me,
then,
And the more of you the better!”

He shouted, and they,
In fear of rebuke, pressed forward on
either side
Of their brave King and giver of
counsel, and the Argives
Opposite them reinforced their

battalions behind

The great wall. And now a still hotter
struggle ensued.

For the powerful Lycians could not
break their way through

The Danaan wall and beat a path to the
ships,

Nor could the Danaan spearmen thrust
them back

From the wall once they had won a
position upon it.

But as two men with measuring-rods in
hand

Contend with each other from either side
of a fence

Where their two fields come together,
and bitterly fight

In a narrow space for a just allotment of

land,

So now the battlements held them apart
as over

The top they smote the bull's-hide
bucklers in front of

Their chests, the circular shields and
fluttering targets.

And many were cut by thrusts of the
ruthless bronze,

Not only when anyone turned his back in
the fight,

But many were wounded clean through
the shield itself.

All down the line the towers and
battlements glistened

With flowing blood from men of both
sides, Achaeans

And Trojans alike. But still the
Achaean staunchly
Held their ground. As a careful widow
that wearily
Spins for a living balances weight and
wool
In either pan of the scales, making them
equal,
That she may earn some paltry support
for her children,
So equally now their raging battle was
drawn,
Till Zeus gave the higher glory to
Priam's son Hector,
The first man to plunge inside the
Achaean's wide wall,
First shouting thus to the horde of
Trojans behind him:

“On, you horse-taming Trojans, smash
the wall
Of the Argives and hurl on the ships your
god-blazing fire!”

Thus he urged all of them on, and they
giving ear
Charged in one body straight at the wall
and started
To climb the ramparts with sharp-
pointed spears in their hands.
And Hector picked up a stone in front of
the gate
And carried it with him, a broad-based,
pointed boulder
That not even two of this generation’s
strongest
Could manage to heave on a wagon. Yet

Hector easily
Held it alone, since now crooked
Cronos' son Zeus
Made the stone light for him. As a
shepherd lightly
Picks up with one hand and carries the
fleece of a ram,
Scarcely aware of the weight, so Hector
easily
Lifted the boulder and bore it straight on
at the thick
And tight-fitting doors of the gate, high
double-doors
With two crossbars inside well locked
by a bolt
In the middle. Charging in close, he took
a firm stance
And hurled the stone at the doors,

planting his feet
Well apart to insure the force of his
blow. And the stone
Crashed into the middle, broke off the
hinges, and fell
Inside, as the great gate groaned and the
bars gave way
And the doors flew apart beneath the
force of the boulder.
Then glorious Hector sprang in, his stern
face dark
As fast-falling night. But his bronze
shone ghastly about him,
And in his hands he held two spears, nor
could
Anyone but a god have held the man
back, when once

He had plunged through the gate with his eyes so fiercely flaming.

Whirling about in the crowd, he called the Trojans

To scale the wall, and again they heeded his urging.

Quickly many climbed over the top while others

Poured in through the strongly wrought gate. And the Danaans fled

In fear mid the hollow ships, and the screams were unceasing.

BOOK XIII

Fighting Among the Ships

Now when Zeus had sent Hector and
many Trojans charging
Down on the ships, he left the two
armies there
In the toil and tears of unceasing
struggle, while he
Averted his shining eyes and looked far
out
On the lands of the horse-handling
Thracians, the close-fighting
Mysians,
The august Hippemolgi, drinkers of

mares' milk, and the Abii,
Justest of men. The Father no longer
turned
His shining eyes toward Troy, for he had
no hint
In his heart that any immortal would dare
come down
To strengthen either the Trojan or
Danaan forces.^{[1](#)}

But lordly Poseidon, shaker of shores,
was not
For a moment unwatchful from where on
the highest peak
Of well-wooded Samothrace^{[ak](#)} he sat
rapt at the sight
Of raging battle, for from his position
there

He could clearly see all Ida, the city of
Priam,
And the ships of Achaeans. There he sat,
after he
Had emerged from the sea, and he had
compassion on all
The Achaeans now overcome by the
Trojans, but against
Almighty Zeus he seethed with bitter
resentment.

Soon he strode swiftly down the
precipitous slope,
And the towering mountains and the
trees of the forest trembled
Beneath the immortal feet of Poseidon.
Quickly
He took three mighty strides, and with

the fourth

He reached his goal at Aegae, where
built in the depths

Of the sea he has his famous home, a
palace

Golden and gleaming, enduring forever.
Once there

He hitched to his car his brazen-hoofed
horses, fast-flying

Steeds with manes of streaming gold.
And the garments

He wore were of gold, as was the well-
wrought whip

He held in his hand as he mounted the
car and drove out

Over the waves. And the beasts that live
in the sea^{[al](#)}

Came up from the depths on all sides
and gambolled beneath him,
Acknowledging him as their King, and
the sea itself,
Rejoicing, parted and made way before
him. And the chariot's
Axle was dry, as swiftly his far-
bounding horses
Bore Poseidon toward the Achaean
ships.

Midway between Tenedos and craggy
Imbros
There is a huge cave in the depths of the
sea, and here
The mighty creator of earthquakes pulled
up and unharnessed
His horses and threw down before them

ambrosial fodder

To munch on. Then he put hobbles of
gold on their feet,

Hobbles that could not be broken or
shaken loose,

That his pair might stay where they were
until their master

Returned. Then off he went to the camp
of Achaeans.

There the massed Trojans, like flame
or hurricane wind,

Were rushing on with Priam's son
Hector, roaring

And screaming their war-cries, and
hoping that they would soon take

The Achaean ships and kill all the
bravest beside them.

But now Poseidon, embracer and shaker
of earth,
Emerged from the brine, determined to
urge on the Argives.
Taking the form and tireless voice of
Calchas,
He spoke first of all to the two Ajaxes,
who were
Already eager for action:

“If you two will only
Be mindful of might and not at all of
chill fear,
You’ll save the Achaean army. Nowhere
else
In the fight do I dread the powerful
Trojans. Though many
Have scaled the great wall, the well-

greaved Achaeans will hold them
All back. Only here am I really afraid of
what
Might happen to us, here where yonder
madman
Leads on like furious fire, Hector, who
falsely
Claims Zeus as his father. But may some
god inspire
You both to firmly stand your ground
here and to bid
The others do likewise. Thus you may
drive him back
From the fast-faring ships, no matter
how eager he is,
And even though the mighty Olympian
himself
Is urging him on.”

So saying, the kingly embracer
And shaker of shores touched both of
them with his staff
And filled them with valorous heart, and
their arms and legs
He made feel rested and light. Then he
took off
Like a swift-winged hawk that rising
hangs high in the sky
Above a tall thrust of rock before
swooping over
The plain in pursuit of some other bird.
Even so
Earthshaking Poseidon darted away.
Quick Ajax,
Son of Oïleus, was first aware of the
god,

And now he spoke thus to Ajax, son of
Telamon:

“Ajax, one of the gods from Olympus,
appearing

To us in the form of our prophet, tells us
to fight

By the ships. For that was surely not
Calchas, our seer

And reader of bird-signs. I glimpsed his
feet and legs

As he left, and knew him at once for a
god, since even

The gods are sometimes easily known.
And now

The heart in my breast feels more than
ever eager

For struggle and conflict, and now my

feet below

And hands above are madly desirous of
battle!”

Then Ajax, son of Telamon, answered
him thus:

“Even so my own invincible hands are
restlessly

Gripping my spear, my spirit is hot, and
the feet

Beneath me are more than ready to
charge. Right now

I would like nothing better than meeting
in single combat

Priam’s son Hector, the always eager to
fight.”

While the two Ajaxes were talking
thus to each other,

Exulting in battle-joy that a god had put
In their hearts, earth-girdling Poseidon
was in the rear

Arousing disheartened Achaeans, who
there mid the swift-sailing

Ships were attempting to get back their
courage. Their limbs

Were leaden from hours of fearful toil,
and now

Their hearts were filled with terror at
sight of the horde

Of Trojans that had already scaled the
great wall.

As they saw these advancing, they wept
in cringing despair,

But the mighty creator of earthquakes
went easily in

Among them and set them on to form

once again

Their stalwart battalions. He came first
of all to Teucer

And Leïtus, with whom were the
warriors Peneleos, Thoas,

And Deïpyrus, as well as Meriones and
Antilochus, those masterful

Raisers of war-cry. To them he spoke
these winged words:

“For shame, you Argives, acting like
so many babies!

Your prowess, I thought, would save our
ships from the Trojans.

But if now you cringe from miserable
war, then surely

The day of defeat has dawned for the
Argives. Who

Would believe it! this wonder before my
eyes, this terrible
Thing I never imagined could happen—
the Trojans
Charging our vessels! Why they have
always been
Like timorous, panicky deer that
fearfully wander
The woodland till they, unresisting and
weak, fall prey
To jackals and panthers and wolves. So
until now
The Trojans have had no slightest desire
to stand
And face the spirit and might of
Achaeans, not even
For one brief moment. But here they are
now, far

From the city, waging their war at the
hollow ships,
And this all because of our leader's
ignoble deed
And a pusillanimous people, who since
they are striving
With him had rather die mid the fast-
faring ships
Than fight to protect them. But even
though the warlike
Son of Atreus, powerful King
Agamemnon,
Is to blame for it all, he having insulted
The quick-footed son of Peleus, still we
ourselves
Cannot afford to be shirkers in battle.
Let us,

In fact, quickly make up for his evil. The
hearts

Of heroes are able to heal. Nor can you
excuse

Any longer your lack of furious valor,
you

The Achaeans' bravest and best. I
wouldn't quarrel

With some wretched fellow who
couldn't do any better,

But my heart seethes with blame at sight
of you here.

O you slackers, soon you shall see what
greater pain

Cowardice causes! But come, let each
one of you

Fill his heart with shame and blame for
himself,

For now the battle has grown to be truly tremendous.

Screaming Hector, mighty as ever, has smashed

His way through gate and long bars and carries his war

Right in toward the ships!”

So saying, earth-girdling Poseidon
Stirred the Achaeans to rally their powerful ranks

About the two Ajaxes, nor could host-urging Athena

Nor Ares himself have come among them and failed

To honor their might. For there picked men of the bravest

Awaited the charge of the Trojans and

noble Hector,
Forming against them a spear-bristling
wall. So close
The Achaeans stood to each other that
shield pressed on shield,
Helmet on helmet, and man on man, so
close
That the horsehair plumes on the bright-
horned helmets
brushed
Each other with every nod of a head, and
spears
Were crossed as brave hands brandished
them forward. All minds
Were fixed on the battle, for which they
were ready and eager.

Unswervingly on came the Trojans,

massed and mighty

With Hector before them, great Hector
plunging ahead

Like a ruthless, death-bearing boulder
that bounds down the slope

Of a mountain when a wintry, rain-
swollen river washes it

Loose with a flooding of water and
sends it headlong

Bouncing and flying—high in the air it
leaps

Through the echoing forest, crashing its
way through all

Before it until it reaches the level plain,
Where at last it loses its force and rolls
to a stop.²

So for a while Prince Hector ferociously

threatened

To kill his way through to the sea past
shelters and ships

Of Achaeans, but when that warrior
came to collide

With the serried battalions, there his
onslaught was halted.

The sons of Achaeans met him with
thrusting swords

And double-barbed spears and made
him reel and fall back,

Screaming thus to the army of fighters
behind him:

“You Trojans and Lycians and dueling
Dardanians, hold

With me here! This wall of Achaeans
will not keep me back

For long. They'll yield before my spear,
believe me,
If truly the greatest of gods drives me on,
the bolt-crashing
Husband of Hera!"

So Hector encouraged the Trojans,
And out strode his brother Deïphobus,
holding his round shield
Before him and quickly advancing. But
at him Meriones
Aimed a bright spear, nor did he miss
his mark.
He struck the round shield, but instead of
piercing the bull's-hide
The long shaft broke at the socket, as
Deïphobus quickly
Held from him the bull's-hide buckler,

fearing the spear
Of fiery Meriones, who now shrank back
in a crowd
Of his friends, frustrated and angry at
breaking his spear
And failing to fell his man. Off he went
Past shelters and ships of Achaeans to
fetch a long lance
He had left in his lodge.

But the others fought on with loud,
Unquenchable cries. And Teucer,
Telamon's son,
Was first to bring a man down, the
spearman Imbrius,
Son of many-horsed Mentor. Before the
sons
Of Achaeans came, Imbrius lived in

Pedaeum

And had as his wife a bastard daughter
of Priam,

Medesicasta. But when the Danaans
came

In their swiftly maneuverable ships, he
went back to Troy,

Where he was great mid the Trojans, and
lived in the house

Of Priam, who honored him equally with
his own children.

This was he whom Teucer jabbed under
the ear

With a thrust of his lengthy javelin, then
drew the point out.

And Imbrius fell like an ash that grows
on top

Of a far-seen towering mountain till

someone's bronze
Brings it down and its fresh green
foliage strikes earth. Even so
He fell, and about him rang his elaborate
armor.

Then Teucer rushed eagerly forward to
strip the man
Of his war-gear, but Hector met his
advance with a cast
Of his glittering spear. But Teucer,
looking straight at him,
Just managed to dodge the hurtling
bronze, which embedded
Itself in the chest of charging
Amphimachus, son
Of Actorian Cteatus. And Amphimachus
crashed to the ground

With a clanging of brazen war-gear.
Then Hector rushed out
To tear from the fallen Achaean his
head-hugging helmet,
But Telamonian Ajax lunged with his
spear
At the charging Hector, failing however
to find
His flesh behind so much grim bronze.
But he struck
The boss of his shield such a powerful
blow that Hector
Reeled back from the corpses, and
Achaeans bore both of
them off

The Athenian chieftains, Stichius and
noble Menestheus,

Carried Amphimachus into the host of
Achaean,
While both Ajaxes, raging with furious
fight,
Bore off the Trojan Imbrius. Just as two
lions
Seize a goat from a pack of razor-fanged
hounds
And carry it off through dense
underbrush, holding it
High in their jaws, so now the two
helmeted Ajaxes
Held Imbrius high and stripped off his
bronze. Then Ajax,
Son of Oïleus, angry and grieved for
Amphimachus,
Hacked the head from Imbrius' tender
neck

And sent it spinning away like a ball, to
drop
In the dust at the feet of Hector.

The heart of Poseidon
Seethed with rage when his grandson
Amphimachus fell
In the awesome encounter, and off he
went by the shelters
And ships to stir up Achaeans and make
still more trouble
For Trojans. And then he met spear-
famous Idomeneus.
He had been with a comrade whose knee
the keen bronze
Had recently wounded. His men had
carried him in,
And Idomeneus, now that he had

instructed the surgeons,
Was on his way to his lodge before
going back
To the battle, for which he still was
eager. Taking
The voice of Andraemon's son Thoas,
King of Aetolians
In Pleuron and sheer Calydon and
honored by them
Like a god, lordly earth-shaking
Poseidon spoke
To him thus:

“Idomeneus, counselor of Cretans,
where now
Are the threats that sons of Achaeans
used to hurl
At the Trojans?”

To which Idomeneus, leader of
Cretans:

“So far as I know, O Thoas, no one of us
Is to blame. All of us here are
experienced fighters,

And not a man of us shrinks from evil
war

Because he is gripped by cowardly fear.
I am forced

To believe that it must be the pleasure of
Cronos’ son Zeus,

The high and the mighty, that we
Achaeans should die here

Far from Argos, forever unsung and
unknown.

But Thoas, you have consistently been a
staunchly

Foe-fighting man and a splendid urger of others

Whenever you've seen men about to retreat. So do not

Give up now, but call your encouragement out

To every man you can."

And Poseidon, shaker Of shores, replied: "Idomeneus, never may he

Who willingly shrinks from this fight today return home

From Troy, but here may that man become the delight

Of ravenous dogs. But go, get your gear and come on.

Now we must hurry and do what we can

together.

For there is a prowess in union even of weaklings,

And we two have what it takes to fight with the bravest.”

So saying, the great god rejoined the toiling men,

And Idomeneus went to his well-built lodge, put on

His exquisite armor, caught up a couple of spears,

And headed back for the field like a bolt of lightning

That Cronos’ son Zeus takes up in his hand and hurls

From gleaming Olympus, a far-seen bolt that dazzles

Across the sky as a fiery sign to mortals.
So flashed the bronze about the breast of
Idomeneus

As he ran. But while he was still near
his lodge,

He met his able comrade and squire
Meriones

On his way to fetch a bronze-headed
spear,³

And stalwart Idomeneus spoke to him,
saying:

“Meriones,
Son of Molus, fast on your feet and the
dearest

Of all my comrades, why do you come
here now,

Leaving the fierce and fiery struggle?

Can you

Be wounded, weak and in pain from the
point of some arrow?

Or do you come after me with a
message? No need,

Since I, at least, am already eager—to
fight,

Not sit in my lodge!”

And Meriones, getting his drift:

“Idomeneus, counseling lord of bronze-
armored Cretans,

I am on my way for a spear, if perhaps

You have one left in your lodge. Just
now I shattered

The one I had on the shield of haughty
Deïphobus.”

To which Idomeneus, King of the

Cretans, replied:

“If spears are your wish, whether one or twenty, you’ll find them

Propped in my lodge against the bright entrance wall,

Spears I have taken from Trojans I’ve slain, since I

Do not care for fighting the foe at a distance. Hence

I have spears and bossed shields, helmets and flashing breastplates.”

Then gravely Meriones answered: “I too am supplied

With plenty of Trojan spoils, but they are all stored

In my lodge and black ship and none of them now are near.

For believe me, I too am not remiss in
courage,
And when the battle-strife breaks out I
always
Take my stand mid the very foremost
men
In the hero-enhancing battle. Some other
Achaean
Might very well be unaware of my
prowess,
But surely, I think, you know me much
better than that.”

And then Idomeneus, King of the
Cretans, replied:
“What need is there for you to speak of
these things?
I do indeed know how valiant a man you

are,

As would be seen if now all the bravest
of us

Were counted off by the ships for an
ambush, wherein

A man's valor is soonest discerned and
the cowards set off

From the brave. For the coward's face
changes color, nor can

His spirit sustain him. He cannot keep
still, but crouching

He nervously shifts his weight from foot
to foot,

And his heart pounds hard as he broods
on the imminent fates

Of death, and his teeth continue to
chatter. But the brave man

Keeps his color, nor is he overly fearful

When once he has taken his place in the
warriors' ambush.

That man's only prayer is quickly to
clash

In the awesome flames of fight. Not, I
say,

At the picking of such a party would any
man scorn

Your courage or the might of your hands.
And should you in toil

Of war be hit by arrow or spear, it
would not

Be from behind, but as you were
charging ahead

To dally a bit with the foremost you
would receive

The bitter shaft in belly or breast. Come

then,

Let us no longer loiter here nor talk
Any more like two little boys, or
someone may lose
All patience with us. Go on to my lodge
and get
A strong spear for yourself.”

He spoke, and Meriones, peer
Of the hurtling War-god, quickly took
from the lodge
A bronze-pointed spear, and immensely
eager for battle
Followed Idomeneus. As murdering
Ares enters
A battle with Rout, his mighty and
fearless son
Before whom even the bravest retreat—

these two

Put on their armor and go out from
Thrace to join

The Ephyri or the great-hearted
Phlegyes, both of whose pleas

They never grant, but always give the
glory

To one side or the other—even like that
pair of gods

Did Meriones and Idomeneus, leaders of
men, go forth

Into battle helmeted well in blazing
bronze.

And now Meriones spoke to Idomeneus,
saying:

“Son of Deucalion, where are you
most inclined

To enter the battle? On the right of the
host,
Straight up the center, or shall we go in
on the left,
Where surely, I think, the long-haired
Achaeans are failing
Most in the fight?”

And again Idomeneus, King
Of the Cretans, replied: “The ships in
the center have others
To guard them, the two Ajaxes and
Teucer, the best
Of our bowmen and also good in hand-
to-hand combat.
They will give Priam’s son Hector more
than his fill
Of fighting, no matter how eager and

mighty he is!

Hard indeed he will find it, rage as he will,

To master the spirit and dauntless strength of those men

And then set fire to the ships, unless great Zeus

Himself should hurl a blazing firebrand down

Among the swift vessels. For huge Telamonian Ajax

Will never yield to any mere mortal who eats

The grain of Demeter and can be quelled by cleaving

Bronze or a heavy rock. Not even before Rank-smashing Achilles would Telamon's son give way,

At least in hand-to-hand fighting, for no
man can vie
With Achilles when it comes to
swiftness of foot. But let us
Do as you have suggested and head for
the host
On the left, that we may find out right
away whether we
Shall win glory ourselves or give it now
to another.”

He spoke, and Meriones, peer of the
rapid War-god,
Led the way toward the left of the battle,
where Idomeneus
Wanted to enter.

As soon as the Trojans sighted
Idomeneus, surging in like a flame, him

And his squire armored in ornate bronze,
they shouted
One to another through the great melee
and all charged
At him together, and now by the sterns of
the ships
Loud strife and clashing arose. And as
when gusts
Come many and fast on a day when shrill
winds are blowing
And raising the thick dust on roads up
into a swirling
Huge cloud, so now they clashed in one
fierce throng,
Each man eager to use his sharp bronze
on another.
And the man-wasting battle bristled with
lengthy, flesh-rending

Spears, and eyes were blinded by the
blazing of bronze
From gleaming helmets, new-burnished
breastplates, and flashing,
Resplendent shields, as chaotically on
the men came.
Hard-hearted indeed would that man
have been who could
Have looked on that slaughter with joy
instead of lament.

Thus two mighty sons of Cronos pitted
their power
Against each other, creating horrible
pain
For heroic mortals. Zeus wanted Hector
and his side
To win—just enough to give glory to

foot-swift Achilles,
For Zeus had no wish at all that the host
of Achaeans
Should die there at Troy. He wanted
only to glorify
Thetis along with her brave-hearted son.
But Poseidon
Stole furtively forth from the gray salt-
sea, and going
Among the Argives urged them on, for he
Was deeply indignant at Zeus and filled
with resentment
Because he was helping the Trojans
conquer the Argives.
Both gods came of one stock and
lineage, though Zeus
Was the elder and richer in wisdom.
Hence Poseidon

Would openly not aid the Argives, but
furtively went
Through the host in the form of a man,
seeking thus to arouse them.
Then each god took an end of strong
strife's rope
In that all-leveling and evil war, and
between
Both armies they tugged on the taut,
unbreakable bond
Till the knees of many a warrior
loosened in death.

Now Idomeneus, although his hair was
graying,
Called to the Danaan troops, and
charging right into
The horde of Trojans he turned their

advance to retreat.

For he killed one of their proudest
allies, Othryoneus

Of Cabesus, a relative stranger in Troy,
Who had but recently followed the
rumor of war

And come. This man had asked in
marriage the loveliest

Daughter of Priam, Cassandra herself
But instead

Of rich gifts of wooing, he had promised
to do a great deed—

To drive the stubborn sons of Achaeans
away

From the land of Troy. And the ancient
Priam promised

To give him the girl, confirming his
word with a nod

Of his head. Then trusting in this,
Othryoneus fought
For the Trojans. But now Idomeneus
aimed his bright spear
At him and caught him full in the belly as
he
Came swaggering on, uselessly clad in a
breastplate
Of bronze. He thudded to earth, and thus
Idomeneus
Vauntingly mocked him:

“Othryoneus, my most hearty
Congratulations on your engagement to
marry
Dardanian Priam’s daughter—that is if
you really
Deliver all that you promised the man.

We too,
You know, would promise as much as he
did and keep
Our word exactly. We would, in fact, be
delighted
To give you the loveliest daughter of
King Agamemnon,
Bringing her here from Argos for you to
make her
Your wife—if only you'd join up with
us and sack
The populous city of Troy. But say,
come now
With us to the seagoing ships that we
may make terms
And arrange for the wedding. You'll
find us no churls when it comes
To the price for a bride.”

So taunting his victim, warlike
Idomeneus started to drag him off by the
foot
Through the terrible struggle, but Asius
came to help
His comrade Othryoneus. He came on
foot in front of
His chariot, which his driver kept so
close behind him
That always the horses' breath was hot
on his shoulders.
Asius came very eager to cut down
Idomeneus,
Who, however, was too quick for him
and hurled
His spear in at the throat just under the
chin and drove

The bronze clean through, so that Asius
fell as an oak
Or poplar or lofty pine falls when men
in the mountains
Cut them down with keen axes to furnish
timber
For ships. So now, in front of his horses
and car,
The groaning Asius lay stretched out,
clutching
At the bloody dust. And his driver,
stricken with panic,
Lost his wits completely, nor did he dare
To turn back the horses and so escape
the hands
Of the Argives. Then battle-staunch
Antilochus, son
Of magnanimous Nestor, aimed at him

with his spear

And hurled it hard through his middle,
missing the useless

Breastplate of bronze and fixing it full in
his belly.

Gasping he fell from the sturdy car, and
Antilochus

Drove the horses away from the Trojans
and into

The hands of well-greaved Achaeans.

Then Deïphobus,
Bitterly grieving for Asius dead, came
up

Very close to Idomeneus and hurled his
glittering spear.

But Idomeneus, looking straight at him,
avoided the hurtling

Bronze, for he hid himself behind his
round shield,
His buckler well wrought with bull's-
hide and flashing bronze
And fitted with two arm-rods. Behind it
he crouched
While the spear flew over, stridently
grazing the rim.
But not in vain did Deïphobus let the
lance fly
From his powerful hand, for he struck
Hippasus' son,
The people's shepherd Hypsenor, in the
liver
Under the midriff, and immediately
unstrung his knees.
And Deïphobus fiercely exulted, loudly
boasting:

“Not unavenged, I think, good Asius lies.

Now he'll be glad on his way to the house of Hades,

The strongest gate-guarder of all, for I have provided

A traveling companion for him!”

Such was his vaunt,
Which grieved the Argives and most of all aroused

The spirit of flame-hearted Antilochus.
And he, in spite of

His sorrow, did not neglect his dear friend, but ran

And stood over him, using his shield as a cover.

Then two loyal comrades, Echiüs' son

Mecisteus

And noble Alastor, lifted Hypsenor and
carried him,

Heavily groaning, back to the hollow
ships.

But Idomeneus mightily raged with no
pause at all,

Constantly eager to shroud some Trojan
in blackness

Of night, or to go down himself in
keeping off death

From the men of Achaea. The next man
he killed was strong

Aesyetes' god-nurtured son, heroic
Alcathous.

He was a son-in-law of Anchises,
married

To that lord's eldest daughter,
Hippodameia,
Whose father and lady mother at home in
their hall
Had doted on her their darling, for she
surpassed
All other girls her age in beauty, skill,
And good sense, and so the best man in
the wide realm of Troy
Had made her his wife—the man whom
lordly Poseidon
Now destroyed beneath the spear of
Idomeneus.
For the god bewitched his bright eyes
and so paralyzed
His powerful legs that Alcathous found
it impossible
Either to run to the rear or dodge to one

side.

But he was standing still as a pillar or
high

Leafy tree when the raging Idomeneus
thrust his spear

Deep into his chest, cleaving his coat of
bronze

That had till then kept death away from
his body,

But which now gave a dull clang as
through it the spear cut.

And Alcathous thudded to earth with the
spear fixed

In his heart, that beating yet caused the
butt-end to quiver

Till finally hulking Ares stilled its fury.

And Idomeneus fiercely exulted, loudly

boasting:

“I say, Deiphobus, you that saw fit to
brag so,
Shall we now call it quits—three dead
men
For one—or would you, mad sir, care to
come on
And face me alone, that you may
discover what manner
Of Zeus-sprung King has come here? For
our line is
From Zeus, who first begot Minos to be
the ruler
Of Crete, and Minos begot the flawless
Deucalion,
Who then begot me, the King of many
men

In broad Crete. And now my ships have
brought me here
As a curse to you and your father King
Priam, and to all
Of the other Trojans.”

Now Deïphobus could not decide
What to do, whether to go back and get
some comrade
Of his, some great-souled Trojan to help
him, or whether
To try it alone. But pondering gave him
the answer—
Namely, to go for Aeneas. Him he found
standing
In back of the battle, for Aeneas was
always angry
At royal Priam⁴ because he paid him no

honor

Among the people, great man though he
certainly was.

Now Deïphobus came up close and his
words came winged

With telling entreaty:

“Aeneas, counselor of Trojans,
Now there is great need of you to help in
the fight

For your brother-in-law Alcathous. If
you care

At all for your sister's husband, come
with me now

To rescue his corpse. He, after all, was
the one

Who brought you up at home from the
time you were little,

And he, I say, has fallen to spear-famed
Idomeneus!”

These words stirred the heart in the
breast of Aeneas, ,
Who hungry for battle went at once for
Idomeneus.

He, however, did not flee in his fear
Like some pampered boy, but stood his
ground like a boar
Hard-pressed in the mountains, one that
trusts in his strength
And awaits the clamoring throng that
comes against him
At bay in a lonely place. He bristles his
back
Up high and fire flames from his eyes as
he whets

His tushes and impatiently waits for his
chance at the dogs

And men. So now Idomeneus stood and
faced

Cry-answering Aeneas, but he did
bellow back to his comrades

For help, looking to Ascalaphus,
Aphareus, and Deïpyrus,

As well as Meriones and Antilochus,
masters of war-cry.

To these he spoke winged words, urging
them thus:

“Come here, my friends, and help one
standing alone,

For deeply I fear the swiftly-charging
Aeneas,

Now coming at me. Great is his power

to kill men

In battle, and his is the flower of youth,
when the might

Of a man is strongest. Were we of equal
age

And in our present mood, then the
outcome would be

More uncertain, and either of us might
win a great victory.”

He spoke, and they with one accord
closed in

And stood by Idomeneus, close together
and sloping

Their shields to their shoulders. And
Aeneas on his side called

To his comrades, looking for help to
Deïphobus, Paris,

And noble Agenor, who like him were
leaders
Of Trojans. And after them came the
troops, as sheep
Follow after the ram from pasture to
where they drink,
And their shepherd rejoices to see them.
Even so, the heart
Of Aeneas was glad when he saw the
host behind him.

Then over Alcathous' corpse they
clashed with long spears,
And the bronze on their breasts rang
grimly as through the crowd
They aimed at each other. And more than
all the rest
Two fiercely battling peers of the War-

god, Aeneas

And Idomeneus, lusted to cleave each
other's flesh

With the ruthless bronze. Aeneas made
the first cast,

But Idomeneus, looking straight at him,
avoided the spear,

The hurtling bronze of Aeneas that
vainly flew

From his powerful hand and quivering
stuck in the ground.

Then Idomeneus threw and pierced the
gut of Oenomaus,

Cutting a gash in his armor, through
which his entrails

Oozed. He fell in the dust and clawed
the ground.

And Idomeneus wrenched his long-

shadowing spear from the corpse,
But so belabored was he by missiles he
could not
Remain to strip from his victim's
shoulders the exquisite
Armor. For he was no longer fast in a
charge,
Neither able quickly to follow a cast of
his own
Nor nimbly avoid another's. And since
his speed
Was no longer such as to take him safely
from battle,
He mixed in hand-to-hand fighting and
kept off death
At close quarters. Now, as step by step
he withdrew,

Deiphobus hurled his bright spear at
him, for always,
Remembering his taunts, he hated
Idomeneus. Again,
However, he missed, but sent his huge
shaft through the shoulder
Of Ares' son Ascalaphus, bringing him
down
In the dust, where dying he clutched at
the ground. But as yet
Huge-hulking, bellowing Ares was not
aware
That his son had gone down in the
mighty struggle. For he sat
On the highest peak of Olympus beneath
golden clouds,
Where he along with the other immortal
gods

Was kept from the war by the will of
almighty Zeus.

Now over Ascalaphus fighting men
rushed together,

And Deïphobus tore the bright helmet off
the still head.

But Meriones, peer of swift Ares, sprang
at Deïphobus,

Stabbing the Trojan's upper arm with his
spear,

And the plumed bronze fell from his
hand and clanged on the
ground.

Then again Meriones sprang,
swooping in like a vulture,

Jerked the huge spear from the arm of
Deïphobus, and quickly

Shrank back mid a crowd of comrades.
And Polites took
His brother Deiphobus round the waist
with both arms
And got him out of the horrible conflict,
back
To where his fast horses stood waiting
for him with their driver
And ornate car. These bore him off to
the city,
Faint with pain and heavily groaning,
and the dark blood
Dripped from his new-wounded arm.

But the others fought on
With loud, unquenchable cries. Then
Aeneas, leaping
At Aphareus, son of Caletor, plunged his

sharp spear

Deep into his throat, and the man's head
fell to one side

As he crumpled up beneath his helmet
and shield,

And heartbreaking death engulfed him.

And Nestor's son

Antilochus, watching his chance sprang
out at Thoon

Just as he turned and slashed his back
with a spear,

Completely cutting the vein that runs up
the back

To the neck. This he severed, and Thoön
fell

On his back in the dust, stretching up
both of his hands

To his dear friends. But Antilochus

leaped upon him
And started to strip his shoulders of
armor, cautiously
Looking from side to side. For he was
soon
Surrounded by Trojans fiercely thrusting
their spears
At his all-glinting shield. They failed,
however, to pierce
The huge piece, nor did they so much as
scratch his flesh
With the ruthless bronze they wielded.
For Poseidon, shaker
Of shores, completely protected the son
of King Nestor,
Even though he was belabored with
many keen missiles.

Nor did Antilochus try to flee from the
foe,
But ranged among them constantly
wielding his spear
And eager to cast at some Trojan, or to
charge in close
And clash hand to hand. But as he drew
back to throw
Through the melee, Adamas, son of
Asius, seeing
Him so, charged in from nearby and
plunged his sharp bronze
At Antilochus' shield. Poseidon,
however, god
With the blue-black hair, destroyed the
force of the spear-point,
Begrudging that bronze the life of
Nestor's brave son.

Half of the shaft stuck there in the shield
like a fire-hardened
Stake, while the rest of it lay on the
ground. And Adamas,
Shunning destruction, shrank back mid a
crowd of comrades.
But Meriones came at him hotly and
hurled his spear in
Between his privates and navel, where
Ares is cruelest
To suffering mortals. Deeply he planted
it there,
And Adamas leaned toward the shaft,
writhing about it
Like a stubborn bull that herdsman rope
in the hills
And drag away resisting. So Adamas

twisted

And writhed for a while, but not very
long—just

Till the warring Meriones came and
wrenched the spear

From his gut. Then darkness enveloped
his eyes.

And Helenus,
Son of Priam, swinging a huge Thracian
sword,

Came down on Deïpyrus' temple,
splitting his helmet

And ripping it off to the ground, where it
rolled mid the feet

Of the fighters till some Achaean
retrieved it. And the pit-black

Darkness of death came down on

Deïpyrus, quickly
Eclipsing his eyes.

Then Atreus' son Menelaus
Was gripped with grief for his fellow
Achaean, so he,
The great battle-roarer, boldly stalked
out, threatening
Heroic Prince Helenus, Atrides drawing
his spear back
Even as Helenus bent the horns of his
bow.
Thus both at one instant let fly, the one
with an arrow
Swift from the bowstring, the other with
keen-pointed spear.
And the son of Priam landed his shaft on
the breast

Of King Menelaus, but the painful point
glanced off

The bronze of his breastplate. As the
black-skinned beans or chickpeas

Along a large threshing floor leap from
the flat

Wide winnowing-fan, tossed up by a
rapidly shoveling

Winnower before a gusty shrill wind, so
now

The keen arrow glanced from the bronze
of famed Menelaus

And sped on its way But he, the great
battle-roarer,

Threw and struck Prince Helenus full on
the hand

Wherein he was holding his polished
weapon, and the bronze point

Tore through his flesh and into the bow.
Then Helenus,
Shunning destruction, shrank back mid a
crowd of comrades,
Dangling his hand and dragging the
ashen shaft.
And great-souled Agenor drew the spear
from his hand
And wrapped the wound with a strip of
twisted sheep's wool,
Making a sling of the fine-woven stuff,
which the squire
Of the people's shepherd Agenor carried
for him.

Now Peisander charged straight at
illustrious King Menelaus,
But an evil fate was leading him on to

his death—

His death at your hands, Menelaus, there
in the awesome

Heat of battle. But as they came close to
each other,

Atreus' son Menelaus missed, his spear
Turning off to one side. Peisander,
however, struck

With his bronze on the other's wide
shield, which stopped the point

From piercing clean through, and the
shaft broke off at the socket.

Even so, Peisander rejoiced and still
had high hopes

Of winning. But Atreus' son whipped
out his sword

With the studs of silver and sprang at
Peisander, who brought

From behind his shield a splendid
bronze battle-ax

Set on a lengthy handle of well-polished
olive.

At once they came at each other. And
Peisander hacked

Menelaus on the horn of his helmet, a
little below

The horsehair plume, but Atrides caught
his opponent

Squarely between the eyes, crunching the
bones in

Loudly and dropping both bloody eyes in
the dust

At his feet. Doubling up, Peisander fell,
and Menelaus

Planted a foot on his chest and stripped

him of armor,
Exultantly saying:

“Surely in just this condition
Will all you insufferable Trojans leave
the ships
Of the swiftly-drawn Danaans, you that
are always so hungry
For the horrible screams of battle. Nor
have you any
Shortage at all of other most shameful
disgraces—
Such, for instance, as that you heaped on
me,
You men like so many filthy bitches! you
That had no fear in your hearts of the
harsh wrath of Zeus,
Hospitality’s high-thundering god, who

some day will sack

Completely your steep citadel. For you
abducted

My wife, who had I am sure welcomed
you warmly,

And taking much treasure to boot you
wantonly sailed

Away. And now you would like nothing
better than throwing

Your terrible fire on the seagoing ships
of heroic

Achaean, whom surely you'd like to
destroy one and all.

But you will be stopped, believe me, no
matter how spoiling

For blood you may be—O Father Zeus,
they say

You vastly surpass all men and gods in

wisdom,
Yet from you all of these horrors come!
Even now you are favoring proud and
evil men,
Trojans who always presume and whose
spirit is blindly
Wanton and wicked, nor do they ever get
half
Enough of evil, all-leveling war. Men
get
Their fill of all things, of sleep and love,
sweet song
And flawless dancing, and most men like
these things
Much better than war. Only Trojans are
always
Thirsty for blood!”

So saying, Menelaus the blameless
Stripped the corpse of its bloody armor
and gave it
To comrades of his, and he himself went
back
And mixed with the front-line
champions. At once Harpalion,
King Pylaemenes' son, charged down
upon him,
He who followed his dear sire to Troy
to fight
In the war but never returned to the land
of his fathers.
Closing in quickly, he plunged his spear
at the center
Of King Menelaus's shield, but did not
succeed

In driving the bronze clean through. Back
he shrank

Mid a crowd of comrades, shunning
destruction and nervously

Glancing about him, lest someone should
get to his flesh

With the bronze. But as Harpalion
headed for cover,

Meriones shot at him a bronze-pointed
arrow

And struck him on the right buttock. The
point passed under

The bone and into his bladder, and
Harpalion sank

In the arms of his friends, where soon he
breathed forth his life

And lay stretched out in the dust like a
worm, while his blood

Ran darkly forth, soaking the ground.
The brave
Paphlagonians did all they could. Then
putting him
In a chariot, some of them took him to
sacred Ilium,
Grieving, and among them went his
weeping father.
Nor for his dead son was any blood-
price ever paid.[am](#)

But the death of this man infuriated
Prince Paris,
For Harpalion had once been his host
among the numerous
Paphlagonians. Hence, in anger for him,
He shot a bronze-headed shaft. Now
there from his home

In Corinth was a son of the seer
Polyidus, a certain
Euchenor, both wealthy and good. This
man had boarded
His ship with very full knowledge of his
deadly fate,
For often his noble old sire Polyidus had
told him
That he must either die of a horrible
illness
At home, or among the ships of Achaea
be killed
By the Trojans.[†] Therefore, he went to
the war, avoiding
The onerous fine he would else have had
to pay
And also escaping the pain of hateful

disease.

Now Paris struck him just under the
jawbone and ear,

And at once the spirit took leave of his
limbs, and he

Was seized by abhorrent darkness.

So here the fight raged
Like blazing fire. But Zeus-loved Hector
had not

Been informed and had no idea that there
on the left

Of the ships the Argives were rapidly
killing his men.

The Argives, in fact, very nearly won a
great victory,

So huge was the might of Poseidon,
embracer and shaker

Of earth, who kept inspiring the Argives
and adding
His strength to theirs. Hector, then, still
fought
At the point where first he had crashed
in the gate and sprung
Within the wide wall, smashing the
close-drawn ranks
Of shield-bearing Danaans, there where
the ships of Ajax
And Protesilaus were hauled up high on
the beach
Of the briny gray sea. At this point the
wall was lower
Than anywhere else, and here the melee
of men
And Danaan horses was most chaotic of
all.

And the warriors here, the Boeotians
and long-robed Ionians,
The Locrians, Phthians, and splendid
Epeans, had all
They could do to stem noble Hector's
attack on the ships,
Nor were they able to thrust him back
from themselves,
As onward the great Prince came like
flaming fire.
Here too were picked Athenians led by
their chieftain
Peteos' son Menestheus, followed by
Pheidas,
Stichius, and able Bias. The Epeans
were headed
By Phyleus' son Meges, Amphion, and

Dracius, while the
Phthians
Fought behind Medon and unretreating
Podarces.

This Medon was King Oïleus' bastard
and thereby

A brother of Ajax, but since he had
killed a kinsman

Of his stepmother Eriopis, wife of
Oïleus,

He lived far from home in Phylace. And
Podarces, the other

Brave leader, was Iphiclus' son and the
grandson of Phylacus.

These two in full armor fought in front of
the spirited

Phthians, who with the Boeotians fought
in defense

Of the ships. But the lawful son of
Oileus, Ajax

The swift, would not for an instant leave
the side

Of Ajax, son of Telamon. Quite like a
pair

Of wine-red oxen that strain with equal
heart

To draw the strong plow through fallow
earth, as the sweat

Streams up from about the base of their
horns and they

Toil on down the furrow, held no further
apart

Than the polished yoke holds them, till
they have cut through to
the edge

Of the field, so now the two Ajaxes
stood and fought
By each other's side. Behind
Telamonian Ajax
Came many a brave band of comrades,
who always took
His shield whenever his sweat-drenched
limbs grew weary.
But after the great-hearted son of Oileus
came none
Of his Locrian troops, for none of them
relished close combat,
Since they had no bronze-plated helmets,
plumed thickly with
horsehair,
Nor any round shields or ashen spears,
but trusting
In bows and slings of well-twisted

sheep's wool, they followed
Oileus' son to Ilium. Rapidly shooting
With these, they broke the Trojan
battalions. So those
Up front, clad in their richly wrought
armor, fought
With the Trojans and brazen-helmeted
Hector, while these,
The Locrian bowmen, shot from behind
unnoticed,
But with their arrows they took all fight
from the Trojans
And threw them into confusion.

The Trojans then
Would miserably have retreated, leaving
the ships
And making for windy Troy, had

Polydamas not

Again come up to brave Hector, and
said: "Hector,

Surely you find it hard to accept the
advice

Of another. Because God gave you pre-
eminent prowess

In war, you want to believe that you're
also supreme

In wisdom and counsel, but you cannot
possibly take

All things on yourself. For to one man
God gives prowess

In war, to another in dancing, or playing
the lyre

And singing. And in another man far-
seeing Zeus

Puts an excellent mind, much to the

profit of many,
Whom his quick thinking frequently
saves from ruin,
As surely he knows better than anyone
else.

Hence I will speak and say what seems
to me best.

Around you burns a ring of blazing war,
But the spirited Trojans who got past the
wall are some

Of them standing apart though fully
armed, while others

Are scattered among the ships where
always outnumbered

They're fighting. But come, fall back and
call in all

Our best men. Then we can think of all

possible plans

And together decide what to do, whether
to fall

On the many-oared ships, if God should
will that we win,

Or else to withdraw from the ships
without further harm

To ourselves. Frankly I fear the
Achaeans may yet

Pay us back for what we did to them
yesterday, for they

Have one at the ships who never gets
battle enough,

And who, I think, will not much longer
keep

So completely out of the fighting.”

Polydamas spoke,

And Hector, pleased with such counsel,
leaped down and replied
In these winged words: “Polydamas,
keep here with you
All our best men, while I go yonder and
face
The fighting. I’ll come back as soon as
I’ve given my orders.”⁵

So saying, he left, his bronze as
glittering bright
As a snowy mountain, and shouting
instructions he ran
Through the army of Trojans and Trojan
allies. And they
All made for the genial Polydamas,
Panthous’ son,
When they heard the orders of Hector.

But he sped on
Through the foremost champions,
seeking Deïphobus and mighty
Prince Helenus, and Adamas, son of
Asius, and Asius,
Son of Hyrtacus, hoping that he might
find them.
But he found none of them both alive and
unwounded,
For two were stretched out by the sterns
of Achaean ships,
Felled by Argive hands, and the others
were back
In the city, wounded by spears at close
range and long.
One, though, he soon discovered there
on the left
Of the tearful struggle, Prince Paris, the

lord of lovely
Blonde Helen, cheering his comrades
and urging them on
In the fight. Coming up to him, Hector
spoke these harsh words:
“Foul Paris! most handsome, girl-crazy
seducer, where,
If you will, are Deïphobus and mighty
Prince Helenus, and
Adamas,

Son of Asius, and Asius, son of
Hyrtacus?
And where, I say, is Othryoneus? Now
steep Troy
Is utterly lost, and now total ruin is
utterly
Certain for you! ”

Then the handsome Paris replied:
“Hector, now you are blaming an
innocent man.
At some other time I may have left a
battle,
But not today. My mother bore even me
Not wholly a coward. For ever since
you sent
Your men into battle against the ships,
we
Have held our ground here and
ceaselessly dallied our bit
With the Danaan forces. Our friends, of
whom you inquire,
Are dead, except Deïphobus and mighty
Prince Helenus,
And both of them have withdrawn with

arm-wounds received

From long spears. Cronos' son Zeus kept
death from those two.

But on! Lead us wherever your heart and
soul

Say go, and we will eagerly come on
behind you,

Nor shall we, I think, be any way lacking
in valor

So long as our strength holds out. Once
that is gone,

No man can fight, no matter how eager
he is."

So saying, Prince Paris persuaded the
mind of his brother,

And they made straight for the place
where the din of battle

Was greatest, about Cebriones and
peerless Polydamas,
And Phalces, Orthaeus, godlike
Polyphetes, and Palmys,
And Hippotion's sons Ascanius and
Morys, who had come
The morning before from fertile
Ascania, sent
As relief for their fellows, and now Zeus
impelled them to fight.
And on they came with the force of
perilous winds
That rush down hard on the sea before
the thunder
Of Father Zeus and stir up the brine with
incredible
Roaring, raising up numerous foaming
waves

In the swell of the surging and loud-
crashing sea, high-curved
And white, billow on billow one after
the other.

So the Trojans, massed in formation,
rank

Upon rank and blazing with bronze,
followed their chieftains.

Priam's son Hector led all the rest, he
The equal of man-ruining Ares. Before
him he held

His round shield, thick with hides and
heavy bronze plate

Hammered on it, and about his temples
his bronze helmet swayed.

Striding out here and there, he tried the
Achaeans' battalions,

Seeing if anywhere one of them would
give way
Before his shield-covered charge. But he
was unable
To quell the Achaean spirit, and Ajax,
coming
Ahead with long strides, was first to
challenge him, saying:

“Madman! come closer. Why are you
trying so vainly
To frighten the Argives? Believe me, we
are not at all
Unskillful in battle, and only by Zeus’s
rough scourge
Have we been so whipped. You, I
suppose, would still like
To plunder our ships, but know that we

too have hands

That are quick to defend what is ours. In
fact, we have

A much better chance to take and
plunder your populous

City And as for yourself, I say the day
nears

When you in full flight shall pray to
Father Zeus

And the other immortals to make your
mane-tossing horses

Faster than falcons, as on toward the city
they bear you

Beating up dust from the plain.”

As he spoke, a bird

Flew by on the right, a high-flying eagle,
whereat

The Achaeans cried out, made brave by
the ominous bird-sign.

But shining Hector replied: “Ajax, you
word-bungling,

Bellowing fool! what now have you
said! I only

Wish that I all my life were as surely the
son

Of aegis-great Zeus and queenly Hera
and so

Were honored as Athena and Apollo are,
as surely

Today holds evil for everyone of the
Argives!

And with them you too will be killed, if
you have the courage

To stand and await my long spear, which
soon shall bite deep

Through your lily-white skin. And you
with your fat and your flesh
Shall glut the dogs and carrion birds of
Troy
When you have gone down among the
ships of Achaea!”[an](#)

He spoke, and led the charge, and after
him came
His men with an unbelievable roar,
which the host
Behind them took up. And the Argives
opposite them
Replied with their screams of battle, nor
did they forget
Their courage and war-skill, but stood
and awaited the charge
Of the bravest Trojans. And the two

armies' cries went up
Through the air to the ray-bright,
splendid aether of Zeus.[ao](#)

BOOK XIV

The Tricking of Zeus

The cries of battle were not unheard
by Nestor,
Though at his wine,¹ and his words to
Asclepius' son
Came winged with concern: "Think, my
noble Machaon,
What we had best do. By the ships the
cries of lusty
Young fighters grow constantly louder.
But you, now, sit
Where you are and drink the bright wine,
until Hecamede,

She of the beautiful braids, heats a warm
bath

For you and washes the clotted blood
from your wound.

I will go out at once to where I can see
How the fighting progresses.”

So saying, he took the thick shield
Of his horse-breaking son Thrasymedes.
All gleaming with bronze,
It lay in the lodge, for the son had taken
the shield
Of his father. And now, picking up a
strong spear, sharp-pointed
With bronze, the old one stepped out of
the lodge and immediately
Saw a disgraceful sight, the great wall
breached

And the Argives in chaotic flight before
the high-hearted
Trojans. And as the huge sea stirs
darkly, heaving
With silent swell foretelling the onset of
swift
Shrill winds, while the waves roll on in
no certain direction
Till some steady gale from Zeus comes
down and determines
Their course, even so the old King
pondered, his mind
Divided two ways, whether he should
charge into the mass
Of swiftly-drawn Danaans, or go for
Atreus' son
Agamemnon, high King of the host. And
as he pondered,

One way seemed better, to go for the son
of Atreus.

Meanwhile, the others were fighting and
killing each other,

And loudly the stubborn bronze rang
about their bodies

As they smote each other with swords
and two-pointed spears.

But Nestor now was met by the god-
fostered kings

As they made their way up through the
ships, those whom the bronze

Had wounded—Tydeus' son Diomedes,
Odysseus,

And Atreus' son Agamemnon. Far from
the fighting

Their ships were drawn up on the beach

in the very first row
Beside the gray sea, and the wall had
been built beyond those
Drawn furthest up on the plain. For the
beach, though wide,
Could not begin to hold all the vessels,
and the warriors,
Cramped for space, had drawn the ships
up in rows
That covered the whole wide shore
between the two headlands.
The kings, therefore, together and using
their spears
For support, were headed inland to get a
good view
Of the screaming struggle, and their
mood was one of depression.
But when they saw old Nestor, their

spirits sank lower
Still, and lord Agamemnon spoke to him
thus:

“O Neleus’ son Nestor, great glory of
all the Achaeans,
Why have you left the man-wasting war
and come here?
I fear huge Hector may yet live up to his
word,
The threats he laid upon us when once he
spoke
Among the Trojans, saying that he would
never
Return from the ships to Ilium till he had
sent them
All up in flames and slaughtered us as
well.

Such were his words, and now they are coming true.

O shame! for surely the other well-greaved Achaeans

Have filled their hearts with resentment against me, just

As Achilles did, and now they are all refusing

To fight by the drawn-up ships.”

And Gerenian Nestor:

“Yes truly, these things have now come to pass, and now

Disaster is on us, nor could great Zeus himself,

He who thunders on high, make anything else

Occur. For the wide wall is down, the

unbreachable bulwark

We trusted as sure protection for both
the ships

And ourselves, and now amid the swift
ships the battle

Goes ceaselessly on, nor can you tell, no
matter

How hard you look, from which side the
Achaeans are being

Driven in rout, so completely confused
is the slaughter

As up to the sky the battle-roar rises. But
come,

Let us consider what we had best do—if
thinking

Can help at all now. But this much is
certain, that none

Of you here should enter the battle, since

no wounded man
Is any good in a fight.”

Then again Agamemnon,
King of men, replied: “Nestor, since
they
Are fighting now beside the sterns of the
ships,
And the well-made wall and trench have
failed, on which
The Danaans labored so hard in the hope
they would be
An impassable bulwark protecting the
ships and ourselves,
I’m forced to believe that it must be the
pleasure of Zeus,
The high and the mighty, that we
Achaeans should die here

Far from Argos, forever unsung and
unknown.

This I felt when he was helping the
Danaans

Heartily, and now I know it is so, for he
Is glorifying our foes like blissful gods
And binding the strength of our mighty
hands completely.

But come, let everyone do as I order.
Take

All the ships drawn up in the first row
hard by the sea

And drag them well out on the sparkling
brine and moor them

With anchor-stones until divine night
shall arrive—

If indeed the Trojans will cease their
attack for her sake—

And then we may drag down all the rest
of the ships.

For surely one cannot be blamed for
shunning sheer ruin,
Though it be by night. Far better to flee
and escape
Than stay and be taken.”²

Then, with a scowl of disgust,
Resourceful Odysseus replied: “O son
of Atreus,
What words are these that pass the guard
of your teeth!
Accursed and ruinous man that you are,
would you
Were heading some army of miserable
cowards and not
The commander of us, to whom great

Zeus has given
The task, from youth to old age, to fight
and wind up
Each horrible war till each of us withers
away
Can it be that you're really so eager to
leave untaken
The wide streets of Troy, for which we
have suffered so much?
Be silent, then, lest another Achaean
should hear
These words that no man possessed by
his senses should ever
Give voice to, much less a sceptered
King, the ruler
Of many, these Argive hosts who look to
you
For their orders. But obviously you have

no sense at all

To have given this order in the midst of
a screaming battle,

To have us drag down to the sea our
well-decked ships,

And so give the Trojans, who even now
are the victors,

An even more wonderful chance of
wiping us out

Completely! For once the ships are
drawn down to the sea,

The Achaeans will surely no longer hold
out in the battle,

But constantly looking behind them,
they'll soon have no heart

For fighting. Then, O leader of hosts,
your plan

Will destroy us all!”

And again the commander-in-chief
Agamemnon replied: “Odysseus, truly
your words
Of harsh reproach hurt me deeply, but I
am not bidding
The sons of Achaeans to drag their ships
down to the sea
Against their will. So now I would like
to hear—
From young or old—some better counsel
than mine.
Right now such counsel would be more
than welcome to me.”

Among them then spoke battle-roaring
Diomedes,
Saying: “That man is nearby, nor will

you have to
Look for him long, provided you all are
willing
To listen and not be resentful and angry
toward me
Because I'm the youngest man here. I too
declare
That I am the son of a noble, valiant
father,
Tydeus, whom now in Thebes the
heaped earth covers.
For Portheus sired three marvelous sons
—Agrius,
Melas, and thirdly my own father's
father, Oeneus
The horseman, who lived, as did the
others, in Pleuron
And steep Calydon and outdid them all

in prowess.

He stayed on there, but my father his son
went wandering

And settled in Argos, for such, I believe,
was the will

Of Zeus and the other immortals. And
there he married

A daughter of King Adrastus and lived
as a wealthy

Man, in a splendid house with more than
enough

Rich wheat fields, many fine orchards of
fruit trees, and plenty

Of sheep and cattle. And with his spear
my father

Excelled all other Achaeans. But surely
you must have

Heard all these things, and so you know
I speak truly.

Hence you cannot despise any worth-
while counsel

Of mine on grounds that I am the son of a
coward

And weakling. So come, let us go as we
must to the battle,

Wounded men though we are. There we
can hold

Ourselves back from the fiery fighting
and out of range

Of the missiles, and that way receive no
second wound,

But there we can urge on the others and
send into battle

Those who indulge their spiteful spirits
and stand

Apart from the melee.”

He spoke, and they listened closely,
Then obeyed him, setting out with the
king

Of men Agamemnon leading the way.

Now Poseidon,
The famous shaker of shores, had not
missed any

Of this, and taking the form of an aged
man

He went along with the chiefs, gripped
the right hand

Of Atreus’ son Agamemnon, and spoke
winged words:

“Atrides, surely now the ruthless heart
Of Achilles rejoices within him as he
looks out

On the slaughter and rout of Achaeans,
utterly stupid
Fool that he is. But may God yet cast him
down,
And may he die in his folly! With you,
though, O King,
The happy gods are not altogether angry
Even yet you shall see the wide plain
dim with dust
As the captains and counselors of the
Trojans beat
A retreat to the city from these your
shelters and ships.”

So saying, Poseidon, speeding off over
the plain,
Gave out a great shout as loud as the
cries of nine

Or ten thousand men embroiled in the
War-god's chaos
Of battle. Even such was the shout that
the lordly Earthshaker
Gave out from his breast, inspiring the
heart of every
Achaean with truly great power to fight
and wage war
Without ceasing.

Now Hera, she of the golden throne,
From high on a peak of Olympus saw
how Poseidon
Busied himself in the man-enhancing
battle,
And joyfully knew him at once for her
and her husband's
Own brother. But also she saw Zeus,

where he sat

On the highest peak of well-watered Ida,
and hatred

Welled up in her heart. And then she
considered, the heifer-eyed

Queenly Hera, how she might best trick
the wits

Of aegis-great Zeus.³ And this is the plan
she preferred—

To make herself sweetly seductive and
go to Mount Ida,

Tempting him thus to lie with her and
make love,

That she might steep his lids and cunning
mind

In soothing and subtle sleep. So off she
went

To the bedroom her dear son Hephaestus
had fashioned for her,
Hanging thick doors from the door-posts
and fitting them well
With a secret lock that no other god
could open.
Having entered and closed the bright
doors, she began by taking
Ambrosia and cleansing her exquisite
body, then rubbed herself
Richly with oil, ambrosial, soft, and
fragrant,
Which when it is used in Zeus's brazen-
floored palace
Sweetens both heaven and earth with its
fragrance. With this
She rubbed her desirable body, then
combed her hair

And plaited bright beautiful braids,
ambrosial, which she
Let fall from her fair immortal head.

Next

She put on a gown perfumed with
ambrosia, one made

And richly embroidered for her by
Athena herself.

This she pinned about her breasts with
beautiful

Brooches of gold, and fastened around
her waist

A belt, from which a hundred tassels
fluttered,

And in her pierced lobes she put a fine
pair of earrings,

Glowing and graceful three-drop

clusters. And high
On her head she fixed a veil, as
shimmering white
As sunlight, and on her shining feet
bound beautiful
Sandals. Now when she had thus
prepared her body
With all this enchantment, she left the
bedroom and called
Aphrodite, getting her well apart from
the other
Immortals, and saying:

“Will you now listen to me,
Dear child, and do me a favor? Or will
you refuse
What I ask because, while you help the
Trojans, I help

The Danaans, for which your heart is
resentful, I know?”

To which Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus:
“Hera,
Honored goddess and daughter of mighty
Cronos,
Say what you have in mind, and if it can
Be done and done by me then my heart
says do it.”

And slyly Queen Hera replied: “Give
to me now, then,
Love and desire,⁴ the powers with
which you subdue
All immortal gods as well as all death-
destined men.
For I am on my way to the very ends
Of the all-feeding earth to visit Oceanus,

source

Of all the immortals, and Tethys our
mother, both of whom

Nurtured and cherished me at home in
their halls,

Having taken me from Rhea^{ap} when all-
seeing Zeus

Thrust Cronos down beneath earth and
the unresting sea.

I am going to visit them both and put an
end

To their incessant quarreling, for truly
now

It has been a long time since they went to
bed and made love,

Since each avoids the other and both
hearts seethe

With bitter resentment. If I with words
could change
The way those two feel and get them to
go back to bed
And make love with each other, they
would surely adore me
And honor me highly forever.”

Again Aphrodite,
Adorer of smiles, replied: “I cannot, of
course,
Refuse you, nor would it be right for me
to, since you
Sleep close in the arms of Zeus, our
greatest and best.”

So saying, she loosed from about her
breasts an artfully
Handworked sash whereon were

depicted all sorts
Of erotic allurements—love and desire
and words
So seductively sweet they would turn the
head of anyone,
Even the wise. Laying this in her hands,
she said:

“Take now this sash and tuck it deep in
your bosom.
Richly embroidered upon it is all lovers
need,
And with it, believe me, you won’t come
back unsuccessful,
No matter what your heart may desire.”

So spoke
Aphrodite, and heifer-eyed queenly Hera
smiled,

And smiling she tucked the sash in the
fold of her bosom.

Then Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus,
went home,
But Hera went darting down from high
on a peak
Of Olympus, touched at Pieria and
lovely Emathia,
Then sped across the topmost snowy
peaks
Of the horse-handling Thracians, nor
once grazed the ground with
her feet.

At Athos she left the land and swiftly
skimmed
The billowing sea till she came to
Lemnos, the city

Of godlike King Thoas. There she found
Sleep, brother
Of Death, clung fast to his hand, and
spoke to him thus:

“O Sleep, lord of all gods as well as
all men,
If ever you paid any heed to my words,
please do
What I ask of you now, and I will
always be
Extremely grateful to you. Lull to sleep
the shining,
Brow-shaded eyes of Zeus, as soon as
I’ve lain
With him and made love, and I will give
you fine gifts,
Including a gorgeous throne of immortal

gold,
Which my son Hephaestus, the lame
ambidextrous god,
Shall skillfully fashion for you, with a
foot-rest below
On which you may rest your shining feet
when you dine.”

And soothing Sleep replied: “Hera,
great goddess,
Daughter of powerful Cronos, any other
of the gods
Everlasting I might put to sleep with no
compunctions
At all, even the stream of the river
Oceanus,
Whom the gods are all from, but Cronos’
son Zeus

I will not come near, nor will I lull him
to sleep

Unless he himself says do so. For I have
already

Learned my lesson from a task you once
gave me when Heracles,

Zeus's high-hearted son, set sail from
Ilium

After he'd sacked and leveled the
Trojans' city.

Then I beguiled the wits of Zeus of the
aegis

And drifted my sweetness around him,
since you were determined

To do his son harm, having stirred up
blasts of dangerous

Winds that swept huge Heracles off
across

The open sea to the populous island of
Cos,
Far away from his friends. And Zeus
awoke in a rage
And hurled the gods all about his great
house, looking
For me above all, and he would have
flung me clean
Out of sight, from heaven into the deep
sea, if Night
Had not saved me, she who masters both
gods and men.
To her I came asking help, and Zeus, in
spite of
His fury, stopped his pursuit, for he had
awe
Of doing whatever swift Night disliked.

And now
You want me to do this other impossible
thing.”⁵

To which the heifer-eyed queenly
Hera: “Sleep,
Why let your mind dwell on such
miserable things? Do you
Imagine that all-seeing Zeus will ever
support
The Trojans with anything like the fury
he felt
On account of Heracles, his own son?
But come now,
Do as I ask, and I’ll give to you in
marriage
One of the fresh young Graces, Pasithea,
her

Whom you've always yearned for.”

She spoke, and Sleep, now happy,
Answered her thus: “Come, then, and
swear to me
By the fateful water of Styx, taking hold
with one hand
Of the bountiful earth and of the bright
sea with the other,
That all of the gods below with Cronos
may witness
This promise of yours^{aq} to give me one
of the fresh
Young Graces, Pasithea, her whom I've
always longed for.”

Such were his words, and the white-
armed goddess Hera
Did not disregard him, but swore the

oath he demanded,
Invoking by name each one of the gods
called Titans
That lurk in the depths below Tartarus.
Then, having ended
Her oath, she and Sleep, enclosed in
thick mist, sped over
The cities of Lemnos and Imbros and
swiftly flew
On their way. At Lectum they first left
the sea, then came
To well-watered Mount Ida, mother of
wilderness creatures,
As they flew on above the dry land with
the tree-tops
Trembling beneath them. And now,
before Zeus saw him,
Sleep flew up into a tall pine tree, the

tallest

That grew on Mount Ida, shooting up
through the mist

Into the clear aether above. There he
perched,

Well hidden amid thick branches of
pine, in the form

Of a mountain songbird, one that the
gods call chalcis,

But men cymindis.

Hera, though, swiftly approached
The heights of Gargarus, peak of lofty
Ida,

And cloud-gathering Zeus laid eyes upon
her. He no sooner

Did so than love encompassed his keen-
plotting heart,

As on that day when first they went to
bed

And made love together, without their
dear parents' knowledge.[ar](#)

So now he stood up before her and
spoke to her, saying:

“Hera, what is it you so much desire,
that thus

You have come down here from
Olympus? And where are the horses
And car you usually drive?”

And cunningly Hera
Replied: “I am on my way to the very
ends
Of the all-feeding earth to visit Oceanus,
source
Of all the immortals, and Tethys our

mother, both of whom

Nurtured and cherished me at home in
their halls.

I am going to visit them both and put an
end

To their incessant quarreling, for truly
now

It has been a long time since they went to
bed and made love,

Since each avoids the other and both
hearts seethe

With bitter resentment. And my horses
stand at the foot

Of well-watered Ida, horses to draw me
over

Both solid land and the sea. But now I
have come

Down here from Olympus, since you

might get angry with me
If I without a word should leave for the
house
Of deep-flowing Oceanus.”

And Zeus, collector of clouds,
Replied: “Hera, later on you may go
there—but come,
Let the two of us now lie down right
here and enjoy
Ourselves making love. For never
before did desire
For either goddess or woman so
overwhelm
The heart in my breast—not even when I
loved the wife
Of Ixion, who bore me Peirithous, peer
of the gods

In counsel, nor when I loved the trim-
ankled Danaë ,
Acrisius' daughter, who gave birth to
Perseus, the most
Distinguished of men, nor when I loved
the daughter
Of far-famed Phoenix, who bore me
Minos and godlike
Rhadamanthus, nor when I loved
Semele, or Alcmene in Thebes,
Alcmene who bore me a son, strong-
hearted Heracles,
While Semele bore Dionysus, delighter
of mortals,
Nor when I loved Queen Demeter, with
the beautiful braids,
Or glorious Leto, or hitherto yourself—
As now I love you and feel more

strongly than ever
The grip of delicious desire.”

Then, still trying
To trick him, Queen Hera spoke thus:
“Most dreadful son
Of Cronos, what are you saying! What
would happen
If now we did as you wish and lay down
up here
Making love on the heights of Mount Ida,
where all is wide open
To view, and one of the gods everlasting
should see us
Asleep and go tell the tale to all of the
other
Immortals? Then, believe me, I could not
get up

And go back to your house, I'd be so
ashamed and embarrassed.

But if you really would like to, if that's
what your heart

Now desires, why you have a bedroom,
you know, one fashioned

For you by your own dear son
Hephaestus, who hung

Thick doors from the door-posts. Let us
go there and lie down,

Since bed is what you desire."

Then Zeus of the gathering
Clouds spoke thus: "Hera, have no fear
That anyone, god or man, shall see what
we do,

For I shall conceal us well with a thick
golden cloud.

Through it not even the Sun could see us,
though his
By far is the brightest light of all.”

So saying,
Cronos’ son Zeus caught his wife in his
arms, and under them
Sacred earth made tender new grass
grow up,
And dewy clover, crocus, and hyacinth,
thick
And softly luxuriant, holding them up off
the ground.
There they lay down, completely
concealed by a fair
Golden cloud, from which fell drops of
glistening dew.

Then peacefully slumbered the Father

on Gargarus peak,
By love and sleep overcome, still
holding his wife
In his arms. But sweet Sleep flew off to
the ships of the Argives
To tell the embracer and shaker of earth.
Coming up
To him close, he spoke winged words:
“With all of your heart,
Poseidon, add your strength to the
Danaans’ and give them
Glory, if only briefly, while Zeus yet
sleeps,
For Hera has subtly seduced him to lie
with her
And make love, and I have drifted soft
slumber about him.”

He spoke, and took off for the famous
nations of men,
But he stirred Poseidon to give still
more help to the Danaans.

Quickly he sprang mid the foremost and
loudly shouted:

“Argives, can it be that you’re really
willing to yield

The victory again to Priam’s son Hector,
to have him

Capture the fleet and cover himself with
glory?

He himself boasts that thus it shall be,
since Achilles

Remains mid the hollow ships with a
heart full of bitter

Resentment. But Achilles we won’t miss

too much, if only
We do our best to support one another.
So come,
Let everyone do as I say. Let us put on
the largest
And best shields we have in the host and
cover our heads
With all-gleaming helmets and take in
our hands the longest
Spears—and charge! I myself will go in
the lead,
Nor will Priam's son Hector be able to
hold his ground long,
Believe me, no matter how great his
fury. Whoever
Considers himself a battle-staunch
fighter, but has
A small shield on his shoulder, let him

give it to someone weaker
And arm himself with one of the larger
shields.”

He spoke, and all of them gladly
agreed. And the kings,
Though wounded, marshaled the men,
even Tydeus’ son
Diomedes, Odysseus, and Atreus’ son
Agamemnon.

These went through the army and made
the men exchange war-gear,
And the good men donned the good
armor, while the worse fighters
put on
The worse. Having covered their bodies
in blazing-bright bronze,
They charged ahead with mighty shore-

shaking Poseidon

In the lead, and in his strong hand he
held

An awesome long sword—a blade like a
flash of lightning—

Which no man may so much as touch in
horrible war,

A dreadful weapon which all men shrink
from in terror.

And opposite them resplendent Hector
marshaled

The forces of Troy. And truly the tension
of terrible

Hatred was drawn to the point of
breaking, by Poseidon,

God of the blue-black hair, and glorious
Hector,

Who lent his strength to the Trojans,

while the great god aided
The Argives. As the two armies clashed
with a mighty hubbub
Of war-cries, the surf surged up to the
shelters and ships
Of the Argives. But neither the crashing
thunder of billows
That break on the beach, driven in from
the deep by hard-blowing
Blasts of North Wind, nor the roar of
raging fire
When it leaps to wither the forest in the
deep ravines
Of a mountain, nor the shriek of the wind
in the high-foliaged oaks
When it howls in its fury the loudest, is
so very loud

As the chilling screams of battle that
came from Achaeans
And Trojans alike as now they charged
at each other.

Resplendent Hector led off by hurling
a spear

At Ajax, Telamon's son, who then was
turned

Full toward him, nor did he miss his
man, but struck him

Where the two baldrics—one of his
shield and one

Of his silver-nailed sword—were
stretched across his chest, ,

And they protected his tender flesh. And
Hector

Was angry because the swift shaft had

flown in vain

From his hand, and back he shrank in a
crowd of his comrades,

Seeking to save his life. But as he
withdrew,

Great Ajax, Telamon's son, struck him
hard

With a stone, one of the many used to
prop

The swift ships, but rolling now among
the feet

Of the fighters. Lifting it high in the air,
he struck

Hector hard on the chest, above the
shield-rim and close by

The neck, and the blow spun Hector
around like a top

And caused him to stagger in circles.

And as when a huge oak
Falls, uprooted by lightning from Zeus
our Father—

An awesome, sulphureous bolt that takes
the courage

From anyone standing nearby and
watching—even so

Great Hector crashed to the dusty earth.⁶

His second spear

Dropped from his hand, and quickly he
crumpled up

Beneath his helmet and shield, as about
his body

The elaborate bronze rang loudly.

Then sons of Achaeans,
Hurling their spears and fiercely
screaming their war-cries,

Ran up with the hope of dragging him
off, but not

One man of them managed to wound the
commander-in-chief

Of the Trojans with either a thrust or a
cast, for the bravest

Surrounded their leader and guarded him
well—Polydamas,

Aeneas, and noble Agenor, Sarpedon,
King

Of the Lycians, and blameless Glaucus,
and there not one

Of the others was oblivious of him and
his plight, but all

Held out their round shields before him.
And his friends took him up

In their arms and carried him out of the
toilsome fight

Till they came where his swift horses
waited, standing with driver
And ornate car at the rear of the battle
and tumult.

These drew him, heavily groaning, back
toward the city.

But when they came to the ford of
swirling Xanthus,

The fair-flowing river whose Father is
immortal Zeus,

The comrades of Hector lifted him from
the chariot,

Stretched him out on the ground, and
over him splashed

Cool water. At this he came to and
looked up, and kneeling

He vomited clots of dark blood. Then

back he sank

To the ground, and darkness like that of
black night enveloped

His eyes, for still the blow was too
much for his spirit.

Now when the Argives saw Hector
withdrawing, they charged

The Trojans with even more zest and
keenly recalled

Their prowess in battle. Then far the
first to draw blood

Was Ajax, son of Oïleus, who wounded
Satnius,

Springing at him with his sharp-headed
spear, even Enops'

Son, whom a flawless Naiad nymph
conceived

To Enops while he was tending his herd
by the banks
Of Satnioeis. Springing at him, the
spear-famous son
Of Oïleus wounded him deep in the side,
and Satnius
Writhed to the ground, as about him the
Trojans and Danaans
Clashed in strenuous struggle. To help
him then
Came fiercely spear-wielding
Polydamas, Panthous' son,
And casting he struck the right shoulder
of Prothoënor,
Son of Areïlycus, and all the way
through his shoulder
The heavy spear tore its way, and down
in the dust

Prothoenor fell, in agony gripping a
handful
Of dirt. And Polydamas cruelly exulted,
boasting
As loud as he could:

“Aha! once more, I believe,
A spear has not leaped in vain from the
powerful hand
Of Panthous’ son. For one of the Argives
has kindly
Received it deep in his flesh, and now, I
think,
He can lean on it for a staff, as down he
hobbles
To Hades’ house!”

He shouted, boasting, and deeply
Disturbed the Argives, especially the

fiery heart

Of great Telamonian Ajax, who was
nearest the man

When he fell. Quickly he hurled his
bright spear as the boaster

Drew back, but Polydamas dodged to
one side and thus

Avoided dark death. The spear was
received, however,

By Archelochus, son of Antenor, for the
gods had decreed

He should die. Him the spear struck at
the place where head

And neck come together, on the top
vertebra of the spine,

And severed both sinews. Far sooner
then his head

And mouth and nose reached earth as he

fell than did
His shins and knees. And Ajax called
out in turn
To peerless Polydamas:

“Consider, Polydamas, and tell me
Frankly if this was not a worthy one
To be slain in requital for Prothoënor.
He seemed
No coward to me, nor at all ignobly
descended,
But more like a brother of strong horse-
breaking Antenor,
Or maybe even a son. Surely the family
Resemblance is striking indeed!”

He spoke, well aware
Who it was he had killed, and grief
gripped the hearts of the Trojans.

Then Acamas came and bestrode his
brother Archelochus,
And felled with a thrust of his spear
Boeotian Promachus,
Who had hold of the feet and was trying
to drag
From beneath him Archelochus' corpse.
And over him Acamas
Loudly, terribly vaunted:

“You Argive cowardly
Bowmen, insatiate lovers of talking big,
Not for Trojans alone shall there be
labor
And sorrow, but you too shall just as
wretchedly die!
See how your Promachus sleeps,
overcome by my spear,

That my brother's blood-price may not
long remain unpaid.

This is why a man prays for a kinsman at
home to survive him,
For one to avenge his death and ward off
disgrace."

Thus he called, and his boasting
pained the Argives,
Especially the spirit of fiery Peneleos.
He rushed upon
Acamas, who, however, did not hold
fast .

Against Prince Peneleos' onslaught.
Peneleos' thrust
Struck Ilioneus, the only son his mother
bore Phorbas,
Rich in flocks, the man whom Hermes

loved most

Of all the Trojans and so gave great
wealth to him.

The spear went in beneath Ilioneus'
brow

At the base of his eye, forced the eyeball
out, passed on

Through the socket and out at the nape of
his neck, and Ilioneus

Sank to the ground, stretching out both of
his hands.

But Peneleos drew his sharp sword and
brought it down hard

On the dying man's neck, and the
helmeted head, with the great spear

Still through the eye, dropped to the
ground. And Peneleos

Held it up high like the head of a poppy,

showing it

Thus to the Trojans and, boasting,
exultantly shouted:

“I say, O Trojans, go tell the dear
father and mother
Of lordly Ilioneus to wail for him in
their halls,
In payment for Promachus’ life,
Alegenor’s son,
Whose wife will never rejoice in her
loved husband’s
Coming, when we young men of Achaea
go home
In our ships at last from this your land of
Troy.”

At these words trembling took hold of
the knees of all Trojans,

And each of them frantically glanced
about in search of
Some way to escape dire death.

Now tell me, O Muses,
You that have homes on Olympus, which
Achaean
Was the first to carry off bloody armor
as spoils
When once the famed shaker of earth had
turned the course
Of battle. The first was surely Ajax, son
Of Telamon. He struck down Hyrtius,
son of Gyrtius
And chief of the brave-hearted Mysians.
Antilochus stripped
The bronze from Phalces and Mermerus,
Meriones cut down

Morys and Hippotion, and Teucer
accounted for Prothoon
And Periphetes. Then Atreus' son
Menelaus
Thrust his spear deep in the side of the
people's lord
Hyperenor, and the cleaving bronze
made way for the entrails
To ooze through. His life throbbed out at
the spear-stabbed wound,
And darkness came down on his eyes.
But Ajax the runner,
Swift son of Oïleus, caught and killed
most of all,
For no other could equal his speed in
pursuit, when Zeus
Put panic in soldiers and turned them to
headlong retreat.

BOOK XV

The Achaeans Desperate

When the Trojans had scrambled
through trench and sharp
stakes, and many
Had died at the hands of the Danaans,
terrified still
They came to a halt beside their
chariots, their faces
A ghastly pale olive with fear. And Zeus
woke up
Where he lay beside golden-throned
Hera, high on a peak
Of Mount Ida. At once he sprang up and

saw what was happening,
Trojans chaotically fleeing and Argives
pursuing,
With lord Poseidon among them. And
then he saw Hector
Stretched on the plain with his comrades
sitting around him,
Great Hector gasping for breath, half
conscious, and vomiting
Blood, for it was by no means the
feeblest Achaean
Of all who had dealt him the blow.
Seeing him thus,
The Father of gods and men felt
compassion for him,
And sternly scowling at Hera he spoke
to her, saying:

“Hera, impossible goddess! surely
your own
Evil tricks have put noble Hector out of
the action
And driven the host in retreat. Truly I do
not
Know but that you shall yet be the first to
reap
The fruits of your miserable malice and
plotting—when I
Put stripes on you with a whip! Can it be
that you’ve really
Forgotten when I hung you high with an
anvil suspended
From each of your ankles and a band of
unbreakable gold
About your wrists? And you hung far up

in the air

Among the clouds, and the gods
throughout high Olympus,

Though greatly indignant, were none of
them able to get

Close to you and release you. And any of
them I got hold of

I seized and hurled from my threshold,
so that when he reached earth

He just lay there too weak to move.

Even so, my heart

Still hurt for godlike Heracles, whom
you, in league

With the blasting North Wind, had sent
in accord with your evil

Contriving far over the barren and
unresting sea

To the populous island of Cos. Him I

brought back

From there, safe to horse-pasturing
Argos, though only

After his toils had been many and
painful. Of this

I remind you once more to put an end to
your wiles

And make you see how little real good it
does you

To come here apart from the other
immortals and subtly

Seduce me to lie with you and make
love.”¹ 1

At this

The heifer-eyed queenly Hera
shuddered, and answered

In these winged words: “Now then, to

this let earth

Be my witness and broad heaven above
and the tumbledown waters

Of subterranean Styx—which to the gods
Is the oath most great and terrible-and
your own divine head

And the marriage bed of us both, by
which I would never

Swear falsely, that it is by no will of
mine that Poseidon,

Creator of earthquakes, does damage to
Trojans and Hector

And nothing but good for their foes.² I
think that he saw

The Achaeans worn out and despairing
beside their vessels

And pitied them so much that his own

soul urged him and told him
To help. But to you, O god of the
gathering storm,
I say I myself would counsel Poseidon to
go
Wherever you told him to go.”

She spoke, and the Father
Of gods and men smiled, and answered
in these winged words:
“If truly, O heifer-eyed queenly Hera, our
thoughts
Hereafter agree, as you sit among the
immortals,
Then surely Poseidon will bend his mind
to ours,
Regardless of how disinclined he may
be. So if

You are frank and sincere in what you
have said, go now
To the family of gods and send Iris here
along with
Bow-famous Apollo, that she may go
mid the host
Of bronze-clad Achaeans and bid lord
Poseidon drop out
Of the fight and go home. And Phoebus
Apollo must rouse up
Hector to action again, breathing strength
back into
His body and making him quickly forget
the pains
That are now unnerving his spirit. Then
let Apollo
Put cowardly panic in all the Achaeans
and hurl them

Back in headlong retreat on the many-
oared ships
Of Peleus' son Achilles, who then will
rouse up
His comrade Patroclus. Him resplendent
Hector
Will kill with his spear in full view of
Troy, but only
After Patroclus has slain many other
young men,
Including my own noble son Sarpedon.
And Achilles
The kingly, raging in wrath for
Patroclus, shall end
The life of Hector, from which time I'll
cause a constant
Retreat of the Trojans away from the

ships till at last
The Achaeans shall take steep Troy with
the help of a plan
From Athena. Until then, though, I will
not cease my anger,
Nor will I allow any other immortal to
help
The Danaans, not till Achilles has had
his desire
Fulfilled, as I at first promised and
bowed my head
In assent on the day the goddess Thetis
embraced
My knees, pleading with me to honor her
son,
Achilles, taker of towns.” [3](#)

He spoke, and the white-armed

Goddess Hera did not disobey him, but
went

From the mountains of Ida to the heights
of lofty Olympus.

And quick as the thoughts of a much-
traveled man who often

Wishes himself here or there,
remembering richly

And thinking, "I wish I were this place,
or that": even

So swiftly Queen Hera eagerly flew till
she came

To steep Olympus and found the
immortal gods

Together in Zeus's palace. At sight of
her there

They all sprang up and pledged her with
cups of welcome.

But she passed all of them by save pretty
Themis, [as](#)

Whose cup she accepted, for Themis
was first to run up
And greet her, speaking to her these
winged words:

“Hera, why do you come here like one
distraught?
Surely the son of Cronos has frightened
you badly,
And he your own husband!”

Then Hera, the white-armed goddess,
Replied: “Do not ask me to go into that,
divine Themis.
You yourself know what kind of spirit he
has,
How haughty, harsh, and unyielding. But

go take your place
And begin for the gods the abundant
feast in these halls,
And then you shall certainly hear, along
with all
Of the other immortals, what evil things
Zeus declares
He will do. My news will not, I believe,
make everyone
Equally glad, whether mortals or gods, if
indeed
There is anyone now who can dine in
anything like
A good mood!”

So saying, Queen Hera sat down, and
wrath
Arose in all of the gods throughout the

great hall

Of Zeus. And Hera laughed with her
lips, but the frown

Froze hard on her forehead above the
dark brows, as vexed

With them all she spoke out among them:
“Fools! how childish

And thoughtless we were to vent our
rage against Zeus.

Yet truly we’re still just as eager to go
up to him

And thwart his will, either by words or
by force.

But he sits apart and gives no one here
so much as

A second thought, so sure he is that his
power

And strength are supreme among the

immortals. Therefore,
Take with patience whatever bad things
he sends you.
Already, I think, keen pain has been
fashioned for Ares,
Since his own son, to him the dearest of
men,
Has fallen in battle, Ascalaphus, he
whom huge Ares
Claims as his own.”[at](#)

So she, and Ares slapped
His brawny big thighs with the flat of his
hands, and angrily
Spoke out, crying: “Do not now blame
me,
O you that have homes on Olympus, if I
go down

To the ships of Achaea and take revenge
on the Trojans

For killing my son, even though my fate
be to fall

A victim of Zeus's bright bolt, and to lie
mid the dead

Stretched out in the blood and the dust.”

He spoke, and at once
Gave orders to Panic and Rout to
harness his horses,

While he put on his all-shining armor.
Then greater,

More miserable wrath and resentment
would surely have been

Stirred up between Zeus and the other
immortals, if Athena

Had not been seized with fear for them

all. Leaving

The chair she sat in, she shot through the door and removed

The helmet from Ares' head and the shield from his shoulders.

Then taking the bronze-headed spear from his powerful hand,

She stood it aside and thus rebuked the impulsive,

Furious War-god:

“You stupid, maniacal fool!

Yes you will be utterly ruined. Surely you have ears

To hear with, but now all your sense and self-control

Have left you. Didn't you hear what the white-armed goddess

Hera just said, she who has newly
returned
From Olympian Zeus? And now do you
really wish
To bring all these woes on yourself, and
so, grieving still,
Be forced back up to Olympus, having
sowed the seeds
Of many great evils for all the rest of us
here?

So saying, she made
Impetuous Ares sit down again in his
chair.
Then Hera requested Apollo and Iris, the
immortal
Gods' messenger, to go with her from
the hall, and once

Outside she came to the point in these winged words:

“Zeus says for you both to go with all speed to Mount Ida.

When you have arrived and looked on his face, carry out

Whatever he then may urge and command you to do.”

Having thus delivered her message, Queen Hera returned

To her throne, but Apollo and Iris took off at once

And flew on their way When they came to well-watered Ida,

Mother of wilderness creatures, they found far-thundering

Zeus, where he sat on the summit of

Gargarus peak,
While about him wreathed a cloud of
fragrant mist.

Then the two of them stood in the
presence of Zeus, collector

Of clouds, and he was by no means
displeased to see them,

For they had promptly obeyed the words
of his wife.

And first to Iris he spoke in these
winged words:

“Fly swiftly, quick Iris, and carry this
message in full

To lord Poseidon, and see that you do
not speak falsely.

Tell him to leave the battle at once, and
either

Rejoin the family of gods, or shroud
himself deep
In his own sacred sea. And if he will
pay no attention
To these words of mine, but chooses
instead to ignore them,
Let him consider in mind and heart
whether he
Will be able to stand against an attack by
me,
Regardless of how great his strength.
For I declare myself
Much his better in might, and the elder
besides,
Though he thinks nothing of calling
himself the equal
Of Zeus, whom all of the other
immortals regard

With an awesome deep dread.”

He spoke, and wing-footed Iris
Did not disobey, but swiftly flew down
from the range
Of Ida to sacred Ilium. And as when
snow
Or freezing hail falls fast from the
clouds, driven on
By hard blasts of the sky-born North
Wind, even so swiftly
Quick Iris flew eagerly down, and
coming up close
To the world-renowned shaker of
shores, she spoke to him thus:

“O blue-haired embracer of earth, I
come here to you
With a message from Zeus, who bears

the aegis. He says
For you to leave the battle at once, and
either
Rejoin the family of gods, or shroud
yourself deep
In your own sacred sea. And if you will
pay no attention
To these words of his, but choose
instead to ignore them,
He threatens to come here at once and
pit his might
Against yours in an all-out fight. But he
warns you to keep yourself
Well out of reach of his hands, for he
declares himself
Much your better in might, and the elder
besides,
Though you think nothing of calling

yourself the equal
Of Zeus, whom all of the other
immortals regard
With an awesome deep dread.”

Then fiercely indignant, the world-
renowned
Shaker of shores spoke thus:
“Outrageous, outrageous!
Truly a haughty and arrogant message,
no matter
How strong he may be, if he really thinks
he can force one
Equal in honor with him to do as he
wishes.
For we are the sons of Cronos and Rhea
—Zeus,
Myself, and the third is Hades, King of

the nether

Dead. And the world is divided three
ways among us,

And each has his own domain. When the
lots were shaken,

I won the gray sea as my home and realm
forever,

And Hades won the deep nether gloom,
while Zeus

Was allotted broad heaven, the clouds
and clear upper air,

But the earth and lofty Olympus are
common to all.

Therefore I refuse to do as Zeus says I
should.

Let him abide in peace in his third of the
world,

No matter how strong he may be. And let

him stop trying
To scare me with threats of superior
might, as though
He thought me some cowardly weakling.
For him it would be
Far better to hurl his blustering threats at
his own
Sons and daughters, those he sired
himself, who have
No choice in the matter, but have to do
as he bids.”

To which wind-footed swift Iris
replied: “Can it be,
O blue-haired embracer of earth, that
you really wish me
To go back to Zeus with this answer so
hostile and harsh?

But since the great are never rigid, will
you
At all change your mind? The Furies,
you know, always
Favor the elder.”

And again earth-shaking Poseidon:
“Divine Iris, your point is well taken,
and surely it is
A fine thing when a messenger speaks
with such understanding.
But still most bitter resentment comes
over my heart
And soul whenever Zeus hurls harsh
words at another
His peer in every respect and to whom
has fallen
An equal share. For now, though, I yield,

in spite of
My deep indignation. But let me add
this, a threat
Straight out of my wrath—if ever apart
from me
And the spoil-driving goddess Athena,
and Hera, Hermes,
And lord Hephaestus, Zeus shall decide
to spare
Steep Troy and not lay it waste, nor give
the Argives
Great power, then truly the rancorous
breach between us
Will not be subject to healing!”⁴

So saying, the Earthshaker
Left the Achaean ranks and shrouded
himself

In the sea, and sorely those warring
heroes missed him.

Then Zeus, who gathers the clouds,
spoke thus to Apollo:

“Go now, dear Phoebus, straight to
bright-helmeted Hector,
For now the embracer and shaker of
earth has entered
His sacred sea, avoiding our ruinous
wrath.

Had he not, others too would have heard
of our feud, even

Those nether gods in the gloomy world
about Cronos.

But this way is better far for me, as well
as

Himself, that he should have yielded to

my strong hands

In spite of his bitter resentment, since not
without sweat

Would the issue have been decided. But
you take up

The tasseled aegis and shake it wildly
above

The warring Achaeans to stir up panic
among them.

And then, far-smiter, take care of
glorious Hector

And waken huge might in him until the
Achaeans

Shall come in their flight to the ships and
the Hellespont stream.

From that time on I myself will decide
what things

Must be said and done to give the

Achaeans new wind
And respite from war.”

He spoke, and Apollo did not fail
To heed the words of his Father, but
darted down
From the mountains of Ida with all the
speed of a falcon,
Killer of doves and swiftest of birds. He
found
Prince Hector, son of wise-hearted
Priam, no longer
Sprawled out on the ground, but now
sitting up, since from
The moment Zeus willed to revive him
he had begun
To regain his great heart and to know his
comrades about him,

And so his gasping and sweating had finally ceased.

Far-working Apollo came up to him close and spoke thus:

“Hector, son of Priam, why are you sitting

Apart here, weak and unable to rise?
Can it be

That some great pain has recently overwhelmed you?”

Bright-helmeted Hector weakly answered him, saying:

“Which of the gods, O mightiest one, are you?

Aren't you aware that back at the sterns of the ships,

As I was killing his comrades, fierce-

screaming Ajax

Struck me hard on the chest with a stone
and took

All the fight from my furious spirit?

Indeed, I thought

That surely I'd see the dead and Hades'
house

This very day, when once I had breathed
my last."

Then lordly far-working Apollo
replied: "Be strong,

For strong indeed is the helper whom
Zeus has sent down

From Ida to stand by your side and assist
you, even I,

Phoebus Apollo, god of the golden
sword,

Who have always protected both you
and your steep citadel.

But up now, and order your numerous
charioteers

To drive their fast horses straight for the
hollow ships,

And I will go in the lead and level the
way

For the horses and cars, and also I'll
turn back in flight

The fighting Achaeans.”

So saying, Apollo inspired
The Trojan commander-in-chief with
powerful strength.

As when a horse at the manger eats his
fill

Of barley, breaks his halter, and

thunders away

On the plain, eager to splash in the
rippling river—

He throws back his head, and his mane
streams over his shoulders

As he exults in his splendor and gallops
full speed

For the grazing ground of mares—so
Hector, once

He had heard the god's voice, ran hard
through the Trojan ranks

Urging on his charioteers. And as when
farm-hands

And dogs pursue a horned stag or wild
goat and lose

Their quarry among the sheer rocks or in
the dark woods,

And suddenly then a bearded lion,

aroused

By their cries, appears in their path, and
they quickly forget

Their ardor and, turning, take to their
heels, so now

The Danaans thronged in pursuit of the
Trojans, constantly

Thrusting at them with swords and two-
pointed spears,

But once they saw Hector ranging the
ranks they were all

Unmanned by terror, and their hearts
sank down to their heels.

Then Thoas, son of Andraemon, spoke
out among them.

He was by far the most gifted of all the
Aetolians,

Skillful in hurling the lance and just as good

In hand-to-hand combat, nor were there many Achaeans

Who could defeat him when in the place of assembly

The young men strove in debate. Now he, in an effort

To help, spoke to them, saying:

“Amazing! this is

A truly great marvel my eyes behold—
huge Hector,

Risen again, somehow escaping the fates.

Surely we all were hoping that Hector had died

At the hands of Ajax, son of Telamon.

Now, though,
Some god has saved and delivered the
man, who has
Already relaxed the limbs of many a
Danaan,
Nor has he, I think, ended his slaughter
yet,
Since he would not be out there as the
eager champion
Of Troy if bolt-crashing Zeus had not so
willed it.
But come, let everyone do as I say. Let
most
Of the army go back to the ships, but we
who claim
To be bravest and best, let us make a
stand against him
And hold him off with our outheld,

thrusting spears.

No matter how hot his fury, I do not believe

He has the courage to charge headlong into

Such a band of Danaans.”

With this, having listened closely,
They gladly agreed. Then those who rallied round Ajax

And King Idomeneus and Teucer,
Meriones, and Meges,

Peer of the War-god, braced themselves for the clash,

Calling out to the other champions to come and face

The oncoming Hector and army of Trojans, while behind them

Most of the men made their way back to the ships.

And the Trojans came on in close-ordered ranks with Hector
Rapidly striding before, while ahead of him
Went Phoebus Apollo, his shoulders wreathed in mist,
Bearing the awesome tasseled aegis, gleaming
And grim, that Hephaestus the smith had given to Zeus
To awaken panic in warriors. Apollo bore this
In his hands as he went at the head of the host.

And the Argives

Stood still in close-ordered ranks,
awaiting the clash,
And the piercing war-scream went up
from both sides, as arrows
Leaped from the bow-strings and many a
spear, hurled hard
By some brawny arm, sank home in the
flesh of a fast-fighting
Youthful warrior, while many another
stuck up
In the ground midway, nor ever reached
the white flesh
For which it so lusted. Now just as long
as Apollo
Held the aegis motionless in his hands,
The shafts of both sides hit their marks
and fighters kept falling.
But when he glared straight in the horse-

loving Danaans' faces
And shook the dread aegis, while
shouting fiercely at them,
Then their hearts quailed in their breasts,
and quickly they lost
Their impetuous valor. Like a herd of
cattle or large flock
Of sheep stampeded at night in the murky
darkness
By two wild beasts that suddenly spring
out at them
And find no herdsman nearby, so now
the Achaeans
Lost their nerve and fled, for Apollo
filled them
With panic, that he might give glory to
Hector and the Trojans.

Then, as the Argives scattered, the
Trojans cut them down
Singly. Hector killed Stichius and
Arcesilaus,
The first a trusted companion of great-
souled Menestheus,
The other a captain of bronze-clad
Boeotians. And Aeneas
Boldly cut down and stripped both
Medon and Iasus.
This Medon was King Oïleus' bastard
and thereby
The brother of Ajax, but since he had
killed a kinsman
Of his stepmother Eriopis, wife of
Oïleus,
He lived far from home in Phylace. And

Iasus served

As a captain among the Athenians, he the
son

Of Sphelus and grandson of Bucolus.

And Polydamas killed

Mecisteus, while in the first charge

Polites laid Echius

Low, and noble Agenor accounted for
Clonius.

Meanwhile, Paris struck down

Deïochus, trying

To flee mid the foremost fighters, hitting
him hard

At the base of the shoulder and driving
the bronze clean through.

Now while they were stripping the
war-gear from these, the

Achaean

Were scrambling this way and that
through the trench and sharp
stakes,

Forced to take cover behind their wide
wall. Then Hector

Called out to the Trojans: "Let the
bloody spoils be

And charge on the ships! Anyone I see
holding back

Over here, away from the vessels, I'll
kill on the spot,

Nor shall his kin, neither men nor
women, give him

His due funeral fire later on, but dogs
shall rip up

His body in front of our city!"

So saying, he brought
The lash down on his horses and sent a
great shout ringing all
Up and down the ranks of the Trojans,
and they, returning
His cry, drove onward with him in the
midst of incredible
Clamor. Going before them, Phoebus
Apollo
Easily bridged the deep trench by
kicking the banks down
Into the middle, thus building a
causeway across,
A way long and wide, as wide, in fact,
as a strong man
Testing his strength can hurl a javelin.
Over this

They streamed, rank after rank, with
Apollo still
Before them, sternly bearing the
awesome aegis.
And he with great ease knocked down a
long length of the Argive
Wall, as when a small boy at play by the
sea
Scatters the mansion of sand that he with
much pleasure
Has built, gleefully knocking it down
with his hands
And his feet. With equal ease, O
powerful Phoebus,
You undid the Achaeans' hard toil and
filled them with panic.⁵

Then the Danaans halted beside their

ships, and calling
For help to one another each of them
lifted
His arms in loud and fervent prayer to
all
Of the gods. But surely Gerenian Nestor
prayed hardest,
He the Achaeans' old sentinel, lifting his
hands
To the starry sky and praying:

“O Father Zeus,
If ever a man of us back in wheat-
wealthy Argos
Burned to you fat pieces of thigh from
bull
Or ram while making a prayer for his
safe return

Which then you promised, nodding your
head in assent,
Remember those offerings now and
ward off from us,
O Olympian, the ruthless day of our
doom, nor allow
The Achaeans thus to be overwhelmed
by the Trojans.”

Such was his prayer, and Zeus the
contriver, hearing
The words of Neleus’ aged son, mightily
Thundered. But when the Trojans heard
the loud clap
Of aegis-great Zeus, they felt more
warlike than ever
And charged harder still on the Argives.
As when a huge wave

Of the far-journeyed sea, driven on by
the force of the wind,
Best raiser of waves, washes over the
side of a ship,
So now the war-screaming Trojans
poured over the ruins
Of the rampart, driving their chariots up
to the sterns
Of the ships, where they fought in close
combat with two-pointed
spears—
Still in their cars, though now the
Achaeans had climbed
High up on the decks of the drawn-up
black ships, and from there
They were fighting with long-jointed,
bronze-headed pikes that lay
At hand on the ships to be used in battles

at sea.

Now Patroclus, so long as Achaeans
and Trojans fought
Round the wall away from the ships, sat
in the lodge
Of kindly Eurypylus, cheering him up
with talk
And applying ointments to his severe
wound to deaden
The piercing dark pangs. But when he
saw troops pouring in
Through the wall and the panicking
Danaans fleeing with screams
Of terror, he groaned aloud and slapped
his thighs
With the flat of his hands,⁶ sadly,
anxiously saying:

“Eurypylus, I cannot stay with you here
any longer,
Great though your need surely is. For
now a huge fight
Is upon us. Let your squire, then, take
care of you here, while I
Run back to Achilles and urge him to
enter the battle.
Who knows but that with God’s help my
persuasion may work?
The advice of a friend is frequently most
effective.”

While he was still speaking, he started
out for Achilles.
Meanwhile, the other Achaeans
staunchly fought back
At the charging soldiers, but though the

Trojans were fewer,
They could not drive them back from the
vessels, nor could
The Trojans break through the Danaan
ranks and get in
Among the shelters and ships. The line
of battle
Was drawn so even it made one think of
the line
A skillful carpenter, taught in his craft by
Athena
Herself, uses to cut a ship's timber
straight.
So evenly then the two warring sides
were strained.

Others were fighting round various
ships, but Hector

Singled out flashing-bright Ajax, and
these two fought
For one ship, nor could huge Hector
drive Ajax back
And set the ship on fire, nor could Ajax
thrust
Hector back, since a god drove him on.
But Ajax threw
His spear and pierced the chest of
Caletor, Clytius'
Son, as he was coming with fire for the
ship,
And Caletor thudded to earth, dropping
the torch
From his hand. Then Hector, seeing his
cousin prone
In the dust before the black ship, called
out to the Trojans

And Lycians:

“You Trojans and Lycians and dueling
Dardanians,
Whatever you do, yield no ground now
in this
Our time of great need, but rescue
Clytius’ son
Before the Achaeans strip off his armor,
now that
He lies in the dust before the long line of
ships.”

So saying, he hurled his bright spear at
Ajax, and missed,
But Lycophron, son of Mastor, a
comrade-in-arms
Who lived with Ajax, since he in sacred
Cythera

Had murdered a man—him the piercing
bronze

Of Hector struck on the head just over
the ear

As he stood on the deck with Ajax, and
down in the dust

He toppled from high on the stern of the
ship, and his limbs

Relaxed in death. Shuddering, Ajax
called thus

To his brother:

“Teucer, old friend, truly now
We have lost a trusted companion,
Mastor’s brave son,
Whom since the day he came to us from
Cythera

We’ve honored at home in our halls as

much as we have

Our own parents. Now huge-hearted
Hector has killed him.

Where, then,
Are those quick-killing arrows of yours
and the bow you received
From Phoebus Apollo?"

He called, and Teucer, hearing,
Took his bent bow and quiver of arrows
and hurried
To take his stand beside Ajax, and at
once he began
To shower his shafts on the Trojans. The
first man he hit
Was Cleitus, Peisenor's glorious son
and the squire
Of Polydamas, lordly son of Panthous.

Cleitus

Was busily reining his horses, trying to
drive them

Where Trojan battalions were in the
most trouble, thereby

Winning the thanks of Hector and all the
Trojans.

But swiftly indeed he met with disaster,
an evil

That no one, however zealous, could
then have kept from him.

For the groan-fraught arrow pierced the
back of his neck,

And Cleitus pitched from the chariot,
causing the horses

To shy and run off, rattling the empty
car.

But their master, princely Polydamas,

quickly saw
What had happened and was first to get
hold of the horses. He
turned them
Over to Astynous, son of Protiaon,
giving him
Careful instructions to hold them nearby,
while keeping
A sharp eye on him at the front. Then he
went and rejoined
The first rank of champions.

Now Teucer took another shaft out,
This one to shoot at bronze-helmeted
Hector, and he
Right then would have ended the fight by
the ships of Achaea,
If only his bolt had gone true and ended

the life

Of Hector raging in battle. But Teucer
was not

Unobserved by the keen mind of Zeus,
who protected Hector

And took that glory from Teucer. For
just as he drew

His flawless bow against Hector, Zeus
broke the strong-twisted

String, and the bronze-weighted arrow
flipped off to one side

As the big bow dropped from his hand.
Shuddering, Teucer

Spoke thus to his brother:

“Now confound it all! surely
Some god is utterly thwarting our efforts
in battle,

For now he has knocked the bow from
my hand, having broken
A new-twisted string that I myself tightly
bound on
This morning, that it might bear well the
many shafts
I then intended to shoot.”

And Telamon's son,
Great Ajax, replied: “So be it, brother.
You let
Your bow and thick-flying arrows lie
where they are,
Since now some god, begrudging
success to the Danaans,
Has undone their strength. But take a
long spear in your hand
And a shield on your shoulder, and

while you are battling the foe
Do all you can to encourage the rest of
our men.
The Trojans may have the upper hand
now, but let us
Remember our furious prowess and not
allow them
To capture without a hard struggle our
well-oared vessels.”

At this, Teucer ran and put the bow in
his lodge.
Then around his shoulders he hung a
hide shield of four layers,
And on his noble head he put a strong
helmet
With horsehair plume defiantly waving
above him,

And then, picking up a strong spear
sharp-pointed with bronze,
He ran at full speed and resumed his
stand beside Ajax.

When Hector saw that the arrows of
Teucer had failed,
He called to the Trojans and Lycians,
loudly shouting:

“You Trojans and Lycians and dueling
Dardanians, now,
My friends, be men, and filled with
furious boldness
Here at the hollow ships! For truly my
eyes
Have just seen how Zeus brought to
nothing the arrows of one
Who ranks very high. Quite easy it is to

tell

Whose side Zeus is on, since he gives
glory to some

And fails to help others, in fact takes
their might away,

And now he takes strength from the
Argives and helps us instead.

Charge, then, in close ranks at the ships,
and if any of you

Stops an arrow or spear and so
overtakes

His death and doom today, why then let
him die!

To die in defense of one's country is not
ignoble.

And that man's wife and children, as
well as his house

And allotment of land, will then be safe

and free

From all harm—if only the Argives have
gone in their ships

To their own dear native land!”

Hector’s words made them fight
Even harder. And Ajax, opposite him,
called

To his comrades, shouting: “For shame!
you Argives. Now

It is certain that either we ourselves die,
or else

Save our lives by driving this imminent
evil back

From the ships. Or do you suppose that
once these vessels

Are taken by yonder bright-helmeted
Hector you all

Will then be able to walk your way back
to the precious
Land of your fathers? Do you not hear
how Hector,
Raging to burn the ships, urges on his
whole army?
Believe me, it's not a dance he's inviting
them to,
But a battle! Nor have we any way wiser
or better
Than this—to try our might against theirs
in hand-to-hand
Combat. Far better to find out at once
whether we here
Are destined to live or die than to have
our lives uselessly
Squeezed drop by drop from our bodies
against these black ships

By men worse than we in this most miserable struggle!”

With this he inspired the Argives also to fight
Even harder. Then Hector killed Perimedes’ son Schedius,
Leader of Phocians, and Ajax cut down an infantry
Captain, Laodamas, splendid son of Antenor.
Polydamas laid low and stripped Cyllenian Otus,
A friend of Phyleus’ son Meges and a chief of the proud
Epeans. And Meges, seeing, lunged at Polydamas,
Who, however, caused him to miss by

writhing

Out from beneath him, for Apollo did not
see fit

For Panthous' son Polydamas to be
overcome

In that front rank of champions. But
Meges' spear

Sank deep in the chest of Croesmus, who
no sooner crashed

To the ground than Meges was on him
stripping his shoulders

Of armor. But at once the great spearman
Dolops leaped

Upon him, Dolops the bravest offspring
of Lampus,

Son of Laomedon. He it was, a man

Well schooled in furious fighting, who
charged in close

And stabbed his spear clean through the
center of Meges' shield,
But his thickly wrought breastplate
saved him, the curved one of
bronze
That he always wore. For his father
Phyleus had brought it
Home from Ephyre, where flows the
river Selleïs
And where Euphetes, King of his
people, had made him
A present of it, that he might wear it in
battle,
A guard against furious foemen. And
now it kept death
From the body of Meges his son, who
countered by thrusting

His keen-cutting spear at Dolops' helmeted head.

Striking the socket on top of his bronze-plated head-gear,

He shore off the horsehair plume, which fell in the dust,

Still bright with its dye of fresh scarlet.

But Dolops, yet hoping

To win, stood his ground and fought on, oblivious

Of fierce Menelaus who now came up from behind

And hurled his spear. And the bronze went in at the shoulder

Of Dolops and madly tore on through his breast. Reeling,

He pitched face down in the dust, and both Menelaus

And Meges hurried to strip from his
shoulders his war-gear
Plated with bronze.

But Hector called out to his kinsmen,
A shout intended for them one and all,
but first
He rebuked Hicetaon's son, the strong
Melanippus.
He, while the foe was still far away, had
lived
In Percote and fed his lumbering cattle
there.
But when the graceful ships of the
Danaans came,
He went back to Troy, where he lived a
high-ranking man
In the house of Priam, who treated him

quite as well

As he did his own children. Now Hector
called him by name

And chided him thus:

“Are we then to give up this way,
Melanippus? Has your heart no feeling
at all for your kinsman

There in the dust? Don’t you see what
they’re doing with the brazen

War-gear of Dolops? But on! For the
long-distance fighting

Is over. Now we must clash hand to
hand in a fight

To the finish—either we kill them, or
they take our city

And utterly wipe out her people!”

So saying, he led

And the other, godlike, followed.
Meanwhile, the great
Telamonian Ajax spurred on the
Argives, shouting:
“Be men, my friends, and stout of heart!
Fear nothing
In this great struggle but dishonor before
each other.
Of men who shun dishonor, more are
saved
Than slain, but flight is a poor defense
and wins
No glory of any kind!”

He spoke, and though
The men were already eager to fight for
their lives,
They took his words to heart and fenced

in the ships
With a wall of bright bronze. And Zeus
continued to strengthen
The Trojan attack. Then King Menelaus,
the loud
Battle-roarer, thus exhorted Antilochus:

“No other
Man we have, Antilochus, is younger
than you,
Nor more fleet-footed than you, nor as
valiant as you
In battle. Go on, then—charge out there
and lay
Some Trojan man low!”

So saying, he quickly drew back
Himself, but stirred up Antilochus, son
of Nestor.

He quickly sprang out in front of the
foremost fighters,
Glared fiercely about him, and hurled
his bright spear, and before
him
The Trojans fell back. And not in vain
he threw,
But struck Hicetaon's son, the proud
Melanippus,
Just as he entered the battle, full on the
breast
By the nipple, sending him thunderously
down and covering
His eyes with darkness. Antilochus,
then, leaped upon him,
Quick as a hound that springs on a
wounded fawn,
One some hunter has happened to hit,

relaxing

His limbs in death, as swiftly he sprang
from his bed.

Even so nimbly on you, Melanippus,
leaped Antilochus,
Staunch in battle, eager to strip off your
armor.

Brave Hector, however, was not
unaware of the action,
And swiftly he charged through the
fighting to meet Antilochus,
Who, though fast as a fighter, would not
await him,
But fled like a frightened wild beast, one
that has killed
A hound or a herdsman tending his
cattle, and flees

Before a great crowd of angry men can
gather.

So now retreated Antilochus, son of
Nestor,

Followed by inhuman screams and a
shower of groan-fraught

Missiles. Nor did he turn and stand till
he reached

The company of comrades.

Now the Trojans, like so many
ravenous

Lions, charged at the ships, fulfilling the
promise

Of Zeus, who continued to heighten their
power and weaken

The hearts of the Argives, depriving
them of sweet glory,

While keenly inciting the Trojans. For
Zeus had decreed
In his heart to give the glory to Hector,
that he
At last might hurl on the beaked black
ships his god-blazing,
Tireless fire, thereby fulfilling
completely
The brazen request of Thetis. So Zeus
the planner
Was waiting to see the glare from a
flaming ship,
For then henceforth he would cause a
Trojan retreat
From the ships and give the Danaans
glorious victory.⁷

With all this in mind, he was driving

on at the hollow
Ships bold Priam's son Hector, a man
already
Quite eager. But now he raged like
spear-wielding Ares,
Fierce as a fire on the mountains,
burning the brush
And trees of a thickly grown forest.
Foam formed round his mouth,
His eyes blazed madly beneath his
lowering brows,
And the shining helmet about his temples
shook awesomely
As he fought. For Zeus of the bright
upper air was himself
His protector, pledged to glorify him
alone
Mid so many other warriors. For he

would not live long,
Since Pallas Athena^{au} was rapidly
bringing closer
The day of his doom, when he would go
down forever
Beneath the huge strength of Peleus' son
Achilles.

Now, though, bold Hector was eager to
break the Achaean
Ranks, charging fiercely at them
wherever he saw
The most men and the most splendid
armor. But he, in spite of
His ardor, could not break through, for
they held close together,
Tight and firm as a wall, solid and
strong

As a huge beetling cliff close by the gray
sea, a bulwark
Of stone that takes unshaken the many
hard blasts
Of screaming wind and the blows from
the swollen big waves
That boom against it. So the Danaans,
unretreating,
Stood fast against the Trojans.

Then Hector, shining like fire
All over, sprang at the line of men and
fell on them
Hard, like a towering, wind-swollen
wave that under
The clouds rolls swiftly along to crash
on a ship,
And the decks for a while disappear

under foaming sea-water,
While the dread blast roars in the sail
and the hearts of the sailors
Quake in their terror at thus escaping
death
By so very little. Even so the hearts of
Achaeans
Went all to pieces with fear. For Hector
fell
On their ranks like a hugely ferocious
lion that springs
Mid a great herd of cattle grazing their
fill in a low-lying
Meadow—the herdsman with them is
one who has never
Learned how to deal with a fierce wild
beast that has just
Undone a sleek heifer. He goes with the

herd, but either
Up front or behind, while the lion leaps
in at the middle,
Kills a fine cow, and stampedes all of
the others.
So now the Achaeans were thoroughly
routed by Hector
And Father Zeus, miraculously, for
Hector killed
But one man—Periphetes, Copreus' dear
son from Mycenae,
A man far better than Copreus his father,
he
Who had frequently gone with orders
from cruel King Eurystheus
To powerful Heracles. Surely his son
Periphetes

Was better in every way, in fleetness of
foot,
In fighting, and also in brains, for he was
one
Of the keenest men in Mycenae. And he
it was
Who enabled Hector to win and cover
himself
With glory, for turning he tripped on the
rim of his foot-reaching
Shield, his wall against spears, but now
it served only
To trip him and send him down on his
back, while about
His temples his helmet horribly rang.
This attracted
The notice of Hector, who ran and
standing above him

Transfixed his breast with a spear, right
in among
His horrified comrades, who did him no
good at all,
For they too were frozen with terrible
fear of great Hector.

Soon the Achaeans fell back, taking
cover behind
The first line of ships, but the Trojans
poured in upon them
And forced them to give still further
ground, but they stopped
At the first line of shelters, where all
remained in a body,
Instead of scattering throughout the
camp, for they constantly
Yelled at each other, and shame held

them fast, and fear.

But most of all Gerenian Nestor, old
sentinel

Of Achaea, besought each man by his
parents, pleading:

“Be men, my friends, and don’t be
disgraced in the eyes
Of others. Remember, each of you,
children and wife
And possessions, and your parents living
or dead. For the sake
Of those who are absent, I beg you to
make a strong stand
And not to turn tail and flee!”

So saying, he strengthened
The spirit and might of all, and Athena
cleared

From before them a murky thick cloud of
amazing darkness,
So that daylight shone brightly, as well
from the side of evil,
All-leveling battle as from that where
the other ships lay.
Then all saw war-screaming Hector
along with his men,
Both those who stood in the rear,
inactive, and those
Who fought by the swift-running ships.

But now it no longer
Seemed good to the soul of
magnanimous Ajax to stay
At the shelters where huddled the rest of
the sons of Achaeans.
He much preferred to stride up and

down the decks

Of the ships, wielding a long battle-pike
for fighting

At sea, jointed with rings and thirty-
three feet

In length. And like a trick-rider who
harnesses four

Fine horses, carefully picked, and
gallops toward

A great city, over a plain down a well-
traveled road

Where many people, both men and
women, marvel

At his performance as he continues to
leap

From horse to horse while onward they
fly, so Ajax,

Now, kept leaping from deck to deck of

the ships,
And always his voice went up to the sky,
as he
With terrible shouts cried out to the
Danaans to defend
Their shelters and ships. Nor was
Hector content to stay
Mid the throng of bronze-breasted
Trojans, but as a flashing
Gold eagle plunges ferociously down on
a flock
Of wild birds that feed by the bank of a
river—whether geese
Or cranes or long-necked swans—so
Hector charged straight
For a dark-prowed ship, and the huge
hand of Zeus thrust him on

From behind, as that god also aroused
the rest
Of Hector's fierce army.

So again a shrill battle took place
Beside the ships, a fight so slashingly
fought
That you would have said they faced
each other fresh
And unwearied. But the two struggling
sides did not think alike.
The Achaeans knew they were trapped
and felt doom was sure,
While the Trojans hoped in their hearts
to burn the ships
And destroy the Achaean army. Then
Hector grasped
The stern-horn of a brine-skimming,

beautiful seagoing ship,
That had brought brave Protesilaus to
Troy, though it never
Carried him home to his own dear
country again.

Now around his ship the Achaeans and
Trojans were cutting
Each other down in close combat, since
they no longer
Threw lances or shot whizzing arrows.
But standing up close
In stubborn oneness of spirit they hacked
at each other
With keen battle-axes and hatchets, and
slashed away
With huge swords and two-pointed
spears. And many indeed
Were the splendid dark-hilted blades

that littered the ground,
Some falling from warriors' hands,
some cut from their shoulders,
As fiercely they fought, flooding the
black earth with blood.

Now Hector, once he had seized the
ship by the stern,
Would not let go the high horn he
gripped, and thus
He called to the Trojans: "Bring fire,
and with it your voices
All raised at once in the war-cry. For
Zeus now gives us
A day worth all the rest—to take the
ships
That came here to Troy against the will
of the gods

And brought us innumerable woes, woes
we suffered
On account of the cowardly elders, who
when I was eager
To fight at the ships, held me and all the
rest back.
But if far-seeing Zeus then blunted our
wits,
Now of himself he urges and orders us
on!”

At this they sprang at the Argives
harder than ever.
But Ajax no longer remained where he
was, for missiles
Rained down all around him. Expecting
death any moment,
He little by little retreated on the seven-

foot bridge

Amidships, leaving the deck of the well-balanced vessel.

There he stood watch, and kept from the ship any Trojan

Who tried to burn it with unwearied fire, and always

His awesome voice called out to the Danaan troops:

“O friends, heroic comrades of Ares, be men,

Dear friends, and remember your strength in the war-charge. Can it be

That we think we have reinforcements behind us, or some

Stronger wall to keep off destruction? Believe me, there is

No walled town nearby, wherein we
might find reinforcements
And so, defending ourselves, succeed in
reversing
The fortunes of war. No indeed! we are
here on the plain
Of bronze-breasted Trojans, with
nothing behind us but water!
Survival lies in the strength of our hands,
not
In compassion shown toward the
Trojans.”

He shouted, and all
The while kept thrusting madly away at
the foe
With his keen-cutting spear. Whoever
would charge at the hollow

Ships with a blazing torch in his hand,
striving
To win praise from Hector, urging them
on, for that man
Ajax waited and wounded him soon with
a thrust
Of his lengthy sea-pike. That bronze he
embedded in twelve
Trojan warriors, wounding them there in
front of the ships.

BOOK XVI

The Death of Patroclus

While they were warring around the
benched ships, Patroclus
Came up to Achilles, Prince of his
people, and standing
Beside him shed hot tears, weeping like
a spring
Whose dark streams trickle down the
rocky face of a cliff.¹
And noble Achilles, a warrior fast on
his feet,
Had compassion on him, and spoke in
these winged words:

“Why are you weeping, Patroclus, like
some little girl
That runs along by her mother and begs
to be
Taken up, clutching her dress, holding
her back,
And looking tearfully up at her till at last
She is taken up? Like that little girl,
Patroclus,
You shed these big tears. Have you
something to say to the Myrmidons,
Or to me myself? Have you alone heard
some late news
From Phthia? Surely men say that
Menoetius, son
Of Actor, still lives, as does King
Peleus, [av](#) Aeacus’

Son, at home among his Myrmidons.
Were either
Of those two dead, then indeed we
would greatly grieve.
Or is your sorrow for Argives, now
being slaughtered
Beside the dark hulls on account of their
own overreaching?
Keep it in no longer. Speak out, and
share it with me.”

Then heavily sighing, the horseman
Patroclus replied:
“O Peleus’ son Achilles, far strongest of
all
The Achaeans, do not mock or blame me
for this,
So awesome now is the terrible pain in

which

The Achaeans are toiling. For now our
bravest men,

Stricken by arrows or spear-thrusts, lie
at the ships.

Strong Diomedes, Tydeus' son, has been
hit,

And both spear-famous Odysseus and
King Agamemnon

Have suffered disabling spear-wounds,
and Eurypylus too

Is out with an arrow deep in his thigh,
and about these

Our surgeons of many drugs are busy,
trying

To help them. But what, Achilles, can
anyone do

With you? May wrath like that you

cherish never

Lay hold of me, O man perversely
courageous!

What profit will men yet to be have from
you, if now

You refuse to keep from the Argives
shameful destruction?

O creature without compassion, surely
you are

No son of Thetis and knightly Peleus.
Only

The gray salt-sea and the beetling cliffs
of stone

Could have brought into being a creature
so harsh and unfeeling!

But if your heart is set on escaping some
dire word

From Zeus, revealed to you by your
goddess mother,²

Then send me forth now at the head of
the Myrmidon host,

That I may be a light of hope to the
Danaans.

And let me strap on my shoulders that
armor of yours,

That the zealous Trojans may take me for
you and quickly

Withdraw from the fighting. Then the
battling, war-worn sons

Of Achaeans may have a chance to catch
their breath—

Such chances in battle are few—and we
who are fresh

May easily drive, with little more than

our war-screams,
The exhausted Trojans away from the
ships and the shelters
And back toward the city.”

Such was his plea, poor childish
Fool that he was, for it was his own hard
death
And doom for which he pleaded.

Then greatly disturbed,
Quick-charging Achilles spoke thus:
“Ah, my Zeus-sprung
Patroclus, what are you saying! I don’t
give a straw
For anyone’s fateful foretelling—none
that I know of,
That is—nor has my goddess mother
brought to me

Any such word from Zeus.³ What fills
my heart
And soul with so much bitter resentment
is simply
That one whose equal I am should want
to rob me
And take my prize of prestige for no
better reason
Than this, that he has more power. This
indeed bitterly
Rankles, after all I have done and
suffered for him!
That girl the sons of Achaeans picked
out as a prize
For me, since I had sacked a walled
town and made her
Mine with my spear. Then Atreus' son

Agamemnon,
Our great and lordly commander,
snatches her back
From my arms as though I were some
lowly, contemptible tramp.

“Well, what’s done is done. I will not,
it seems,
Be filled with fierce anger forever,
though I said I would not
Change my mind till the fighters were
screaming about my own
vessels.⁴

So now put my famous armor about
your shoulders
And lead into battle the fight-loving
Myrmidons, if truly
A dark cloud of Trojans has settled

about the black ships,
Leaving the Argives little space and
nothing
Behind them by way of support but the
surf-beaten shore
Of the sea. I suppose the whole town of
Troy has poured out
Against them, fearless as can be, since
now they no longer
See the shining front of my helmet
glaring
Nearby. If only King Agamemnon treated
Me well, very soon those Trojans would
run for their city
And fill all the gullies with corpses on
their way,
Whereas now they have brought their
attack right into our camp.

For the spear of Tydeus' son Diomedes
rages
No longer to keep off death from the
Danaans, nor as yet
Have I heard the voice of Atreus' son
Agamemnon,
Bawling orders from his hated head. But
the shouts
Of slaughtering Hector crash round
about me, as he
Continues to urge on the Trojans, who
fill the plain
With their own mighty cries, as they
horribly scourge the Achaeans.

“Go, then, Patroclus, fall on them hard
and save
The ships from destruction, lest the

Trojans really burn them
And their blazing fire rob all of us of our
precious,
Longed-for return. But pay close
attention to this
Most important part of my counsel, that
you may win
For me great honor and glory from all of
the Danaans,
Making them bring back to me that
exquisite girl
And give in addition splendid gifts.
When you
Have driven the Trojans away from the
ships, come back.
And if Hera's loud-crashing lord should
give you a chance
To win great glory, even so do not fight

without me

The war-loving Trojans, since that
would do my reputation

No good! Do not, I tell you, get carried
away

In the heat of conflict and slaughter and
so lead the men

Toward the city. For one of the gods
everlasting may decide

To descend from Olympus and fight
against you—Apollo,

For instance, who works from afar and
dearly loves

All Trojans. Come back, then, when
once you have saved the vessels,

And let the others go fighting across the
plain.

O Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, how
very
Deeply I wish the death of every Trojan
Who lives in the world, and of every
Argive too,
That just myself and Patroclus might live
and alone
Succeed in reducing this tower-
crowned, sacred city
To rubble and dust!"⁵

While thus they spoke to each other,
Ajax, belabored with missiles, no longer
stood firm.
For the will of Zeus and the lordly
bronze-hurling Trojans
Were too much for him. The flashing
helmet he wore

About his temples constantly rang with
the terrible
Blows that steadily fell on the well-
wrought plates
Of bronze, and his strong left shoulder
grew numb from always
Firmly holding his sun-glinting shield.
Nor were they
Able to knock it aside, no matter how
hard
They threw. But now he was painfully
panting, and the sweat
Streamed down all over his body, since
he had not even
A moment to catch his breath, and
danger on danger
Shot in from every side.

O tell me now, Muses,
You that have homes on Olympus, how
fire first fell
On the Argive ships.

Bold Hector charged in at Ajax,
And swinging his huge sword hard he
shore off the point
Of the long ashen spear, so that now
Telamonian Ajax
Stood foolishly shaking a pointless pike,
while well
Away to one side the bronze point
bounced and lay still.
Then Ajax shuddered from deep in his
breast, as his great heart
Knew the work of immortal gods and
had

To admit that high-crashing Zeus was
willing a victory
For Trojans and rendering vain
whatever he tried
To do in the fight. So at last brave Ajax
fell back
From the fierce fall of missiles, and the
Trojans threw untiring fire
On the graceful ship. At once
unquenchable flame
Streamed over the hull.

As the hungry fire swirled round the
stern
Of the ship, Achilles slapped his huge
thighs^{aw} and spoke
To Patroclus, saying: "Up now, Zeus-
sprung Patroclus,

Commander of horsemen. Now for
certain I see
At the ships the rush of high-roaring fire.
Don't allow them
Thus to destroy the vessels and cut off
our only
Escape. On with that armor, then, faster!
while I
Go muster the men.”
Such were his words, and Patroclus
Put on the glittering bronze.⁶ First he
covered
His shins with greaves, fair greaves with
ankle-clasps of silver.
Next, about his chest he carefully
strapped
The richly wrought breastplate of

Aeacus' grandson Achilles,
A gorgeous piece that sparkled and
shone like the stars.
And from his shoulders he slung the
bronze sword with the bright
studs
Of silver along with the shield both
wide and thick.
Then on his noble head he put a strong
helmet
With horsehair plume defiantly waving
above him,
And last he took up two long sturdy
spears that fitted
His grip to perfection. But the spear of
peerless Achilles
He left where it was, a huge spear,
heavy and long.

No Achaean fighter could wield it but
mighty Achilles
Himself, this strong spear of ash that
Cheiron the Centaur
Had given to Peleus, Achilles' dear
father. It came
From the peak of Mount Pelion, and was
meant to bring death to
the foe.

Then Patroclus ordered Automedon
quickly to harness
The horses. For next to rank-smashing
Achilles, he cared for
Automedon most, and he of all drivers
was surest
To stay close at hand, awaiting his call
in the melee.

So Automedon yoked Achilles' fast
horses, Xanthus
And Balius, swift as the blasting gales.
For the West Wind
Had sired them on the stormy filly
Podarge, as she grazed
In a field by the stream of Oceanus. And
in the side-traces
He put the perfect horse Pedasus, that
Achilles had won
When he took Eëtion's city, and
Pedasus, though
But a mortal steed, kept up with the
immortal pair.

Meanwhile, Achilles strode mid the
shelters, giving all
Of his Myrmidons orders to arm, after

which they rushed out
Like so many flesh-rending wolves,
great beasts unspeakably
Savage—wolves that have killed a huge
horned stag
In the mountains and gorged themselves
on his flesh till the jaws
Of all are dripping with blood, and off
the pack runs
To lap with their slender lean tongues
from a spring of dark water,
Belching up scarlet gore and still quite
ferocious,
Though now their bellies are bulging.
Even so the Myrmidon
Captains and counselors rushed to form
round Patroclus,
The noble dear friend of their leader.

And Achilles himself,
Resembling the War-god, stood in the
midst of all,
Urging on charioteers and shield-bearing
soldiers.

God-loved Achilles led fifty swift
ships to Troy,
And on the benches in each came fifty
men,
His comrades. And he had appointed
five trusted commanders,
While he himself ruled mightily over all.
The first battalion was led by
Menesthius, him
Of the bright-glinting breastplate, the son
of Spercheius, god
Of the Zeus-fed river. His mother, a

daughter of Peleus,
The fair Polydora, had lain with untiring
Spercheius
And borne him Menesthus, who,
however, took
The surname of Borus, Perieres' son,
who gave
Gifts of wooing past counting and
publicly married the girl.
The next battalion was led by warlike
Eudorus,
A god's child born of a maiden, Phylas'
daughter
Polymele, the exquisite dancer.
Powerful Hermes,
Slayer of Argus, saw her dancing in the
chorus
Of Artemis, goddess of golden shafts

and the echoing
Shouts of the chase. Soon he went up to
her room
And secretly lay with her, and she bore
to Hermes
The helper a splendid son, Eudorus,
swift
Of foot and quick as a fighter. But when
at last
The goddess of childbirth, labor-
inducing Eileithyia,
Had brought him forth to the light and he
had seen
The rays of the sun, then the strong and
fiery Echecles,
Son of Actor, took Polymele home
As his wife, having given innumerable

gifts of wooing,
And Eudorus was left with his
grandfather Phylas, who raised him
And tenderly loved him, quite as if he
had been
His own son. And the third battalion was
led by Peisander,
Maemalus' son, a warlike man expert
As a spearman, surpassed in such
fighting by no other Myrmidon
Save Patroclus, the comrade of Peleus'
great son.
And the knightly old Phoenix captained
the fourth contingent,
And Alcimedon the fifth, he the faultless
son
Of Laerces. When at last Achilles had
martialed them all

With their leaders, battalion by separate
battalion, he laid

This stern charge upon them, saying:

“Myrmidons, let no man
Forget the many harsh threats that you
here with me

Beside the swift ships throughout all the
time of my wrath

Have hurled at the Trojans, each one of
you chiding me thus:

‘O hard son of Peleus, surely, O pitiless
one,

Your mother nursed you on gall, not
milk, since now

You hold your unwilling comrades here
at the ships.

But come, let us all return home in our

seagoing vessels,
If thus disabling is this evil wrath that
has so
Encompassed your heart.' So you would
often gather
And babble such stuff at me. Well now
you have
Before you a truly great chance for
warlike deeds,
Of which you have been so exceedingly
avid. Go then,
With hearts full of valor, and show the
Trojans your prowess."

So saying, he put still more courage in
all of the men,
And the ranks as they listened drew even
closer together.

Like the close-fitting stones a man lays
in building the wall
Of a lofty house, a wall to keep out the
wind,
So now their helmets and brightly
bossed shields were together,
The Myrmidons standing so close that
shield pressed on shield,
Helmet on helmet, and man on man, so
close
That the horsehair plumes on the bright-
horned helmets brushed
Each other with every nod of a head.
And out
Before all, arrayed in full armor, were
two fierce warriors,
Patroclus and Automedon, both equally
eager to fight

In the Myrmidon van.

But Achilles went into his lodge
And lifted the lid of a beautiful inlaid
chest
That his mother Thetis, silvery-footed,
had put
On his ship for him to carry along,
having filled it
Full with tunics and wind-warding
cloaks and fleecy
Warm blankets. There too he kept a fair-
beaten cup,
From which no other man drank the
bright wine, nor would
Achilles pour libations from it to any
god
Other than Zeus the Father. Taking this

cup

From the chest, he cleansed it with
sulphur and rinsed it well

In pure running water, then washed his
hands and ladled

A cup of the sparkling wine. Nor was he
unnoticed

By Zeus, strong lover of thunder and
lightning, as he

Stood out in the forecourt's center and
poured forth the wine,

Looking to heaven, and praying:

“Lord Zeus, Dodonaean,
Pelagian, you that dwell in the distance,
ruling wintry

Dodona, where your prophets the Selloi
live, priests

Who go with feet unwashed and who
sleep on the ground—

Hear as you heard me before when I
prayed. You honored me

Then, and woefully smote the Achaean
host.

Grant me now another prayer, for though
I myself will stay at the ships, I am
sending my friend

Into battle along with the Myrmidon
troops. With him,

O far-seeing Zeus, send glory. Make
strong and courageous

The heart in his breast, that Hector too
may know

Whether my dear comrade can fight his
own battles, or whether

His hands invincibly rage only when I

too
Enter the toil and tumult of Ares. But
when
He has driven the chaotic fighting away
from the ships,
I pray let him come back to these swift
ships and me,
Completely unharmed and with all of his
armor intact,
And with him bring back his close-
fighting Myrmidon comrades.”⁷

Such was his prayer, and Zeus the
contriver heard him,
And the Father granted him part, and part
he denied.
That Patroclus should beat the battling
men from the ships

He granted, but refused to grant his safe
return
From the fight.

Now Achilles, when he had poured the
libation
And made his prayer to Father Zeus, re-
entered
His lodge and put the cup back in the
chest. Then
He came out and stood in front of the
door, for still
His heart was eager to witness the
awesome clash
Of Achaeans and Trojans.

Meanwhile, the bronze-armored men
Marched on with noble Patroclus, till
fiercely they charged

And hurled themselves on the Trojans.
Like wasps that nest
At the wayside and are forever
tormented by boys,
Who stir them up and make them a
menace to many,
So that when some traveler, going by,
unwittingly
Stirs them again, out they swarm in their
fury
Of heart to fight in defense of their
young, so now
With heart and spirit like theirs the
Myrmidons fell
On the Trojans, and unquenchable cries
went up. But the voice
Of valiant Patroclus was heard over all,
shouting:

“Myrmidon comrades of Peleus’ son
Achilles,
Be men, my friends, and remember your
powerful prowess,
That you may win honor for Peleus’ son,
your Prince,
Who by the ships is far the best of the
Argives,
As you are his able and excellent close-
fighting comrades.
Strike hard, I say, that Atreus’ son,
imperial
Agamemnon, may know how blind he
was to give
No honor at all to the bravest and best of
Achaeans!”

These words inspired them with

courage, and as they fell
All at once on the Trojan troops, the
ships re-echoed
Their terrible war-cries. And when the
Trojans caught sight
Of stalwart Patroclus, of him and his
comrade Automedon,
Both blazing in war-gear of bronze, the
heart of each man
Was disturbed, and all their battalions
were shaken, for now
They thought that Achilles the quick had
renounced his wrath
At the ships and chosen to help once
again. So each
Of the Trojans frantically glanced about
in search of
Some way to escape dire death.

Then Patroclus was first
To hurl a bright lance straight at the
mass of men
That moiled round the stern of the ship
of Protesilaus.
His victim was bold Pyraechmes, the
chief who had led
The horse-drawn Paeonians out of
Amydon, where flows
The wide-rippling Axios. He struck his
right shoulder, knocking him
Back in the dust with a groan, and about
him his comrades
Were routed, for when he killed their
superlative leader
Patroclus roused panic in all the fighting
Paeonians.

Thus he beat them back from the ships
and extinguished

The roaring flames, then left the half-
burnt vessel

Behind as the war-screaming Danaans
poured through the gaps

Between ships with fierce-yelling
Trojans retreating before them.

As when lightning-gathering Zeus rifts a
dark cloud

That enshrouds the crest of a towering
mountain, revealing

All peaks, high headlands, and even
ravines, as the light

Breaks through from the infinite aether,
even such was the moment

Of respite enjoyed by the Danaans when
they had extinguished

The ravenous fire. But still the battle
went on,
For the Trojans had not yet been turned
to headlong retreat
From the ships by the battle-lusty
Achaeans, but always
They tried to resist them, and only fell
back when they had to.

Then man accounted for man in the
scattered fight
As the battle chieftains paired off. First
brave Patroclus
Drove his sharp bronze clean through
Areilycus' thigh,
Just as he turned, and the spear broke the
bone and hurled him
Face down on the earth. And fierce

Menelaus thrust
His spear deep into the breast of Thoas,
where his flesh
Was uncovered by shield, and relaxed
his limbs in death.
And Phyleus' son Meges kept his eyes
fixed on Amphiclus
Ferociously charging, and proved too
quick for him
With a stab in the leg's thickest part,
where sinew and muscle
Were ripped and cut round the point of
the spear, so that darkness
Eclipsed his bright eyes. Then one of the
sons of Nestor,
Antilochus, jabbed his keen bronze at
Atymnius and drove
The spear through his side, pitching him

prone. But Maris,
His brother, rushed in a rage at
Antilochus and stood
In front of the corpse. Prince
Thrasymedes, however,
Another of Nestor's sons, was too quick
for him,
And well before Maris could thrust,
Thrasymedes pierced
His shoulder and tore the arm muscles
away and completely
Shattered the bone, felling the man with
a crash
And covering his eyes with darkness.
Thus brothers overcame
Brothers, who now descended to
Erebus, two brave

Lycian friends of Sarpedon and spear-
throwing sons of Amisodarus,
Who raised the raging Chimaera, the ruin
of so many.

And Ajax, son of Oileus, charged
Cleobulus
Caught still alive in a tangle of warring
men,

And there he undid his strength by a
blow on the neck

With his dark-hilted sword, whereat the
whole blade was left smoking

With blood, as purple death came down
on his eyes

And powerful fate embraced him. Then
Peneleos and Lycon,

Each missing the other with spear-casts,
charged together

With swords. And Lycon came down
very hard on the horn
Of the other's plumed helmet and broke
his blade off at the hilt,
But Peneleos sank his sword deep in his
enemy's neck
Just under the ear, and all but cut off his
head,
It hanging by nothing but skin, and the
limbs of Lycon
Were loosed. And Meriones swiftly
caught up with Acamas
And thrust his bronze into that leader's
right shoulder
At the moment he mounted his car,
hurling him hard
To the ground, where everything went

black. Then Idomeneus
Drove his ruthless bronze straight
through the mouth
Of Erymas and on beneath the man's
brain, splitting
Apart the white bones and knocking his
teeth out. Both eyes
Filled with blood, and gaping he spurted
and sprayed more blood
Through nostrils and mouth, till death's
black cloud enclosed him.

Thus each of these Danaan leaders
killed his man.
As ravenous wolves spring out on
terrified lambs
Or kids, when the flocks, through the
fault of some careless shepherd,

Are scattered about in the mountains, so
now the Danaans
Sprang on the Trojans, who no longer
thought of their furious
War-charge, but only of screaming
retreat.

And Ajax

The great was constantly eager to hurl
his spear
At huge bronze-helmeted Hector, but he,
in his knowledge
Of fighting, kept his broad shoulders
well covered with shield
Of enduring bull's-hide and always
stayed on the alert
For whistling arrows and whizzing
spears. He knew,

Of course, that the tide of battle was turning, but still

He stood fast in an effort to save his faithful comrades.

And as when Zeus overcasts the earth with storm

And clouds go forth from Olympus throughout the bright sky,

Even so the terrified screams of battle and rout

Arose from the Argive ships, nor was it with any

Small semblance of order that those harried Trojans retreated.

And Hector himself, with full armor on, now abandoned

The troops he had led, drawn away behind his fast horses,

While other less fortunate Trojans
struggled to get
Through the deep-dug ditch. There many
a pair of galloping,
Car-drawing horses broke off the shaft at
the base
And left the car of their master.

And Patroclus was hot
In pursuit, calling savagely out to the
Danaans and intending
The Trojans no good, who now in the
screaming terror
Of rout retraced their tracks on the plain,
their broken
Battalions stampeding beneath a huge
cover of dust
That spread out under the clouds as the

hard-hoofed horses

Ran at full speed away from the shelters
and ships

And back toward the city of Troy. And
Patroclus, yelling

His war-scream, directed his horses
wherever he saw

The thickest rout of retreating men, and
they

Kept going down beneath his chariot's
axles,

Pitching headlong from cars that
overturned

With clatter and clang. And the deathless
swift horses of Peleus,

Those glossy gifts of the gods, bore
brave Patroclus

Over the ditch at a bound, hurtling on

After Hector, whom always Patroclus
was eager to strike,
But his horses too were swift and kept
him ahead.

As when on an autumn day Zeus darkens
the earth

With storm clouds and sends the gale-
driven rain beating down,

He being in wrath against men for
crooked decrees

They have made in the heat of assembly,
driving out justice

And giving no thought to the vengeance
of gods, and all

Their rivers flood over in spate,
washing great gullies

In every hillside, as down from the

mountains they roar

To the dark-blue sea, wrecking the
farmers' tilled fields:

Even so awesome and deafening now
was the roar

Of Trojan horses galloping on toward
the city.

But when Patroclus had headed off the
retreat,

He turned the leading battalions back
toward the ships,

Nor would he allow them, in spite of
their frenzy, to get

Within the town walls. And there in the
space between ships

And the river and high wall of Troy, he
rode in among them

And killed right and left, thus taking his
vengeance for many
Dead comrades. The first to fall was
Pronous, pierced
With a cast of Patroclus' bright spear,
hitting deep in the chest
At a spot uncovered by shield, and his
limbs relaxed
In death as he crashed to the ground.
Next he charged down
On Enops' son Thestor, who huddled
and cringed in his chariot,
Terrified out of his wits and no longer
holding
The reins. Patroclus approached and
jabbed his spear
Through this man's right jaw and on
through his teeth. Then

gripping

The shaft he hoisted him over the rail
and out of

The car, as a man out on a projection of
rock,

Angling with line and glittering hook,
hauls in

A huge fish from the sea. Even so
Patroclus heaved Thestor,

Impaled on the glittering bronze, up out
of the car

And flopped him down on his face, and
life took leave

Of him as he fell. Then, as Erylaus ran at
him,

He struck him full on the head with a
stone, splitting

His skull within the deep helmet and
dropping him prone
In the dust, where heartbreaking death
engulfed him. And then,
One after the other, he fought with
Erymas, Amphoterus,
And Epaltes, Damastor's son
Tlepolemus, Echius,
Pyris, and Ipheus, Euippus, and Argeas'
son
Polymelus, and each of them he stretched
out in death
On the bountiful earth.

But when Sarpedon saw
His godlike comrades, Lycians with
unbelted tunics,
Being thus overwhelmed by Patroclus,

son of Menoetius,
He shouted these words of reproach:
“For shame, O Lycians,
Disgraceful! and where are you off to,
running so swiftly?
Now I myself will confront this man and
find out
Who he is who proves so vastly too
much for you all,
Having loosed the knees of many
excellent warriors
And done the Trojans much damage.”

So saying, he sprang
Fully armed from his car to the ground.
And Patroclus, opposite
Him, saw and did likewise. And now,
like a pair

Of crook-clawed, bent-beaked vultures
that fight with harsh screams
High up on a rock, these two charged
screaming together.

And Zeus, the son of devious Cronos,
saw them

And felt compassion, and thus he spoke
to Hera,

His sister and wife:

“Ah, miserable me! since the man
I love most, Sarpedon my son, is fated to
die

At the hands of Patroclus, son of
Menoetius. And now

As I ponder I cannot decide whether I
shall snatch him

Up yet alive and set him down far away

From weeping war in the rich land of
Lycia, or whether
Now I shall let him go down at the hands
of Patroclus.”

And heifer-eyed regal Hera answered
him thus:

“Most dreadful son of Cronos, what are
you saying!

Can it be that you really wish to deliver
a mortal,

One long fore-destined by fate, from
dolorous death?

Well do as you like, but don't suppose
for one moment

That all of us like what you do! And
here's something else

You'll do well to remember. If you do

send Sarpedon alive

To his home, don't be surprised when
some other god

Wishes to take his own dear son away
From the horrible conflict. For fighting
around the great city

Of Priam are many sons of the gods, and
you

Will surely stir up fierce resentment
among the immortals.^{[8](#)}

But if the man is really so dear to your
heart,

And if you are really so deeply grieved
at his fate,

Why go ahead and allow him to fall and
die

At the hands of Patroclus down there in

the bloody encounter.

Then, when his years are over and his
soul gone forever,
Send Death and care-lulling Sleep, that
they may bear him
Away to the wide land of Lycia. There
his brothers
And kinsfolk will give him the dead's
due rites, a proper
Entombment, with mound and memorial
pillar.”

She spoke,
Nor was she ignored by the Father of
men and gods.
Yet he wept a shower of bloody tears on
earth
In honor of his dear son, whom Patroclus

was soon

To kill in the fertile land of the Trojans,
far away

From his own dear country.

Now as they came within range,
Patroclus threw and hit Thrasymelus, the
able

Squire of Sarpedon, the spear going
deep in his gut

And loosing his limbs forever. But
Sarpedon's bright spear

Missed its mark and struck the right
shoulder of the trace-horse

Pedasmus,

Who frantically whinnied as down in the
dust he thudded.

Choking, he gasped out his life, and his

spirit took flight.

But the other two horses shied apart,
creaking

The yoke and tangling the reins, while
the trace-horse lay dead

In the dust. Then spear-famed
Automedon found what to do.

Whipping out his long sword from
beside his big thigh, he leaped

To the ground and quickly cut the horse
loose, and the other two

Came together and pulled at the yoke
once more,

As again the two warriors charged in
heart-eating hatred.

But again Sarpedon's bright spear
missed its mark, and the
point

Hurtled over Patroclus' left shoulder
without even grazing
The flesh. Then Patroclus in turn came
on with the bronze,
And not at all vainly did that spear fly
from his hand,
For it struck where the midriff encloses
the quick-throbbing heart.
And Sarpedon fell as an oak or poplar
or lofty pine
Falls when men in the mountains cut
them down
With keen axes to furnish timber for
ships. So now,
In front of his horses and car, Sarpedon
lay groaning,
Stretched out on the earth and clutching

at the bloody dust.

And as when a lion brings down a
glossy red bull,

Springing into the midst of the shuffling
cattle, and the fiery bull

Struggles and bellows as he dies in the
jaws of his foe,

Even so did the leader of shield-bearing
Lycians gasp out

Defiance in death at the hands of
Patroclus, calling out

Thus in his throes on the name of his
cherished comrade:

“Good Glaucus, great fighting man
among men, now truly

Your skill with the spear and boldness
in battle are needed!

Now, if indeed you are eager to fight, let
war,
Evil war be the chief desire of your
heart. But first
Go up and down through the Lycian host
and urge
All the leaders to fight for Sarpedon, and
then put your own
Bright bronze into action, fighting in my
defense.
For if now the Achaeans strip me of
armor out here
In front of the drawn-up ships, I shall be
a disgrace
To you and a hanging down of the head
for as long a
You live. So come, hold your ground
like a man, and urge on

All of the others.”

As thus he spoke, dark death.
Came over his eyes and nostrils alike.
Then Patroclus,
Planting a foot on his chest, jerked the
spear from his flesh,
And the midriff followed the spearhead,
so that he drew out
Together his keen-cutting bronze and the
warrior's soul.
Meanwhile, the Myrmidons held
Sarpedon's hard-snorting
Horses, who panicked and reared, now
that their car
Was left empty.

When he heard the cry of Sarpedon,
the heart

Of Glaucus was filled with unspeakable
grief, since he
Was unable to succor his friend. He
caught and gripped
His arm hard, for his wound still
throbbed with pain, the wound
That Teucer, keeping off death from his
comrades, had made
With an arrow as Glaucus charged the
high wall. Then praying,
He made this plea to Apollo, who
strikes from afar:

“O listen, my lord, to me, you that
roam
Through the rich land of Lycia or else
here in Troy, and can
Everywhere well hear a mortal in pain,

such a mortal

As now Glaucus is. For I am sorely
afflicted

With this grievous wound, and the sharp
pangs shoot through my arm,

Nor will it stop bleeding. My shoulder
above it is heavy

And aching, and I am no longer able to
grip

My spear firmly or go out and fight with
the foe. And now

The bravest of men is dead, Sarpedon
himself,

The son of Zeus, who would not protect
his own child.

But you, my lord, heal this terrible
wound—

Lull the pain and give me strength, that I

May encourage my Lycian comrades to
fight for Sarpedon
And that I myself may battle about the
body
Of him now fallen and dead.”

Thus he prayed,
And Phoebus Apollo heard him. At once
he relieved
His sharp pain, staunched the flow of
dark blood that ran
From the horrible wound, and put in his
heart new courage.
And Glaucus knew what had happened
and deeply rejoiced
That the great god Apollo had answered
his prayer so promptly.
First he ranged up and down throughout

all the Lycians,
Exhorting the leaders to fight for their
fallen chief,
And then he strode rapidly into the
Trojan troops
To Panthous' son Polydamas and noble
Agenor,
And on to Aeneas and bronze-armored
Hector, by whom
He stood and spoke, and his words came
winged with entreaty:

“Hector, now surely you altogether
neglect
Your allies, men who are fighting and
dying on your
Account, far from their friends and the
land of their fathers.

Even so, you don't care to help them.
Now low lies Sarpedon,
High leader of shield-bearing Lycians,
he that ruled Lycia
With justice and strength. Him brazen
Ares has dashed
In the dust beneath the spear of
Patroclus. But come,
My friends, go with me, and share my
fear of the shame
That will be if the Myrmidons strip off
his armor and do
Vile things to his corpse, they being in
terrible wrath
For Danaans dead, men whom we killed
with our spears
Here at the ships."

At these words the Trojans were
seized

With grief overwhelming, unbearable
sorrow, for Sarpedon

Had long been a pillar of strength to
their city, though he

Was no native of Troy. For with him
came many men,

And of them all he was the greatest in
battle.

So the Trojans charged straight at the
Danaans, eager for slaughter,

And Hector led the attack, in wrath for
Sarpedon.

But shaggy-hearted Patroclus urged on
the Achaeans,

Savagely shouting thus to the two

Ajaxes,
Who scarcely needed his urging:

“Be fierce, you two,
In fighting the foe! Be the men you’ve
always been
Among fighters, or even more deadly.
Low lies Sarpedon,
The first man to breach the Achaean
wall. Let us charge, then,
And strip his shoulders of armor and do
vile things
To his corpse, and let us cut down with
the ruthless bronze
Any man of his comrades who makes an
attempt to defend him.”

He spoke, but they were already eager
for action.

And when both sides had ordered and
strengthened their forces,
Trojans and Lycians opposing Achaeans
and Myrmidons,
They clashed with-awesome screams
and strident ringing
Of armor to fight for the body of him
now fallen.
And to make the battle-toil even more
baneful, Zeus spread
Murderous darkness all over the bloody
encounter.

At first the Trojans thrust back the
quick-eyed Achaeans,
For down went a man by no means the
worst of the Myrmidons,
Namely the son of spirited Agacles,

shining

Epeigeus, who once had ruled over
pleasant Budeum,

Till having killed a noble near kinsman
of his

He came as a suppliant straight to king
Peleus and Thetis

Of the silver feet, and they had sent him
to Troy

Along with rank-smashing Achilles, that
he too might fight

The Trojans. Now just as he laid his
hands on the corpse,

Resplendent Hector came down on his
head with a stone,

Splitting his skull within the thick helmet
and dropping him

Prone in the dust as heartbreaking death

engulfed him.

Then grief for his slaughtered comrade
came over Patroclus,

And he charged through the front rank of
warriors fast as a hawk

In flight, when the swift bird drives
before him the jackdaws

And starlings. Even so straight, O
Patroclus, commander

Of horsemen, you charged on the Lycians
and Trojans, wrathful

At heart on account of your comrade
slain. And he struck

Ithaemenes' dearly loved son Sthenelaus
hard

On the neck with a stone, tearing the
tendons away.

Then the front-fighting champions and
glorious Hector fell back.

They fell back as far as a lengthy
javelin flies

When a man in a contest or life-
wrecking battle tests

His might in a distance throw. So far and
no farther

The Trojans retreated before the
charging Achaeans.

Glaucus, brave leader of shield-bearing
Lycians, was first

To whirl round, and whirling he brought
down magnanimous Bathycles,

Chalcon's dear son, whose home was in
Hellas, where thriving

He had been one of the wealthiest

Myrmidon lords.

Turning suddenly on him as he was
about to catch up,

Strong Glaucus pierced his chest with a
spear and sent him

Crashing to earth. And heavy grief came
over

The hearts of Achaeans at the fall of so
splendid a man,

But the Trojans rejoicing, with courage
renewed, quickly rallied

About the dead Myrmidon.

Nor did the Achaeans give up,

But still came on straight at the foe. Then
Meriones

Killed a helmeted Trojan, Onetor's bold
son

Laogonus, a priest of Idaean Zeus, one
honored
Like a god by the people. Him Meriones
pierced
Beneath the jaw and ear, and quickly his
spirit took leave
Of his limbs and abhorrent darkness
seized him. Aeneas
Now hurled his bronze at Meriones,
hoping to hit him
As on he came under cover of shield.
But Meriones,
Looking straight at him, avoided the
bronze by ducking
Forward, and Aeneas' long lance, flying
vainly forth
From his powerful hand, embedded
itself in the ground

Behind its intended victim, where the
butt-end quivered
Till finally hulking Ares stilled its fury.

Aeneas, then, shouted in anger:
“Meriones, surely
You are an agile dancer, but if my spear
Had found its mark your dancing days
would have ended,
I think, forever!”

To which spear-famous Meriones:
“Very hard it would be, Aeneas, strong
though you are,
To quench the life of every man who
confronts you.
You too, I suppose, are mortal. Hence if
I cast
And vitally wound you with my keen

bronze, very quickly,
In spite of your strength and the faith you
have in your hands,
You would give glory to me and your
miserable soul
To horse-famous Hades!”

He vaunted, but valiant Patroclus
Rebuked him, saying: “Meriones, why
would a brave
Fighting man like yourself make such a
speech? Good friend,
Our insults will never drive any of those
Trojans back
From the body. Their own bloody
corpses will litter the ground
Far sooner. Victory in battle still lies in
the might

Of our hands, while words are for men
in council. Hence
As a soldier it does not become you to
multiply words,
But only and always to fight!”

So saying, he led
And the other, godlike, followed. And as
when a thudding
And crashing goes up from mountain
ravines where woodsmen
Are felling tall trees, and the din is
heard in the distance,
So now about them a loud noise arose
from the much trampled
Earth, a clanging of bronze and
hammered hide shields,
As they smote each other with swords

and two-pointed spears.

Nor could the best eyes in the world
have still recognized

Sarpedon, so thick was the covering of
missiles, blood

And dust that lay on his body from head
to foot.

And warriors thronged round the corpse
as numerous quite

As flies that drone through a dairy when
spring has come

And fresh milk drenches the foaming full
vessels and pails.

Even so, they swarmed round the corpse.

Meanwhile, Zeus

Never once turned his eyes away from
the horrible struggle,

But kept looking down on the fighters,
pondering much
In his heart concerning the death of
Patroclus, whether there
In the battle Prince Hector should hew
him down with the bronze
And strip his shoulders of armor, or
whether for still
More men he should cause to increase
the terrible toil
Of war. And as he pondered, one way
seemed better,
To let the brave friend of Achilles once
again drive
Toward the city the Trojan troops and
bronze-armored Hector,
And thus take many more lives.

So first he made Hector
Afraid and, panicking, he leaped up on
his car
And wheeled round to run, calling out on
the rest of the Trojans
To follow and flee, for Hector saw
clearly which way
Zeus' sacred balance was tipping. And
the mighty Lycians
No longer stood fast, but all of them ran
in retreat,
Having seen their King lying dead with a
spear in his heart,
Dead in a huge heap of dead, for many
had fallen
Upon him as Zeus strained taut the
horrible strife.

Then from Sarpedon's shoulders the
Achaean stripped off
The glittering bronze, which valiant
Patroclus gave
To his comrades to carry back to the
hollow ships.
And now to Apollo cloud-gathering Zeus
spoke thus:

“Up if you will, loved Phoebus, and go
lift Sarpedon
From under that hailing of spears and
wipe from his body
The cloud-black blood. Then carry him
far away
And wash him well in the silvery rills of
a river,
Anoint his flesh with ambrosia, and

clothe him all

In the fragrant garments of gods. Having
done as I ask you,

Give him to Sleep and Death, the swift
twin brothers,

To carry, that they may quickly set him
down

In the fertile wide land of Lycia. There
his brothers

And kinsfolk will give him the dead's
due rites, a proper

Entombment, with mound and memorial
pillar.”⁹

He spoke,

And Apollo did not disregard the voice
of his Father,

But down he came from the mountains of

Ida and entered
The grim confusion of fighting. Quickly
he lifted
Sarpedon from under the hailing of
spears, and when
He had carried him far away from
ruinous war,
He washed him well in the silvery rills
of a river,
Anointed his flesh with ambrosia, and
clothed him all
In the fragrant garments of gods. Having
done these things,
He gave him to Sleep and Death, the
swift twin brothers,
To carry, and very quickly they set him
down
In the fertile wide land of Lycia.

Then Patroclus, calling
Commands to the horses and to
Automedon, drove
In pursuit of the Trojans and Lycians,
blind foolhardy child
That he was! For had he obeyed the
careful orders
Of Peleus' son Achilles, he surely
would then
Have escaped the miserable doom of
murky death.
But always God's will is stronger by far
than man's.
Great Zeus can make the bravest fighter
retreat.
And easily keep him from winning,
especially when

He inspires another to fight like fury
against him.

And now it was surely Zeus who filled
with blind force

The spirit of gallant Patroclus.

Then who was the first
And who was the last you slew and
stripped, O Patroclus,
That day when the gods invited you
deathwards? Adrastus
Was first, then Autonos and Echeclus,
and Megas' son Perimus,
Epistor, and Melanippus, followed by
Elasus, Mulius,
And Pylartes. From these he took life
away, and all
The others decided to flee.

Then indeed would the sons
Of Achaeans, led on by raging Patroclus,
have taken
Tall-gated Troy, for all around him
Patroclus
Killed with his spear. But Phoebus
Apollo stood firm
On the well-built wall, intending
destruction for him,
But only good for the Trojans. Three
times Patroclus
Sprang up on an angle of that lofty wall,
and three times
Apollo battered him back¹⁰ by dint of
blows
From his own deathless hands, striking
hard against the bright

shield.

But when like a demon he charged a fourth time, then

With a terrible cry Apollo spoke these winged words:

“Fall back! Zeus-descended Patroclus. It is not fated

That by your spear this town of the gifted Trojans

Shall be laid waste, nor even by that of Achilles,

A man far better than you!”

Before the dread voice
Patroclus fell back a long way, avoiding
the wrath

Of far-darting Apollo.

Meanwhile, Hector was holding

His solid-hoofed horses in check at the
Scaean Gates,
Unable to make up his mind whether he
should drive
Once again out into the hubbub of battle,
or whether
Now he should order the Trojan troops
to gather
Within the thick wall. As he pondered,
divided, Apollo
Came up to him there in the guise of a
man young and strong,
Even Asius, horse-breaking Hector's
uncle, own brother
Of Hecuba and son of Dymas, whose
home was in Phrygia
Close by the river Sangarius. Looking
exactly

Like him, Apollo, son of Zeus, spoke
thus

To the Trojan chieftain:

“Why is it, Hector, that you
Are no longer fighting? Such idleness
hardly becomes you!

Were I as much stronger as I am weaker
than you,

You would soon regret this drawing
away from the battle.

But come, drive out at Patroclus these
strong-hoofed horses

Of yours, and see if Apollo will grant
you the glory

Of bringing that great fighter down.”

So saying, the god
Re-entered the tumult of toiling mortals.

And Hector,
Resplendent, gave orders to fiery
Cebriones to lash
The team into battle. Meanwhile,
Apollo, back
In the turmoil of slaughter, spread mid
the slashing Argives
Evil confusion and gave the glory to
Trojans
And Hector. But Hector, ignoring all
other Danaans,
Did not attempt to kill any of them, but
drove
His strong-hoofed horses straight and
fast at Patroclus,
Who opposite him leaped down from his
car to the ground
With a spear in his left hand, while with

his right he caught up
A hand-fitting stone, jagged and
sparkling. Then,
With no long awe of Hector, he hurled it
with all
Of his weight in the throw, nor did he
hurl in vain,
For the sharp stone hit Hector's driver
Cebriones, bastard
Son of world-famous Priam, hit him
squarely
Between the eyes as he held the reins of
the horses,
Bashing the bone in, bringing both of his
brows together
And dropping his eyes in the dust below
his feet.

And like a diver he pitched from the
well-made car
As life took leave of his bones forever.
Then,
O horseman Patroclus, you shouted these
mocking words:

“Aha! what a fine acrobat that warrior
is!
What a really superb somersault! Truly,
if he
Were out on the fish-full sea, he could
bring up bushels
Of oysters, no matter how rough the
water, leaping in
From the deck of his ship as now he
turns flips from his
chariot

Here on the plain. I had no idea they had
Such performers in Troy!”[11](#)

With this he charged at the fallen
Cebriones with a spring like that of a
wounded lion,
A beast undone by his own fierce heart,
that gets
A spear in the chest while raiding a
cattle-pen.
Even so on Cebriones, O Patroclus, you
sprang
In your fury. And opposite him huge
Hector leaped down
From his car to the ground, and the pair
squared off to fight
For the corpse, quite like a couple of
lions that high

Mid the peaks of a mountain contend for
a slaughtered stag,
Both equally hungry and savage of heart.
So now
For Cebriones those two masters of
combat, Patroclus,
Son of Menoetius, and all-shining
Hector, were eager
To gash each other's flesh with the
pitiless bronze.
But Hector had hold of the corpse by the
head and would not
Let go, and Patroclus held fast to one
foot, while around them
The others, Trojans and Danaans, pitted
their powers
In battle. And as the East Wind and the
South compete

With each other at tossing the trees in a
thick-wooded glen
Of the mountains, a forest of beech and
ash and smooth-barked
Cornel trees, the long boughs of which
strike against one another
With a fearful noise of knocking and
breaking branches,
So now the Achaeans and Trojans
clashed man to man
And struck deadly blows left and right,
nor would either side think
Of disastrous retreat. All around
Cebriones' body
Keen-pointed spears stuck up in the
earth, and the ground
Fairly bristled with feathered arrows

that eagerly sprang
From the bowstrings. And many huge
stones bashed into the shields
As the warriors battled about him. But
Cebriones lay
In the swirling dust, forgetful of chariot-
skill,
Though mighty even in death.

Now as long as the Sun
Climbed up toward mid-heaven, the
missiles of both sides struck
home,
And the warriors fell. But when he
turned toward the time
When oxen are loosed from the yoke, [ax](#)
then the Achaeans,
In a manner surpassing their lot and

power, proved stronger.

Dragging Cebriones from under the
missiles

And away from the screaming Trojans,
they stripped his shoulders

Of armor, but Patroclus returned for
more fierce fighting.

Ferociously now he charged on the
Trojans. Three times

This peer of the fast-fighting War-god
sprang at the foe,

Yelling his blood-chilling cry, and three
times he slaughtered

Nine men. But when like a demon he
charged a fourth time,

Then at last, O Patroclus, the end of your
life came in sight. [ay](#)

For there in the mighty struggle Apollo
came at you,
An awesome grim god indeed! And he
was unseen
By Patroclus as on through the turmoil he
came in a thick
Cloud of mist. Then standing behind him,
Apollo struck
His back and broad shoulders hard with
the flat of his hand,
Whirling the eyes of Patroclus. Off came
his high-crested
Helmet and rolled with a clang mid the
horses' feet,
And the plumes were smirched with
blood and dust. Never
Before had this been allowed, to foul
with dust

That horsehair-crested helmet, for
always before
It guarded the head and handsome brow
of the son
Of a goddess, Achilles himself But now
Zeus allowed it
To come into Hector's possession, that
he might wear it
The little while he yet had to live on
earth.
And in Patroclus' hands the long-
shadowing, bronze-pointed
Spear, though huge and heavy and strong,
was broken
To pieces, and from his shoulders the
tasseled shield
With its baldric fell in the dust, as lord

Apollo,
Son of Zeus, stripped off his breastplate.
Then,
His mind dazed and his splendid body
unable to move,
He stood in a stupor, till a young
Dardanian struck him
Between the shoulders with a short
spear-cast from behind,
Even Panthous' son Euphorbus, he who
surpassed
All fighters his age as a spearman,
horseman, and runner,
And who had already hurled twenty
warriors down
From their cars at this his first time with
a chariot, fighting
In actual combat. He it was, O knightly

Patroclus, who first got his bronze in
your flesh. But when
You remained on your feet, he jerked the
ash spear from your
body
And lost himself in the throng. For
Euphorbus had no
Intention of facing Patroclus in that fiery
fight,
Completely unarmed though he was.

Now Patroclus, stunned
And weak from the blow of Apollo and
wound of the spear,
Fell back mid a crowd of his comrades,
avoiding sure death.
But Hector, aware that great-souled
Patroclus was wounded

And drawing back, charged down on
him through the ranks
And drove his bronze-headed spear
clean through his lower
Belly and back, and Patroclus fell with a
dull,
Disheartening thud, filling the host of
Achaeans
With horror and grief As a lion at last
gets the best
Of a weariless boar, when the two most
savagely fight
Mid the peaks of a mountain for one
small pool of water
Which both are thirsty to drink from—
the wheezing, obstreperous
Boar fights hard, but the lion is stronger
and wins—

So now from Menoetius' brave son,
after he had himself
Slain many, Priam's son Hector took the
life,
Standing right by him and thrusting him
through with his spear.
Then he spoke these words, harsh and
winged with vaunting:

“Patroclus, you thought, I suppose, that
you would level
Our city, then take all freedom away
from the women
Of Troy and carry them back in your
ships to your own
Dear country, poor infantile fool that you
are! In defense
Of those women Hector's fast horses go

galloping forth

To the fight, where I surpass with the
spear all other

War-loving Trojans, I that keep from my
people

The hard day of doom. As for you,
vultures shall pick

Your bones right here. Ah miserable
wretch! not even

Achilles, for all his great prowess,
could help you, he

That remained in the camp, but gave you
careful instruction,

I'm sure, saying, as forth you sallied:
'Do not

Come back to these hollow ships, O
Patroclus, commander

Of horsemen, until you have torn the

tunic on murderous
Hector's breast and soaked it red with
his blood!'

Ah yes, I can hear him saying it now, and
you

Were the miserable fool he persuaded!"

Then very feebly,
O dying Patroclus, you answered him
thus: "For this time,

Hector, make your high vaunt, for
Cronos' son Zeus

And Apollo have given you victory,
though they themselves

Are the ones who broke me and stripped
my shoulders of armor.

Not twenty Hectors could ever have
done it, but all

Would surely have died on this plain
beneath my long spear.

Pernicious fate in the form of Apollo
slew me,

And a man named Euphorbus—while
Hector came third in my
slaying.^{[12](#)}

And here's something else that you
will do well to remember:

Namely, that you yourself are not very
long

For this life, since death and powerful
fate are standing

Beside you even now, and they will
surely

See to it that you go down in death at the
hands

Of mighty Achilles, Aeacus' matchless grandson.”

As thus he spoke, the final end arrived,
And his soul flew forth from his body
and journeyed to Hades,
Bewailing her lot as one too soon bereft
Of youth and manly vigor. And now to
the corpse
Of his foe, all-shining Hector spoke
thus:

“Patroclus,
Why do you prophesy my sheer ruin?
Who knows
But that Achilles, though son of fair-
haired Thetis,
May first lose his life to me and become
a spear-victim

Of mine?"

So saying, he put one foot on the
corpse

And wrenched the bronze head from the
wound, shoving the body

Back from the spear. And at once he
took off with the weapon

In pursuit of Automedon, godlike squire
of Achilles

The swift, for Hector was eager to bring
him down too.

But the horses Automedon drove kept
him ahead,

The deathless swift horses of Peleus,
bright gifts of the gods.

BOOK XVII

The Valiant Deeds of Menelaus

Now King Menelaus, beloved of Ares,
saw
That in the hot struggle Trojans had slain
Patroclus,
And armored in flaming bronze he
charged through the front rank
Of fighters and took his stand, bestriding
the corpse
Of his comrade, as over her first-born
calf a cow stands
Plaintively lowing. So now tawny-

haired Menelaus

Stood over Patroclus, holding his spear
and round shield

At the ready, raging to kill whoever
might come

Against him.

And Panthous' son Euphorbus, he
Of the tough ashen spear, was also well
aware

That peerless Patroclus had fallen, and
coming up close

He spoke these words to Ares-loved
Menelaus:

“Atrides, nurtured of Zeus, commander
of armies,

Fall back and leave the body and leave,
I say,

The bloody war-gear. For none before
me of the Trojans
And their far-famous allies got a spear
in Patroclus
In this huge battle. Therefore, allow me
to finish
My triumph and win great renown in the
city of Troy,
Or I with one throw will deprive you of
honey-sweet life!”

Then deeply angered, tawny Menelaus
replied:
“Great God almighty! how poor a thing
arrogance is!
Of course no leopard or lion or even
ferocious
Wild boar, most mighty and savage of

beasts, has anything
Like the fierce spirit of Panthous' sons,
men
Of the tough ashen spear. Maybe so, but
the strong Hyperenor, [az](#)
Panthous' horse-breaking son, got very
little
From his short life, once he had made
light of my prowess
And stood up against me, thinking that I
was the weakest
Of Danaan warriors. It was not, I say, on
feet
Of his own that he went back to gladden
the heart
Of his darling wife and delight his
excellent parents.

Nor will I fail to undo your strength,
Euphorbus,
If now you stay and confront me. But I
myself warn you
Not to do so, but lose yourself in the
crowd
Before you suffer disaster. Once it
occurs,
It will be too late for you not to play the
fool!”

He spoke, but words brought only this
from Euphorbus:
“Now indeed, O god-fed King
Menelaus, you shall pay
Every jot of the price for my brother,
about whose death
It seems you’re still bragging. And truly

you are the blackguard
Who widowed his bride, withdrawn in
her new bridal chamber,
And heaped indescribable anguish and
grief on his parents.
But now I've a chance to soften their
sorrow, if only
I bring your head and bloody armor and
toss them
Proudly in Panthous' hands and in those
of his wife,
The beautiful Phrontis. But on with the
fight! It will not
Take long to decide it and see whose
strength will be first
To give in."

So saying, he stabbed the round shield.

But instead
Of the bronze tearing on through, the
point was turned
By the sturdy buckler. Then Atreus' son
Menelaus
Lunged with his spear, praying to Father
Zeus.
And as Euphorbus fell back, he plunged
his bronze in
At the pit of his throat, with faith in his
beefy hand
And all of his weight behind it, and the
point passed clean
Through Euphorbus' soft neck, sending
him crashing to earth
With a ringing of armor about him.
Warm blood now ran through
His hair, which had been like the hair of

the Graces, braided
And bound with silver and gold and
gathered in
As a wasp is. And like a lusty young
olive tree
That a man tries to grow in a lonely
place, where water
Plentifully burbles, a slender flourishing
sapling
That sways with all of the breezes that
blow and puts out
Lovely white blossoms, till all at once a
hurricane
Comes and tearing it up from its trench
lays it out
Undone on the earth, even such was
Euphorbus, he

Of the tough ashen spear, whom Atreus'
son Menelaus
Stretched out in death and started to strip
of his armor.

And as when a mountain-bred lion
with trust in his brawn
Springs on the choicest heifer in all of a
grazing
Herd and snaps her neck in his powerful
jaws,
Then gulps her entrails and laps his fill
of her blood,
While at a safe distance around him the
hounds and herdsman
Raise a great racket but lack the courage
to come
Any nearer, since olive-pale fear grips

all of them hard,
So now not one of the Trojans dared go
and face
Renowned Menelaus. Hence quite
simply would he
Have carried away the glorious gear of
Euphorbus,
If Phoebus Apollo had not begrudged
him the spoils,
And so, in the form of Mentes, a leader
among
The Cicones, stirred up huge Hector
against him, approaching
That peer of the fast-fighting War-god
and speaking to him
In these winged words:

“Hector, you race after what

You can never attain, the horses of fire-souled Achilles.

Besides, no mere mortal can well control those horses.

Only Achilles can, for he is the son
Of an immortal mother. Meanwhile,
warlike Menelaus

Stands over Patroclus and has already
cut down

The best of the Trojans, Panthous' son
Euphorbus,

Whose furious war-charge has now been
ended forever!"

So saying, the god re-entered the
tumult of mortals.

But Hector's heart was packed with
darkest torment,

As he looked across the ranks and
quickly spotted
King Menelaus stripping the glorious
war-gear
From dead Euphorbus, stretched out on
the ground with blood
Still running down from the horrible
spear-wound. Then Hector
Strode out through the foremost fighters,
armored in flaming
Bronze and screaming his awesome
war-cry, a man
Like the flame of Hephaestus, not easily
quenched. Nor did
Menelaus fail to hear that heart-piercing
cry,
And now deeply troubled he spoke to his
own great heart:

“Ah miserable me! if I should leave
behind me

This exquisite bronze and Patroclus too,
who lies here

Fallen in my behalf, then surely every
Danaan fighter who sees me will show
his contempt.

But if, upholding my honor, I stand all
alone

To do battle with Hector and other
Trojans, I'm afraid

They'll surround me, their many against
my one, for now

Bright-helmeted Hector is leading all of
the Trojans

This way. Why, then, do I argue thus
with myself?

Any man at all who insists on fighting
another

Whom God himself sponsors, quickly
brings on his head

A great wave of woe. Therefore, no
Danaan fighter

Who sees me fall back before Hector
will blame me one bit,

Since surely Hector's strength comes
directly from God.

Even so, if only I might find powerful
Ajax,

Good at the shrill battle-scream, we two
could turn

And regain our stomach for fighting,
even though we did it

In God's despite, still hoping and trying
to win

For Peleus' son Achilles the corpse of his friend.

So something, at least, would be saved.”^{[1](#)}

While he so pondered
In mind and heart, the Trojan troops
came on
With Hector leading. And now Menelaus
retreated,
Leaving the corpse and turning from side
to side,
Like a bearded lion that dogs and angry
men
Drive from a cattle-pen, hurling their
spears and shouting
Till his heart so valiant before soon
freezes with fear,

And reluctantly he goes forth, leaving the
farmyard.

So now from Patroclus went tawny
Menelaus. But when

He reached the mass of his men, he
turned and stood,

Looking all over for great Telamonian
Ajax.

Quickly he saw him on the far left flank
of the battle,

Cheering his men and urging them on in
the fight,

For Phoebus Apollo had filled them with
panic. Menelaus

Took off at a run and soon he came up to
him, saying:

“Ajax, good friend, come with me, and

let the two of us
Hurry to fight for the dead Patroclus, that
we
May at least carry back his corpse to
Achilles—his naked
Corpse, for already bright-helmeted
Hector has taken
The armor!”

These words deeply stirred huge
flame-hearted Ajax,
Who rapidly strode away through the
front rank of champions
With tawny Menelaus beside him. Now
Hector had finished
The stripping of dead Patroclus and was
at that moment
Dragging the corpse to where he could

cut off the head

With his keen-bladed bronze and give
the trunk to the lean dogs

Of Troy. But when Ajax approached
him, bearing his shield

Like a tower, Hector fell back, merged
with his men,

And leaped on his chariot. First, though,
he gave the exquisite

A armor to comrades of his, that they
might carry it

Into the city to be his most glorious
trophy.

Meanwhile, Ajax stood over Patroclus,
covering

Him with his huge broad shield,
bestriding him there

Like a lioness over her cubs, one that

hunters

Have met as through the forest she leads
her litter,

And that, in the pride of her power,
lowers her brows

Till her eyes are mere slits as she awaits
their attack.

Even so, great Ajax bestrode heroic
Patroclus,

And by him stood Atreus' son Menelaus,
who,

Though the War-god's favorite, was
seething with still-growing sorrow.

Then Glaucus, Hippolochus' son and
leader of Lycians,

Scowled darkly at Hector and harshly
berated him thus:

“Hector, your looks are surely
impressive enough,
But a fight finds you wanting. It seems
that your great reputation
Belongs to one who is really a cowardly
turntail!
Just ask yourself how you intend to save
your city
And home with no other help than that
provided
By native-born Trojans. For at least not
one of the Lycians
Will fight any longer to save your town
from the Danaans,
Since now we know there were never to
be any thanks
At all for our ceaseless efforts against
the foe.

For how, O stone-hearted one, how in
the heat

Of battle would you ever help any
ordinary soldier

When here you have left Sarpedon, your
guest and your friend,

To be the Argives' victim and spoil?
And Sarpedon

Was one to whom you owed much, both
your whole city

And you, though now you lack the
courage to keep

The dogs from his body. Therefore, if
the Lycians will listen

To me, we'll all go home and leave your
city

To certain and utter destruction. But if

only there were
In the Trojans that dauntless, unshakable
valor that should
Possess men who labor and fight in
defense of their country,
Then we right quickly would drag
Patroclus to Ilium.
And if we should do so, haling his body
from battle
And into King Priam's great city, the
Argives would soon
Return the splendid war-gear of
Sarpedon, and then
We would bring into Ilium his body too.
For the man
About whom we fight was the friend of a
very great soldier,
By far the best of all Argives here with

the ships

And the leader of truly superior close-fighting troops.

But you most lamentably lacked what it takes to stand

Face to face with huge-hearted Ajax and look him straight

In the eyes and do battle with him in the fiery midst

Of war-screaming men, for he is much stronger than you! ”²

Then scowling at him, bright-helmeted Hector replied:

“Glaucus, why would such a man as you are say anything

So uncalled for? Truly, good friend, I thought you

The wisest of all who live in rich-
landed Lycia.

But now I would not give a straw for
your understanding,

Since you have accused me of running
from monstrous Ajax.

Believe me, I'm not one who shudders at
bloody battle

Nor at thundering horses. But always
God's will is stronger

By far than man's. Aegis-great Zeus can
make

The bravest fighter retreat and easily
keep him

From winning, especially when he
inspires another

To fight like fury against him. So come,
my friend,

Go by my side and observe my prowess
in battle.

Just see throughout this whole day if
ever I act

Like the coward you call me, or if
instead I don't stop

Many Danaans, eager for war though
they be, from fighting

To win dead Patroclus.”

So saying, he sent a great cry
Ringing out to the Trojans, shouting:

“You Trojans and Lycians

And dueling Dardanians, now, my
friends, be men,

And filled with furious boldness! while I
put on

The bright armor of matchless Achilles,

the splendid war-gear
I took from stalwart Patroclus once I had
slain him.”

So saying, Hector, his bronze helmet
flashing, left
The fiery conflict, and rapidly running he
soon
Caught up with his comrades, who had
not yet got very far
Toward town with Achilles’ famous and
exquisite armor.
Then standing apart from the tearful
struggle, he changed
His war-gear, giving his own to the
fight-loving Trojans
To carry to sacred Ilium, and putting on
The immortal bronze of Peleus’ son

Achilles,
Armor the heavenly gods had given his
father
And that he, when old, had given his son,
who never
Lived to be old in the armor he had from
his father.³

Now when from far off cloud-
gathering Zeus saw Hector
Donning the war-gear of Peleus' godlike
son,
He shook his head and spoke to his own
heart thus:
"Ah wretched mortal! you have no
thoughts at all
Of death, though death draws very near
you. Instead,

You are donning the immortal armor of a
most valiant man,
Before whom you're not the only one
who trembles,
You that have killed his brave and
lovable friend
And ignobly taken his war-gear. For a
while, however,
I'll give you great martial force, in
return for which
You must forfeit your sweet home-
coming from battle. Never
Will your Andromache take from the
hands of her husband
The glorious armor of Peleus' son
Achilles."

He spoke, then bowing his iron-dark

brows he made

The armor fit well on the body of
Hector, into whom

Now came the spirit of Ares, the grim
god of slaughter,

And his limbs were renewed from
within with spirit and vigor.

Then he went back to his famous allies,
roaring

His powerful war-cry, and all of them
saw him there

Resplendently clad in the bronze of
huge-hearted Achilles.

Going up and down among them, he
cheered and encouraged

Each man he could—Mesthles and
Glaucus and Medon,

Thersilochus, Asteropaeus, Deisenor,

and Phorcys,
Hippothous, Chromius, and Ennomus,
reader of bird-signs—

All these he encouraged, speaking to
them winged words:

“Listen, you unnumbered nations of
neighboring allies.

I did not call you men here from your
native cities

Merely to swell the army of Troy, but
that

You might willingly save the Trojans’
children and wives

From these warmongering Achaeans.
For this reason only

I’ve all but exhausted the goods of my
people that you

Might have food and presents and a
daily renewal of spirit.

Therefore let every last man of you here
charge straight

At the enemy, heedless of whether you
live or die—

For such is the game of battle. And
whoever forces

Ajax to yield and drags Patroclus, dead
Though he is, into the midst of horse-
breaking Trojans,

With that man I'll split the spoils half
and half, and his glory
Shall be as mine is!"

He ended, and all of them rushed
Headlong on the Danaans, holding their
spears up high

And eagerly hopeful of dragging the
corpse of Patroclus
From beneath the great Ajax, poor
childish fools that they were!
For truly over that corpse he was to take
The lives of many in that attack. But now
Even Ajax spoke thus to battle-roaring
Atrides:

“O god-fed good Menelaus, I no
longer think
That even we two can back out off this
fight by ourselves.
Nor am I by any means so much
concerned for the corpse
Of Patroclus, that soon shall glut the
dogs and birds
Of the Trojans, as now I am for the

safety of my head
And yours. For yonder comes glowering
Hector, a terribly
Dark cloud of war enshrouding us all,
and we two
Especially are sure to die—unless, my
friend,
You can call to the other Danaan chiefs
and make
Someone hear!”

He spoke, and battle-roaring Menelaus
Did not ignore him, but shouted a far-
piercing cry
To the chiefs: “O friends, captains and
counselors
Of the Argives, you that drink the
community wine

With Atreus' sons Menelaus and King
Agamemnon
And issue orders to your respective
commands—
All you that receive your rank and honor
from Zeus—
I cannot now easily pick you separately
out,
So hotly blazes the huge strife of battle.
But now let each of you come on the
double, with no
Special summons from me, and with you
bring fierce indignation
Lest the poor corpse of Patroclus soon
become
The delight of Trojan dogs.”

Then the son of Oïleus,

Ajax the racer, heard every word, and he
Was the first to come running through the
hot fighting, and
Idomeneus
Followed and Idomeneus' comrade
Meriones, that peer
Of the slaughtering War-god. But as for
the others who came
To support those Achaeans, who has the
mind to recall them
And name all the names?

Then the Trojans, with Hector leading,
Charged all together. And as when a
gigantic wave
Roars in at the mouth of some Zeus-fed
river, opposing
The flow, and the headlands resound on

either side

As the salt-sea booms against them, so
now with a din

As great the clamoring Trojans came on.

But now

The Achaeans stood round the corpse of
Patroclus, firm

And unflinching, united in purpose and
walled about

With bronze shields. And Cronos' son
Zeus shed a heavy mantle

Of mist down over their bright-flashing
helmets, for Patroclus,

While he was alive and the friend of
Achilles, had never

Been disliked by Zeus, and now he hated
to see

His body become the delight of his

enemies' dogS.⁴

Hence Zeus aroused his comrades in defense.

But at first the Trojans dislodged the quick-eyed Achaeans,
Who left the corpse and shrank back in fear, but not
One man did the eager Trojans lay low with their spears,
For they turned their efforts to dragging the corpse away.
The Achaeans, however, did not stay back very long,
For Ajax rallied them quickly—Ajax, who
In form and fighting surpassed all the Danaan chiefs

But the peerless son of Peleus. Straight
through the front rank
Of fighters he burst with the furious
might of a foaming
Wild boar that wheels at bay in some
glade of the mountains
And easily scatters the hounds and lusty
young hunters.
Thus great Telamon's son, the illustrious
Ajax,
Charged mid the Trojan battalions and
scattered them quickly,
Though they had taken their stand round
Patroclus, fiercely
Determined to drag him into their city
and so
Win the glory themselves.

Already Hippothous, splendid
Son of Pelasgian Lethus, was dragging
the corpse
Through the melee, having bound his
baldric about one ankle
In his eager effort to please the Trojans
and Hector.
But swiftly indeed he met with disaster,
an evil
That no one, however zealous, could
then have kept from him.
For Ajax came darting in through the
crowd and plunged
A spear through his bronze-cheeked
helmet, and the headpiece crested
With horsehair was split round the point,
and Hippothous' bloodmingled

Brains spurted out from the wound and
ran down along
The socket and shaft of the weapon.
Right there his strength
Was dissolved, and letting the foot of
great-souled Patroclus
Fall to the ground, he fell very quickly
himself,
Face down on the corpse, far away from
loamy Larissa.
And for his careful upbringing he never
repaid
His dear parents, since now his life was
cut short by the spear
Of spirited Ajax.

Then Hector met his advance
With a cast of his own bright spear. But

Ajax, looking
Straight at him, just managed to dodge
the hurtling bronze,
Which flew on to lodge in Schedius,
magnanimous Iphitus'
Son and best by far of the Phocians, one
Who lived in a mansion as lord over
many at Panopeus,
World-renowned. Hector's spear hit him
squarely just under
The collarbone, tore on through, and
came out at the base
Of his shoulder. And royal Schedius
clanged to the ground
With a clashing of brazen war-gear.
Then Ajax in turn
Killed flame-hearted Phorcys, son of
Phaenops, striking him

Full in the gut as he boldly bestrode
Hippothous.

The bronze cut a gash in his armor,
through which his entrails

Oozed, and Phorcys, falling full length in
the dust,

Clawed at the earth. Then glorious
Hector and the foremost

Trojan fighters gave ground, and the
yelling Argives

Dragged off the bodies of Phorcys and
Hippothous and stripped

Their shoulders of armor.

And now the fiery Achaeans
Would surely have driven the weary,
terrified Trojans
Back up into Troy, and so by dint of

sheer force

And power have won more glory than
Zeus intended,

If Phoebus Apollo himself had not
roused Aeneas,

Appearing to him in the form of his old
father's herald,

Periphas, Epytus' son, a kindly man

Who had served long and well in the
house of Anchises. Looking

Exactly like him, Apollo, son of Zeus,

Came up to Aeneas and spoke:

“How in the world,

Aeneas, would you ever defend steep
Troy if God

Were against you? as indeed I have seen
others do, putting

Their faith in their own manly prowess
and that of their fellows

And holding their realm in defiance of
Zeus himself.

But here Zeus clearly wills the victory
for us

Far more than he does for the Danaans,
yet you are much

Too afraid to do any real fighting!”

He spoke, and Aeneas
Looked on his face and knew him at
once for Apollo,

The god who strikes from afar, and
lifting his voice

He shouted to Hector and all of the
others, saying:

“O leaders of Trojans and Trojan allies,

what

A disgrace it will be if now these fiery
Achaeans

Drive the terrified Trojans back up into
Troy!

But truly a god just stood by my side and
assured me

That all-knowing Zeus is still on our
side in the battle.

So let us charge straight for the Danaans
and make all the trouble

We can for them as they struggle to get to
the ships

With the body of dead Patroclus.”

With this he sprang
Far out in front of the first-line
champions and stood,

And the Trojans rallied and turned to
face the Achaeans.

Then with a thrust of his spear Aeneas
brought down

Leocritus, son of Arisbas and excellent
comrade

Of Lycomedes. And as he fell
Lycomedes,

Dear to the War-god, felt pity for him,
and coming

In close he hurled his bright spear and
struck Apisaon,

Hippasus' son and the people's lord, in
the liver

Under the midriff, thus suddenly causing
his knees

To buckle—Apisaon from fertile
Paeonia, who next to

Asteropaeus surpassed all the rest of his people

In fighting. And as he fell this Asteropaeus,

Dear to the War-god, felt pity for him and fiercely

Charged in to battle the Danaans. He, however,

Charged in vain, for he met a wall of bronze shields

Bristling with spears, long lances held by the chieftains

Who stood round the corpse of Patroclus. For Ajax was busy

Among them shouting orders, instructing them strictly

To hold their ground, with none either

falling back
Or boldly fighting in front of the other
Achaeans,
But all, he said, should stand fast by the
body and fight
Hand to hand.

Such were the commands of gigantic
Ajax,
And quickly the earth was empurpled
with blood as the dead
Fell thick and fast, the Trojan dead and
the dead
Of their proud allies, and the dead of the
Danaans too,
For they fought no bloodless encounter,
though of them far fewer
Were falling, since always they tried in

the melee to keep death
Away from each other.

Thus war's holocaust blazed on,
Nor would you have thought either sun
or moon were shining,
So thick was the dark cloud of mist that
enshrouded the struggle
Of all the great fighters who fought
round Menoetius' dead son.
But the other Trojans and well-greaved
Achaeans fought
In relative comfort beneath a clear sky,
from which
The piercing rays of the sun shone down
upon them,
And no cloud could be seen above either
the plain or the mountains.

These fought at intervals, resting from
time to time

And standing apart far enough to avoid
the groan-fraught

Shafts of the foe. Those leaders around
the body,

However, were greatly distressed by the
fog and the fighting

And suffered much from the weight of
their pitiless bronze.

Two chiefs were not there, Antilochus
and Thrasymedes,

For they did not know that flawless
Patroclus was dead.

They thought he was still alive and
fighting the Trojans

Up front. Meanwhile, they fought in
another part

Of the field, looking out to avoid both
death and panic
Among their companions, as Nestor had
told them to do
When he sent them away from the black-
hulled vessels and forth
Into battle.

So all day long their hard hatred raged,
And the knees and legs and face of each
man, the arms
And the eyes, incessantly streamed with
the sweat of their toil,
As the two armies fought round swift
Achilles' dead friend.
And as when a man gives a large bull's-
hide to his people
For stretching, one already drenched in

fat, and they

Stand apart in a circle and pull away at
the sides

Till its own moisture goes and the fat
sinks in, many men

Tugging with all of their might to stretch
it as taut

As they can, so now all around they
were tugging away

At the corpse, with neither side making
much gain, though still

Their hearts were full of hope, the
Trojans eager

To drag the body to Troy, the Achaeans
pulling

Toward the hollow ships. And around
the corpse the struggle

Grew savagely wild, as on the strong

champions fought,
Nor could even host-urging Ares nor
Pallas Athena
Have seen them so and made light of
their efforts, no matter
How spiteful those deities were.

Even such was the toil
Of evil war that Zeus strained taut that
day
Over dead Patroclus. Nor as yet did
godlike Achilles
Have any knowledge at all of Patroclus'
death,
For the fighting went on beneath the
Trojan wall
Far away from the swift-running ships.
Hence Achilles had

No idea what had happened, but thought
his friend would surely
Return alive after he had pressed eagerly
on
To the very gates of Troy. He knew that
Patroclus
Would not sack the city without him, nor
with him either, [ba](#)
For often his goddess mother had told
him in private
What almighty Zeus was planning. Now,
however,
She did not let him know of the
monstrous thing that had
happened,
That now his most precious friend had
been destroyed.

Meanwhile, round the dead body the
fighters continued
To clash, constantly killing with sharp-
pointed spears.
And thus would one of the bronze-clad
Achaeans shout:
“O friends, it would scarcely be to our
credit for us
To go back to the hollow ships without
the body.
Far better for us if at once the black
earth would engulf us
All, if now we're to give these horse-
taming Trojans
The glory of dragging Patroclus to their
city!”

And likewise one of the spirited

Trojans would yell:

“O friends, though all of us here be
destined to die

By this body, yet let not a man of us
shrink one foot

From the fighting!”

Thus they would cry to encourage and
strengthen

Each other as on they fought. And the
iron din

Went up through empty air to the
burnished bronze sky.

But apart from the battle Achilles’
horses were weeping,

And had been so since first they learned
that their fighter

Had gone down dead in the dust at the

murderous hands

Of Hector. Surely Automedon, stalwart
son

Of Diores, had done all he could to
move them, laying on

Many hard blows with his flying swift
lash and alternately

Coaxing and cursing for all he was
worth. But the pair

Refused to go back to the ships and the
broad Hellespont,

Nor would they go into battle among the
Achaeans.

Instead, they stood with the ornate car,
still

As a pillar of stone on the grave of some
dead man or woman,

Bowing their heads to the ground.⁵ And
their hot tears
Fell on the earth as they mourned for
Patroclus, and both
Their luxuriant manes were dirtied with
dust as they streamed
From under the yoke-pad on either side
of the yoke.
And as they wept, Zeus saw and felt
compassion.
Shaking his head he spoke to his own
heart thus:

“Poor wretches! why did we give you
to Peleus the King,
A mortal, while you are immortal and
ageless? Was it
That you too might suffer the woes of

unhappy men?

For of all the creatures that breathe and
move on earth,

I know there is none more utterly
wretched than man.

At any rate Priam's son Hector shall
never mount up

In your colorful car, since that I will not
allow.

Is it not quite enough that he wears
Achilles' armor

And makes his vain boast about it? But
now I'll put

New strength in your hearts and legs that
you may carry

Automedon safely from war to the
hollow ships.

For I shall give more glory still to the

Trojans,
Urging them on until they have driven the
Argives
Back to the well-timbered ships,
steadily killing
Till the sun goes down and powerful
darkness arrives.”

So saying, he breathed noble ardor
into the horses,
And shaking the dust from their manes
they took off at a gallop
And drew the swift car mid the moil of
Achaean and Trojans.
And Automedon fought behind them,
though greatly grieved
For his friend Patroclus, swooping in
with the car

Like a vulture that falls on a large flock
of geese. Rapidly
He would dash in through the huge chaos
of battle,
Then rapidly flee. But fast though he
went in the sacred
Car, it was more than one man could do
to handle
Both spear and horses at once, so
Automedon slew
Not a single man as in and out he
charged.
But at last a comrade noticed his actions,
Alcimedon,
Son of Laerces and grandson of Haemon,
and standing
Behind the chariot he spoke to him thus:

“What god,
Automedon, has so deluded your
excellent mind
That now you fight in this manner amid
the Trojans—
Up front and completely alone? For your
fighter and friend
Is dead, and the armor he wore is now
on the shoulders
Of Hector, who glories in wearing the
famous bronze
Of Achilles.”

And Automedon, son of Diores: “What
man,
Alcimedon, equals you at holding and
driving
Immortal horses? No one but Patroclus,

godlike

In skill, was as good, and now death's
doom has engulfed him.

Come then, you take the lash and glossy
reins

And I'll be the one to dismount and do
the fighting.”

He spoke, and Alcimedon sprang on
the battle-swift car

And caught up the lash and reins as
Automedon leaped

To the ground. Then shining Hector
noticed them there

And quickly spoke thus to Aeneas
nearby: “O counselor

Of bronze-breasted Trojans, yonder I
see the two horses

Of Aeacus' grandson Achilles appearing
in battle

With two really puny charioteers. If you
Are willing, I'm sure we can capture
that fine pair of chargers,
Since those two weaklings with them
will never stand up
To us and fight man to man."

Such were his words,
And Anchises' brave son agreed. Then
they charged straight ahead,
Their shoulders protected by shields of
bull's-hide, well-tanned
And tough and covered with plenty of
hammered-on bronze.
And with them went godlike Aretus and
Chromius too,

And all of them went full of hope to kill
the two men

And drive off the neck-arching horses—
poor infantile fools

That they were! For not without
shedding blood of their own

Were they to get back from Automedon.
He now made his prayer

To Father Zeus, and within him his dark-
seething heart

Was infused with spirit and power. Then
he spoke thus

To his trusted companion Alcimedon:

“Come now, good friend,
And don’t hold those horses too far
away, but let me
Feel their hot breath on my back as I

fight. For truly
I don't think that Priam's son Hector
will run out of fury
Until, having killed both of us, he
springs up behind
Achilles' mane-tossing horses and routs
the ranks
Of the Argive warriors, unless he
himself should fall
Mid the foremost."

So saying, he called to the two Ajaxes
And King Menelaus: "You Ajaxes both,
leaders
Of Argives, and you, Menelaus, come
now! Leave the corpse
With those who are bravest to hold their
ground and keep off

The enemy ranks, and keep off from us,
the yet living,
The pitiless day of our doom. For now
charging down
On us hard through the tear-fraught toil
come Aeneas and Hector,
The bravest of Trojans. The outcome
lies in the lap
Of the gods. So here goes my cast, and
may Zeus determine
The issue of all.”

With this, he drew back his long-
shadowing
Spear and hurling it struck the round
shield of Aretus,
And the keen bronze cut its way through,
went on through his belt

And deep in his belly. And as when a
powerful man
Comes down hard with a keen-cutting ax
on the head
Of a field-ranging ox just back of the
horns and cuts
Clean through the bone, causing the beast
to lurch forward
And fall, so now Aretus sprang forward,
then fell
On his back, and the quivering, razor-
keen spear in his guts
Unstrung his limbs. Then Hector hurled
his bright spear
At Automedon, who looking straight at
him avoided the bronze
By ducking forward, and Hector's long
lance embedded

Itself in the ground behind its intended
victim,
Where the butt-end quivered till finally
hulking Ares
Stilled its fury. And now the two would
have closed
And cut at each other with swords, if the
two Ajaxes
Had not intervened, for when they
answered the call
Of their comrade and came through the
melee, fear seized Aeneas
And Hector and godlike Chromius, and
back they fell,
Leaving dead Aretus stretched out on the
earth. And Automedon,
Peer of the fast-fighting War-god,

stripped off the armor
And made his boast, exulting:

“Surely I’ve got
Some small satisfaction now for the
death of Patroclus,
Though this man I’ve killed cannot be
compared with him.”

So saying, he picked up the bloody
war-gear, and placing it
In the chariot he mounted, his feet and
hands
Smeared with blood, like a lion fresh
from devouring a bull.
And again the hard struggle, tearful and
grim, was strained
Inhumanly taut above the corpse of
Patroclus,

And Pallas Athena came down from the
sky and augmented
The strife. For loud-thundering Zeus,
whose purpose was
changing,
Had sent her to urge on the Danaans. As
when Zeus arches
An ominous rainbow across the sky as a
portent
Of war or chilling storm that makes men
on earth
Stop work and bothers the flocks, so
now Athena,
Shrouding herself in a lurid cloud,
entered
The Danaan host and incited the heart of
each man.
The first she encouraged was strong

Menelaus, he being
Nearby. Assuming the form and
weariless voice
Of Phoenix, she spoke to him thus:

“To you, for sure,
Menelaus, head-hanging shame will
come, if the faithful
Friend of haughty Achilles be ripped by
swift dogs
Beneath the Trojan wall. So hold your
ground
With all of your might and urge on all of
the others!”

Then King Menelaus, he of the shrill
battle-scream,
Replied: “Phoenix, old sire, my ancient-
born friend,

If only Athena would give me strength
and keep off
The raining missiles, I surely would like
nothing better
Than this defense of Patroclus' body, for
deeply
His death has pierced my very heart. But
Hector
Rages like furious fire and doesn't let up
At all with his deadly havocking bronze.
Obviously
Zeus has decided to give the glory to
him."

At this the blue eyes of Athena blazed
with delight,
Since in his appeal he had mentioned her
first of all gods.

And she put strength in his shoulders and
legs and infused
His heart with the daring persistency of
a fly,
That always comes back for more no
matter how often
It be brushed away from one's skin, so
dauntless is it
In stinging and so very fond of man's
blood. With such
Bold daring as that she filled his dark-
seething heart,
And standing over Patroclus he hurled
his bright spear.
Now among the Trojans was one both
wealthy and brave,
Podes, son of Eëtion, and he was the
favorite

Of Hector, a man with whom he had
shared very many
Fine dinners. Him tawny-haired
Menelaus pierced
With his bronze through war-belt and
belly, just as he started
To flee, and brought him down with a
thunderous crash.
And Atreus' son Menelaus quickly
dragged
The dead body away from the Trojans
and into the ranks
Of his own good comrades.

Then Phoebus Apollo came up
To Hector and urged him on, in the form
of Phaenops,
Asius' son from Abydos, whom Hector

preferred

Over all of his guests from abroad.

Looking exactly

Like him, far-working Apollo spoke
thus: “How can you,

Hector, expect any man of Achaea to
fear you

At all after this—this blenching before
Menelaus

Who often has proved a puny spearman
indeed?

But now with no one to help him he’s
drawn a dead body

Away from the Trojans for good—the
body of your

Noble favorite, a champion surpassing
champions—yes Podes,

Son of Eëtion!”

He spoke, and a black cloud of grief
Descended on Hector, who rapidly
strode through the front rank
Of fighters, clad in his high-burnished
bronze. And Zeus
Took up the terrible tasseled aegis and
shook it
All awesomely gleaming, and over
Mount Ida he gathered
The storm clouds and filled the sky with
thunder and lightning,
Thus signaling victory for Trojans, rout
for Achaeans.

The first to begin the retreat was
Boeotian Peneleos.
For as he stood fast, ever facing the foe,
he received

A wound on top of his shoulder, as
Polydamas' spear-point
Cut through to the bone, for he it was that
had cast
From not far away. And Hector in man-
to-man combat
Put Leitus, son of Alectryon, out of the
action
By jabbing his bronze in the brave
Boeotian's wrist,
And Leitus, anxiously looking around
him, shrank
From the fighting, since now he no
longer felt sure of his grip
On the spear as he sought to battle the
Trojans. But as Hector
Went after Leitus, Idomeneus threw and
struck him

A blow on the breastplate close by the
nipple, causing
A scream to go up from the Trojans as
that long spear-shaft
Broke in the socket. Then Hector hurled
his bright bronze
At Idomeneus, son of Deucalion,
standing now
In a car, and just barely missed him. He
struck, though, Coeranus,
Meriones' comrade and driver who
came with him
From the fortified city of Lyctus. For
Idomeneus had come
From the well-balanced ships on foot,
and would surely have fallen
A glorious triumph for Trojans if

Coeranus had not
Come up very fast with the flying-hoofed
horses. He came
To Idomeneus then as a light of
deliverance and kept
From him the ruthless day of his death,
though he
Himself lost life at the hands of
murderous Hector.
His spear went in beneath bold
Coeranus' ear
And jaw, uprooting his teeth and
splitting his tongue.
Coeranus pitched from the car and let the
reins fall
To the ground. But quickly Meriones
gathered them up,
Handed them to Idomeneus, and spoke to

him, saying:

“The lash now! and use it well until
you get back

To the swift-running ships. You yourself
know very well

That we no longer have any chance in
this fight.”

He spoke, and Idomeneus lashed the
mane-tossing horses

Back to the hollow ships, for fear had
fallen

Upon him.

Nor did Menelaus and huge-hearted
Ajax

Fail to see that Zeus was giving the
victory

To Trojans, and great Telamonian Ajax

spoke thus:

“Now confound it all! any man, however foolish,

Can see whose side Zeus is on. For the Trojans let no missile

Fly that doesn't strike home, no matter who hurls it,

Whether brave captain or coward—Zeus guides them all

To their marks, while all of our shafts fall vainly to earth.

But come, let us think for ourselves and find the best way

To rescue this body and please our dear friends by returning

Ourselves, for our comrades behind us must be in great fear

As they look out at us and lose all hope

that the fury
Of slaughtering Hector and his
invincible hands
Will be stopped before he falls on the
black-hulled vessels.
If only some comrade of ours would
carry word
With all speed to Peleus' son Achilles,
who,
I believe, has not even heard the horrible
news
That his dearest friend is dead. But I can
see
No Achaean fit for the mission, so thick
is the dark
Cloud of mist enshrouding us all, both
men and horses.

O Father Zeus, deliver the sons of
Achaeans
From this great darkness. Clear the air
and enable
Our eyes to see. If kill us you must, then
kill us,
O lord, in the light.”

Such was his plea, and the Father,
Pitying him as he wept, quickly
dispersed
The dark cloud of mist, and the sun
shone brightly on all
As the whole battlefield was clearly
revealed. Then Ajax
Said this to battle-roaring Menelaus:

“Look about now,
God-fed Menelaus, and see if

Antilochus, son
Of magnanimous Nestor, is still alive. If
so,
Instruct him to run with all speed to fiery
Achilles
With word that his most precious friend
has been destroyed.”

Menelaus did not ignore him, but went
like a lion
Leaving a cattle-yard, one exhausted
from harassing
Dogs and farmhands, who watch all
night to protect
Their fat oxen and drive him away. The
flesh-hungry lion
Charges right in, only to be driven back
By a rain of spears and blazing torches,

hurled

At him by brawny bold arms, Still
hungry, he has to

Retreat, and slinks off at dawn
disappointed. So now

Menelaus, unwilling at heart, went away
from Patroclus,

Greatly reluctant, since much he feared
that Achaeans

In painful rout would leave the body a
prey

For the foeman. Hence he exhorted both
Ajaxes

And Meriones, fervently saying:

“Both of you Ajaxes,
Leaders of Argives, and you, Meriones,
remember

How lovable luckless Patroclus was, for
he
Knew how to be kind to all those about
him, before
Death's doom engulfed him."

So saying, tawny Menelaus
Took off, searching the plain like an
eagle, the bird
That men say possesses the sharpest
eyesight of all
Winged creatures that fly under heaven,
that sees from on high
Even the fleet-footed hare as he huddles
beneath
Some leafy bush—even on him the fierce
eagle
Falls and catching him kills him at once.

So now,
O King Menelaus, your bright eyes
roamed through the moil
Of your numerous troops in search of old
Nestor's son
Still alive. Soon then he saw him far on
the left,
Cheering his men and urging them on in
the fight.
Approaching him there, tawny Menelaus
spoke thus:

“God-nurtured Antilochus, come here
to me, that you
May learn what horrible thing has
happened, something
I deeply wish never had. You see, I'm
sure,

How God is rolling a great wave of woe
on the Argives
And giving the victory to Trojans. And
now the best
Of Achaeans is dead, Patroclus himself,
and the Danaans
Terribly miss him. But you now, run
with all speed
To the ships and tell Achilles what I
have told you.
If he loses no time, he may yet bring to
his ship
The still whole corpse of his friend—the
naked corpse,
Since huge bright-helmeted Hector is
already wearing
His armor.”

At this, Antilochus paled with
horror.[bb](#)

He stood for a while quite speechless,
his eyes full of tears
And his sobs all choked up within him.
He did not, however,
Neglect Menelaus' command, but set out
on the run,
Having given his bronze to his matchless
driver Laodocus,
Who close beside him was wheeling his
solid-hoofed horses.

Then weeping he ran from the field of
fighting to tell
The cruel word to Achilles. Nor was
your spirit disposed,
O King Menelaus, to stay and assist the

battered

Friends of Antilochus, men of Pylos who
missed him

Greatly. Instead, Menelaus sent Prince
Thrasymedes

To help them and hurried to stand once
again by the corpse

Of Patroclus. There with the two Ajaxes
he spoke

To them, saying:

“I’ve sent out a man to the fast-faring
ships

On his way to fleet-footed Achilles, not
that I have

The slightest idea that Achilles will
come and do battle,

No matter how great his hatred for royal

Hector.

For how can he fight the Trojans without
any armor?

But come, let us think for ourselves and
find the best way

To get out of here with the body and get
ourselves out

Alive from this perilous moil of war-
screaming Trojans.”

And great Telamonian Ajax replied:
“All

That you say is quite right, most
illustrious King Menelaus.

So quickly now, you and Meriones stoop
and shoulder

The body and bear it out of the fighting,
while we two

Behind you, alike in soul as we are in
name,
Fight off the Trojans and royal Hector,
even we,
The two Ajaxes, who many a time have
stood
By each other and fought in the face of
mad-slashing Ares.”

At this the two powerful warriors
stooped and quickly
Shouldered the body, whereat the throng
of Trojans
Behind them shouted in protest. And
straight upon them
The fierce Trojans charged, like hounds
that dart in front of
Young hunters straight on a stricken wild

boar, lusting

To rip him apart till the great beast,
trusting in brawn,

Wheels and confronts them, sending
them back on their haunches

And off in all directions. Even so the
Trojans

Came on in a pack, repeatedly thrusting
with swords

And two-pointed spears, but whenever
the Ajaxes turned

And stood against them, their faces
paled with fear

And no man dared to charge in and fight
for the dead.

As the two chiefs labored to bear the
body quickly

From battle and to the hollow-hulled
vessels, a war-charge
Wild as blazing fire was hurled against
them,
An onset hot as a huge conflagration that
suddenly
Comes on a city and, fiercely flaming,
collapses
The homes as a high wind keeps it
roaring. Even so
After them the Trojans came on with a
constant hubbub
Of horses and spearmen. And as when
two mules pull hard
On either side of a log or a long ship-
timber
To drag it down a rugged trail from the
mountains

And, straining, both are well nigh
overcome with the pain
And sweat of their toil, so now
Menelaus and mighty
Meriones labored to bear the body
quickly
From battle. And always behind them the
two Ajaxes
Held off the foe as a ridge does flooding
waters—
Some wooded ridge that happens to lie
across
A whole plain and so holds back the
cruel streams
Of powerful rivers, turning their currents
to wander
The plain and remaining unbroken no

matter how mighty
The force of the flood. Even so, the two
Ajaxes
Held off the onrush of Trojans, who,
however,
Kept coming, led by Aeneas, son of
Anchises,
And bronze-blazing Hector. And as a
cloud of starlings
Or jackdaws scream for their lives and
flee when they see
A hawk falling toward them with certain
death for small birds,
So now before Hector and slashing
Aeneas the nimble
Achaeans fled screaming in fear for their
lives, having lost
All stomach for fighting. And many fine

pieces of armor

Fell in and about the trench as the
Danaans fled,

And there was no respite at all from
horrible war.^{[6](#)}

BOOK XVIII

The Shield of Achilles

While thus on the plain war's
holocaust blazed, Antilochus,
Fast on his feet, arrived with his news
for Achilles.

He found him in front of his high-horned
vessels, anxiously

Brooding on what had now come to
pass, deeply troubled

And speaking thus to his own great-
hearted self:

“Ah miserable me! how is it that now
once more

The Achaeans are driven in panic across
the plain
And back to the ships? O let it not be
that the gods
Have wrought for my soul that ghastly
evil foretold
To me once by my mother, who said that
while I yet lived
The Myrmidon's bravest and best would
leave the light
Of the sun beneath the hands of the
Trojans! Truly,
Gallant Patroclus must now be dead.¹ O
foolhardy
Comrade of mine! Surely I gave him
strict orders
To come back here to the ships as soon

as the fierce fire
Was out, and not to pit his powers
against
Those of Hector.”

As thus he worried in mind and heart,
Antilochus, shedding hot tears, came up
and reported
The miserable message: “What pain is
mine, O son
Of wise-hearted Peleus, that I have to
tell you such horrible
News, of a thing I wish deeply had never
occurred.
Patroclus has fallen, and round his
corpse they are fighting—
His naked corpse, for huge bright-
helmeted Hector

Is already wearing your armor!”

At this a black cloud
Of grief enveloped Achilles, and taking
a dark
Double-handful of soot he poured it over
his head,
Defiling his handsome face and fragrant
tunic
With filthy black ashes. Then he dropped
down full length
In the dust, mighty even in grief, and
with his
Own hands he befouled and tore at his
hair. And the women
Whom he and Patroclus had taken as
booty shrieked
In anguish of heart and ran out of doors

to sink

Round the form of their flame-hearted
master and beat their breasts

With their hands, while Antilochus,
weeping and moaning, held

The hands of heart-grieved Achilles, for
fear that he might

Draw a blade and cut his own throat.²

Then awesome indeed

Were the groans and shrieks of Achilles,
and though she sat deep

In the sea beside her old sire, his
goddess mother

Heard him. At once she took up the wail,
and the goddesses

Crowded around her, all of the daughters
of Nereus

That live with their father deep in the
salt-water sea.

Glauce was there and Thaleia and with
them Cymodoce,

Speio, Nesaea, Thoë, and heifer-eyed
Halia,

Limnorea, Cymothoë, and Actaea,

Iaera, Amphithoë, Melite, and Agaue,

Doto and Proto, Dynamene and
Pherousa,

Dexamene, Callianeira, and
Amphinome,

Doris, Panope, and world-renowned
Galatea,

Nemertes and Apseudes and
Callianassa,

And Clymene with Ianeira and Ianassa,

Maera, Orithyia, and fair-braided

Amathea,
And all the other daughters of Nereus
that live
In the depths of the sea. With these was
the silvery cave crowded,
And all of them beat their breasts in
lament, as Thetis,
Who led their wailing, cried out among
them, saying:

“Hear me, O Nereids, sisters of mine,
that all
Of you may know what pain there is in
my heart.
Ah wretched me! the miserable mother
of valor
And woe, for I bore a matchless heroic
son

To be the best of all warriors. When I
had tenderly
Reared him, as one would a seedling he
plants in a rich
Orchard plot, and watched him shoot up
like a sturdy young tree,
I sent him off with the big-beaked ships
to Troy,
That he might do battle with Trojans. But
never again
Shall I welcome him home to the house
of Peleus. Yet
He must suffer so long as he lives in the
light of the sun,
Nor can I help him at all by going to him.
Go I will, though, that I may see my dear
child
And hear what grief has come on him

while he has held back
From battle and bloodshed.”

So saying, she left the cave,
And the weeping nymphs went with her,
cleaving the waves
Of the sea till they came to the loamy
rich land of the Trojans.
Then one by one they came up on the
beach where thickly
The Myrmidon ships were drawn up
around fast Achilles.
And his divine mother came to where he
lay groaning,
Uttered a shrill cry of grief herself, and
taking
His head in her hands spoke these words
winged with compassion:

“My child, why are you crying? What
sorrow has entered
Your heart? Speak out to me now and
hide it no longer.
Surely you’ve got what you wanted from
Zeus, since you prayed
With uplifted hands that all of the sons of
Achaeans
Should be huddled up at the sterns of
their ships and suffer
Disgraceful defeat because of their great
need for you.”

Then heavily sighing, fast-footed
Achilles replied:
“My mother, it’s true the Olympian has
answered my prayers,
But what good to me is all that when my

dearest friend

Is dead, Patroclus, the man I loved and
respected

Above all other comrades, as much
indeed

As I do my own self? Now I have lost
him, and Hector,

Who killed him, has stripped off that
beautiful armor, huge

And incredibly bright, a present the gods
gave Peleus

The same day they gave you to him in
marriage. Would you

Had stayed where you were mid the
deathless nymphs of the sea

And that Peleus had taken a mortal
woman for bride.

But now you too will have measureless

grief, you

For the death of your son, whom never
again will you

Welcome home. For my heart bids me no
longer to live

Among men, unless first of all I am able
to take

Hector's life with my spear in requital
for that of Patroclus,

Whom he made his booty and spoil.”

Then again tearful Thetis

Spoke to her son: “If you, my child, do

As you say, then surely you too will
soon die, for soon

After Hector's death your own will
certainly come.”

Then greatly moved, fast-footed

Achilles replied:

“Then soon let me die! since I was not there to help

My friend when he died.³ He fell very far from the land

Of his fathers, and needed me with him to keep off destruction.

So now, since I shall never return to my own

Precious country, and since I was no help at all to Patroclus,

Nor to my many other friends whom Hector

Has slaughtered, with me sitting here by the ships just so much

Useless weight to burden the earth, me, Who am unsurpassed as a fighter, though

not as a talker,
By any man now alive mid the bronze-
clad Achaeans—
O how I wish all strife would die among
gods
And men and with it anger, that causes
the wisest
To sulk and storm, resentment that is
more delicious
Than trickling honey and spreads like
smoke in the hearts
Of mortals, as mine most surely did
when King
Agamemnon provoked me. Well, what's
done is done.
Now we must conquer the anger within
us—because
We must. And I will enter the battle in

search of
Hector, the man who killed my most
precious friend,
And as for my own fate, certainly I'll
accept that
Whenever Zeus wills to fulfill it, Zeus
and the other
Immortal gods. For not even powerful
Heracles
Kept death away, though he was surely
the favorite
Of Cronos' son Zeus the almighty. Even
he succumbed
To fate and the grim resentment of Hera.
And so
I too shall lie still in death, if a similar
fate

Has been fashioned for me. But now I
intend to win
Splendid fame, and now because of me
will many
Of Troy's women and many deep-
breasted Dardanians
Wipe with both hands the tears from
their tender cheeks
As sob follows grief-laden sob, for I
will have made them
Know what it means for me to be present
in battle.⁴
Don't try, then, to keep me from fighting
because of your love
For me. You will not succeed!"

Then the goddess Thetis,
She of the silvery feet, spoke thus:

“Surely,
My child, it is no evil thing to help your
comrades
Survive the bloody dangers of war. But
now
Your fine armor is held by the Trojans,
your gleaming bronze war-gear.
Bronze-loving Hector, in fact, exultantly
wears it
About his own shoulders, though he’ll
not enjoy it long,
Since now his own death is near. So
hold yourself back
From the turmoil of Ares until you see
me returning,
And in the morning I will return with
exquisite
Armor from lord Hephaestus himself.”

With this
She turned from her son and spoke to her
sea-born sisters:
“All of you, now, plunge into the sea’s
broad bosom
And go to the halls of our father, the
briny old man
Of the sea, and make your report to him
of all this.
I must be off to the famous craftsman
Hephaestus
On lofty Olympus to see if he’ll make for
my son
Some marvelous, all-shining armor.”

She spoke, and her sisters
The sea nymphs quickly vanished amid
the salt waves,

But the goddess Thetis, she of the silvery
feet,
Went up to Olympus, that she might bring
glorious armor
For her precious son.

While her feet were taking her there,
The screaming Achaeans fled before
man-killing Hector
And came to the ships and the
Hellespont. Nor could the well-greaved
Achaeans draw forth Patroclus, the
friend of Achilles,
From under the raining missiles, for
again the men
And horses of Troy came up to the body,
led by
Priam's son Hector with fury like that of

fire.

Three times resplendent Hector seized
the corpse

By the feet and loudly called out to the
Trojans, so eager

Was he to drag it away, and all three
times

The two Ajaxes, fired with
unquenchable courage, beat him

Back from the body. But Hector
remained unshaken

In his resolution, and either he charged
at them

Through the tumult, or stood his ground
and called to his men,

But he never once yielded so much as a
foot. For the Ajaxes

Had no more success in frightening

Hector

Away from the corpse than field-dwelling shepherds who try

To drive from a carcass a tawny and starving lion.

And now would Hector have hauled off the body and won

Unspeakable glory had not wind-footed swift Iris

Sped down from Olympus with word for Achilles to arm

For the battle. She came in obedience to Hera, without

The knowledge of Zeus and the other immortals, and standing

Close to Achilles she spoke to him these winged words:

“On your feet! son of Peleus, most
dreaded of men. Go rescue
Patroclus, on whose account a grim
battle is raging
In front of the ships. There men are
slaughtering men,
The Achaeans defending the corpse of
your friend, while the Trojans
Charge in to drag it away to windy
Ilium.
Blazing Hector is fiercest of all in his
efforts
To haul off the corpse, and his urge is to
hack off the head
From the tender neck and fix it high up
on a stake
Of the wall. On your feet, then, and lie

here no longer! Let shame
Fill your heart, lest soon the poor corpse
of Patroclus become
The delight of Trojan dogs—your shame
and disgrace,
If that corpse should come to your hands
at all mutilated
By Trojans!”

Then quick Achilles answered her
thus:
“Divine Iris, which of the gods sent you
here with this message?”

And again wind-footed swift Iris:
“Hera sent me,
The illustrious wife of high-throned
Zeus, who has
No knowledge at all of my coming

down, nor does
Any other immortal that dwells on
snowy Olympus.”

To which Achilles replied: “But how
should I go
Into battle when they out there are
holding my armor?
And my dear mother forbade me to arm
myself
Till she gets back from Hephaestus with
splendid war-gear
For me. I’m aware of no man’s armor
that I
Could use, except the big shield of
Telamonian Ajax,
And he, I’m sure, is using that piece
himself

Mid the foremost fighters, where he
rages hotly, wielding
His spear in defense of dead Patroclus.”

And again
Wind-footed swift Iris: “We know very
well who has
Your armor. But go to the trench as you
are and show
Yourself to the Trojans that they may be
so appalled
By the sight that they will stop fighting.
Then the war-worn son
Of Achaeans may have a chance to catch
their breath.
Such chances in battle are few.”

When thus she had spoken,
Fast-footed Iris took off. Then Zeus-

loved Achilles

Got up, and about his great shoulders
Athena flung

The bright-tasseled aegis,⁵ and round his
head the fair goddess

Drifted a golden mist, from which she
made blaze

A high-flaming fire. And as when smoke
billows up

From a distant island-city beleaguered
by foes,

And the soldiers defend it throughout the
day from the walls

Of their town till at last the sun sets and
the signal fires, many

And large, send their glare high up in the
sky, that men

On neighboring islands may see and
come in their ships
To ward off destruction, so now from
the head of Achilles
The blaze went up toward heaven.

Striding out from the wall,
He took his stand by the trench, though
he did not join
The Achaean troops, since he had
respect for his mother's
Strict command. He stood there and
shouted, while out
On the plain Athena joined her voice
with his, and he caused
Unspeakable chaos among the Trojans.
His voice
Rang out as piercingly clear as the

scream of a trumpet
When soul-wrecking foes are attacking a
city. And when
They heard Achilles' brazen voice, the
hearts
Of the Trojans were stunned with
surprise, and even the mane-tossing
Horses sensed fear in the air and turned
back their cars
In panic. And their drivers were
terrified when they saw
The unwearying fire blaze up with such
awesome glare
Above the head of great-souled
Achilles, for the bright-eyed
Goddess Athena made the flames rise.
Three times
Across the trench great Achilles mightily

shouted,
And three times the Trojans and their
world-famous allies
Were thrown into chaos. And there
twelve men of their bravest
Were killed by the cars and spears of
their own fellow soldiers.

Meanwhile, the thankful Achaeans
dragged Patroclus
From under the missiles and lifted him
onto a litter,
While round him followed his dear
mourning friends, and with them
Went fast Achilles, shedding hot tears,
as now
He looked down on his faithful friend,
torn by the mangling

Bronze and borne on a litter. He had sent
him with horses
And car into battle, but never again did
he welcome him
Back from the fighting.

Then heifer-eyed queenly Hera
Sent the unwearying Sun on his way to
the stream
Of Oceanus. So at last the Sun, though
reluctant,
Went down, and the brave Achaeans had
rest from the cruel
Strife of that all-leveling and evil war.

And opposite them the Trojans, drawn
back from the harsh
Encounter, unyoked from the cars their
fast-running horses

And met in assembly before even
thinking of supper.

And they stood all during the meeting,
since no one there

Cared to sit, so anxious were they at the
coming forth

Of Achilles, who had for so long stayed
out of the fighting.

Then thoughtful Polydamas, [bc](#) Panthous'
son, spoke first,

For he alone looked before as well as
behind.

He was a comrade of Hector—both had
been born

On the selfsame night—and he was as
gifted in speech

As Hector in battle. Now, in an effort to

help,

He spoke to them thus:

“Consider closely, my friends.

My own advice, since we are so far
from the wall,

Is that all of us now should go back to
the city, instead of

Awaiting bright Dawn out here on the
plain by the ships.

So long as Achilles held back because
of his wrath

Against King Agamemnon, the Achaeans
were easier men

To fight, and I too was glad to spend the
night out

By the shapely ships in the hope that we
might soon take them.

But now I am deeply afraid of quick-
charging Achilles,
A man of so mighty a spirit that he will
be
Unwilling to fight in the midst of the
plain, where both
The Achaeans and Trojans have suffered
the War-god's fury
Now he will aim his attack at the city
itself—
And at our wives! Let us, then, go back
there ourselves,
For believe me, I know what will
happen. Right now divine night
Has delayed fast-footed Achilles. But if
in the morning
He puts on some armor and comes out to
find us still here,

I tell you a great many men shall get well acquainted

With him. That man who escapes to holy Troy

Will be very glad that he did, but the dogs and the vultures

Shall feast on innumerable Trojans—may I never hear

How many! If, however, we do as I say, Even though we dislike to, we'll concentrate our forces

In the meeting place of the city, which is well protected

By walls with their strong, smooth-timbered gates, high

And well-barred. Then, at the first sign of Dawn, we'll arm

And take our stand on the walls, so that
if Achilles
Wishes to leave the ships and fight
against us
For the city, so much the worse for him!
He'll go back
Again to the ships, having worn out his
neck-arching horses
With galloping back and forth in front of
the walls.
He won't have the courage to break his
way in and pillage
The town. Before that, he will himself
be devoured
By the flashing-swift dogs of Troy!"

Then scowling at him,
Bright-helmeted Hector replied:

“Polydamas, this counsel
Of yours, that we should go back and be
penned up again
In the city, is most distasteful to me. Can
it be
That you haven’t had quite enough of
being shut up
In those walls? There was a time when
men were accustomed
To tell of King Priam’s city, so famous it
was
For its stores of bronze and gold. But
now its exquisite
Treasures are gone from the homes, and
countless fine things
Have been sold into Phrygia and into
lovely Maeonia,
Since great Zeus became angry with us.

And now

When at last that almighty god, the son of
devious

Cronos, has given me victory beside the
ships

And enabled me thus to coop the
Achaeans up close

By the sea, you, like a fool, advise the
host

To retreat. I command you to cease such
folly, nor will

So much as one man pay attention to you.
I'll see to that! But come, let all of us
now

Do as I say. Go take your supper by
companies

Throughout the host, and don't neglect to

stand watch

And all of you stay alert. And if any
Trojan

Is overly worried about his possessions,
let him

Collect them and turn them over for
public consumption.

Better for our own people to profit from
them

Than for the Achaeans to. But at the first
sign

Of Dawn, let us launch a keen-slashing
attack on the ships.

And if Achilles is really there to fight us,
It will indeed be so much the worse for
him!

I surely will not run from him nor away
from the horrors

Of battle, but face to face I'll oppose
him and see
Who wins the great victory, he or I. The
War-god
Is partial to none, and often he who
would kill
Is the one who gets killed!"

Thus Hector rebuked him, and all
Of the Trojans cheered, poor childish
fools that they were!
For Pallas Athena deprived them of
sense. They lauded
Hector and his bad advice, but not one
man
Had praise for Polydamas, although his
counsel was wise.⁶
Then throughout the host they took their

evening meal.

All night the Achaeans raised the wail
for Patroclus.

And among them Achilles led the
mournful chant,

Laying his man-killing hands on the
breast of his friend

And incessantly moaning, with grief as
wrathful as that

Of a tawny lioness, one whose cubs
some hunter

Of deer has stolen from out a deep
wood, and the lioness

Comes back too late and is stricken with
furious grief,

And her bitter anguish keeps her trailing
the man

Through many a gorge in a frantic effort
to find him.

So now Achilles, heavily groaning,
spoke

To the Myrmidons:

“Ah misery! how vain were the words
I uttered

That day when at home in the palace I
tried to console

The noble Menoetius, saying to him that
when

We had sacked the city of Troy I would
bring back to him

At Opus his splendid son Patroclus and
with him

His share of the spoil.^{bd} But Zeus does
not bring to fulfillment

All of the promises mortals make, and
now

Both Patroclus and I are doomed to stain
with our blood

The same Trojan soil, since I shall never
go back

To be welcomed at home by the knightly
old Peleus, nor

By Thetis, my mother, for here the black
earth shall hold me.

But now, Patroclus, since I shall go
under this ground

After you, I will bring to this place
before your body

Is burned both the armor and head of
Hector, the killer

Of great-hearted you! And in front of
your pyre I'll cut

The throats of twelve splendid sons of
the Trojans, venting
My wrath because of your killing.[be](#)
Until that time,
You shall lie here beside my beaked
ships, and around you
Day and night shall captive women of
Troy
Along with deep-breasted Dardanians
cry out in mourning
With shedding of tears, all of the women
Patroclus
And I took by force, toiling hard with
our spears, when together
We plundered rich cities of mortal men.”

So saying,
Royal Achilles told his comrades to set

A great three-legged cauldron over the
fire, that they
With all speed might wash the blood and
gore from Patroclus.
They set the bath cauldron over the coals
and poured in
Water for washing and beneath it heaped
wood. Then,
As the flames leaped round the
cauldron's belly, the water
Grew warm. And when it boiled in the
gleaming bronze,
They washed the corpse and anointed it
richly with oil,
Filling the wounds with ointment aged
for nine years.
Then they laid him out on a bed and
covered him over

From head to foot with a thin linen
shroud, over which
They draped a lovely white robe. So all
night long
About swift Achilles the Myrmidons
wailed in their grief
For Patroclus.

Meanwhile, Zeus spoke these words to
Hera,
His sister and wife: "I see you have had
your own way,
O heifer-eyed regal Hera, this time by
arousing
Swift-footed Achilles. Truly the long-
haired Achaeans
Must be your very own children!"
To which Queen Hera

Replied: "Most dreadful son of Cronos,
what
Are you talking about! Why even a
mortal, who lacks
The resources we have, will do what he
can for a friend.
So how was I, who claim to be best of
goddesses
On at least two accounts, in that I am the
eldest
And also your wife, you being King of
all
The immortals—how, I say, was I not to
weave
What evil I could for my hated foes the
Trojans?"

While thus they were talking, Thetis of

the silver feet

Arrived at the house of Hephaestus, a
mansion built

By the great limping god himself It was
wrought of immortal

Bronze and shone out among the deities'
houses

Bright as a star. At the moment
Hephaestus was busily

Turning from bellows to bellows,
sweating with toil

As he labored to finish a score of three-
legged tables

To stand round the sides of his firm-
founded hall. On each

Of the legs he had put a gold wheel, that
those magic tables

Might cause all to marvel by going with

no other help

To the gathering of gods and by likewise
returning to his house.

The tables were almost finished, but still
he had not

Attached the elaborate handles, which
now he was forging

With rivets hammered to fit them. While
he worked hard

On these with great skill, the bright-
footed goddess approached,

And lovely Charis, [bf](#) she of the
shimmering veil

Whom the famous lame god had married,
saw her and came

To the door. Then warmly taking her
hand, she said:

“My lovely-gowned Thetis, to what do we owe this visit?
You are indeed an honored and welcome guest,
Though your visits here have not been frequent. But follow me
Further, that I may set some refreshment before you.”

With this, divine Charis led her in and seated
Her in a beautiful chair, all richly wrought
And studded with silver, with a rest below for the feet.
And she called to the famous craftsman her husband, saying:
“Hephaestus, come in here. Thetis has

something to ask you.”

Upon which the great ambidextrous deity called:

“Surely, then, a revered and powerful goddess

Is in our home, the very one who saved me

From anguish that time I had fallen so far on account of

My bitch-hearted mother who wished to get rid of me

Because of my lameness.^{[bg](#)} Then I would surely have suffered

Much more than I did, if Thetis had not been so kind—

Thetis and Eurynome, daughter of circling Oceanus.

I stayed with them for nine years and
made a great many
Intricate things, brooches and spiral
bracelets,
Cupped earrings and necklaces, all
highly wrought by me
Within their high-vaulted cave, while
around us flowed
The endless stream of Oceanus, seething
with foam.
No man or immortal knew where I was,
except
Of course Thetis and Eurynome, since
they had taken me in.
And now divine Thetis, she of the
beautiful braids,
Has come to our house on a visit. Hence
I must do all

I can to repay her for rescuing me. Serve
her
Something refreshing and fine, while I
put my bellows
And tools away.”

So saying, he roused his huge bulk
From the anvil, puffing and limping,
though his thin legs
Were nimble enough. He set the bellows
away
From the fire, and gathering up his tools
he put them
Away in a silver chest. With a sponge he
wiped
His face and hands, his powerful neck
and shaggy
Chest, then put on a tunic, took a strong

staff,
And limped toward the door. Quickly,
girls of gold,
Exactly resembling living maids, hurried
To help their master—they all have
minds of their own,
Speech and strength, and the gods
everlasting have given them
Marvelous skill with their hands. When
these had assisted
Their master through the door, he limped
up to Thetis,
Sat down in a gleaming chair, took her
hand warmly,
And calling her name, spoke thus:

“My lovely-gowned Thetis,
To what do we owe this visit? You are

indeed

An honored and welcome guest, but your
visits here

Have not been frequent. So say what you
have in mind,

And if it can be done and done by me
Then my heart says do it.”

And Thetis, weeping, replied:

“O Hephaestus, is there any goddess
who lives on Olympus

To whom Zeus has given so many
sorrows as he has

To me? He made me alone, of all the sea
nymphs,

Endure the bed of a mortal, of Peleus,
son

Of Aeacus, sorely against my will. [bh](#)

This Peleus
Lies in his palace, worn out with sad old
age,
But now I have other troubles. For Zeus
gave me
A son to bear and to raise, one who
would be
The bravest and best of all warriors.
When I had tenderly
Reared him, as one would a seedling he
plants in a rich
Orchard plot, and watched him shoot up
like a sturdy young tree,
I sent him off with the big-beaked ships
to Troy,
That he might do battle with Trojans. But
never again
Shall I welcome him home to the house

of Peleus. Yet
He must suffer so long as he lives in the
light of the sun,
Nor can I help him at all by going to him.
Lord Agamemnon snatched from his
arms the girl
That the sons of Achaeans picked out for
him as a prize.
Then while he was wasting his heart in
grief for her,
The Trojans penned the Achaeans up
close to the sterns
Of their ships and held them there. So
the Argive elders
Pleaded with him for his aid, offering
him many
Splendid gifts. And though he refused to

defend them

From ruin himself, he did lend Patroclus
his armor

And sent him forth into battle with many
Myrmidons.

All that day they fought round the Scaean
Gates

And could on that selfsame day have
taken the town,

If Apollo had not slain Patroclus up front
mid the champions,

Killing him there after he had done much
damage

To Trojans, though Hector received the
credit and glory.

Now, then, I've come to your knees to
see if you'll give

My soon-to-die son new armor—a

shield and a helmet,
Bright greaves with ankle-clasps, and a
breastplate too.
For the armor he had was lost with his
faithful friend
When he was cut down by the Trojans.
And now my son
Lies on the ground grieving his
sorrowful heart out.”

Then the great ambidextrous god
answered her thus:
“Take heart, and try not to worry. I only
wish
That I were as able to save him from
hateful death,
When the dread hour of doom comes on
him, as I am able

To make a bright set of armor for him, a set
So exceedingly fine that all who see it
will marvel.”

With this, he left her there and went
back to his bellows,
Which now he turned toward the fire and
told to blow.

And the bellows—all twenty of them—
blew on the crucibles,
Sending forth blasts of wind wherever
the toiling god
Wished them to make the fire hotter in
order to further
His work. And on the fire he put
stubborn bronze,
And tin, and precious silver and gold.

Then he set
His huge anvil up on the block and took
up in one hand
A massive hammer, and fire-seizing
tongs in the other.

First he fashioned a shield both wide
and thick,
Skillfully forging it all. About it he
hammered
A triple-thick rim, to which he attached
a baldric
Of silver. The rest of the shield was five
layers thick,
And on it he wrought, with cunning skill,
many
Elaborate things.

He made lovely images there

Of earth and heaven,⁷ of sea and
weariless sun,
Of the moon at full and of all
constellations that shine
In the sky—the Pleiads, the Hyads, and
mighty Orion,
And the Great Bear, by some called the
Wain, which circles
In its place, its eyes on Orion the Hunter,
and never
Sinks in the baths of Oceanus.

On it he wrought
Two beautiful cities⁸ and filled them
with people. In one
There were weddings and banquets, and
by the light of high-blazing
Torches, parties were leading the brides

from their homes
And through the streets, as the loud
bridal song arose.
Young men were whirling about in the
dance to the music
Of flutes and lyres, and women stood at
their doors
To watch the procession and marvel.
The men, though, had gone
To the place of assembly, where two of
their number were striving
To settle a case concerning a murdered
man's blood-price.
The defendant declared his cause to the
people and vowed
He was willing to pay the whole price,
but the other refused
To accept it, and each was eager to have

a judge's

Decision in his behalf. The people were
cheering

Both men, some favoring one and some
the other,

But heralds held all of them back from
where in the sacred

Circle the elders sat on the polished
stones,

Each taking the great-lunged herald's
staff when it came

To him in his turn. With this each elder
would come

To the fore and give his opinion. And in
the center

Two talents of gold were lying, the fee
to be given

To him who uttered the straightest and truest judgment.

But the other city was shown besieged
by two
Shining hosts of bronze-armored men.
And they were divided
Between two plans, either to sack and
pillage
The lovely town, or to lift the siege in
return
For half its possessions. Those within,
however,
Would not go along with this proposal at
all,
And instead they were arming and
getting an ambush ready.
Leaving their wives and small children,

together with all
The old men, to guard the wall, the
others went forth
Behind Ares and Pallas Athena, both
wrought of gold
And wearing gold armor, tall and
beautiful figures,
Quite as the gods should be, that clearly
stood out
Above the men they were leading. When
these arrived
At the place where it pleased them to lay
their ambush, down
In the bed of a river where all kinds of
cattle watered,
They posted two guards apart from the
rest to keep
A sharp look-out for sheep and shuffling

cattle, and then

They sat down to wait in their flashing
bronze. Very soon

The herds came, attended by two happy
herdsmen, gaily

Playing their pipes and suspecting no
treacherous ambush.

But those in hiding sprang out, killed the
two herdsmen,

And quickly cut off the many beeves and
beautiful

Flocks of silvery white sheep. Now the
city's besiegers,

Gathered in council, heard the bawling
of cattle,

And leaping up quickly behind their
high-stepping horses

They rapidly drove to where the attack
had occurred.

And there, by the banks of the river, they
fought a pitched battle,

Gashing each other with bronze-headed
spears. Hatred

And Chaos took part in the struggle, as
did the spirit

Of ruinous Death, who was shown
laying violent hands

On one man wounded but still alive, on
another

Unwounded as yet, while a third who
was dead already

She dragged through the gore by the feet,
and the cloak on her

shoulders

Was crimson with warriors' blood. Thus

they all mingled
And fought like living men, and each
side was hauling
Its dead away from the foe.

Thereon he set
A wide field of rich fallow land, thrice-
plowed and soft.
Here many plowmen were wheeling
their teams and cutting
Long furrows. And each time they came
to the edge of the field,
A man would step out and place in their
hands a cup
Of honey-sweet wine. Then the plowmen
would turn and head
Down the furrow, eager to reach the
field's edge again.

And behind them the earth, though made
of gold, grew black,
Exactly as real earth does when it's
plowed. Such
Was the marvelous art of Hephaestus.

And there on the shield
He depicted the huge estate of a king,
whereon
His workers were reaping,⁹ wielding
their sharp reaping hooks.
All along the swath the handfuls of grain
were falling,
And boys would gather them up in their
arms and carry them
Over to binders, who tied them up into
sheaves.
Among them the king, his royal staff in

hand,
Stood quietly rejoicing, while off from
them in the shade
Of an oak his heralds were roasting an
ox they had slaughtered,
Preparing a meal for the reapers, and
women were sprinkling
The meat with abundant white barley.

And on it he made
A fair golden vineyard, where heavy
dark clusters of grapes
Were supported by silver poles. About it
he ran
A trench of blue lapis and outside of that
a tin fence.
Only one path led into the vineyard, and
by it

The pickers came and went whenever
they gathered
The grapes. Along it girls and young men
were gaily
Bearing the honey-sweet fruit in full
wicker baskets,
And with them a boy, strumming his lyre,
sang sweetly
In his fine voice a dirge for the death of
Linus,
While all the others kept time to the
music, dancing
And chanting together.

There he also made a herd
Of straight-horned cattle, fashioning
them of gold
And tin. With lowing they hurried from

farmyard to pasture,
A field by the quivering reeds of a
clamorous river.
Four herdsman of gold were walking
beside the cattle,
And with the men nine flashing-swift
dogs were shown.
But up at the front of the herd two
awesome lions
Had seized a loud-lowling bull and
dragged him, terribly
Bellowing, off to one side, while the
dogs and young men
Came running. The lions, however,
ripped open the hide
Of the bull and gulped his entrails,
lapping their fill
Of dark blood, as the herdsman vainly

attempted to scare them

By urging on the quick dogs. These
shrank from sinking

Their teeth in the lions, but stood up
close, barking

And springing away.

And the great ambidextrous god
Wrought on the shield a wide and
beautiful valley,

Wherein was a meadow for silvery
white sheep with sheepfolds,
Shelters, and pens.

And on it the famous lame god
Made with great skill a dancing-floor¹⁰
like the one

In wide Knossos which Daedalus built a
long time ago

For her of the beautiful braids, the fair
Ariadne.

There on the floor young men and bull-
bringing maidens

Were holding each other's wrists and
dancing, the girls

In sheer linen gowns, the men in close-
woven tunics

To which a faint gloss had been given
with soft olive oil.

And on their heads the girls wore lovely
garlands,

While all the men had golden daggers
hanging

From belts of silver. First they would
spin in the dance,

Their skillful feet whirling around like
the wheel of a potter

Who squats to give it a turn and see how it runs.

Then they would form in long lines and dance toward each other.

And all around the exquisite dancers a large

And delighted crowd was standing, as in and out

Among them a pair of performers gaily turned cartwheels.

At last, all about the rim of the massive shield

He put the powerful stream of the river Oceanus.[11](#)

Next, having finished the shield both wide and thick,

He forged Achilles a breastplate

brighter than flame,
Then beat out a weighty helmet, close-
fitting, crested
With gold, and beautifully wrought, and
finally fashioned him
Greaves of flexible tin.

Now when the great
Ambidextrous god had made all the
armor, he took it
And laid it before the feet of Achilles'
mother.
And she like a hawk swooped down
from snowy Olympus,
Bearing the flashing armor Hephaestus
had made.

BOOK XIX

The Reconciliation

As crocus-clad Dawn arose from
Oceanus' stream,
That she might bring light to gods and
mortal men,
Thetis arrived at the ships with the gifts
from Hephaestus.
There she found her dear son embracing
Patroclus
And wailing, while round him his
comrades stood weeping. At once
The bright goddess stood by his side
among them, took

His hand warmly in hers, and spoke to him thus:

“My child,
In spite of our grief, we must allow this man
To lie as he is, since now he is dead forever
By will of the gods. But take from Hephaestus this glorious
War-gear, more exquisite armor than any man yet
Has worn on his shoulders.”

So saying, the goddess set down
The armor in front of Achilles, and all of the pieces
Rang in their intricate splendor. Then trembling seized all

Of the Myrmidons, nor did they dare to
so much as look
At the armor, but shrank back in terror.
But when Achilles
Saw the armor, his wrath increased, and
his eyes
Glared out from beneath his lids with the
awesome fury
Of flame. He picked up the gear and
deeply rejoiced
In the glorious gifts of Hephaestus, and
when he had sated
His soul with gazing upon their
elaborate art,
He spoke to his mother in these winged
words:

“My mother,

This armor Hephaestus has given is fit
indeed
To be the work of an immortal god, nor
could any
Mortal achieve it. Now, then, I'll arm
for the fight,
Though I am extremely uneasy that while
I'm away
Flies will light on the bronze-dealt
wounds of Patroclus
And breed worms in them, thus defiling
his corpse.
No life is left in him now, and all of his
flesh
Will rot."

Then silver-shod Thetis replied: "My
child,

Don't let such things distress you. I'll do
my best
To keep from his corpse the pestilent
swarms of flies
That feed on the flesh of men slain in
battle. Though he
Should lie where he is throughout a
whole year, his flesh
Would be sound as ever, if not indeed
sounder. But you
Go call to the place of assembly the men
of Achaea
And there renounce your wrath against
Agamemnon,
The people's shepherd. Then arm
yourself with all speed
For the battle, and fill your heart with
dauntless courage."

Thus she spoke, and her words
inspired Achilles
With truly invincible valor, and into the
nostrils
Of dead Patroclus the goddess instilled
ambrosia
And ruby nectar, that his firm flesh might
still
Continue to be so.

Meanwhile, noble Achilles
Strode off along the shore of the sea,
terribly
Shouting, and soon he aroused the
Achaean warriors.
Even they who had always stayed at the
ships—
The helmsmen who wielded the

steering-oars, and the stewards
Who dealt out the rations—even these
came to the place
Of assembly, since now Achilles, who
had for so long
Stayed out of the painful fighting, had
come forth again.
Those two squires of Ares, battle-
staunch Diomedes
And brilliant Odysseus, limped in and
sat down at the front,
Each using his spear for support, since
both were still feeling
Their recent wounds. Last of all came
King Agamemnon,
He too still favoring his wound, the gash
that Coon,
Son of Antenor, had made with his

bronze-pointed spear.

When all the Achaeans had gathered,
swift-footed Achilles

Arose and spoke thus:

“My lord Agamemnon, was this, then,
Better for us, for you and for me, that we
With hearts full of sorrow raged in soul-
eating hate

On account of a girl? O how I wish that
Artemis

There by the ships had killed her with
one of her arrows

That day when I leveled Lyrnessus and
took her as booty.

Then would far fewer Achaeans have
bitten the dust

Of this unspeakable earth beneath the

hands

Of their foes, while I wouldn't fight
because of resentment.

Our quarrel did much good for the
Trojans and Hector,

But long indeed the Achaeans will think
of our strife

With miserable sorrow. Well, what's
done is done.

Now we must conquer the anger within
us—because

We must. Now I at least shall put an end
To my wrath. It would hardly become
me to go on this way

Forever.¹ But come, Atrides, quickly
command

The long-haired Achaeans to get

themselves ready for battle,
That I may engage the Trojans and see if
they wish
To spend this night out here by the ships.
Believe me,
Many a Trojan will be very glad to sit
down
And rest anywhere, that is if he escapes
The fury of war and my spear!”

Thus he spoke,
And the well-greaved Achaeans roared
their applause, so glad
Were they that the great-souled son of
Peleus had now
Renounced his wrath. Then the king of
men Agamemnon
Spoke among them, not coming out in the

center,

But standing before his seat:

“Surely, O friends,

Danaan heroes, comrades of Ares,
surely

You should pay attention to him who
stands up to speak,

And not interrupt him. The world's most
gifted speaker

Could never make himself heard above
the hubbub

Of an army, no matter how strong his
voice might be!

Now I wish to speak to Achilles, but I
want every man

Of you other Argives to pay close
attention and know

What I say. Very often you men of
Achaëa have had
Your say and spoken against me, though
really I am not
To blame.² But Zeus and powerful Fate
are, and the Fury
That stalks through the mist. For that day
here in the place
Of assembly they hurled on my soul
harsh blindness and caused me
To take from Achilles the prize that is
rightfully his.
But what could I do, since God himself
brings all things
To pass? That day God worked through
his eldest daughter,
Sweet Folly—a ruinous power that

blinds the judgments
Of all. Soft are her feet, for she never
goes
On the ground, but always she treads the
air just over
Men's heads, ensnaring first one, then
another, and making
Them err through foolish infatuation.
Why once
She blinded Zeus himself, though people
say he
Is the greatest of gods and men. But even
him
Wily Hera beguiled, using well her
female cunning,
On that day when Alcmene was due to
give birth
In tower-crowned Thebes to the

powerful Heracles. That day
Zeus made this pronouncement to all of
the gathered gods:

“ ‘Pay attention to me, all gods and
goddesses too,
That I may say what my heart commands
me to speak.

This day shall the goddess of childbirth,
the labor-inducing
Eileithyia, bring forth to the light a man
who shall rule
Over all of his neighbors, one of those
men descended
From me by blood.’

“But queenly Hera craftily
Answered him thus: ‘Your failure to do
what you say,

O Olympian, will prove you a liar in
this. But come,
Swear to me now an unbreakable oath
that he
Who this day shall fall between the feet
of a woman,
Born a child of your blood, shall really
rule
Over all of his neighbors.’

“So Hera, but Zeus was oblivious
Of what she intended, and there he
swore a great oath—
Even Zeus, completely deluded by Folly.
Then Hera
Sprang down from the peak of Olympus
and quickly arrived
In Achaean Argos where, as she well

knew,
The noble wife of Sthenelus, son of
Perseus,
Had carried a son in her womb for some
seven months.
This child Hera brought quickly forth to
the light
Before his due time, but she held back
Alcmene's son
By restraining the goddess of
childbirth.^{bi} Then Hera herself
Went with the news to Cronos' son Zeus,
and said:

“ ‘O Father Zeus, lord of the dazzling
bolt,
I come to inform you that on this day
there has

Already been born that excellent man
who shall
Be King of the Argives—Eurystheus,
son of Sthenelus,
The son of your own son Perseus. Hence
he is worthy
To be the Argives' ruler.'

“At this, sharp pain
Struck deep in the heart of Zeus, and
grabbing a handful
Of Folly's bright-braided hair, he swore
an unbreakable
Oath in his fury of soul that never again
Would she, the deluder of all, be
allowed on Olympus
Or anywhere near the star-studded
heaven. So swearing,

He whirled her about by the hair and
flung her down
From the starry sky, so that soon she
arrived mid the works
Of men. But still Zeus would groan
whenever he saw
His beloved son Heracles toiling
beneath some foul labor
That King Eurystheus laid on him. So
also I,
When huge bright-helmeted Hector was
cutting the Argives
To pieces beside the sterns of their
ships, could not
Forget Folly, who blinded me from the
first. But since
I surely was blinded, and robbed of all
sense by Zeus,

I am eager to make amends and to give
in requital
Gifts beyond counting. So get yourself
ready for battle,
And rouse all the rest of the army As for
the gifts,
I promise you all that lord Odysseus
offered
The other night when he came to your
lodge. Or,
If you'd rather, stay out of the battle for
just a while longer,
Straining to fight though you are, and my
men shall bring
These gifts from my ship, that you may
see for yourself
What glorious things they are.”

Then fast Achilles:

“Renowned Atrides, king of men
Agamemnon,

The gifts are yours to give or withhold,³
as is right

And you see fit. But now, with no further
delay,

Let us call up our lust for battle. It hardly
becomes us

To talk time away when there is great
work to be done.

Now when once again Achilles is seen
by many

Up front with his bronze-headed spear
depleting the ranks

Of Troy, let each of you think who is
back in the battle

And fight with your man in the mood
such thinking inspires!”

To which resourceful Odysseus
answered, saying:

“Not quite so fast, O godlike Achilles,
great warrior

Though you are. Don’t send the sons of
Achaeans

Into battle with Trojans before they have
eaten,

For once the ranks clash and the War-
god breathes his fury

Into both sides, the fight will not soon be
over.

So order the men to breakfast beside the
swift ships

On food and wine, the source of their

courage and strength.

Not one of us here could fight all day
long till sunset

With nothing to eat. No matter how
ardent for battle

He were, his legs would be leaden
before he knew it,

As thirst and hunger caught up with him,
and soon

His knees would grow weak. But he
who has his fill

Of food and wine fights all day long,
sustained

By the strength of his heart, and beneath
him his legs hold out

Until all are ready to quit. So come,
Achilles,

Break up the meeting and bid the men go

fix a meal.

Regarding the gifts, let King Agamemnon
have them

Brought here to the place of assembly,
that all the Achaeans

May see them and your own spirit be
warmed with delight.

And let him stand up mid the Argives
and swear an oath

To you that he has never gone to bed
With the girl and made love with her, as
men and women,

O Prince, so naturally do. And let your
own heart

Be forgiving and gracious. Then let him
make further amends

With a lavish feast in his lodge, that you

may lack nothing
You have coming to you. And you,
Agamemnon, hereafter
Be juster toward others. A king loses
nothing who makes
Amends to one he has first unjustly
offended.”

To him the commander-in-chief
Agamemnon replied:
“Your words, O son of Laertes, have
filled me with gladness,
For justly you have explained as well as
expounded,
And nothing has been left out. The oath
you describe
I am ready and anxious to take, nor shall
I be false

Before God in so doing. But let Achilles
stay here

For a while, hot though he be for battle,
and all

Of you others stay too, till the gifts are
brought from my lodge

And we swear our oaths of faith with
due sacrifice.

And as for you, Odysseus, these are your
orders:

Pick out a number of men, the best young
princes

Among the Achaeans, and bring from my
ship all the gifts

That we promised Achilles the other
night, and bring

The women as well. And let Talthybius
get

A boar ready, that here in the midst of
this huge gathered host
We may make our due sacrifice to Zeus
and the Sun.”

Fast-fighting Achilles, however,
answered him, saying:
“Most famous Atrides, king of men
Agamemnon,
It would be much better for you to take
care of these things
At some other time, when perhaps there
shall come a lull
In the fighting and when my own spirit is
somewhat appeased.⁴
But now the mangled dead still lie
where Hector
Left them when Zeus gave glory to him,

and you

And Odysseus bid us eat breakfast! My
orders now

To all the Achaeans would be to fight
hard all day

On empty and starving stomachs, and
then, when the sun

Goes down and we have avenged our
disgrace, to make

A huge meal for ourselves. Until that
time no food

Or drink shall pass down my throat, at
least, since my

Dear friend lies torn in my lodge, his
feet toward the door,

While round him our comrades are
mourning. Hence I have no interest

At all in food and drink, but only in

slaughter

And blood and the agonized groans of
mangled men.”

Then Odysseus, always resourceful,
answered him thus:

“O Achilles, son of Peleus, strongest by
far

Of all the Achaeans, surely you’re
stronger than I

And more than a little better at hurling
the spear,

But I in counsel may very well far
surpass you,

Since I am older and have experienced
more.

So listen to me and let your heart heed
what I say.

Men soon get enough of hard fighting,
especially when Zeus,
The dispenser of victory, tips his
balance against them.
Then with their bronze they reap far
more straw than grain,
And soon they're exhausted. Nor can we
consider mourning
The dead by denying our bellies, since
day after day
So many men die that, believe me,
there'd be no more eating
At all! So we have no choice but to bury
the dead,
Hardening our hearts and weeping for
one day only.
For all those still left alive from the
hateful tumult

Of battle must make themselves eat and
drink, that we
May go on in armor of unyielding bronze
to fight
The foe without undue pause and harder
than ever.
Now let no man in this army hold back
for want
Of orders—these are your orders, and
woe to him
Who loiters here at the ships! All
together, let us
March out and charge with savagely
slashing Ares
Upon the horse-breaking Trojans.”

So saying, Odysseus
Went off with the sons of King Nestor,

Phyleus' son Meges,
Thoas, Meriones, Creon's son
Lycomedes,
And Melanippus, and quickly they strode
to the lodge
Of Atreus' son Agamemnon, where each
man followed
Instructions. They brought from the
shelters the seven tripods
Atrides had promised, twelve horses,
and twenty bright cauldrons,
And forth they led seven women,
flawless at work
With their hands, and lovely Briseis
made eight. Then Odysseus
Weighed out ten talents of gold and led
the way back
With the young Achaeans loaded down

with the gifts.

These they set in the place of assembly,
and up rose

Agamemnon, while the god-voiced
herald Talthybius stood

By the army's commander-in-chief
holding a boar

With both hands. And the son of Atreus
drew the knife

That always hung beside his great
scabbard and from

The head of the boar he cut the first
bristles. Then lifting

His hands in prayer to Father Zeus, with
all

The Argives silently sitting, heeding
their King

In good order, he looked up at heaven's
expanse and prayed:

“May Zeus be my witness first, the
highest and best
Of gods, then Earth and Sun and the
Furies that punish
Men in the nether world for swearing
falsely,
That never yet have I laid a hand on
Briseis,
Neither to take her to bed nor for
anything else.
She has lived in my lodge the whole
time quite unmolested.
And if this oath be false in any way,
May the gods everlasting inflict me with
countless sorrows,

All that they give to a man who sins
against them
By swearing falsely.”

He prayed, then cut the boar’s throat
With the unfeeling bronze, whereupon
Talthybius whirled
With the carcass and flung it into the
great gray gulf
Of the sea, thus providing a feast for the
fish. Then Achilles
Stood up and spoke mid the war-loving
Argives, saying:

“O Father Zeus, how total is that cruel
blindness
You cast upon men! Agamemnon would
never have filled
My heart with rage, nor ruthlessly taken

the girl

In spite of my wrath, if you, O Zeus, had not

Already decreed that many Achaeans should die.

But now let all of you go to your meal, that we

May soon clash with the Trojans.”

With this, he quickly broke up
The assembly, and all of the others
dispersed to their ships.

But the spirited Myrmidons busied
themselves with the gifts

And brought them all to the ship of
godlike Achilles.

There they stowed them away in his
shelters, leaving

The women there and proudly driving
the horses
Off to his herd.

But when Briseis, gorgeous
As sweet Aphrodite the golden, saw
Patroclus
Gashed and torn with the mangling
bronze, she flung
Herself on him and shrieked in her grief,
and with her hands
She tore at her breasts and soft neck and
beautiful face.
Wailing, this woman lovely as
goddesses cried:

“Patroclus, most precious to my
wretched heart, I left you
Alive when I went from this lodge, but

now, 0 leader

Of many, I come back to find you lying
here dead.

Thus misery continues to follow misery
for me.

The husband to whom my father and
queenly mother

Gave me I saw lying dead before our
city,

Gashed with the mangling bronze, and
my three precious brothers,

All sons of the mother who bore me,
were likewise all

Overtaken by their day of doom. But
you, when Achilles

Killed my husband and leveled King
Mynes' city,

You wouldn't allow me to grieve, but

comforted me

With the promise that you would have
great Achilles make me

His lawful wife, and have him take me
to Phthia

In one of his ships and joyfully celebrate
there

With a wedding feast mid the
Myrmidons. Hence I weep

For your death without ceasing, for you
the forever gentle.”⁵

Thus she spoke, constantly sobbing,
and all

Of the other women added their tears to
hers,

Outwardly mourning Patroclus, but also
lamenting

Their own miserable plight. And around
Achilles

The Achaean elders gathered, pleading
with him

To eat. But he refused, groaning and
saying:

“I plead with you, my friends, if only
someone

Will listen, not to urge food and drink on
me,

Since I am so full of heart-rending grief
I'll go

As I am till sundown, no matter how
empty I get.”

At this the other chiefs left him there,
but the two sons

Of Atreus stayed, as did Idomeneus,

Nestor,
And the knightly old Phoenix, all trying
further to comfort
Their grieving friend. But his heart
would not be appeased
At all, till he had hurled himself straight
into
The blood-dripping jaws of war.
Remembering Patroclus,
He heaved a deep sigh and said:

“Ah how very well,
O my unlucky, most precious friend, how
very well
You would set forth a fine meal for us in
this lodge
And with what dispatch, whenever the
Argives were hastening

To hurl a tear-fraught attack on the
horse-taming Trojans!

But now you lie here, gashed and torn,
and I, so much

Do I miss you, have no wish at all to eat
or to drink,

Though there is plenty right here at hand.
Nothing

That I could suffer could be more painful
than this,

Not even news of my father's death, who
now

In Phthia is probably shedding bitter
tears for lack

Of the son he lost, while I am here in a
land

Of strangers, fighting on horrible
Helen's account

With men of Troy—nor even news that
my own son
Was dead could hurt me more, he who is
being
Brought up for me in Scyros, my own
Neoptolemus,
If indeed that godlike boy is still alive. [6](#)
Always before, I hoped in my heart that I
Alone would die far away from horse-
pasturing Argos
Here in the land of Troy, but that you,
Patroclus,
Would go back to Phthia and take my son
with you, [bj](#) sailing
From Scyros in a fast black ship, then
showing him all things
At home—my treasures, my slaves, and

my great high-roofed house.
For Peleus by now is probably dead and
gone,
Or barely alive, worn out with hateful
old age
And his miserable waiting for news that
I am dead.”

Thus he spoke in his weeping, and all
of the elders
Still present added their groans, each
one of them thinking
Of those he had left at home. And as they
wept,
Cronos’ son Zeus both saw and pitied
their grief,
And at once he spoke these winged
words to Pallas Athena:

“My child, you’ve now completely
forsaken your own
Favorite fighter. Have you no more
concern for Achilles
At all? He sits down there in front of his
high-horned
Vessels, weeping for his dead friend.
The others
Have gone to their meal, but he will
touch nothing to eat
Or to drink. But go, distill into his breast
Delightful ambrosia and nectar, to stave
off the pangs
Of hunger later on.”

So saying, he prompted
Athena, a goddess who needed no
urging, and she

Like a wide-winged, high-screaming
hawk shot down from heaven
Through the bright air. And while the
Achaeans were hurriedly
Arming for battle throughout the camp,
she instilled
Delightful ambrosia and nectar into the
breast
Of Achilles, that grim pangs of hunger
might not undo
His strong limbs. Then she returned to
the thick-walled house
Of her almighty Father, just as the
Argives came pouring
Out from the ships. As when from Zeus
the snowflakes
Come fluttering down thick and fast,
driven on by hard blasts

Of the sky-born North Wind, so now
from the ships came flashing
Bright helmets, bossed shields, bronze-
gleaming breastplates, and
spears
Of tough ash. And the brightness of all
went up to the sky,
As earth all around seemed to laugh, so
radiant was she
Beneath all that flashing of bronze, and
the ground resounded
Like thunder beneath the feet of the
marching army.

In the midst of all this, great Achilles
put on his war-gear.
He gnashed his teeth, and his eyes glared
fierce as fire,

For into his heart unbearable grief had
pierced.

Thus in his hatred of Trojans, he put on
the gifts

Of the god, the armor Hephaestus had
forged for him

With toil and painstaking art. First he
covered

His shins with greaves, fair greaves with
ankle-clasps of silver.

Next, about his chest he put the
breastplate,

And from his shoulders he slung the
bronze sword with the studs

Of bright silver, and then with one hand
he caught up the shield

Both wide and thick, and from it there
came a gleam

Like that of the moon. And as when
sailors at sea,
Borne by a storm far over the fish-full
deep
Far away from their loved ones, glimpse
the gleam of a fire
From some lonely hut in the mountains,
so now from the beautifully
Intricate shield of Achilles the
brightness went far
Through the air. Then lifting the weighty
helmet he set it
Upon his head, where it sparkled and
shone like a star,
And the golden plumes that Hephaestus
had fixed in the crest
Of horsehair danced gaily above it. And

royal Achilles

Tried himself in the armor to see if it
fitted

Him well and allowed his splendid
limbs to move freely,

And he, the people's shepherd, felt light
as a bird,

As if that armor were wings to lift him
aloft.

Then from its stand he took the spear of
his father,

A huge spear, heavy and long. No
Achaean fighter

Could wield it but mighty Achilles
himself, this strong spear

Of ash that Cheiron the Centaur had
given to Peleus,

Achilles' dear father. It came from the

peak of Mount Pelion,
And was meant to bring death to the
foe. [bk](#)

Automedon and Alcimus
Busily harnessed the horses, putting
about them
The beautiful breast-bands, forcing the
bits back into
Their jaws, and drawing the reins
behind to the sturdy
Rail. Then Automedon seized the bright
hand-fitting lash
And mounted the car, and behind him
Achilles stepped up,
Fully armed and as dazzling as blazing
Hyperion. Then harshly
He called to his father's horses:

“Xanthus and Balius,
World-famous foals of Podarge, this
time take care
To bring your rider back safe to the
Danaan host
When the fighting is over, instead of
leaving him dead
On the plain as you left Patroclus.”

From under the yoke
The horse Xanthus answered, he of the
bright-glancing feet.
He bowed his head so that all of his
mane, streaming
From under the yoke-pad, swept the
ground, and Hera,
The white-armed goddess, gave him a
voice:

“This time,
O gigantic Achilles, we’ll bring you back
safe enough,
Though surely your day of doom is
already near.
Nor shall we be the cause of your death.
That will be
Brought about by a very great god and
powerful Fate.
It was through no sloth nor slowness of
ours that Trojans
Were able to strip the gear from
Patroclus’ shoulders,
But one of the strongest gods of all, the
son
Of lovely-haired Leto, slew him among
the front fighters

And gave the glory to Hector. We two
can run
As fast as the blasting West Wind, which
people say
Is the fleetest of winds, but you are
already fated
To die, overwhelmed by the force of a
god and a mortal.”[bl](#)

When thus he had spoken, the Furies
deprived him of speech,
And Achilles, deeply disturbed, replied:
“Xanthus,
What need have you to prophesy death
for me?
I am already aware that it is my fate
To die here, far from my much-loved
father and mother.

Even so, I'll not relax till I've given the
Trojans
Their fill of bloody war."

So saying, he yelled
And drove those solid-hoofed horses up
mid the foremost.

BOOK XX

The Gods at War

Thus beside the beaked ships and all
around you,

O war-starved Achilles, Achaeans
armed for the fight,

And up the plain from them the Trojans
did likewise.

But powerful Zeus, from the many-
ridged peak of Olympus,

Bade Themis call the gods to a meeting,¹
and quickly

She went to them all and summoned them
to the assembly

At Zeus's palace. Not one river-god was
absent
Except Oceanus, nor any nymph, of all
those
Who haunt the lovely groves, the springs
where rivers
Rise, and the grassy fields. Once there at
the house
Of the cloud-gathering god, all the
immortals took seats
Within the rows of bright columns which
skillful Hephaestus
Had made for Zeus their Father.

Nor did earth-shaking
Poseidon ignore Themis' call, but
emerged from the brine
To join them. And now he sat in their

midst and inquired
About Zeus's purpose: "Why, O lord of
the lightning,
Have you called this meeting of gods?
Are you worried about
The Achaeans and Trojans, between
whom battle is almost
Ready to blaze?"

Then Zeus of the gathering gale
Answered him thus: "You're right, great
shaker of shores,
I have indeed called this gathering of the
immortals
Because of my deep concern for those
warriors, doomed
Though they are. I myself, of course,
will stay on a ridge

Of Olympus, from which I may watch the war as I please.

But all of you other immortals go down and help

The Achaeans and Trojans, aiding whichever side

You prefer. For if fast-fighting Achilles attacks

The unaided Trojans, they won't be able to hold out

A moment. They've never been able to so much as see him

Without fear and trembling, and now that flaming rage

For the death of his friend is eating his heart, I'm afraid

He will outstrip his fate by leveling the walls of the city."

These words of Cronos' son Zeus
awoke stubborn war,
And the gods went down to join their
differing favorites.
Hera and Pallas Athena went to the ships
Of the Argives, and with them Poseidon
and luck-bringing
Hermes,
The wiliest god of all. And with these
went Hephaestus,
Exulting in might, for though he limped,
his thin legs
Were nimble enough. But huge bright-
helmeted Ares
And Apollo with hair unshorn went
down to the Trojans,
Along with arrow-showering Artemis,

Leto,
The river-god Xanthus, and Aphrodite,
adorer
Of smiles.

So long as the gods were not there, the
Achaeans
Won glorious victory, since now
Achilles, who had
For so long stayed out of the painful
fighting, had come forth
Again, and there was no Trojan whose
legs did not tremble
At sight of quick-footed Achilles,
flaming in arms
Like the man-maiming War-god himself
But when the Olympians
Entered the tumult, host-harrying Hatred

arose

With a vengeance. Athena screamed her
great war-cry, now

From beside the deep trench outside the
wall, now

From the surf-beaten shore of the sea,
and opposite her

Dread Ares, ominous as a dark
whirlwind, screamed

From the citadel heights, and again as he
charged down the slope

Of Callicolone beside the banks of
Simoeis.

Thus the happy gods greatly augmented
the clash

Of battle and made bitter strife break out
everywhere

Between the two armies fighting in
horrible uproar.

Then from on high the Father of gods and
men

Awesomely thundered, while down
below Poseidon

Caused the limitless earth to rumble and
quake

From plain to sheer mountain peaks.
Well-watered Ida

Was shaken from bottom to top, as were
the city

Of Troy and ships of Achaea. Hades,
god

Of ghosts in the world under ground,
was filled with panic

And sprang from his throne with a
scream, lest Poseidon, shaker

Of earth, should split the ground open
above him and thus
Reveal to men and immortals the ghastly
abodes
Of death, the moldering horrors that even
the gods
Would look on with loathing.

Such was the mighty uproar
When god clashed with god in strife. For
against lord Poseidon
Stood Phoebus Apollo, god of the
winged shafts,
And opposite Ares stood bright-eyed
Athena. Opposing
Hera was Phoebus' sister, the archer
Artemis,
Goddess of golden shafts and the

echoing shouts

Of the chase, while coming forth against

Leto was powerful

Luck-bringing Hermes, and there

opposing Hephaestus

Came the god of the great deep-swirling
river,

Called Xanthus by the immortals,

Scamander by men.

So gods advanced to meet gods.² But

Achilles had interest

In none but Priam's son Hector, with

whose blood

He most lusted to glut the battling Ares,

him

Of the tough hide shield. Host-urging

Apollo, however,

Inspired great strength in Aeneas and
sent him to face
The raging son of Peleus. Assuming the
form
And voice of Priam's son Lycaon,
Apollo,
Son of Zeus, spoke thus to the counselor
of Trojans:

“Aeneas, where now are the brags you
made to the princes
Of Troy when you, over wine, declared
yourself ready
To fight man to man with Peleus' son
Achilles?”

To which Aeneas: “Lycaon, why
would you tell me
This way to fight face to face, against my

will,
With haughty Achilles? Not that it would
be
My first encounter with him, since once
already
He put me to flight with his spear,
driving me down
From Mount Ida where he had come for
our cattle the time
He sacked and laid waste Lyrnessus and
Pedasus both.
That time Zeus saved me by giving me
strength and putting
Great speed in my legs. Else I would
surely have died
At the hands of Achilles and those of
Athena, who went
Before him bearing the light of victory

and bidding him

Kill with his bronze-headed spear both
Trojans and Leleges.[bm](#)

May no man, then, fight face to face with
Achilles,

For always beside him a god goes,
warding off death.

And even unaided his spear flies very
straight,

Nor does it stop save deep in the flesh of
some mortal.

Still, were God to give us an equal
chance

In man-to-man combat, he would not
easily beat me,

Not though he claims to be made of solid
bronze!”

Then lord Apollo, son of Zeus,
replied:

“Heroic Aeneas, why don’t you also
invoke

The gods everlasting? After all, men say
Aphrodite,

Daughter of Zeus, is your mother, while
surely Achilles

Was born of a lesser goddess.
Remember, your mother

Is Zeus’s own daughter, his the sea-
ancient’s child.

But on! Charge with your unyielding
bronze straight at him,

And don’t be turned aside by any insults
Or threats from him.”

So saying, he breathed great power

Into Aeneas, and he, the people's
shepherd,
Strode out through the front line of
fighters, his bronze helmet flashing.
Nor was the son of Anchises unnoticed
by Hera
As out he went through the moil of men
to face
The son of Peleus. Calling her friends
about her,
The goddess spoke thus:

“Poseidon, Athena, you two
Consider what we should do now. Here
comes Aeneas,
Flaming in bronze, set on by Phoebus
Apollo
To face Achilles in fight. But come, let

us

Turn him back at once, or else let one of
us stand

By the side of Achilles and give him
great power too.

Nor should we allow his spirit to fail at
all,

That he may know beyond doubt that we
who love him

Are the best of immortals, while those
who have hitherto warded

Defeat from the Trojans are deities
worthless as wind.

Here we have come from Olympus to
mix in this melee

And keep Achilles safe all this day long,
Though afterward he shall suffer
whatever Fate spun

For him with the thread of his life on the
day his mother
Bore him. But if he fails to learn all this
From heaven itself, he may be unduly
afraid
When some god confronts him in battle.
For hard indeed
Are the gods to look upon when they
appear
In their own true forms.”

And Poseidon, creator of earthquakes,
Replied: “Hera, don’t rage beyond what
is wise.
It hardly becomes you. I myself would
not wish
To hurl gods together in hate, and
anyway we

Are much too strong for those others.
Rather, let us
Go apart from the battle to where we can
sit down and watch,
And war shall be for mortals. However,
if Ares
Or Phoebus Apollo should start
anything, or should they
Hold back Achilles and keep him from
fighting, then quickly
Fierce war shall come from us too. And
very soon then,
I believe, those others shall leave the
battle and join
The gods on Olympus, defeated by our
forceful hands!”

So saying, Poseidon, god with the

blue-black hair,
Led the way straight to the mighty
bulwark of earth
That the Trojans and Pallas Athena had
heaped up high
For godlike Heracles, that he might
retreat behind it
Whenever the huge sea-monster, sent by
Poseidon
To lay waste the land of the Trojans,
drove him back
From the beach to the plain. There the
gods with Poseidon
Sat down and wreathed their shoulders
with cloud that could not
Be dispelled, while opposite them the
gods backing Trojans
Sat down on the brow of Callicolone

round you,
O daring Apollo, and Ares, taker of
towns.

Thus both parties sat in council, both
uneager
To enter the sorrowful conflict, though
high-throned Zeus
Had bidden them to.

Meanwhile, the whole plain was
afame
With bronze-flashing men and horses,
and earth resounded
And rang beneath the tumultuous beat of
their feet
As they charged toward each other. But
now their two greatest
champions

Came out in the space between the two
armies, spoiling
To battle each other, Aeneas, son of
Anchises,
And noble Achilles. First came Aeneas,
defiantly
Tossing his heavy-helmeted head,
gripping
His gallant shield close in front of his
chest, and brandishing
Fiercely his bronze-headed spear.
Against him Achilles,
Son of Peleus, came charging on like a
lion,
A ravenous beast that all the men of a
village
Have come out anxious to kill. At first
he pays them

No heed, but goes his way till one of the
fast

And lusty young spearmen sinks a lance
in his flesh.

Then with a jaw-splitting roar he gathers
himself

To charge, and foam forms all round his
fangs, while in him

His great heart groans. Lashing his ribs
and flanks

With his tail, he works himself up for the
fight, then charges

Straight on in his fiery-eyed fury,
careless of whether

He kill or be killed there in the front line
of spearmen.

So now Achilles was driven on by his

fury

And warrior's pride to go out and face
great Aeneas.

And when they had come sufficiently
near each other,

Fast-footed royal Achilles spoke to him
thus:

“Tell me, Aeneas, why have you come
out so far

From the ranks to stand and confront me?

Can it be

That your heart is ambitious and fills you
with hope of soon

Replacing King Priam as lord of the
horse-taming Trojans?

What folly! for even if you should kill
and strip me,

Priam would not give the kingship to
you. King Priam
Has sons of his own, and his mind is
sound, not silly!
Or have the Trojans laid out an estate for
you
Greater than any other, acres of orchard
And plowland for you to enjoy—if you
should happen
To kill me, that is. Not easy, I think,
you'll find
That assignment. For surely I now recall
a day
Some time ago when I routed you with
my spear.
Don't you remember, Aeneas, when you
were alone
And I made you leave your cattle and

hurtle headlong

Down the slopes of Mount Ida? Not so
much as one little look

Did you cast behind you that day as you
ran. From there

You fled to Lyrnessus, which I attacked
with the help

Of Athena and Father Zeus and sacked it
completely,

Leading the women off no longer free.

Zeus and the other gods saved you that
time, but not

This day, I believe, will they save you
again, as you

Undoubtedly think they will. So I myself
warn you

Not to confront me, but lose yourself in

the crowd

Before you suffer disaster. Once it occurs,

It will be too late for you not to play the fool!”

And Aeneas answered him, saying:

“Son of Peleus,

Don't think to scare me with words, as if

I were some

Little boy, since I am at least the equal of you

When it comes to hurling insults. We both know who

Each other is with regard to parents and lineage,

For though neither one of us ever laid eyes on the other's

Dear parents, we've both heard the
stories which mortal men
Have passed down from days gone by.
Men say you're the son
Of matchless Peleus and that your
mother is Thetis,
She of the beautiful braids, a child of the
brine.
But I claim descent from courageous
Anchises, my father,
And Aphrodite herself!³ And of these
two couples,
One or the other shall this day mourn a
dear son,
For I don't think we two shall part and
leave this struggle
With nothing exchanged but infantile

prattle. But if

You really would hear who I am, listen
and learn

What many know already First of all
Cloud-gathering Zeus begot Dardanus,
who founded Dardania

Before sacred Ilium ever went up in the
plain

As a city for mortals, who lived at that
time on the slopes

Of well-watered Ida. And Dardanus too
had a son,

King Erichthonius, one who lived to
become

The richest man in the world. He had a
herd

Of three thousand horses that grazed in
the low-lying meadows,

Spirited mares with fine little colts
beside them.

With these as they grazed the North
Wind fell deeply in love,
And changing himself to a glossy-maned
black stallion

He sired twelve colts on them. These,
when they galloped

The grain-giving earth, could cross in
their sport a field

Of ripe barley without so much as
disturbing a kernel,

And when they cavorted across the
broad back of the brine,

They would skim the high waves that
break on the gray salt-sea.

Erichthonius, then, begot Tros, King of

the Trojans,
And Tros had three matchless sons—
Assaracus, Ilus,
And godlike Ganymede, [bn](#) the best-
looking boy ever born,
So handsome the gods caught him up to
Olympus, that he
Might live with them there and be the
cupbearer of Zeus.
And Ilus in turn begot peerless
Laomedon, father
Of Priam, Tithonus, Clytius, Lampus,
and Hicetaon,
Scion of Ares. And Assaracus' son was
Capys,
Who sired Anchises, who next begot me,
and Priam

Begot Prince Hector. Such is my lineage,
Achilles,
And the blood I claim to be of.

“But as for prowess
In battle, Zeus gives it or takes it away
as he,
The almighty, sees fit. So come, let us no
longer
Stand here in the midst of battle prating
like two
Little boys. There is surely no lack of
insults for either
Of us to mouth, vile things so many
they’d sink
A ship of two hundred oars. For the
tongue of man
Is a glib and versatile organ, and from it

come many
And various words, whose range of
expression is wide
In every direction. And the sort of words
a man says
Is the sort he hears in return. But what
makes the two of us
Wrangle and nag like a couple of
spiteful women,
Who having aroused in each other heart-
eating hatred
Go out in the street and spit harsh words
back and forth,
As many false as true, since hateful rage
Does the talking? For since I am eager
for combat, you'll not
Turn me back with mere words before
we have battled with bronze

Man to man. Come then, let us at once
have a taste
Of each other's spear-points!"

He spoke, and drove his huge lance
Into Achilles' dread and marvelous
shield,
Which loudly cried out about the bronze
point of the weapon.
Achilles, gripped with quick terror,
shoved the shield out
With his powerful hand, away from his
flesh, for he thought
The long-shadowing spear of great-
hearted Aeneas would easily
Pierce it—childish fool that he was not
to know
In his mind and heart that the glorious

gifts of the gods

Will not easily break or give way before
the onslaught

Of mortals. Nor did the huge lance of
fiery Aeneas

Tear through the shield, for the gold, the
god's gift, held it back.

Though he drove it clean through the first
two layers, there remained

Three other folds, for the great limping
god had hammered

Together five layers in all, two bronze,
two tin,

And between them a gold one, in which
the ashen spear stopped.

Then great Achilles let fly his long-
shadowing spear

And struck the round shield of Aeneas
not far from the rim
Where the bronze and backing of bull's-
hide were thinnest. And the
shield
Gave out a strident shriek as through it
tore
The shaft of Pelian ash. Then Aeneas
was gripped
With panic, and cringing he held the
shield up, away
From his flesh, as the spear shot over his
back and stilled
Its force in the ground, though it split
apart two circles
Of the Trojan's man-guarding shield.
Having thus escaped
The long lance, Aeneas stood up, and the

sight of that shaft
So close to his flesh filled his bright
eyes with measureless
Panic and pain. But Achilles whipped
out his keen blade
And charged down upon him,
ferociously screaming his war-cry,
And mighty Aeneas picked up a huge
stone, one
That no two men of today could even lift
But that he picked up with one hand and
easily threw.
Then Aeneas would surely have struck
with the stone the helmet
Or life-saving shield of charging
Achilles, who then
Would have closed with him and taken

his life with the sword,
If Poseidon had not been keeping sharp
watch. At once
He spoke thus mid the gods everlasting:

“Truly my grief
Is great for high-souled Aeneas, who
soon indeed
Shall go down to Hades’ halls, killed by
Achilles
For heeding the word of far-working
Apollo—childish
Fool that he was! For Apollo will not
keep sad death
From him for a moment. But why should
that innocent man
Suffer woes that belong to others, he
who has always

Given such pleasing gifts to the sky-
ruling gods?

So come, let us save him from death, for
Zeus himself

Will be angry if now Achilles cuts the
man down.

It is surely already decreed that Aeneas
shall outlive

The war, so that Dardanus' seed may not
die and his line

Disappear, since Zeus adored Dardanus
more than he did

Any other child he had by a mortal
woman.

For now Cronos' son has come to
despise the house

Of Priam, and surely the mighty Aeneas
shall soon rule

The Trojans, and after him the sons of
his sons,
Great princes yet to be born.”⁴

Then heifer-eyed Hera,
Queen of the gods, replied: “O shaker of
shores,
You must decide for yourself concerning
Aeneas,
Whether you wish to save him or let him
be killed,
Despite his great prowess, by Peleus’
son Achilles.
For we two, Pallas Athena and I, have
sworn
Very numerous oaths in the presence of
all the immortals
That we would never keep from the

Trojans the hard day
Of doom, not even when Troy shall burn
with furious
Fire lit by the warlike sons of
Achaeans.”

When Poseidon heard this, he went
alone through the fight
Mid a tumult of hurtling spears till he
came to Aeneas
And famous Achilles. Quickly he
covered the eyes
Of Peleus’ son with mist, then drew
from the shield
Of Aeneas the sharp ashen spear. This
he laid down
At the feet of Achilles, but Aeneas he
swept from the ground

And sent him vaulting high over the
heads of numerous
Heroes and horses till finally he came
down
Far out on the edge of the charge-
churned chaos of battle
Just where the Caucones were arming
themselves for the fray.
There earthquake-making Poseidon drew
close to his side,
And his words came winged with
warning:

“Aeneas, what god
Commands you to fight in such blind
rage with the high-hearted
Son of Peleus, who is both stronger than
you

And dearer to the immortals? Rather,
give ground
Whenever you meet him, or you before
your time
Will enter the house of Hades. But after
Achilles
Collides with his own dark fate and
dies, then summon
Your courage to fight their greatest
champions, for none
Of the other Achaeans will ever be able
to kill you.”

So saying, he left him there, having
told him all.
Then at once he dispelled the marvelous
mist from the eyes
Of Achilles, who stared hard about him,

and much amazed
Spoke thus to his own great heart:

“A miracle, surely!
This wonder my eyes behold. Here lies
my spear
On the ground, yet he at whom I so
eagerly hurled it
Is nowhere in sight. Truly it seems that
Aeneas
Is dear indeed to the immortal gods,
though I
Thought his claims were idle and empty.
Well, let him go.
He’s so glad to be still alive he’ll hardly
have heart
To try me again. But now I will call to
the Danaans,

Lovers of fight, then go forth myself and
test

The mettle of other Trojans.”

With this, he ran
Down the ranks calling out to each man:
“No longer, O noble
Achaeans, stand off from the Trojans,
but come, let man
Attack man, and all of you fight like fury!
Very hard
It is for me, no matter how mighty, to
deal
With so many foes and fight with them
all. Even Ares,
Immortal god though he is, could never
hurl back
A charge so galloping fierce as this of

the Trojans,
Nor could Athena—not that I intend
To be idle, so long as I’ve hands and
feet and the strength
To use them in battle. Straight through
their front rank I will charge,
Nor do I believe any Trojan will greatly
rejoice
To find himself close to my spear.”

Thus he encouraged
The Danaan troops, while glorious
Hector called out
To the Trojans, saying that he would go
face Achilles:
“You high-hearted Trojans, don’t let
Peleus’ son scare you.
With words I too could battle even the

gods,
Though with a spear it would be much
harder, since they
Are far stronger than we. But Achilles
will be doing well
To fulfill half of his boast. The rest he
will leave
Undone. Against him now I will go,
though his hands
Are like flame—I say though his hands
are like flame, and his heart
Like gleaming iron!”

So saying, he urged them on,
And the Trojans faced the Achaeans and
raised their spears
To charge. Then both armies clashed in
furious fight

And shrill war-cries went up. But
Phoebus Apollo
Came close to Hector and said: "Hector,
don't think
For a moment of singly facing Achilles,
but wait
For him in the ranks in the midst of
roaring conflict,
Or surely he'll cut you down with his
spear, or close
And use his sword."

He spoke, and Hector, terrified,
Shrank back among his men, having
heard the voice
Of a god.

But Achilles, his heart clad in valor,
charged

Mid the Trojans, screaming his
awesome war-cry,⁵ and first
He cut down Iphition, the excellent son
of Otrynteus
And leader of many men. A Naiad
nymph
Had borne him to King Otrynteus, taker
of towns,
At the foot of Mount Tmolus in the
opulent land
Of Hyda. Him, as he charged straight on,
Prince Achilles
Caught with his spear full on the head
and split
His skull in two. He fell with a
thunderous crash,
And over his corpse Achilles exulted,

crying:

“How very low you lie now, O son of
Otrynteus,
Most terrifying of men. Right here is the
place
Of your death, though you were born on
the huge estate
Of your fathers by Lake Gygaea near
fish-teeming Hyllus
And eddying Hermus.”

Such was his boast, but shadow
Eclipsed the eyes of Iphition, and
quickly the rims
Of Achaean chariots cut him to shreds,
right
Where he fell in the front of the war-
clash, and fiercely Achilles

Went on to slaughter Demoleon, son of
Antenor.

That excellent bulwark in battle Achilles
stabbed

In the temple, easily piercing his bronze-
cheeked helmet.

On through the bronze and bone beneath
tore the point

And spattered the helmet inside with the
warrior's brains,

Thus stopping Demoleon's furious
charge. Then,

As Hippodamas sprang from his car and
fled before him,

He thrust his spear deep into his back.
And as

He gasped out his life he roared like a
bull that young men

Drag bellowing in as an offering for
Helice's lord

Poseidon, for bull's blood pleases the
Earthshaker most.

Even so Hippodamas bellowed as his
proud spirit

Took leave of his bones. Then Achilles
charged on with his spear

In pursuit of Prince Polydorus, son of
Priam.

His father had strictly forbidden his
entering the battle,

For he was the youngest and dearest of
all his sons,

And the fastest of all as a runner. But
now, showing off

His fleetness of foot like a child, he

dashed here and there

Through the front-fighting ranks till he
was deprived of his life.

For him Achilles, fast on his feet as any,
Struck with a cast of his spear in the
small of the back

As he darted by, squarely striking him
where

The gold clasps of his war-belt joined
and the halves of his breastplate

Met. The spear-point tore its way
through and emerged

By the navel, and round him a cloud of
blackness closed in,

As he sank to the ground clutching his
guts with both hands.

But when Prince Hector saw

Polydorus his brother
Clutching his guts and sinking to earth,
his own eyes
Dimmed with tears, nor could he bear
any longer
To range apart, but out he strode to
encounter
Achilles, brandishing his keen spear that
flashed
Like a flame. When Achilles saw him,
he poised his own weapon,
Then challenged him thus:

“Now near is the man who most
Of all men has caused my heart pain, the
man who murdered
My cherished comrade, and now no
longer shall we two

Shrink from each other down lanes of
hard-fighting men.”

He spoke, then savagely scowling at
Hector, said:

“Come nearer, that all the sooner you
may be bound
In the bonds of destruction!”

But Hector, his bronze helmet flashing,
Boldly answered him thus: “O son of
Peleus,

Don’t think to scare me with words, as if
I were some

Little boy, since I am at least the equal
of you

When it comes to hurling insults. Also, I
know

Very well how able you are with a

spear, and that I
Am not nearly so strong. Yet truly the
outcome of this fight
Lies in the lap of the gods eternal, who
may
Allow me, though weaker, to take your
life with a spear-cast,
Since my weapon too has proved
killing-keen before!”

So saying, he drew back his spear and
threw, but Athena,
Breathing lightly, blew it back from
Achilles
So that it returned to Prince Hector and
fell on the ground
At his feet. Then savagely Peleus’ son
sprang at him,

Screaming his terrible war-cry and
eager to kill.

But Apollo caught Hector up, with all
the ease

Of a god, and wrapped him in cloud.⁶

Three times fast Achilles

Charged and thrust his spear into the
mist, but when

The fourth time he rushed like a demon
upon him, he cried

A chilling and awesome cry and spoke
to Hector

In these winged words:

“Again, you dog, you’ve managed
To get away with your life, though this
time just barely!

Once more you have Phoebus Apollo to

thank, to whom

You must be careful to pray before you
come

Within even the sound of hurtling spears.

Well,

Believe me, I'll finish you yet—the next
time we meet,

If only some god will also look out for
me.

Right now I'll take my rage out on your
friends, whomever

I happen to come on!"

So saying, he thrust his spear
Through the neck of Dryops, who fell at
his feet. Leaving
Him there, Achilles went on to put out of
action

Demuchus, Philetor's son, a big man and
brave,
First wounding his knee with a spear-
cast, then ending his life
With a slash of his lengthy sword. Next
he charged down
On Laogonus and Dardanus, sons of
Bias, and knocked them
Both from their chariot, taking one's life
with a cast
Of his spear and killing the other in
close with his sword.
Then Alastor's son Tros—he reached
for the knees of Achilles,
Pleading with him to take him alive, to
pity
A man the same age as himself and not
cut him off

So young, fool that he was not to know
that with him

There would be no heeding, that there
was nothing sweet-tempered

Or mild in Achilles, but only ferocious
heart—

Tros tried to hug the man's knees,
jabbering a prayer

To be spared, but Achilles thrust his
sword in at the liver,

Which slipped from the wound as the
dark blood quickly welled out

And slithered down to drip from his
chest. Soon all

Became dark and he fainted. And on
went Achilles to stab

His bronze spear-point from ear to ear

through Mulius' skull,
And then to strike Echeclus full on the
head
With his dark-hilted sword, whereat the
whole blade was left smoking
With blood, as purple death came down
on his eyes
And powerful fate embraced him. Next,
he jabbed
His bronze-pointed spear through the
arm of Deucalion, right
Where the tendons join at the elbow, and
he stood there
With his arm too heavy to lift, awaiting
the death
Coming on, and Achilles, whipping his
sword through the neck
Of the warrior, swept his helmeted head

far away,
Causing marrow to spurt from his spine
and his corpse to lie
Stretched out on the ground. On he
charged in pursuit
Of Peires' flawless son Rhigmus, a
warrior there
From fertile Thrace. Him he pierced
deep in the belly,
And down he pitched from his car. And
as Areïthous,
Driving for Rhigmus, wheeled the horses
around,
Achilles thrust his keen lance through his
back and hurled him
To earth. At once the horses panicked
and ran.

As when through the deep ravines of a
drought-stricken mountain
A god-sustained blaze wildly sweeps,
and the thick forest burns
As the driving wind wreathes all in
whirling flame,
So now Achilles raged everywhere with
his spear,
Charging on like a demon, constantly
pressing hard
On the foe and cutting them down in such
numbers that the black
earth
Ran with Trojan blood. And like a pair
Of broad-browed, loud-lowling bulls that
some farmer yokes
To tread out white barley strewn on his

firm threshing-floor,
And quickly their hooves do the husking,
even so the solid-hoofed
Horses of great-souled Achilles
trampled on corpses
And shields. And the axle below and
handrails above
Were all splashed and bespattered with
blood from the battering
hooves
Of the horses and metal rims of the
wheels, as onward
Achilles pressed in pursuit of glory,
soiling
His unconquered hands with the filth of
horrible slaughter.

BOOK XXI

The Struggle of Achilles and the River

Now when they came to the ford of
swirling Xanthus,
The fair-flowing river that immortal
Zeus begot,
There Achilles divided the Trojan
forces, and part
He drove across the plain toward the
city, routing them
Over the same stretch of land where
Achaeans had fled
The day before when resplendent Hector

was raging,
And Hera, to make their way hard, now
drifted dense fog
In front of them. But the other half were
trapped
In the silvery swirls of the deep-running
river. Into it
They plunged with tremendous confusion
and noise, as man
After man hit the stream with a splash
and the banks re-echoed
The din. Frantically shouting, they
thrashed and swam
This way and that, spun about in the
powerful whirlpools.
And as when locusts sense the onrush of
fire
And fly for a stream to escape the quick-

coming flames

Of a weariless blaze, then huddle low in
the water,

So now in front of Achilles the
clamorous course

Of deep-swirling Xanthus was cluttered
with men and horses.

Zeus-sprung Achilles, leaning his
spear against

Some tamarisks on the bank, leaped like
a demon

Into the water armed only with his sharp
sword

And the stern resolution to kill. And he
laid about him,

Killing men right and left, and from them
came grim sounds

Of groaning as they were struck with the
sword, and the water
Ran red with their blood. And as small
fish flee darting
Before a hungry huge dolphin, cramming
the coves
Of some excellent harbor, lest they be
devoured by the glutton,
Even so the Trojans cowered beneath
the steep banks
Of the terrible river. At last Achilles, his
arms
Worn weary with killing, chose twelve
young Trojans alive
From out the river as blood-price for
dead Patroclus,
Son of Menoetius. [bo](#) These he led up the

bank,
Fear-dazed like so many fawns, and tied
their hands fast
Behind them with their own well-cut
leather belts, which they wore
About their soft woven tunics, and
turned them over
To comrades of his for them to lead
away
To the hollow ships. Then back he
sprang, eager
As ever to cut men asunder.

There on the bank
He met a son of Dardanian Priam,
youthful
Lycaon, anxious to flee from the river.
This man

He had captured before, at night in his
father's orchard,
Where able Achilles, an evil unlooked
for, had come
Upon him while he was cutting young
branches of fig
To be the handrails of a chariot. That
time he had sent him
By ship to well-settled Lemnos and
gotten a price
For him from the son of Jason. From
there he was ransomed
By a former guest of his, Eëtion of
Imbros,
Who paid a much greater price and sent
him to splendid
Arisbe. Escaping from those protecting
him there,

Lycaon returned to the house of his
fathers in Troy,
Where he for eleven days enjoyed
himself
With his friends, all glad that he had
come back from Lemnos.
But on the twelfth day, God brought him
again to the hands
Of Achilles, who this time was surely to
send him, unwilling
As ever, down to Hades' halls. Now
fast-footed,
Noble Achilles knew him at once, for
Lycaon
Had gotten so hot and tired struggling his
way
From the river and up the bank that he

had thrown all
Of his bronze to the ground, and now he
appeared without helmet
Or shield or spear. Astounded to see
him, Achilles
Spoke thus to his own great heart:
“Who would believe it!
This wonder before my eyes. Truly the
spirited
Trojans whom I have destroyed will
now arise
From the deep nether gloom, if one is to
judge by the flight
Of this man, who though he was sold in
sacred Lemnos
Has somehow escaped the ruthless day
there, nor has
The gray brine held him back, the

fathomless sea that discourages
Many anxious to cross it. But now he
shall taste
The point of my spear, that I may
discover for sure
Whether he will also return from below,
or whether
The life-giving earth will hold him as
fast as she does
Many other strong fellows.”

Thus thinking, he stood where he was
While Lycaon approached him, crazy
with fear and frantic
To catch at his knees, his one thought to
avoid harsh death
And final black doom. Achilles raised
his long spear,

Hot for the kill, but Lycaon ducked and
ran under

The cast to clutch his foe's knees, and
the spear shot over

His back and into the ground, its
yearning for man's meat

Thwarted. Lycaon then pleaded, with
one hand clasping

Achilles' knees, with the other his
sharp-pointed spear.¹

Holding on for his life, he spoke these
fear-winged words:

“Achilles, here at your knees, I beg
you to have

Some regard and pity for me. To you, O
Zeus-nurtured

One, I should be a sacred pleader, since

you

Were the first with whom I broke
Demeter's bread

On the day you captured me in the well-
planted orchard

Of Priam and sent me far from my father
and friends

To be sold in sacred Lemnos, where I
was bought

For the worth of a hundred oxen. But I
was ransomed

For three times that much, and this is but
the twelfth day

Since I arrived back in Troy after many
hardships.

And now once more deadly fate has put
me in your hands!

Father Zeus must surely despise me to

give me to you

Again, and surely my mother Laothoë
did not

Bear me to live very long, she the
daughter

Of ancient Altes, King of the war-loving
Leleges,

Holding steep Pedasus on the Satnioeis
River.

His daughter was one of King Priam's
numerous wives,

And she bore me and another, and you
will have butchered

Us both. For him you've already brought
down mid the front rank

Of foot-fighting soldiers, my brother,
godlike Polydorus,

Whom you transfixed with your keen-
bladed spear. And now
Right here evil death shall be mine, for I
don't think I'm likely
To get away from your hands now that
some demon
Has brought me near you. But let me say
one other thing
For you to consider—spare me, since I
was not born
From the same womb as Hector, who
slaughtered your friend, the strong
And the gentle.”

So spoke to him splendid Lycaon,
begging
For life, but not at all kind was the voice
he heard say:

“You fool! offer no ransom, nor
argument either,
To me. For until the day Patroclus caught
up with
His fate and was killed, I preferred to
spare the Trojans,
And many indeed were they whom I took
alive
And sold into slavery, but now there is
not even one
Who shall escape death, not a single one
whom God
Brings into my hands before the walls of
Ilium—
No Trojan at all, I say, shall escape,
much less
The sons of Priam! And you, my friend,
you also

Die, but why all this fuming and fuss
about it?

Patroclus too died, a man far better than
you!

And do you not see what sort of warrior
I am,

How handsome, how huge? My father's
a man of great worth,

My mother a goddess, yet death and
powerful fate

Hang over me too. One morning or
evening or noon

Will surely come when some man shall
kill me in battle,

Either by hurling his spear or shooting a
shaft

From the bowstring.”^{[2](#)}

At this Lycaon's knees shook and he
went
To pieces inside. Releasing the spear, he
kneeled
Reaching out with both hands. But
Achilles drew his sharp
sword
And brought it down on his collarbone
close by the neck,
And the two-edged blade disappeared in
his flesh, stretching him
Out on the earth, where he lay with his
dark blood drenching
The ground. Seizing him then by the foot,
Achilles
Slung him to drift in the river, shouting
these words

Winged with vaunting:

“Float there with the fish that shall
clean the blood

From your wound quite without feeling
for you, nor shall

Your mother lay you out on a bed and
mourn.

But swirling Scamander shall roll you
into the broad gulf

Of the brine, and many a wave-hidden
fish shall dart up

Beneath the dark ripple to eat the fat of
Lycaon.^{[3](#)}

So may all of you die, till we reach the
city

Of holy Troy, you in retreat, and I
Killing men from behind. Not even this

beautiful river,
Strong swirling with silver eddies, shall
be any help
To you, despite the long time you have
sacrificed bulls
To the River-god Xanthus and hurled
while still alive
Fine solid-hoofed horses into his
swirling pools.
Even so, all of you Trojans shall meet a
harsh fate
And die, so paying the price for killing
Patroclus
And making suffer those other Achaeans
whom you
By the fast-running ships cut down while
I was inactive.”

At this the River-god Xanthus became
very angry
At heart and pondered hard in his mind
how he
Might cut short Achilles' war-work and
keep the Trojans
From ruin. Meanwhile, Achilles gripped
his long-shadowing
Spear and rushed upon Asteropaeus, son
Of Pelegon, hot for the kill. This Pelegon
claimed
As his father the wide-flowing Axius
River, stream
Of deep swirls, who mingled in love
with fair Periboea,
The eldest daughter of King
Acessamenus, to sire

The father of Asteropaeus, upon whom
Achilles
Now charged. And Pelegon's son strode
through the water
To face him, holding two spears, and
Xanthus, wrathful
For all the young men whom Achilles
had ruthlessly killed
In his stream, breathed courage into his
heart. Now when
They came within range Achilles, fast on
his feet,
Shouted first:

“Who are you and where are you from,
that you dare
To confront me? Unhappy indeed are
those whose children

Oppose me!”

To which the glorious son of Pelegon:
“Haughty Achilles, why do you ask who
I am?

I come from fertile Paeonia, far away,
Leading my warriors armed with long
spears, and this

Is now the eleventh day I’ve been here. I
trace

My line from the wide-rippling Axius
River, by far

The loveliest river on earth and the
father of spear-famous

Pelegon, who, men say, sired me. But
now,

O splendid Achilles, do battle!”

Such was his challenge,

And shining Achilles drew back his
Pelian ash,
But Asteropaeus let fly both spears at
once,
Since he was quite ambidextrous. One
struck the marvelous
Shield, but the layer of gold, the god's
gift, held it back,
While the other grazed Achilles' right
forearm, causing
The cloud-black blood to gush out. But
the spear-head went on
To bury itself in the ground, still lusting
for man's meat.
Then Achilles in turn hurled his straight-
flying ash
At Asteropaeus, eager to kill him, but
missed

And struck the high bank so hard that the
spear sank in
Full half its length. But Achilles drew
his sharp sword
From beside his thigh and rushed toward
his foe, who was vainly
Striving to pull the ash of Achilles free
From the bank. Three times he strained
with his powerful arm,
And three times he did no more than
make the shaft quiver.
The fourth time he tried to bend and
break it, but now
Achilles charged in and slashed him
across the navel,
Thus spilling his guts on the ground and
wrapping his eyes

In darkness. Gasping, he died, and
Achilles sprang onto
His chest and stripped off his armor,
exultantly crying:

“Lie here where you fell! Very hard it
is for the son
Of a river to vie with a child of Cronos’
son.⁴

For though you claim as your grandsire
the wide-flowing Axius,
I trace descent from almighty Zeus
himself!

My father Peleus is King of innumerable
Myrmidons,
And his father, Aeacus, he was begotten
by Zeus.

And just as Zeus is mightier far than all

Of the sea-mingling rivers, so also his
seed is stronger
Than that of a stream. Right here, in fact,
is a truly
Tremendous river, and what help has he
been to you?
For no one can fight with Cronos' son
Zeus. With him
Not even powerful Achelous strives, nor
even
The still more enormously mighty deep-
circling Oceanus,
Stream from whom all seas and rivers
rise,
All springs and bottomless wells. But
even Oceanus
Dreads the bright bolt of great Zeus, and
feels deep terror

Whenever it crashes above him!”

So saying, he jerked
His spear from the bank and left dead
Asteropaeus
Prone in the sand, with the dark water
lapping his corpse
And the eels and the fish nibbling and
ripping the fat
From his kidneys. Achilles then went in
pursuit of the well-horsed
Paeonians, who, having seen their best
spearman succumb
In hard fight to the hands and sword of
Peleus' son,
Huddled in panic along the swirling
river.
There he slaughtered Thersilochus,

Mnesus and Mydon,
Astypylus, Thrasius, Aenius, and
Ophelestes.

Nor would swift Achilles have paused
in his killing had not

The angry river called out to him in the
voice

Of a man, uttering it from out a deep
whirlpool:

“O Achilles, inhuman you are in
strength and brutality

Of performance, for always the gods
themselves

Assist you. But if Zeus has willed that
you are to kill

All the Trojans, then drive them out of
my waters and do

Your foul work on the plain. Already my
exquisite stream
Is jammed with dead men, and so choked
with your ruinous killing
That I can no longer pour my wealth of
water
Into the bright sea. So now, great
commander of men,
Desist! You truly appall me!”

To which the fast runner
Achilles replied: “So be it, O god-fed
Scamander.
The insolent Trojans, however, I’ll not
stop killing
Till I have penned them up in their city
and fought
A contest with Hector, to see just who

will kill whom.”

With this, he charged at the foe like a
demon, but now
The deep-swirling river spoke thus to
Apollo: “For shame!
O silver-bowed one. You have not
obeyed the strict charge
Of Zeus your Father, who told you to
stand by the Trojans
And give them aid till the sun goes down
and darkens
The fertile fields.”

So Xanthus spoke, but Achilles
Sprang from the bank into the midst of
his current,
And quickly the river rushed on him with
surging flood,

And filling his stream with churning
water he cleaned
His course of the dead men killed by
Achilles, roaring
Fierce as a bull as up on the banks he
cast
The innumerable corpses, while saving
survivors beneath
His fair waters, hiding them well in the
huge swirling pools.
Then grimly the foaming wave curled
over Achilles,
And striking his shield the current kept
shoving him back
And sweeping his feet from beneath him.
Desperate, he caught
Overhead a tall and sturdy elm that grew
From the bank, but it fell across the

lovely stream,
Completely uprooted, and with its thick
branches and roots
It dammed the river still further.
Achilles, then, gripped
With panic, sprang out of the swirl and
started to run
At top speed across the wide plain. But
instead of desisting,
The great River-god rolled on in pursuit
with a huge
Churning wave of dark and ominous
crest, that he
Might cut short Achilles' war-work and
keep the Trojans
From ruin. But Peleus' son got a lead as
long as

A spear-cast, fleeing with all the speed
of a hunting
Black eagle, the strongest and fastest of
birds, and as
He shrank from beneath the high wave
and fled across land
The bronze on his breast rang loud, and
on came the river
Behind him, awesomely roaring. And as
when a stream
Flows down from a spring of dark
water, led mid plants
And garden-plots by a man with a
mattock, who clears
All obstructions away from before it, so
that as it burbles
And murmurs along down the slope it
sweeps all the pebbles

Away and soon gets ahead of him who
guides it,
So now the wave of the surging river
outstripped
Achilles, fast though he was, for the
gods are far stronger
Than men. And every time great Achilles
would try
To stand and confront the wave, that he
might learn
If all the sky-keeping gods had teamed
up against him,
The towering wave of the heaven-fed
river would crash
On his shoulders, and though he tried
desperately to force
His way up through the flood, the strong

undertow of the river

Kept tiring his legs and cutting the
ground from beneath him.

At last, looking up at broad heaven, the
son of Peleus

Cried out in complaint:

“O Father Zeus, why is it
That none of the gods will pity my plight
and save me

From this dread river?⁵ Any other fate
would be better

Than this—not that I blame you heavenly
gods

So much as I do my own mother, who
stupefied me

With false words, saying that I should
die by the wall

Of the bronze-breasted Trojans, a victim
of swift-flying shafts
From the bow of Phoebus Apollo. If
only Hector,
The best man bred here, had slain me!
Then killer and killed
Would both have been equally noble.
But now I seem
To have been allotted a fate most
dismal, trapped
In this tremendous river and swept away
Like some poor pig-herding boy who
fails to make it
Across a rain-swollen torrent.”

In answer Poseidon
And Pallas Athena immediately came to
his side

In the form of men, and clasping his
hands in theirs

Spoke reassuring words, the Earthshaker
first:

“Son of Peleus, be not unduly afraid or
anxious,

Since you have such Zeus-approved
helpers as Pallas Athena

And I. It is not your lot to be overcome

By a river. Far from it, for soon he'll
fall back, as you

Shall see for yourself. But we will give
you good counsel,

If you will but listen. Let not your hands
refrain

From evil, all-levehng war till you have
penned up

The Trojan survivors within the famed

walls of their city.

Then, when you have taken the life of
Prince Hector,
Go back to the ships. Thus we grant the
glory to you.”

With this, they went back to the gods,
while Achilles, afire
With the word of immortals, charged
over the plain, which by now
Was flooded with water, and the
splendidly armored corpses
Of many young warriors floated there.
But Achilles
Raised his knees high as he charged
straight against the onrush
Of water, nor could the wide-flooding
river restrain him,

So great was the strength Athena put in
him. Not
That Scamander gave up, for he became
fiercer than ever
Against Achilles, and rearing his mighty
surge
To a foam-capped, curling crest, he
shouted thus
To Simoeis, god of the stream that
joined his:

“Dear brother,
Let us combine our forces and quench
the might
Of this man, or soon he’ll sack King
Priam’s great city,
Nor will the Trojans be able to hold out
against him.

Come quickly to help me. Flood all your
streams with water
From all of your springs and rouse all
your torrents, then raise
A huge billow, churning with tree-trunks
and boulders, that we
May stop this monstrous savage who
now conquers all
And thinks himself equal to gods. For I
do not believe
His strength will help him at all, nor his
good looks,
Nor even that marvelous armor, which I
shall wrap
In slime deep under water, and he
himself
I'll cover with tons of sand and silt, until
No Achaean shall know where to look

for his bones. Right here
I'll heap up his barrow myself, nor shall
he have need
Of another when fellow Achaeans give
him a funeral!"

So saying, he sent his towering wave,
churning
With foam and blood and corpses,
raging down
On Achilles.⁶ And the ominous billow
curled high above him,
Just at the point of fatally crashing upon
him.
But Hera, afraid that the powerful deep-
swirling river
Would sweep Achilles away, spoke out
at once

To her own dear son Hephaestus:

“Up, my child.

For surely we thought that you, the great
limping god,

Were matched in fight with deep-
eddying Xanthus. Go fast

As you can to bear aid, and wreath the
whole plain in your flames.

Meanwhile, I'll hurry and send from the
sea hard blasts

Of West Wind and the bright-flowing
South, that they may constantly

Fan your fierce fire and burn up the
many dead Trojans,

War-gear and all. But you attack Xanthus
directly—

Burn all the trees on his banks, and boil

all his water,
And don't be turned aside by any soft
words
Or threats from him. Cease not in your
fury one whit
Till you hear me shout. Then hold back
your untiring flame."

She spoke, and Hephaestus prepared
his god-blazing fire.
First it flared on the plain and burned all
the dead,
The numerous corpses strewn there by
Achilles, and soon
The bright water was gone and all the
plain dry. And as when
In autumn the West Wind soon dries a
new-watered orchard,

Much to the gardener's joy, so now the
whole plain
Was dried and the dead completely
consumed. Then straight
On the river himself he turned his all-
glaring fire.
Consumed were the tamarisks, elms, and
willows, along with
The clover, rushes, and marsh grass that
grew by the stream
So abundantly. Greatly tormented were
eels and fish
In the eddies, and all along the fair water
they leaped
And tumbled this way and that, badly
hurt by the blast
Of resourceful Hephaestus. The
powerful river himself

Was on fire, and thus he called out to the great artificer:

“Hephaestus, what god can successfully quarrel with you?

I will not contend with one so awesomely wrapped

In blazing fire. Cease the fight now, and as

For the Trojans, Achilles can empty their city of people,

For all I care. For what has a river to do With strife, or assisting in strife?”

On fire all the time

He was talking, his lovely stream was boiling and steaming.

And like a cauldron of glistening hog’s lard that bubbles

And spurts when sere logs are kindled
beneath it and all
Is melted and brought to a boil, even so
the fair stream
Of Xanthus flamed and his water
seethed, nor did he
Desire to flood the plain further, but
halted, greatly
Distressed by the blast of cunning
Hephaestus. Then
The River-god earnestly prayed these
winged words
To Queen Hera:

“O Hera, why should your son afflict
me
More than he does all others? You
surely do not

Blame me so much as you do all those
other helpers
Of Trojans. I will cease if you say so, O
goddess,
But make Hephaestus also refrain. And
further,
I'll swear an oath that I will never keep
From the Trojans the hard day of doom,
not even when Troy
Shall burn with furious fire lit by the
warlike
Sons of Achaeans.”

At this the white-armed Hera
Spoke at once to her own dear son:
“Hephaestus,
My so splendid child, withdraw. It is
hardly right

To hurt an immortal this way on account
of mere men.”

She spoke, and the water returned to
the bed of the river
And rolled as before, a strong and
beautiful stream.

When the fury of Xanthus was quelled,
the fight with Hephaestus
Was over, for Hera, though angry, ended
their struggle.

But now strife fell on the other
immortals, hatred
Both heavy and hard, for the spirit
within them was blown
In conflicting directions. As fiercely they
clashed with a deafening
Roar, the wide earth re-echoed their din

and the huge vault
Of heaven resounded as if with the
blasting of trumpets.
And Zeus, from where he sat high up on
Olympus,
Heard the clashing and laughed to
himself, delighted
To see the immortals at odds with each
other.⁷ Nor did they
Hold back any longer, once shield-
piercing Ares had charged
On Athena, jabbing his spear and yelling
these words
Of insult:

“Why you, you bitch’s flea, does your
Proud spirit make you so savage that you
dare bring

The very immortals together in hatred
and strife?

Have you forgotten that time you helped
Diomedes

Wound me, seizing his spear in full sight
of all

And driving it into my unblemished
flesh?[bp](#) Now,

I think, you'll pay the whole price for
that and all

You have done!"

So saying, he stabbed her fluttering
aegis,

The awesome aegis against which not
even the bolt

Of great Zeus can prevail. But blood-
streaming Ares thrust

His lengthy spear hard on it, and Pallas
Athena

Fell back and seized from the ground
with her powerful hand

A nearby stone, black, jagged, and huge,
that men

Long ago had put there to mark the line
of a field.

This rugged rock she brought down hard
on the neck

Of charging Ares and unstrung his limbs
at once.

His armor rang as he fell, and there he
lay

With his locks in the dust, the War-god
sprawled out over what
seemed

More than an acre. Then Athena laughed

loud, and over him
Spoke these proud words, winged with
triumph and vaunting:
“You infantile fool! how long will it
take you to learn
The proper respect for my always
superior strength?
At this rate, you’ll pay the full price
demanded by Hera
Your mother, who in her anger at you for
deserting
The Argives and helping the insolent
Trojans has called out
The Furies against you.”

When she had thus spoken, she turned
Her bright eyes away. But the daughter
of Zeus, Aphrodite,

Took Ares' hand and tried to revive him,
as he

Lay moaning and groaning, so weak he
could scarcely move.

Then Hera noticed her effort and quickly
spoke

To Athena these winged words:

“For shame! O invincible
Daughter of aegis-great Zeus. There
once again

That bitch's flea Aphrodite is leading
Ares,

Maiming of men, out of the blazing chaos
Of battle. But after her, quick!”

At this, Athena
Exultantly sped in pursuit, and charging
upon her

She struck Aphrodite a terrible blow on
the breasts

With her powerful hand. Then her heart
and limbs gave way

On the spot, so that both she and Ares
lay helplessly stretched

On the all-feeding earth and, vaunting,
Athena spoke over them

These winged words:

“So may all helpers of Trojans
End up when they fight against bronze-
breasted Argives. Let

Their courage and stamina be like those
of soft

Aphrodite, when she came here against
me to help Ares.

If all Trojan allies were such as she,

then long

Before now this war would have ended
and we would have plundered
The populous city of Troy!”

At this the goddess
White-armed Hera smiled, but earth-
shaking Poseidon
Spoke thus to Apollo: “O Phoebus, why
do we two
Stand off from each other? It hardly
becomes us, now that
The others have started. Surely it would
be disgraceful
For us to go back to the brazen-floored
palace of Zeus
On Olympus without so much as striking
a blow.

Begin then, since you are the younger. It
would not be fair
For me to, since I am both older and
more experienced.
Fool, how little real sense you have! For
you
Don't seem to remember the horrors that
we two endured
When Zeus sent only us of the gods to
labor
A year for haughty Laomedon here at
Troy,
To take our orders and get our firm-
promised pay
From him. I built round their city a wall,
wide
And most imposing, a barrier not to be
broken,

While you, O Phoebus, herded their
lumbering fat cattle
Through all the valleys and woods of
many-ridged Ida.
But when the gay seasons ended the
year, then loathsome
Laomedon roughly sent us away with
threats
As our only reward. He threatened, in
fact, to tie
Our hands and our feet and sell us in far-
distant islands
As slaves. Oh yes, and he made us
believe he was going
To slice off our ears with a sword! So
back to Olympus
We went, boiling inside because of the

pay

He had promised and then refused. And
now it is

To his people that you give your grace,
instead of assisting

Us in bringing the arrogant Trojans to
abject

Ruin, and with them their children and
honored wives.”

Then the far-working lord Apollo
answered him, saying:

“Earthshaker, you’d hardly consider me
sane if I

Should do battle with you for the sake of
ephemeral mortals,

Poor wretches that flame with life for a
little while

Like flourishing leaves that draw their
food from the earth,
Then wither and die forever. Let us,
then, cease
This nonsense at once, and leave the
fighting to men.”[bq](#)

So saying, he turned away, for he was
ashamed
To trade blows with his uncle. But now
his sister Artemis,
Wild Queen of savage beasts and the
untamed forest,
Fiercely railed at him thus: “Look how
the great archer
Runs! yielding the victory all to
Poseidon
And giving him glory for nothing. Fool,

why carry

A bow worthless as wind? Now never
again

Let me hear you boast as of old mid
immortal gods

In the halls of our Father that you would
fight face to face

With Poseidon.”

So she, but far-striking Apollo had
nothing

To say in reply. The revered wife of
Zeus, however,

Made this wrathful speech, thus chiding
with words of insult

The goddess of fast-flying shafts:

“You brazen bitch,

I’ll teach you to stand against me!

Believe me, I'm no
Easy mark in a fight, regardless of that
bow of yours
And the lioness-like disposition Zeus
gave you to use
Against women, whom he allows you to
slay as you will.
Truly you'd be a great deal better off in
the mountains
Killing wild deer and other such
wilderness creatures
Than here to fight against those who are
stronger than you.
However, learn if you wish what
fighting is
And how much mightier I am than you,
since now
You insist on matching your strength

against mine!”

So saying,
Queen Hera seized both of Artemis’
wrists with her left hand
And snatching the bow off her back with
her right, she boxed
The ears of her writhing foe, spilling her
arrows
All over and all the while smiling. Then
Artemis, weeping,
Fled from her like a dove that flies from
a hawk
And hides in some cave or hollow rock,
since she
Is not fated so to be caught. Even thus,
tearful Artemis
Fled from Queen Hera, leaving her bow

and arrows.

Then to Artemis' mother Leto the
messenger Hermes,
Slayer of Argus, spoke thus:

“Leto, I have
No idea of fighting you. No easy thing
It is to trade blows with the wives of
cloud-driving Zeus.
You're welcome to go and boast mid the
immortal gods
That you overcame me with that great
power of yours.”

Such were his words, and Leto picked
up the curved bow
And the arrows that lay all around in the
swirling dust
And retired, but Artemis came to the

brazen-floored palace
Of Zeus on Olympus and all but
collapsed at the knees
Of her Father, her fragrant gown
quivering with sobs, and he,
The son of Cronos, hugged his daughter,
and laughing
Softly, inquired:

“Who of the heavenly gods,
Dear child, has badly mistreated you
now, as though
You had done something wrong where
everybody could see?”

To which the fair-garlanded Queen of
the echoing chase:
“Your own wife it was that beat me,
Father—yes,

I mean white-armed Hera, the cause of
all this hatred
And strife among the immortals.”

While these two spoke thus
With each other, Apollo entered high-
hallowed Troy,
Concerned for the walls of the firm-
founded city, lest that
Very day the Danaans go beyond fate
and plunder
It all. But the other immortals returned to
Olympus,
Some in wrath and some in great
exultation,
And sat with their Father, lord of the
lowering sky.

Meanwhile, Achilles continued his

slaughter of men
And solid-hoofed horses. And as when
the angry gods
Cause toil and suffering for men by
setting fire
To their city, from which the smoke
billows up to dim
The wide sky, so now Achilles brought
labor and woe
On the Trojans.

At this point, ancient Priam mounted
The god-built wall and saw how
gigantic Achilles
Drove all the Trojans before him in
headlong, helpless
Rout. Groaning, he climbed back down
to the ground,

Calling out down the wall to the glorious
gate-keeping guards:

“Hold the gates wide with your hands,
till the fleeing troops
Can get inside, for here they come with
Achilles
Close behind them, and many, I fear,
will not make it.
But shut the double doors tight as soon
as the men
Are inside, for I am aghast at the thought
of that murdering
Monster within these walls!”

At this they shot back
The bars and swung the gates wide, thus
giving the Trojans
A light of deliverance. Apollo,

moreover, charged out
To meet the stampede, that he might keep
ruin away
From the Trojans, who came on fast for
the looming wall
Of the city, all of their throats dry and
gritty with thirst
And their bodies grimy with dust from
the plain. And always
Behind them Achilles came on with his
spear, his heart
In the grip of savage rage and the lust to
win glory

Then indeed would the sons of
Achaeans have taken Ilium,
Town of the towering gates, if Phoebus
Apollo

Had not inspired noble Agenor, the
blameless and stalwart
Son of Antenor. Into his heart Apollo
Infused great courage, then stood beside
him in person,
Shrouded in mist and leaning against an
oak tree,
That he might keep Death's heavy hands
away from the man.
Thus, when Agenor looked out at town-
taking Achilles,
He stopped and stood still, awaiting his
charge, while in him
His heart darkly seethed with many wild
thoughts. Deeply troubled,
He spoke to his own great spirit:
“Ah misery! if now

I run with the rest in rout before mighty
Achilles,
He'll surely catch up with me and
butcher me there
For a coward. But what if I leave the
troops to be driven
By Peleus' son, while I make rapid
tracks
Away from the wall across the Ileian
Plain
And continue till I am concealed mid the
woods and valleys
Of Ida? Then in the evening, when I have
bathed
In the river and washed off the sweat, I
could go back to Troy.
But why do I argue thus with myself?
Achilles

Would certainly see me going from city
to plain

And soon overtake me with his great
fleetness of foot.

Nor would it be possible then to escape
dark death

And the fates, for he above all men is
awesomely strong.

What else then remains but for me to go
out and face him

In front of the city? No one thinks him
immortal.

He has but one life, and that may be
fatally reached

By the keen-cutting bronze. What glory
he has is a gift

From Cronos' son Zeus."

So saying, he gathered his courage
To face the oncoming Achilles, and his
brave heart
Was on edge for the clashing of combat.
As when a leopard
Leaves a dense thicket to spring on a
hunter, and goes
With no fear of the baying hounds, and
still goes on
In her fury though he be quicker and
pierce her through
With his spear—still she advances to
grapple with him
Before death: so now proud Antenor's
son, goodly
Agenor, refused to retreat till he had
clashed

With Achilles, and holding his round
shield before him and hefting
His spear, he shouted:

“I know, O splendid Achilles,
That you in your heart have hope of
sacking the city
Of god-gifted Trojans this day—fool that
you are!

For many and hard are the battles yet to
be fought

Over Troy. She still has plenty of battle-
bold warriors

Inside her walls, men who stand
between you

And their own dear parents, wives, and
sons, and who guard

Great Ilium. You, though, shall meet

your doom on this spot,
No matter how awesome and bold you
are in a fight!”

So saying, he hurled the sharp spear
with his powerful arm,
Nor did it miss, but struck the shin of
Achilles
Under the knee, where his greave of
new-hammered tin
Shrilly grated and rang, as back bounced
the point of keen bronze,
Unable to pierce the glorious gift of
Hephaestus.
Then Peleus’ son charged hard at
godlike Agenor,
But Phoebus Apollo would not allow
him to win

Any glory there, and snatching Agenor
away
He hid him in mist and sent him out of
the battle
To go back uninjured. Then, far-working
Apollo
Deceitfully kept Peleus' son from the
Trojans. He took
The form of Agenor exactly and stood in
the path
Of charging Achilles, who hotly pursued
him across
The wheat-bearing plain, turning him
toward deep-swirling
Scamander. But crafty Apollo remained
just a little
Ahead, beguiling Achilles with hope of
soon

Overtaking his foe. Meanwhile, the rest
of the Trojans,
Madly stampeding, rushed with
unspeakable joy
Through the gates of the city and
swarmed through the town.
Nor did
They dare this time await one another
outside
The walls to find out who managed to
get away
And who failed to make it. But
frantically all of them poured
Through the gates, whoever had legs still
able to run.

BOOK XXII

The Death of Hector

So throughout the city they rested like
panic-worn fawns,
Exhausted from heat and running, slaking
their thirst
And cooling off as they leaned on the
marvelous battlements.
Meanwhile, the Achaeans, leaving their
shields on their shoulders,
Drew near the wall, and Hector, bound
fast in the bonds
Of treacherous fate, stood waiting
outside the city

In front of the Scaean Gates. Then
Phoebus Apollo
Revealed himself to Achilles, spitefully
saying:

“What, O son of Peleus, can you
possibly think
You’re achieving, you a mere mortal
hotly pursuing
Me, an immortal god? You rage so
madly
That still you have not perceived that
I’m an immortal.
But have you no interest in further
slaughter of Trojans,
Whom you were routing in panic, but
who have now
Poured into the city while you were

sprinting out here?

You'll never kill me, since I am not fated to die."

Then greatly enraged, fleet-footed Achilles replied:

"You've duped me, O far-working god, most ruthless of all

The immortals—duped me by leading me here, away

From the wall. Else many a Trojan now in the city

Would surely lie out on the plain with a bloody mouthful

Of dirt. You've robbed me of truly great glory and cheaply

Saved those you favor, since you have no fear of revenge

To come. O would that I had the power
to wreak
Vengeance on you as I saw fit!”

So saying, Achilles
Was off for the city, still thinking great
deeds, and he ran
With the speed of a prize-winning horse
in a chariot-race,
A powerful stallion that stretches
himself full length
As lightly he gallops across the wide
plain. So Achilles
Churned hard his quick feet and knees.

The ancient Priam
Was first to see him as on he came
toward the city,
Brilliantly flashing bright as the star that

rises

In autumn to outshine all of the myriad
others

That burn in the blackness of night—the
star men call

The Dog of Orion, most brilliant of all,
but wrought

As a sign of bad days, for he is the
bringer of much

Deadly fever upon wretched mortals. So
now the bronze flashed

On the chest of charging Achilles. And
the old one groaned

A great groan and violently beat his gray
head with his hands,

As he screamed a plea to his precious
son still standing

Before the high gates, determined and

anxious to clash
With Achilles. To him old Priam,
reaching out both
Of his arms, called pitifully:

“Hector, I beg you, dear child,
Don’t stand there alone and wait for the
charge of that man,
Or death at his hands may soon be yours,
since he
Is far stronger than you—and a savage!
If only the gods
Loved him no better than I do! Then
quickly the dogs
And vultures would feast on his
unburied corpse, thus lifting
Some measure of terrible grief from my
heart. For he

Has deprived me of many brave sons,
either slaughtering them
Or selling them off as slaves to distant
islands.

Right now I miss two more of my sons,
Lycaon

And Polydorus, nowhere to be seen mid
the Trojans

Gathered within the city, even those two
boys

The Princess Laothoë bore me. If they
still live

In the Argive camp, we'll do all we can
to ransom

Those two with bronze and gold, since
there is plenty

At home that ancient Altes, a King of
high fame,

Sent with his daughter Laothoë. But if
already

They're dead and in Hades' halls, great
grief shall come

On the hearts of their mother and me,
from whom their lives sprang.

The rest of the Trojans will not grieve
so long—unless

You also go down at the hands of
Achilles! Come then,

My son, put walls between you and him,
that you

May yet save the men and women of
Troy, instead

Of giving great glory to Peleus' son and
losing

Your own sweet life. Moreover, have

pity on miserable

Me, wretched but still quite able to feel!

Think of the grinding fate Father Zeus is
preparing

For me, to kill me in feeble old age,
after I

Have seen countless horrors—my sons
in the throes of death,

My daughters and daughters-in-law
dragged off by loathsome

Achaean hands, their marriage chambers
wrecked

And despoiled, and their babies dashed
to the ground in the heat

Of horrible war. Myself last of all, with
the life

Ripped out of my limbs by slash or
thrust of sharp bronze,

Shall hungry dogs tear further—my own
table hounds

Brought up in my halls to guard the gate
of my palace.

Gone mad from lapping their master's
blood, they'll loll

In my courts. A young man cut down in
battle may

Very well lie exposed, though the
mangling bronze has done

Its worst on his body. Dead and naked
though such

A young warrior lie, nothing is seen that
is not

Noble and fair. But when savage dogs
defile

The gray head and beard and the privy

parts of an old man
Fallen—surely nothing more foul than
this can come upon
Wretched mortals!”¹

So saying, old Priam tore
Gray hairs from his head, but he could
not persuade the heart
Of his son. And then, beside the old
King, Hector's mother,
Wailing and shedding hot tears, undid
the front
Of her gown and, holding out one of her
breasts, spoke these words
Winged with entreaty:

“Hector, my child, have
Some regard for this, and pity your
mother, if ever

I quieted your crying by giving you suck
at this breast.

Remember all this, my precious child,
and fight

Yonder savage from inside the walls.

Do not be so heartless

As now to stand there and face him. For
if he should kill you,

I'll never be able, my darling, to whom I
gave life,

To so much as mourn your dead body
laid out on a bed,

Nor shall your rich-gifted wife, but far
over there

By the Argive ships fast dogs shall
devour you completely!"

Thus the two wept and called out to

their much-loved son,
Beseeching him over and over, but they
could do nothing
To change Hector's heart as there he
stood and awaited
The clash with gigantic Achilles. And as
a bright snake
Of the mountains, swollen and fierce
from its diet of deadly
Poisons, waits in his lair for a man,
balefully
Glaring forth and coiling about within,
So Hector, his courage unquenched,
would not give ground,
But leaned his bright shield against the
wall's jutting tower
And, deeply troubled, spoke thus to his
own great spirit:

“Ah misery! if now I take cover within
the gates

And the walls, Polydamas surely will be
the first

To reproach me, since he is the one who
urged me to lead

The Trojans back into Troy during the
dread

Accursed night when great Achilles
came forth. But I

Wouldn't listen, much to the sorrow of
many, and now

That I've all but destroyed the troops
through my own stubborn pride,

I can't face the men and gown-trailing
women of Troy,

Lest some low fellow should say: ‘Great

Hector put all
Of his trust in his own brute strength and
destroyed the whole
army!’²

So they will surely remark, but it were
far better

For me to face and slay Achilles and so
Return home in triumph, or now to die
bravely myself

In front of the city. But what if I lay my
bossed shield

And thick helmet down and, leaning my
spear on the wall,

Go out unarmed to meet the matchless
Achilles

And promise him that we’ll give to
Atreus’ sons

To carry away both Helen and all the
shiploads

Of treasure Prince Paris brought home to
Troy—thus starting

The war—and say that I'll have the
elders of Troy

Swear a strong oath for the Trojans that
we will divide

With the Argives all of the treasure that
this lovely city

Contains? But why do I argue these
things with myself?

Let me not be so foolish as thus to
approach him

Only to have him completely refuse to
pity

Or hear me at all, but kill me instead,
unarmed

As some helpless woman, my bronze
lying back by the wall.

This, I fear, is hardly the time for a
lengthy

Chat with Achilles by oak-tree or rock,
such as

A boy and his girl might have with each
other—boy

And his girl indeed!³ Much rather, let us
now clash

With no further delay, that we may find
out to whom

The Olympian wills the high glory.”

As thus he debated,
Achilles, peer of the plume-waving
War-god, loomed up
Before him hefting his spear of Pelian

ash,
That awesome bronze-bladed shaft,
above his right shoulder,
While all about him his marvelous armor
was flashing
Like leaping flames or the rising sun.
Then Hector
Took but one look before trembling
seized him all over,
Nor did he dare hold his ground, but
leaving the gates
Behind him, he fled in fear with the son
of Peleus,
Putting his faith in his speed as a runner,
hot
In pursuit. As a hawk of the mountains,
fastest of fowls,
Darts with shrill screams in pursuit of a

trembling dove,
Hungry to kill her, so now Achilles sped
on
In his furious wrath, and Hector before
him ran swiftly
Beneath the wall of the Trojans. Past the
place
Of lookout and the wind-swayed wild
fig tree they ran, always
Out from the wall along the wagon-made
road,
And came to the two fair-bubbling
fountains, where those
Two springs jet up that feed deep-
swirling Scamander.
Hot water flows from the one, and over
its stream

Steam rises like smoke from a blazing
fire, while even
In summer the other runs cold as hail or
chill snow
Or hard-frozen ice itself And there by
those fountains
Are handsome wide washing-troughs
where the wives and fair
daughters
Of Trojans had washed glossy clothes in
the days of peace
Before the Achaeans came.

By these they dashed,
One fleeing, the other pursuing. A good
man led
The race, but the one in pursuit was far
the stronger

And came swiftly on, for now it was not
for any
Mere hide or sacrificed bull that they
strove, such as men
Most usually race for, but now it was for
the life
Of horse-breaking Hector. And as when
hard-hoofed, prizewinning
Stallions wheel fast around the turn-
posts, and some
Fine prize is put up, a tripod perhaps, or
a woman,
In games for a warrior dead, so now
these two
Swiftly circled the city of Priam three
times, while all
The gods gazed down on their race.
Then the Father of men

And immortals was first to speak out
among them, saying:

“Look now, truly a much-cherished
man I see

Being chased about the high walls, and
my heart grieves greatly

For Hector, who often has burned for me
the thigh-pieces

Of oxen high on the crags of many-
ridged Ida

And on the citadel heights. But now
great Achilles

Is chasing him swiftly about Priam's
city. Come then,

You gods, think and decide whether we
shall save him

From death, or slay him at last, brave

man though he is,
At the hands of raging Achilles, Peleus’
son.”

Then the goddess Athena, her blue
eyes blazing, answered him
Thus: “O Father, lord of the dazzling
bolt
And darkly ominous cloud, what are you
saying!
Can it be that you really wish to deliver
a mortal,
One long fore-destined by fate, from
dolorous death?
Well do as you like, but don’t suppose
for one moment
That all of us like what you do!”

Then Zeus, god of gales,

Replied: "Why so grim, my Tritogeneia?
Dear child, I was not altogether in
earnest in what
I said, and surely I want to be gentle
with you.
Do as you please, and restrain yourself
no longer."

So saying, he started Athena, who
needed no urging,
And down she went darting from high on
the peaks of Olympus.

But fast Achilles, ceaselessly running,
pressed hard
Upon Hector. And as when a hound in
the mountains jumps
The fawn of a deer and chases him hotly
through glade

And winding gorge, relentlessly tracking
him down

Whenever he cowers in hiding beneath a
dense thicket,

So Hector now could not escape
Achilles.

As often as he endeavored to make a
dash

For the lofty Dardanian Gates, hoping
his fellows

Above on the wall might cover his effort
with showers

Of shafts till he gained the protection of
well-built bastions,

Achilles would cut him off and turn him
back

Toward the plain, while he himself
continued to run

On the city-side of the course. And as in
a dream

A man is unable to chase one who
wishes to flee,

And both, though struggling to run,
remain rooted fast,

So that neither gains on the other, so now
Achilles

Could not overtake Hector, nor could
swift Hector

Escape. But how did the Trojan manage
to keep

Away for so long from the fierce fates of
death? Only

With help from Apollo, who came for
the last and final

Time to inspire him with strength and

quicken his knees.

And Achilles signaled his men with
shakes of his head

Not to hurl their bitter missiles at
Hector, lest someone

Else might win the glory of bringing him
down,

And he himself come second. But when
for the fourth

Time around they reached the fair
fountains, Father Zeus

Lifted his golden scales and set on the
pans

Two fates of forever-sad death, one for
Achilles

And one for horse-breaking Hector.
Then by the middle

He took the balance and raised it, and

down all the way
To Hades' house sank the death-day of
Hector, whereat
Apollo left him.
But bright-eyed
Athena came up
To Achilles and spoke to him these
winged words:
"Now, finally,
Zeus-loved resplendent Achilles, I've
hope that we two
Will cut Hector down, no matter how
hungry for battle
He is, and bear to the ships great glory
for all
The Achaeans. For now he cannot
escape us, not even
If far-working Phoebus suffers

tremendously for him
And grovels in his behalf before Father
Zeus
Of the aegis. So take your stand and get
back your breath,
While I go persuade your quarry to fight
with you
Man to man.”

So spoke Athena, and Peleus’ son,
gladly
Obeying, stood where he was, leaning
upon
His bronze-bladed shaft of ash. Athena
left him
And came up to shining Hector,
assuming the form
And weariless voice of his brother

Deïphobus. Standing
Beside him, she spoke to him these
words winged with beguilement:

“Dear brother, surely fleet-footed
Achilles has sadly
Abused you, chasing you thus around
Priam’s city.
But come, let us now stand against him
and beat back his charge
Together.”

To which great Hector, his bronze
helmet flashing:
“Deiphobus, you’ve always been my
favorite brother
By far, of all the sons that were born to
Priam
And Hecuba. Now, though, I’m sure I

shall hold you dearer
Than ever, since you have dared to come
out and help me,
While all the others stay back of the lofty
walls.”

To him then the goddess bright-eyed
Athena replied:
“Dear brother, believe me, our father
and queenly mother
And all of the comrades about me
earnestly pleaded
With me to stay where I was, so
fearfully do
They all tremble before Achilles. But my
heart was deeply
Pained by piercing sorrow for you. So
now

Let us charge straight at him and fight,
nor let there be
Any sparing of spears, that we may
know at once
Whether Peleus' son is going to cut us
both down
And carry our bloodstained armor back
to the ships,
Or whether he shall go down beneath the
bronze point
Of your spear.”

With these guileful words Athena
induced him
To fight, and when they got within range
of each other,
Huge Hector, his bronze helmet flashing,
spoke first to Achilles:

“No longer, O Peleus’ son, will I flee
before you,
As I have done three times around the
great city
Of Priam, without the heart to stand up to
your charge.
For now my spirit says fight with you
face to face,
Whether I kill or be killed. Come then,
let us
Invoke our gods to sanction this pact
between us,
For they will witness and guard our
covenant best.
If Zeus allows me to outlast you and rob
you
Of life, I’ll do to your corpse no foul
defilement.

But when I have stripped off your armor,
Achilles,
I'll give your dead body back to the host
of Achaeans—
And you do the same for me.”

Then savagely scowling
At him, fast-footed Achilles replied:
“Hector,
You madman, don't stand there babbling
to me of covenants.
There are no faithful oaths between lions
and men,
Nor do wolves and lambs have any
oneness of heart,
But they are always at fatal odds with
each other.^{[4](#)}
So too it is not to be thought that we can

ever

Be friends, nor shall there be any peace
between us

Till one or the other has fallen and
glutted with blood

The battling Ares, him of the tough hide
shield!

Recall every jot of your warrior's
prowess, for now

Is the time to show your courage and
skill as a spearman.

Escape for you there is none, but Pallas
Athena

Shall soon bring you down with this long
lance of mine.

And now you shall pay all at once for
the grief I endured

For my comrades, whom you in your

raging killed with the spear.”

So saying, he poised his long-shadowing spear and hurled it,
But shining Hector, looking straight at him, escaped,
For he saw it coming and crouched, so that the bronze point
Flew over his head and embedded itself in the earth.

But Pallas Athena snatched it up, without Hector’s knowledge, and gave it back to Achilles. And Hector,
His people’s commander, spoke thus to the great son of Peleus:

“You missed, O godlike Achilles. It seems that Zeus
Has not yet informed you concerning the

day of my doom,
Though surely you thought that he had.
You thought by your glibness
And cunning of speech to fill me with
terror of you
And completely deprive me of courage
and strength. But you'll not
Plant your spear in my back as I flee, but
as I
Charge down straight upon you, drive it
clean through my chest—
If God has granted you that. Look out
now and avoid,
If you can, my keen-cutting bronze.
Here's hoping you take
The whole shaft into your hard flesh!
Surely this war
Would be lighter for Trojans, if you,

their greatest scourge,
Were dead.”

Then poising his shade-making spear,
he cast,
Nor did he miss, but struck full upon the
shield
Of Achilles, from which a long way it
rebounded, enraging
Hector, since his swift shaft had flown
from his hand
In vain. And now, since he had no
second ash spear,
He stood in deep consternation, then
shouted to him
Of the dazzling white shield, Deïphobus,
asking a long spear
Of him. But he was nowhere around, and

Hector,
Aware now of just what had happened,
spoke thus:

“So be it.

Surely the gods have summoned me
deathward. For I

Thought sure that the hero Deïphobus
stood right behind me,

Whereas he is safe on the other side of
the wall,

And Athena has tricked me. Now evil
death is at hand

For me, not far off at all, nor is there any
Way out. Such, I believe, has always
been

Zeus's pleasure, and that of his far-
shooting son Apollo,

Who have in the past been willing and eager to help me.

Now, though, my doom is surely upon me. But let me

Not die without a huge effort, nor let me dishonorably

Die, but in the brave doing of some great deed

Let me go, that men yet to be may hear of what happened.”

So saying, he drew the keen blade that hung by his side,

A sword both heavy and long. Then bracing himself

He charged at Achilles, plunging upon him like some

Huge high-flying eagle that dives through

dark clouds to seize

On the plain a tender lamb or cowering
hare.

Even so, Hector plunged, his sharp
sword held high. And Achilles,
Seething with savage wrath, met the
advance

With one of his own, protecting his chest
with his intricate,
Exquisite shield and tossing his head, so
that all

The gold plumes that Hephaestus had
thickly set in the crest
Of that four-horned helmet shook with a
gorgeous glitter.

And from the bronze point of the spear
that Achilles balanced
In his right hand there went forth a gleam

like that

Which glints amid stars in the blackness
of night from Hesperus,

Fairest of all the stars set in wide
heaven.

Hefting that powerful spear, he scanned
the form

Of his foe to find the spot where a spear
was most likely

To pierce the firm flesh of Hector. He
saw that his armor

Of bronze covered him all the way, the
beautiful

Gear he had stripped from mighty
Patroclus when he

Cut him down.⁵ But there where the
collarbones separate neck

And shoulders, there at his throat, most
fatal of targets,
Appeared a spot unprotected by bronze.
So there,
As on him he charged, great Achilles
drove in his spear,
And the point went through his soft neck
and stuck out behind.
Even so, the ashen shaft, heavy with
cleaving bronze,
Failed to sever the windpipe. Hence
Hector could still say words
And answer his foe. Dying, he sprawled
in the dust,
And shining Achilles exulted above him,
vaunting:

“Hector, I dare say you thought while

stripping Patroclus

That you would be safe, nor did you
have one thought of me,

Since I was not there and since you are a
very great fool!

Behind at the hollow ships that man had
a helper,

One mightier far than himself to avenge
him—me,

The man who unstrung those knees of
yours. Now dogs

And birds will ravin on your shredded
corpse, defiling

You utterly. Meanwhile, Achaeans shall
hold for Patroclus

A high and fitting funeral.”

Then Hector, his bronze helmet

Gleaming, his small strength rapidly draining, answered:

“I beg you, Achilles, by your own knees and parents

And life, do not allow me thus to be eaten

By dogs at the ships of Achaeans. Instead, accept

What you want of our plentiful bronze and gold, a ransom

My father and queenly mother will gladly give you,

If only you'll give back my body, that Trojans and wives

Of Trojans may give me my due of funeral fire.”

Then blackly scowling at him, fast-

footed Achilles

Replied: "Do not beg me by knees or by
parents,

You dog! I only wish I were savagely
wrathful

Enough to hack up your corpse and eat it
raw—

In view of what you have done—but no
man alive

Shall keep the dogs from your head, not
even if here

They should bring and weigh out a
ransom ten or twenty times

What you are worth and promise still
more, not even

If Priam, descended of Dardanus, should
tell them to pay

Your weight in gold—not even then

should your
Queenly mother lay you on a bed and
mourn you, the son
Whom she herself bore, but dogs and
birds shall devour you,
Bones and all!”⁶

Then noble bright-helmeted Hector,
Rapidly dying, replied: “I know you,
Achilles,
All too well, and clearly foresee what
you’ll do,
Nor was there a chance of my changing
your mind. The heart
In your breast is solid iron. But think
what you’re doing,
Or one day I may bring the gods’ wrath
on you, when Paris

And Phoebus Apollo destroy you there,
great valor

And all, at the Scaean Gates.”[bs](#)

As thus he spoke,
The final moment arrived, and his soul
flew forth
From his body and quickly journeyed to
Hades, bewailing
Her lot as one too soon bereft of youth
And manly vigor. And now to the corpse
of his foe,
God-gifted Achilles spoke thus:

“Die—and as
For my own fate, I’ll accept that
whenever Zeus wills
To fulfill it, Zeus and the other immortal
gods.”

He spoke, and drawing the bronze
from Hector's throat,
He laid it aside and started to strip from
his shoulders
The armor, sticky with blood. And the
other sons
Of Achaeans ran up all around and gazed
at the wondrously
Handsome body of Hector, nor did a
man
Approach him without inflicting a
wound in his flesh,
And many a one, with a glance at his
neighbor, would say:

“Aha! fierce Hector is not even nearly
so hard
To handle now as when he hurled

blazing fire
On the ships!”

So saying, a man would step in and
stab

Hector’s body. At last, having stripped
him of bronze, swift Achilles

Stood up among the Achaeans and spoke
to them, saying:

“O friends, captains and counselors of
the Argives,

Now that the gods have enabled us thus
to destroy

This man, who has done more damage
than all of the others

Together, come, let us make a tour with
our weapons

Around Priam’s city and see what the

Trojans intend
To do next, whether they will desert
their high town, now that
Their champion is dead, or whether
they've made up their minds
To stay on without Hector's help. But
what kind of talk
Is this? Back at the ships lies a dead man
unwept
And unburied, Patroclus, whom I will
never forget
So long as my knees are quick and I am
one
Of the living. And though all phantoms
else in Hades'
House forget their dead, even there will
I
Remember my precious comrade. But

come, you sons
Of Achaeans, singing our song of
triumph, let us
Go back to the hollow ships, bearing this
body
Today we have won tremendous
renown, for we
Have slain royal Hector, whom Trojans
have always lauded
Throughout the city as if the man were a
god.”

So saying, he set about foully defiling
the body
Of noble Hector. Piercing behind the
tendons
Of both of his feet between heel and
ankle, he pulled through

And tied leather thongs, and bound them
fast to his chariot,
Leaving the head to drag. Then lifting the
famous
Armor aboard, he mounted the car
himself
And lashed the team on, and they
unreluctant took off
At a gallop. And dust billowed up on
either side
Of the dragging Hector, as his black hair
trailed out
In the dirt and the once so handsome
head was defiled
With foul dust.⁷ For Zeus had now
committed the man
To the hands of his foes to suffer

disgrace and defilement
There in the land of his fathers.

Thus was his head
All filthied with dust, and his mother,
seeing him so,
Tore at her hair and, screaming, flung
wildly off
Her shimmering veil. And his dear father
pitifully groaned,
While the people around them and those
throughout the city
Took up the mournful wail. Nor could
they have grieved
Any more had all looming Troy been
wreathed in flames
From walls to the citadel heights. And
the people had all

They could do to keep old Priam, grief-
frenzied, from rushing
Out through the lofty Dardanian Gates.
He begged them
All, groveling in dung of horses, and
calling
Each man by his name, crying:

“Release me, my friends,
And though you don’t want to, allow me
to go from the city
Alone to the ships of Achaeans. I’ll pray
to this unfeeling
Monster, this worker of horrors, to have
some regard
For my age and for himself in the eyes of
his fellows.
He too, you know, has a father, Peleus, a

man

Like myself, who sired and reared him
to be a great scourge

To the Trojans, to me most of all, so
many have been

My sons cut off by him in the flower of
youth.

Yet not for them all do I mourn so much,
great

Though my grief surely is, as I now
mourn for one only,

Keen sorrow for whom will bring me
down at last

To Hades' dark house—sorrow, I say,
for Hector.

Ah that he might have died in my arms.
Then his mother

And I might at least have found some

relief in weeping

And wailing, she who bore him ill-fated,
and I

His father.”

So spoke old Priam, sobbing, and with
him

His grieving people joined in. And
Hector’s mother,

Old Hecuba, led in their vehement
keening the women

Of Troy, crying: “My child, how
wretched I am!

Why should I go on alive in this terrible
anguish

Of mine, now that you’re gone forever?
You

My constant glory both night and day in

the city

And ever a blessing to all of the men and
women

Of Troy, who greeted you quite as they
would a god,

While you were alive. But now death
and fate have finally

Caught up with you.”

Thus Hecuba wailed through her tears.
But Hector’s wife knew nothing of what
had occurred,

Since no one had gone to tell her that her
dear husband

Remained outside the gates. She was
weaving a web

In an inner room of the high-roofed
house, a scarlet

Web of double width through which she
artfully

Sprinkled a pattern of flowers.^{bt} And
now she called

Through the house to her girls with the
beautiful braids to set

A large three-legged cauldron over the
fire, that there

Should be a hot bath for Hector when he
returned

From the fighting—poor innocent one,
who had no idea

That far from all baths strong fire-eyed
Athena had cut

Hector down by the hand of Achilles.⁸
But then she heard

The shrieks and groans from the wall,

and shaking all over
She dropped the shuttle to earth and
spoke once again
To her fair-braided handmaids:
“Two of you, come go with me,
That I may see what has happened. For
that was the voice
Of my husband’s revered mother, and
my heart leaps
To my mouth and my knees are frozen
beneath me. Surely
Some horror is close at hand for the
children of Priam.
O far from my ears may such news
always be,
But I am terribly fearful that great
Achilles
Has cut brave Hector off from the city

and driven him

Out on the plain, and most likely ended
by now

The fatal pride that has for so long
possessed him.

For Hector would never lag back in the
throng of fighters,

But always insisted on charging well out
in front

And never allowed any man to outdo
him in daring.”

So saying, Andromache rushed from
the hall like a woman

Gone mad, her heart wildly pounding,
and with her went two

Of her handmaids. But when she had
joined the crowd on the wall,

She stopped and looked toward the
plain, and there she saw Hector
Ruthlessly dragged by fast horses away
from the city
And toward the hollow ships of Achaea.
Then darkness
Night-black came over her eyes and
enclosed her, as backward
She fell, flinging far off her shining
headdress,
Her fair coronet, her snood and woven
fillet,
And with them the veil that Aphrodite
the golden
Had given to her on the day that Hector,
he
Of the flashing helmet, had led her forth
as his bride

From Eëtion's house, having given
innumerable gifts
To her father. Now round her crowded
her husband's sisters
And sisters-in-law and in her dead faint
they held her
And tried to revive her. When she came
to and her spirit
Returned to her breast, she lifted her
voice in lament
Mid the women of Troy, sobbing:

“Ah Hector, what misery
Is mine! To one fate, it seems, we were
born, you
Here in Troy in Priam's house, I at the
foot
Of wooded Mount Placus in Thebe in the

house of Eëtion,
Who raised me, the unlucky father of one
whose fate
Is even more cruel. I heartily wish he
had never
Sired me. Now you are going to Hades'
house
In the hidden depths of the earth, leaving
me here
In bitter anguish, a widow in your
spacious halls,
And your son is still just a baby, the son
we two
So unluckily had. For now you can be no
help to him,
Hector, nor he any pleasure to you. And
though
He survives this tear-fraught war with

Achaeans, he'll always
Have plenty of labor and woe to endure,
for others
Will take all his land. A fatherless son is
cut off
From the friends of his childhood. He
goes about with his head
Hanging down and his cheeks wet with
tears, and when in his need
He comes where the friends of his father
are feasting and plucks
At one's cloak or another's tunic,
someone out of pity
Holds out his cup for a moment, just long
enough
To wet the child's lips but leave his
palate still dry.

And up comes a boy whose parents are
still alive

And beats him away from the feast with
his fists, jeering:

‘Get out of here fast! You’ve no father
feasting with us.’

Then, crying, back to his widowed
mother the little one

Runs—our little Astyanax, who always
before

On his father’s lap ate only rich mutton
and marrow,

And who, when he was through playing
and sleepy, would lie

On a bed in the arms of his nurse, a
lovely soft bed,

Where he would sleep well with his
little heart full of good cheer.

Now, though, with no father, he'll suffer
innumerable evils—

My precious Astyanax, Lord of the City,
so called

By the Trojans because you alone, my
husband, protected

Their gates and high walls. But now by
beaked ships, far away

From your parents, slick-wriggling
worms shall devour you, the dogs

Having eaten their fill, all feasting on
your naked body—

Though in your halls you've plenty of
handsome fine clothes,

Which now I shall burn to ashes, since
you'll never lie

In any of them, and such at least I can do

In your honor for all of the men and women of Troy.”

So she through her tears, and the women all added their wails.

BOOK XXIII

The Funeral Games for Patroclus

While the Trojans were grieving
throughout the town, the Achaeans
Returned to their ships and the
Hellespont stream, where each man
Went off to his vessel. Achilles,
however, would not
Allow the Myrmidons thus to be
scattered, but spoke out
Among his war-loving comrades,
saying:

“O Myrmidons,

Men of fast horses and my faithful
friends, let us
Not loose from the cars our solid-hoofed
horses, but let us
Still mounted close in round Patroclus
and mourn him, for such
Is the due of the dead. Then when we
have found some relief
In our grievous lamenting, we will
unyoke our horses
And eat supper here all together.”

At this, they all
As one man began a dirge for the dead,
led
By Achilles. And thrice round the corpse
of Patroclus they drove
Their mane-tossing horses, the men ever

mourning, as Thetis
Aroused in their hearts the desire to
lament. And their tears
Streamed down the warriors' bronze to
sprinkle the sands
Beneath them, so mighty a master of rout
was he
Whom they mourned. And Peleus' son
led the sorrowful chant,
Laying his man-killing hands on the
breast of his friend
And incessantly moaning these words, a
funeral vaunt:

“Rejoice, O Patroclus, even in Hades’
house,
For I am already fulfilling all that I
promised

To you—that I would drag Hector here
and give him
Raw to the dogs, and soon at your pyre
I'll cut
The throats of twelve splendid sons of
the Trojans, venting
My wrath because of your killing.”

He spoke, and further
Foully defiled Prince Hector, flopping
him over
Face down in the dust before the bier of
Patroclus.
And all took off their glittering bronze
and loosed
Their high-whinnying horses. Then the
countless army sat down
By the ship of Aeacus' grandson

Achilles, and he
Provided for them a sumptuous funeral
feast.
Many sleek bellowing bulls, lurching,
succumbed
To the iron as they were slaughtered,
along with great numbers
Of sheep and bleating goats, and
numerous swine,
Well-fattened and flashing their tusks,
were stretched to singe
Above the flame of Hephaestus. And all
round the corpse
Many cupfuls of blood were poured out
in sacred libation.

But now the chief, fast-footed
Achilles, the other

Great leaders conducted to King
Agamemnon, though they
Had all they could do to get him away,
so grieved
Was he in his heart because of his
friend. And when
They arrived at the lodge of Atrides,
they quickly ordered
The high-voiced heralds to set a large
three-legged cauldron
Over the fire, in case they were able to
get
Peleus' son to wash from his flesh the
horrible gore.^{[1](#)}
But he unbendingly said that he would
not, and swore
This oath in his fervor:

“Now truly, by Zeus, the highest
And best of all gods, no water shall
rightly come near
My head until I have shorn off my hair in
grief
And laid Patroclus high on his pyre and
after
His burning heaped up a barrow above
him, for no
Second sorrow shall ever strike through
to my heart like this,
So long as I live on earth. For now,
though, let us
Complete this sorrowful meal, but in the
morning,
O king of men Agamemnon, order the
soldiers

To bring in wood and to make all fit
preparations,
That our dead comrade may journey as
such a man should
Down to the dark kingdom of gloom,
quickly consumed
From our sight by the weariless fire.
Then once again
The troops can turn to their tasks.”

He spoke, and the chiefs,
Having heeded, obeyed him, and quickly
they got the meal ready
And ate, each man with an equal share of
the food.
And when they had eaten and drunk as
much as they wished,
The others went off to their lodges to

sleep, but Achilles
Went out and, heavily groaning, threw
himself down
Mid the Myrmidon host on the beach of
the crashing sea
In an open spot near which the billows
were breaking.
And when sleep took him, deliciously
drifted about him,
Dissolving the cares of his heart—for
his splendid limbs
Were exhausted from chasing Prince
Hector around windy Ilium-
Then appeared to him there the unhappy
ghost
Of Patroclus, exactly resembling the man
himself
In stature and dress and voice and

beautiful eyes,
And he stood at Achilles' head and
spoke to him, saying:

“You sleep, Achilles, forgetful of me
—which you
Never were so long as I lived. Now that
I'm dead,
You neglect me! But bury me soon as
you can, that I
May get within Hades' gates.² So far the
spirits
Have kept me away, mere shadows of
men outworn
That will not allow me to join them
beyond the river.
Vainly I wander about unable to enter
The wide-gated mansion of Hades. But

give me your hand,
I sadly beseech you, for once you have
given my corpse
To the fire, I'll never again come back
from Hades.
Never again in this life shall we two sit
down
Apart from our dear companions and
make plans together,
For that loathsome fate toward which I
have always journeyed
Has now engulfed me forever. Yes, and
you too,
O godlike Achilles, are doomed to fall
and die
Before the wall of opulent Troy. And
one
Other thing I will say and ask you to do,

if you

Will but listen. Do not have my bones lie
apart from your own,

Achilles, but let them lie always
together, as we

Grew up together in your house, from the
time I came there

With Menoetius when I was just a small
boy, fleeing

From Opus to your place because I had
miserably killed

A playmate of mine, Amphidamas' son,
not meaning

To kill him, but angry and fighting
because of a dice game.

Then knightly Peleus received me into
his home,

Lovingly reared me, and made me your
squire. Hence
Let one urn contain the bones of us both,
that golden
Two-handled urn which your goddess
mother gave you.”

Achilles, then, fast in the war-charge,
answered him thus:
“Why, O more than a brother to me, have
you
Come here to give these instructions? Of
course I will heed you
And do all you say. But now come
closer to me,
That though it be for no more than a
moment, we two
May embrace each other and find some

relief from our sorrow
In grievous lamenting.”

So saying, he reached out his arms,
But found nothing there. For the ghost,
insubstantial as smoke,
Was gone beneath earth, gibbering bat-
like. At once
Achilles sprang up, amazed, and striking
his hands
Together, spoke these mournful words:

“Ah now, even
In Hades’ house the soul is something,
though only
An image utterly empty of any real life.
For here all night long the ghost of
unhappy Patroclus
Has stood over me, weeping and

moaning and telling me
What I should do in every detail, and the
phantom
Looked wonderfully like my dear
friend.”

He spoke, and aroused
In them all the desire for further
lamenting, and Dawn
Of the rosy fingers spilled her sweet
light upon them
While they were still grieving about the
piteous corpse.
Then quickly King Agamemnon
dispatched both men
And mules from all of the lodges to go
after wood,
And in charge of them went a man of

high prowess, Meriones,
Squire of manly Idomeneus. Off they
went

With their tree-felling axes and strong-
braided ropes, while the mules
Jogged on ahead. Then uphill and
downhill, about

And around they went till they came to
the forested foothills

Of well-watered Ida. There they began
at once

To fell with their keen-bladed bronze the
high-foliaged oaks,

And with thunderous crashing the trees
kept falling. The Achaeans

Then split up the timber and bound it
behind the mules,

That cut up the ground with their hooves

as they strained for the
plain

Through the dense underbrush. And all
the woodcutters bore logs,
As they were ordered to do by
Meriones, squire
Of kindly Idomeneus. Back on the beach,
they cast
Them down, man after man, on the spot
where Achilles
Planned a huge mound for Patroclus as
well as himself.

When the countless logs had all been
thrown down, there
The Achaeans sat down together. But
quickly Achilles
Ordered the war-loving Myrmidons to

gird on their bronze
And to yoke their horses to shining cars.
And they all
Got up and did as he bade, arming
themselves
And mounting their chariots, footmen
and riders alike.
In front went the horse-drawn fighters,
and following them
Came a huge cloud of infantry, mid
whom his comrades bore
Dead Patroclus, whose corpse they had
covered with locks of their hair
Which they had shorn off and dropped
on him. Behind walked royal
Achilles, holding the head of his friend
and constantly
Mourning, for matchless indeed was the

man whom he
Was escorting toward Hades.

When all had arrived at the place
Achilles had chosen, they set down the
dead and quickly
Stacked up for him a high pile of wood.
But now
Goddess-born swift Achilles
remembered another thing
He must do, and standing apart from the
pyre he cut off
A tawny lock of his hair, the lock he had
let
Grow long for the river Spercheius.
Then deeply moved,
He spoke, looking out on the wine-blue
sea:

“Spercheius,
In vain did my father Peleus vow to you
That when I came back to my own dear
country, I’d cut off
This lock in your honor and offer a holy
hecatomb,
Slaughtering there in addition fifty fine
rams,
All consecrated to you and your fair
springs
Where you have your grove and temple
and altar fragrant
With incense. So promised old Peleus,
but you have not granted
His wish. Now, then, since I will never
go home
To my dear native land again, I will give

to the hero

Patroclus this lock of my hair to go with
him in death.”

So saying, he placed the hair in the
hands of his precious

Comrade, arousing in all of them the
desire

For further lamenting. And now the sun
would have set

On the weeping Achaeans had not
Achilles come up

Beside Agamemnon and said: “Atrides,
of course

The Achaeans may mourn as much as
they wish, but since

They have most respect for your orders,
for now dismiss

The army from round the pyre and bid
them make ready
Their meal, while we, the close friends
of the dead, remain
And take care of these things. And with
us let all of the leaders
Also remain.”

When the ruler of men Agamemnon
Heard this request, he dismissed the
troops at once
To return to their shapely ships, while
the dead's dearest friends
Remained and stacked up a pyre of
wood a hundred feet
Square at the base. Then sorrowing still
they laid
Dead Patroclus up on the peak of the

pyre, before which
They flayed and dressed a great many
fine sheep and sleek
Long-horned cattle. From these Achilles
gathered the fat
And enfolded the dead therein from head
to foot
And heaped the flayed bodies about him.
Against the bier
He leaned large two-handled jars of
honey and oil
And, loudly lamenting, drove four fast
neck-arching horses
Up on the pyre. The lord Patroclus had
kept
Nine table dogs, of which Achilles now
cut
The throats of two and flung them up on

the pyre.

And killing with bronze twelve valiant
sons of the Trojans—

An evil act he had planned in his
heart³—he lit

The pyre so that the iron fury of flame
Might feed on their corpses. Then
groaning, he called by name
On his precious friend:

“Hail, O Patroclus, even
In Hades’ halls—hail and farewell!
Already
I’m doing for you those things I
promised. For twelve
Brave sons of the great-hearted Trojans
are being devoured
By the flames along with you, but

Priam's son Hector

I'll not give to fire to feed on. Him I will
leave

To the dogs!"

Such was his threat, but no dogs dealt
With Prince Hector, for Aphrodite, the
daughter of Zeus,
Warded them off day and night, anointing
his body
With magic, immortal oil of roses, to
keep
His flesh from tearing when savage
Achilles dragged him.

And down on his corpse Apollo drew a
dark cloud

From sky to plain, obscuring the place
where the dead man

Lay, that not too soon the heat of the sun
Might shrivel his flesh around his bones
and sinews.

The pyre of dead Patroclus, however,
would not
Begin burning. But quick-footed royal
Achilles knew
What to do. He stood apart from the pyre
and prayed
To two winds, the North and the West,
promising exquisite
Gifts and liberally pouring libations of
wine
From a golden cup. He besought them to
come, that quickly
The wood might be kindled and all of
the corpses flame.

His prayer came first to the ears of Iris,
who sped
To the winds with his plea. They were
all met at a feast
In the house of the stormy West Wind,
and when Iris came running
And stopped on the threshold of stone,
they all sprang up
At the first sight of her and each invited
her over
To him. But she would not sit, and spoke
to them thus:

“I may not sit down, for I must return
to Oceanus’
Stream and the Ethiopians’ land, where
they
Are offering whole hecatombs to the

immortals,
A sacred feast in which I would share.
But Achilles
Prays to the winds, to you O North and
to you
O blustering West, offering fine gifts and
begging
For you to come, that you may quickly
make burn
The pyre of Patroclus, for whom the
Achaeans all mourn.”

So saying, she left them, and those two
roared off with incredible
Noise, driving the clouds in masses
before them.
Soon they blew on the sea, raising the
waves

Into billows beneath their shrill
whistling, and so came in haste
To the loamy land of Troy and fell on the
pyre,
Causing the god-blazing flame to roar
with huge fury.
All night they howled as one gale about
the flames
Of the pyre, while throughout the night
quick Achilles dipped wine
From a gold mixing-bowl and drenched
the earth all around,
Pouring it from a two-handled cup and
ceaselessly
Calling upon the spirit of hapless
Patroclus.
Just as a father mourns for his son while
burning

His bones, a bridegroom whose death
has brought misery on both
Of his unlucky parents, so now Achilles
mourned
As he burned the bones of his friend,
wearily dragging
Himself around the high pyre,
incessantly moaning.

But at the time when the Morning Star
arises,
Foretelling the coming of light on earth
—the star
After which comes crocus-clad Dawn,
spreading over the sea—
Then the flames died down, the fire
flickered out, and the winds
Returned to their home across the

Thracian deep,
Causing the waves to roar and run high.
And Achilles,
Turning away from the smoldering pyre,
sank down
Exhausted, and at once sweet sleep was
upon him. But now
All those with King Agamemnon
approached in a group,
And when the noise of their voices and
footsteps awoke him,
He sat upright and spoke to them, saying:
“Atrides,
And you other leaders of our united
Achaeans,
First go quench the smoldering pyre with
sparkling

Wine, wherever the fury of flame has
been,
And then let us gather the bones of
Patroclus, son
Of Menoetius, carefully singling them
out from the rest,
Which shouldn't be hard, since he lay in
the midst of the pyre,
While all of the others, both horses and
men, were burned
Apart from him on the edges. Then let us
enfold
The bones in a double layer of fat and
put them
Away in a golden urn, until I myself
Am hidden in Hades. But not at this time
do I bid you
Heap up with much toil a huge barrow,

but one that is fitting.

Then later, when I am no more, you men
who survive me

Amid the many-oared ships build it up
broad

And high.”

He spoke, and they did as swift
Peleus’ son bade.

First they put out the pyre with sparkling
wine,

Wherever the flame had been and the
ashes lay deep,

And weeping they wrapped the white
bones of their lovable friend

In a double layer of fat and put them
away

In a golden urn, which they veiled with

cloth of sheer linen

And placed in his lodge. Then they laid
out the barrow's circle

Around the huge pyre and heaped up
inside it a mound

Of dark earth.

Having built him this barrow, they
started to leave,

But Achilles restrained them and seated
the troops in a large

Open space where the funeral games
were to be.⁴ And from

His ships he brought out the prizes—
cauldrons and tripods

And horses and mules, sleek powerful
oxen, gray iron,

And women gorgeously sashed.

For the charioteers
He set forth splendid prizes—for him
who should run
In first place, a woman flawless in
exquisite handwork
Along with a three-legged, handle-eared
cauldron holding
Some twenty-two measures. And for the
second he put up
An unbroken mare of six years, big with
a mule foal
Soon to be born. For the third he offered
a basin
Untouched by fire, a lovely glittering
piece
That held four measures, and for the
fourth he set out

Two talents of gold, and a two-handled
urn untouched
By fire for the fifth.

Then he stood up and spoke
Mid the Argives, saying: “Atreus’ son,
and you other
Bright-greaved Achaeans, these prizes
are waiting here
For winning drivers to claim them. Now
if we Achaeans
Were holding these games in honor of
some other man,
Surely I would take the first prize off to
my lodge,
For you know how far my horses surpass
all others
In speed, they being immortal, a gift

from Poseidon
To Peleus my father, who gave them to
me. This time,
However, I and my solid-hoofed horses
will not
Compete, so valiant and famous a
charioteer
Have they lost, a driver most kind, who
so many times
Made both of their flowing manes glossy
with soft olive oil
After washing them with bright water.
For him they stand
Immobile in mourning, their hearts full
of sorrow, their manes
Trailing out on the ground, nor will they
move. But you others
Throughout the army, get ready to race,

whoever

Among you has faith in his horses and
well-jointed car.”

At this from Peleus’ son, the fast drivers
assembled.

Far the first to spring up was Admetus’
dear son

Eumelus, commander of many, and able
indeed

As a horseman. Next to arise was the
son of Tydeus,

Strong Diomedes, who yoked to his car
the horses

Of Tros, the same he had taken away
from Aeneas

The time Apollo saved Aeneas
himself.[bu](#)

After him Atrides got up, the tawny
Menelaus,
Descended from Zeus, and yoked his fast
horses—Aethe,
Agamemnon's mare, and his own horse
Podargus. Echepolus,
The son of Anchises of Sicyon, had
given the mare
To King Agamemnon instead of
following him
To wind-swept Troy, since he much
preferred to remain
At home in broad-lawned Sicyon,
delightfully living
On great stores of Zeus-bestowed
wealth. That mare Menelaus
Led under the yoke, a horse champing
eager to run.

And fourth Antilochus harnessed his
mane-tossing horses,
He the fine son of high-hearted King
Nestor, son
Of Neleus, and his horses of Pylia
breed. Then his father
Came up and told him what he should
do, a wise man
Advising one who had knowledge
himself:

“Antilochus,
Young as you are, Zeus and Poseidon
have loved you
And carefully taught you all that there is
to teach
About driving horses. Hence I’ve no
need to instruct you.

Already you know very well how to
wheel your chariot
Close round the turn-post. Your horses,
however, are slowest
Of all in the race, which makes me fear a
sorry
Outcome for you. The others are faster,
true,
But their drivers are not any smarter than
you, my boy,
No smarter at all. So recall every trick
you have learned,
If you don't want those prizes to slip
quickly by you. It's skill,
You know, not strength, that makes a
superior woodman,
And skill alone enables a helmsman to
keep

A straight course on the wine-dark sea
when his ship is beaten
By winds. And believe me, it's skill that
makes the difference
In charioteers! One driver will put too
much faith
In his horses and car and allow them to
wheel round the turn-post
Carelessly wide, not trying to keep them
close in
With the reins. But the smart driver,
although his horses are slower,
Knows how to stretch them out in a run
from the first
And keeps his eyes on the man ahead of
him
And on the turn-post, about which he

wheels close in.

Now listen to this. Out there stands a
stump some six feet

In height, a dry stump of oak or pine that
the rain

Has not rotted, and by it on either side,
set firmly

Against it right where the track turns, are
two white stones,

And around it is plenty of smooth ground
for driving. Perhaps

It's an old monument to one who died
long ago,

Or perhaps it was used as a turn-post in
races held

By men in those days. At any rate, swift
Prince Achilles

Has made it his turn-post now. When

you reach it, wheel
Round it close, leaning a bit to the left as
you stand
In your strong-braided car, and give your
right horse the whip
And a shout and plenty of rein. But hold
your left horse
Close in, so close that one might
suppose you had grazed
The stone with the hub of your finely
wrought wheel—but of course
Be wary of really grazing the stone, lest
you injure
The horses and wreck your car, which
the others would doubtless
Enjoy much more than yourself. I tell
you, dear son,

Think fast and stay on your guard, for if
at the turn
You pass all the others, no driver here
will be able
To catch you, much less spurt ahead of
you, coming back,
Not though he drove the mighty Arion,
fast horse
Of Adrastus, and bred of heavenly stock,
or the steeds
Of Laomedon, far the best ever bred
here at Troy.”

So saying, Neleus’ son Nestor went
back and sat down
In his place, having told his son just
what he should do.

The fifth man to ready his mane-

tossing team was Meriones.

Then they all mounted their cars and
tossed their lots

In a helmet held by Achilles. He shook
them, and out leaped

The lot of Antilochus, son of Nestor,
who thus

Got the inside lane, and the lot of lordly
Eumelus

Was next to come out. Then out leaped
that of Atrides,

Spear-famed Menelaus, followed by that
of Meriones.

Last of all to get a lane for his horses

Was Tydeus' son Diomedes, much the
best man

In the race. Then they lined up to start,
and Achilles

Showed them the turn-post far off on the
level plain,
And by it he set as a judge his father's
man,
The godlike Phoenix, to keep a keen eye
on the running
And to tell exactly what happened.

Then all as one man
Brought their whips down on the horses
and rattled the reins
On their backs, excitedly urging them
off, and quickly
They came to a gallop and sped from the
drawn-up ships
Across the smooth plain. From beneath
their breasts the dust
Rose up in thick swirling clouds, and

their manes streamed back
On the wind. And the chariots ran on the
all-feeding earth,
Frequently bouncing high in the air, as
the drivers
Stood in the cars, the heart of each man
throbbing wildly
To win, and each of them shouted to urge
his pair on,
As they flew through the dust on the
plain.

It was not, however,
Till they were galloping down the last
stretch of the course,
Having rounded the turn-post and headed
back toward the sea,
That the field strung out and all of the

horses showed

What speed they were capable of,
stretching themselves

To the utmost. Then quickly the hoof-
flashing mares of Eumelus

Pulled out ahead, and following close
behind them

Came Diomedes' great stallions, horses
of Tros—

Nor far back at all, for they ever seemed
just on the verge

Of mounting Eumelus's car, and
constantly blew

Their hot breath upon his back and broad
shoulders, since all

But over him stretched their heads as
they flew. And now

Diomedes would surely have passed him

or ended the race
Neck and neck, had Phoebus Apollo,
still angry at him,
Not struck from his hand the glittering
whip. Diomedes
Wept with frustration as he saw the
mares of Eumelus
Spurt even more swiftly ahead, while his
stallions, missing
The whip, slowed down and fell back.
Athena, however,
Was not unaware of what Apollo had
done
To cheat the son of Tydeus, and swiftly
she went
In pursuit of the people's shepherd and,
handing him back

His whip, put new strength into his
horses. Then on
She sped to Eumelus, son of Admetus,
and snapped
The yoke of his horses, causing the
mares to swerve
Apart and the shaft to plow up the plain.
Eumelus
Himself was thrown from the car down
into the dirt
Right next to a wheel, thus stripping the
skin from his elbows,
Mouth, and nose, bruising his forehead,
filling
His eyes with tears, and stifling his
powerful voice.
But strong Diomedes swept round the
wreck with his solid-hoofed

Horses and shot out far ahead of the rest,
For Athena endowed his stallions with
power and granted
The glory to him. And next came Atreus'
son,
Tawny-haired Menelaus, but now
Antilochus yelled
To his father's horses:

“Faster! you two. Stretch
Till you burst! With that pair out in first
place, the horses
Of Tydeus' flame-hearted son, I do not
bid you
Compete, for Athena has given them
speed and granted
Glory to him at the reins. But do
overtake

Menelaus's horses, and don't let them
beat you, lest Aethe,
A mare, disgrace you both! But why are
you lagging,
Brave steeds? I'll tell you now what's
what, and believe me
I mean it! No loving care will ever be
yours
Again from King Nestor, if now you're
so sorry as not
To win a good prize, and he will not
hesitate, either,
To cut you both down with keen bronze!
But faster! I say,
And catch them, and I will take care of
the rest. I'll slip by
Them there where the track is narrow.
Believe me, I will!"

These urgent words from their master
frightened the pair
And caused them to quicken their pace
for a time, till soon
Antilochus spotted a low narrow place
up ahead
Where the road had been partly washed
out by rushing water
From hard winter rains. Menelaus held
the track there,
Thinking none would dare try to pass at
that place. But
Antilochus
Swung off the track and drove his sohd-
hoofed horses
Up beside those of Atrides, at which
Menelaus,

Terrified, shouted:

“Antilochus, rein in your team!
You’re driving like some stupid fool!
The track here is narrow,
But soon it widens again. So pass me
there,
Or surely you’ll foul my car and
miserably wreck
Us both!”

He yelled, but Antilochus drove even
faster,
Bringing his whip down hard, as if he
had failed
To hear. And far as a discus flies when a
young man,
Testing his brawn, swings it hard from
the shoulder,

So far they ran side by side. Then the
team of Atrides
Fell back, reined by their master, who
greatly feared
That the solid-hoofed horses were going
to clash on the track
And upset the strong-braided cars, thus
painfully pitching
The drivers, so eager to win, head over
heels
In the dust. But tawny-haired Menelaus
yelled
This rebuke at Antilochus drawing
away:

“Go on,
Damn you! Surely no other mortal has
fewer scruples

Than you. I know now how wrong we
Achaeans were
To think you had any judgment. Nor shall
you carry
That prize away without first swearing
an oath
That you drove a clean race!”

So saying he called to his pair:
“Don’t stop or hold back now, no matter
how hurt
Your spirits may be. But after those
horses, quick!
Their legs will give out before yours, for
both of them carry
More years.”

These urgent words from their master
inspired

The pair to quicken their pace, and soon
they drew near
The team of Antilochus.

Meanwhile, the Argives were sitting
Where they had assembled, watching
sharp for the horses
To come through the dust hanging over
the plain. And the first
To see them was royal Idomeneus,
leader of Cretans,
For he sat outside the assembly, highest
of all
On a place of lookout. Hearing
Diomedes' voice,
He knew it at once, despite the great
distance between them,
And also he recognized one of his

horses, a bay
With a white full moon on his forehead.
Rising, he spoke
To the Argives, saying:

“My friends, captains and counselors
Of the Achaeans, am I the only man here
Who sees the horses, or do you see them
as well?

Some other pair, it seems, are now in the
lead,

And some other driver. The mares of
Eumelus, that led

Clear up to the turn, have now come to
grief somewhere

On the plain. I'm sure I saw them still in
first place

When they rounded the turn-post, but

now I can find them nowhere
At all, though I've scanned the whole
Trojan plain. Do you think
Eumelus perhaps dropped the reins, or
was unable
To hold his pair on the track as he
rounded the turn-post?
He must, I suppose, have failed to make
it, and there
At the turn been hurled to earth, as his
mares in panic
Swerved from the track and tore his car
all to pieces.
But all of you get up and look, for I'm no
longer
Sure what I see, but I think the man now
leading
Is of the Aetolian race and a King mid

the Argives,
In fact the son of horse-breaking Tydeus,
strong
Diomedes himself!”

Then Ajax, son of Oïleus,
Shamefully spoke in rebuke:
“Idomeneus, why
Do you always blabber so much? Those
high-stepping mares
Are still far off on that great stretch of
plain, and you
Are neither the youngest nor most keen-
sighted man
Mid the Argives. Always, however, you
blabber the loudest!
Such noise scarcely becomes you,
especially here

With your betters. The very same mares
are still in the lead,
And that is Eumelus himself, firmly
keeping his stance
In the car and holding the reins!”

Then Idomeneus, King
Of the Cretans, angrily answered: “Ajax,
you
Are indeed our best when it comes to
stupid abuse,
But otherwise you are surely the worst
of the Argives
Because of your gross and stubborn
mind! But come,
Let us wager a tripod or cauldron, and
let Agamemnon
Be judge between us and say which team

is in front,
That you by losing may learn!”

Oïleus’ son Ajax
Sprang up at this to answer with hateful
hard words,
And surely the quarrel would not have
stopped there had not
Achilles himself stood up and said:
“Enough,
Ajax, and no more, Idomeneus, no more
bitter words,
So utterly evil and ugly. They hardly
become you.
You’d blame severely another who
acted this way,
So sit in your places and watch for the
horses. Soon now

They'll be here, all of them straining to
win. Then each
Man of you may clearly see for himself
whose horses
Are first and whose second."

As thus the Prince spoke, Diomedes
Drew near, frequently lashing his horses
with strokes
Brought down hard from the shoulder,
and swiftly his light-leaping
stallions
Came on at a gallop. Their driver was
constantly showered
With dust, and his chariot, covered with
gold and tin,
Ran on behind the rapid-hoofed horses
so fast

That only the slightest trace of the wheel
rims was left

In the powdery dust, as onward his
horses flew

Then reining up in the midst of the place
of assembly,

With sweat streaming off to the ground
from the necks and chests

Of his pair, Diomedes leaped down
from his all-shining car

And leaned his whip against the tough
yoke. Nor did

The strong Sthenelus, Diomedes' dear
friend, at all

Hesitate to claim the first prize for his
comrade, but quickly

He gave to his spirited fellows the
woman to lead

Away and the handle-eared tripod to carry.

Next

To drive in was Antilochus, grandson of Neleus, he

Who had passed Menelaus, not by superior speed,

But by a low trick. Even so, Menelaus held

His fast horses close to the rear of Antilochus' car.

They ran, in fact, no farther behind than a swift horse

Is from the wheel of a car in which he draws

His master over the plain at a gallop, brushing

The metal rim with the tip of his tail, so close

Is he to the wheel as he speeds across the wide flat.

That close Menelaus came in behind Prince Antilochus,

Though at first he had been as far back as one

Hurls the discus. Rapidly he was catching his man,

Running him down as the splendid strength of Aethe,

King Agamemnon's mane-tossing mare, increased.

Had the course been longer, he without doubt would have passed him,

Nor would there have been any chance of a neck-and-neck finish.

Meriones drove in fourth, the noble
squire
Of Idomeneus, fully a spear-cast behind
Menelaus,
Since his fair-maned pair were truly the
slowest of all
In the race, and he the least able driver.

Last
Came Eumelus, son of Admetus,
painfully dragging
His exquisite car and driving his horses
before him.
Seeing him so, quick-footed noble
Achilles
Stood up mid the Argives and spoke, and
his words came winged
With compassion:

“See how in last place the ablest
driver
Of all drives in his solid-hoofed horses.
But come,
Let us give him a prize, as we should.
Let him take the second,
Since now the first has gone to the son of
Tydeus.”

To this all the others agreed, and
Achilles would then
Have given Eumelus the mare, with full
approval
From all the spectators, had not
Antilochus, son
Of magnanimous Nestor, stood up and
challenged the justice
Of Peleus’ son Achilles, saying:

“Achilles,
Angry indeed will I be with you if now
You do as you say, for thus you will
cheat me of what
Is rightfully mine, simply because you
respect
The skill of Eumelus in spite of the fact
that his horses
And car came to grief. Well he should
have prayed to the gods
Everlasting, who then would have kept
him from coming in last.
If you, however, pity him so, and care
So much for him, why you have great
store of gold and bronze
At your lodge, along with hard-hoofed
horses, women,
And cattle. Later, take some of that and

give him

An even more splendid prize, or do it
right now,

That all the Achaeans may warmly
applaud you. But I

Will not yield the mare. I'll fight in
hand-to-hand combat,

In fact, with anyone here who wishes to
claim her."

At this, fast-footed princely Achilles
smiled,

Hugely delighting in his dear comrade
Antilochus.

Then he replied in these winged words:
"Antilochus,

If you wish me to give Eumelus some
other prize

From my lodge, for you I'll do even that.
I'll give him
The breastplate I took from Asteropaeus,
a breastplate
Of bronze with a brilliant casting of
circular tin
Laid on all around it. He'll value it
highly, I know."

So saying, he bade his close comrade
Automedon bring it
Out from the lodge, and he went and
brought it and placed it
At once in the hands of Eumelus, who
joyfully took it.

But then Menelaus got up, his heart
fairly seething
With rage at Antilochus. Into his hand a

herald

Placed the orator's staff and called for
silence

Among the Argives. Then godlike
Atrides spoke thus:

"Antilochus, you that once had good
sense, what

Have you done! You've hindered my
horses and made me look

Like a fool, forcing your own much
inferior team

To the front by a foul. But you captains
and counselors

Of the Argives, come now, and judge
without favor between us,

Impartially please, or surely someone
later on

Will say: 'Menelaus defeated Antilochus

only

By lies. Even so, he got the mare, for
though

His horses were slower by far, he
himself was greater

In rank and power.' But no, I myself will
judge,

Confident quite that none of the Danaans
shall

Have cause to rebuke me, since what I
decide shall surely

Be perfectly just. Zeus-nurtured
Antilochus, come

Over here and stand, as is our custom, in
front of

Your horses and car, holding the slender
whip

You use when you drive. Then lay a
hand on your horses
And swear by Poseidon, who hugs and
shakes the whole earth,
That you committed no willing foul to
get
My car behind you.”

To which the shrewd Antilochus:
“Bear with me now, my lord Menelaus,
for I
Am much younger than you. As an older
and better man,
You know very well what sort of rash
overreaching
A young man is liable to, for though he
thinks faster
His judgment is often too little and light.

May your heart
Have patience with me, then, and I
myself will give you
The mare that I won. Yes, and if you
should ask
In addition some finer thing from my
lodge, I'd want
To give it at once, that I may not spend
all my days
Cast out of your heart, and feel myself a
sinner
Before the powers divine."

So spoke the son
Of magnanimous Nestor, and leading the
mare he gave her
To King Menelaus, whose heart was
warmed like the heart

Of ripening grain when the ears are
sparkling with dew
And the fields are all bristling. Even so,
Menelaus, your heart
Was made glad. Then his words to
Antilochus flew on the wings
Of forgiveness.

“Antilochus, now I myself feel no
more
Anger against you, since you as a rule
are not
At all foolish or flighty. But don't try
another such trick
On your betters. And truly, no other
Achaean could thus
So soon have appeased me. You, though,
have suffered much

And toiled a great deal for my sake, you
and your brother
Along with your excellent father. Hence
I will heed
Your request for forgiveness. And as for
the mare, though surely
She's rightfully mine, I give her to you,
that all
Gathered here may know that my heart is
never unyielding
And haughty.”

Such were his words, and giving the
mare
To Antilochus' comrade Noëmon, he
took for himself
The third prize, the all-shining basin.
And Meriones took

The two talents of gold, since he was fourth to come in.

But the two-handled urn, the fifth prize, remained unclaimed.

So Achilles gave it to Nestor, bearing it through

The assembly of Argives. Standing beside him, he said:

“This, ancient sir, is for you. Lay it away

With your treasures to be a reminder of these funeral rites

For Patroclus, whom never again you’ll see mid the Argives.

This urn I give you quite freely, for now your days

Of boxing and wrestling are over, nor

will you compete
Again in the javelin-throw or foot-race.
The weight
Of years lies heavy upon you.”

So saying, he placed
The urn in his hands, and Nestor
receiving it spoke,
His words flying forth on the wings of
joyful thanks:
“Yes indeed, child, all that you say is
true, and fittingly
Put. My feet and limbs, young friend, are
no longer
Steady and strong, nor do my fists any
more
Lash lightly out from the shoulder. If
only I were

Young again and as sure of my brawn as
I was on that day
At Buprasium when the Epeans were
holding last rites
For King Amarynceus and his sons put
prizes up
For games in his honor. That day no man
was my peer,
Neither mid the Epeans, nor mid my own
people the Pylians,
Nor mid the great-souled Aetolians. In
boxing I won
Over Enops' son Clytomedes, and in
wrestling over
Ancaeus of Pleuron, who pitted his
strength against me.
Iphiclus, fast though he was, I beat in the
foot-race,

And in the javelin-throw I defeated
Phyleus

And Polydorus. I lost but one event,
The chariot-race in which the two sons
of Actor [by](#)

Outstripped me, since they were two
against one, fiercely

Begrudging me victory and forcing their
horses ahead,

For the best prize of all was still in the
lists. They were twins,

And one of them drove with sure hand, a
very sure hand,

While the other laid on the lash. Even
such was the man

I once was, but now I leave these
endeavors to men

Who are younger, since now I must yield
to irksome old age,
But go, and finish these funeral rites and
games
For your comrade too. This gift I gladly
receive,
And my heart rejoices that always you
think of me
As a friend, nor do you neglect to honor
me duly
Among the Achaeans. May the gods in
return give you
Abundant grace to fulfill each desire of
your heart.”

Thus he spoke, and Peleus’ son, having
listened
To old Nestor’s thanks, went back

through the crowd of Achaeans
And brought out rewards for the painful
and difficult boxing.

First he led out and tied in the place of
assembly

A work-hardy mule of six years, one
well broken in—

No easy task with a mule—and for him
who should lose

He set out a two-handled cup. Then
standing there

Mid the Argives, Achilles spoke thus:

“Atrides, and all

You other hard-greaved Achaeans, we
now invite

The best pair of boxers here to square
off and throw punches

Like fury for these two prizes. Let him
whom Apollo
Gives strength to outlast the other, as
witnessed by all
The Achaeans, go off to his lodge with
the work-hardy mule,
While he who loses shall take the two-
handled cup.”

He spoke, and at once a huge man,
courageous and skilled
As a boxer, stood up, one Panopeus’ son
Epeus,
And laying a hand on the work-hardy
mule, he vaunted:
“Now let him come out and fight,
whoever covets
This two-handed cup. For the mule, I

think, will not

Be won by any Achaean who first of all
has to

Beat me with his fists, since I claim to
be the best boxer

Here. So I'm not so good in battle—one
can't be

Expert in every endeavor! But this I say
now,

And believe me I'll do what I say—
namely, crush

Every bone in my crazy opponent's
carcass and pound

His flesh to a pulp! So let his nearest
and dearest

Of kin stand by in a body, that they may
carry

Him off unconscious when I have

finished with him.”

Such was his challenge, and all for a
time sat utterly

Silent. At last one man stood up to face
him,

A godlike man, Euryalus, son of the son
Of Talaus, Mecisteus the King, who had
journeyed to Thebes

For the funeral and games that followed
great Oedipus’ downfall,

And in those games had defeated all the
Cadmeans.

Quickly, Euryalus’ spear-famous
kinsman, Tydeus’

Son Diomedes, girded his cousin’s loins
With a cloth and bound his knuckles with
thongs well cut

From the hide of a range-roaming ox,
warmly encouraging
Him with words, for greatly he wished
him to win.

When the two had been girded, they
strode to the midst of the place
Of assembly and, squaring off, began to
throw powerful

Punches, awesomely grinding their teeth
and streaming

All over with sweat. Then able Epeus
brought one

Up from the ground, as it were, as
Euryalus peered

For an opening, and caught him
crashingly under the jaw.

Nor did he remain after that in an upright
position

For long, since there on the spot his
splendid limbs
Were unstrung. And as when a fish darts
up from beneath
The North Wind's ripple and leaps up
out of the water
And onto the sea-weedy sand of a
shallow, then quickly
Is hidden again beneath a dark wave, so
now
Euryalus arched through the air and
flopped on his back,
So great was the force of the blow. But
gallant Epeus
Took him and set him once more on his
feet, and his cherished
Companions crowded about him and

helped him off

Through the place of assembly, his feet
dragging trails in the dust

As he went, dangling his head to one
side and spitting out

Clots of blood. And they set him down
—still

None too sure where he was—in the
midst of his fellows, while they

Went out and claimed the two-handled
cup.

Then Achilles,
Before all the Danaans, put up rewards
for the painful

And toilsome wrestling, the third event
in the games—

For the winner, a truly tremendous three-

legged cauldron

To straddle the fire, one valued as worth
twelve oxen

Among the Achaeans, and for the loser
he brought out

Among them a woman of many skills,
whom they valued

As worth four oxen. Then Peleus' son
arose

Mid the Argives and said:

“Up now, whichever two men
Among you intend to compete in this
contest.”

He spoke,
And up got huge Telamonian Ajax and
with him

Resourceful Odysseus, skilled at tricks

and contriving.⁵

Then, having girded themselves, the two
men strode out

To the midst of the place of assembly
and immediately locked

Their powerful arms, reminding one of
the sloping

Beams some famous builder connects at
the roof

Of a high-gabled house to keep out the
blustering winds.

And their backs fairly creaked as they
gripped each other hard

With their hands and grappled for all
they were worth, streaming

With sweat and raising many a blood-
livid welt

On each other's ribs and shoulders, as
both of them strained
Every muscle to win the fair-fashioned
tripod. Odysseus,
However, could no more win a fall over
Ajax
Than Ajax could over him, so firm was
his stance.
But when they had grappled so long that
the strong-greaved Achaeans
Began to get bored and restless, gigantic
Ajax,
Telamon's son, grunted thus to
Odysseus:

“O god-sprung
Son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus,
either you

Lift me or let me lift you, and the
outcome we'll leave
To Zeus."

So saying, he lifted Odysseus, but that
Wily man was alertly on guard, and
kicking the bend
Of Ajax's knee with his heel, he caused
his legs
To buckle at once, so that backward he
fell with Odysseus
Riding his chest. Next it was much-
bearing, noble
Odysseus' turn to lift, and though he
could raise him
From earth a few inches only, he
crooked his knee
Behind that of Ajax and down the two

went again,
Side by side in the man-clinging dust.
And now
The two men would have sprung up
again to try a third fall,
If Achilles had not stood up and
restrained them, saying:

“Struggle no further, nor wear
yourselves out with agonized
Effort. Both of you win. Take equal
prizes
And go, that other Achaeans may also
compete.”

To this they willingly listened, then
did as he said,
Wiping the dust from their bodies and
putting their tunics

Back on.

Next came the foot-race, for which
Achilles

Set out still more prizes. For first place
he put up

A mixing-bowl of silver, richly
engraved.

It held six measures and had no equal in
beauty

On all the earth, for the gifted Sidonians,
master

Craftsmen, had made it with all of their
art, and Phoenicians

Had brought it across the misty sea to the
harbor

Of Thoas, to whom they had given the
bowl as a gift.

And later, in ransoming Priam's son
Lycaon,
Euneus, son of Jason, had given the bowl
To Patroclus. This exquisite piece
Achilles put up
As a prize in honor of his dear comrade,
a trophy
For him who should prove to be fleetest
of foot in the race.
For the second he offered a well-
fattened ox, enormous
And sleek, and half a talent of gold for
the last.
Then standing up, he spoke mid the
Argives, saying:
"Up now, whoever would like to
compete in this race."

At this, swift Ajax arose, the fast-
running son

Of Oïleus, as did resourceful Odysseus.

Third

To get up was Antilochus, Nestor's son,
for in this event,

Too, he was the best of the younger
Achaeans.

They lined up to start, and Achilles
showed them the turn-post.

Then off they shot, running hard, with
Ajax quickly

Taking the lead. But able Odysseus was
close

On his heels, as close as the weaving-
rod comes to the breast

Of a brightly-sashed woman when deftly

she passes the woof
Through the warp and holds the rod
close to her bosom. That close
Ran Odysseus, and always his feet
pounded fast in the footsteps
Of Ajax before the fine dust had a
chance to arise,
And the breath of royal Odysseus beat
hot on the back
Of that fast runner's head, as all the
Achaeans shouted
To urge Ajax on in his all-out effort to
win.
But when they began their sprint down
the course's last stretch,
Odysseus prayed quick in his heart to
blue-eyed Athena:
"O goddess, hear me, and come put more

speed in my feet!”

Such was his prayer, and Pallas
Athena, hearing,
Lightened his legs and feet and arms.
Then just

As they started their final spurt for the
rare mixing-bowl,
Ajax slipped up as he ran—undone by
Athena—

And fell where the ground was covered
with dung from the bellowing
Bulls that fast Achilles had slaughtered
in honor

Of gentle Patroclus, and Ajax’s mouth
and nose

Were chock-full of noisome bull-dung.
Then nobly enduring

Odysseus picked up the mixing-bowl, he
Having run in first place, and excellent
Ajax laid claim
To the ox. As he stood there holding the
beast by one horn
And spitting out dung, he spoke mid the
Argives, saying:

“Ugh! but wouldn’t you know it!
Athena made me
Slip up as I ran, though always she goes
like a mother
Right by the side of Odysseus and helps
him always.”

At this the Achaeans laughed with high
glee at Ajax.
Then Antilochus, last to come in but
grinning gaily,

Took up the half-talent of gold and said:
“I’ll say
Something now that all of you already
know, that even
In games the immortals favor the older
men.
For though Ajax is only a little bit older
than I,
Odysseus there is one from an earlier
age,
A very ancient, but, as all say, his
Is a flourishing green old age. Hard
indeed would it be
For any Achaean to race with him and
win,
With the single exception of swift
Achilles himself.”

He spoke, giving glory to Peleus' son,
the fleet-footed,
And Achilles answered him thus:
“Antilochus, not
Without due recognition shall these
words of praise have been spoken
By you. No indeed, for now I will add to
your prize
Another half-talent of gold.”

So saying, he gave it
To him, and Antilochus took it with
thanks. Then Achilles
Brought out to the contest ring a long-
shadowing spear,
And with it a helmet and shield, the war-
gear Patroclus
Had stripped from Sarpedon, and

standing he spoke mid the Argives,
Saying: "Now to compete for these
prizes, we call
For the best two warriors here to put on
their armor,
Take up their bright and flesh-cleaving
bronze, and try
Each other's mettle before the whole
army. Whichever
Shall first get through to the other's firm
flesh and pierce
Through armor and blood to the very
vitals, to him
I will give this fine Thracian sword,
silver-studded, the blade
I took from Asteropaeus. The gear of
Sarpedon
Let both men equally share, and I shall

give

A good dinner to both in my lodge.”

Such were his words,
And huge Telamonian Ajax arose and
with him
Strong Diomedes, Tydeus’ son. Having
armed
Themselves on opposite sides of the
crowd, they strode
To the center, awesomely glaring, as
gripping suspense
Held all the Achaeans. Then fiercely
they charged, clashing
In combat three times. And Ajax pierced
the round shield
Of his able opponent, but failed to draw
blood on account of

The breastplate behind it. Meanwhile,
Tydeus' son
Kept trying to reach the neck of Ajax by
thrusting
Above his great shield with the glittering
point of his spear.
At this the Achaeans were filled with
fear for Ajax
And quickly stopped the encounter,
bidding them each
Take equal prizes. The mighty sword,
however,
Achilles presented to fierce Diomedes,
bringing
It to him along with its scabbard and
finely cut baldric.

Next Peleus' son put up a huge discus

of pig iron,
Which mighty Eëtion used to heave,
before
Fast Achilles killed him and took it
away in his ships
Along with his other belongings. Rising,
he spoke
Mid the Argives, saying: "Come forth,
whoever of you
Would like to compete for this prize.
Though his fields lie out
Very far, the winner will have all the
iron he can use
For five circling years at least. No lack
of iron
Will send his shepherd or plowman into
the city.
He'll have all he needs right there."

He spoke, and up got
Battle-staunch Polypoetes along with his
stalwart comrade,
The godlike Leonteus, and Ajax, son of
Telamon,
And high-born Epeus. They took their
places to throw
And princely Epeus threw first.
Gripping the iron,
He spun and wobbled it off a short way,
an effort
At which the Achaeans shouted with
laughter. Next
Leonteus, scion of Ares, threw, and
thirdly
Great Telamonian Ajax sent the weight
spinning

From out his brawny huge hand past the
marks of both
Other men. But then battle-staunch
Polypoetes gripped
The thick discus and got it off with
tremendous force,
And as far as a herdsman can fling his
short throwing-staff,
Whirling it lightly away above grazing
cattle,
Even so far beyond all the other marks
Polypoetes threw the large weight, and
the army went wild
With applause. Then the comrades of
strong Polypoetes got up
And took the fine prize of their King to
the hollow ships.

For the archers, next, Achilles put up
as prizes

Gleaming blue iron, this time in the form
of twenty

Good axes, ten double-bladed, ten
single, and tying

A trembling dove by the foot with thin
cord to the top

Of the mast from a blue-prowed ship, he
set it up

Far off in the sand and bade the men
shoot, saying:

“Whoever hits yonder timorous dove
let him take

The ten double axes off to his lodge, but
whoever

Hits the cord instead of the bird is the

loser!

The single axes are his.”

At this, strong Teucer
Arose and Idomeneus’ able squire
Meriones.

Then lots were tossed in a helmet of
brass and Teucer’s

Was first to leap out. Quickly, with
marvelous vigor

He got off a shaft, but neglected to
promise Apollo

A glorious hecatomb offering of first-
born lambs.

So he missed the bird, since Apollo
begrudged him a win,

But hit the cord by the foot of his target,
and clean

In two the keen arrow cut the thin string.
At once
The dove darted skyward, the cord
dangled down, and loud
Was the cry that went up from the troops.
But Meriones instantly
Snatched the bow from Teucer—he
already had
An arrow, since he had been holding one
while Teucer
Was aiming—and quickly vowing a
glorious hecatomb
Offering of first-born lambs to Apollo,
who hits
From afar, he spotted the timorous dove
high up
Beneath the clouds, and there, as she
circled, he hit her

Beneath the wing, full in the side, and
the arrow

Went all the way through and, falling,
stuck in the ground

At Meriones' feet. But the dove sank
down on top

Of the mast from the blue-prowed ship,
dangling her head

And drooping her twitching wings, as
swiftly life flew

From her body, and she toppled down
from the mast a long way

To the ground. And the gazing Achaeans
were gripped with amazement.

Meriones, then, took all ten double axes,
While losing Teucer carried the ten
single-bladed

Off to the hollow ships.

Finally, Peleus'
Son brought out and set in the contest
ring

A long-shadowing spear and a basin
untouched by fire,

Of an ox's worth and engraved with
flowers. And up got

The javelin-throwers—Atreus' son, the
high King,

Great Agamemnon, along with
Meriones, worthy

Squire of Idomeneus. Thus, then, the
swift Prince Achilles

Spoke out among them, saying:

“Atrides, we all
Know well how far you surpass all

others, how far
You're the strongest and how far the best
in the javelin-throw
So the basin is yours without a contest.⁶
Take it
And go to the hollow ships. But the
spear, if you will,
Let us present to the hero Meriones.
Such,
At least, I would like."

He spoke, and commander-in-chief
Agamemnon did not disagree. In person
he gave
The bronze-headed spear to Meriones,
then handed the basin,
A truly exquisite piece, to his herald
Talthybius.

BOOK XXIV

Priam and Achilles

So ended the games, and now the
spectators dispersed,
Each man to his vessel, but whereas the
rest looked forward
To supper and then to their fill of
delectable sleep,
Achilles continued his weeping, ever
recalling
His precious companion, nor could all-
conquering sleep
Overcome him, as restless he turned
from side to side

On his bed, sorely missing the manhood
and noble heart
Of his friend and thinking of all that he
had achieved
With him and of all they had been
through together, the wars
Of men and the punishing waves.

Thus night after night
He would spill his big tears, now lying
upon his side,
Then on his back, and presently prone on
his face,
Only to get up at last and roam up and
down,
Distraught, on the shore of the sea. Nor
did he fail
To notice the coming of Dawn, as she

spread her light
Over billows and beach, for then he
would yoke to his car
His fast-running horses, and binding
Hector behind,
He would drag him three times around
dead Patroclus's barrow.
Then he would sit in his lodge, while
Hector lay stretched
On the ground outside, face down in the
dust. Apollo,
However, protected his flesh from
defilement, for he
Pitied him even in death, and wrapping
him up
In the golden aegis, he kept Achilles
from tearing
His corpse as he dragged him.

Achilles, then, madly raging,
Foully dishonored the body of noble
Hector,¹

But meanwhile the blessed gods, who
saw what he did,

Had compassion on Hector and
prompted Hermes, the keen-eyed
Killer of Argus, to go steal the corpse.

And all

Of the gods thought he should, save
Hera, Poseidon, and maidenly

Bright-eyed Athena, each of whom kept
up the hatred

Which they had felt from the first against
holy Troy,

King Priam, and Priam's people,
because of the sin

Of Prince Paris, the man who deeply
insulted Athena
And Hera, when they had come to his
courtyard, by favoring
Sweet Aphrodite, the goddess who
furthered his blind
And disastrous lust.[bw](#) But when the
twelfth morning came
Since Hector had lain a corpse, Phoebus
Apollo
Spoke thus among the immortals:

“You’re ruthlessly cruel,
You gods, and workers of evil! Has
Hector, then,
Never burned thigh-pieces for you of
bulls and goats
Without flaw? And have you so little

concern to save

His mere corpse, for his wife and
mother and little boy

To look upon, along with his father
Priam

And Priam's people, who soon would
burn his dead body

And build him a barrow with all due
funeral rites?

Oh yes, you'd rather help monstrous
Achilles, whose thought

Is outrageous, whose will too rigid to
bend. His heart

Is obsessed with savage revenge, a heart
as unfeeling

And brutal as that of a lordly lion urged
on

By his spirit and might to spring on the

flock of some shepherd
And try for a feast. Like him, Achilles is
void
Of all pity, nor has his heart any shame,
which can help
As well as harm mortal men. A man,
after all,
May lose one dearer to him than this man
was,
A brother, sprung from the same womb
as he, or even
A son. But when he has wept and
fittingly mourned
For him, he ends his grieving, for surely
the fates
Have given to men a tough and patient
spirit.²

Achilles, though, having taken the life of
great Hector,
Binds him in back of his car and drags
him daily
About his dear comrade's barrow.
Truly, he'll win
Nothing good by so doing. Let him,
indeed, beware,
Before we grow really angry at him,
brave man
Though he surely is, for now in his
stupid fury
He sinfully fouls and defiles insensible
clay!"

Angered by this, white-armed Hera
replied:
"Something may come of your words, O

silver-bowed one,
Providing you gods honor Hector no
more than Achilles.
For Hector, you know, is mortal, and to
him a mere woman
Gave suck, but Achilles was born of an
immortal goddess,
Whom I myself lovingly reared and gave
to a man
In marriage, to Peleus, who was very
dear to the gods.
And all of you shining immortals were
there at her wedding,
Including you, Apollo, you friend of
blackguards,
Treacherous always—but there you sat
in our midst
With your lyre in hand!”

Then Zeus, the gale-gathering god,
Spoke thus in answer: "Do not be so
utterly angry,
Hera, against the immortals. Those two
shall never
Be honored the same. Even so, of all the
mortals
In Troy, Hector was dearest indeed to
the gods.
So, at least, I regarded the man, for
never once
Did he fail to please me with gifts.
Never once was my altar
By him left bare of the ample feast—
drink-offering
And savor of burning meat—that we
consider

Our due. But let us forget the proposal to steal

Brave Hector's body. It surely could not be done

Without Achilles' knowing, since night and day

His mother closely attends him. But I wish some immortal

Would go tell Thetis to come here to me, that I

May advise her in time to get her great son to accept

King Priam's gifts of ransom and give Hector back."

He spoke, and gale-footed Iris hurried to carry

His message. Midway between Samos

and craggy Imbros

She dived into the dark sea, and the
billows boomed

As they closed above her. Then down
she shot, like a sinker

Of lead attached to the horn-guarded
hook that plummets

Below bearing death to the ravenous
fish. And there

In a high-vaulted cave she found Thetis,
and all around her

A throng of other sea-goddesses sat,
while she

In their midst was bewailing the fate of
her matchless son,

Who as she knew was destined to fall
and die

In the rich land of Troy, far from his own

dear country.

Standing beside her, quick-footed Iris spoke thus:

“Up now, O Thetis. Zeus of the unfailing counsels

Calls you to come.”

To which the silver-shod goddess:

“Why should that almighty god send summons to me?

I’m ashamed to go mid the gods everlasting, since I

Am now one boundless chaos of grief.

Go,

However, I will. Nor shall his counsel, whatever

It is, be useless to me.”

So saying, the goddess,

Radiantly fair, took a sea-blue veil, the
darkest

Thing she possessed, and started the
journey to Zeus,

With wind-footed Iris leading the way,
and about them

The billows parted as out they stepped
on the beach.

Then off they sped to Olympus. There
they found Cronos' son,

Far-seeing Zeus, and gathered around
him sat all

Of the other undying gods. Then Thetis
sat down

Beside Father Zeus—Athena yielded her
chair—

And Hera, placing a gorgeous gold cup
in her hand,

Welcomed her warmly. When Thetis had
drunk and returned
The bright cup, the Father of gods and
men was the first
To speak:

“You came, divine Thetis, up here to
Olympus
In spite of the comfortless grief I know
you are full of
Let me, then, tell you why I called you to
come.
For the last nine days the immortal gods
have wrangled
About Hector’s corpse and Achilles,
taker of towns.
They’ve even suggested that keen-
sighted Hermes, killer

Of Argus, steal noble Hector's body. But
I
Would much rather resolve their strife in
a way that will honor
Achilles and keep for me in later days
Your worship and love. Go, then, with
all speed to the camp
And tell your son what I say. Tell him
the gods
Are angry with him, I most of all,
because
In his madness of heart he still keeps
noble Hector
Beside the beaked ships, refusing to give
him back.
His awe of me may then overcome him
and lead him
To yield the body. Meanwhile, I'll

dispatch Iris

To great-hearted Priam to bid him go to
the ships

Of Achaea with ransom for his dear son,
gifts

That will soften the heart of Achilles.”

Such were his words,
And the goddess silver-shod Thetis did
not disobey him,
But down she went darting from high on
the peaks of Olympus
And came to the lodge of her grieving
son. She found him there,
Riddled with groans, while round him
his comrades were busy
Preparing the morning meal, having
already slaughtered

A huge shaggy ram. Then sitting close by
his side,
His goddess mother gently caressed him,
called him
By name, and said:

“My child, how long will you go on
Eating your heart out with grieving and
weeping, forgetful
Of food and bed alike. Even that would
be
A good thing, for you to make love with
some woman, since you,
Dear child, have not much longer to live.
Already
Death and powerful fate are standing
beside you.
But hear, now, this message from Zeus.

He says that the gods
Are angry with you, he most of all,
because
In your madness of heart you still keep
noble Hector
Beside the beaked ships, refusing to give
him back.
But come, give up the body, and take in
return
A ransom paid for the dead.”

To which swift Achilles:
“So be it. Whoever brings ransom here,
let him
Bear off the body, if truly such is the
purpose
And will of the great Olympian himself.”
Thus,

Mid many ships, mother and son spoke
words

Both winged and numerous, each to the
other. Meanwhile,

Zeus dispatched Iris to sacred Ilium,
saying:

“Up now, swift Iris, and go. Leave your
seat

On Olympus and bear these tidings to
great-hearted Priam

In Troy, saying that he must go to the
ships

Of the Argives to ransom his precious
son, taking gifts

With him to soften the heart of Achilles.
And tell him

To go by himself, save only perhaps one
herald,

Some older man, to drive the well-
running mule wagon
And bring back to town the body of him
cut down
By Achilles. But let him not dwell on
death, nor have
Any fear, for he shall be led by the
greatest of guides,
Even Hermes, slayer of Argus, and he
will take him
Right into the lodge of Achilles, who
will not only
Not kill him himself—he'll hold back all
of the others.
For he is not really stupid or thoughtless,
nor is he
An utterly godless sinner. No, he'll treat

A suppliant father with care and every kindness.”

He spoke, and gale-footed Iris hurried to carry

His word. Arriving at Priam’s house, she was greeted

By clamorous keening. There in the courtyard his sons

Were seated about their old father, moistening their garments

With tears, while he in their midst sat tightly wrapped

In his shroud-like cloak of mourning, his ancient head

And neck filthily fouled with dung, which he

Had smeared on himself with his hands

as he rolled in grief
On the dung-laden ground. And
throughout the palace his daughters
And daughters-in-law were wailing with
sorrow, recalling
The many brave heroes undone at the
hands of the Argives.
Coming up close, the bright agent of
Zeus addressed him,
And though she spoke softly, his body
trembled all over:

“Be brave, O Priam, descended of
Dardanus, and banish
All fear. I have not come to you now
with a message
Of evil, but one you’ll be glad to hear. I
come

Directly from Zeus, who though far away
still has

Great care and compassion for you. He,
the Olympian

Himself, bids you go ransom your
precious son,

Taking gifts with you to soften the heart
of Achilles.

And you must go by yourself, save only
perhaps

One herald, some older man, to drive the
well-running

Mule wagon and bring back to town the
body of him

Cut down by Achilles. But don't dwell
on death, nor have

Any fear, for you shall be led by the
greatest of guides,

Even Hermes, slayer of Argus, and he
will take you
Right into the lodge of Achilles, who
will not only
Not kill you himself—he'll hold back all
of the others.
For he is not really stupid or thoughtless,
nor is he
An utterly godless sinner. No, he'll treat
A suppliant father with care and every
kindness.”

So saying, fleet-footed Iris took off,
whereupon
Old Priam ordered his sons to harness
mules
To a well-running wagon and bind the
wicker body

On top. He himself went down to his
high-vaulted chamber,
Fragrant with cedar and full of bright
treasures, and calling
To him his wife Hecuba, gently he spoke
to her, saying:

“My sorely afflicted lady, a messenger
straight
From Zeus and Olympus has just come to
me, bidding me
Go to the ships of Achaea with adequate
ransom
For our dear son, splendid gifts to soften
the heart
Of Achilles. But tell me, how do you
feel about this?
As for myself, I’m more than anxious to

go

To the ships, deep into the widely
spread camp of the Argives.”

At this his wife cried out, shrilly
protesting:

“O misery! where now is that wisdom
for which you have always

Been famous, both here at home and
abroad? Why

Would you wish to go unattended into
the fiercely

Glaring presence of him who has
murdered your sons

So many and brave? Surely your heart is
of iron!

For once he gets you before him and
sees who you are,

He'll have neither care nor compassion
for you, believe me.

So now, my husband, let us lament for
our son

Right here in the palace. For such is
surely the lot

That powerful Fate spun out for him on
the day

When I myself bore him, that he should
glut the lean guts

Of flashing-swift dogs far from his
loving parents,

A corpse by the lodge of a violent
monster, whose liver

I'd joyfully eat, if only somehow I could
sink

My teeth into it![bx](#) Only then would I feel

that he'd paid

For the life of my son, who died doing
nothing unmanly,

But standing out in defense of the men
and deep-breasted

Women of Troy, with no thought at all of
running

Or taking cover.”

Then answering her, old Priam

The godlike said: “Don't try to restrain
me when I

Am so anxious to go, nor be a bird of ill
omen

Here in the palace. Believe me, you'll
not change my mind!

For had any earth-dwelling creature
bidden me do this,

Whether some priest or seer or teller of
omens,
We might have considered it false and
thus ignored it
Completely. But now that I've heard in
person the voice
Of the goddess and looked on her face,
I'll go, nor shall
Her words have been spoken in vain.
And if my fate be
To lie a corpse by the ships of the
bronze-clad Achaeans,
Such is my preference. Achilles may
quickly kill me
With my dear son held close in my arms,
once I
Have quenched my desire for tearful
grief and lamenting.”

Thus he resolved, and lifting the ornate
lids

Of the chests, he took twelve exquisite
robes, twelve cloaks

Of single fold, and a dozen each of
blankets,

White mantles, and tunics. Then he
weighed and bore out

Ten talents of gold, which he followed
with two gleaming tripods,

Four bowls, and a marvelous goblet, a
gift from the men

Of Thrace when he had gone there on a
mission, a truly

Rare treasure, but not even this would
the old man spare

In his palace, so deeply desirous was he

to ransom

His precious son.

The next thing he did was to drive
All loitering Trojans out of his portico,
chiding

Them thus with hard words: “Get out,
you disgraceful wretches!

Can it be that you have so little sorrow
at home

That you have to come pestering me
here? Do you think it nothing,

This grief that Cronos’ son Zeus has
brought upon me,

This loss of my most valiant and
princely son?

But you too shall know very well what I
mean, for all

Of you now will fall a much easier prey
to Achaeans
With no Hector here to protect you. As
for myself,
Before I see this city sacked and her
people destroyed,
May I go down and enter Hades' dark
halls."

So saying, he rushed at them with his
staff, and all of them
Rapidly scattered before the furious old
one.
Then he called out to his sons, rebuking
them harshly—
To Helenus, Paris, and Agathon, nobly
gifted,
To Antiphonus, Pammon, and battle-

roaring Polites,
As well as Deïphobus, Hippothous, and
haughty Dius.

To these nine their old father shouted
harsh orders, crying:

“Hurry up, my no-account sons, my
groveling disgraces!

O how I wish that you'd all been killed
at the ships

And that Hector was still alive! How
utterly luckless

Can one old man be? For I sired
excellent sons,

The best by far in the whole wide
country of Troy.

But now, I tell you, not one of them is
alive,

Not Mestor the godlike, not horse-
prizing Troilus, and now
Not Hector, who lived a god among
men, for always
He seemed far more like the son of some
immortal
Than he did of any mere man. All of
them Ares
Has slaughtered, leaving me nothing but
you poor excuses
For men, a bunch of flattering knaves,
champions
Nowhere but on the dance floor, and
stealers of lambs
And kids from your own Trojan people!
Well why the delay?
Get busy right now! Make ready a
wagon, and put

All these things aboard it, that we may
get started at once.”

He spoke, and they, gripped with fear
at the words of their father,
Hauled out a newly built, beautiful
wagon, strong
And smooth-running, and on it they
bound the light wicker body.
Then down from its peg they lifted the
mule-yoke, a box-wood
Yoke with a knob at the center and well
fitted out
With rings for the chains to pass through,
and with it they brought
The yoke-band some fifteen feet long.
Snugly they set
The yoke at the right-angled end of the

car's polished shaft
And flipped the yoke-ring over the peg
in the pole.
Next with the yoke-band they lashed the
knob fast to the upturned
End of the shaft, with three quick turns to
the left
And three to the right, and fastened the
straps, deftly
Tucking the ends in. Then they brought
from the chamber
The treasures of Priam, the boundless
ransom for Hector,
Which they heaped high on the gleaming
wagon, and yoked
To it the sohd-hoofed mules, strong
toilers in harness,
A glorious pair that once the people of

Mysia

Had given to Priam. For Priam himself
they yoked

His own horses, a team reserved for his
use and reared

By himself at the smooth wooden
manger.

Now while the old King
And his herald were waiting beneath the
high roof for all

To be ready, both of them anxiously
planning ahead

In silence, old Hecuba, grieving, came
with a cup

Of honey-sweet wine in her wrinkled
right hand, that they

Might pour a libation before setting out.

She stopped
In front of the horses and said:

“Take now this cup
And pour a libation to Zeus the Father,
earnestly
Praying for your safe return from the
midst of our foes,
Since now your heart is determined to
go, in spite of
My wish that you wouldn't. Then pray to
Zeus once again,
To Cronos' son, god of the lowering
gale, who scans
At a glance the whole country of Troy,
and ask him to send
His most favorably ominous bird, his
own swift bearer

Of omen, the dearest of birds to him, and
the strongest
Of wing. And let him fly by on the right,
that you
May go on to the ships of the swiftly-
drawn Danaans, trusting
In that mighty sign. But if far-seeing Zeus
Refuses to send you his own most
favorable bird,
Then I would by no means advise you to
go to the ships
Of the Argives, no matter how strong
and deep your resolve.”

To which old Priam the godlike: “My
dear, I’ll not
Disregard this urging of yours, for
always it is

A good thing to lift up our hands to Zeus,
praying
That he will have mercy.”

So spoke the old King, and asked
The handmaid in attendance to rinse his
hands with fresh water,
And soon she came up with basin and
pitcher. Then,
Having washed his hands, he took the
cup from his wife,
And walking out to the midst of the
court, he poured
The libation of wine, looking toward
heaven and praying:

“O Father Zeus, ruling from Ida, most
great
And glorious lord, grant that I come to

the lodge

Of Achilles as one to be pitied and
cared for. And send

Your most favorably ominous bird, your
own swift bearer

Of omen, the dearest of birds to you, and
the strongest

Of wing. And let him fly by on the right,
that I

May go on to the ships of the swiftly-
drawn Danaans, trusting

In that mighty sign.”

Such was his prayer, and Zeus
The contriver heard him. At once he sent
out an eagle,

The surest of all winged omens, the
deadly dark hunter

That men call the grape-colored one.
From tip to tip
His wings were as wide as the double
well-bolted doors
Of some wealthy man's high-vaulted
chamber, and by he flew
On the right, swooping low through the
city. All were made glad
By the sight, and the hearts of all were
warmly encouraged.

Then quickly the old one mounted his
car and drove
Through the gate and loud colonnade. In
front the mules
Drew the four-wheeled wagon, with
prudent Idaeus driving,
While rapidly on came old Priam,

constantly laying
The lash on and urging his pair through
the city. And following
Him came all of his kinsmen and friends,
wailing loudly
For him as for one who went to his
death. But when
They got out of the city and came to the
plain, his sons
And sons-in-law turned back to town
with the rest, while the herald
And Priam went on toward the ships, nor
were they unnoticed
By far-seeing Zeus.³ Feeling pity at sight
of old Priam,
He spoke at once to his dear son
Hermes, saying:

“Since you, swift Hermes, who listen
to whom you like,
Take most delight in going as guide to a
man,
Go down and conduct King Priam to the
hollow ships
Of Achaea, and let no Danaan see him at
all
Till he comes to Achilles himself.”

He spoke, and swift Hermes,
Slayer of Argus, obeyed him, putting on
his bright sandals
Of magic immortal gold, which bear him
always
Swift as the wind over boundless earth
and sea.
And he took the wand with which he can

lull to sleep
Or wake from the deepest slumber
whomever he wishes.
With this in his hand the mighty slayer of
Argus
Flew down, and quickly he came to the
Hellespont stream
And the Trojan plain. Then he went on
afoot in the form
Of a princely young man with the first
fine down on his lip,
At that age when youth is most charming.

Meanwhile, the old King
And his herald had driven past Ilus'
huge barrow and stopped
For the horses and mules to drink from
the river. Darkness

Had fallen on earth when the herald
looked up and there
Close at hand saw Hermes, whereat he
spoke thus to King Priam:
“Look out! Dardanian. Now is the time
for quick thinking.
Here comes a man, and soon, I fear, we
shall both
Be ripped all to pieces. But come, let us
leap in the chariot
Now and run for our lives, or else hug
his knees
And beg him for mercy!”

At this the old King was so frightened
He lost all power to think. He stood in a
daze,
Struck dumb, and the hair fairly rose on

his gnarled old limbs.

But Hermes the helper came up and
taking his hand

Inquired: "Where, O father, can you be
driving

These horses and mules through the
fragrant and immortal night

While other people are sleeping? Have
you no fear

At all of the fury-breathing Achaeans,
hostile

And ruthless men that they are, and so
close at hand?

If one of them saw you conveying such
huge store of wealth

Through the fast-fallen blackness of
night, what would you do then?

You're not young yourself, and he who

goes with you is old,
Nor could you defend yourselves against
any man
Who chose to attack you. But so far from
doing you damage
Myself, I will go against any who tries
to. For you
Remind me a lot of my own beloved old
father.”

To which ancient Priam the godlike:
“Things are, dear child,
Just as you say. But surely some god has
stretched out
His hand in protection above me, since
now he has sent
A man such as you, so splendid in face
and physique,

So gifted with keen understanding, and
truly a bearer
Of blessings to me. Your parents are
happy indeed
To have such a son.”

And again the messenger Hermes,
Slayer of Argus, spoke: “What you say,
old sire,
Is well and happily put. But come, tell
me frankly.
Are you taking this treasure to some
foreign folk
For safe keeping, or have you all started
to leave holy Troy
In fear, now that your greatest and
noblest is dead,
Your own valiant son who never let up

for so much

As a moment in waging fierce war
against the Achaeans?”

And the old one, Priam the godlike,
replied: “Who are you,
Brave friend, and who are your parents,
you that have spoken
So fairly and well of the fate of my
unlucky son?”

And the messenger Hermes, slayer of
Argus, said:
“You’re trying me now, old sire, to see
what I know
Of great Hector. I’ve seen him a good
many times in the fury
Of hero-enhancing battle, including the
time

He drove the Argives to the ships and
cut many down
With sharp bronze. And we just stood
there and marveled, forbidden
To fight by Achilles, who seethed with
furious wrath
Against Agamemnon. I am Achilles'
squire,
And the same sturdy ship brought both of
us here. I'm a Myrmidon,
Son of Polyctor, a rich man and old,
very much
Like yourself, and I am the youngest of
his seven sons.
On me the lot fell to come here and fight,
and now
I have left the ships and come to the
plain, for at dawn

The quick-eyed Achaeans will once again attack Troy.

They're restless indeed sitting idle, nor can the kings

Of Achaea restrain them, so hot are they for the fight."

And godlike old Priam replied: "If you really are

A squire of Peleus' son Achilles, come now,

And tell me truly all that you know as to whether

My son is yet at the ships or whether by now

Achilles has hacked him apart and thrown his flesh

To the dogs."

Then the escort Hermes, slayer of
Argus:

“Old sire, not yet have dogs and birds
devoured him,

But he still lies mid the lodges beside
the ship

Of Achilles, just as he has from the first.
And though

This makes the twelfth day he has lain
there, his flesh has not even

Begun to decay, nor do any worms
consume him,

Worms such as feast on the bodies of
battle-slain men.

It's true that Achilles each day at the
coming of bright

Divine Dawn unfeelingly drags him

about the barrow

Of his beloved friend, but he does his
body no damage

At all. If you were to go and see him
yourself,

You'd surely marvel at how he lies,
washed clean

Of blood and fresh as the dew,
altogether unmarred

And unstained. For the numerous
wounds he received from the mob

That thrust their bronze in his flesh have
all closed up

Completely. Even such is the care the
happy gods take

Of your son, though only a corpse, for he
was quite dear

To their hearts."

At this the old one, rejoicing, said:
“My child, what a fine thing it is to give
the immortals
Such gifts as are rightfully due them. For
never once
Did my son—if ever I had such a son—
neglect
In our halls the gods who live on
Olympus, which is why
They’ve remembered him now, though
his fate was to die as he did.
But come, accept this choice goblet from
me and be
My protector, that I by the grace of the
gods everlasting
May come to the lodge of Peleus’ son
Achilles.”

And once again the god who slew
Argus answered:
“You’re testing me now, old sire, but
young though I am
I’ll certainly not allow you to bribe me
with gifts
Behind the back of Achilles. Were I to
accept
What will soon be his own, my heart
should be filled with terror
And dread at the prospect of what might
become of me
Hereafter. But go as your guide I most
surely will,
Even all the way to world-famous
Argos, if such
Is your wish, very carefully guiding and

guarding you always,
Whether on land or aboard a swift ship.
Nor would
Any man attack you for want of respect
for your escort!”

So saying, help-bringing Hermes
sprang up behind
The car-drawing horses, caught up the
whip and the reins
And breathed fresh spirit into the horses
and mules.

When they came to the trench and the
wall round the ships, the guards
Had just begun fixing supper, but
Hermes quickly
Put them to sleep and, thrusting the bars
back, opened

The gates. Then into the camp he drove
the old King,
And with them they brought the wagon of
glorious gifts
For Achilles. Soon they arrived at his
lodge, the lofty
Shelter the Myrmidon men had built for
their chief,
Hewing out beams of pine and roofing it
over
With reed-shaggy thatch from the fields.
And they had built round it
For him a spacious courtyard high
fenced with stakes
Closely set, with a gate strongly locked
by means of one bar
Across it. This huge beam of pine it took
three Achaeans

To move back and forth, though Achilles
could handle the thing
By himself. Once there, luck-bringing
Hermes opened
The gate for old Priam and drove him
inside, and with them
They brought the marvelous gifts for the
swift son of Peleus.
Then stepping down, Hermes spoke thus
to the King:

“Old sire, I that have come to you thus
am a god
Everlasting—Hermes, sent by the Father
to act
As your guide. But now I’ll go back
without letting Achilles
See me, for it would be wrong for an

immortal god

To be so openly welcomed by mortal
men.

But you yourself go in and, embracing
the knees

Of Peleus' son, make your plea in the
name of his father,

Lovely-haired mother, and son, that you
may stir

The depths of his soul.”

So saying, Hermes took off
For the heights of Olympus, and Priam
sprang down from the car

To the ground and, leaving Idaeus in
charge of the horses

And mules, strode straight for the lodge
where Zeus-loved Achilles

Sat. And inside he found him, apart from
all comrades
But two, the hero Automedon, and
Alcimus, scion
Of Ares, who busily waited upon him,
since he
Had just finished eating and drinking,
and still the table
Had not been removed. Great Priam
came in unnoticed
By any, till coming up close to Achilles
he threw
His arms round his knees and kissed his
dread hands, the
murderous
Hands that had killed so many of his
precious sons.
And as when thick darkness of soul

comes down on a man
And killing another he flees from his
own dear country
And comes to some foreign land and the
house of a man
Of bountiful wealth, and wonder grips
all who see him
A suppliant there, so now Achilles was
seized
With exceeding amazement at sight of
sacred Priam,
And those who were with him marveled
and looked at each other.⁴
Then Priam made his plea, beseeching
him thus:

“Remember, Achilles, O godlike
mortal, remember

Peleus your father, a man of like years as
myself,
Far gone on the path of painful old age.
Very likely
His neighbors are grinding him down,
nor is there one there
To keep from him ruin and destruction.
However, so long
As he hears you're alive, his heart can
daily be glad
In the hope that he shall yet see his dear
son returning
From Troy. But I am without good
fortune completely,
Since though I begot the best sons in the
whole wide country
Of Troy, yet now not even one is left!
When the sons of Achaeans arrived, I

had fifty sons

Of my own, nineteen from the womb of
one mother, the rest

Borne to me by women of mine in the
palace. But though

They were many, furious Ares has
unstrung the knees

Of all, and the only one left me, who all
by himself

Protected the city and people, fell to
your spear

Some days ago as he was defending his
country—

Hector my son, and now I have come to
the ships

Of Achaea to pay you a ransom for him,
and I bring

With me a load of treasure past counting.
Have awe
Of the gods, O Achilles, and pity on me,
remembering
Your dear father. I am indeed even more
To be pitied than he, for I have endured
what no other
Earth-dwelling mortal has—to reach out
my hand
To the face of him who slaughtered my
precious sons!”

Such was his plea, and he stirred in
Achilles a yearning
To weep for Peleus his father, and taking
the hand
Of old Priam he gently pushed him
away. Then the two of them

Thought of their losses, and Priam
sobbed sorely for man-killing
Hector, the old King huddling in front of
Achilles,
Whose weeping was now for his father
and now for Patroclus,
And throughout the lodge arose the
sound of their grief.
But when great Achilles had found some
relief in lamenting,
And longing for such had gone out of his
body and soul,
He suddenly sprang from his chair, and
filled with pity
For Priam's gray head and gray beard,
he raised the old King
By the hand and spoke to him these
winged words:

“Wretched sire,
Many indeed are the horrors your soul
has endured.
But how could you ever have come here
alone to the ships
Of the Argives to look in the eyes of the
man who has killed
Your many brave sons? Surely your
heart is of iron!
But come, sit down in a chair, and we’ll
both let our grief,
Great though it is, lie quiet in our hearts.
Cold crying
Accomplishes little. For thus have the
sorrowless gods
Spun the web of existence for miserable
mortals—with pain

Woven in throughout! There stand by the
threshold of Zeus

Two urns, one full of evils, the other of
blessings.

To whomever Zeus, the lover of
lightning, gives

A portion from each, that man
experiences

Both evil and good, but to whomever
Zeus gives nothing

But of the grievous, that man is reviled
by gods

And men and hounded by horrible
hunger all over

The sacred earth. Take Peleus my father
for instance.

No man ever had more glorious god-
bestowed gifts

Than he from the time of his birth, for he
surpassed all
In wealth and good fortune, was King of
the Myrmidon people,
And though but a mortal himself, the
gods gave a goddess
To him for a wife. But even on him the
immortals
Brought evil enough, since there in his
halls no plentiful
Offspring of princes was born, but only
one son,
And he undoubtedly doomed to die
young. Nor can I
So much as look after him as he ages,
since far,
Very far from home I live in the country

of Troy,

A plague to you and your children.
And you, old sire,
We hear were once happy, for you,
because of your wealth
And your sons, were the first of mortals
in all the great space
That lies between Lesbos, south in the
sea, where Macar
Was King long ago, and Phrygia off to
the north
And the free-flowing Hellespont. Since,
though, the heavenly gods
Brought on you this baneful war, your
city has been
Surrounded by havoc and dying men. But
you

Must bear up, nor can you afford to
grieve without ceasing.

You'll not thereby do anything good for
your son.

Before you bring him back to life, you'll
suffer a fate

Little less unhappy yourself!"

To which the old Priam:

"By no means ask me to sit, O god-
nourished man,

So long as Hector lies mid the lodges
uncared for.

Release him to me at once, that I may see
him

Myself, and take the great ransom we
bring to you

For his body. May you enjoy it all and

come

Even yet to the land of your fathers,
since you now have spared me
To live on for a while beholding the
light of the sun.”

Then scowling at him, quick-footed
Achilles spoke sternly:

“Do nothing else to provoke me, old
man! I myself,
With no help from you, have already
agreed to give
Hector back, for Zeus has sent word to
me by the mother
Who bore me, the briny old sea-
ancient’s daughter. And don’t think
I haven’t known all along about you—
that you

Were guided here by some god to the
swift-sailing ships
Of Achaeans. For certainly no mere
mortal, no matter
How young and strong, would ever dare
enter this camp.
He could not get by the guards, nor could
he easily
Push back the bar of my gate. So say
nothing else,
Old man, to make me feel any worse, or
I
May forget to spare even you mid the
lodges, and so break
The strict law of Zeus.”

At this the old king was gripped
By a wordless terror and watched as

Achilles sprang
Through the door of the lodge like a lion,
not by himself,
But accompanied by the two squires, the
hero Automedon
Followed by Alcimus, two that Achilles
honored
Beyond all his comrades, save only the
dead Patroclus.
These then unharnessed the horses and
led
The herald inside, the old King's aged
town crier,
And gave him a seat, and from the
wagon they took
The boundless ransom for Hector. They
left, however,
Two cloaks and a well-woven tunic, that

these Achilles

Might use to wrap up the dead and so
give him back

To be borne to his home. Then Achilles
called for handmaids

To wash and anoint the dead body,
bidding them do it

Where Priam could not see his son, for
Achilles feared

That his guest might not be able to hold
back his wrath,

And so he might lose his own temper
and kill the old man,

Thus sinning against Zeus's law. When
the handmaids had washed

The body and rubbed it with oil and put
about it

A tunic and beautiful cloak, Achilles
himself

Lifted it onto a bier and helped his
companions

Lift it onto the wagon.⁵ Then groaning,
he called

On his precious friend by name:

“Do not be angry

At me, O Patroclus, if even in Hades’
halls

You hear that I’ve given Prince Hector
back to his father,

For not unbefitting at all was the ransom
he gave me,

And you may be sure of getting your due
share of that.”

So spoke great Achilles, then went

back inside and sat down

In his richly wrought chair by the
opposite wall from old Priam,

To whom he spoke thus: “Your son, old
sire, has now

Been released to you as you have
requested and lies

On a bier, and you yourself shall see him
tomorrow

At daybreak while carrying him away—
but let us

Not neglect supper, for even the lovely-
haired Niobe

Ate, though her twelve children all died
in her palace,

Six daughters and six lusty sons. Shaft-
showering Artemis

Brought down the daughters, while

Phoebus Apollo put arrows
Through all of the sons with his silver
bow, both of them
Wrathful with her for comparing herself
with their own mother
Leto, Niobe saying that Leto had only
Two children while she herself had
borne many. So they,
Though only two, destroyed all twelve
of hers.
And there for nine days they lay in their
blood unburied,
For Cronos' son Zeus turned all of the
people to stones.
On the tenth, however, the heavenly gods
held the funeral,
And Niobe, weary of weeping,

remembered to eat.

And now somewhere mid the crags in
the desolate hills

Of Sipylus, where, men say, the nymphs
go to bed

When they tire of dancing about the
stream Achelous,

Niobe stands and, though solid stone,
broods

On her god-sent disasters.[by](#) So come,
my royal old sire,

And let us likewise remember to eat, and
later,

Back in your city, you may lament your
dear son

With innumerable tears.”

So saying, Achilles sprang up

And slaughtered a silvery white sheep,
which his comrades flay-ed
And made ready in every detail,
skillfully cutting
The carcass into small pieces, which
meat they spitted
And roasted well, and drew it all from
the spits.
Then Automedon served them the bread,
setting it forth
In exquisite baskets, while swift
Achilles apportioned
The meat, and they reached out and ate
of the good things before
them.
But when they had eaten and drunk as
much as they wanted,
Priam, descended of Dardanus, sat there

and marveled

At mighty Achilles, thinking how huge
and handsome

He was, a man in the image of gods
everlasting,

And likewise Achilles marveled at
Priam, looking

Upon his fine face and listening to what
he said.

When both had looked on each other
enough, old Priam

The godlike spoke thus:

“Show me my bed, now, Achilles,
O nobleman nurtured of Zeus, that we
may enjoy

A night of sweet sleep. For never once
have my lids

Come together in sleep since my son lost
his life at your hands,
But always I've mourned, miserably
brooding on
My innumerable sorrows and groveling
in dung on the ground
Of my high-walled courtyard. Now,
though, I've tasted some food
And drunk flaming wine. Till now, I had
tasted nothing."

He spoke, and Achilles ordered his
comrades and handmaids
To place two beds in the portico and
cover them
With fine purple robes, light spreads,
and fleecy warm blankets,
And the girls went out with torches and

made the beds.

Then Achilles, fast on his feet, spoke to
King Priam,
Somewhat bitterly saying:

“My dear aged friend,
You’ll have to sleep outside, since one
of the counselors
Of the Achaeans may come to consult
me, as often
They do, and as they should. But if one
of these
Were to catch sight of you through the
fast-flying blackness of night,
He might very well go straight to King
Agamemnon,
Commander-in-chief of the army, and so
there would be

A delay in my giving back the body. But
come,
Tell me frankly. How long would you
like for the funeral rites
Of Prince Hector, that I myself may hold
back from battle
And keep back the others also?"

And the godlike old King:
"If you really want me to give noble
Hector his full
Funeral rites, this, O Achilles, is what
you could do
To help me. You know how we're
penned in the city and also
How far the terrified Trojans must go for
wood
From the mountains. Let us, then, mourn

for him in our halls

For nine days, then burn him and hold
the funeral feast

On the tenth, and on the eleventh build a
barrow

For him. Then on the twelfth we'll fight
again,

If we must."

To which fleet-footed, noble Achilles:
"So be it, my ancient Priam, just as you
wish.

I'll hold back the battle for all the time
you request."

So saying, he clasped the old King's
right wrist, in a gesture
Of friendly assurance. Then there in the
porch of the lodge

The old ones retired, the herald and
Priam, their hearts
Ever thoughtful. But Achilles slept in
one corner of the spacious,
Strongly built lodge, and beside him lay
Briseis,
Lovely of face.

Now all other gods and mortal
Wearers of horsehair-plumed helmets
slept soundly all night,
Overcome by soft sleep, but not on help-
bringing Hermes
Could sleep get a grip, as he pondered
within his mind
How he could get King Priam away from
the ships
Unseen by the powerful guards at the

gate. Standing close

By the head of his bed, he spoke to him,
saying:

“Old sire,

To sleep this way in the midst of your
foes, it must be

You have no idea of possible harm, now
that

Achilles has spared you. True, you have
ransomed your son,

And great was the ransom you paid. Just
think what the sons

You left in the city would have to pay
for your life—

Three times as much at least—if Atreus’
son

Agamemnon should find that you’re here

and the other Achaeans
Get word!”

At this the old King was afraid and
awakened
His herald. And Hermes harnessed the
horses and mules
For them and drove the two old ones
quietly out
Through the slumbering camp, nor did
anyone know of their going.

When they came to the ford of the fair-
flowing river, the swirling
Xanthus, that immortal Zeus begot, then
Hermes
Left for Olympus, just as crocus-clad
Dawn
Was scattering light over earth. And the

King and his herald
With moaning and wailing drove the two
horses on
Toward the town, and the mules came on
with the dead. Nor were
They noticed by any, no man or brightly-
sashed woman,
Until Cassandra, lovely as golden
Aphrodite,
Having gone to the heights of Pergamus,
stronghold of Troy,
Saw her dear father coming on in the car
with his herald,
The aged town crier, beside him. And
then she saw
What they brought on the bier in the
mule-drawn wagon.

Screaming,
She roused the whole town, crying to all
in her grief:

“Come, you men and women of Troy,
you
That took such delight in welcoming
Hector back
From battle alive, since he was the
whole city’s joy
And pride. Come, I say, and look at him
now!”

She called, and soon not one man or
woman was left
In the town, for unbearable grief seized
all, and close
By the gates they met Priam bringing the
corpse of his son.

Hector's dear wife and royal mother
rushed up
To the wheel-spinning wagon, and
touching the head of the dead
They wailed and tore at their hair, while
the people crowded
Around them and wept. And now all day
long till sunset
They would have stayed outside the
gates, lamenting
And weeping for Hector, had not the old
King, still
In the chariot, spoken thus to his people:

“Make way
For the mules to pass through. Later,
when I've brought him home,
You may weep to your heart's content.”

He spoke, and the crowd
Opened up, making way for the wagon.
Once at the palace
They laid Hector out on a corded bed
and seated
Beside him singers to lead in the dirge,
and they chanted
The funeral song with the women
responding in chorus.
Then white-armed Andromache led their
lament, holding
The head of man-killing Hector close in
her arms,
And wailing:

“My husband, early indeed you have
left us,
Me a widow in your spacious halls, your

son

Still a baby, the son we two so unluckily
had,

Who now, I think will never live to be
grown,

Since long before that this city shall
topple in ruins.

For you, my husband, are dead, you that
protected

The town and kept from harm its
excellent wives

And little children. These, I fear, shall
soon

Be riding the hollow ships, and I among
them—

And you, my child, must go with me to
where you shall toil

For some monstrous master, or have

some Achaean seize
Your small arm and hurl you down from
the wall to a miserable
Death, being bitter at Hector for killing
his brother,
Perhaps, or his father, or else his son,
since many,
Many Achaeans have bitten the dusty
huge earth
At the hands of brave Hector, for your
father was not at all gentle
In horrible war—so now the people are
mourning
For you, Hector, throughout the city, and
grief beyond words
You have brought on your parents, but I
far more than all others

Have nothing left but miserable sorrow.
For you
As you died neither stretched out your
arms to me from the bed,
Nor did you say any word of sweet love
that I
Might have kept in my heart through long
days and nights of weeping.”

Thus she spoke in her wailing, and all
of the women
Responded, moaning and weeping. Then
Hecuba took up
The dirge and led the vehement keening,
crying:
“Hector, the dearest by far to my heart of
all
My children, you when alive were also

dear

To the gods, and so they have cared for
you now, though your fate

Was to die as you did. Whenever swift-
footed Achilles

Took other children of mine, he sold
them as slaves

Beyond the barren and unresting sea,
into Samos,

Imbros, and Lemnos, lost in the haze. But
when

With his tapering bronze he had taken
your life, he dragged you

Daily about his comrade Patroclus's
barrow—

Patroclus, whom you, my son, slew—
though even this

Did not resurrect his friend. But now you

lie

Fresh as the dew in our palace, like one
merely sleeping,

Or one whom silver-bowed Phoebus
Apollo has slain

With his gentle shafts.”

Even so she spoke in her wailing,
And roused the passionate keening. Then
Helen was third

To lead the lament, crying: “O Hector,
dearest

By far to my heart of all my husband’s
brothers,

My husband is Paris the godlike, who
brought me to Troy—

Would I had died first! Now this is the
twentieth year

Since I left my own country, but never
once have I heard
From you an evil word or an ugly. In
fact,
When the others reproached me here in
the palace, some brother
Of yours, a sister, or a well-dressed
sister-in-law,
Or even your mother—your father was
kind to me always,
A father to me as well—at such times
you
Would turn them away and restrain them
with your gentle spirit
And courteous words. Hence now I
weep for you
And my own luckless self, grieving at
heart, for now

No longer is anyone left in wide Troy
that is gentle
Or loving to me. All shudder whenever I
pass.”

Such was her wailing lament, and the
numberless crowd
Re-echoed her moans. Then the old King
Priam spoke
Mid his people, saying: “Bring wood,
you men of Troy,
Into the city, and have no dread in your
hearts
Of a treacherous Argive ambush, for
Achilles truly
Assured me when he sent me forth from
the hollow black ships
That he would do us no harm till the

twelfth morning came.”

Such were his words, and they
harnessed their oxen and mules
To wagons and rapidly gathered in front
of the city.

Then for nine days they carted in wood,
a supply

Unspeakably great, but when the tenth
man-lighting morning

Arrived, they carried brave Hector forth,
and laying

Him down on top of the pyre threw
flame upon it.

But as soon as young rose-fingered
Dawn appeared the next day,

The people gathered about Hector’s
pyre, and when

They had quenched with sparkling wine
whatever still burned,
His grieving brothers and friends,
weeping big tears
All the while, collected Hector's white
bones. These they placed
In a golden box, which they wrapped in
soft purple robes
And laid away in a hollowed-out grave.
This they closed
With huge stones laid side by side and
over it, rapidly
Working, they heaped his high barrow,
setting guards round about
To prevent a surprise attack from the
well-greaved Achaeans.
When the barrow was done, they
returned to the palace of Priam,

The Zeus-nurtured King, where they
feasted a glorious feast.

Even so they buried Prince Hector,
tamer of horses.

ENDNOTES

Book I: The Quarrel

1 (p. 1) *Sing, O Goddess ... godlike Achilles*: The first seven lines of the *Iliad* are called the proem. The performing poet calls upon the immortal Muse to inspire his own voice. The Muses are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosune, goddess of Memory—an especially evocative genealogy for a poet performing within an oral tradition. The bard's topic is the “wrath of Achilles” and its devastating effect upon Achilles' comrades. The Greek word *menis*, which is conventionally translated as “wrath” (as in line 1 of the *Iliad*), elsewhere in Homer always denotes a specifically divine wrath (for

example, V.499, and see Muellner's *Anger of Achilles*; find this and other titles in "For Further Reading"). Achilles' wrath is thus associated with the avenging anger of the gods that is consequent upon a transgression of the proper, divinely sanctioned order of both society and the cosmos. The macabre promise to sing of the heroes' bodies made prey for the beasts (in line 5) is literally unfulfilled within the *Iliad*, but the dehumanization that is implicit in the image is literalized in the murderous fury and vicarious cannibalism of Achilles' eventual return to battle in books XX-XXII (see, for example, XXII.404—414, and Segal's *Theme of*

the Mutilation of the Corpse in the “Iliad”).

2 (p. 1) *the two sons* of Atreus: Agamemnon and Menelaus are Atreus’ sons. Agamemnon, the older, rules over Mycenae; he is the commander—king of kings—of the entire Achaean army. Agamemnon is married to Clytemnestra (who will murder him upon his eventual return home). Menelaus’ domain is Sparta (often called Lacedaemon). His wife is Helen (the half-sister of Clytemnestra), whose flight to Troy, whether willing or unwilling, precipitates the Trojan War.

3 (p. 2) “Chryse ... Cilla ... Tenedos ... *the tears I have shed*”: Greek prayers

often invoke the places where the god's presence is especially potent; and the one praying often reminds the divinity of what deeds he or she has previously performed for the god. Apollo is especially associated with pestilence; see, for example, the opening of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

[4](#) . (p. 5) "*I didn't come... because of the Trojan spearmen*": Achilles' rhetoric contains some truth. All the heroes but Achilles are bound to Agamemnon by the Oath of Tyndareus. At the wedding contest of Helen, Tyndareus, the nominal father of Helen (her actual father is Zeus), bound all the suitors by oath to honor his choice of a

husband for Helen (Tyndareus eventually chooses Menelaus, who brought the most gifts); Tyndareus further obliged Helen's suitors to defend her marriage should it be violated. The Achaean army at Troy is, thus, comprised of her former suitors. Achilles, however, did not participate in the marriage contest for Helen, because he was too young (see Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* frag. 204.87-89); as the youngest of all the Achaean heroes, he has come to Troy, as he says, to "gratify" the sons of Atreus—and, we might suspect, for the adventure itself.

5 (p. 5) Briseis: As with the name Chryseis, the name Briseis is a

patronymic: “daughter of Chryses,” “daughter of Brises”—the parallelism between the names underscores the status of each as a “prize” within the Achaean camp of warriors. Both Chryseis and Briseis were captured during Achaean raids on other cities in the region of Troy; each was then “redistributed” by the collectivity of the camp, the former to Agamemnon, the latter to Achilles (we might assume that Chryseis was judged best in appearance and in domestic talents, while Briseis was deemed second best). Within the heroic economy, women are the paramount signs of a warrior’s honor; the loss of Briseis is, thus, a public diminution of Achilles’ status within the

camp, of his very social being. In book IX, Achilles will assert that Briseis was more than a sign of honor—indeed, that he loved her. Briseis herself will speak of her own hopes for a marriage with Achilles at XIX.325-340.

6 (p. 6) “*the monstrous mountain Centaurs, and the slaughter they there / Performed was terrible indeed*”: Nestor recalls the battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs. Perithous, king of the Lapiths, invited the Centaurs (a breed of creatures half-man, half-horse) to the wedding of his daughter Hippodameia. The drunken Centaurs attempted to rape the bride; the ensuing battle is depicted on the frieze of the Athenian Parthenon,

where the victory of the Lapiths is presented as a victory of civilization over barbarism, akin to (for the Athenian viewer) the Greek victory over the Persians in the wars of 490 and 480 B.C.E.

[7](#) (p. 11) *his goddess mother / Heard him*: Thetis is a sea-nymph, the daughter of Nereus—the Old Man of the Sea—and the wife of Peleus. From Pindar (*Isthmian Ode* 8.26-57), we learn that Thetis was desired by both Zeus and Poseidon, but Themis—a prophetic goddess—revealed that Thetis was destined to bear a son greater than the father. Thetis is then married off to the mortal Peleus, and their child is

Achilles, who will be greatest of mortals, but who will not become a threat to Zeus. Thetis, by “marrying down” (to a mortal) effectively preserves Zeus’ order from a son who would overthrow him. Thetis’ shaming marriage to a mortal thus explains her hold over Zeus as well as the tormented “semi-divine” status of Achilles (see Slatkin’s *Power of Thetis* for a full exploration of the mythic background and thematic centrality of Thetis within the *Iliad*).

[8](#) (p. 17) “*after my fall*”: Hephaestus’ lameness is perhaps explained at XV.20-26: Zeus, enraged with Hera for driving his son Heracles to Cos in a threatening

storm, had hung her from Olympus with anvils tied to her feet; Zeus then threatened to hurl from Olympus anyone who came to Hera's aid. The ancient commentators attributed Hephaestus' lameness to just such an attempt—punished as threatened by Zeus—to aid Hera. There is, though, a second account of Hephaestus' laming at XVIII.448-452, where Hephaestus is thrown from Olympus by Hera, who wished to conceal having given birth to a lame child; in this account, he is rescued by Thetis.

Book II: Trial of the Army and the Catalogue of Ships

1 (p. 21) “*try them with words and bid them flee*”: Agamemnon abruptly decides to test the troops—a plan not instructed by the Dream and a near-disaster. When Agamemnon has told the Achaean troops to take flight, the other commanders are to then endeavor to check their flight. But only Odysseus—and only with the assistance of Athena—is able to turn the troops back to Troy. Agamemnon persists in his role as a bad king (he is utterly dependant upon the efforts of Odysseus, as indispensable enforcer), even as we see the

overwhelming desire of the troops—if left to themselves—for a homecoming.

2 (p. 22) “*great Zeus... has bound me now in woeful blindness of spirit*”: It is characteristic of Agamemnon to blame his errors upon the “blindness of spirit”—in Greek, *ate*—that Zeus sends (see also IX. 20 and XIX.105). Here, Agamemnon, as part of his deceptive testing of the troops, castigates Zeus for the *ate* he sends, even as he is himself being deceived by Dream: a fine example of Homeric irony.

3 (p. 25) *Thersites*: The name Thersites is derived from the Greek for “boldness” or “rashness.” He is the only Homeric character to lack both a

patronymic and a homeland, which might indicate that he is a common soldier, here giving voice to the resentment of the people; his ugliness might also be taken as a sign of his lower-class status: The peasants are revolting, as the old joke goes. His base appearance, however, might also place him within a tradition of blame poetry, in which ugly speakers raise a laugh at the expense of the kings; their speech reveals the harm—the “ugliness”—that the kings have done to the community. In Greek poetry, this tradition is represented by the work of Archilochus and Hipponax.

[4](#) (p. 32) *Tell me now, O Muses ...* : With this new invocation of the Muses, the

poet embarks on the Catalog of the Achaeans, in which he sings of the leaders, homelands, and ships of the twenty-nine contingents that comprise the Achaean army. The Catalog has been the subject of much scholarly dispute as to whether it reflects the geographical and political world of the Mycenaean palace-kings (the mid to late thirteenth century B.C.E.) or of the Early Iron Age (c.1025-950 B.C.E.) or of the eighth and even seventh centuries B.C.E. While the Catalog surely does transmit some Mycenaean elements (though largely from sites where there was continuity of habitation from the Mycenaean period to the Archaic period), it is also marked by the

inclusion of later historical settlements, as well as by the omission of earlier, Mycenaean elements that would have been anachronistic or incomprehensible to an audience of the early Archaic period. Though daunting to the modern reader, the Catalog's compendium of geographical, political, and mythical lore—delivered with great poetic virtuosity—was of great fascination for its contemporary audiences.

5 (p. 35) *Thamyris* the Thracian: The Homeric bard includes a digression of especial poetic relevance: Thamyris boasts that his own singing would surpass even that of the Muses in a contest, whereupon they “damage” him

and take away his memory. An analogy between hero and bard is, perhaps, suggested: Just as the hero, in his battlefield accomplishments, becomes like to a god, and thus tempts their deadly anger, so too, the poet sings himself into a condition like to the immortal Muses, at which point he might likewise tempt their jealous vengeance.

6 (p. 37) *warlike Protesilaus*: As in the case of the entry for Philoctetes immediately below (lines 811-820), the bard gives an account of a well-known figure who set out on the expedition to Troy, but who is now not fighting: Protesilaus was the first Achaean killed at Troy; Philoctetes and his bow will

have to be brought to Troy from Lemnos before the city can be conquered. The entries for Protesilaus and Philoctetes might be compared to that for Achilles (lines 779-787), who is now also absent from the fighting.

[7](#) (p. 39) ...*forty black ships*: The Achaean Catalog is now complete; the grand total is: 44 leaders, 1,186 ships, and 60,000 troops (assuming an average ship-load of 50); these numbers are from the commentary of G. S. Kirk. The poet would surely object to the historian Thucydides' slighting assessment of the troop strength at Troy (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.11—12).

[8](#) (p. 41) *Bright-helmeted Hector led*

the Trojans: With Hector, the principal Trojan defender, the poet begins the Catalog of Trojans, which consists of twenty-six leaders and sixteen contingents. For the roughly tripartite political division of the Trojan force, see the note below.

[9](#) (p. 41) *Anchises' brave son Aeneas*: This is the very Aeneas who will escape from Troy to found Rome. Aeneas is the son of Aphrodite and Anchises, whose liaison dangereuse is recounted with much charm and wit in the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, which also foretells Aeneas' escape from the ruins of Troy so that he might re-found Troy in the west (a prophecy that the *Iliad*-poet also

knows, XX.334-341). The genealogy of the entire Trojan royal house is recited by Aeneas himself at XX.233-268. Both Aeneas and Hector are descendants of Dardanus (Aeneas through the line of Assaracus, Hector through that of Ilos), but while Hector is the supreme commander, with especial charge over the contingents from Troy and its environs, Aeneas commands the Dardanians, who inhabit the foothills of Ida that lie outside the Troy region proper; the third group at Troy is the allies, who come from farther afield: from the Northern Troad, extending to the Hellespont and the Propontis; and from the south, especially from Maeonia (about Sardis) and Caria.

Book III: The Duel of Paris and Menelaus

1 (p. 46) *Helen she found in the hall, weaving... on her account:* The poet introduces Helen with an image of extraordinary metapoetic implication. The web that Helen weaves is the color of “purple” (Greek porphureos), which is elsewhere in the *Iliad* associated with blood and with death; the “battles” (Greek aethla) that she weaves into her cloth might also be translated as “sufferings” or “contests” (and the latter might include the contests of her suitors). Helen weaves her own epic.

2 (p. 47) “*Yonder Achaean* is

Atreus‘son’: Beginning with the scholars-critics of Alexandria in the late third century B.C.E., Helen’s identification and description of the Achaean leaders has been known as the *Teichoskopia*, the “Viewing from the Walls.” The scene has often been charged with anachronism, as it would seem that, nine years into the war, Priam would have little need of the information that Helen provides. True enough, but it is preferable to regard the *Teichoskopia* as one of a series of episodes in books III through VIII that serve to fill in the background of the Trojan War and some of the events of the prior nine years. The single combat of Paris and Menelaus—which will soon be narrated—would

also “better” belong to the first year of the War; but, again, the poet narrates “past” events so that his audience might better understand the present disposition of his characters and his plot. Other examples of the past-in-the-present include: Paris’ recollection of his first night with Helen, which concludes book III (and where we might also ponder the difference, for Helen, between past and present); Agamemnon’s mustering and inspection of the troops in book IV, as well as the depiction of Trojan oath-breaking in that same book; the Battle of Champions between Ajax and Hector in book VIII, which might, again, resolve the dispute, followed by the rejected

offer of ransom and the building of the Achaean Wall.

3 (p. 51) *Put on his beautiful armor*: This is the first of four arming-scenes in the *Iliad*: Agamemnon also arms at XI.18-47, Patroclus at XVI. 156—167, and Achilles at XIX.414-43 9. In each instance, the armor, weaponry, and order of dress are the same: greaves, corslet, sword, shield, helmet, spear; this is an example of the oral poet's use of a type-scene (as are scenes of sacrifice and of hospitality). Greaves cover the area between the knee and ankle. As a light-armed archer, Paris has no "breastplate" (corslet) of his own and so must borrow one from his brother Lycaon; single-

combat is not Paris' métier.

Book IV: Agamemnon's Inspection of the Army

1 (p. 57) “*how many horrible / Wrongs ... level / Their mighty stronghold?*”: Zeus’ question has some force, as it is only Paris who has offended Hera (and Athena)—though perhaps the entire city of Troy is implicated in the defense of Helen. At the Judgment of Paris, Paris was asked to choose the fairest from among the trio of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite; he chose Aphrodite, thus gaining the prize of Helen, but also the fierce enmity of the rejected goddesses. Homer, however, does not explicitly recount the Judgment of Paris until

XXIV.34-38, at which point the fall of the city is imminent. The poet's immediate emphasis is upon the implacable, savage wrath of Hera: In place of the divine meal of ambrosia, she would eat Priam and his sons raw—a violation, in the realm of humans, of a fundamental boundary between men and beasts; gods and beasts are equally unconstrained by the culture-defining taboos of the Greeks (the gods are, for instance, incestuous).

2 (p. 58) *the Father of gods ... by no means ignored her*: Hera does succeed in gaining Zeus' assent to her plan to break up the truce that has still held—shakily—from the end of book III.

Greeks and Trojans will not be reconciled; moreover, the Trojans will now be re-characterized as oath-breakers.

[3](#) (p. 62) *You would not then have found / The great Agamemnon napping ...* : After the debacles of leadership that marked books I and II, Agamemnon reasserts himself in an episode that the ancient critics called the *epipolexis*, the “Tour of Inspection.” Agamemnon inspects the troops and offers speeches of praise and of blame; this will be the last major episode before the long-delayed outbreak of full combat between Achaeans and Trojans.

[4](#) (p. 66) *Prince Polyneices*: Polyneices

is the brother of Eteocles; both are sons of Oedipus, and both have been cursed by their father. The curse is active in the dispute of the two brothers over the rule of Thebes. Polyneices looks for aid to his father-in-law, Adrastus, and assembles five other heroes (and their followers) to march against Thebes: These are the Seven against Thebes; their attack upon the city will fail (see the following note). The story of the failed mission was recounted in an oral tradition known as the *Thebais*, of which only the barest scraps of fragments survive, as well as in a *Thebaid* by the Latin poet Statius (91/92 C.E.). Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* of 467 B.C.E. also tells of the attack upon

Thebes; it focuses upon Eteocles and the defense of the city.

5 (p. 67) “*So don’t compare our merits / With theirs*”: Sthenelus speaks intemperately but truthfully: Tydeus’ generation did fail to capture Thebes, and their failure was a direct consequence of their “reckless folly” and contravention of divine signs. Indeed, Tydeus’ death is especially distinguished for its transgressive cannibalism: Tydeus—while writhing in his death throes—attempted to eat the brains of the mortally wounded Theban defender Melanippus. Athena, who had intended to confer immortality upon Tydeus, changes her mind upon seeing

Tydeus' final act of blood-thirst. Sthenelus' allusive account of Tydeus' bestiality thus tops Agamemnon's prior account of Tydeus' deeds and, more generally, casts a skeptical light upon the oft-repeated claim that fathers are better than sons.

Book V: The Valiant Deeds of Diomedes

1 (p. 72) ... *she sent him into / The thickest part of the battle*: Diomedes' aristeia—his “excellent deeds” on the battlefield—begins with Athena's kindling of his war-strength. In the absence of Achilles, Diomedes emerges as the single greatest offensive warrior of the Achaeans (Ajax is the greatest defender). Book V narrates his ever-increasing martial successes, which lead him into a state “like to a god” or even “like something more than a god.” During this period of heightened physical prowess, Diomedes even

wounds Aphrodite and Ares, thus putting himself in great danger of suffering divine vengeance; his martial exultation becomes such that he threatens to overstep the boundary between mortal and divine, to “fight Father Zeus himself,” as Aphrodite will later claim (V.400). The aristeia of Diomedes provides an interpretative template for the battlefield glories and dangers of the other heroes, including both Patroclus (in book XVI) and Achilles (at the start of book XXII, Achilles is also likened—ominously—to the brightest of late summer stars, which is the dog-star Orion).

[2](#) (p. 77) “... *what the horses* of Tros

are like”: The horses of Tros are of a divine breed, initially a gift of Zeus to Tros (in recompense for Zeus’ abduction of his son Ganymede). The horses are particularly valuable booty; as such, they especially command the actions of Diomedes (assisted by Sthenelus) in the following narrative.

[3](#) (p. 83) “... *horse-taming Diomedes*”: Dione’s threat that Diomedes will die for his attack upon Aphrodite is not fulfilled, though it does illustrate the danger into which his *aristeia* has inevitably led him: death-provoking contention with the gods themselves (the preceding example of Heracles, who is not killed by the gods, but himself

immortalized, is a strictly one-time exception). Diomedes, upon his safe return home after the fall of Troy, will discover that his wife Aegialeia has been unfaithful—perhaps this is Aphrodite's belated revenge. Diomedes sails from his native Argos and ends his days in northern Apulia, among the Daunians.

[4](#) (p. 89) “... *he leveled the city of Troy and plundered / Her streets*”: Laomedon (the father of Priam) had promised Heracles a reward of his partly divine horses (from the same breed as those that Diomedes earlier won from Aeneas; see also note 2 above), as Heracles had saved his

daughter Hesione from a sea-monster. Laomedon reneged on the deal, and Heracles sacked the city; this is the first Sack of Troy. (The poet tells of a marker of Heracles' battle with the sea-monster at XX.161—167.)

5 (p. 90) “... *Zeus who bears the aegis*”: The Homeric aegis is a kind of shield, perhaps covered in goat-skin (its etymology connects it to the Greek for “goat”: aig-) , perhaps suspended from the shoulders. In classical art, Athena's aegis is a shawl-like skin wrapped around the shoulders. In addition to its protective function, the aegis, when shaken, can put an army to flight or produce storms.

Book VI: Hector and Andromache

1 (p. 97) *clutching the knees of his captor*: Grasping the knees of the victor while begging for mercy (while also promising a ransom) is the regular gesture of battlefield supplication in the *Iliad*; it is never successful (though we will hear of Achilles' positive response to supplications in the past—for example, at XI. 115-118). Other examples of supplication include the appeals of Dolon (X.42 7—431), of the sons of Antimachus (XI.145-150), of Lycaon (XXI.95-121), and, finally, of Hector (XXII. 3 95-401). The following

threat of Agamemnon to kill even the unborn children of Troy foreshadows the general fate of the city and casts a particularly grievous shadow upon the upcoming scene between Hector and Andromache.

2 (p. 99) “*But if you are some immortal... I will not fight you... Not even ... brawny Lycurgus*”: Diomedes, who in the prior book fought with three gods—Aphrodite, Apollo, and Ares—now claims that he would not fight with an immortal. A lesson learned or words of consummate self-satisfaction? Diomedes’ negative paradigm is Lycurgus, a Thracian king who attempted to resist the spread of Dionysus (who is

both “mad” and “maddening”) and his cult; he is punished by the Olympians with blindness and early death (the *exemplum* of Lycurgus is otherwise mentioned at line 955 of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and compare the deeds and punishment of Pentheus in Euripides’ *Bacchae*) . The nurses of Dionysus received the baby god from his father, Zeus, and nurtured him on Mount Nusa in Thrace.

[3](#) (p. 99) “... *so one generation of men / Gives way to another*”: The comparison of human generations to leaves is one of the most famous and most imitated of Iliadic similes—see, for example, Mimnermus 2.1-2, Simonides 19, and

Aristophanes' *Birds* 685; see also the *Iliad* XXL.526-528, where the simile is recast by Apollo from a divine perspective. Human life is as evanescent (and as unredeemed) as that of the leaf that falls in season; nature cares nothing for the life of the individual, only for the survival of the species. Yet Glaucus proceeds to recite the names and exploits of his ancestors ("listen and hear what many know / Already"); some mortals do, it seems, through their adventures, gain a place within the collective memory, thus rescuing their name from the anonymity and sameness of the leaves—a rescue of meaning all the more valuable for its very uncertainty.

[4](#) (p. 100) “Anteia ... *lusted madly to lie with Bellerophon*”: The tale of the Queen who longs for her husband’s guest-friend and who, upon being rebuffed, makes false and potentially deadly accusations to her husband is a folktale found in many cultures—it is often referred to as the Potiphar’s-wife theme, after the story of the false accusation of Joseph (see the Bible, beginning at Genesis 39:7 ff.). The most familiar version in Greek is found in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (where Hippolytus is Phaedra’s stepson); see also the story of Peleus and the wife of Acastus (Apollodrus 3.13.3 and Pindar Nemean 4.54-58). In the Homeric

version, the reluctance of Proetus to kill Bellerophon probably reflects a family connection between Proetus and Glaucus, the father of Bellerophon—a guest-host relation that, if violated, would provoke a blood-curse or a vendetta or both. Proetus instead sends Bellerophon on the series of death-defying adventures that become the basis of his fame: a vindication of his name against the false charges of Anteia and an immortalization of his name through heroic deeds.

[5](#) (p. 101) “... *he roamed alone the Aleian Plain, / Consuming his soul and avoiding all human tracks*”: The end of Bellerophon is mysterious and haunting.

The poet avoids recounting the most famous (and notorious) of Bellerophon's exploits, which is his attempt to storm Olympus on the back of Pegasus, the immortal winged horse; the gods hurl him from his mount. Rather, the poet emphasizes the final wandering unto death of Bellerophon, who ends his life, apart from men and gods, upon the Plain of Wandering ("Aleian" is a pun on the Greek word for "to wander"). All the heroic deeds and rewards seem insufficient for Bellerophon, whose centripetal wandering leads him onto a plain that might well be an image of his own consciousness. During the Renaissance, Bellerophon became a defining type of the melancholic, the man

born under the sign of Saturn; see [Aristotle] *Problem* 30, as reread by Marsilio Ficino in the late fifteenth century.

[6](#) (p. 102) ... *golden armor / For bronze, or a hundred oxen for nine*: The unequal exchange of armor affects a jolt in ethos and tone following the joyous chivalry of the pact that Diomedes and Glaucus just agreed upon. Ancient and modern critics have expended enormous ingenuity upon explaining the shift in tone; perhaps we should simply acknowledge a (somewhat mystifying) Homeric joke.

[7](#) (p. 107) “... *where the city / Is best assaulted and the wall most easily*

scaled”: Andromache pleads that Hector remain close to the city wall. Andromache’s claim that there is a weak spot in the Trojan defense may reflect a tradition that the Wall of Troy was built in its entirety by Apollo and Poseidon except for one section, which was built by the mortal Aeacus and which is, in consequence, vulnerable to attack (Pindar *Olympian* 8.31-46; see also VII.491—494, where Poseidon recollects his part in building the Trojan Wall).

8 (p. 107) “*But how could I face the men of Troy, or their wives ... if I were to skulk like a coward*”: In response to Andromache’s plea that he remain near

to the Trojan Wall and mindful of wife and child, Hector invokes his sense of *aidos*—of reverence, of respect, of shame. In Homeric Greek, *aidos* is a responsiveness to the ethical judgments of others within the community; it is a social emotion provoked by the perception of one's place in the social structure and of the obligations that accompany that place. Hector's sense of *aidos* before the entirety of his community does not permit him to rank the claims of wife and son above those of his community. In being preeminently responsive to the claims of his community, Hector must set aside the claims of those who are most his own. (For an illuminating reading of this

extraordinarily moving passage, see Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the "Iliad,"* pp. 113-127.)

Book VII: *The Duel of Hector and Ajax*

1 (p. 113) “... and *my glory will not be destroyed*”: Hector imagines funeral rites for the defeated man that include the heaping of a great barrow over his grave. The tumulus will itself be a mighty memorial sign to those who pass by of the name of Hector—a visual analog to the “glory forever” provided by epic poetry itself, which Achilles invokes at IX.475.

2 (p. 114) “... if *only / I were* as young as when ...”: This is the second of four autobiographical recitations by Nestor: Earlier, at I.303—317, he told of his

comradeship with the Lapiths; at XI.653—853, he will tell of his youthful exploits in the battles between Pylians and Epeians; and at XXIII.726—743, he will recall his victories at the funeral games of Amarynceus. In this instance—as also in the example from book XI—Nestor asserts the excellence of his prior deeds as a foundation upon which to base his exhortation to the present generation of heroes—here, to the front-fighters of the Achaeans; in book XI (where Nestor’s intervention will be decisive), to Patroclus and, he hopes, Achilles.

[3](#) (p. 119) *So they turned back ...* : With this exchange of pledges of friendship

and gifts, Hector and Ajax bring their strife to an end. The elaborate courtesies of the heroic code are enacted for a final time in the Iliad; there will be no further peaceable resolutions in the fighting to come.

4 (p. 119) “... *land of our fathers*”: With the establishment of a truce and the collection of the bones of the dead, the “First Great Day of Battle” comes to an end, as does the first narrative movement of the Iliad: The past, including prior attempts at resolution, has been re-represented; the principal heroes have been richly characterized; the dispositions of the Achaean and Trojan armies have been dramatized. With the

building of the Achaean wall and the refusals of Paris to return Helen and of the Achaeans to accept ransom that immediately follow, the hostilities of the narrative present are set to be rejoined, as is the plan of Zeus (first announced in book I) to honor Achilles by turning the tide of battle against the Achaeans.

Book VIII: The weakening Achaeans

1 (p. 124) “*That’s how much stronger I am than you gods and all mortals*”: With this vivid assertion of his own preeminence, Zeus clears the mortal battlefield of the Olympians. Zeus can now—through the martial successes of Hector—fulfill his promise to Thetis to bring the Achaeans to grief in the absence of Achilles. (For the futility of resistance by the other gods to Zeus, see also the exchange between Hera and Poseidon at VIII. 224—240, as well as Zeus’ threatening speech to Hera at VIII.534-553, with note 3 below.)

2 (p. 127) ... *the old King mounted the car / With Diomedes*: The epic tradition also knows a version of the rescue of Nestor in which the old man is saved by his son Antilochus, who sacrifices his own life for his father's. The poet Pindar (Pythian 6.28ff.) makes of that telling a paradigm of filial piety.

3 (p. 137) "*For massive Hector... about the corpse of Patroclus*": Zeus, having dramatically quelled any rebellion against his rule by Hera and Athena, now foretells the fulfillment of his promise of book I to honor Achilles: Hector and the Trojans will continue to have martial success until the death of Patroclus, after which Achilles will

rejoin his comrades. As well, we now see that Zeus' honoring of Achilles will bring enormous grief to Achilles himself—the loss of Patroclus.

Book IX: Agamemnon's Offers to Achilles

1 (p. 140) “... *since his is the greatest power*”: Agamemnon urges flight upon the Achaeans with the same words he used in book II, when he was under the influence of the deceptive Dream sent by Zeus (II.19—41, and IX.18—28); here, his words are in earnest (and Zeus is now responsible for his plight), but his counsel of retreat is met not with a rush to the ships (as in book II), but with Achaean resistance and refusal. The reuse of speech-blocks and type-scenes is a technique of the oral poet; here, that technique is in the service of a (rather

ironic) characterization of a persistently despondent Agamemnon, as well as of an intensification of the dramatic urgency of the present moment: The deliberations that follow are of the utmost consequence, wholly lacking the dream and comic elements of the “retreat” of book II.

2 (p. 143) “*I acted blindly*”: Agamemnon claims he was struck with a moral blindness or an infatuation of mind that diminished his capacity for reasoned action—what the Greeks call *ate*, and which always leads to disaster. In book XIX (lines 104—167), Agamemnon will offer a lengthy account of *ate* (“Sweet Folly”). Earlier, in book

I (lines 478—485), Achilles had asked Thetis to appeal to Zeus for a Trojan victory so that Agamemnon “might know his ate” (“that Atreus’ son ... may know how blind he was”). Achilles’ appeal to Zeus is now reaching fulfillment.

3 (p. 145) ... *there they found him / Soothing his soul with a resonant lyre... Part of the loot he had taken when he himself sacked / Eëtion’s city*: Achilles is reintroduced into the narrative with an extraordinarily suggestive image. He now sits apart, playing the role of the bard, singing of “warriors’ fame”; he is no longer the doer of martial deeds but is the commemorator of those deeds. The lyre is itself an object and instrument of

beauty, even as it was captured in bloody warfare; so, too, Homeric poetry makes a beautiful song out of carnage.

[4](#) (pp. 146-147) “... *your father Peleus was talking / To you... ‘be reconciled quickly / That Argives young and old may respect you still more’*”: The parting of father and son in Phthia is also recalled in book XI (lines 881-884) by Nestor, who recollects the same occasion, though with a somewhat different version of Peleus’ words; Nestor will also include the parting words of Menoetius (Patroclus’ father) to Patroclus. At XVIII. 368—373, Achilles will recall his own final words to Menoetius. In the present passage

(and in the book XI passage), Peleus' knowledge of his son's quick temper is evident.

5 (p. 148) "*All of these gifts are yours, if only / You'll stop being angry*": Up to this point, Odysseus has faithfully reported Agamemnon's offer of gifts, but he now omits Agamemnon's conclusion, which contained an implicit comparison of Achilles to Hades and a command to Achilles to recognize Agamemnon's greater rank and age (IX.179-183). Instead, Odysseus first appeals to Achilles' sense of pity for his comrades, then to his desire for glory by offering up Hector, who now fights in the front-ranks. Achilles, however, will fully (and

furiously) understand that an acceptance of Agamemnon's gifts (and especially an acceptance of Agamemnon's offer to make him his son-in-law!) amounts to a recognition of Agamemnon's greater authority; to accept the king's gifts is to acknowledge the (greater) social position that they concretize.

[6](#) (p. 148) "*I, then, will say what seems to me best*": In book I, Athena stopped Achilles from killing Agamemnon with the promise of receiving "three times as much as what you may lose" (line 248). Achilles has now been offered much more than that (and Agamemnon has acknowledged his ate, note 2 above). All expectation is that Achilles will

accept the gifts and return to his comrades, yet Achilles refuses. It is at this point that the *Iliad* ventures into previously unexplored thematic terrain; and Achilles, in the emotionally roiling, bitterly sarcastic, and relentlessly reevaluating speech that now follows, is the primary explorer of that new terrain—no longer a hero (only) of deeds, but of consciousness. (See the introduction for further discussion of some aspects of Achilles' great speech.)

[7](#) (p. 151) “*The knightly / Old Peleus made me your guardian ...*”: In the first part of his response to Achilles' refusal of Agamemnon's gifts and to his threat to depart at sunrise, Phoenix recounts his

own youthful autobiography and how he came to be Achilles' tutor (a role that the poetic tradition more often attributes to the kindly centaur Cheiron) and surrogate father. As a young man, Phoenix, too, was embroiled in a potentially deadly dispute over a mistress—in this case, his father's. Amyntor will curse his son with sterility, driving Phoenix to flee his homeland rather than become a parricide. In Phthia, Phoenix, now an exile, receives an act of extraordinary grace: Peleus not only offers him refuge (which is obligatory in the case of exiles), but a kingdom and the nurturance of a son. Peleus, in effect, rectifies the curse that Amyntor had placed upon

Phoenix: Peleus loved Phoenix as a “father loves / His only son and heir”; in return for this act of generosity beyond expectation, Phoenix will love Achilles as his own son. (Peleus’ Phthia seems to be a notable place of refuge; the homicides Epeigeus and Patroclus also find refuge there—see XVI.651—659, and XXIII. 98—104).

[8](#) (p. 153) “*Even the gods can yield...*” : The second part of Phoenix’ speech features the allegory of the Prayers. Following inevitably, if at a slower pace, upon instances of “Sin,” which here translates the Greek *ate* (an impaired mental state that leads to moral error and further folly; see above, note

2), the Prayers offer a chance of healing, of brooking disaster before it fully erupts. If the Prayers are rejected, they themselves (as Phoenix presents it) pray to Zeus for vengeance, which takes the form of further and decisive *ate*. Though others in the *Iliad* speak of *ate* (most prominently, Agamemnon at lines 19.104-167), Achilles himself will never explain his own actions in terms of *ate*.

[9](#) (p. 154) “*We’ve all heard similar stories / About the old heroes...*”: In the third and final part of his speech, Phoenix recounts the old story of Meleager, a traditional tale that would have been part of the repertoire of the

performing bard. Meleager's successful killing of the Calydonian Boar is succeeded by two tales of strife: Fighting breaks out between Curetes and Aetolians (Meleager's people) over the spoils of the Boar, and anger erupts between Meleager and his mother Althaea over Meleager's killing of Althaea's brother, perhaps also in a dispute over the spoils of the Calydonian Boar. Althaea calls upon the Fury to avenge her brother, and Meleager—in anger—withdraws from the battle against the Aetolians to retire with his wife, Cleopatra. In other versions of the Meleager tradition, Althaea takes hold of a magical firebrand that represents Meleager's life and casts it into the fire;

as the firebrand diminishes, so too does Meleager's strength (see Bacchylides 5.94-154, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 8.273-525, and Apollodorus 1.8.1-3). The other tellings of Meleager's story also relate his death in battle at the hands of Apollo, a death similar to that of Achilles (see Hesiod's *Catalog of Women*, frag. 25.11-13 and 280)—a not insignificant part of the story, though not told by Phoenix.

[10](#) (p. 156) "*Her lurid account stirred Meleager's / Soul ... he went out and donned / His flashing armor*": Meleager is supplicated first by priests and elders, then by father, mother, and sisters, then by comrades, and finally by his wife,

Cleopatra. The order of supplication enacts a traditional scale of ascending affection: fellow citizens, parents and siblings, spouse; into this order, Phoenix inserts the “friends”—the martial companions—between family and spouse. In terms of the embassy to Achilles, we might understand Odysseus to represent the army, Phoenix the father, and Ajax the companions. Crucial to an interpretation of the Meleager paradigm is to note that the name of Meleager’s wife is Cleopatra, which simply reverses the two elements that are also found in the name of Patroclus (in Greek, Kleo-patre and Patro-kleos). In the *Iliad*, it is Patroclus’ plea (in book XVI) that will finally move Achilles, though

even then Achilles will send—much to his own grievous loss—Patroclus to fight in his place. Finally, the name of Patroclus—so much in play at the climax of Meleager’s story—is itself a “speaking name,” signifying “the fame of the ancestors” (from Greek *kleos* “poetic fame” and *patre* “father/ancestor”). Patroclus thus has the exemplary heroic name, as it signifies epic poetry itself, which transmits the fame of the prior generations. Patroclus—as comrade and as concept—thus stands at the summit of Achilles’ “scale of affection”—though both meanings cannot finally coexist, and each will experience revaluation.

[11](#) (p. 157) “... *whether we / Should go*

back to our own or stay where we are”: Though Achilles warns Phoenix that his supplication on behalf of Agamemnon risks a permanent alienation of his love, he now makes a first concession: They will consider in the morning whether to stay or to go; compare IX.489-491, where Achilles had asserted that he would definitely sail home on the coming morning.

[12](#) (p. 158) “*But Hector... Will stop his advance... when he reaches my lodge / And looming black vessel*”: Achilles now makes a second and crucial concession: He will not sail in the morning, and he will fight when Hector brings fire to his ships. Though Ajax’

just preceding speech was the shortest of the three, its appeal to the “love of friends” proves to be the most effective. The degree to which Ajax’ appeal to the love and respect of the martial collective both succeeds (Achilles will not now return home) and fails (but Achilles will not yet honor the supplications of his friends and return to battle) presents some concluding measure (in book IX) of the volatile state of Achilles’ mind. (See the introduction for further discussion of Ajax’ speech.)

Book X: The Night Adventure

1 (p. 160) ... *no sweet sleep held... Agamemnon, so worried was he / By the many problems of war:* Book X begins with a sleepless Agamemnon calling a council, as he did in book II; the result, however, will not be a full-scale mobilization of the troops, but the dispatch of Diomedes and Odysseus under cover of night to spy upon the Trojans. Beginning with the first ancient commentators and continuing to present-day scholar-critics, book X has often been judged to be an interpolation within the overall design of the Iliad. Nothing in book X advances the overall plot of the poem; it has also been ejected from

the monumental Iliad for its folkloristic qualities, for its depiction of Odysseus and Diomedes as murderous liars, for its nighttime setting, and for its culmination in an Achaean victory (which is inconsistent with the full activation in book VIII of Zeus' plan to bring honor to Achilles by aiding Hector and the Trojans). Book X has also been scorned for numerous atypical linguistic features (words and phrases found in the *Odyssey* but not otherwise in the Iliad), as well as anomalies of religious practice (gilding the horns of sacrificial cattle, X.329) and of heroic headgear (Diomedes' leather helmet, Odysseus' boar-tusk cap, X.288-295). Critics who

have retained book X have found respite from the solemnities of book IX in its grim humor and, when humor fails (as in the killing of Dolon and of the sleeping Rhesus and his men), have praised the book for its depiction of the brutality that lurks just beneath the heroic code, ready to erupt under cover of night—and, perhaps most tellingly, in the absence of Achilles. Finally, we might note that the treacherous deceit of Diomedes and Odysseus foreshadows the Fall of Troy itself, which will succumb not to the daytime force of the Achaeans but to nighttime tricks.

[2](#) (p. 169) *Then he put on his head / A ferret-skin cap:* While Diomedes wears

the helmet of a bull and Odysseus that of a boar, Dolon wears the helmet of a ferret (or weasel) and the skins of a wolf. While the clothing and caps are disguises (the heroes have shed their conventional attire), they seem also to communicate something essential about the characters of those who put them on.

3 (p. 171) “... *the* Thracians, *newly arrived, and among them / Their King, Rhesus*”: Dolon, in his terror, discloses more than he was asked; and, at Dolon’s revelation of the exceptional horses and chariot of Rhesus, Diomedes and Odysseus set aside their original intent of reconnaissance so that they might capture such rich booty. The epic

tradition knew of at least two other versions of the Rhesus story: In one, an oracle foretells that Rhesus and his horses will be invincible if they should drink of the waters of the Scamandrus (see Virgil's *Aeneid* 1.472-473); in another, Rhesus' actual deeds are so extraordinary that Hera grows alarmed—in both versions, Diomedes and Odysseus are dispatched to kill Rhesus.

Book XI: The Valiant Deeds of Agamemnon

1 (p. 176) *Strife shouted a loud and terrible war-scream, which stirred ... the Achaeans ... to fight / Without ceasing: With the new dawn and the war-cry of Strife, Zeus further enacts his intention to bring honor to Achilles through a defeat of the Achaeans (see VIII.536-544, and note 3 to book VIII above). The Great Day of Battle now begins; the battle itself is in two primary movements—books XI—XII and XIII—XV—and though each movement begins with an Achaean success, each ends with a resounding Achaean defeat. The day*

itself does not come to a close until book XVIII (lines 254—257), where Achilles' supernatural shriek at the trench (many translators and commentators use the term “ditch”) echoes the opening cry of Strife. Achilles' cry will be so disordering that Hera will compel the Sun to set early.

[2](#) (p. 183) ... *such were the sharp and bitter / Pangs that racked Agamemnon now*: With a startling simile that compares the pain of Agamemnon's wound to that of a woman in labor, Agamemnon's brutal *aristeia* comes to an abrupt end; the great king will now be led off like a woman to her accouchement (Achilles is surely

somewhere laughing). Agamemnon's aristeia is followed by that of Hector, just as Zeus had earlier promised (XI.212-216); and indeed, the pace of Zeus' plan now accelerates: In short order, Diomedes, Odysseus (neither any longer protected by Athena, as they were in book X), Machaon, and Eurypylus are wounded, and finally, Ajax is forced to retreat (see XI.621—639, where Ajax is compared first to a lion, then—uniquely and rather touchingly—to a donkey being cudgeled by boys).

3 (p. 187) *Deeply troubled, / He spoke to his own great heart:* Odysseus' monologue is the first in the Iliad, though two more will follow in this book and

ten more in books XVII-XXII (among the most striking are those of Menelaus at XVII.104-123, Agenor at XM.629-647, and Hector at XXII.117-149). The lone warrior debates with himself the contrary possibilities of fight and retreat. Odysseus' speech moves beyond the now familiar motives of worldly honor and posthumous glory (and the converses of blame and shame) to a consideration of the moral obligations of the "brave" (or "excellent") man as opposed to the coward. Under duress from the wound that he will soon receive from Socus, the pragmatic Odysseus—"insatiably wily"—will reemerge in retreat.

[4](#) (p. 188) "*But carrion birds shall pick*

the flesh from your bones ... Whereas ... The noble Achaeans will surely bury me / With all due funeral rites”: The threat that the heroes’ bodies will be made prey for wild beasts was first expressed in the Iliad’s proem. Odysseus now makes explicit an opposition that thematically structures the poem: Funeral rites, which serve both to close a wound within the community and to memorialize the name of the dead, are contrasted to a horrific “anti-funeral,” in which the body, treated as mere meat (or as mere nature), is consumed by wild beasts—and so made to vanish without trace.

[5](#) (p. 192) ... *thus marking the start of*

evil / For him: This is a crucial turning point: Achilles has been observing the Achaean rout from the stern of his ship, and he now sends forth Patroclus to gather further information. Patroclus' embassy to the Achaeans sets in motion the series of events that will lead to Patroclus' death and to Achilles' return to battle. The referent of "him" is double: The "start of evil" is surely for Patroclus, but it is for Achilles as well. Achilles' call to Patroclus is motivated by a wound to Machaon, who—like Achilles—learned the healing art from Cheiron. Book XI will conclude with Patroclus, who in turn learned his medical skills from Achilles, tending to the wounded Eurypylus (XI.904-913).

6 (p. 194) *“If only I were / As young and my strength as unyielding as once...”*: Nestor now uncorks a loquacious reminiscence of his own youth. His tale is one of heroic coming-of-age through cattle-raiding; indeed, it has been convincingly argued that the defining initiatory adventure for an Indo-European hero is the cattle-raid, in which the boy must display the bravery and the stealth that the adult male hero requires. Nestor’s adventure takes place in the context of ongoing strife between the Pylians and the Epeans, in which the latter have had by far the greater success; Nestor’s eleven older brothers have been killed in the previous battles.

Nestor's coming-of-age—in which, crucially, he must also overcome the opposition of Neleus, his father—is both a personal achievement and the revivification of his community. Upon emerging from his disguise among the foot-soldiers with his triumphant leap upon a chariot and now wielding a deadly spear, Nestor is the new ruler of Pylos, surpassing and supplanting his father—and saving his own people by so doing. Nestor offers his tale as a goad to action for Achilles (via Patroclus), but an audience might also sense that the past was a simpler (if already oedipalized) time.

[7](#) (p. 197) “*Let him send you at the*

head of the Myrmidon host”: Nestor now formulates the fatal plan that Patroclus should fight in Achilles’ stead and in Achilles’ armor, and Patroclus, greatly moved, sets off to return to Achilles’ shelter. His progress, however, is immediately halted by the wounded Eurypylus, who provokes Patroclus’ pity (XI.904—913). Patroclus will not return to Achilles until book XVI.

Book XII: The Storming of the Wall

1 (p. 200) *Where they before had poured their* bright-flowing streams: Book XII begins with an extraordinary reflection upon the destruction of the Achaean Wall, which was proposed and constructed in book VII (lines 367-374 and 472-481), where its destruction was also foretold by Zeus (in response to Poseidon's complaints, VII.482-494). In the proem to book XII, that destruction is now narrated, but—uniquely in the *Iliad*—from the point of view of the poet's historical audience, for whom the epic heroes are half-divines (see line 24), a

term used only here in the *Iliad* and a word appropriate to civic cult-practice—that is, to an audience for whom the heroes are now recipients of cult-offerings rather than, or in addition to, the subjects of epic verse. Moreover, the poet's insistence upon the complete disappearance of any sign of the Achaeans from the beach of the Hellespont might itself be understood as responsive to an audience that now wonders about the historical remains of Troy: Where's the evidence? The poet's boldly self-confident answer is to destroy any traces of the Wall; all an audience needs in order to know the story of Troy is the bard's own song. (A quip of Aristotle's well captures the

bard's world-creating-and -destroying-power: "The poet who invented it destroyed it," frag. 162.

2 (p. 200) ... *Polydamas came up / To daring Hector and spoke to him and the others*: Polydamas has the role of counselor to Hector; this is the first of four speeches of advice; see also XII.223—245, XIII.835—860, and XVIII.284-317. All four of Polydamas' speeches are guided by a concern for the collective safety—and not with individual honor or glory; contrast, for example, Odysseus' speech at XI.458-468 (see book XI, note 3 above) or Sarpedon's upcoming speech at XII.330-351. Hector's subsequent rejections of

Polydamas' advice (XII.223—268 and, especially, in book XVIII) underline his increasing recklessness, driven by the fatal delusion that Zeus' favor will last.

[3](#) (p. 206) “*Glaucus, why is it that we above all are honored... as though we were gods?*”: Sarpedon's speech on the motives of the hero is among the finest in the *Iliad*. In the first part of his speech, Sarpedon speaks of heroism as a social obligation: The hero receives special honors—land grants, prominent places at the communal feast—from his community, for which he must ultimately show himself worthy by fighting in defense of his community; or, as in the case of the Lycian Sarpedon at Troy, the

hero must fight elsewhere so as to show himself deserving of the rewards he receives at home; a role that begins in the community's need for defense thus generates a necessity for martial aggression. In the second part of his speech (beginning with "Ah, my friend ..."), Sarpedon shifts to individual motives: The hero's heightened sense of death (Sarpedon speaks as if the Death-spirits are right behind his back)—his knowledge that he will not be "deathless and ageless forever"—leads him to venture knowingly into battle, where he might gain the compensatory immortality that epic poetry promises. (See Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the "Iliad,"* pp. 99-101 and Schein, *The*

Mortal Hero, pp. 70-72, for two exemplary readings of Sarpedon's speech.)

Book XIII: Fighting Among the Ships

1 (p. 212) ... that *any immortal would dare come down / To strengthen either the Trojan or Danaan forces*: Following the headlong narrative rush that culminated with Hector's bursting through the gate to the Achaean camp, the opening of book XIII directs Zeus' gaze—and the audience's attention—to regions far to the north of Troy: The milk-drinking Hippemolgi are nomadic Scythians (like Herodotus' Massagetae in his *Histories* 1.216), while the utopic Abii, whose name signifies “without violence” in Greek, inhabit the nether

northern regions. Zeus' averted gaze permits the intervention of Poseidon into the battle and a (temporary) revival of Achaean fortunes. The careless ease of Zeus—even as he risks, but never loses, his rule—is not untypical.

2 (p. 216) *Like a ruthless, death-bearing boulder that bounds down the slope... and rolls to a stop:* The boulder to which Hector is now compared recalls that with which Hector burst open the gate of the Achaean defenses at the end of book XII (lines 481-497). But the simile of the boulder also suggests the increasing degree to which Hector, caught up in his own momentum, in his own certainty of Zeus' favor, becomes

less the agent of his own choices than the object borne along by the now uncontrollable rush of events that he himself has set in motion.

3 (p. 218) He met ... *Meriones / On his way to fetch a bronze-headed spear:* Idomeneus and Meriones come upon each other in a situation of potential mutual embarrassment, for each discovers the other well behind the fighting line. With relieved good humor, each asserts his own valor and accepts the correspondent claims of the other. With their spears restored, they return to the battlefield.

4 (p. 224) ... *standing / In back of the battle, for Aeneas was always angry / At*

royal Priam: Aeneas' absence from the battle is explained in terms of rivalry between the two branches of the Trojan royal house—one represented by Priam and Hector, the other by Anchises and Aeneas (see note 9 to book II above). The cause of the dispute is an offense to “honor” that goes unexplained, but Aeneas' anger is expressed by a (verbal) form that derives from the word for Achilles' anger (*menis*); and like Achilles after Patroclus' death, Aeneas ends his withdrawal for the sake of one who is dear to him.

[5](#) (p. 232) “... I'll *come back* as soon as *I've given my orders*”: Polydamas concludes his third speech of advice to

Hector with a first Trojan premonition of the return of Achilles. Hector does not acknowledge that point, but he does (for the first and only time) heed Polydamas' advice to call a council of the Trojan leaders. A council, however, is not possible, as it turns out that the principal Trojan fighters are wounded or dead. Polydamas' advice is good, but circumstance has rendered it inapplicable; caution is no longer permitted Hector.

Book XIV: The Tricking of Zeus

1 (p. 236) *The cries of battle were not unheard by Nestor, / Though at his wine:* This opening scene of Nestor at his wine, accompanied by Machaon and attended by Hecamede, picks up immediately upon the scene where we last saw Nestor (in book XI, immediately before the dispatch of Patroclus). The ancient commentators express some shock at the amount of time that Nestor has been drinking while his fellow Achaeans have been fighting—ever since XI. 720, some three books earlier. But at issue is less Nestor's

heroic tippling than Homer's narration of simultaneous actions as consecutive. A scene that the poet puts aside is picked up where it was left off, while the intervening actions are conceived of as concurrent with that scene. The battlefield action framed by Nestor's bout of drinking is simultaneous with it—that is, the drinking of book XIV is temporally continuous with the drinking of book XI (no intervening time has elapsed), and the scenes in Nestor's shelter are simultaneous with the fighting of books XII and XIII.

2 (p. 238) "*Far better to flee and escape / Than stay and be taken*": Agamemnon proposes, now for the third

time, a retreat to the ships and a sailing from Troy—though a launching of the ships while under attack risks a total disaster, as Odysseus will point out. When Agamemnon falsely and foolishly proposed a retreat in book II (131-138), it was Odysseus who succeeded in regrouping the army; following Agamemnon's call for retreat in book IX (lines 18-26), it was Diomedes who rallied the leaders with a speech. In the present instance, both Diomedes and Odysseus will intervene to prevent an Achaean retreat.

3 (p. 240) *And then she considered, the
heifer-eyed / Queenly Hem, how she
might best trick the wits / Of aegis-*

great Zeus: Hera, delighting from afar in Poseidon's aid to the Achaeans, resolves that Zeus should remain indolent for as long as possible; she will seduce her husband. The ensuing "Deception of Zeus" is an episode of darkly glittering humor that burlesques the tradition of the *hierogamia*, or Sacred Marriage. The holy union of Zeus and Hera was imagined to take place upon a mountaintop and to produce the divine, fertilizing dew upon which the seasonal success of the crops was dependent; this divine marriage was reenacted and celebrated at various festival-rites throughout the Greek world from as early as the Mycenaean period (see lines 394—399 for an eruption of

fecund nature at the climax of the hierogamia of Zeus and Hera). In the Homeric parody, neither Zeus nor Hera retain much—or any—of their cultic aura and awe. Hera, driven by hatred, perverts her role as protector of the domestic hearth: She must seduce her own husband; her conjugal “duty” is itself a trick. Zeus’ role as husband of Hera (and guardian of guest-friendship) is surely vitiated by his catalog of prior seductions (lines 360-370), while his recitation of past amours—each an occasion of strife with Hera—seems calculated to repel rather than attract (though Hera, if her seduction is to succeed, must swallow any of the gall

that Zeus' recitation of former lovers surely induces).

4 (p. 241) *And slyly Queen Hera replied: "Give me now, then, / Love and desire..."*: Hera's seduction of Zeus requires an initial deception of Aphrodite; if Hera is to succeed, she will need the love-charms that Aphrodite can provide. The less-than-astute goddess of love is easily duped by Hera's tale that she is on a mission to restore conjugal relations between the squabbling Oceanus and Tethys (who are here conceived of as primeval, cosmogonic parents), for domestic harmony is, after all, Hera's divine concern. But, of course, the outcome of

Hera's seduction will be an increase in strife between her and Zeus, a further sharpening of Olympian divisions. Oceanus and Tethys—whose union might bode a cosmic harmony—will not be reconciled.

[5](#) (p. 243) “*And now / You want me to do this other impossible thing*”: Sleep initially refuses Hera's request with a recollection of a prior occasion on which he had aided Hera's plans by charming Zeus to sleep. While Zeus was held under Sleep's dominion, Hera caused Heracles—as he departed from Troy, following the first Sack of the city (V.715-716, and see note 4 on book V above)—to be swept away to the island

of Cos (Zeus himself will give further details at XV. 28-32); on Cos, Heracles will have to fight several Giants (Pindar's *Nemean* 4.25-27 and *Isthmian* 6.31-33), who are also among the opponents of Zeus' rule. The entire narrative of the "Deception of Zeus" is shot through with allusions to prior cosmic strife (note Zeus' response upon waking up from Sleep's first spell)—and will itself precipitate an intensification of Olympian discord.

[6](#) (p. 247) *And as when a huge oak / Falls... Hector crashed to the dusty earth*: The battle of Hector and Ajax has been forestalled from the end of book XIII (lines 956-960). The simile of the

felled oak—toughest of trees—leads an audience to think that Hector has been slain. Hector, however, though badly stunned, is carried off the field and revived, if with difficulty, by his comrades. In Hector's absence—and as Zeus slumbers contentedly on—the Trojan rout begins (and is soon accelerated by the gruesome, panic-inducing slaughter of Ilioneus, at XIV.561-573). The battle will not be reversed until Hector's return to battle in book XV (beginning at line 301); the Greeks will respond to Hector as to a man miraculously restored to life (beginning at line 327).

Book XV: The Achaeans Desperate

1 (p. 252) “... how *little real good it does you / To ... Seduce me to lie with you and make love*”: Zeus, roused from his post-coital slumber, quickly realizes the implication of Hera’s perfidy; she no longer simply resists his will (as she did in books I, II, and VIII) but actively plots against it. In response, Zeus invokes the very same rebellion that Sleep had earlier cited in his initial refusal of Hera’s plans: the stormy transport of Heracles to Cos (XIV.281-290, with note 5 to book XIV above); but the emphasis now falls not upon Sleep’s

fear of punishment, but upon Zeus' extravagant prior punishment of Hera: his hand-to-foot binding of her by a golden chain. Though Zeus' response to Hera retains some of the comic energy of the "Deception of Zeus," his description of lashing and binding Hera likely references an underlying myth of cosmic strife between sky-god and earth-goddess. The "anvils" (Greek *akmones*) attached to Hera's ankles are themselves meteorites, signs of Zeus' punishing thunderbolt.

2 (p. 252) "*... it is by no will of mine that Poseidon ... does damage to Trojans and Hector / And nothing but good for their foes*": Hera once again

swears by the Styx (as she did in her persuasion of Sleep), but her words carefully sidestep essentials: Poseidon had intervened on the Achaeans' behalf of his own accord; she says nothing of her own actions to aid Poseidon. Perjury is avoided, and so is the truth.

[3](#) (p. 253) “... Thetis... *pleading with me to honor her son, / Achilles, taker of towns*”: In response to Hera's oath, Zeus foretells his overarching plan in the greatest detail yet—now including the death of Sarpedon, his own son. No longer immobilized by Hera's trick, Zeus reasserts his own authority as he prophecies the progress of his plan to honor Thetis. Zeus' speech, however, is

unexpectedly conciliatory: He will not beat Hera or hang her from her ankles but will instead seek to incorporate her into his plans: She is to be the agent of Poseidon's acquiescence to Zeus' plan; the goal is now an Olympian unanimity in Zeus' will. Zeus' inclusion of the death of Sarpedon in his unfolding of events is itself a sacrifice to the cause of Olympian conciliation. All the immortals, Zeus included, must lose someone or something dear to them; thus, we next see that Ares must reconcile himself (under Athena's harsh tutelage) to the loss of his son Ascalaphus (XV.148-166).

[4](#) (p. 257) "... *then truly the rancorous*

breach between us / Will not be subject to healing!”: Poseidon is reconciled to Zeus’ rule with more difficulty than was Ares. He acquiesces only after a second reminder from Iris that Zeus is the elder—now given threatening force by an invocation of the Furies, enforcers of familial order and respect. Poseidon’s sticking point of contention is the threat that Zeus poses to the balance of divine power. Though younger than Zeus, Poseidon stakes his claim on his brotherly equality with Zeus, as well as with Hades. According to the story of the drawing of lots, each of the three brothers received as their own the respective realms of the Sea, the Heavens, and the Underworld (with

earth and Olympus as shared territory). Poseidon claims that he would stay in his realm if only Zeus would remain in his, but Iris' reiteration of the link between primogeniture and power finally prevails, and Poseidon abruptly retires into the sea—in much less grandiose fashion than that with which he emerged at the start of book XIII (lines 49-50).

[5](#) (p. 261) ... *O powerful Phoebus / You undid the Achaeans' hard toil and filled them with panic*: The Achaeans' hard labor in the building of their wall and the Trojans' grueling campaign against that wall and its defenders in book XII stand in marked contrast to the ease with

which Apollo now breaches the wall—like a boy gleefully knocking down his sand castles. The present passage surely recalls the proem of book XII (see endnote 1 to book XII above).

[6](#) (p. 262) Patroclus ... *groaned aloud and slapped his thighs / With the flat of his hands...* : Slapping the thighs expresses extreme and pressing grief. Earlier in the poem, Asius (XII.170), then Ares, in grief for his son Ascalaphus (XV. 129-130), used this gesture; this linked series will culminate at XVI. 149, when Achilles slaps his thighs at the sight of fire on the Achaean ships. The present scene of Patroclus tending to Eurypylus rejoins that at the

end of book XI (lines 902-920), where Patroclus' return to Achilles was interrupted by his pity for the wounded Eurypylus; his concern for the entirety of the Achaeans now sets him back in motion.

7 (pp. 267-268) Zeus... *was waiting to see the glare from a flaming ship, / For then ... he would... give the Danaans glorious victory*: The poet prefaces the great and fearful victory of Hector with a recapitulation of Zeus' plan: Even as the poet anticipates Hector's coming triumph, he also reminds his audience that Hector's glory (coupled with Zeus' favor) will be temporary, subordinate to Zeus' overarching plan to honor forever

Thetis and her son.

Book XVI: The Death of Patroclus

1 (p. 272) ...Patroclus / Came up to Achilles... weeping like a spring / Whose dark *streams trickle down the rocky face of a cliff*: Patroclus' interrupted return to Achilles is now complete (see endnote 6 to book XV above). The comparison of Patroclus' tears to a spring of dark water recalls the tears of Agamemnon that began book IX (lines 15-16); and as in book IX, a supplication of Achilles now follows, which itself evokes two examples from Phoenix' book IX speech: First, as Meleager was supplicated by Cleopatra,

so Achilles is now supplicated by the one dearest to him, Patroclus (see endnote 10 to book IX above); second, Patroclus' plea to Achilles might well be construed as analogous to the intervention of the Prayers, who (in Phoenix' allegory), if scorned, pray to Zeus for a renewed and decisive fate (see endnote 8 to book IX above). But we should also keep in mind that Achilles, in book IX, seems—in his concentrating wrath—to contemplate understandings and actions that, though shaped by the old stories and allegories, are no longer wholly in agreement with, or guided by, those same stories.

[2](#) (p. 273) “*But if your heart is set on*

escaping some dire word / From Zeus, revealed to you by your goddess mother...”: Patroclus, in his concluding appeal to Achilles, takes up the very words of Nestor’s exhortation to Patroclus in book XI, which follows upon the old man’s account of his youthful exploits (lines 877-884): Is Achilles inhibited by some prophecy? If so, then let Patroclus go forth in Achilles’ armor. In place of Nestor’s account of boyhood cattle-raids, Patroclus charges Achilles with pitilessness: His parents are not Thetis and Peleus (whom he has just claimed to love), but the sea and the cliffs, so bereft is he of mortal care. Responsiveness to others, which Patroclus has exemplified

in his healing and tendance of Eurypylus in books XI and XV (lines 904-913 and 447—451, with notes above), is now also the ground of Patroclus' indictment of Achilles and of his fatal appeal that he himself be permitted to return to the fight.

3 (p. 273) “... *nor has my goddess mother brought to me / Any such word from Zeus*”: This is an interpretative crux: Some readers, ancient and modern, have charged Achilles with a lack of full candor in his denial of any prophetic word from his mother, for at IX.471-478—the “Choice of Achilles,” itself one of the most famous of Iliadic passages—Achilles spoke of Thetis' prophecy of

alternate fates: a long life without renown in Phthia or a youthful death at Troy recompensed by “glory forever”; other readers, however, have stressed the human motivations of Homer’s characters: They do not seek, and are not influenced by, prophetic advice, for such would diminish their mortal responsibility; prophecies are directly referred to only when their recollection is too late (see XVIII.8-12: “Olet it not be ...”) ; full revelation of Zeus’ plan for Achilles does not take place until XVIII.109-111 , when Achilles, “greatly moved,” acknowledges his coming death.

[4](#) (pp. 273-274) *“I will not, it seems, /*

Be filled with fierce anger forever, though I said I would not / Change my mind till the fighters were screaming about my own vessels”: Another interpretative crux: Achilles acknowledges that he cannot remain ceaselessly wrathful, and yet he still does not return to battle but rather assents to Patroclus’ plan (which originated with Nestor) to send Patroclus forth in his stead. One interpretation proposes that Achilles is simply holding himself to his word, as he announced it to Ajax and the Embassy at IX. 747-7 59 (and see endnote 12 to book IX): He will not fight until the fire reaches his ships, which has not yet happened; Achilles, then, suffers for his

own ethic of honesty. A second interpretation holds that Achilles, even while acknowledging that his wrath cannot be perpetual, clings relentlessly to his hatred of Agamemnon, who treated him as “some lowly contemptible tramp”; the price paid for Achilles’ intransigence, his “tragic error,” is the death of Patroclus. A final interpretative possibility is that Achilles recognizes that the moment to put aside his wrath has arrived, even as he honors Patroclus’ request to aid the Achaeans; Achilles relinquishes his wrath by means of an act of friendship.

5 (pp. 274-275) “... *Deeply I wish... That just myself and Patroclus might*

live and alone / Succeed in reducing this... sacred city / To rubble and dust”: To Patroclus’ earlier question about what profit Achilles might be to men to come (XVI.35-36), Achilles responds with a demonic prayer for the destruction of all Achaeans and Trojans except for himself and Patroclus. And to Patroclus’ appeal to the love or comradeship of the army (Greek *philotes*), Achilles responds that the only love that now binds—the only love worthy of existence—is that between himself and Patroclus. In Achilles’ prayer, the unconscious—where love and death intertwine, which knows neither yes nor no—erupts.

6 (p. 276) ... *and Patroclus / Put on the glittering bronze*: For arming scenes, see endnote 3 to book III above. The assemblage of Patroclus' borrowed regalia highlights elements that likely derive from the folktale motif of three magical gifts: invincible armor, a spear that always returns to its hero, and immortal horses. Achilles' armor will have to be knocked from Patroclus before he can be killed (XVI.913-931), while Achilles' mighty ash spear proves too weighty for Patroclus to lift, foretelling Patroclus' doomed effort to take over Achilles' role. To Achilles' immortal horses, Automedon adds, as a trace-horse, the mortal Pedasus, who

will be killed by Sarpedon: The mix of mortal with immortal horses surely also bodes ill, even as it also suggests something of Patroclus' own unstable admixture of elements.

[7](#) (p. 279) *"I pray let him come back to these swift ships and me ... And with him bring back his close-fighting Myrmidon comrades"*: In his solemn prayer, Achilles reminds Zeus of his positive response to Achilles' prayer from book I: The Achaeans have, indeed, been smote (Achilles' present prayer to Zeus follows the model set by Chryses' second prayer to Apollo in book I, following Apollo's striking of the Achaeans with plague [see lines

531-537]). By invoking Zeus' prior favorable response, Achilles hopes again to influence Zeus, to bring Zeus into accord with his own desire. But Zeus' plan no longer aligns with Achilles' desire, nor with the possibilities of the traditional hero's life. Achilles prays that Patroclus might gain, in the fighting, both glory and a safe return—the two poles of Achilles' "choice" in book IX and two elements that cannot both structure a hero's life. In another sense, Achilles prays to Zeus to affirm Achilles' own prior double injunction to Patroclus upon sending him forth to battle (XVI. 104-107): "to win great glory," but not to "get carried away / In the heat of conflict and slaughter"; as

we will soon see, the two commands cannot coexist.

8 (p. 284) “... *and you / Will surely stir up fierce resentment among the immortals*”: The death of sons and the grief of fathers has been a recurrent source of pathos in the Iliad’s account of fallen warriors; that theme is now enacted on the divine level. In response to Zeus’ sorrow and vacillation about the death of Sarpedon (which Zeus himself foretold at XV.71-74; see also V.733-738 and XII.434-435, where Sarpedon is, in each instance, saved for his present fate), Hera invokes the finality of human mortality, and, crucially, she holds Zeus to the divine

compromise that was enunciated in book XV: All the gods must lose something beloved; Zeus, as ruler of the gods, must make a paradigmatic sacrifice of his own beloved son. If Zeus should fail to uphold the order of the cosmos, itself predicated upon an irreversible human mortality, chaos would ensue: All the gods would take to the battlefield.

[9](#) (p. 290) “... *the dead's due rites, a proper / Entombment, with mound and memorial pillar*”: Sarpedon's body was earlier described as unrecognizable, covered by weapons, blood, and dust (XVI.728-730); the befouling of Sarpedon's body anticipates the mutilation with which Patroclus' corpse

will be threatened as well as the actual savagery inflicted upon Hector's corpse. Sarpedon's corpse is, however, rescued by Apollo and by Sleep and Death, under orders from Zeus. The terrifying violence of the battlefield, in which warriors are not only killed but their corpses mutilated, gives way to divine cleansing and to a mysterious transport as gentle (and welcome) as sleep. The "mound and memorial pillar" that Zeus promises foresee the establishment of a heroic tomb in Lycia, at which cult honors will be dedicated to Sarpedon; later literary and epigraphical evidence does, indeed, attest to local honors in Lycia for Sarpedon (and for Glaucus).

10 (p. 291) *Three times* Patroclus /
Sprang up ... and three times / Apollo
battered him back ... : Patroclus' triple
attack upon the Wall of Troy, countered
by Apollo's triple defense, is a narrative
pattern that we first saw at V.482-496,
in Diomedes' attack upon Apollo; we
will see the same pattern again, at
XX.497-498, where Apollo has already
swept Hector away. In each instance, the
hero is said to be "like a demon"—or,
"like something more than a man"—upon
his fourth charge. To make the fourth
charge is, then, to surpass a mortal limit,
to bring oneself into direct conflict with
the god—who is, in all three cases,
Apollo. In book V, Diomedes retreats

following Apollo's warning at the fourth charge (thus barely saving his life); here, in book XVI, Patroclus too retreats after the fourth charge, but only temporarily, for the pattern will soon repeat itself at lines 910-914, where Apollo proceeds to contrive Patroclus' death. Achilles—whose permanent condition is “like something more than a man”—will also be killed through Apollo's machinations (though outside the Iliad itself).

[11](#) (p. 292) “*I had no idea they had / Such performers in Troy*”: If Patroclus' pity—his healing capacity—has been the leading element of his prior characterization, his cruel taunt over the body of Cebriones, as well as the

escalating blood-frenzy of his killings, dramatizes that Patroclus is no less susceptible than his comrades to the berserker aspects of the warrior. Achilles' parting advice to Patroclus—to "come back" once the Trojans have been driven from the ships (XVI. 101-102)—proves fatally impossible, for the trajectory of the warrior in his *aristeia* moves inevitably toward a furious transgressive violence that wreaks death even as it pollutes the warrior himself. The warrior who is "like something more than a man" is also like something less than human—defiling and finally defiled: This is the state that epic poetry itself must purify.

[12](#) (p. 295) “... *while Hector came third in my slaying*”: In his death throes, Patroclus knows exactly who his slayers were, which he could not have known at the climax of battle itself, for Apollo was invisible, while Euphorbus struck from behind, then disappeared into the ranks. The nearness of death makes Patroclus prophetic, and the accuracy of his account of his own death vouchsafes his prophecy that Hector will die at Achilles’ hands. Hector’s victory precipitates Hector’s death.

Book XVII: The Valiant Deeds of Menelaus

1 (p. 300) “So something, at least, would be saved”: On the form of the warrior’s monologue, see Odysseus’ speech at XI.459-468, with endnote 3 to book XI above. Menelaus begins with an acknowledgment of his own responsibility for Patroclus’ death—beneath which might also lurk a deeper sense of his own responsibility for the war as well as his own ineffectiveness in prosecuting it. He further acknowledges the blame that others would cast upon him for now abandoning Patroclus, but then—

extraordinarily, and in marked contrast to the other monologists cited above—he withdraws, seeking the help of Ajax. The general pattern of withdrawal and call for aid will recur throughout book XVII, as will the use of rebuke as a goad to action.

[2](#) (p. 301) “... for he is much stronger than you”: Sarpedon’s dying words were an appeal to Glaucus, his comrade from Lycia, to recover his armor (XVI.561-572); following Sarpedon’s death (and after being healed by Apollo), Glaucus rallied the Trojan forces. In this speech of rebuke, Glaucus’ grief for his lost comrade leads to angry abuse of Hector and to the threat to return home with the

remaining Lycians. Glaucus' conviction of the cowardice and ingratitude of Hector and the Trojans, freely developed amid thoughts of the lost beloved, bears comparison to Achilles' response to Odysseus in book IX.

3 (p. 302) ... armor he had from his father: The armor of Achilles was a gift from his father, Peleus, who himself received the panoply (full suit of armor) from the gods. Hector, like Patroclus before him, secures his own doom by donning the immortal armor (as Zeus' immediately following prophecy reiterates). The gifts of the gods are, it seems, intended only for their original recipients (and their descendants); but

the divine arms also prove irresistible for those who would “be” Achilles, whether first for Patroclus in his beneficent desire to save the Achaeans and now for Hector, who is driven by a densely compacted set of emotions and motives: resentment at Glaucus’ chastening rebuke, the desire to claim (and extend) divine favor, desperate need to save Troy, and heroic vainglory.

[4](#) (p. 304) Zeus ... hated to see / His body become the delight of his enemies’ dogs: With this evocation of Zeus’ care for Patroclus as well as of the dread fate that threatens the unprotected body, the battle for Patroclus’ corpse recommences in earnest; it will not be

settled until XVIII.238, by Achilles' intervention. The extraordinary length of the battle for Patroclus' corpse, in its brutality and animal similes, well dramatizes the tendency of Homer's warriors to become the beast—preeminently, the dog or jackal—that they themselves most fear (the extraordinary simile of the Myrmidons and the wolves at XVI. 184—192 anticipates this theme); as well, an audience remains in prolonged anticipation of Achilles' response to his comrade's death (Achilles' ignorance of Patroclus' death at lines XVII.474—485).

[5](#) (p. 309) ... still / As a pillar of stone

on the grave of some dead man or woman, / Bowing their heads to the ground: At the very center of book XVII stand Achilles' immortal horses, as immobile as a grave stele in their mourning for Patroclus (which foreshadows their inevitable mourning for Achilles) . Zeus then proceeds to read (as it were) that central stele in his following reflections upon the "wretched" condition of humans, so keenly aware of their own mortality. Zeus' pity, however, is more for the horses than for the humans, for the immortal horses have permitted themselves to grieve for mortals.

[6](#) (p. 317) And there was no respite at

all from the horrible war: With the sending-forth of Antilochus to Achilles and with this final chaotic scene of fighting, the absence of Achilles is drawing to a close, as is the battle narrative that has dominated the previous ten books, with the exception of book IX. The impasse evident in the fighting over Patroclus' corpse is set to be broken by the vengeful return of Achilles.

Book XVIII: The Shield of Achilles

1 (p. 318) Truly, / Gallant Patroclus must now be dead: We have not seen Achilles since his prayer to Zeus for Patroclus' safe return (XVI. 2 74—291, with endnote 7 to book XVI above). In the monologue that opens book XVIII, Achilles fears what an audience has long known: Patroclus is dead. The evident rout of the Achaeans signals to Achilles that Patroclus must have perished. As well, Achilles now recalls Thetis' prophetic words that Patroclus would die at Troy before Achilles—a clarification of the prophecy as reported

at XVII.480-483, where it was understood to mean that Achilles and Patroclus would not take Troy together (and where Achilles seemed to understand that he himself would die first). The full recollection and clarification of Thetis' prophecy—namely, that Patroclus will die first—only comes when it is devastatingly too late. The confusion and late memory that surrounds Thetis' prophecy serves to ensure that Achilles' motivations are only human—limited by partial knowledge and expectant hopes.

[2](#) (p. 319) ... Antilochus ... held / The hands of heart-grieved Achilles, for fear that he might / Draw a blade and cut his

own throat: Gestures of mourning and intimations of Achilles' own death now merge. The befouling of head and of clothes while rolling in the dust is a sign of mourning, even as it is also suggestive of the warrior's death. The lamentation of the Nereid chorus that follows, as well as the particular lament of Thetis at lines 59—67: ("Here me, O Nereids ..."), also suggests that it is Achilles who is now mourned as much as Patroclus. Thetis' cradling of Achilles' head upon her arrival at the ships is also a gesture of mourning ; she holds Achilles as if he were already a corpse.

[3](#) (p. 320) "Then soon let me die! since I was not there to help / My friend when

he died”: With these terse lines, among the most moving in the poem, Achilles accepts his own death; the meaning of Thetis’ prophecy is now crystalline, as is Achilles’ acceptance of it. He will return to battle not for gifts or kingships but to avenge the loss of his beloved. As Achilles acknowledges in his prior exchange with Thetis, Zeus has granted Achilles’ prayers, but only with the sacrifice of the one companion whose love bound Achilles to the mortal world. Apart from Patroclus—and now forever separated from Patroclus—Achilles is, as he goes on to assert, “just so much / Useless weight to burden the earth” (lines 116-117).

[4](#) (p. 321) “... for I will have made them / Know what it means for me to be present in battle”: Achilles speaks of the coming mourning of the Trojan widows even as he himself lies prostrate, surrounded by the grieving Nereids. Achilles reasserts his place as warrior—and his image foreshadows the Fall of Troy—but in his grief for Patroclus he seems also to identify himself with the inconsolable widow. Our perspective oscillates rapidly between the heroic battle for glory and the devastation that the battle wreaks.

[5](#) (p. 321) Then Zeus-loved Achilles / Got up, and about his shoulders Athena flung / The bright-tasseled aegis ... : As

he rises from his prostrate position of mourning, Achilles' withdrawal comes to an awe-filled end. This is Achilles' apotheosis, the momentary culmination of his desire for immortality. Athena herself arms the naked Achilles with the divine aegis, and the goddess wreathes his head with a golden cloud, which is otherwise only associated with divinities; the fire that burns from Achilles' head is elsewhere used by Zeus to subdue the Titans. The triple-scream of Achilles (XVIII. 254-258) is itself a deadly force, killing twelve Trojans and throwing their army into rout (thus freeing Patroclus' corpse); and the scream is a response to the loss of the beloved Patroclus—an

intensification of the mourning cries upon the beach. The force that Achilles' scream unlooses is so daemonic that the cosmos itself is disrupted : Hera, fearful of utter chaos, pushes the Sun down early—and, at last, the Great Day of Battle comes to a stunning conclusion.

[6](#) (p. 326) They lauded / Hector and his bad advice, but not one man / Had praise for Polydamas, although his counsel was wise: The poet unambiguously signals Hector's error. Exulting in the victories of the day and still confident of Zeus' favor, Hector vaunts that he can now defeat even Achilles—if Achilles really has even returned. Borne along by Hector's hopes, the Trojans assent to his

counsel to remain on the Trojan plain rather than to retreat behind the safety of the city-wall. And so the Trojans are destroyed by Achilles on the following day.

[7](#) (p. 331) He made lovely images there / Of earth and heaven ... : For Achilles, Hephaestus forges a great round shield upon the model of those that the other heroes have carried: a shield of multiple layers stretched over a lighter frame, fronted by decorated bronze. But the divinely wrought Shield of Achilles quickly leaves its precedents behind so as to become a dazzling display of the poet's own art—now deployed not in the representation of the heroic order, but of

a non-heroic world, which we have previously glimpsed only in the similes. On the Shield of Achilles, the disparate abundance of similes scattered throughout the poem is shaped into a coherent and ordered whole. Hephaestus begins his work with the central ring of the Shield, which depicts the heavenly bodies. These are the fixed signs, whose regular, observable progress through the heavens orders the rhythms and regularities of human life and the seasons of the agricultural year.

8 (p. 331) On it he wrought / Two beautiful cities ... : The second ring of the Shield (from the center) depicts a city at peace and a city at war. The

emphasis falls upon cultural and political practice and mediation: The wedding and adjudication scenes present the possibility of political unity through, first, the making of kinship, then through the possibility of political adjudication of communal strife. In the city at war, we also see the possibility of collective action in the debates of the council and in the planning and execution of the ambush. For further interpretative suggestions on this ring of the Shield, see the introduction.

[9](#) (p. 333) And there on the shield / He depicted the huge estate of a king, whereon / His workers were reaping ... : On the third and central ring of the

concentric design, Hephaestus depicts the farmer's year: ploughing, reaping, vintage, and fallow seasons. While the first ring presented the world of nature and the second the world of human culture (as kinship and as politics), the middle ring displays man's potentially productive relation with the natural world—a relation wholly excluded from the main narrative of the Iliad.

[10](#) (p. 334) And on it the famous lame god / Made with great skill a dancing-floor: On the fourth and penultimate ring, Hephaestus returns to the depiction of the cultural world, but now as art. The dance is pure motion; the community depicted is a joyous one. It is the genius

of the Iliad-poet to remind us that if the cultural work depicted on the second ring—the wedding and the court—is what we need to live with each other in something close to peace (in private and in public), we yet also need artful communion and release; while the second ring depicts the culture that we need, the fourth ring depicts the culture that we want.

[11](#) (p. 334) ... all about the rim of the massive shield / He put the powerful stream of the river Oceanus: The final, encircling ring of the Shield repeats the pure motion of the fourth ring, though now in the realm of nature, and presents a contrast to the first ring, which

depicted nature in its fixity and regularity.

Book XIX: The Reconciliation

1 (p. 337) “Now I ... shall put an end / To my wrath. It would hardly become me to go on this way / Forever”: Achilles’ language and sentiment is quite close to that at XVI.72—74 (and see endnote 4 to book XVI) . In the earlier passage, the recognition that anger cannot be fierce forever led to the sending forth of Patroclus. With Patroclus now dead, and with Achilles suffering for that death, Achilles himself will venture forth. Though Achilles’ speech is one of reconciliation with Agamemnon and with the Achaean camp

(he does not speak of Patroclus or of the motive of revenge in this speech), his imperiousness remains: It was Achilles who called the Assembly, and it is Achilles who now gives a battle-order to Agamemnon.

2 (p. 337) “Very often you men of Achaea have had / Your say and spoken against me, though really I am not / To blame”: Agamemnon, in response to Achilles’ expression of remorse to the assembled Achaeans, pronounces himself blameless: Zeus, Fate, the Fury, and, most especially, Ate (“Sweet Folly”) gained control of him; Agamemnon has blamed Ate before, in his false account of Zeus in book II and

in his sincere and desperate proposal to flee Troy in book IX (see II.131-132 and IX.132, with endnotes to each passage). In hindsight, a foolish and disastrous act, otherwise inexplicable, is blamed upon an impulse from without. Agamemnon proceeds to offer a lengthy etiology of Ate—and why she wanders among mortals—in his retelling of the birth and bondage of Heracles. Throughout his account, Agamemnon draws a parallel, doubtless displeasing to Achilles, between himself and Zeus, but ignores the parallel suggested by the story of Heracles and Eurystheus—the man of better nature enslaved to the man of kingly power.

3 (p. 339) “Renowned ... Agamemnon, / The gifts are yours to give or withhold”: Though Ate is to blame, Agamemnon does offer gifts to Achilles; the social practice of compensation—the acceptance of juridical responsibility—needs still to be enacted. Achilles, however, no less than in book IX, is unmoved by the old stories and will not accept Agamemnon’s gifts. No less than before, Achilles’ acceptance of Agamemnon’s compensatory gifts would legitimate Agamemnon’s authority, as well as the underlying economy of heroic honor. The desire for revenge drives Achilles’ return to the Achaean camp, but he remains resistant to the

social forms and obligations that construct and govern that camp.

4 (p. 340) “It would be much better... to take care of these things / At some other time ... when my own spirit is somewhat appeased”: Odysseus has diplomatically proposed a transfer of gifts and a swearing of oaths; he has also vigorously and at surprising length asserted the necessity of the feast so as to refresh and fortify the troops for the coming battle; Agamemnon approves. Achilles again defers the gifts and, now, the oaths (when the gifts are brought to his shelter, he makes no acknowledgment of them); as for the feast, whose practical necessity is so

passionately described by Odysseus, Achilles will not join in that either. To Odysseus' appeals to the life-sustaining necessity of food, Achilles, now death-bound, is impervious. The feast, for Achilles, is neither an occasion of collective commensality nor even of biological sustenance; what does sustain is the desire for revenge.

5 (p. 343) "Hence I weep / For your death without ceasing, for you the forever gentle": Briseis, the object of the initial dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon, previously a mute sign of the honor of male heroes, now speaks. The history that she recounts is one of escalating loss, including that of her

husband. But Patroclus, “forever gentle” in his healing role, had assuaged Briseis’ grief with the promise of a wedding in Phthia to Achilles, where she might have recovered a social place and a social world. With the death of Patroclus and, soon, that of Achilles, Briseis’ displacement and grief—her suffering of the depredations of war—becomes, again, her fixed fate.

[6](#) (p. 344) ... my own Neoptolemus, / If indeed that godlike boy is still alive: Achilles makes the extraordinary assertion that the death of Patroclus is more grievous to him than that of father or of son. The prior limit of imaginable grief, the loss of male kin, is here

surpassed by the loss of the companion in love. To eat would, in Achilles' formulation, be a betrayal of that love, for it would be a tacit admission that life goes on in the absence of the beloved.

Book XX: The Gods at War

1 (p. 347) But powerful Zeus ...
Bade Themis call the gods to a meeting
... : At the end of book XIX, Achilles
had armed in his new panoply, had
mounted his chariot, and was setting off
to lead the Achaeans (who have by now
had their feast) into battle. His aristeia is
now interrupted by a council of the gods,
at which Zeus revokes the prohibition
that he had established at the divine
council that began book VIII: The gods
are now free to enter the melee. Zeus'
reasons are twofold: Without the gods
on the field, Achilles will too soon,
earlier than is fated, take Troy; and Zeus,
who now watches from the Olympian

heights, anticipates a spectacularly entertaining contest: the comedic struggles of the gods; the piteous, tragic struggles of the mortals. We might also suggest that the disordering presence of the gods upon the battlefield—at XX.67-73, Hades itself might burst open—is especially appropriate to the return of Achilles: As the overthrowing son that Zeus avoided by marrying Thetis to Peleus (see endnote 7 to book I above), Achilles, in his return to battle, with its cosmic and potentially chaos-inducing response, evokes the cosmos-overturning battle that Zeus has forever precluded—and that Zeus now manages, as if the artist-director of a private

spectacle.

2 (p. 349) So gods advanced to meet gods: With the gods now paired off against each other, like boxers awaiting the bell, the poet suddenly returns our attention to Achilles. The narrative of the Theomachy, “The Battle of the Gods,” will not resume until XXI.431 (where it will take a rather more comic turn). Achilles’ aristeia—the hero himself is searching relentlessly for Hector—is now rejoined, but only to be interrupted again: Rather than the usual series of successful duels, Achilles is now involved in a lengthy and inconclusive battle with Aeneas (on whom, see endnote 9 to book II and

endnote 4 to book XIII above).

3 (p. 352) “But I claim descent from courageous Anchises, my father, / And Aphrodite herself”: Achilles has just taunted Aeneas for his lack of favor within the Trojan ruling house (“Priam would not give the kingship to you. King Priam / Has sons of his own,” lines 205-206). Aeneas, following his complaints about needless verbosity, responds to Achilles with an extended discourse on genealogical themes. He first matches his descent from Aphrodite against Achilles’ descent from Thetis (both heroes are “half-divines”), then offers a full recitation of the Trojan genealogical line. Aeneas’ recitation, coming at a

point in the poem where images of Troy's impending destruction have been cumulating (most impressively in the similes on the fire that shoots from Achilles' head upon his appearance at the trench, XVIII.232-239), serves as a memorial of the entire Trojan line, which is soon to be utterly destroyed—with the exception of Aeneas himself (see note immediately below).

[4](#) (p. 355) "... Aeneas shall soon rule / The Trojans, and after him the sons of his sons, / Great princes yet to be born": Poseidon's prophecy of Aeneas' coming rule over the Trojans reverses the lack of honor in which his line is now held. Though the line that descends from Ilus

through Priam and his sons will be destroyed for Paris' abduction of Helen, the descendants of Aphrodite through the blameless line of Anchises and Aeneas will be saved (see, too, the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite 196-197, which likewise prophecies the survival of Aeneas' line) . The contrast between the fates of Achilles and Aeneas, both goddess-born, is instructive: Achilles dies as a youthful hero and will be immortalized in the honor—the poetic fame—that the bard bestows; Aeneas, in contrast, will survive Troy's fall so as to be immortalized in the city-founding and cultural work of his own descendants; the former is immortalized in the timelessness of art, the latter in the

ongoing works of history. (Virgil's version of Poseidon's prophecy is: *hic domus Aeneae cunctis dominabitur oris / et nati natorum et qui nascentur ab illis* ("There the house of Aeneas will reign over all lands, even his children's children and those who will be born of them"), *Aeneid* 3.97-98).

[5](#) (p. 357) ... Achilles ... charged / Mid the Trojans, screaming his awesome war-cry: Achilles' *aristeia*, much interrupted, now begins in earnest with a massacre ; the mounting carnage is vividly evoked by the image of the chariot wheel that lacerates the corpse beneath (an image reiterated in greater detail in the final lines of this book).

Achilles' killing of the especially youthful, especially beloved Polydorus, son of Priam, draws Hector back to the forefront of the battle.

[6](#) (p. 359) But Apollo caught Hector up, with all the ease / Of a god, and wrapped him in cloud: Achilles is, once again, thwarted by divine intervention; even Achilles' power, it seems, is limited by the fated time for the Fall of Troy. On the immediately following triple attack, see endnote 10 to book XVI. While the fourth attack has, in our prior examples, placed the hero in fatal danger, Achilles will emerge from Apollo's mist baffled, but with his killing energy redoubled; "like a

demon,” he will slaughter the Trojans until, as is prophesied—but deferred—within the Iliad, Apollo (and Paris) will kill him before the gates of Troy.

Book XXI: The Struggle of Achilles and the River

1 . (p. 363) Lycaon then pleaded, with one hand clasping / Achilles' knees, with the other his sharp-pointed spear: For prior scenes of supplication, see endnote 1 to book VI above. Achilles' encounter with Lycaon is the culmination of supplication scenes involving "minor" characters; as well, it prepares the audience for the plea of Hector in book XXII. Lycaon, moreover, has a prior claim upon Achilles' religious scruples: While Lycaon was Achilles' captive (as both Achilles and Lycaon recount, Achilles did—in the time

before the death of Patroclus—respect the pleas of suppliants), he received hospitality (“Demeter’s bread”) from him; the breaking of bread between captor and captive creates a bond of guest-friendship between the two; this aspect of Lycaon’s story perhaps anticipates the shared meal in book XXIV between Achilles and Priam (who is Lycaon’s father).

2 (p. 364) “One morning or evening or noon / Will surely come when some man shall kill me in battle, / Either by hurling his spear or shooting a shaft / From the bowstring”: Achilles acknowledges Lycaon’s claims as suppliant and guest-friend by calling Lycaon “friend” (line

132, Greek philos) . Yet, in Achilles' present logic, all are preeminently "friend"—or "dear"—to death. Claims of religious scruple, as also claims of rank and status—Achilles, after all, is a goddess' son—are rendered meaningless by the brute fact of death itself: As Patroclus has died, so must Hector; as Hector, so Achilles; as Achilles, so all mortals. Achilles, in his demonic presence upon the battlefield, has himself become death for the Trojans, the agent of their fate as mortals.

[3](#) (p. 364) "... and many a wave-hidden fish shall dart up / Beneath the dark ripple to eat the fat of Lycaon": Though

the haunting threat that the hero's body will be devoured by dogs and birds is never literally fulfilled in the Iliad, Achilles does feed the body of Lycaon (and of Asteropaeus, soon to follow) to the eels and the fishes. If death in the river perhaps holds some possibility of purification that might lessen the horror of consumption by the fishes, that possibility is quickly eliminated by the complaint of Xanthus, the river-god, that his waters have been polluted by the slaughter that Achilles has wreaked within it.

[4](#) (p. 366) "Very hard it is for the son / Of a river to vie with a child of Cronos's son": Achilles, vaunting over the

corpse of the ambidextrous Asteropaeus, now responds to his opponent's initial boast of being born of a river goddess: Achilles is a son of Zeus, with whom no mere son of a river can contend; even Oceanus, the source of all the world's rivers, is no match for Zeus' lightning. Achilles' attempt to assert Zeus' paternity is, perhaps, motivated by the success of Aeneas' claims of superior descent from Aphrodite, which were acknowledged by Poseidon's rescue. By invoking his grandfather Aeacus' descent from Zeus, Achilles would play a genealogical trump card, though he can do so only by ignoring his mother's association with the element of water and by invoking his grandfather rather

than his father.

5 (p. 368) “O Father Zeus, why is it /
That none of the gods will pity my plight
and save me / From this dread river?”:
Achilles’ boast of genealogical
superiority to any river has been put to
the test by the enraged Scamander and
has been proven false. The river has
overwhelmed him, seemingly sweeping
away even the possibility of a hero’s
death before Troy; what awaits is an
ignoble death no better than that of
“some poor pig-herding boy”—so much
for Achilles’ genealogical boasts!
Likewise, Achilles’ prayer to Zeus, of
whose paternity he just boasted, will not
be answered; rather, Poseidon and

Athena, in mortal form, will offer Achilles encouragement. The defeat of Achilles' claims to be the son of Zeus again evokes the underlying mythology of Zeus' avoidance of union with Thetis (on which see endnote 1 to book XX and endnote 7 to book I); if Achilles were the son of Zeus, he would be the ruler of the cosmos. The battle with the river, in all its disordering and polluting force, evokes the possibility of Achilles' descent from Zeus, only so as to reject it decisively.

[6](#) (p. 369) ... he sent his towering wave,
churning / With foam and blood and
corpses, raging down / On Achilles: The
process begun by Achilles' slaughter-

drive of half the Trojans into the river and by his feeding of Lycaon and Asteropaeus to the fishes reaches a pitch of pollution, which then provokes yet more pollution. Only the fire of Hephaestus—which now engages in an elemental battle with the water of the river—can finally succeed in purifying the Scamandrus' streams; the higher purifying element burns the corpses and restores the prior beauty of the river (XXI.427-428).

[7](#) (p. 371) And Zeus, from where he sat high up on Olympus, / Heard the clashing and laughed to himself, delighted / To see the immortals at odds with each other: With the laughter of

Zeus, the Theomachy, which was interrupted at XX.84, where the gods were paired off and champing for action, resumes. The bouts that follow, with the exception of that between Apollo and Poseidon, prove well worthy of Zeus' laughter. The knockabout antics of the gods offer a brief respite from the defilement of Achilles' battle with the river and the upcoming duel with Hector. The essential frivolity of the Homeric gods is contrasted to the heroizing efforts of the mortals (a point acknowledged at the conclusion of the one non-comic encounter, between Poseidon and Apollo, where the brevity of human life becomes the reason for the gods' withdrawal). Finally, the comic

battles present a last defeat of the pro-Trojan gods (Ares, Aphrodite, Artemis, Hermes) prior to the Fall of Troy. Only Apollo retains his dignity; he departs to protect the fleeing Trojans, but even his role is limited to assuring that Achilles does not sack Troy before its appointed time (XXI.586-589).

Book XXII: The Death of Hector

[1](#) (p. 380) “... surely nothing more foul than this can come upon / Wretched mortals”: Priam concludes his appeal to Hector with a vivid description of the very worst death that can befall a Homeric man: to be devoured by his own dogs before his own house, exposed and disgraced among his own people; the proper orders of both house and community are betrayed and overturned. The warrior’s role, which finds its origin in the necessity of the community’s defense, is also associated with a savagery that reduces humans to

predatory dogs and that destroys the constituent values of civilization itself. In his appeal to Hector to return within the walls of Troy rather than to face Achilles, Priam threatens Hector with the guilt of killing a parent; so too—in the following speech—does Hecuba, who, in exposing her breast to her son, makes her appeal in the most literal of ways.

[2](#) (p. 381) “ ‘Great Hector put all / Of his trust in his own brute strength and destroyed the whole army’ ”: In the first portion of his soliloquy, Hector recalls his error in rejecting the advice of Polydamas at XVIII.353-355 (on which see endnote 6 to book XVIII): The

Trojans did remain on the Trojan plain, where they were then destroyed on the following day by Achilles. Hector's sense of shame before his community causes him now to remain outside the wall. His words also recall his dialogue with Andromache at VI.486-487 (on which, see endnote 8 to book VI). Hector had rejected Andromache's plea that he remain within the wall by invoking his sense of *aides*—of reverence and shame before the community. He now invokes that same sense of *aidos*—before Polydamas, before the women of Troy, before the nameless inferior man—to explain his inability to return within the walls of Troy; as Andromache had foreseen,

Hector's own strength will be his downfall.

[3](#) (p. 381) "... such as / A boy and his girl might have with each other—boy / And his girl indeed": As Hector feels himself isolated from the community, the preeminent source of his strength and identity, he falls into fantasy: first, of somehow arranging a settlement between Trojans and Achaeans, then—most startlingly—of approaching Achilles as a virgin girl approaches a boy in a scene of courtship. Having lost his social identity as warrior of Troy, he imagines himself to be "some hopeless woman."

[4](#) (p. 386) "There are no faithful oaths between lions and men ... But they are

always at fatal odds with each other”: To Hector’s proposal that each pledge to the other that he will return the vanquished man’s corpse, Achilles responds that oaths are not possible between beings of different species; Achilles will treat Hector as the wild animal treats his prey. Hesiod, in his *Works and Days* (275-279), provides one commentary upon Achilles’ claims: “Cast these things into your heart / And listen now to justice; forget about force. / This law the son of Cronos set out for people: Fish and beasts and winged birds / eat each other, since they have no justice. / To men he gave justice; it is best by far.”

[5](#) (p. 387) ... the beautiful / Gear he had stripped from mighty Patroclus when he / Cut him down: When Achilles looks at Hector, he sees his own armor (which Hector had put on at XVII. 2 2 5-231, and see endnote 3 to book XVII). He is, thus, reminded of Patroclus, even as he puts the spear to an image of his former self. Virgil recalls and transforms this scene at the close of the Aeneid, when Aeneas kills Turnus upon catching sight of the belt that Turnus had stripped from Pallas (Aeneid 12.940-952).

[6](#) (pp. 387-388) “I only wish I were savagely wrathful / Enough to hack up your corpse and eat it raw ... but dogs and birds shall devour you, / Bones and

all”: This is perhaps the most horrific speech in the Iliad, though one for which we have been well prepared; see Achilles’ preceding image of the lion at XXII. 301, his treatment of the bodies of Lycaon (XXI. 151-156) and Asteropaeus (XXI.234-238), as well as Zeus’ ascription to Hera of the desire to eat “old Priam raw / Along with ... all the rest of the Trojans” at IV.40-41 ; finally, Hecuba will express a desire to eat Achilles’ liver at XXIV.250-251. In Achilles’ present speech to Hector, he addresses Hector as “dog”; but note that in a preceding simile, the poet has compared Achilles to a dog (XXII.213-216, “as when a hound ...”) . The relation between predator and prey is

continuous and reversible: As the warrior marshals from within himself the predatory energies that his role requires, he becomes himself a beast—and always potential prey to another.

[7](#) (p. 389) ... and the once so handsome head was defiled / With foul dust: The evocation of Hector's prior godlike beauty and status in Troy is immediately followed by Achilles' defiling of Hector's body. For Achilles, it is as if killing Hector is not enough to satisfy his desire for vengeance, but he must again and again enact the conquest of Hector by continually despoiling his body (which the gods will protect). The resolution of this impasse—the release

of Hector—is, then, central to the final book of the poem.

8 (p. 390) ... far from all baths strong
fire-eyed Athena had cut / Hector down
by the hand of Achilles: Andromache
was last seen in the final scene of book
VI, where Hector had instructed her to
return to her loom and to her supervision
of the household maids, while he
returned to the battle (lines 541-544).
These are precisely the activities in
which Andromache is now engaged,
with the further detail—of excruciating
pathos—that she has ordered the water
for Hector's bath to be heated. With the
casting off of the headdress that she had
received at her wedding and with her

imagining of the fate of Astyanax, the full desolation of her future is vividly anticipated.

Book XXIII: The Funeral Games for Patroclus

1 (p. 394) ... wash from his flesh the horrible gore: The inconsolable, irresolvable quality of Achilles' grief, even after the slaying of Hector, is suggested by his unwillingness to wash the gore of the battle from his body. Achilles insists, as it were, upon his own impurity, his own distance from the purifying activities of his comrades. Likewise, he remains apart from the feast and its commensalities, even as he now arranges a sacrifice and feast for the other Achaeans. And, finally, he continues in his despoliation of Hector's

body, futilely seeking resolution through the repetition of his own violence and anger.

[2](#) (p. 395) “But bury me soon as you can, that I / May get within Hades’ gates”: In the opening of his speech, Patroclus’ ghost states the ancient belief that cremation or burial permitted the ghost to enter Hades; once the body was buried, the ghost could no longer depart Hades. Throughout the speech, Patroclus’ ghost recalls, if enigmatically, details that evoke the quality of his former life with Achilles: In life, the two “sat apart” from their comrades, where they made private plans; in death, Patroclus’ ghost now

asks that that separate unity be maintained: The ashen remains of the two should be mingled in a single urn. Patroclus' ghost concludes his speech with a recollection of his own boyhood arrival in Phthia, as a fugitive from the slaying of a playmate over a game a dice (an ironic commentary on "gentle Patroclus"?). Once in Phthia, Patroclus—like Phoenix before him (see IX.500-508, with endnote 7 to book IX)—received far more from Peleus than the conventions of asylum required: While Phoenix received a surrogate son to love, Patroclus receives a friend who will be beloved.

[3](#) (p. 398) And killing with bronze

twelve valiant sons of the Trojans—/ An evil act he had planned in his heart ... : Achilles' premeditated sacrifice of the twelve Trojans (prepared for at XVIII.382-384 and XXI.29-30) is an act of exceptional violence, going far beyond anything that Patroclus' ghost instructed and further dramatizing the irremediable quality of Achilles' mourning: The blood-price of Patroclus is paid by the lives of twelve others, yet still Achilles remains without peace, lacking any relation to the world that is not articulated through violence; even after the sacrifice of the twelve Trojans, Achilles continues his boast that he will feed Hector to the dogs.

4 (p. 400) But Achilles restrained them and seated the troops in a large / Open space where the funeral games were to be: Following the cremation of Patroclus' body and the heaping up of the grave-barrow, Achilles brings forth the prizes for the funeral games, which will occupy the remainder of book XXIII. The events will be the chariot-race (lines 336-751—by far the longest of the events), boxing (752-812), wrestling (813-861), running (862-928), warrior's duel (929-959), putting the shot (960-987), archery (988-1024), and spear-throwing (1025-1043). The events are themselves imitations of aspects of combat; at the games, the contestants

deploy the skills and strengths that also serve them on the battlefield, but the victor is restrained by the rules of the contest, while the loser is not victimized, is not made the victor's prize. In the context of the funeral of Patroclus, the games are an opportunity for a wounded and grieving community to reassert, within a controlled arena, some of its constituent strengths and potential unities. Achilles himself, however, remains remote, a detached, god-like convener of the contests and an arbiter of disputes. The sustaining passion of Achilles remains the dragging and defiling of Hector's body, an action in excess of any mortal rules, yet not beyond mortal capacity.

[5](#) (p. 412) And up got huge Telamonian Ajax and with him / Resourceful Odysseus, skilled at tricks and contriving: The wrestling contest of Ajax and Odysseus perhaps foreshadows the contest of the same two heroes, at the post-Iliadic funeral games of Achilles, for the hero's arms—a contest that will be won by Odysseus by treachery and one that will lead to Ajax' suicide. Here, Achilles, with the mediating, strife-dispelling tact that he displays throughout the games precludes such a disaster by declaring both heroes to be the victor (so, too, does the poet of the Iliad forestall Odysseus' coming victories over a heroism of strength by

one of craft).

6 (p. 417) “Atrides, we all / Know well how far you surpass all others ... so the basin is yours without a contest”: If Agamemnon were to lose the spear-throwing contest, the ability of games to disguise and regulate the harder violence and inequities of the social order would be sorely taxed; it is best not to put Agamemnon’s prowess to the actual test, but instead to simply acknowledge his preeminence. Thus, in the realm of games, does Achilles avoid an outbreak of the resentments and angers that ignited the strife of book I.

Book XXIV. Priam and Achilles

[1](#) (p. 418) Achilles, then, madly raging, /
Foully dishonored the body of noble
Hector ... : For Achilles, nothing has
changed. Though he convened and
adjudicated the rituals of the games with
extraordinary grace, those rituals have
accomplished nothing for him: He
remains restless and disconsolate in his
grief and longing for Patroclus; he
continues futilely to wreak his
inexhaustible vengeance upon Hector's
corpse. We move, then, from the realm
of social practice (the games) to divine
intervention.

2 (p. 419) “... But when he has wept and fittingly mourned / For him, he ends his grieving, for surely the fates / Have given to men a tough and patient spirit”: Apollo, in his complaint to the other gods about the savage mourning of Achilles (he is like a “lordly lion”), describes Achilles as having destroyed pity and shame (Greek *aidos*, on which see endnote 8 to book VI); he is responsive to his community neither as one recognizing a shared mortal lot nor as one guided by that community’s norms. Moreover, Achilles’ mourning—claims Apollo—exceeds that appropriate for blood-kin, and even the loss of blood-kin is one that mortals,

with their “tough” spirits, are able to bring to an end. Apollo’s claim about blood-kin is earlier contradicted by Achilles’ claim that Patroclus’ death is more painful than that of father or son (XIX.371-374, with endnote 6 to book XIX). Finally, the truth of Apollo’s claim about the tough, enduring spirit of mortals remains at issue in the following encounter of Achilles and Priam and, especially, in Achilles’ retelling of the story of Niobe.

3 (p. 427) And Priam went on toward the ships, nor were they unnoticed / By far-seeing Zeus: Priam’s nighttime journey to visit Achilles contains many elements of a katabasis, or Journey to the

Underworld. Even before setting out, Priam has been bewailed as a dead man by Hecuba and by his kin and household. His crossing of the Trojan plain to the shelter of Achilles is guided by Hermes, who is traditionally a psychopompos, a conductor of the souls of the dead to Hades. Together, Priam and Hermes pass by a tomb (that of Ilos) and cross over a river. Night, Hermes, the crossings of tomb and of river—these are four mythical boundaries of Hades. The elaborate and emphatically heavy door of Achilles' shelter is also suggestive of the entrance to Hades' palace. Achilles, then, who has slain so many of Priam's sons, plays the role of King of the Dead (or, perhaps, that of

Minos, rich judge of the Underworld).

4 (p. 431) ... so now Achilles was seized / With exceeding amazement at the sight of sacred Priam, / And those who were with him marveled and looked at each other: This is the Iliad's final and most magnificent scene of supplication: The familiar gesture of grasping the knees is here followed by Priam's kissing of the man-slaying hands of Achilles; in the crossing of a taboo boundary, there is, perhaps, some new possibility of healing. In the simile that follows, Priam is the murderer, while Achilles is the wealthy man who might offer refuge; for a moment each takes on the role of the other (of refugee and of

king, of father and of son)—an occasion of wonder, which opens each to the experience of the other's grief; it remains uncertain whether, as Apollo claims, mortals, with their tough hearts, can put their grief away, but between Achilles and Priam grief can now be shared. So, too, can a meal now be shared, as well as the telling of stories, within which Achilles and Priam might locate and make sense of their common humanity.

[5](#) (p. 434) ... Achilles himself / Lifted it onto a bier and helped his companions / Lift it onto the wagon: Having shared in Priam's grief for Hector, Achilles now supervises the washing of Hector's body

and, with his own hands, places the body upon the wagon that will carry it to the bier; this is the traditional task of the mother of the dead. Thus, Achilles inaugurates and participates in the burial of Hector, with which the Iliad is complete.

INSPIRED BY THE ILIAD AND THE ODYSSEY

The Iliad and the Odyssey established the underpinnings of all subsequent serious Greek poetry and drama. Important Greek poets who followed—from Aeschylus to Sophocles to Theocritus—borrowed techniques used in the two poems, including elevated language and a distinguished hero in a situation of extremity. The Latin critic Longinus pointed out the Iliad and the Odyssey's influence on, among others, Plato and Herodotus, and the works' strong impact on ancient Greece was well documented. In addition to poets,

dramatists, philosophers, and historians, the overall culture reflected veneration for “Homer”; the Greeks printed his imagined face on coins, held celebration days in his honor, and often repeated his verse aloud.

Virgil’s *Aeneid* (c.29-19 B.C.E.), the great Latin poem of the classical age, is in many ways a sequel to the *Iliad*. Virgil modeled the poem on the Greek narrative in an effort to link ancient Greece with the later flowering of Rome. The *Aeneid* follows the journey of the Trojan hero Aeneas as he flees the smoldering remains of Troy and realizes that his destiny is to found a grand new city in the West. The first six books,

patterned after the *Odyssey*, trace his journey to what is modern-day Italy. Borrowing heavily from the *Iliad*, the subsequent six books detail the war between the Trojans and the native Latins, who are wary of the influx of foreigners. The Trojans eventually win the war, and Aeneas marries the daughter of a local ruler and establishes the city of Lavinium; his descendants go on to found Rome.

After the Roman Empire collapsed in the late fifth century C.E., Homeric studies became practically dormant for hundreds of years. In the fourteenth century, Italian poets Giovanni Boccaccio and Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) commissioned Latin

translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey that helped spread the reputation of the epics during the Renaissance. Though in *The House of Fame* (c.1374-1385) Chaucer cites the two poems as a key influence, their impact was slight in England before the sixteenth century, when the study of Greek became more common in schools. George Chapman's famed English translation of the Iliad appeared in 1598. Shakespeare drew from Chapman's Iliad for the play *Troilus and Cressida*, a tragic love story set in Troy.

The English language's closest match to the Iliad and the Odyssey is John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667); the

preeminent epic poem in English, it reflects Milton's profound understanding of the spirit of the great Greek epics. *Paradise Lost* tells the biblical tale of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, with special emphasis on the role of a magnificently characterized Satan. Besides following the style of the *Iliad*, Milton modeled the opening scene and several other parts of his poem directly on it.

In the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope achieved wealth and renown for his translation of the *Iliad*, the first parts of which appeared in 1715. Owing partly to Chapman and Pope, and the decline of medievalism, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were among the most widely

read works in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their influence at the time manifested itself most clearly in an abundance of mock epics that parodied the traditional form's lofty themes and diction. Among these the best remembered today is Pope's poem *The Rape of the Lock* (1714).

John Keats wrote two sonnets about the Greek epics: "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816) and "To Homer" (1818) . In the latter poem, Keats writes of the bard:

So thou wast blind;—but then the
veil was rent,
For Jove uncurtain'd heaven to let
thee live,

And Neptune made for thee a
spumy tent,
And Pan made sing for thee his
forest-hive.

Lord Byron wrote the epic *Don Juan* (1819-1824) in the Homeric style, and several other poets also invoked it, including William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Among nineteenth-century poets, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, most famous for “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854), shows the strongest Homeric influence in style and subject. But in general the nineteenth century was a time of invention in the world of poetry, and most authors steered clear of

the epic form.

Several twentieth-century poets and prose stylists reimagined the two great epic Greek works with radical new perspectives. Rupert Brooke's poem "Menelaus and Helen" (1911) cynically sees the couple growing senile in Troy years after the war has ended. Arguably the most innovative stylistic adaptation is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which mirrors Homeric epic in structure and scope yet takes place in modern Dublin on a single day: June 16, 1904. The title poem in W.H. Auden's *The Shield of Achilles* (1955) is a sober work that debunks the supposed majesty of war, instead exposing its gruesome inhumanity. *Omeros* (1990), an epic

poem by Caribbean-born Derek Walcott, winner of the 1992 Nobel Prize in Literature, movingly applies the Homeric template to the lives of fisherman and villagers on the island of Saint Lucia.

The twentieth century's invention on behalf of narrative—the cinema—has made abundant use of the two great Greek epics. Recently, Brad Pitt starred as Achilles in director Wolfgang Petersen's blockbuster *Troy* (2004), which was loosely based on the *Iliad*. Generally, however, film has favored the *Odyssey* over its counterpart; the creative adaptation of Joel and Ethan Cohen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

(2000) is a notable example.

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

In this section, we aim to provide the reader with an array of perspectives on the text, as well as questions that challenge those perspectives. The commentary has been culled from sources as diverse as comments contemporaneous with the work, literary criticism of later generations, and appreciations written throughout the work's history. Following the commentary, a series of questions seeks to filter Homer's *Iliad* through a variety of points of view and bring about a richer understanding of this enduring

work.

Comments

PLATO

Homer intended Achilles to be the bravest of the men who went to Troy, Nestor the wisest, and Odysseus the wiliest.

—from Lesser Hippias (c.399 B.C.E.), translated by Benjamin Jowett (1871)

ARISTOTLE

Besides this, Epic poetry must divide into the same species as Tragedy; it must be either simple or complex, a story of

character or one of suffering. Its parts, too, with the exception of Song and Spectacle, must be the same, as it requires Peripeties, Discoveries, and scenes of suffering just like Tragedy. Lastly, the Thought and Diction in it must be good in their way. All these elements appear in Homer first; and he has made due use of them. His two poems are each examples of construction, the Iliad simple and a story of suffering, the Odyssey complex (there is Discovery throughout it) and a story of character. And they are more than this, since in Diction and Thought too they surpass all other poems.

—from the Poetics (c.350 B.C.E.),

translated by Ingram Bywater (1920)

QUINTILIAN

I shall, I think, be right in following the principle laid down by Aratus in the line, "With Jove let us begin," and in beginning with Homer. He is like his own conception of Ocean, which he describes as the source of every stream and river; for he has given us a model and an inspiration for every department of eloquence. It will be generally admitted that no one has ever surpassed him in the sublimity with which he invests great themes or the propriety with which he handles small. He is at

once luxuriant and concise, sprightly and serious, remarkable at once for his fullness and his brevity, and supreme not merely for poetic, but for oratorical power as well. For, to say nothing of his eloquence, which he shows in praise, exhortation and consolation, do not the ninth book containing the embassy to Achilles, the first describing the quarrel between the chiefs, or the speeches delivered by the counsellors in the second, display all the rules of art to be followed in forensic or deliberative oratory? As regards the emotions, there can be no one so ill-educated as to deny that the poet was the master of all, tender and vehement alike. Again, in the few lines with which he introduces both of

his epics, has he not, I will not say observed, but actually established the law which should govern the composition of the exordium? For, by his invocation of the goddesses believed to preside over poetry he wins the goodwill of his audience, by his statement of the greatness of his themes he excites their attention and renders them receptive by the briefness of his summary. Who can narrate more briefly than the hero who brings the news of Patroclus' death, or more vividly than he who describes the battle between the Curetes and the Aetolians? Then consider his similes, his amplifications, his illustrations, digressions, indications

of fact, inferences, and all the other methods of proof and refutation which he employs. They are so numerous that the majority of writers on the principles of rhetoric have gone to his works for examples of all these things. And as for perorations, what can ever be equal to the prayers which Priam addresses to Achilles when he comes to beg for the body of his son? Again, does he not transcend the limits of human genius in his choice of words, his reflexions, figures, and the arrangement of his whole work, with the result that it requires a powerful mind, I will not say to imitate, for that is impossible, but even to appreciate his excellences? But he has in truth outdistanced all that have

come after him in every department of eloquence; above all, he has outstripped all other writers of epic, the contrast in their case being especially striking owing to the similarity of the material with which they deal.

—from *Institutio Oratoria* (c.96 A.C.E.), translated by H. E. Butler (1920)

LONGINUS

Was Herodotus alone a devoted imitator of Homer? No, Stesichorus even before his time, and Archilochus, and above all Plato, who from the great Homeric source drew to himself innumerable tributary streams. And perhaps we

should have found it necessary to prove this, point by point, had not Ammonius and his followers selected and recorded the particulars.

This proceeding is not plagiarism; it is like taking an impression from beautiful forms or figures or other works of art. And it seems to me that there would not have been so fine a bloom of perfection on Plato's philosophical doctrines, and that he would not in many cases have found his way to poetical subject-matter and modes of expression, unless he had with all his heart and mind struggled with Homer for the primacy, entering the lists like a young champion matched against the man whom all admire, and

showing perhaps too much love of contention and breaking a lance with him as it were, but deriving some profit from the contest none the less. For, as Hesiod says, “This strife is good for mortals.” And in truth that struggle for the crown of glory is noble and best deserves the victory in which even to be worsted by one’s predecessors brings no discredit.

—from *On the Sublime* (approximately first century C.E.), translated by W. Rhys Roberts (1899)

ALEXANDER POPE

Homer is universally allowed to have had the greatest invention of any writer

whatever. The praise of judgment Virgil has justly contested with him, and others may have their pretensions as to particular excellences; but his invention remains yet unrivalled. Nor is it a wonder if he has ever been acknowledged the greatest of poets, who most excelled in that which is the very foundation of poetry. It is the invention that, in different degrees, distinguishes all great geniuses....

Our author's work is a wild paradise, where, if we cannot see all the beauties so distinctly as in an ordered garden, it is only because the number of them is infinitely greater. It is like a copious nursery, which contains the seeds and

first productions of every kind, out of which those who followed him have but selected some particular plants, each according to his fancy, to cultivate and beautify. If some things are too luxuriant it is owing to the richness of the soil; and if others are not arrived to perfection or maturity, it is only because they are overrun and oppressed by those of a stronger nature.

It is to the strength of this amazing invention we are to attribute that unequalled fire and rapture which is so forcible in Homer, that no man of a true poetical spirit is master of himself while he reads him. What he writes is of the most animated nature imaginable; every thing moves, every thing lives, and is put

in action. If a council be called, or a battle fought, you are not coldly informed of what was said or done as from a third person; the reader is hurried out of himself by the force of the poet's imagination, and turns in one place to a hearer, in another to a spectator....

We come now to the characters of his persons; and here we shall find no author has ever drawn so many, with so visible and surprising a variety, or given us such lively and affecting impressions of them. Every one has something so singularly his own, that no painter could have distinguished them more by their features, than the poet has by their manners. Nothing can be more exact than

the distinctions he has observed in the different degrees of virtues and vices. The single quality of courage is wonderfully diversified in the several characters of the Iliad....

If we descend from hence to the expression, we see the bright imagination of Homer shining out in the most enlivened forms of it. We acknowledge him the father of poetical diction; the first who taught that “language of the gods” to men. His expression is like the colouring of some great masters, which discovers itself to be laid on boldly, and executed with rapidity. It is, indeed, the strongest and most glowing imaginable, and touched with the greatest spirit. Aristotle had

reason to say, he was the only poet who had found out “living words”; there are in him more daring figures and metaphors than in any good author whatever. An arrow is “impatient” to be on the wing, a weapon “thirsts” to drink the blood of an enemy, and the like, yet his expression is never too big for the sense, but justly great in proportion to it. It is the sentiment that swells and fills out the diction, which rises with it, and forms itself about it, for in the same degree that a thought is warmer, an expression will be brighter, as that is more strong, this will become more perspicuous ; like glass in the furnace, which grows to a greater magnitude, and

refines to a greater clearness, only as the breath within is more powerful, and the heat more intense.

—from the preface to his translation of the Iliad (1715)

SAMUEL RICHARDSON

I admire you for what you say of the fierce, fighting Iliad. Scholars, judicious scholars, dared they to speak out, against a prejudice of thousands of years in its favour, I am persuaded would find it possible for Homer to nod, at least. I am afraid this poem, noble as it truly is, has done infinite mischief for a series of ages; since to it, and its copy the Eneid,

is owing, in a great measure, the savage spirit that has actuated, from the earliest ages to this time, the fighting fellows, that, worse than lions or tigers, have ravaged the earth, and made it a field of blood.

—from a letter to Lady Bradshaigh (1749)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

I have [been] reading little else but Homer. I am now in the 23rd book; you can imagine the wonders of poetry which I have enjoyed in the five preceding books. Indeed this part of the Iliad, the Patrocleiad, seems to me to surpass all other portions of the Iliad, as that production considered as a whole

surpasses any other single production of the human mind. Familiarity with Homer increases our admiration and astonishment—I can never believe that the *Odyssey* is a work of the same author.

—from a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg (July 6, 1817)

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

But in Homer and Chaucer there is more of the innocence and serenity of youth than in the more modern and moral poets. The *Iliad* is not Sabbath but morning reading, and men cling to this old song, because they still have

moments of unbaptized and uncommitted life, which give them an appetite for more. To the innocent there are neither cherubim nor angels. At rare intervals we rise above the necessity of virtue into an unchangeable morning light, in which we have only to live right on and breathe the ambrosial air. The Iliad represents no creed nor opinion, and we read it with a rare sense of freedom and irresponsibility, as if we trod on native ground, and were autochthones of the soil.

—from *AWeek* on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849)

MATTHEW ARNOLD

I think there never yet has been a perfect literature or a perfect art because the energetic nations spoil them by their illusions and their want of taste—and the nations who lose their illusions lose also their energy and creative power. Certainly Goethe had all the negative recommendations for a perfect artist but he wanted the positive—Shakespeare had the positive and wanted the negative. The Iliad and what I know of Raphael's works seem to me to be in a juster measure and a happier vein than anything else.

—from a letter to Arthur Hugh Clough
(September 6, 1853)

GEORGE MEREDITH

So you like Ballads. Well, the Iliad, greatest of poems, is a great Ballad. So you choose well.

—from a letter to Mlle. Hilda de Longueuil (April 30, 1887)

EDWARD THOMAS

I am interested in nothing and would for ever sit still and seek nothing if I had to be continually nailing my mind to something with my nice docility. And yet unawares I am lured into interest as when I found myself today near crying as

I read the Iliad to Merfyn.

—from a note found among his wife's letters (October 9 . 1907)

G. K. CHESTERTON

One vital mistake is made about this matter by Mr. Carnegie and his kind. They persistently say, and they actually seem to think, that wars arise out of hatred. There may have been wars that arose out of hatred, but at this instant I cannot recollect a single one. In this, as in many other matters, the truest tale in the world is the Iliad or Siege of Troy. Wars never begin in hatred; they either arise out of the honourable affection a

man has for his own possessions; or else out of the black and furtive affection he has for someone else's possessions. But it is always affection; it is never hate. The Greeks and Trojans did not hate each other in the least; there is scarcely one spark of hatred in the whole of the Iliad, save that great flare that comes out of the hero's love for Patroclus. The two armies are strewing the plain with corpses and dyeing the very sea with blood from love and not from detestation. It all arises because Paris has conceived an evil affection for Helen, while Menelaus cannot cease to love her. In other words, both hosts are fighting, not because fighting is not nasty, but because they have something nice to

fight about....

If one may love a tree one may love a forest; if a forest, one may love a valley; if a valley, a whole country or a whole character of civilisation. One may love it rightly, like Menelaus, or wrongly, like Paris. But it is always desire and not repugnance.

—from the Illustrated London News
(January 14, 1911)

HENRY BRADLEY

I have got through 13 books of the Iliad, bored a good deal with reading how X wounded Y, how Y killed X, and what a lot of blood ran out of $X + Y$. But the

Hector and Andromache passage is not surpassed, if it is equalled, by anything even in the *Odyssey*; and I stick to my old heresy that the much despised *Doloneia* is a brilliant piece of work, though it does look like a patch of different colour from the coat.

—from a letter to Robert Bridges
(March 16, 1912)

HAROLD LASKI

The *Iliad*, after all, is great drama; the scene for instance where Priam goes to ask Achilles for the body of Hector, and is refused, would wring the heart of a stone.

—from a letter to Oliver Wendell Holmes (August 29, 1923)

Questions

1. Let's say that Agamemnon can stand for institutional power, although the man is a moral pipsqueak. And Achilles, we could say, stands for individual genius; no one doubts that he is a great warrior. Surrounding them is their community, which has its own kind of authority and power. If you were a soldier on the field of Troy, to which of these three would you lend your support? But remember

that sometimes we support a weak ruler for the sake of public order, or to unite a community toward an important goal, such as winning a war. Remember also that sometimes charismatic geniuses, people we admire and even love, make ruinous mistakes. And remember that majority opinion can be wrong, as when almost everybody everywhere thought that the institution of slavery was perfectly acceptable.

2. What would you say is the function of Thersites, Odysseus, or Diomedes within the Iliad as a whole?
3. Which would you choose: a long

life celebrated by no one but your immediate circle, or a short life of dramatic accomplishment and unwithering fame?

4. Does the Iliad in your eyes have any relevance to events occurring now?

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Phry'gia

Phry'gian

Phthi'a

Phthi'ans

Phthi'res

Phy'lace

Phy'lacus

Phy'las

Phy'leus

Phylomedu'sa

Pidy'tes

Pie'ria

Pit'theus

Pityei'a

Pla'cus

Platae'a

Plei'ads

Pleu'ron

Podalei'rius

Podar'ces

Podar'ge

Podar'gus

Po'des

Poli'tes

Pol'lux

Polyae'mon

Po'lybus

Polyc'tor

Poly'damas

Polydo'ra

Polydo'rus

Polyi'dus

Polyme'le

Polyme'lus

Polynei'ces

Polyphe'mus

Polyphe'tes

Polyphon'tes

Polypoe'tes

Polyxei'nus

Por'theus

Posei'don

Pram'nian

Pri'am

Proe'tus

Pro'machus

Pro'nous

Protesila'us

Prothoë'nor

Pro'thoön

Pro'thous

Protia'on

Pro'to

Pry'tanis

Pte'leos

Pto'lemy

Pyg'mies

Pylae'menes

Pylae'us

Pylar'tes

Pyle'ne

Py'lian

Py'lon

Py'los

Pyraech'mes

Py'rasus

Py'ris

Py'tho

Rhadaman'thus

Rhe'a

Rhe'sus

Rhe'ne

Rhig'mus

Rhi'pe

Rhodes

Rho'dian

Rho'dius

Rhy'tium

Sa'lamis

Sa'mos

Sa'mothrace

Sanga'rius

Sarpe'don

Satni'oeis

Sat'nus

Scae'an Gates

Scaman'der

Scaman'drius

Scandei'a

Scar'phe

Sche'dius

Schoe'nus

Sco'lus

Scy'ros

Scy'rus

Se'lagus

Sele'pus

Selle'is

Sel'loi

Se'mele

Se'samon

Ses'tos

Sic'yon

Si'don

Sido'nian

Si'moeis

Simoei'sius

Sin'tian

Si'pylus

Si'syphus

Smin'theus

So'cus

So'lymi

Spar'ta

Spei'o

Sperchei'us

Sphe'lus

Sten'tor

Sthenela'us

Sthe'nelus

Sti'chius

Stra'tia

Stro'phius

Stympha'lus

Sty'ra

Styx

Sy'me

Talae'menes

Ta'laus

Talthy'bius

Tar'ne

Tar'phe

Tar'tarus

Tec'ton

Te'gea

Te'lamon

Telamo'nian

Tele'machus

Te'nedos

Tenthre'don

Terei'a

Te'thys

Teu'cer

Teu'tamus

Teu'thras

Thalei'a

Thal'pius

Thaly'sius

Tha'myris

Thauma'cia

Thea'no

Thebae'us

The'be

Thebes

The'mis

Thersi'lochus

Thersi'tes

The'seus

Thespe'ia

Thes'salus

Thes'tius

Thes'tor

The'tis

This'be

Tho'as

Tho'ë

Tho'ön

Thoö'tes

Thrace

Thra'cian

Thra'sius

Thrasyme'des

Thrasyme'lus

Thro'nium

Thryoes'sa

Thry'um

Thyes'tes

Thym'bra

Thymbrae'us

Thymoe'tes

Ti'ryns

Ti'tans

Ti'tanus

Titares'sus

Titho'nus

Tlepo'lemus

Tmo'lus

Tra'chis

Tre'chus

Tric'ca

Tritogenei'a

Tro'ad

Troe'zen

Troeze'nus

Tro'ilus

Tro'jan

Tros

Troy

Ty'chius

Ty'deus

Typho'eus

Uca'legon

U'ranus

Xan'thus

Zacyn'thus

Zelei'a

Zeus

a

Chryses, the priest of Apollo, has a daughter named Chryseis; their city is Chryse.

†Priam is the king of Troy, which the Achaeans have now besieged for almost ten years.

b

Danaans (and Argives) are Achaeans.

c

Literally, a sacrifice of 100 oxen, but often refers to any large animal sacrifice.

d

Insolent violence that lessens the honor,

the social standing, of another.

e

Achaean contingent under Achilles' command.

f

The stream that runs around the flat disk of Earth.

g

Homeric dreams regularly divide into the true and the false.

h

Agamemnon initially assembled the entire Achaean fleet at Aulis, in northern Boeotia.

i

The Caÿstrius (later, Kaustros) flows into the sea at Ephesus.

j

The Greek barbaros indicates that the Carians do not speak Greek.

k

Though both names belong to the poetic tradition, Paris is more frequent.

l

Antenor remembers a first diplomatic mission to recover Helen.

m

Hebe is the goddess of youth and the Olympian wine steward.

n

Hera's cult was prominent in these three Peloponnesian cities.

o

Simoeisus is named after the Trojan river upon whose banks he was born.

p

Pergamus is the highest point, the acropolis, of Troy.

q

The giants would attack the gods by heaping Mount Ossa on Olympus, and then Mount Pelion on Ossa.

r

Zeus refers to Cronos and the other

Titans, who are imprisoned in Tartarus, the deepest level of the Underworld.

s

The Scaean Gates of Troy face the battlefield and are a regular observation point.

t

Paris and Helen seem to have sailed to Troy by way of Phoenicia.

u

Hector named his son after the principal river of Troy, the Scamander.

v

The four levels of the Homeric cosmos,

in descending order, are Aether, Sky, Hades, and Tartarus. Olympus is between Aether and Sky; Earth is between Sky and Hades.

W

On the way to Troy, the Achaeans stopped at Lemnos, where they abandoned Philoctetes (the hero of Sophocles' eponymous tragedy).

X

Heracles was enslaved to Eurystheus as punishment for killing his own wife and children.

Y

Cerberus is the multiheaded “hound” that

guards the entrance to Hades.

[Z](#)

Zeus invokes the dread fates of his prior opponents, who now languish in the lowest depths.

[aa](#)

Agamemnon's abuse of Diomedes is described beginning at IV.433.

[ab](#)

The Furies—or Erinyes—are guardians of oaths and curses; they are especially sensitive to the disrespect of parents.

[ac](#)

Autolycus (“Wolfman”) is Odysseus’

thievish maternal grandfather; see
Odyssey 19.

ad

For Tydeus' exploits, see IV.450 and
V.893.

ae

The name Dolon means “Sneaky” or
“Tricky.”

af

On supplication, see endnote 1 to book
VI.

ag

The mission of Menelaus and Odysseus
to Troy has been previously mentioned
at

III. 226-229.

ah

The Moliones are elsewhere represented as “Siamese twins”; they reappear in another of Nestor’s reminiscences (“the two sons of Actor”), at XXIII.738.

ai

Nestor now recalls, at greater length, the parting scene in Phthia that Odysseus had also recalled at IX.284-292. (See also endnote 4 to book IX).

aj

Hector is thinking of Zeus’ promise, as relayed by Iris at XI. 212-216.

ak

From Troy, the peak of Samothrace is visible to the northwest, beyond “craggy Imbros.”

al

The gambolling beasts of the sea are dolphins.

am

“In peace, sons bury fathers; in war fathers bury sons” (Herodotus’ Histories 1.87).

†Euchenor’s choice of fates resembles that of Achilles: home or Troy.

an

Compare the end of the single combat at

VII.334 (also see endnote 3 to book VII);
the
contest of Hector and Ajax is rejoined at
XIV.454.

[ao](#)

Though the cries of the armies ascend to
the aether, Zeus' attention remains
averted.

[ap](#)

Rhea is Hera's (and Zeus') mother; Hera
is kept safe in remote Oceanus while
Zeus is
battling Cronos.

[aq](#)

Hera must swear by powers greater and
older than herself.

ar

According to Callimachus (frag. 48), the secret and incestuous liaison of Zeus and Hera lasted three centuries.

as

A principal role of the goddess Themis is to preside over divine assemblies.

at

Ascalaphus was killed by Deïphobus at XIII. 595-597. For Zeus will leave the Achaeans and high-hearted Trojans At once and come straight here to Olympus to punish Us all, and he, believe me, will lay violent hands On each of us here, on the innocent and guilty alike.

Therefore I bid you forget this wrath for
your son. For many more powerful men
than he in force And might of hand have
long before this been slain, And many
others will die hereafter. The offspring
Of mortals can hardly all be kept safe,
regardless Of what their lineage may
be.”

[au](#)

Athena is the patron goddess of the
Achaean victory.

[av](#)

Menoetius and Peleus are the fathers,
respectively, of Patroclus and Achilles;
see

IX.284-292 and XI.878-884 for the

fathers' parting words in Phthia.

[aw](#)

For the gesture of thigh-slapping, see endnote 6 to book XV.

[ax](#)

Oxen are unyoked when the day is two-thirds done; the sun's descent bodes Patroclus' final hour.

[ay](#)

See XVI.806-809, with endnote 10, for the triple charge.

[az](#)

Menelaus killed Hyperenor at XIV.592-596.

[ba](#)

Achilles had thought that he and Patroclus would not sack Troy together; see XVIII.12-13 (with endnote) and XIX.371-374.

[bb](#)

Antilochus' ignorance of Patroclus' death is explained at XVII.446-447; Antilochus is fighting in a distant part of the battle.

[bc](#)

See endnote 2 to book XII, about Polydamas.

[bd](#)

On the parting scene in Phthia, see

endnote 4 to book IX.

be

The threat to cut the throats of twelve Trojans is further anticipated at XXI. 29-37 and fulfilled at XXIII. 207-210.

bf

“Grace” is Hephaestus’ consort.

bg

Compare the account of Hephaestus’ laming at I.689—695 with endnote 8 to book I.

bh

See endnote 7 to book I for an account of Thetis’ marriage.

bi

Hera hastens the birth of Eurystheus and retards the birth of Heracles. Eurystheus, the weaker man, thus becomes the beneficiary of Zeus' preceding oath, rather than Heracles, the stronger man—and Zeus' intended king.

[bj](#)

See endnote 1 to book XVIII.

[bk](#)

See XYI. 167-1 72 for the ash spear of Cheiron.

[bl](#)

Prior to Xanthus' prophecy Achilles had known only that he would die after

Hector.

bm

At XX.200-225, in their upcoming battle, Achilles will taunt Aeneas with the memory of this same incident.

bn

These are the three lines of Trojan descent: the descendants of Assaracus are Anchises and Aeneas; the descendants of Ilus are Priam and Hector; Ganymede, Zeus' "cupbearer," will have no descendants.

bo

Achilles had vowed the sacrifice of the

twelve Trojans at XVIII.382-384; he fulfills the promise at XXIII.207-210.

[bp](#)

See V.950-952 for the wounding of Ares by Diomedes.

[bq](#)

See VI.155-159 (with endnote 3) for a use of the same image, but from the perspective of mortals.

[br](#)

Zeus also weighed the fates of Achaeans and Trojans at VIII.72-79, where his plan to honor Thetis begins to be fulfilled; in

both instances, a prior plan becomes irrevocable.

[bs](#)

See XIX.462-474 and XXI.136-141 for earlier prophecies of Achilles' death.

[bt](#)

Compare the scene of Helen at her web at III.141-145 (with endnote 1).

[bu](#)

For the horses of Tros, see V246-249, with endnote 2.

[bv](#)

The two sons of Actor are the Moliones, who appeared in Nestor's autobiographical account

of his youthful exploits, at XI. 796-803.

[bw](#)

This is the Iliad's only explicit retelling of the Judgment of Paris.

[bx](#)

Compare Achilles' vaunt over Hector's body at XXII.404-414, and see endnote 6.

[by](#)

In her inconsolable grief, Niobe is petrified; she becomes the rock formation of Mount Sypylus, whose running waters are her ceaseless tears.