



THE ESSENTIAL HOMER

Translated and Edited by **STANLEY LOMBARDO**

Introduction by **SHEILA MURNAGHAN**

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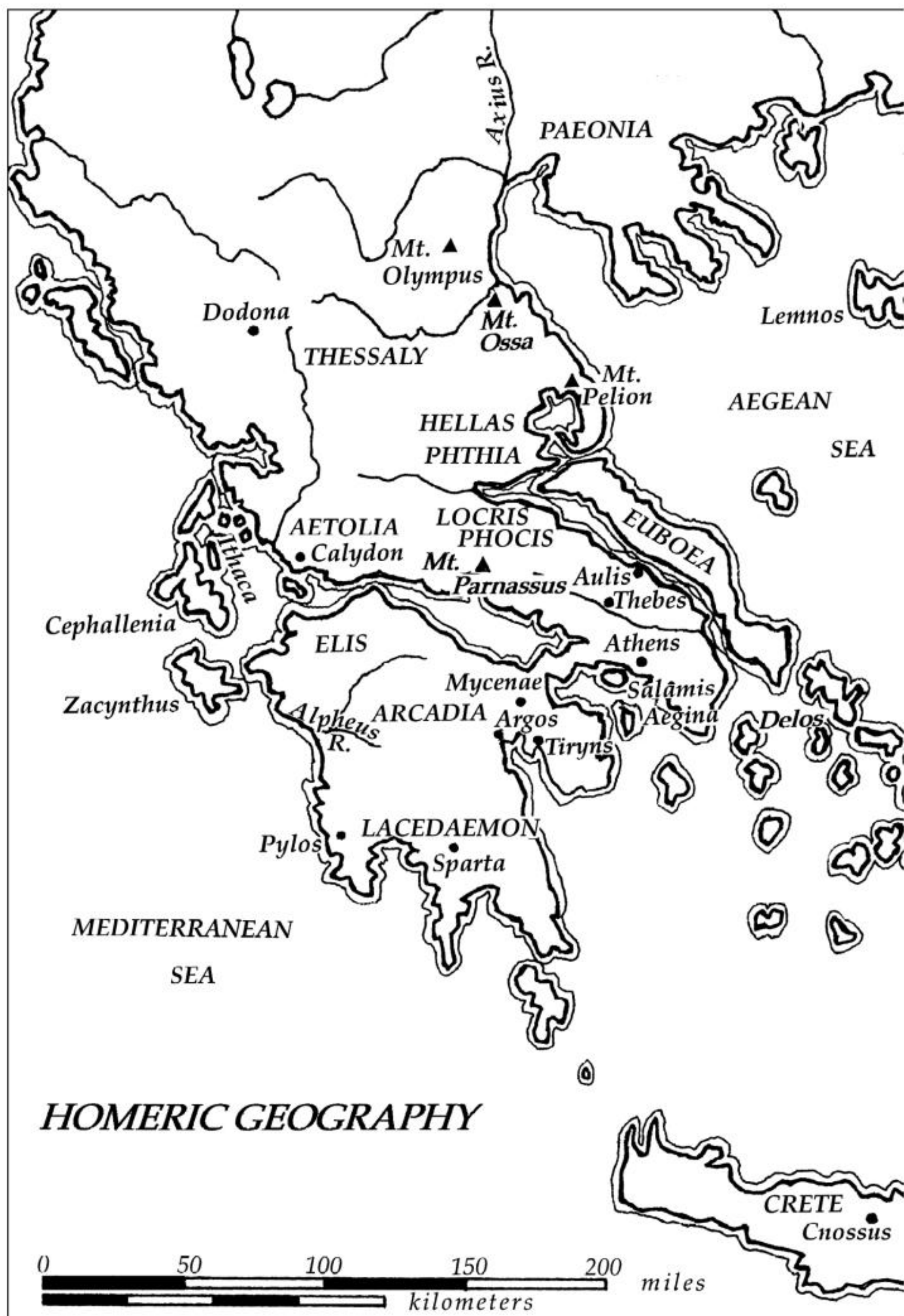
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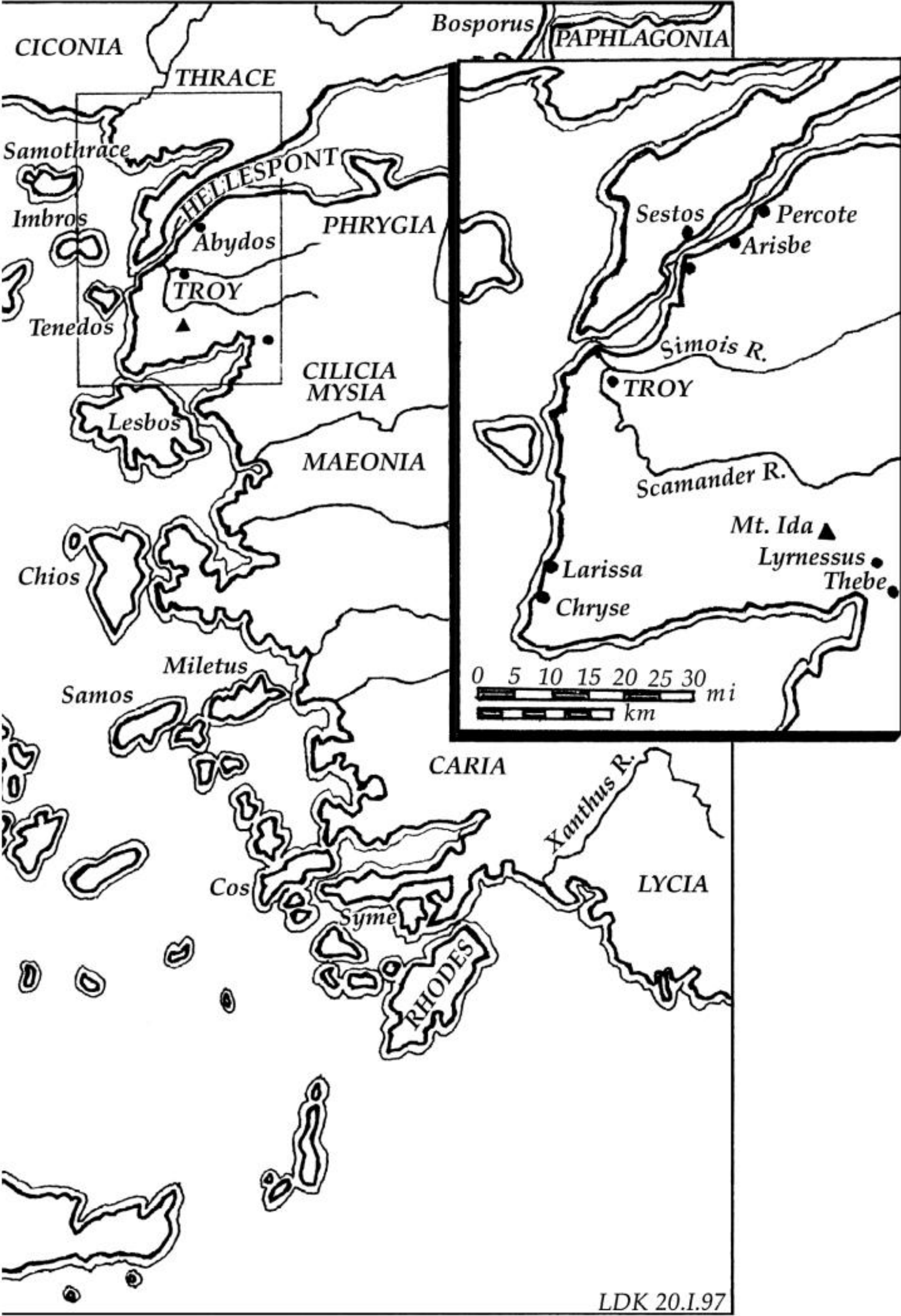
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Introduction

The earliest works of ancient Greek literature are two epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both attributed to a single poet, Homer. Although very different in their themes, settings, and outlooks, both of these poems display the expansive scope of epic, which typically recounts events with far-reaching historical consequences, sums up the values and achievements of an entire culture, and documents the fullness and variety of the world. And both poems deal with the same event in Greek mythology, the war against Troy.

In the myth of the Trojan War, the Greeks band together and sail to Troy, on the coast of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Their purpose is to recover Helen, the beautiful wife of a Greek chieftain, Menelaus, who has been stolen by the Trojan prince Paris, and to punish Troy for Helen's abduction. The Greeks spend ten hard years fighting around Troy until they finally succeed in taking the city and can return at last to their homes. Each of the Homeric epics relates a major portion of this legend, but each does so by concentrating on the events of a very short period and on the experiences of a particular hero.

The *Iliad* focuses on the greatest fighter of the Greeks, Achilles, and describes a crucial period late in the war, in which Achilles quarrels with the Greek commander Agamemnon and refuses to fight any longer, then changes course and returns to battle to kill the Trojan champion Hector. Not only is this episode decisive (since Hector's loss assures Troy's fall), but it is also told in a way that evokes the entire war. The poem looks back to the war's origins and ahead both to the defeat of Troy and to Achilles' own death in battle, portraying all the major heroes and surveying the glorious successes and painful losses of both sides.

The *Odyssey* concerns the war's aftermath, the difficult journey home from Troy, and focuses on Odysseus, the wily hero whose return is both the most challenging and the most successful. Concentrating on the last leg of Odysseus' ten-year journey and his recovery of a home that has been taken over by enemies, the *Odyssey*

nonetheless incorporates accounts of what happened to the other major Greek heroes after the war, fills in Odysseus' adventures from the time he left Troy, and describes the long period of anxious waiting endured by his wife and son in his absence.

This sophisticated technique of using a single episode to evoke a larger body of legendary material is one indication that these poems are not the earliest tellings of these stories. Although they represent for us the beginning of Western literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are also themselves the products of a long poetic tradition, now lost to us, that developed over several periods of early Greek history.

The Trojan legend, which includes tales of disaster and destruction for both the defeated Trojans and the victorious Greeks, is a mythic account of the end of the first stage of ancient Greek history, which is known as the Bronze Age, after the widespread use of bronze (rather than iron, which was not yet in common use), or the Mycenaean period, after the city of Mycenae, one of the main power centers of that era. Mycenaean civilization developed in the centuries after 2000 B.C.E., which is approximately when Greek-speaking people first arrived in the area at the southern end of the Balkan peninsula that we now know as Greece. Those Greek-speakers gradually established there a rich civilization dominated by a few powerful cities built around large, highly organized palaces. These palaces were at once fortified military strongholds and centers for international trade, in particular trade with the many islands located in the Aegean Sea, to the east of the Greek mainland. On the largest of those islands, the island of Crete, there was already flourishing, by the time the Mycenaeans arrived in Greece, a rich and sophisticated civilization, known as Minoan civilization, by which the Mycenaeans were heavily influenced and which they came ultimately to dominate.

From the Minoans the Mycenaeans gained, along with many other crafts and institutions, a system of writing: a syllabary, in which each symbol stands for a particular syllable, as opposed to an alphabet, in which each symbol stands for a particular sound. The Mycenaeans adapted to the writing of Greek the syllabary that the Minoans used to write their own language, a language that, although we have examples of their writing, still has not been identified. This earliest Greek writing system is known to present-day scholars as

Linear B, and archaeologists excavating on Crete and at various mainland centers including Mycenae and Pylos have recovered examples of it incised on clay tablets. These tablets contain not—as was hoped when they were found—political treaties, mythological poems, or accounts of religious rituals—but detailed accounts of a highly bureaucratic palace economy: inventories of grain or livestock, lists of palace functionaries assigned to perform such specialized roles as “unguent boiler,” “chair-maker,” or “bath-pourer.”

Mycenaean civilization reached its height at about 1600 B.C.E. and was essentially destroyed in a series of natural disasters and political disruptions about 400 years later, around 1200 B.C.E. We do not really know what happened, but all of the main archaeological sites show some evidence of destruction, burning, or hasty abandonment at about that time, and a sharp decline thereafter in the ambition and complexity of their material culture. Among these is the site of Troy itself, which was discovered in the late nineteenth century by Heinrich Schliemann, who followed the topographical details given in the *Iliad*; through this discovery, Schliemann both vindicated the historical validity of Homer and helped to found the field of archaeology.

Related in some way to the disruptions that ended the Bronze Age was the emergence of a new group of Greek-speakers as the dominant people on the mainland. The classical Greeks referred to these people as the Dorians and believed that they had invaded Greece from the north. Modern historians are uncertain whether they were new migrants or people already present in Greece who newly came to power in the upheavals of this period. In any case, many people left the mainland as a consequence and moved east, settling on various islands of the Aegean and along the coast of Asia Minor, in the area that is now western Turkey but that then became, in its coastal region, as much a part of the Greek world as was the mainland itself.

Both the Greeks who remained on the mainland and those who migrated to Asia Minor lived in conditions that involved less material prosperity and less highly organized concentrations of political and military power than were characteristic of the Mycenaean period. Their period is traditionally known as the “Dark Age” because their physical remains suggest a less magnificent level of civilization and because we know relatively little about it, although recent work in archaeology is increasing our knowledge

and revealing more evidence of prosperity and artistic achievement than had previously been available.

In the transition to the Dark Age, writing, which was probably practiced in the Mycenaean period only by a small class of professional scribes, fell out of use, and the Greeks became once again a culture without writing. On the other hand, they had always relied, and they continued to rely, on oral communication as their central means of recalling, preserving, and transmitting the historical memories, religious beliefs, and shared stories that in our culture would be committed to writing—or now to various forms of electronic media. In particular, the Greeks of Asia Minor, known as the Ionians, developed a tradition of heroic poetry, through which they recalled their own history, looking back and recounting the experiences of that earlier lost era. This poetry centered on certain legendary figures and events, among them the events surrounding the Trojan War, which, as mentioned before, appear to reflect the final moments of Mycenaean civilization.

The so-called Dark Age came to an end during a period roughly corresponding to the eighth century—the 700s—B.C.E. The cultural shift that we label the end of the Dark Age and the beginning of the Archaic period involved, not a series of upheavals, as with the end of the Bronze Age, but the emergence of new activity in a variety of fields. A growth in population led to a wave of colonization, with established Greek centers sending out colonies to such places as the Black Sea, Sicily, southern Italy, and southern France. There was also greater contact among the various Greek communities, which were politically distinct and remained so for centuries. This contact led to the development of institutions designed to unite those communities culturally and to reinforce a shared Greek, or Panhellenic, heritage, such as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and the Olympic games (founded in 776 B.C.E.). Around this time, the Greeks began to build large-scale stone temples and to make large-scale statues and a new kind of pottery decorated with elaborate geometric patterns. Many of the features of Greek culture that we associate with the Classical Period—the period that loosely corresponds to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.—had their origins in the eighth century.

In addition to colonization, this was also a time of increased trade and thus of greater contact with other Mediterranean cultures.

One consequence of this trade was the renewal of contacts, which had been intensive in the Mycenaean period, with cultures of the Near East. Through their dealings with the Phoenicians, a Semitic people living in present-day Lebanon, the Greeks learned a new system of writing—not a syllabary like Linear B, but an alphabet, the alphabet that is still used to write Greek and that was adapted to become the Roman alphabet, now widely used for many languages, including English. This new way of writing Greek quickly became much more widespread than Linear B had been, and it was put to a greater variety of uses. Among these was the writing down of poetry, and it is generally believed among scholars (although by no means universally agreed) that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* came into being in the written form in which we know them at that time.

Although we know these poems in written form, we can see in their style and in their narrative techniques traces of their oral origins, even if there is considerable disagreement among scholars over how close to those origins these particular works may be. Specifically, these poems manifest a use of repeated elements—phrases, lines, groups of lines, and types of episodes—that are an essential feature of an oral poet's style. Because a poet who performs orally does not memorize and recite an unchanging artifact but composes his song as he goes at the same rate at which he delivers it, he relies on a supply of stock elements; acquiring that supply is a vital part of his training. Analysts of Homeric style have discovered that the repeated features that are immediately noticeable to readers form an elaborate system both of ready-made whole lines and of short phrases that allowed the poet easily to generate new lines that conformed to the requirements of the meter in which he composed, a meter known as the dactylic hexameter. Among the most striking of these are the phrases used to identify the characters, which link their names with their attributes or their ancestry, and which exist in different forms to be used as needed at different places in the line and in different grammatical cases. But the use of repeated patterns extends to much larger units as well, including obvious repetition of whole blocks of lines, as when, for example, a character reports on an event in the same words in which it was originally narrated, or the more subtle use of repeated sequences of actions to describe such recurrent circumstances as a host welcoming a guest or one character visiting another in search of important information.

Because repeated elements such as epithets have such a clear usefulness as aids to oral composition, it is hard to be sure how much further significance they are meant to bear in any particular context, although they certainly are meaningful as general expressions of a character's nature. For example, the central heroes of both poems have epithets that sum up their distinctive forms of excellence. The semidivine warrior Achilles is known as *dios* (godlike) and *podas ôkus* (swift-footed), whereas the wily survivor Odysseus is known as *polumêtis* (extremely clever) and *polutlas* (enduring much), but that usage does not mean that Achilles is displaying his speed when he is called *podas ôkus* (which is sometimes applied to him when he is sitting down) or that Odysseus is being especially clever at the points at which he is called *polumêtis*. The question of how integral these repeated elements are to the meaning of Homeric poetry is especially pressing for the translator, who has to decide whether to carry this stylistic feature over to a new language and a poetic form that does not have the same strict metrical rules as Homer's hexameters. The modern translator is also involved in a different relationship between the poem and the audience—not a live performance at which all parties were present at once and at which the conventions of Homeric style were familiar and unremarkable, but a less direct form of communication over large stretches of time and space, mediated through the printed page.

Stanley Lombardo has played down the repetitive dimension of the Greek original more than some other translators do, for the sake of a swift narrative pace and of making the characters speak in English as real people do. He has also taken advantage of some of Homer's repetitions for a creative solution to one of the most difficult problems of translation, the way in which there is almost never a single word or phrase that captures what is in the original. The fact that the same expressions occur over and over again gives him a chance to try a range of different versions that cumulatively add up to what is in the Greek. For example, one of the most famous lines in Homeric poetry is one that appears twenty times in the *Odyssey* and twice in the *Iliad*, which is used to describe the coming of dawn. This time-marker is, in part, a routine building block of Homeric poetry, a convenient, efficient way of marking a new phase in the action that corresponds to the start of a new day. But the announcement of dawn's appearance is made to fill an entire line through the addition

of two epithets, which mean “early-born” and “rosy-fingered.” By offering us several different versions of this line, Lombardo is able to bring out much more fully the many meanings of these wonderfully suggestive adjectives, as shown in these examples from the *Odyssey*: “Dawn’s pale rose fingers brushed across the sky” (2.1); “Dawn came early, touching the sky with rose” (5.228); “Dawn spread her rose-light over the sky” (8.1); “Dawn came early, with palmettoes of rose” (9.146); “Light blossomed like roses in the eastern sky” (12.8); “At the first blush of Dawn. . . .” (half of 12.324).

The relationship between oral poetry and Homeric style was not fully understood until earlier in this century. A crucial step in this understanding was the comparative work of an American scholar, Milman Parry, who during the 1920s and 1930s studied oral poets who were then still practicing their art in the Balkan region. Parry saw that many of their techniques corresponded to the conventions of Homeric style. For well over a century before Parry’s discoveries, scholars had been worrying over the ways in which Homeric poetry is different from later poetry produced through the medium of writing, speculating about how these poems were produced, or what came to be known as “the Homeric question.” Much attention was given to inconsistencies between different sections of the narrative or to places in which sections of the narrative seem to be awkwardly joined. For example, the *Iliad* relates the death of the same minor warrior in two different places and includes passages in which some of the characters seem unaware of the stubborn way in which Achilles goes on refusing to fight even after Agamemnon has tried to make peace with him. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is told by the seductive sorceress Circe that he must visit the land of the dead, but when he gets there, things do not go at all the way that she has said they will. Or, at the end of the poem, some of Odysseus’ defeated enemies give an account of how he regained his house that does not match the actual narrative.

These inconsistencies were seen by scholars who were known as “analysts” as supporting a theory according to which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were each created through the joining together by editors of several shorter traditional poems composed by illiterate bards. According to this theory, the *Iliad* might have been put together from a poem about Achilles and from several other battle narratives about the Trojan War; and the *Odyssey* might have been

put together from one poem about Odysseus' exotic journey from Troy, from another about his homecoming, and from yet another about the adventures of his son Telemachus. The analysts were countered by "unitarians," scholars who found in each poem an overall unity of theme and conception that outweighs those inconsistencies and points to a single intelligence shaping the entire work. Parry's discoveries have tended to uphold the unitarian position because they reveal that the kinds of small inconsistencies that concerned the analysts are both common and unimportant in the context of oral performance.

Although the answers to the Homeric question proposed during the 18th and 19th centuries are not generally accepted today, the scholars who wrestled with it helped to show how different these works are from modern poetry, and they recognized early on that an important clue to their origins might be provided by the singers actually portrayed in the *Odyssey*, Phemius and Demodocus, who perform songs as entertainment for groups of people gathered in aristocratic households. Phemius and Demodocus are like the modern bards studied by Parry in that they perform songs that are at once new and traditional, original retellings of legendary material that is the common property of the singer and the audience. Also like modern oral poets, they display a high degree of responsiveness to their audiences as they give shape to each particular version of a story.

The fact that one of these poets, Demodocus, is blind marks the poet as a figure who relies on inner resources. In Homeric terms, that reliance means that the poet is divinely inspired, instilled by the Muses with knowledge of past events that he has not himself witnessed. For divine inspiration, we might substitute the inherited skills and familiarity with poetic tradition of an oral poet, but in either case, those inner resources can be contrasted to the external aid of writing, which is never alluded to in the *Odyssey*, and alluded to only once in the *Iliad*. It is interesting that ancient legends about Homer, the poet to whom both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*—along with other poems—were attributed, claim that he was blind, so that he too was seen as both a visionary figure—in myth, prophets are also often blind—and one who did not write. It should be noted, though, that ancient stories about Homer, like most of the biographical information we have about early Greek poets, are largely fictitious, based mainly on the events of the *Odyssey*, so that Homer is portrayed as an

itinerant beggar, which happens to be a role adopted by Odysseus as a disguise for much of the *Odyssey*.

We have no reliable information about Homer that would allow us to decide whether, for example, he really was responsible for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* or to determine just what role he played in the process by which the poems that we have come into being. A key step in that process was the point at which the traditions of oral performance intersected with the new practice of writing and the epics took on the written form in which we now know them. One of the main challenges now facing Homeric scholars is that of figuring out to what extent the distinctive qualities of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are due to the use of writing. On the one hand, the poems bear all the marks of oral style, which tend to disappear quickly once a poet learns to write. On the other hand, they are far too long to have ever been performed on a single occasion like the ones depicted in the *Odyssey*, and there is considerable debate about whether the large-scale design and complex structure exhibited by both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* could have been produced without the aid of writing. And, even though most scholars believe that the poems were written down in the eighth century B.C.E. when writing first became available, others argue that the first written texts were produced later, possibly in Athens in the sixth century B.C.E., where we know an effort was made to produce official versions of both epics.

Whenever they were actually written down and however much they may have been shaped by writing, the Homeric epics were still primarily oral works, in the sense that they were regularly performed and were known to their audiences through performance, well into the classical period. The process of transmission by which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became what they are today—that is, poems experienced almost exclusively through reading, whether in Greek or in translation—is a long and complicated one. It starts with that first, still mysterious moment when the epics were first written down and encompasses many stages of editing and copying: by ancient scholars, especially those working in Alexandria in the third century B.C.E., who were responsible, for example, for the division of both poems into twenty-four books; by medieval scribes, who copied out the manuscripts on which our modern editions are based; and by modern scholars who have produced the texts from which translations like the ones in this volume are made.

Amid such uncertainty, the idea that the singers in the *Odyssey*, Phemius and Demodocus, might represent poets of the kind who helped to shape the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is not at all implausible. Many of the customs and institutions represented in the poems reflect the times in which the poems and their traditions took shape rather than the earlier period during which the events depicted supposedly occurred. Historians and archaeologists who have compared the culture described in the Homeric epics with what we know of Greek history have discovered that the epics describe a world that does not correlate to any one period but that combines elements of the Bronze Age with elements of the Dark Age: memories of the earlier time in which the Trojan legend is set have been woven together with circumstances borrowed from the period during which the Trojan legend evolved. The many depictions of daily life in peacetime communities found in the *Odyssey* tend to reflect that later period. The kingdoms depicted there are much smaller and much less highly organized than those of the Mycenaean period, and many details of their material culture and social organization accord more closely to what we know of Dark Age life—a way of life that, we then assume, must have seemed quite familiar to the poem's original audience.

From the way that each of the Homeric epics begins, we can sense that they are building on a long, preexisting tradition. The *Iliad* plunges into the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon with confidence that its audience will already be familiar with these characters and the legends to which they belong. That the *Odyssey* is not the first telling of Odysseus' story seems clear from the opening lines, in which the subject is simply identified as "the cunning hero, the wanderer, who was blown off course"; his name is not mentioned until many lines later—a fitting introduction for a hero who will turn out to specialize in concealing his identity and waiting for the strategic moment. Throughout both poems, various characters, especially the oldest and wisest, make comparisons with similar situations outside the poem, apparently drawing on an inherited fund of similar legends. For the most part, however, we can only speculate about the ways in which the epics that we have reshape earlier versions of their stories, creating through shifts of focus or the addition of new details a kind of commentary on previous traditions that would have added to the interest and pleasure of these poems for their original audiences.

We can get some sense of the interplay of different narratives within a tradition from the relationship between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* themselves. The nature of this relationship has been discussed ever since antiquity, when there was already a debate about whether both poems were by the same author. An English scholar of the late 19th century, David Munro, compared the two poems and discovered an interesting phenomenon (now known as “Munro’s law”), which is that there is no overlap in their contents: neither poem recounts any events that are told in the other. This discovery lends itself to several conclusions, such as that the two poems were composed in complete ignorance of each other, but the most likely conclusion is that they were designed to complement one another. The *Odyssey* seems, in fact, to go out of its way to fill in the rest of the story of the *Iliad*, including events that are implicit but still untold at the end of the *Iliad*, such as the death and burial of Achilles and the taking of Troy. As a pair, the two poems seem designed to give, through a complex combination of their own main events and the wider experiences they include through reminiscences and other kinds of allusions, a comprehensive account of the Trojan War.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* complement each other, not only in their contents but also in their visions of human life and their definitions of heroism. The *Iliad* is entirely focused on war, and one of the main themes of the poem is the inescapability of war even when people are fully aware of its evils. The story of Achilles turns on his attempt to leave the war and his discovery that he cannot, and his story is necessarily limited to the battlefield; he knows from a prophecy that if he stays and fights at Troy, he will never go home. Achilles’ qualities are preeminently those of a warrior: physical courage and strength, skill in battle, and the single-minded pursuit of honor even at the cost of his life. The *Odyssey* tells another story of hardship and struggle, but it is also one of survival and eventual success, as Odysseus finally achieves the satisfying homecoming that is lost for Achilles and for most of the other Greeks. The *Odyssey* includes a wide range of settings, some fantastic, some quite ordinary and domestic, and has a broader sense of human possibilities. Correspondingly, Odysseus is a different kind of hero: versatile, adaptable, and as dependent on his wits as on his physical powers.

In some of the *Odyssey*’s allusions to the *Iliad*, we can even detect an element of rivalry between the two poems. At one point,

Odysseus encounters the bard Demodocus, who is singing a song that, like the Homeric epics, concerns the Trojan War. Demodocus' song is a curious one because it seems to be a kind of alternate version of the *Iliad*. Whereas the *Iliad* focuses on a quarrel between the two major Achaean heroes Achilles and Agamemnon, this song focuses on a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus. From other sources, we know what this quarrel must have been about, for the two heroes were evidently supposed to have disputed whether Troy would ultimately be taken by *biê*, "force," the quality at which Achilles' excelled, or *mêtis*, "cleverness," the quality at which Odysseus excelled. When Odysseus then asks Demodocus for another song and specifies that its subject should be the story of the Trojan Horse, he is implicitly pointing to the resolution of this dispute. Although, as the *Iliad* recounts, Achilles' might is essential to the Trojan defeat, especially through his killing of Hector, the city is taken in the end only through a clever trick contrived by Odysseus with the help of the goddess Athena, the infiltration of the city by a band of men hidden within a huge statue of a horse. In having Demodocus sing, at Odysseus' request, a kind of alternative *Iliad* concerned with the opposition between Achilles and Odysseus, the *Odyssey* sets up a competition with both the *Iliad* and its hero that Odysseus wins. If Achilles has to choose between staying at Troy and winning glory there or going home again, Odysseus, the *Odyssey* tells us, is the hero who does not have to make that choice, who manages to have it all.

Taken together, these two poems offer us a full-scale introduction to the Trojan War, a mythic event that encapsulated for the Greeks their own early history and that has played a central role in the subsequent traditions of Western art and literature. Through this myth, they portray an entire world, within which their very different heroes struggle to define themselves, and offer us two powerful, compelling perspectives on war itself. As seen in the *Iliad* through the figure of Achilles, war is an overwhelming experience that dominates human life and the arena of preeminent human achievement; as seen in the *Odyssey* through the figure of Odysseus, war is one of many challenges to be mastered with cunning intelligence, survived, and crowned with a glorious and adventurous homecoming.

Sheila Murnaghan
University of Pennsylvania

A Note on the Translation

The poetics of this translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are easily and briefly stated: rhythms and language drawn from natural speech, in the tradition of American poetry; emphasis on the physicality, rapidity, and suppleness of the verse; varied treatment of epithets and formulae, often heightening their effect as poetic events; treatment of similes as partially independent poetic moments, indicated by italics and indentation; close attention to presentation of the text on the page; commitment to the poetic line. Above all, this translation reflects the oral performance nature of the original poems. It began as scripts for performance, and it has been shaped by the complementary pressures of poetic composition and oral performance. Throughout the period of composing the translation as poetry on the page, I continued reciting it to audiences, voicing the text as I crafted it and crafting it to capture the voice that I heard.

Stanley Lombardo

A Note on the Abridgment

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are presented here in versions approximately one-half as long as the original epics. The passages that have been retained appear exactly as in the original Lombardo translation and have not been condensed or digested in any way. Omitted passages are indicated by book and line number and are summarized very briefly. The selections have been made with an eye toward keeping the major characters in play and highlighting the interventions of the gods in human affairs.

ILIAD 1

RAGE:

Sing, Goddess, Achilles' rage,
Black and murderous, that cost the Greeks
Incalculable pain, pitched countless souls
Of heroes into Hades' dark,
And left their bodies to rot as feasts
For dogs and birds, as Zeus' will was done.

5

Begin with the clash between Agamemnon—
The Greek warlord—and godlike Achilles.

Which of the immortals set these two
At each other's throats?

10

Apollo,
Zeus' son and Leto's, offended
By the warlord. Agamemnon had dishonored
Chryses, Apollo's priest, so the god
Struck the Greek camp with plague,
And the soldiers were dying of it.

15

Chryses
Had come to the Greek beachhead camp
Hauling a fortune for his daughter's ransom.
Displaying Apollo's sacral ribbons
On a golden staff, he made a formal plea
To the entire Greek army, but especially
The commanders, Atreus' two sons:

20

"Sons of Atreus and Greek heroes all:
May the gods on Olympus grant you plunder
Of Priam's city and a safe return home.
But give me my daughter back and accept
This ransom out of respect for Zeus' son,

25

Lord Apollo, who deals death from afar.”

A murmur rippled through the ranks: 30
“Respect the priest and take the ransom.”
But Agamemnon was not pleased
And dismissed Chryses with a rough speech:

“Don’t let me ever catch you, old man, by these ships again,
Skulking around now or sneaking back later. 35
The god’s staff and ribbons won’t save you next time.
The girl is mine, and she’ll be an old woman in Argos
Before I let her go, working the loom in my house
And coming to my bed, far from her homeland.
Now clear out of here before you make me angry!” 40

The old man was afraid and did as he was told.
He walked in silence along the whispering surf line,
And when he had gone some distance the priest
Prayed to Lord Apollo, son of silken-haired Leto:

“Hear me, Silverbow, Protector of Chryse, 45
Lord of Holy Cilla, Master of Tenedos,
And Sminthian God of Plague!
If ever I’ve built a temple that pleased you
Or burnt fat thighbones of bulls and goats—
Grant me this prayer: 50
Let the Danaans pay for my tears with your arrows!”

Apollo heard his prayer and descended Olympus’ crags
Pulsing with fury, bow slung over one shoulder,
The arrows rattling in their case on his back
As the angry god moved like night down the mountain. 55

He settled near the ships and let loose an arrow.
Reverberation from his silver bow hung in the air.
He picked off the pack animals first, and the lean hounds,
But then aimed his needle-tipped arrows at the men
And shot until the death-fires crowded the beach. 60

Nine days the god's arrows rained death on the camp.
 On the tenth day Achilles called an assembly.
 Hera, the white-armed goddess, planted the thought in him
 Because she cared for the Greeks and it pained her
 To see them dying. When the troops had all mustered, 65
 Up stood the great runner Achilles, and said:

"Well, Agamemnon, it looks as if we'd better give up
 And sail home—assuming any of us are left alive—
 If we have to fight both the war and this plague.
 But why not consult some prophet or priest 70
 Or a dream interpreter, since dreams too come from Zeus,
 Who could tell us why Apollo is so angry,
 If it's for a vow or a sacrifice he holds us at fault.
 Maybe he'd be willing to lift this plague from us
 If he savored the smoke from lambs and prime goats." 75

Achilles had his say and sat down. Then up rose
 Calchas, son of Thestor, bird-reader supreme,
 Who knew what is, what will be, and what has been.
 He had guided the Greek ships to Troy
 Through the prophetic power Apollo 80
 Had given him, and he spoke out now:

"Achilles, beloved of Zeus, you want me to tell you
 About the rage of Lord Apollo, the Arch-Destroyer.
 And I will tell you. But you have to promise me and swear
 You will support me and protect me in word and deed. 85
 I have a feeling I might offend a person of some authority
 Among the Greeks, and you know how it is when a king
 Is angry with an underling. He might swallow his temper
 For a day, but he holds it in his heart until later
 And it all comes out. Will you guarantee my security?" 90

Achilles, the great runner, responded:

"Don't worry. Prophecy to the best of your knowledge.
 I swear by Apollo, to whom you pray when you reveal
 The gods' secrets to the Greeks, Calchas, that while I live

And look upon this earth, no one will lay a hand 95
 On you here beside these hollow ships, no, not even
 Agamemnon, who boasts he is the best of the Achaeans.”

And Calchas, the perfect prophet, taking courage:

“The god finds no fault with vow or sacrifice.
 It is for his priest, whom Agamemnon dishonored 100
 And would not allow to ransom his daughter,
 That Apollo deals and will deal death from afar.
 He will not lift this foul plague from the Greeks
 Until we return the dancing-eyed girl to her father
 Unransomed, unbought, and make formal sacrifice 105
 On Chryse. Only then might we appease the god.”

He finished speaking and sat down. Then up rose
 Atreus’ son, the warlord Agamemnon,
 Furious, anger like twin black thunderheads seething
 In his lungs, and his eyes flickered with fire 110
 As he looked Calchas up and down, and said:

“You damn soothsayer!
 You’ve never given me a good omen yet.
 You take some kind of perverse pleasure in prophesying
 Doom, don’t you? Not a single favorable omen ever! 115
 Nothing good ever happens! And now you stand here
 Uttering oracles before the Greeks, telling us
 That your great ballistic god is giving us all this trouble
 Because I was unwilling to accept the ransom
 For Chryses’ daughter but preferred instead to keep her 120
 In my tent! And why shouldn’t I? I like her better than
 My wife Clytemnestra. She’s no worse than her
 When it comes to looks, body, mind, or ability.
 Still, I’ll give her back, if that’s what’s best.
 I don’t want to see the army destroyed like this. 125
 But I want another prize ready for me right away.
 I’m not going to be the only Greek without a prize,
 It wouldn’t be right. And you all see where mine is going.”

And Achilles, strong, swift, and godlike:

“And where do you think, son of Atreus, 130
 You greedy glory-hound, the magnanimous Greeks
 Are going to get another prize for you?
 Do you think we have some kind of stockpile in reserve?
 Every town in the area has been sacked and the stuff all divided.
 You want the men to count it all back and redistribute it? 135
 All right, you give the girl back to the god. The army
 Will repay you three and four times over—when and if
 Zeus allows us to rip Troy down to its foundations.”

The warlord Agamemnon responded:

“You may be a good man in a fight, Achilles, 140
 And look like a god, but don’t try to put one over on me—
 It won’t work. So while you have your prize,
 You want me to sit tight and do without?
 Give the girl back, just like that? Now maybe
 If the army, in a generous spirit, voted me 145
 Some suitable prize of their own choice, something fair—
 But if it doesn’t, I’ll just go take something myself,
 Your prize perhaps, or Ajax’s, or Odysseus’,
 And whoever she belongs to, it’ll stick in his throat.

But we can think about that later. 150

Right now we launch
 A black ship on the bright salt water, get a crew aboard,
 Load on a hundred bulls, and have Chryseis board her too,
 My girl with her lovely cheeks. And we’ll want a good man
 For captain, Ajax or Idomeneus or godlike Odysseus— 155
 Or maybe you, son of Peleus, our most formidable hero—
 To offer sacrifice and appease the Arch-Destroyer for us.”

Achilles looked him up and down and said:

“You sorry, profiteering excuse for a commander!
 How are you going to get any Greek warrior 160
 To follow you into battle again? You know,

I don't have any quarrel with the Trojans,
 They didn't do anything to *me* to make me
 Come over here and fight, didn't run off *my* cattle or horses
 Or ruin *my* farmland back home in Phthia, not with all 165
 The shadowy mountains and moaning seas between.
 It's for *you*, dogface, for your precious pleasure—
 And Menelaus' honor—that we came here,
 A fact you don't have the decency even to mention!
 And now you're threatening to take away the prize 170
 That I sweated for and the Greeks gave me.
 I never get a prize equal to yours when the army
 Captures one of the Trojan strongholds.
 No, I do all the dirty work with my own hands,
 And when the battle's over and we divide the loot 175
 You get the lion's share and I go back to the ships
 With some pitiful little thing, so worn out from fighting
 I don't have the strength left even to complain.
 Well, I'm going back to Phthia now. Far better
 To head home with my curved ships than stay here, 180
 Unhonored myself and piling up a fortune for you."

The warlord Agamemnon responded:

"Go ahead and desert, if that's what you want!
 I'm not going to beg you to stay. There are plenty of others
 Who will honor me, not least of all Zeus the Counselor. 185
 To me, you're the most hateful king under heaven,
 A born troublemaker. You actually *like* fighting and war.
 If you're all that strong, it's just a gift from some god.
 So why don't you go home with your ships and lord it over
 Your precious Myrmidons. I couldn't care less about you 190
 Or your famous temper. But I'll tell you this:
 Since Phoebus Apollo is taking away my Chryseis,
 Whom I'm sending back aboard ship with my friends,
 I'm coming to your hut and taking Briseis,
 Your own beautiful prize, so that you will see just how much 195
 Stronger I am than you, and the next person will wince
 At the thought of opposing me as an equal."

Achilles' chest was a rough knot of pain
 Twisting around his heart: should he
 Draw the sharp sword that hung by his thigh, 200
 Scatter the ranks and gut Agamemnon,
 Or control his temper, repress his rage?
 He was mulling it over, inching the great sword
 From its sheath, when out of the blue
 Athena came, sent by the white-armed goddess 205
 Hera, who loved and watched over both men.
 She stood behind Achilles and grabbed his sandy hair,
 Visible only to him: not another soul saw her.
 Awestruck, Achilles turned around, recognizing
 Pallas Athena at once—it was her eyes— 210
 And words flew from his mouth like winging birds:

“Daughter of Zeus! Why have you come here?
 To see Agamemnon's arrogance, no doubt.
 I'll tell you where I place my bets, Goddess:
 Sudden death for this outrageous behavior.” 215

Athena's eyes glared through the sea's salt haze.

“I came to see if I could check this temper of yours,
 Sent from heaven by the white-armed goddess
 Hera, who loves and watches over both of you men.
 Now come on, drop this quarrel, don't draw your sword. 220
 Tell him off instead. And I'll tell you,
 Achilles, how things will be: You're going to get
 Three times as many magnificent gifts
 Because of his arrogance. Just listen to us and be patient.”

Achilles, the great runner, responded: 225

“When you two speak, Goddess, a man has to listen
 No matter how angry. It's better that way.
 Obey the gods and they hear you when you pray.”

With that he ground his heavy hand
 Onto the silver hilt and pushed the great sword 230

Back into its sheath. Athena's speech
 Had been well-timed. She was on her way
 To Olympus by now, to the halls of Zeus
 And the other immortals, while Achilles
 Tore into Agamemnon again: 235

“You bloated drunk,
 With a dog's eyes and a rabbit's heart!
 You've never had the guts to buckle on armor in battle
 Or come out with the best fighting Greeks
 On any campaign! Afraid to look Death in the eye, 240
 Agamemnon? It's far more profitable
 To hang back in the army's rear—isn't it?—
 Confiscating prizes from any Greek who talks back
 And bleeding your people dry. There's not a real man
 Under your command, or this latest atrocity 245
 Would be your last, son of Atreus.

Now get this straight. I swear a formal oath:
 By this scepter, which will never sprout leaf
 Or branch again since it was cut from its stock
 In the mountains, which will bloom no more 250
 Now that bronze has pared off leaf and bark,
 And which now the sons of the Greeks hold in their hands
 At council, upholding Zeus' laws—

By this scepter I swear:
 When every last Greek desperately misses Achilles, 255
 Your remorse won't do any good then,
 When Hector the man-killer swats you down like flies.
 And you will eat your heart out
 Because you failed to honor the best Greek of all.”

Those were his words, and he slammed the scepter, 260
 Studded with gold, to the ground and sat down.

Opposite him, Agamemnon fumed.

Then Nestor
 Stood up, sweet-worded Nestor, the orator from Pylos
 With a voice high-toned and liquid as honey. 265
 He had seen two generations of men pass away

In sandy Pylos and was now king in the third.
He was full of good will in the speech he made:

“It’s a sad day for Greece, a sad day.
Priam and Priam’s sons would be happy indeed, 270
And the rest of the Trojans too, glad in their hearts,
If they learned all this about you two fighting,
Our two best men in council and in battle.
Now you listen to me, both of you. You are both
Younger than I am, and I’ve associated with men 275
Better than you, and they didn’t treat me lightly.
I’ve never seen men like those, and never will,
The likes of Peirithous and Dryas, a shepherd to his people,
Caineus and Exadius and godlike Polyphemus,
And Aegeus’ son, Theseus, who could have passed for a god, 280
The strongest men who ever lived on earth, the strongest,
And they fought with the strongest, with wild things
From the mountains, and beat the daylights out of them.
I was their companion, although I came from Pylos,
From the ends of the earth—they sent for me themselves. 285
And I held my own fighting with them. You couldn’t find
A mortal on earth who could fight with them now.
And when I talked in council, they took my advice.
So should you two now: taking advice is a good thing.

Agamemnon, for all your nobility, do not take his girl. 290
Leave her be: the army originally gave her to him as a prize.
Nor should you, son of Peleus, want to lock horns with a king.
A scepter-holding king has honor beyond the rest of men,
Power and glory given by Zeus himself.
You are stronger, and it is a goddess who bore you. 295
But he is more powerful, since he rules over more.
Son of Atreus, cease your anger. And I appeal
Personally to Achilles to control his temper, since he is,
For all Greeks, a mighty bulwark in this evil war.”

And Agamemnon, the warlord: 300

“Yes, old man, everything you’ve said is absolutely right.
But this man wants to be ahead of everyone else,

He wants to rule everyone, give orders to everyone,
 Lord it over everyone, and he's not going to get away with it.
 If the gods eternal made him a spearman, does that mean
 They gave him permission to be insolent as well?" 305

And Achilles, breaking in on him:

"Ha, and think of the names people would call me
 If I bowed and scraped every time you opened your mouth.
 Try that on somebody else, but not on me. 310
 I'll tell you this, and you can stick it in your gut:
 I'm not going to put up a fight on account of the girl.
 You, all of you, gave her to me and you can all take her back.
 But anything else of mine in my black sailing ship
 You keep your goddamn hands off, you hear? 315
 Try it. Let everybody here see how fast
 Your black blood boils up around my spear."

So it was a stand-off, their battle of words,
 And the assembly beside the Greek ships dissolved.
 Achilles went back to the huts by his ships 320
 With Patroclus and his men. Agamemnon had a fast ship
 Hauled down to the sea, picked twenty oarsmen,
 Loaded on a hundred bulls due to the god, and had
 Chryses' daughter,
 His fair-cheeked girl, go aboard also. Odysseus captained,
 And when they were all on board, the ship headed out to sea. 325

Onshore, Agamemnon ordered a purification.
 The troops scrubbed down and poured the filth
 Into the sea. Then they sacrificed to Apollo
 Oxen and goats by the hundreds on the barren shore.
 The smoky savor swirled up to the sky. 330

That was the order of the day. But Agamemnon
 Did not forget his spiteful threat against Achilles.
 He summoned Talthybius and Eurybates,
 Faithful retainers who served as his heralds:

“Go to the hut of Achilles, son of Peleus;
Bring back the girl, fair-cheeked Briseis.
If he won’t give her up, I’ll come myself
With my men and take her—and freeze his heart cold.” 335

It was not the sort of mission a herald would relish.
The pair trailed along the barren seashore 340
Until they came to the Myrmidons’ ships and encampment.
They found Achilles sitting outside his hut
Beside his black ship. He was not glad to see them.
They stood respectfully silent, in awe of this king,
And it was Achilles who was moved to address them first: 345

“Welcome, heralds, the gods’ messengers and men’s.
Come closer. You’re not to blame, Agamemnon is,
Who sent you here for the girl, Briseis.

Patroclus,

Bring the girl out and give her to these gentlemen. 350
You two are witnesses before the blessed gods,
Before mortal men and that hard-hearted king,
If ever I’m needed to protect the others
From being hacked to bits. His mind is murky with anger,
And he doesn’t have the sense to look ahead and behind 355
To see how the Greeks might defend their ships.”

Thus Achilles.

Patroclus obeyed his beloved friend
And brought Briseis, cheeks flushed, out of the tent
And gave her to the heralds, who led her away. 360
She went unwillingly.

Then Achilles, in tears,
Withdrew from his friends and sat down far away
On the foaming white seashore, staring out
At the endless sea. Stretching out his hands, 365
He prayed over and over to his beloved mother:

“Mother, since you bore me for a short life only,
Olympian Zeus was supposed to grant me honor.
Well, he hasn’t given me any at all. Agamemnon

Has taken away my prize and dishonored me.” 370

His voice, choked with tears, was heard by his mother
As she sat in the sea-depths beside her old father.
She rose up from the white-capped sea like a mist,
And settling herself beside her weeping child
She stroked him with her hand and talked to him: 375

“Why are you crying, son? What’s wrong?
Don’t keep it inside. Tell me so we’ll both know.”

And Achilles, with a deep groan:

“You already know. Why do I have to tell you?
We went after Thebes, Eëtion’s sacred town, 380
Sacked it and brought the plunder back here.
The army divided everything up and chose
For Agamemnon fair-cheeked Chryseis.
Then her father, Chryses, a priest of Apollo,
Came to our army’s ships on the beachhead, 385
Hauling a fortune for his daughter’s ransom.
He displayed Apollo’s sacral ribbons
On a golden staff and made a formal plea
To the entire Greek army, but especially
The commanders, Atreus’ two sons. 390
You could hear the troops murmuring,
‘Respect the priest and take the ransom.’
But Agamemnon wouldn’t hear of it
And dismissed Chryses with a rough speech.
The old man went back angry, and Apollo 395
Heard his beloved priest’s prayer.
He hit the Greeks hard, and the troops
Were falling over dead, the god’s arrows
Raining down all through the Greek camp.
A prophet told us the Arch-Destroyer’s will, 400
And I demanded the god be appeased.
Agamemnon got angry, stood up
And threatened me, and made good his threat.
The high command sent the girl on a fast ship

Back to Chryse with gifts for Apollo, 405
 And heralds led away my girl, Briseis,
 Whom the army had given to me.
 Now you have to help me, if you can.

Go to Olympus
 And call in the debt that Zeus owes you. 410
 I remember often hearing you tell
 In my father's house how you alone managed,
 Of all the immortals, to save Zeus' neck
 When the other Olympians wanted to bind him—
 Hera and Poseidon and Pallas Athena. 415
 You came and loosened him from his chains,
 And you lured to Olympus' summit the giant
 With a hundred hands whom the gods call
 Briareus but men call Aegaeon, stronger
 Even than his own father Uranus, and he 420
 Sat hulking in front of cloud-black Zeus,
 Proud of his prowess, and scared all the gods
 Who were trying to put the son of Cronus in chains.

Remind Zeus of this, sit holding his knees,
 See if he is willing to help the Trojans 425
 Hem the Greeks in between the fleet and the sea.
 Once they start being killed, the Greeks may
 Appreciate Agamemnon for what he is,
 And the wide-ruling son of Atreus will see
 What a fool he's been because he did not honor 430
 The best of all the fighting Achaeans."

And Thetis, now weeping herself:

"O my poor child. I bore you for sorrow,
 Nursed you for grief. Why? You should be
 Spending your time here by your ships 435
 Happily and untroubled by tears,
 Since life is short for you, all too brief.
 Now you're destined for both an early death
 And misery beyond compare. It was for this
 I gave birth to you in your father's palace 440
 Under an evil star.

I'll go to snow-bound Olympus
 And tell all this to the Lord of Lightning.
 I hope he listens. You stay here, though,
 Beside your ships and let the Greeks feel 445
 Your spite; withdraw completely from the war.
 Zeus left yesterday for the River Ocean
 On his way to a feast with the Ethiopians.
 All the gods went with him. He'll return
 To Olympus twelve days from now, 450
 And I'll go then to his bronze threshold
 And plead with him. I think I'll persuade him."

And she left him there, angry and heartsick
 At being forced to give up the silken-waisted girl.

Meanwhile, Odysseus was putting in 455
 At Chryse with his sacred cargo on board.
 When they were well within the deepwater harbor
 They furled the sail and stowed it in the ship's hold,
 Slackened the forestays and lowered the mast,
 Working quickly, then rowed her to a mooring, where 460
 They dropped anchor and made the stern cables fast.
 The crew disembarked on the seabeach
 And unloaded the bulls for Apollo the Archer.
 Then Chryses' daughter stepped off the seagoing vessel,
 And Odysseus led her to an altar 465
 And placed her in her father's hands, saying:

"Chryses, King Agamemnon has sent me here
 To return your child and offer to Phoebus
 Formal sacrifice on behalf of the Greeks.
 So may we appease Lord Apollo, and may he 470
 Lift the afflictions he has sent upon us."

Chryses received his daughter tenderly.

Moving quickly, they lined the hundred oxen
 Around the massive altar, a glorious offering,
 Washed their hands and sprinkled on the victims 475

Sacrificial barley. On behalf of the Greeks
Chryses lifted his hands and prayed aloud:

“Hear me, Silverbow, Protector of Chryse,
Lord of Holy Cilla, Master of Tenedos,
As once before you heard my prayer, 480
Did me honor, and smote the Greeks mightily,
So now also grant me this prayer:

Lift the plague
From the Greeks and save them from death.”

Thus the old priest, and Apollo heard him. 485

After the prayers and the strewing of barley
They slaughtered and flayed the oxen,
Jointed the thighbones and wrapped them
In a layer of fat with cuts of meat on top.
The old man roasted them over charcoal 490

And doused them with wine. Younger men
Stood by with five-tined forks in their hands.
When the thigh pieces were charred and they had
Tasted the tripe, they cut the rest into strips,
Skewered it on spits and roasted it skillfully. 495

When they were done and the feast was ready,
Feast they did, and no one lacked an equal share.
When they had all had enough to eat and drink,
The young men topped off mixing bowls with wine
And served it in goblets to all the guests. 500

All day long these young Greeks propitiated
The god with dancing, singing to Apollo
A paean as they danced, and the god was pleased.
When the sun went down and darkness came on,
They went to sleep by the ship's stern-cables. 505

Dawn came early, a palmetto of rose,
Time to make sail for the wide beachhead camp.
They set up mast and spread the white canvas,
And the following wind, sent by Apollo,
Boomed in the mainsail. An indigo wave 510

Hissed off the bow as the ship surged on,
Leaving a wake as she held on course through the billows.

When they reached the beachhead they hauled the black ship
High on the sand and jammed in the long chocks;
Then the crew scattered to their own huts and ships. 515

All this time Achilles, the son of Peleus in the line of Zeus,
Nursed his anger, the great runner idle by his fleet's fast hulls.
He was not to be seen in council, that arena for glory,
Nor in combat. He sat tight in camp consumed with grief,
His great heart yearning for the battle cry and war. 520

Twelve days went by. Dawn.
The gods returned to Olympus,
Zeus at their head.

Thetis did not forget
Her son's requests. She rose from the sea 525
And up through the air to the great sky
And found Cronus' wide-seeing son
Sitting in isolation on the highest peak
Of the rugged Olympic massif.
She settled beside him, and touched his knees 530
With her left hand, his beard with her right,
And made her plea to the Lord of Sky:

"Father Zeus, if I have ever helped you
In word or deed among the immortals,
Grant me this prayer: 535
Honor my son, doomed to die young
And yet dishonored by King Agamemnon,
Who stole his prize, a personal affront.
Do justice by him, Lord of Olympus.
Give the Trojans the upper hand until the Greeks 540
Grant my son the honor he deserves."

Zeus made no reply but sat a long time
In silence, clouds scudding around him.
Thetis held fast to his knees and asked again:

“Give me a clear yes or no. Either nod in assent
Or refuse me. Why should you care if I know
How negligible a goddess I am in your eyes.” 545

This provoked a troubled, gloomy response:

“This is disastrous. You’re going to force me
Into conflict with Hera. I can just hear her now, 550
Cursing me and bawling me out. As it is,
She already accuses me of favoring the Trojans.
Please go back the way you came. Maybe
Hera won’t notice. I’ll take care of this.
And so you can have some peace of mind, 555
I’ll say yes to you by nodding my head,
The ultimate pledge. Unambiguous,
Irreversible, and absolutely fulfilled,
Whatever I say yes to with a nod of my head.”

And the Son of Cronus nodded. Black brows 560
Lowered, a glory of hair cascaded down from the Lord’s
Immortal head, and the holy mountain trembled.

Their conference over, the two parted. The goddess
Dove into the deep sea from Olympus’ snow-glare
And Zeus went to his home. The gods all 565
Rose from their seats at their father’s entrance. Not one
Dared watch him enter without standing to greet him.
And so God entered and took his high seat.

But Hera

Had noticed his private conversation with Thetis, 570
The silver-footed daughter of the Old Man of the Sea,
And flew at him with cutting words:

“Who was that you were scheming with just now?
You just love devising secret plots behind my back,
Don’t you? You can’t bear to tell me what you’re thinking, 575
Or you don’t dare. Never have and never will.”

The Father of Gods and Men answered:

“Hera, don’t hope to know all my secret thoughts.
 It would strain your mind even though you are my wife.
 What it is proper to hear, no one, human or divine, 580
 Will hear before you. But what I wish to conceive
 Apart from the other gods, don’t pry into that.”

And Lady Hera, with her oxen eyes wide:

“Oh my. The awesome son of Cronus has spoken.
 Pry? You know that I never pry. And you always 585
 Cheerfully volunteer—whatever information you please.
 It’s just that I have this feeling that somehow
 The silver-footed daughter of the Old Man of the Sea
 May have won you over. She *was* sitting beside you
 Up there in the mist, and she did touch your knees. 590
 And I’m pretty sure that you agreed to honor Achilles
 And destroy Greeks by the thousands beside their ships.”

And Zeus, the master of cloud and storm:

“You witch! Your intuitions are always right.
 But what does it get you? Nothing, except that 595
 I like you less than ever. And so you’re worse off.
 If it’s as you think it is, it’s my business, not yours.
 So sit down and shut up and do as I say.
 You see these hands? All the gods on Olympus
 Won’t be able to help you if I ever lay them on you.” 600

Hera lost her nerve when she heard this.
 She sat down in silence, fear cramping her heart,
 And gloom settled over the gods in Zeus’ hall.
 Hephaestus, the master artisan, broke the silence,
 Out of concern for his ivory-armed mother: 605

“This is terrible; it’s going to ruin us all.
 If you two quarrel like this over mortals
 It’s bound to affect us gods. There’ll be no more
 Pleasure in our feasts if we let things turn ugly.
 Mother, please, I don’t have to tell you, 610

You have to be pleasant to our father Zeus
So he won't be angry and ruin our feast.
If the Lord of Lightning wants to blast us from our seats,
He can—that's how much stronger he is.
So apologize to him with silken-soft words, 615
And the Olympian in turn will be gracious to us."

He whisked up a two-handled cup, offered it
To his dear mother, and said to her:

"I know it's hard, Mother, but you have to endure it.
I don't want to see you getting beat up, and me 620
Unable to help you. The Olympian can be rough.
Once before when I tried to rescue you
He flipped me by my foot off our balcony.
I fell all day and came down when the sun did
On the island of Lemnos, scarcely alive. 625
The Sintians had to nurse me back to health."

By the time he finished, the ivory-armed goddess
Was smiling at her son. She accepted the cup from him.
Then the lame god turned serving boy, siphoning nectar
From the mixing bowl and pouring the sweet liquor 630
For all of the gods, who couldn't stop laughing
At the sight of Hephaestus hustling through the halls.

And so all day long until the sun went down
They feasted to their hearts' content,
Apollo playing beautiful melodies on the lyre, 635
The Muses singing responsively in lovely voices.
And when the last gleams of sunset had faded,
They turned in for the night, each to a house
Built by Hephaestus, the renowned master craftsman,
The burly blacksmith with the soul of an artist. 640

And the Lord of Lightning, Olympian Zeus, went to his bed,
The bed he always slept in when sweet sleep overcame him.
He climbed in and slept, next to golden-throned Hera.

ILIAD 2

The gods slept soundly that night,
And the men, by their warhorses.

But Zeus lay awake in the dark,
Thinking of how to honor Achilles
And destroy Greeks by the shipload. 5
His thoughts parted like stormclouds,
And in the clear space between them
He saw what seemed to be the best plan:
To send to Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
A wooly menace, a Dream, 10
And to it he spoke these feathery words:

“Go, deadly Dream, along the Greek ships
Until you come to the hut of Agamemnon,
And deliver this message to him exactly:
Order him to arm his long-haired Greeks. 15
Now is his time to capture Troy.
The Olympian gods are no longer divided;
Hera has bent them all to her will
And targeted the Trojans for pain.”

The Dream listened and went. Shadows flew 20
Around the Greek ships. It found Agamemnon
Wrapped in deep, starlit slumber.

The Dream stood above his head. It looked
Like Nestor, the old man that Agamemnon
Respected the most, looked just like Nestor, 25
And this dream that was a god addressed the king:

“Asleep, son of Atreus, horsebreaker,
Wise man? You can’t sleep all night.
All those decisions to make, so many people

Depending on you. I'll be brief. 30
 I am a messenger from Zeus, who is
 Far away, but loves you and pities you.
 He orders you to arm your long-haired Greeks.
 Now is your time to capture Troy.
 The Olympian gods are no longer divided; 35
 Hera has bent them all to her will
 And targeted Troy for sorrow from Zeus.
 Think it over. Keep your wits about you,
 And don't forget this when sleep slips away."

And the voice trailed off, leaving him there 40
 Dreaming of things that were never to be.
 He thought he would take Priam's city that day,
 The fool. He didn't know what Zeus had in mind,
 The pain and groans for both Trojans and Greeks
 In the unendurable crush of battle. 45
 He woke from sleep, the god's voice
 Eddying around him. He sat upright,
 Pulled on a silky shirt, threw on a cloak,
 Laced a pair of sandals on his shining feet,
 And hung from his shoulder a silver-worked sword. 50
 And he held his imperishable, ancestral staff
 As he walked through the ships of the bronze-kilted Greeks.

Dawn had just reached the peak of Olympus,
 Speaking light to Zeus and the other immortals.

[Lines 55–225 are omitted. Agamemnon tests the troops' morale by suggesting that they lift the siege and sail for home. They are barely restrained from doing so by Odysseus, who brings them back to assembly.]

And so Odysseus mastered the army. The men all
 Streamed back from their ships and huts and assembled
 With a roar.

*A wave from the restless, churning sea
 Crashes on a beach, and the water seethes and thunders.* 230

They had all dropped to the sand and were sitting there,
 Except for one man, Thersites, a blathering fool
 And a rabble rouser. This man had a repertory
 Of choice insults he used at random to revile the nobles,
 Saying anything he thought the soldiers would laugh at. 235
 He was also the ugliest soldier at the siege of Troy,
 Bowlegged, walked with a limp, his shoulders
 Slumped over his caved-in chest, and up top
 Scraggly fuzz sprouted on his pointy head.
 Achilles especially hated him, as did Odysseus, 240
 Because he was always provoking them. Now
 He was screaming abuse at Agamemnon.
 The Achaeans were angry with him and indignant,
 But that didn't stop him from razzing the warlord:

“What’s wrong, son of Atreus, something you need? 245
 Your huts are filled with bronze, and with women
 We Achaeans pick out and give to you first of all
 Whenever we take some town. Are you short of gold?
 Maybe some Trojan horse breeder will bring you some
 Out of Ilion as ransom for his son 250
 Whom I or some other Achaean has captured.
 Maybe it’s a young girl for you to make love to
 And keep off somewhere for yourself. It’s not right
 For a leader to march our troops into trouble.
 You Achaeans are a disgrace, Achaean women, not men! 255
 Let’s sail home in our ships and leave him here
 To stew over his prizes so he’ll have a chance to see
 Whether he needs our help or not. Furthermore,
 He dishonored Achilles, who’s a much better man.
 Achilles doesn’t have an angry bone in his body, 260
 Or this latest atrocity would be your last, son of Atreus!”

That was the abuse Agamemnon took
 From the mouth of Thersites. Odysseus
 Was on him in a flash, staring him down
 With a scowl, and laid into him: 265

“Mind your tongue, Thersites. Better think twice

About being the only man here to quarrel with his betters.
 I don't care how bell-toned an orator you are,
 You're nothing but trash. There's no one lower
 In all the army that followed Agamemnon to Troy. 270
 You have no right even to mention kings in public,
 Much less badmouth them so you can get to go home.
 We have no idea how things are going to turn out,
 What kind of homecoming we Achaeans will have.
 Yet you have the nerve to revile Agamemnon, 275
 Son of Atreus, the shepherd of his people,
 Because the Danaan heroes are generous to him?
 You think you can stand up in public and insult him?
 Well, let me tell you something. I guarantee
 That if I ever catch you running on at the mouth again 280
 As you were just now, my name isn't Odysseus
 And may I never again be called Telemachus' father
 If I don't lay hold of you, strip your ass naked,
 And run you out of the assembly and through the ships,
 Crying at all the ugly licks I land on you." 285

And with that he whaled the staff down
 On Thersites' back. The man crumpled in pain
 And tears flooded his eyes. A huge bloody welt
 Rose on his back under the gold stave's force,
 And he sat there astounded, drooling with pain 290
 And wiping away his tears. The troops, forgetting
 Their disappointment, had a good laugh
 At his expense, looking at each other and saying:

"Oh man! You can't count how many good things
 Odysseus has done for the Greeks, a real leader 295
 In council and in battle, but this tops them all,
 The way he took that loudmouth out of commission.
 I don't think he'll ever be man enough again
 To rile the commanders with all his insults."

That's what they were saying in the ranks. 300

[Lines 301–471 are omitted. Odysseus and Nestor advance powerful arguments for continuing the war.]

The warlord Agamemnon
 Ordered the heralds to muster the troops
 In battle formation. They gave their skirling cry,
 And all the commanders around Atreus' son 475
 Hurried to have their men fall in.
 And in their midst Athena, eyes like slate,
 Carried the aegis, priceless and out of all time,
 Pure gold tassels flying in the wind, each
 Woven strand worth a hundred oxen. 480
 And the goddess herself, glowing like moonlight,
 Rushed over the sand, sweeping them on
 And stiffening their hearts, so that for each of them
 To die in battle was sweeter than going home.

A fire raging through endless forests 485
In a mountain range can be seen far away
As a distant glow.

Likewise the glare
 From the advancing army's unimaginable bronze,
 An eerie light that reached the stratosphere. 490

Migratory birds—cranes, geese, or long-necked swans—
Are gathering in a meadow in Asia
Where the river Caystrius branches out in streams.
For a while they fly in random patterns
For the pure joy of using their wings, 495
But then with a single cry they start to land,
One line of birds settling in front of another
Until the whole meadow is a carpet of sound.

Likewise from the ships and huts, tribe after tribe
 Poured out onto the Scamander's floodplain, 500
 And the ground groaned and reverberated
 Under their feet and the hooves of their horses.

And they stood in the flowering meadow there,
 Countless as leaves, or as flowers in their season.

Innumerable throngs of buzzing flies 505
Will swarm all over a herdsman's yard
In springtime, when milk wets the pails—

Likewise the throngs of long-haired Greeks
 Who stood on the plain facing the Trojans,
 Intent on hammering them to pieces. 510

And as goatherds easily separate out
Wide flocks of goats mingled in pasture,

So the commanders drew up their troops
 To enter battle, and Lord Agamemnon
 Moved among them like Zeus himself, 515
 The look in his eyes, the carriage of his head,
 With a torso like Ares', or like Poseidon's.

Picture a bull that stands out from the herd
Head and horns above the milling cattle—

Zeus on that day made the son of Atreus 520
 A man who stood out from the crowd of heroes.

[Lines 522–872 are omitted. In a passage known as the Catalogue of the Ships, the poet lists the contingents of the Greek army and their leaders.]

But tell me now, Muse, who were the best
 Of men and of horses in the Atreides' army?

The best horses were the mares of Eumelus, 875
 Swift as birds, of the same age, with matching coats,
 And their backs were as even as a levelling line.
 Apollo Silverbow had bred them in Pereia,
 A team of mares who bore Panic in battle.

The best warrior was Telamonian Ajax— 880
 While Achilles was in his rage. For Achilles
 Was second to no one, as were the horses
 That bore Peleus' flawless son. But now he lay idle
 Among his beaked, seagoing hulls, furious
 With Agamemnon, the shepherd of the people, 885
 The son of Atreus. Achilles' men
 Amused themselves on the shore, throwing
 The discus and javelin and shooting their bows.
 The horses stood beside their chariots
 Champing lotus and marsh parsley. 890
 The chariots lay covered in their owners' huts.
 The men missed their leader. They tramped
 Through the camp and had no part in fighting.

The army marched, and it was as though the land
 Were swept with fire. Earth groaned beneath them, 895

*As beneath Zeus when in his wrath he thunders
 And lashes the country of the Arimi with lightning
 Where men say Typhoeus lies in the ground.*

So the earth groaned under their feet
 As they pressed on quickly over the plain. 900

Zeus notified the Trojans of all this
 By sending Iris streaking down to Ilion.
 She found the citizens assembled in one body,
 Young and old alike, near Priam's gate, talking.
 Iris positioned herself nearby 905
 And made her voice sound like Polites'—
 A son of Priam who, trusting his speed,
 Often sat as lookout on top of the barrow
 Of old Aesytes, watching for any movement
 Of Greek troops from their ships. 910
 Using his voice, the goddess said to Priam:

"Sir, you are as fond of endless speeches now
 As you were in peacetime. But this is war.

I have been in a battle or two, but never
Have I seen an army like this, 915
Covering the plain like leaves, or like sand,
As it advances to attack the city.
Hector, you're in charge of this operation.
But because there are so many allies here
With different languages from points abroad, 920
Each captain should give the word to his own men
And lead them out marshalled by cities."

Hector knew this was a goddess' speech
And dismissed the assembly. They rushed to arms.
All the gates were opened, and the troops 925
Poured through them, on foot and in war cars.
In front of the city there is a steep hill
Out in the plain, level terrain all around it.
Men call this hill Batieia. Immortals call it
The barrow of Myrine the Dancer. 930
It was here that the Trojans and their allies
Drew up their troops in companies.

[The rest of Book 2 (lines 933–97) is omitted. The poet lists the contingents of the Trojan army.]

ILIAD 3

Two armies,
The troops in divisions
Under their commanders,

The Trojans advancing across the plain

Like cranes beating their metallic wings 5
In the stormy sky at winter's onset,
Unspeakable rain at their backs, their necks stretched
Toward Oceanic streams and down
To strafe the brown Pygmy race,
Bringing strife and bloodshed from the sky at dawn, 10

While the Greeks moved forward in silence,
Their breath curling in long angry plumes
That acknowledged their pledges to die for each other.

Banks of mist settle on mountain peaks
And seep into the valleys. Shepherds dislike it 15
But for a thief it is better than night,
And a man can see only as far as he can throw a stone.

No more could the soldiers see through the cloud of dust
The armies tramped up as they moved through the plain.

And when they had almost closed— 20
Was it a god?—no, not a god
But Paris who stepped out from the Trojan ranks,
Leopard skin on his shoulders, curved bow, sword,
And shaking two bronze-tipped spears at the Greeks
He invited their best to fight him to the death. 25

When Menelaus, who was Ares' darling, saw him
Strutting out from the ranks, he felt

*As a lion must feel when he finds the carcass
Of a stag or wild goat, and, half-starving,
Consumes it greedily even though hounds and hunters
Are swarming down on him.* 30

It was Paris all right,
Who could have passed for a god,
And Menelaus grinned as he hefted his gear
And stepped down from his chariot. He would 35
Have his revenge at last. Paris' blood
Turned milky when he saw him coming on,
And he faded back into the Trojan troops
With cheeks as pale as if he had seen—
Had almost stepped on—a poisonous snake 40
In a mountain pass. He could barely stand
As disdainful Trojans made room for him in the ranks,
And Hector, seeing his brother tremble at Atreus' son,
Started in on him with these abusive epithets:

“Paris, you desperate, womanizing pretty boy! 45
I wish you had never been born, or had died unmarried.
Better that than this disgrace before the troops.
Can't you just hear it, the long-haired Greeks
Chuckling and saying that our champion wins
For good looks but comes up short on offense and defense? 50
Is this how you were when you got up a crew
And sailed overseas, hobnobbed with the warrior caste
In a foreign country and sailed off with
A beautiful woman with marriage ties to half of them?
You're nothing but trouble for your father and your city, 55
A joke to your enemies and an embarrassment to yourself.
No, don't stand up to Menelaus: you might find out
What kind of a man it is whose wife you're sleeping with.
You think your lyre will help you, or Aphrodite's gifts,
Your hair, your pretty face, when you sprawl in the dust? 60
It's the Trojans who are cowards, or you'd have long since
Been dressed out in stones for all the harm you've done.”

And Paris, handsome as a god, answered him:

“That’s only just, Hector. You’ve got a mind
Like an axe, you know, always sharp, 65
Making the skilled cut through a ship’s beam,
Multiplying force—nothing ever turns your edge.
But don’t throw golden Aphrodite’s gifts in my face.
We don’t get to choose what the gods give us, you know,
And we can’t just toss their gifts aside. 70
So all right, if you want me to fight, fine.
Have the Trojans and the Greeks sit down,
And Menelaus and I will square off in the middle
To fight for Helen and all her possessions.
Winner take all. 75
And everyone else will swear oaths of friendship,
You all to live here in the fertile Troad,
And they to go back to bluegrass Argos
And Achaea with its beautiful women.”

Hector liked what he heard. 80
He went out in front along the Trojan ranks
Holding a spear broadside and made them all sit down.
Greek archers and slingers were taking aim at him
And already starting to shoot arrows and stones
When Agamemnon boomed out a command 85
For them to hold their fire. Hector was signalling
That he had something to say, and his helmet
Caught the morning sun as he addressed both armies:

“Listen to me, Trojans, and you warriors from Greece.
Paris, on account of whom this war began, says this: 90
He wants all the Trojan and Greek combatants
To lay their weapons down on the ground.
He and Menelaus will square off in the middle
And fight for Helen and all her possessions.
Winner take all. 95
And everyone else swears oaths of friendship.”

Utter silence,
Until Menelaus, who was good at the war shout, said:

“Now listen to me, since my pain is paramount
 In all this. It may be that the Greeks and Trojans 100
 Can at last call it quits. We’ve had enough suffering
 From this quarrel of mine that Paris began.
 Whichever of us is due to die, let him die.
 Then the rest of you can be done with each other.
 Bring a pair of lambs, a white one and a black, 105
 For Earth and Sun. Our side will bring another for Zeus.
 And have Priam come, so he can swear oaths himself,
 In person, since his sons are arrogant perjurers
 Who would just as soon trample on Zeus’ solemn word.
 Younger men always have their heads in the clouds. 110
 An old man looks ahead and behind, and the result
 Is far better for both parties involved.”

You could see their mood brighten,
 Greeks and Trojans both, with the hope
 That this wretched war would soon be over. 115
 They pulled their chariots up in rows,
 Dismounted, and piled up their weapons.

There was not much space between the two armies.

Hector dispatched two heralds to the city
 To fetch the lambs and summon Priam. 120
 Agamemnon sent Talthybius back to the ships
 With orders to bring back a lamb.

While these human heralds were off on their missions,
 Iris, the gods’ herald (who is also the rainbow),
 Came to white-armed Helen disguised as Laodice, 125
 Her sister-in-law and Priam’s most beautiful daughter.
 She found Helen in the main hall, weaving a folding mantle
 On a great loom and designing into the blood-red fabric
 The trials that the Trojans and Greeks had suffered
 For her beauty under Ares’ murderous hands. 130
 Iris stood near Helen and said:

“Come and see, dear lady, the amazing thing

The Greek and Trojan warriors have done.
 They've fought all these years out on the plain,
 Lusting for each other's blood, but now 135
 They've sat down in silence—halted the war—
 They're leaning back on their shields
 And their long spears are stuck in the sand.
 But Paris and Menelaus are going to fight
 A duel with lances, and the winner 140
 Will lay claim to you as his beloved wife."

The goddess' words turned Helen's mind
 Into a sweet mist of desire
 For her former husband, her parents, and her city.
 She dressed herself in fine silvery linens 145
 And came out of her bedroom crying softly.
 Two maids trailed behind, Aethrê,
 Pittheus' daughter, and cow-eyed Clyménê.
 They came to the Western Gate,
 Where a knot of old men sat— 150

Priam, Panthous, Thymoetes,
 Lampus, Clytius, Hicetaon
 (Who was in Ares' bloodline),
 Ucalegon and Antenor,
 Who lived and breathed wisdom— 155

These veterans sat on the wall by the Western Gate,
 Too old to fight now, but excellent counsellors.

*Think of cicadas perched on a branch,
 Their delicate voices shrill in the woods.*

Such were the voices of these Trojan elders 160
 Sitting on the tower by the Western Gate.
 When they saw Helen coming
 Their rasping whispers flew along the wall:

"Who could blame either the Trojans or Greeks
 For suffering so long for a woman like this." 165

“Her eyes are not human.”

“Whatever she is, let her go back with the ships
And spare us and our children a generation of pain.”

But Priam called out to her:

“Come here, dear child, sit next to me 170
So you can see your former husband
And dear kinsmen. You are not to blame
For this war with the Greeks. The gods are.
Now tell me, who is that enormous man
Towering over the Greek troops, handsome, 175
Well-built? I’ve never laid eyes on such
A fine figure of a man. He looks like a king.”

And Helen,
The sky’s brightness reflected in her mortal face:

“Reverend you are to me dear father-in-law, 180
A man to hold in awe. I’m so ashamed.
Death should have been a sweeter evil to me
Than following your son here, leaving my home,
My marriage, my friends, my precious daughter,
That lovely time in my life. None of it was to be, 185
And lamenting it has been my slow death.
But you asked me something, and I’ll answer.
That man is Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
A great king and a strong warrior both.
He was also my brother-in-law—shameless bitch 190
That I am—if that life was ever real.”

The old man was lost in reverie and wonder:

“The son of Atreus. Born to power and wealth.
Blessed by the gods. Now I see
How many Greek lads you command. 195
I thought I saw it all when I went
To Phrygia once and saw thousands

Of soldiers and gleaming horses
 Under the command of Otreus and Mygdon
 Massed by the banks of the Sangarios, 200
 An army in which I myself served
 On that fateful day when the Amazons
 Swept down to fight against men.
 They were nothing compared to these wild-eyed Greeks.”

Then he saw Odysseus and asked: 205

“Now tell me about this one, dear child,
 Shorter than Agamemnon by a head
 But broader in the shoulders and chest.
 His armor is lying on the ground
 And he’s roaming the ranks like a ram, 210
 That’s it, just like a thick-fleeced ram
 Striding through a flock of silvery sheep.”

And Helen, Zeus’ child:

“That is Laertes’ son,
 The master strategist Odysseus, born and bred 215
 In the rocky hills of Ithaca. He knows
 Every trick there is, and his mind runs deep.”

Antenor turned to her and observed astutely:

“Your words are not off the mark there, madam.
 Odysseus came here once before, on an embassy 220
 For your sake along with Menelaus.
 I entertained them courteously in the great hall
 And learned each man’s character and depth of mind.
 Standing in a crowd of Trojans, Menelaus,
 With his wide shoulders, was more prominent, 225
 But when both were seated Odysseus was lordlier.
 When it came time for each to speak in public
 And weave a spell of wisdom with their words,
 Menelaus spoke fluently enough, to the point
 And very clearly, but briefly, since he is not 230

A man of many words. Being older, he spoke first.
 Then Odysseus, the master strategist, rose quickly,
 But just stood there, his eyes fixed on the ground.
 He did not move his staff forward or backward
 But held it steady. You would have thought him 235
 A dull, surly lout without any wit. But when he
 Opened his mouth and projected his voice
 The words fell down like snowflakes in a blizzard.
 No mortal could have vied with Odysseus then,
 And we no longer held his looks against him.” 240

The third hero old Priam saw was Ajax.

“And who is that giant of a Greek over there,
 Head and shoulders above the other Achaeans?”

And Helen, shining in her long trailing robes:

“That is big Ajax, the army’s mountain. 245
 Standing beyond him is Idomeneus,
 Like a god, with his Cretan commanders.
 He used to come often from Crete
 And Menelaus would entertain him
 In our house. And now I can make out 250
 All the other Greeks, those I know
 And whose names I could tell you.
 But there are two commanders I do not see,
 Castor the horsebreaker and the boxer
 Polydeuces, my brothers, born of one mother. 255
 Either they didn’t come here from lovely Lacedaemon,
 Or else they did come in their seagoing ships
 But avoid the company of the fighting men
 In horror of the shame and disgrace that are mine.”

But they had long been held by the life-giving earth 260
 There in Lacedaemon, their ancestral land.

And now the heralds came up to the town
 With the sacrificial victims, the two rams,

And as fruit of the fields, hearty wine
In a goatskin bag. The herald Idaeus 265
Held a gleaming bowl and a golden chalice
And roused the old man with this speech:

“Rise, son of Laomedon.
The best men of Troy and Achaea summon you
Down to the plain to swear solemn oaths. 270
Paris and Menelaus will fight
A duel for the woman, and she will
Follow the winner with all her possessions.
Everyone else will swear oaths of friendship,
We to live here in the fertile Troad, 275
And they to go back to bluegrass Argos
And Achaea with its beautiful women.”

The old man stiffened.
He ordered his companions to yoke his horses,
Then mounted himself and took the reins. 280
Antenor rode with him in the beautiful chariot
And they drove out through the Western Gate
And onto the plain. They pulled up in the space
Between the two armies and stepped down to the earth.

Agamemnon rose, 285
And Odysseus, deep in thought.

Heralds brought the animals for the oaths
And mixed wine in the great bowl.
They poured water over the kings' hands,
Then Agamemnon drew the knife 290
That hung by his sword scabbard
And cut hairs from the rams' heads.
The heralds gave these to the leaders on both sides,
And Agamemnon lifted his palms to the sky:

“Zeus, Father, Lord of Ida, 295
Greatest and most glorious;
Helios, who sees all and hears all;

Rivers and Earth, and Powers below
Who punish perjurers after death,
Witness and protect these sacred Oaths: 300
If Paris Alexander kills Menelaus,
Helen and all her goods are his,
And we will sail away in our ships.
But if Menelaus kills Paris,
The Trojans will surrender Helen 305
With all her goods and pay the Argives
A fit penalty for generations to come.
If Priam and Priam's sons refuse,
Upon Paris' death, this penalty to me,
I swear to wage this war to its end." 310

He spoke, then slashed the rams' throats
And put the gasping animals on the ground,
Their proud temper undone by whetted bronze.

Then they all filled their cups
With wine from the bowl and poured libations 315
To the gods eternal and prayed,
Greek and Trojan alike, in words like these:

"Zeus almighty and most glorious
And all you other immortal gods,
Whoever breaks this oath and truce, 320
May their brains spill to the ground
Like this wine, theirs and their children's,
And may other men master their wives."

But Zeus would not fulfill their prayers.

Then Priam spoke his mind: 325

"Hear me, Trojans and Achaean soldiers:
I am going back now to windswept Ilion
Since I cannot bear to see with my own eyes
My dear son fighting with Menelaus,
Who is dear to Ares. Zeus and the other immortals 330

Doubtless know whose death is destined.”

And this man who was a god’s equal
Loaded the rams onto his chariot
For interment in Trojan soil, mounted,
And took the reins. Antenor stood behind him 335
And together they drove back to Ilion.

Priam’s son Hector and brilliant Odysseus
First measured off an arena and then
Shook lots in a bronze helmet to decide
Which of the two would cast his spear first. 340
You could see hands lifted to heaven
On both sides and hear whispered prayers:

“Death, Lord Zeus,
For whichever of the two
Started this business, 345
But grant us your peace.”

Great Hector shook the helmet, sunlight
Glancing off his own as he looked away,
And out jumped Paris’ lot.

The armies 350

Sat down, rank after rank, tooled weapons
And high-stepping horses idle by each man.

The heroes armed.

Paris, silken-haired Helen’s present husband,
Bound greaves on his shins with silver clasps, 355
Put on his brother Lycaon’s breastplate,
Which fit him well, slung around his shoulders
A bronze sword inlaid with silver
And a large, heavy shield. On his head he placed
A crested helmet, and the horsehair plume 360
Nodded menacingly.

Likewise Menelaus' gear.
They put their armor on in the ranks
And then stepped out into no-man's-land,
A cold light in their eyes. 365

Veterans on both sides, horse-breaking Trojans
And bronze-kneed Greeks, just sat and stared.
They stood close, closer, in the measured arena,
Shaking their spears, half-mad with jealousy.
And then Paris threw. A long shadow trailed his spear 370
As it moved through the air, and it hit the circle
Of Menelaus' shield, but the spearpoint crumpled
Against its tough metal skin. It was Menelaus' turn now,
And as he rose in his bronze he prayed to Zeus:

"Lord Zeus, make Paris pay for the evil he's done to me, 375
Smite him down with my hands so that men for all time
Will fear to transgress against a host's offered friendship."

With this prayer behind it Menelaus' spear
Carried through Paris' polished shield
And bored into the intricate breastplate, 380
The point shearing his shirt and nicking his ribs
As Paris twisted aside from black fatality.
Menelaus drew his silver-hammered sword
And came down with it hard on the crest
Of Paris' helmet, but the blade shattered 385
Into three or four pieces and fell from his hands.
Menelaus groaned and looked up to the sky:

"Father Zeus, no god curses us more than you.
I thought Paris was going to pay for his crimes,
And now my sword has broken in my hands, 390
And my spear's thrown away. I missed the bastard!"

As Menelaus spoke he lunged forward
And twisted his fingers into the thick horsehair
On Paris' helmet, pivoted on his heel,
And started dragging him back to the Greeks. 395

The tooled-leather chinstrap of Paris' helmet
Was cutting into his neck's tender skin,
And Menelaus would have dragged him
All the way back and won no end of glory.
But Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter, had all this 400
In sharp focus and snapped the oxhide chinstrap,
Leaving Menelaus clenching an empty helmet,
Which the hero, spinning like a discus thrower,
Heaved into the hands of the Greek spectators.
Then he went back for the kill. 405

But Aphrodite
Whisked Paris away with the sleight of a goddess,
Enveloping him in mist, and lofted him into
The incensed air of his vaulted bedroom.
Then she went for Helen, and found her 410
In a crowd of Trojan women high on the tower.

A withered hand tugged at Helen's fragrant robe.

The goddess was now the phantom of an old woman
Who had spun wool for Helen back in Lacedaemon,
Beautiful wool, and Helen loved her dearly. 415
In this crone's guise Aphrodite spoke to Helen:

"Over here. Paris wants you to come home.
He's propped up on pillows in your bedroom,
So silky and beautiful you'd never think
He'd just come from combat, but was going to a dance, 420
Or coming from a dance and had just now sat down."

This wrung Helen's heart. She knew
It was the goddess—the beautiful neck,
The irresistible line of her breasts,
The iridescent eyes. She was in awe 425
For a moment, and then spoke to her:

"You eerie thing, why do you love
Lying to me like this? Where are you taking me now?
Phrygia? Beautiful Maeonia? Another city

Where you have some other boyfriend for me? 430
Or is it because Menelaus, having just beaten Paris,
Wants to take his hateful wife back to his house
That you stand here now with treachery in your heart?
Go sit by Paris yourself! Descend from the gods' high road,
Allow your precious feet not to tread on Olympus, 435
Go fret over him constantly, protect him.
Maybe someday he'll make you his wife—or even his slave.
I'm not going back there. It would be treason
To share his bed. The Trojan women
Would hold me at fault. I have enough pain as it is.” 440

And Aphrodite, angry with her, said:

“Don't vex me, bitch, or I may let go of you
And hate you as extravagantly as I love you now.
I can make you repulsive to both sides, you know,
Trojans and Greeks, and then where will you be?” 445

Helen was afraid, and this child of Zeus
Pulled her silvery-white linens around her
And walked silently through the Trojan women,
Eluding them completely. The goddess went ahead
And led her to Paris' beautiful house. The servants 450
Suddenly all found something to do.
Helen moved like daylight to the vaulted bedroom,
Where Aphrodite, smiling, placed a chair for her
Opposite Paris. Helen, daughter of Zeus,
Sat down and, averting her eyes, said reproachfully: 455

“Back from the war? You should have died out there,
Beaten by a real hero, my former husband.
You used to boast you were better than Menelaus,
When it came to spear work and hand-to-hand combat.
Why don't you go challenge him to fight again, 460
Right now? I wouldn't recommend it, though,
A fair fight between you and Ares' redhead darling.
You'd go down in no time under his spear.”



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What could I do against your superior strength?
 Still, it's not right to cancel all my hard work.
 I too am a god, from the same stock as you,
 The eldest daughter of devious Cronus,
 And honored both by position of birth 70
 And as the wife of the lord of all the immortals.
 Let's call this a draw and yield to each other,
 I to you, and you to me, and the other gods
 Will all fall in line. Quickly now,
 Dispatch Athena into the war zone 75
 To maneuver the Trojans to break the truce
 And do some damage to the exultant Greeks."

Zeus had no wish to argue this,
 And he winged these words to Pallas Athena:

"Go down instantly to the battlefield. 80
 Get the Trojans to break the truce
 And do some damage to the exultant Greeks."

Athena had been longing for action.
 She flashed down from the peaks of Olympus

Like a star that the son of devious Cronus 85
Sends as a portent to sailors, or to an army
Camped on a wide plain, a brilliant meteor
That sheds sparks all along its shining furrow.

This was Pallas Athena rocketing down
 Into no-man's-land. They were frozen with awe, 90
 Horse-breaking Trojans and bronze-kneed Greeks,
 Soldiers glancing at each other, saying things like:

"We'll be fighting again soon."

"This could mean peace."

"It means war, if Zeus wants to bring it." 95



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Thus Diomedes and his driver.

Their two opponents

Drove their thoroughbreds hard

And quickly closed the gap, and Pandarus,

Lycaon's splendid son, called out:

295

"You're tough, Diomedes, a real pedigreed hero.

So I only stung you with that arrow?

Well, let's see what I can do with a spear."

The shaft cast a long shadow as it left his hand

And hit Diomedes' shield. The bronze apex

Sheared through and stopped

Just short of his breastplate.

Pandarus, thinking he had hit him, whooped again:

300

"Got you right through the belly, didn't I?"

You're done for, and you've handed me the glory."

305

Diomedes answered him levelly:

"You didn't even come close, but I swear

One of you two goes down now

And gluts Ares with his blood."

His javelin followed his voice, and Athena

Guided it to where the nose joins the eye-socket.

The bronze crunched through the pearly teeth

And sheared the tongue at its root, exiting

At the base of the chin.

310

Pandarus fell from the car,

315

His armor scattering the hard light

As it clattered on his fallen body.

His horses shied—

Quick movement of hooves—

As his soul seeped out into the sand.

320

Aeneas vaulted down with his shield and spear,

Afraid that the Greeks might drag the body away.



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An arrow the same man shot him with
 Among the dead in Pylos, making him suffer. 430
 He went to the house of Zeus on Olympus
 In agony, pierced with pain. The arrow
 Had driven right through his shoulder.
 Paieon rubbed on an anodyne
 And healed him, Hades being no mortal. 435
 Heracles was simply outrageous and reckless
 To provoke the Olympian gods with arrows.
 And now Athena has set this man upon you,
 This fool Diomedes, who doesn't understand
 That a man who fights with gods doesn't last long, 440
 His children don't sit on his lap calling him 'Papa'
 To welcome him home from the horrors of war.
 So as strong as he is, he had better watch out
 Or someone braver than you might fight him,
 And Aegialeia, Adrastus' heroic daughter, 445
 The wife of Diomedes, tamer of horses,
 Will wake her family from sleep with lamenting
 Her wedded husband, the best of the Achaeans."

And with both her hands she wiped off the ichor.
 The wrist was healed, and the pain subsided. 450

Athena and Hera were looking on
 And making snide remarks to provoke Zeus.
 The grey-eyed goddess opened with this:

"You won't get angry if I say something,
 Will you, Father Zeus? The truth is this: 455
 Aphrodite has been urging some Greek lady
 To traipse after her beloved Trojans,
 And while she was stroking this gowned beauty
 She scratched her frail little hand on a golden brooch."

The Father of Gods and Men smiled 460
 And calling Aphrodite said to her:

"Dear child, war isn't your specialty, you know.



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The white-armed goddess reined in the horses,
Unyoked them, and shed a thick mist around them.
Simois made ambrosia sprout up for them.

The two goddesses, though passionate to come 830
To the aid of the Greeks, stepped forward
As quietly as doves. They were soon in the thick of things
Where the army's elite, drawn to Diomedes' strength,
Clustered around him like huge animals, lions
Or razorback hogs that can rip a man apart. 835
Hera took her stance there and transformed herself
To look like Stentor, whose bronze voice sounds as loud
As fifty voices combined. And she yelled:

"For shame, Greeks! You're all show and no fight.
When godlike Achilles used to enter battle 840
The Trojans wouldn't so much as leave their gates
Out of fear for what his spear could do.
Now they have us backed up against our ships."

This got their fighting spirit up. Meanwhile,
Grey-eyed Athena flashed to Diomedes' side. 845
She found that prince beside his horses and car,
Cooling the wound from Pandarus' arrow.
The sweat where his broad shield strap rubbed
Was bothering him, and his arm was sore.
He was lifting the strap and wiping off 850
The dark, clotted blood when the goddess,
Casually grasping the horses' yoke, said to him:

"You're not very much like your father, you know.
Tydeus had a small build, but he was a fighter—
Even when I wouldn't allow him to fight 855
Or show his stuff. Like the time he came to Thebes
As a solo envoy to all those Cadmeians.
I ordered him to keep his peace at the banquet,
But he had a lot of heart, as he always had,
And challenged the Cadmeian youths and beat them all, 860
Effortlessly. Of course I was there beside him.



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And Hebe bathed him and dressed him handsomely, 965
 And he sat beside Zeus exulting in glory.
 Then back to the palace of great Zeus
 Came Argive Hera and Athena the Protector,
 Having stopped brutal Ares from butchering men.

ILIAD 6

The battle was left to rage on the level expanse
 Between Troy's two rivers. Bronze spearheads
 Drove past each other as the Greek and Trojan armies
 Spread like a hemorrhage across the plain.

[Lines 5–102 are omitted. The Greeks counterattack. The Trojan seer Helenus, Hector's brother, persuades him to return to Troy and ask the women to pray to Athena.]

Hector took his brother's advice.
 He jumped down from his chariot with his gear
 And toured the ranks, a spear in each hand. 105
 He urged them on, and with a trembling roar
 The Trojans turned to face the Achaeans.
 The Greeks pulled back. It looked to them
 As if some god had come from the starry sky
 To help the Trojans. It had been a sudden rally. 110
 Hector shouted and called to the Trojans:

“Soldiers of Troy, and illustrious allies,
 Remember to fight like the men that you are,
 While I go to the city and ask the elders
 Who sit in council, and our wives, to pray 115
 To the gods and promise bulls by the hundred.”



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I don't remember my father Tydeus,
 Since I was very small when he left for Thebes
 In the war that killed so many Achaeans. 230
 But that makes me your friend and you my guest
 If ever you come to Argos, as you are my friend
 And I your guest whenever I travel to Lycia.
 So we can't cross spears with each other
 Even in the thick of battle. There are enough 235
 Trojans and allies for me to kill, whomever
 A god gives me and I can run down myself.
 And enough Greeks for you to kill as you can.
 And let's exchange armor, so everyone will know
 That we are friends from our fathers' days." 240

With this said, they vaulted from their chariots,
 Clasped hands, and pledged their friendship.
 But Zeus took away Glaucus' good sense,
 For he exchanged his golden armor for bronze,
 The worth of one hundred oxen for nine. 245

When Hector reached the oak tree by the Western Gate,
 Trojan wives and daughters ran up to him,
 Asking about their children, their brothers,
 Their kinsmen, their husbands. He told them all,
 Each woman in turn, to pray to the gods. 250
 Sorrow clung to their heads like mist.
 Then he came to Priam's palace, a beautiful
 Building made of polished stone with a central courtyard
 Flanked by porticoes, upon which opened fifty
 Adjoining rooms, where Priam's sons 255
 Slept with their wives. Across the court
 A suite of twelve more bedrooms housed
 His modest daughters and their husbands.
 It was here that Hector's mother met him,
 A gracious woman, with Laodice, 260
 Her most beautiful daughter, in tow.
 Hecuba took his hand in hers and said:

"Hector, my son, why have you left the war



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Swept me away before all this could happen.
 But since the gods have ordained these evils,
 Why couldn't I be the wife of a better man,
 One sensitive at least to repeated reproaches?
 Paris has never had an ounce of good sense 370
 And never will. He'll pay for it someday.
 But come inside and sit down on this chair,
 Dear brother-in-law. You bear such a burden
 For my wanton ways and Paris' witlessness.
 Zeus has placed this evil fate on us so that 375
 In time to come poets will sing of us."

And Hector, in his burnished helmet:

"Don't ask me to sit, Helen, even though
 You love me. You will never persuade me.
 My heart is out there with our fighting men. 380
 They already feel my absence from battle.
 Just get Paris moving, and have him hurry
 So he can catch up with me while I'm still
 Inside the city. I'm going to my house now
 To see my family, my wife and my boy. I don't know 385
 Whether I'll ever be back to see them again, or if
 The gods will destroy me at the hands of the Greeks."

And Hector turned and left. He came to his house
 But did not find white-armed Andromache there.
 She had taken the child and a robed attendant 390
 And stood on the tower, lamenting and weeping—
 His blameless wife. When Hector didn't find her inside,
 He paused on his way out and called to the servants:

"Can any of you women tell me exactly
 Where Andromache went when she left the house? 395
 To one of my sisters or one of my brothers' wives?
 Or to the temple of Athena along with the other
 Trojan women to beseech the dread goddess?"

The spry old housekeeper answered him:



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And stroked her with his hand and said to her: 510

“You worry too much about me, Andromache.
 No one is going to send me to Hades before my time,
 And no man has ever escaped his fate, rich or poor,
 Coward or hero, once born into this world.
 Go back to the house now and take care of your work, 515
 The loom and the shuttle, and tell the servants
 To get on with their jobs. War is the work of men,
 Of all the Trojan men, and mine especially.”

With these words, Hector picked up
 His plumed helmet, and his wife went back home, 520
 Turning around often, her cheeks flowered with tears.
 When she came to the house of man-slaying Hector,
 She found a throng of servants inside,
 And raised among these women the ritual lament.
 And so they mourned for Hector in his house 525
 Although he was still alive, for they did not think
 He would ever again come back from the war,
 Or escape the murderous hands of the Greeks.

Paris meanwhile

Did not dally long in his high halls. 530
 He put on his magnificent bronze-inlaid gear
 And sprinted with assurance out through the city.

*Picture a horse that has fed on barley in his stall
 Breaking his halter and galloping across the plain,
 Making for his accustomed swim in the river, 535
 A glorious animal, head held high, mane streaming
 Like wind on his shoulders. Sure of his splendor
 He prances by the horse-runs and the mares in pasture.*

That was how Paris, son of Priam, came down
 From the high rock of Pergamum, 540
 Gleaming like amber and laughing in his armor,
 And his feet were fast.

He caught up quickly



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They slammed together shields and spears—
 Rawhide ovals pressed close, bronze thoraxes
 Grinding against each other, and the groans
 Of men being slain and the cries of those slaying
 Hung in the air as the earth ran with blood. 70

As long as the holy light climbed toward noon
 Soldiers on both sides were hit and fell.
 But when the sun straddled heaven's meridian,
 The Father stretched out his golden scales.
 On them he placed two dooms of agonizing death, 75
 One for the Trojans, one for the Greeks.
 He held the scales in the middle, and down sank
 The Greek day of doom, down to the fertile earth,
 While the Trojans' soared up to the sky's expanse.
 Then Zeus thundered from Ida, and sent a blazing flash 80
 Into the Greek army. The soldiers gaped
 In wonder, and their blood turned milky with fear.

[Lines 83–356 are omitted. The battle sways, but the Trojans, with Zeus' support, gain the upper hand.]

Watching all this, Hera was moved to pity
 And said to Athena in a flurry of words:

“Don't the two of us care any more that the Greeks
 Are being beaten? This may be the end. 360
 One single man, Priam's son Hector,
 Is pushing them all to the brink of doom.
 His rampage is no longer bearable.
 Just look at how much harm he has done!”

And the grey-eyed goddess said to her: 365

“I would love to have this man snuffed out,
 Killed by the Argives in his own native land.
 But my father is on a rampage himself now,
 And constantly thwarts all my best efforts.



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“The awesome son of Cronus has spoken again!
 We’re all too familiar with your irresistible strength, 475
 But we still feel pity for the Danaan spearmen
 Who are now destined to die an ugly death.
 Fine! We will withdraw from the war,
 If you command it. But we will still advise the Greeks,
 So they won’t all be casualties of your wrath.” 480

And Zeus, clouds gathering around him:

“At dawn you will see Cronus’ almighty son,
 If you wish, my ox-eyed lady Hera,
 Making casualties of much of the Greek army.
 Hector will not be absent from the war 485
 Until Achilles has risen up from beside his ship
 On the day when the fighting for Patroclus’ dead body
 Reaches its fever pitch by the ships’ sterns.
 That is divinely decreed.

Your wrath is nothing to me, 490
 Not even if you go to the deepest foundations
 Of Earth and Sea, where Cronus and Iapetus
 Dwell out of the light of Hyperion the Sun,
 Cooled by no winds, in the trench of Tartarus—
 Not even then will I care that you are angry, 495
 Because there is nothing more shameless than you.”

He spoke, and white-armed Hera said nothing.

The sunlight fell into the Ocean, drawing
 Black night over earth’s fields, a sunset
 The Trojans resented, but to the Greeks 500
 Welcome, thrice-prayed-for ebony night.

Hector made camp, leading the Trojans
 Along the river some distance from the ships
 To an open space that was clear of the dead.
 They stepped to the ground from their chariots 505
 To hear Hector speak. In his hand was a spear
 Sixteen feet long, bronze point gleaming, the ferrule gold.



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Automedon held the meat while Achilles
 Carved it carefully and spitted the pieces.
 Patroclus, godlike in the fire's glare, 215
 Fed the blaze. When the flames died down
 He laid the spits over the scattered embers,
 Resting them on stones, and sprinkled the morsels
 With holy salt. When the meat was roasted
 He laid it on platters and set out bread 220
 In exquisite baskets. Achilles served the meat,
 Then sat down by the wall opposite Odysseus
 And asked Patroclus to offer sacrifice.
 After he threw the offerings in the fire,
 They helped themselves to the meal before them, 225
 And when they had enough of food and drink,
 Ajax nodded to Phoenix. Odysseus saw this,
 And filling a cup he lifted it to Achilles:

"To your health, Achilles, for a generous feast.
 There is no shortage in Agamemnon's hut, 230
 Or now here in yours, of satisfying food.
 But the pleasures of the table are not on our minds.
 We fear the worst. It is doubtful
 That we can save the ships without your strength.
 The Trojans and their allies are encamped 235
 Close to the wall that surrounds our black ships
 And are betting that we can't keep them
 From breaking through. They may be right.
 Zeus has been encouraging them with signs,
 Lightning on the right. Hector trusts this— 240
 And his own strength—and has been raging
 Recklessly, like a man possessed.
 He is praying for dawn to come early
 So he can fulfill his threat to lop the horns
 From the ships' sterns, burn the hulls to ash, 245
 And slaughter the Achaeans dazed in the smoke.
 This is my great fear, that the gods make good
 Hector's threats, dooming us to die in Troy
 Far from the fields of home. Up with you, then,
 If you intend at all, even at this late hour, 250



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Now that I don't want to fight him anymore,
I will sacrifice to Zeus and all gods tomorrow,
Load my ships, and launch them on the sea.
Take a look if you want, if you give a damn,
And you'll see my fleet on the Hellespont 370
In the early light, my men rowing hard.
With good weather from the sea god,
I'll reach Phthia after a three-day sail.
I left a lot behind when I hauled myself here,
And I'll bring back more, gold and bronze, 375
Silken-waisted women, grey iron—
Everything except the prize of honor
The warlord Agamemnon gave me
And in his insulting arrogance took back.
So report back to him everything I say, 380
And report it publicly—get the Greeks angry,
In case the shameless bastard still thinks
He can steal us blind. He doesn't dare
Show his dogface here. Fine. I don't want
To have anything to do with him either. 385
He cheated me, wronged me. Never again.
He's had it. He can go to hell in peace,
The half-wit that Zeus has made him.
His gifts? His gifts mean nothing to me.
Not even if he offered me ten or twenty times 390
His present gross worth and added to it
All the trade Orchomenus does in a year,
All the wealth laid up in Egyptian Thebes,
The wealthiest city in all the world,
Where they drive two hundred teams of horses 395
Out through each of its hundred gates.
Not even if Agamemnon gave me gifts
As numberless as grains of sand or dust,
Would he persuade me or touch my heart—
Not until he's paid in full for all my grief. 400
His daughter? I would not marry
The daughter of Agamemnon son of Atreus
If she were as lovely as golden Aphrodite
Or could weave like owl-eyed Athena.



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Shocked by his speech and his stark refusal.
 Finally the old horseman Phoenix spoke,
 Bursting into tears. He felt the ships were lost. 445

“If you have set your mind on going home,
 Achilles, and will do nothing to save the ships
 From being burnt, if your heart is that angry,
 How could I stay here without you, my boy,
 All by myself? Peleus sent me with you 450

On that day you left Phthia to go to Agamemnon,
 A child still, knowing nothing of warfare
 Or assemblies where men distinguish themselves.
 He sent me to you to teach you this—
 To be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds. 455

I could not bear to be left behind now
 Apart from you, child, not even if a god
 Promised to smooth my wrinkles and make me
 As young and strong as I was when I first left
 The land of Hellas and its beautiful women. 460

I was running away from a quarrel with Amyntor,
 My father, who was angry with me
 Over his concubine, a fair-haired woman
 Whom he loved as much as he scorned his wife,
 My mother. She implored me constantly 465

To make love to his concubine so that this woman
 Would learn to hate the old man. I did as she asked.
 My father found out and cursed me roundly,
 Calling on the Furies to ensure that never
 Would a child of mine sit on his knees. 470

The gods answered his prayers, Underworld Zeus
 And dread Persephone. I decided to kill him
 With a sharp sword, but some god calmed me down—
 Putting in my mind what people would say,
 The names they would call me—so that in fact 475

I would not be known as a parricide.
 From then on I could not bear to linger
 In my father’s house, although my friends
 And my family tried to get me to stay,
 Entreating me, slaughtering sheep and cattle, 480

Roasting whole pigs on spits, and drinking
 Jar after jar of the old man's wine.
 For nine solid days they kept watch on me,
 Working in shifts, staying up all night.
 The fires stayed lit, one under the portico 485
 Of the main courtyard, one on the porch
 In front of my bedroom door. On the tenth night,
 When it got dark, I broke through the latches
 And vaulted over the courtyard fence,
 Eluding the watchmen and servant women. 490
 I was on the run through wide Hellas
 And made it to Phthia's black soil, her flocks,
 And to Lord Peleus. He welcomed me kindly
 And loved me as a father loves his only son,
 A grown son who will inherit great wealth. 495
 He made me rich and settled me on the border,
 Where I lived as king of the Dolopians.
 I made you what you are, my godlike Achilles,
 And loved you from my heart. You wouldn't eat,
 Whether it was at a feast or a meal in the house, 500
 Unless I set you on my lap and cut your food up
 And fed it to you and held the wine to your lips.
 Many a time you wet the tunic on my chest,
 Burping up wine when you were colicky.
 I went through a lot for you, because I knew 505
 The gods would never let me have a child
 Of my own. No, I tried to make you my child,
 Achilles, so you would save me from ruin.
 But you have to master your proud spirit.
 It's not right for you to have a pitiless heart. 510
 Even the gods can bend. Superior as they are
 In honor, power, and every excellence,
 They can be turned aside from wrath
 When humans who have transgressed
 Supplicate them with incense and prayers, 515
 With libations and savor of sacrifice.
 Yes, for Prayers are daughters of great Zeus.
 Lame and wrinkled and with eyes averted,
 They are careful to follow in Folly's footsteps,

They are careful to follow in Folly's footsteps,
 But Folly is strong and fleet, and outruns them all, 520
 Beating them everywhere and plaguing humans,
 Who are cured by the Prayers when they come behind.
 Revere the daughters of Zeus when they come,
 And they will bless you and hear your cry.
 Reject them and refuse them stubbornly, 525
 And they will ask Zeus, Cronus' son, to have
 Folly plague you, so you will pay in pain.
 No, Achilles, grant these daughters of Zeus
 The respect that bends all upright men's minds.
 If the son of Atreus were not offering gifts 530
 And promising more, if he were still raging mad,
 I would not ask you to shrug off your grudge
 And help the Greeks, no matter how sore their need.
 But he is offering gifts and promising more,
 And he has sent to you a delegation 535
 Of the best men in the army, your dearest friends.
 Don't scorn their words or their mission here.
 No one could blame you for being angry before.
 We all know stories about heroes of old,
 How they were furiously angry, but later on 540
 Were won over with gifts or appeased with words.
 I remember a very old story like this, and since
 We are all friends here, I will tell it to you now.
 The Curetes were fighting the Aetolians
 In a bloody war around Calydon town. 545
 The Aetolians were defending their city
 And the Curetes meant to burn it down.
 This was all because gold-throned Artemis
 Had cursed the Aetolians, angry that Oeneus
 Had not offered her his orchard's first fruits. 550
 The other gods feasted on bulls by the hundred,
 But Oeneus forgot somehow or other
 Only the sacrifice to great Zeus' daughter.
 So the Archer Goddess, angry at heart,
 Roused a savage boar, with gleaming white tusks, 555
 And sent him to destroy Oeneus' orchard.
 The boar did a good job, uprooting trees

But Oeneus' son, Meleager, killed it
 After getting up a party of hunters and hounds 560
 From many towns: it took more than a few men
 To kill this huge boar, and not before
 It set many a hunter on the funeral pyre.
 But the goddess caused a bitter argument
 About the boar's head and shaggy hide 565
 Between the Curetes and Aetolians.
 They went to war. While Meleager still fought
 The Curetes had the worst of it
 And could not remain outside Calydon's wall.
 But when wrath swelled Meleager's heart, 570
 As it swells even the hearts of the wise,
 And his anger rose against Althaea his mother,
 He lay in bed with his wife, Cleopatra,
 Child of Marpessa and the warrior Idas.
 Idas once took up his bow against Apollo 575
 To win lissome Marpessa. Her parents
 Called the girl Halcyone back then
 Because her mother wept like a halcyon,
 The bird of sorrows, because the Archer God,
 Phoebus Apollo, had stolen her daughter. 580
 Meleager nursed his anger at Cleopatra's side,
 Furious because his mother had cursed him,
 Cursed him to the gods for murdering his uncle,
 Her brother, that is, and she beat the earth,
 The nurturing earth, with her hands, and called 585
 Upon Hades and Persephone the dread,
 As she knelt and wet her bosom with tears,
 To bring death to her son. And the Fury
 Who walks in darkness heard her
 From the pit of Erebus, and her heart was iron. 590
 Soon the enemy was heard at the walls again,
 Battering the gates. The Aetolian elders
 Sent the city's high priests to pray to Meleager
 To come out and defend them, offering him
 Fifty acres of Calydon's richest land 595
 Wherever he chose, half in vineyard,
 Half in clear plow-land, to be cut from the plain.

And the old horseman Oeneus shook his doors,
 Standing on the threshold of his gabled room,
 And recited a litany of prayers to his son, 600
 As did his sisters and his queenly mother.
 He refused them all, and refused his friends,
 His very best friends and boon companions.
 No one could move his heart or persuade him
 Until the Curetes, having scaled the walls 605
 Were burning the city and beating down
 His bedroom door. Then his wife wailed
 And listed for him all the woes that befall
 A captured people—the men killed,
 The town itself burnt, the women and children 610
 Led into slavery. This roused his spirit.
 He clapped on armor and went out to fight.
 And so he saved the Aetolians from doom
 Of his own accord, and they paid him none
 Of those lovely gifts, savior or not. 615

Don't be like that. Don't think that way,
 And don't let your spirit turn that way.
 The ships will be harder to save when they're burning.
 Come while there are gifts, while the Achaeans
 Will still honor you as if you were a god. 620
 But if you go into battle without any gifts,
 Your honor will be less, save us or not."

And strong, swift-footed Achilles answered:

"I don't need that kind of honor, Phoenix.
 My honor comes from Zeus, and I will have it 625
 Among these beaked ships as long as my breath
 Still remains and my knees still move.
 Now listen to this. You're listening? Good.
 Don't try to confuse me with your pleading
 On Agamemnon's behalf. If you're his friend 630
 You're no longer mine, although I love you.
 Hate him because I hate him. It's as simple as that.
 You're like a second father to me. Stay here,
 Be king with me and share half the honor.

These others can take my message. Lie down
And spend the night on a soft couch. At daybreak
We will decide whether to set sail or stay.” 635

And he made a silent nod to Patroclus
To spread a thick bed for Phoenix. It was time
For the others to think about leaving. Big Ajax,
Telamon’s godlike son, said as much: 640

“Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,
Resourceful Odysseus—it’s time we go.
I do not think we will accomplish
What we were sent here to do. Our job now 645
Is to report this news quickly, bad as it is.
They will be waiting to hear. Achilles
Has made his great heart savage.
He is a cruel man, and has no regard
For the love that his friends honored him with, 650
Beyond anyone else who camps with the ships.
Pitiless. A man accepts compensation
For a murdered brother, a dead son.
The killer goes on living in the same town
After paying blood money, and the bereaved 655
Restrains his proud spirit and broken heart
Because he has received payment. But you,
The gods have replaced your heart
With flint and malice, because of one girl,
One single girl, while we are offering you 660
Seven of the finest women to be found
And many other gifts. Show some generosity
And some respect. We have come under your roof,
We few out of the entire army, trying hard
To be the friends you care for most of all.” 665

And Achilles, the great runner, answered him:

“Ajax, son of Telamon in the line of Zeus,
Everything you say is after my own heart.
But I swell with rage when I think of how
The son of Atreus treated me like dirt 670

In public, as if I were some worthless tramp.
 Now go, and take back this message:
 I won't lift a finger in this bloody war
 Until Priam's illustrious son Hector
 Comes to the Myrmidons' ships and huts 675
 Killing Greeks as he goes and torching the fleet.
 But when he comes to my hut and my black ship
 I think Hector will stop, for all his battle lust."

He spoke. They poured their libations
 And headed for the ships, Odysseus leading. 680
 Patroclus ordered a bed made ready
 For Phoenix, and the old man lay down
 On fleeces and rugs covered with linen
 And waited for bright dawn. Achilles slept
 In an inner alcove, and by his side 685
 Lay a woman he had brought from Lesbos
 With high, lovely cheekbones, Diomedes her name,
 Phorbas' daughter. Patroclus lay down
 In the opposite corner, and with him lay Iphis,
 A silken girl Achilles had given him 690
 When he took steep Scyros, Enyeus' city.

By now Odysseus and Ajax
 Were in Agamemnon's quarters,
 Surrounded by officers drinking their health
 From gold cups and shouting questions. 695
 Agamemnon, the warlord, had priority:

"Odysseus, pride of the Achaeans, tell me,
 Is he willing to repel the enemy fire
 And save the ships, or does he refuse,
 His great heart still in the grip of wrath?" 700

Odysseus, who endured all, answered:

"Son of Atreus, most glorious Agamemnon,
 Far from quenching his wrath, Achilles
 Is filled with even more. He spurns you
 And your gifts, and suggests that you 705

Think of a way to save the ships and the army.
 He himself threatens, at dawn's first light,
 To get his own ships onto the water,
 And he said he would advise the others as well
 To sail for home, since there is no chance now 710
 You will storm Ilion's height. Zeus has stretched
 His hand above her, making her people bold.
 This is what he said, as these men here
 Who came with me will tell you, Ajax
 And the two heralds, prudent men both. 715
 Phoenix will spend the night there. Tomorrow
 He sails with Achilles on his voyage home,
 If he wants to. He will not be forced to go."

They were stunned by the force of his words
 And fell silent for a long time, hushed in grief, 720
 Until at last Diomedes said in his booming voice:

"Son of Atreus, glorious Agamemnon,
 You should never have pleaded with him
 Or offered all those gifts. Achilles
 Was arrogant enough without your help. 725
 Let him do what he wants, stay here
 Or get the hell out. He'll fight later, all right,
 When he is ready or a god tells him to.
 Now I want everyone to do as I say.
 Enjoy some food and wine to keep up 730
 Your strength, and then get some sleep.
 When the rosy light first streaks the sky
 Get your troops and horses into formation
 Before the ships. Fight in the front yourselves."

The warlords assented, taken aback 735
 By the authority of Diomedes' speech.
 Each man poured libation and went to his hut,
 Where he lay down and took the gift of sleep.

[Book 10 is omitted. Odysseus and Diomedes raid the Trojan camp by night.]



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The Greeks and Trojans kept coming on. 70
 Turning their backs would have meant
 A disastrous rout. They fought on equal terms,
 Head to head, going after each other
 Like rabid wolves. Eris looked on rejoicing,
 The only god who took the field that day. 75
 All of the others kept their peace,
 Idle in their homes on Olympus' ridges,
 Sulking because the Dark Cloud, Zeus,
 Meant to cover the Trojans with glory.
 The Patriarch paid them no mind. He sat 80
 Apart from the others in glorious solitude,
 Looking down at Troy and the Achaean ships,
 The flash of bronze, men killing and being killed.

As long as the holy light climbed toward noon,
 Men were hit and fell on both sides of the battle. 85

*Toward evening, the woodsman turns home,
 His hands sore from swinging his axe
 And his heart weary from felling tall trees,
 And all his desire is for the sweetness of food.*

About that time in the long afternoon 90
 The Danaans broke through, their captains calling,
 Calling each other through the ranks of men,
 Until their valor split the enemy lines.
 Agamemnon led the way, taking out Bienor,
 A Trojan commander, and his driver, Oileus. 95
 Oileus at least had the chance to jump down
 And face Agamemnon, but as he charged
 The warlord's spear drove into his forehead.
 Oileus' heavy bronze helm had little effect
 On the spear's sharp point, which penetrated 100
 Not only the helmet's rim but the skull's bone,
 Scrambling the grey stuff inside. So much
 For these two. The warlord left them there,
 Their naked chests gleaming in the level light,
 And went on to kill Isus and Antiphus, 105

Two sons of Priam, bastard and legitimate,
 Riding in one car. The bastard held the reins
 And Antiphus stood by. Achilles once
 Had bound these two with willow branches,
 Surprising them as they watched their sheep 110
 On Ida's hills, and later released them for ransom.
 Now Agamemnon, Atreus' wide-ruling son,
 Hit Isus with his spear above the nipple
 And Antiphus with his sword beside his ear,
 Knocking both from the car. As he was busy 115
 Stripping their armor he recognized their faces
 From the time when Achilles had brought them
 Down from Ida and to the beachhead camp.

*Imagine how easily a lion crushes
 A pair of fawns in his powerful jaws. 120
 He has come to where they lie huddled together
 On the forest floor, and has ripped out their hearts.
 And though their mother is near she can do
 Nothing to save them. Trembling herself,
 She bolts through the thick woods, and sweat 125
 Glazes her skin as she flees the great cat.*

The Trojans were chased off, none of them able
 To help Agamemnon's two victims.

Peisander and Hippolochus were next,
 Battle-hardened sons of Antimachus, 130
 Who in the shrewdness of his heart
 And in consideration of Paris' substantial gifts
 Had argued against surrendering Helen
 To blond Menelaus. Agamemnon now took
 His two sons instead. Together in one car 135
 They were trying to get their rearing horses
 Under control—the reins had slipped from their hands—
 When Agamemnon charged them like a lion.
 They fell to their knees in their chariot's basket:

“Take us alive, son of Atreus, for ransom. 140

Antimachus' palace is piled high with treasure,
 Gold and bronze and wrought iron our father
 Would give you past counting once he found out
 We were alive and well among the Greek ships."

Sweet words, and they salted them with tears. 145
 But the voice they heard was anything but sweet:

"Your father Antimachus—if you really are
 His sons—once urged the Trojan assembly
 To kill Menelaus on the spot
 When he came with Odysseus on an embassy. 150
 Now you will pay for his heinous offense."

He spoke, and knocked Peisander backward
 Out of his chariot with a spear through his chest
 And sent him sprawling on the ground.
 Hippolochus leapt down. Agamemnon 155
 Used his sword to slice off both arms
 And lop off his head, sending his torso
 Rolling like a stone column through the crowd.
 He didn't bother them further, but pressed on
 To where the fighting was thickest, Greeks 160
 In their leg-armor crowding in behind him,
 Killing Trojans on foot, from chariots,
 Dust rolling up from the plain like thunder
 Under the horses' hooves, and all the while
 In the blood-red bronze, Agamemnon killing, 165
 Calling to his Greeks, the great warlord

*Like fire consuming dry manzanita
 When the winds rise up
 And the scrub forest is burned to its roots,*

The Trojans falling as they fled, 170
 And the horses, arching their necks,
 Rattled empty cars along the lanes of war,
 Feeling the absence of their faultless masters
 Who lay sprawled on the ground

Dearer now to vultures than to their wives. 175

Zeus drew Hector out of the boiling dust,
 Out of the blood, out of the noise and the slaughter,
 While Agamemnon pressed on,
 Howling to his Greeks to follow him.
 Past the ancient tomb of Ilus, 180
 Over the middle of the plain,
 Beyond the windy fig tree
 They rushed toward the city,
 Yearned for it, the son of Atreus calling them,
 Calling, his hard hands spattered with gore. 185
 But when they came to the Western Gate
 And the oak tree there, the two armies halted,
 Waiting. There were still some Trojan stragglers
 Being driven across the plain like cattle.

In the dead of night a lion rushes a herd, 190
Scattering them all, though only one heifer will die.
He crushes her neck first in his teeth,
Then greedily laps up all her soft insides.

Agamemnon picked off the hindmost Trojans
 One by one, toppling them from their chariots, 195
 And was coming up to Ilion's steep wall
 When the Father of Gods and Men
 Came down from heaven and onto Ida's peaks
 In one step, a thunderbolt in his hands,
 And sent gold-winged Iris off with a message: 200

"Go, swift Iris, and take word to Hector
 That as long as he sees Lord Agamemnon
 Storming through the ranks and laying them low
 He should hold back and order other troops
 To engage the enemy. But when at last 205
 Agamemnon is wounded by an arrow or spear
 And mounts his chariot, then will I
 Loan Hector strength to kill and keep killing
 Until he comes to the thwarted ships

And the sun sets and sacred darkness falls.” 210

Thus Zeus, and Iris moved like rain
Down from Ida’s hills and to holy Ilion
Seeking Hector, splendor of Priam’s house,
And found him standing in his chariot.
Iris hovered nearby on windy feet: 215

“Hector, son of Priam, Father Zeus
Has sent me here with a message for you.
As long as you see Lord Agamemnon
Storming through the ranks and laying them low
You should hold back and order other troops 220
To engage the enemy. But when at last
Agamemnon is wounded by an arrow or spear
And mounts his chariot, then will Zeus
Loan you the strength to kill and keep killing
Until you come to the thwarted ships 225
And the sun sets and sacred darkness falls.”

Iris spoke and was gone, and Hector
Vaulted from his chariot with all his gear.
Brandishing a pair of spears he toured the troops
And worked them into a frenzy for battle. 230
A ripple moved through their lines as they turned
And faced the Greeks. Over against them
The Achaean forces stiffened their lines.
The two armies were poised for battle, but one man,
Agamemnon, charged forward first, 235
Determined to fight far in advance of all.

And now, Muses, who reside on Olympus,
Tell me who came, of all the Trojans
And their famed allies, to face Agamemnon.
It was Iphidamas, one of Antenor’s sons, 240
A good man, tall, bred on Thracian farmland.
His mother was Theano, and her father,
Cisseus, raised the boy from infancy.
When he came of age, Cisseus gave him



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Hector, son of Priam, peer of Ares, bane of mortals,
 Falling on the conflict the way a windstorm
 Falls on the sea and churns the violet water. 315

[Lines 317–631 are omitted. Hector leads the Trojans against the Greeks and turns them back. Odysseus and Diomedes are wounded.]

So the fight went on, like wildfire burning.

Meanwhile, the sweat-glazed mares of Neleus
 Had pulled Nestor, and Machaon with him,
 Out of the battle and into the Greek camp, 635
 And Achilles saw them as they went by.
 Achilles was standing on the stern of his ship
 Gazing out at the blood, sweat, and tears
 Of the Greeks in rout. And the great runner
 Called to his comrade Patroclus from the ship, 640
 And Patroclus heard him and came out of the hut
 Like the god Ares. This was the beginning of evil
 For Menoetius' strong son, who now asked:

“Why have you called me, Achilles? What do you want?”

And Achilles, the great runner, answered: 645

“Son of Menoetius, my heart's companion,
 If I have it right, the Greeks will soon be
 Grovelling before me. They've reached their limit.
 But I want you to go now and ask Nestor
 Whom he is bringing wounded from battle. 650
 From behind, it looked just like Machaon,
 Son of Asclepius, but I didn't see his face.
 The horses went by at a pretty good clip.”

Patroclus did as his beloved friend asked
 And sprinted through the camp. 655

Nestor had just reached his hut

And was stepping down from the chariot
 With Machaon. His squire Eurymedon
 Unhitched the old man's horses,
 And the two dried the sweat from their tunics 660
 By standing in the onshore breeze for a while.
 Then they went into the hut and sat on chairs
 While Hecamede prepared a drink for them.
 This woman, who had long, beautiful hair,
 Nestor had taken out of Tenedos 665
 When Achilles sacked it. She was the daughter
 Of a great man, Arsinous, and the Greeks
 Had chosen her for Nestor, their best in council.
 She now drew up for them a polished table
 With blue enamelled feet, and set on it 670
 A bronze basket, and next to it an onion
 Grated for their drink, and pale green honey,
 And sacred barley meal. Then she set down
 A magnificent cup the old man had brought from home,
 Studded with gold rivets. It had four handles, 675
 With a pair of golden doves pecking at each,
 And a double base beneath. Anyone else
 Would have strained to lift the cup from the table
 When full, but old Nestor raised it easily.
 Into this cup Hecamede, beautiful as a goddess, 680
 Poured Pramnian wine, grated goat cheese into it
 With a brazed grater, and sprinkled white barley on top.
 She motioned for them to drink. They did so,
 And when they had slaked their parching thirst,
 They began to swap tales and were enjoying themselves 685
 When Patroclus stood in the door, more like a god
 Than a man. Seeing him, the old man jumped up
 From his gleaming chair, took him by the hand,
 Led him inside, and asked him to sit down.
 Patroclus refused, in no uncertain terms: 690

"No thank you, venerable sir, no seat for me.
 I have too much respect for Achilles, who sent me
 To ask you whom you have brought back wounded.
 But I see for myself it is Machaon,

And I will bring this news back to Achilles now. 695
 You know, sir, what a hard man he is,
 Quick to blame even the blameless.”

And Nestor, the horseman from Gerenia:

“And why does Achilles feel any sorrow
 For wounded Greeks? He has no idea 700
 Of the grief that has spread through the army.
 Our best men have been hit and are lying
 Wounded in camp. Diomedes is out,
 And Odysseus, a good man with a spear,
 Even Agamemnon has taken a hit. 705
 Eurypylus, too, an arrow in his thigh.
 Machaon here I have just brought back
 With an arrow wound. But Achilles
 For all his valor has no feeling for us.
 Is he waiting until our ships go up in flames 710
 On the shore of the sea, in spite of our efforts,
 And we are all killed in a row? For my strength
 Is not as it once was in my knotted limbs.
 Oh to be young again, with my strength firm,
 As I was in the cattle wars with the Eleans 715
 When I killed Itymoneus, the valiant son
 Of Hypeirochus, a man of Elis,
 During the drive back. Leading the charge
 In the fight for his cattle, he was hit by my spear
 And fell, and the country folk all fled in terror. 720
 The spoils we corralled from out of the plain!
 Fifty herds of cattle and as many flocks of sheep,
 As many droves of pigs, as many herds of goats.
 And one hundred and fifty chestnut horses,
 All mares, many with foals underneath. 725
 We drove them all into Pylos by night,
 Up to the citadel. And Neleus was glad
 I had done so well, going to war as a boy.

[Lines 729–805 are omitted. Nestor tells a story about his youthful exploits.]

That is the sort of man I was. But Achilles?
 His valor is for himself alone. And yet I think
 He will sorely lament the army's destruction.
 Ah yes, my young friend—Menoetius,
 On the day he sent you forth from Phthia 810
 To join Agamemnon, laid a charge on you.
 Mustering the army throughout Achaea,
 We had come to the well-built house of Peleus,
 And we found the hero Menoetius inside
 With you and Achilles. The old horseman Peleus 815
 Was burning a bull's fat thighbones to Zeus
 Out in the courtyard. He held a golden cup
 And poured flaming wine as the sacrifice blazed.
 You two were busy with the flesh of the bull
 When we appeared in the doorway. Achilles 820
 Jumped up in astonishment, took us by the hand,
 And led us inside. He had us sit down,
 Then set before us all that guests should have.
 When we had our fill of food and drink
 I began to speak, urging that you come with us. 825
 You were both right eager, and your fathers
 Laid on you both many commands. Old Peleus
 Told Achilles to be preeminent always,
 But to you Menoetius gave this command:
 'My son, Achilles is higher born than you, 830
 But you are older, though he is much stronger.
 Advise him, speak to him wisely, direct him,
 And he will be better off for obeying.'
 Thus spoke the old man, but you have forgotten.
 Still, you should speak to Achilles. 835
 It is not too late, and he just might listen.
 Who knows but that with the help of some god
 You might rouse his spirit? You are his friend,
 And it is good for friends to persuade each other.
 If some oracle, or a secret his mother 840
 Has learned from Zeus, is holding him back,
 Let him send *you* out, let *you* lead a troop
 Of Myrmidons and light the way for our army.
 If you wear his armor, and the Trojans think

You are he, they will back off and give the Greeks
Some breathing space, what little there is in war.
Our rested men will turn them with a shout
And push them back from our ships to Troy.” 845

This speech put great notions in Patroclus’ head,
And he went sprinting down the line of ships 850
To Achilles. But when he reached Odysseus’ hulls,
Where the assembly grounds and altars stood,
He ran into Eurypylus limping in from battle
With an arrow in his thigh. Sweat poured down
His neck and shoulders, and black blood pulsed 855
From his terrible wound, but his spirit was strong.
When Patroclus saw him he cried out in dismay:

“Ah, you Greek heroes, you were all destined
To die far from home and glut Trojan dogs
With your white fat. Eurypylus, tell me, 860
Is there any way to hold back Hector now,
Or will we all go down beneath his spear?”

And the wounded Eurypylus:

“We’ll all be piling into our black ships soon.
We have no defense left. All our best 865
Have been hit and are laid up in camp,
And the Trojans only get stronger.
Lend me a hand here. Lead me back to my ship
And cut this arrow out of my thigh.
Wash the blood off in warm water 870
And put some soothing poultices on it,
The good stuff. They say Achilles taught you
And that he learned from Chiron, the just centaur.
Our medics, Podalirius and Machaon—
One is laid up wounded and needs a doctor himself, 875
And the other is out there fighting the Trojans.”

Menoetius’ valiant son answered:

“What are we going to do, Eurypylus?
 I am on my way to Achilles now
 With a message from Lord Nestor. 880
 But you’re hurting, and I won’t let you down.”

He put his arm around Eurypylus’ chest
 And helped him to his hut. His attendant,
 When he saw them, spread hides on the floor.
 Patroclus had him lie down, and with a knife 885
 Cut from his thigh the barbed arrow.
 He washed the wound off with warm water
 And patted into it a bitter root
 That he had rubbed between his hands,
 An anodyne that took away the pain. 890
 The bleeding stopped, and the wound was dry.

ILIAD 12

While Patroclus doctored Eurypylus
 The battle raged on. The Greeks
 Still had the protection of their trench
 And the wide wall above it they had built
 As the last line of defense for their ships— 5
 For the time being. When they built that wall
 And drove the trench around it to protect their ships
 And all their plunder, they neglected to offer
 Formal sacrifice to the immortal gods.
 Built against the will of the immortals, 10
 The wall could not endure for long.
 While Hector lived and Achilles raged
 And the city of Priam was still unpillaged,
 The great wall of the Greeks stood firm.
 But when all the best Trojans had died 15
 And many Greeks had fallen or had left

And after ten years Priam's city had fallen
 And the Greeks had sailed back to their native land,
 Then Poseidon and Apollo conspired
 To sweep away the wall, bringing against it 20
 The might of all the rivers that flow down
 From Ida's mountains to the sea—
 Rhesus and Heptaporus, Caresus and Rhodius,
 Granicus and Aesepus, shining Scamander
 And Simois, along the banks of which 25
 Many bullhide shields and helmets fell in the dust,
 And a generation of men who were half-divine.
 Phoebus Apollo turned all their mouths together
 And for nine days sent their flood against the wall.
 Zeus poured down rain continually, the sooner 30
 To wash the wall into the sea. The Earthshaker
 Led the way, holding a trident in his hands,
 And pushed into the waves all the foundations
 Of beams and stones the Greeks had laid with toil.
 He made all smooth along the mighty Hellespont 35
 And again covered the great shore with sand.
 The wall was gone. He turned the beautiful rivers
 Back to flow in their original channels.

This Poseidon and Apollo were to do
 In time to come. But now the battle raged 40
 On both sides of the well-built wall. The beams
 Rang as they were struck, and the Greeks,
 Whipped back by Zeus, were penned in with their ships,
 Terrified of Hector, who had engineered the rout
 And who still fought like a howling wind. 45

[Lines 46–258 are omitted. Hector leads the Trojans across the trench and up to the wall around the Greek camp.]

To the noise of their advance Zeus now added
 A wind from Ida's mountains that blew dust 260
 Straight at the ships and the bewildered Greeks.
 The sky god was giving the glory to the Trojans

And to Hector.

Trusting these portents
 And their own strength, the Trojans did their best 265
 To breach the wall. Pulling down pickets
 And battlements, they threw them to the ground
 And set to work prying up the huge beams
 The Greeks had used to reinforce the wall.
 They were dragging these out, hoping to topple 270
 The entire structure, but even then the Greeks
 Refused to give way, patching the battlements
 With bullhide and beating off the invaders.

Both Ajaxes were on the wall, patrolling it
 And urging on the troops, using harsh words, 275
 Gentle words, whatever it took
 To get the men back into the fight:

“Friends!—and I mean everyone from heroes
 To camp followers—no one ever said
 Men are equal in war. There is work for us all. 280
 You know it yourselves. I don’t want a single man
 To return to the ships now that you have heard
 The rallying cry. Keep the pressure on.
 Olympian Zeus may still grant us
 To drive the enemy back to the city.” 285

And they roused the Greeks to battle.

*Snow flurries fall thick on a winter’s day
 When Zeus in his cunning rouses himself
 To show humans the ammunition he has.
 He lulls the winds and he snows and snows 290
 Until he has covered all the mountain tops,
 Headlands and meadows and men’s plowed fields.
 And the snow falls over the harbors
 And the shores of the grey sea, and only
 The waves keep it off. The rest of the world 295
 Is enveloped in the winter tempest of Zeus.*

The stones flew thick upon the Trojans
 And upon the Greeks, and the wooden wall
 Was beaten like a drum along its whole length.

For all this, though, Hector and his Trojans 300
 Would never have broken the barred gate
 Had not Zeus roused his own son, Sarpedon,
 Against the Greeks, as a lion against cattle.
 Sarpedon held before him a perfect shield,
 Its bronze skin hammered smooth by the smith, 305
 Who had stitched the leather beneath with gold
 All around the rim. Holding this shield
 And brandishing two spears, Sarpedon advanced.

*The mountain lion has not fed for days
 And is hungry and brave enough to enter 310
 The stone sheep pen and attack the flocks.
 Even if he finds herdsmen on the spot
 With dogs and spears to protect the fold,
 He will not be driven back without a try,
 And either he leaps in and seizes a sheep 315
 Or is killed by a spear, as human heroes are.*

Godlike Sarpedon felt impelled
 To rush the wall and tear it down.

He turned to Glaucus and said:

“Glaucus, you know how you and I 320
 Have the best of everything in Lycia—
 Seats, cuts of meat, full cups, everybody
 Looking at us as if we were gods?
 Not to mention our estates on the Xanthus,
 Fine orchards and riverside wheat fields. 325
 Well, now we have to take our stand at the front,
 Where all the best fight, and face the heat of battle,
 So that many an armored Lycian will say,
 ‘So they’re not inglorious after all,
 Our Lycian lords who eat fat sheep 330



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This abridgment of Stanley Lombardo's translation of the Homeric epics conveys the shape of both poems through a shrewd selection of substantial and complete passages. The result is a fascinating juxtaposition of two stories—one, of "Achilles' rage," the other, of "Odysseus' return"—told with the economy and brilliance of a master poet and storyteller.

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