A Song of Ilium

by

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To my teachers.

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I wish you could have read this.
Commentary on the Translation

>alert δεῖ µαθόντας ποιεῖν, ταῦτα ποιοῦντες µαθάνοµεν
What we must have learned in order to do, we learn by doing.

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

It would be hypocritical of me to say this translation was premeditated. Certainly, I was interested in working with the text, but I had honestly expected my thesis to be a different kind of project. However, time and I again I found myself playing with the Greek, delighting in an English word that captured its majesty. Soon these words grew to phrases, phrases to sentences, and when full monologues stretched before me, I had to be honest: I would translate it. Months passed like this, filled with pitfalls and triumphs. I stumbled about and gradually found my bearing. By no means, in my eyes, have I finished. What I share today is a small, unrefined fraction of what I hope it to be.

However, now that I am presented with a type of closing, I am forced to reflect and to clarify: to understand what has guided me, even before I was aware. Like Gorgias, I have long seen this project as my plaything. Now, I must defend it as my work.

“The true hero, the true subject, the center of the Iliad is force:” this is the titular claim of Simone Weil’s L’Iliade ou le poème de la force (1940). Of all the interpretations I have read, this has most closely revealed my own feeling. She goes on:

Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away. In this work, at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to. For those dreamers who considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past, the Iliad could appear as an historical document; for others, whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, today as yesterday, at the very center of human history, the Iliad is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors. (Weil, 6)
The second of these claims, the *Iliad* as a mirror of our own time, is one I will return to much later in conclusion. For now, I am captivated with her focus on force. Her own work defining it, in all its subtleties, is lengthy, but early on she summarizes the concept:

...it is that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was here, and the next minute there is nobody here at all; this is a spectacle the *Iliad* never wearies of showing us... (Weil, 6)

Whatever demise may come, we watch it arrive in gruesome detail, “no reticence veils the step from life to death (Weil, 26).” This is what first drew me to the *Iliad*. This, above all else, is what I strived to preserve in translation. But though Weil’s concept of force is well defined, its presentation is complicated:

...such a heaping-up of violent deeds would have a frigid effect, were it not for the note of incurable bitterness that continually makes itself heard, though often only a single word marks its presence, often a mere stroke of the verse, or a run-on line. It is in this that the *Iliad* is absolutely unique, in this bitterness that proceeds from tenderness and that spreads over the whole human race, impartial as sunlight. Never does the tone lose its coloring of bitterness; yet never does the bitterness drop into lamentation. Justice and love, which have hardly any place in this study of extremes and of unjust acts of violence, nevertheless bathe the work in their light without ever becoming noticeable themselves, except as a kind of accent. Nothing precious is scorned, whether or not death is its destiny; everyone’s unhappiness is laid bare without dissimulation or disdain; no man is set above or below the condition common to all men; whatever is destroyed is regretted. (Weil, 25)

Death in the *Iliad*, the ultimate marker of force’s hand, is not in and of itself overwhelming. It is the poet’s words that convey its power, that tear at our hearts. Often, we are only told a man’s name and lineage before learning his demise. Yet in the instants afterwards, through simile, we are flooded with his memory: his struggles, his triumphs, his purpose, his life. The weight of his passing comes washing over us, in all the “bitterness” which Weil describes; the strength of this moment lies in its subtlety. The
words of Shakespeare are still his own, even in a poor actor’s mouth, but without the proper cadence, rhythm, and inflection, they are ruined. They fall from tragic to maudlin, even as the same plot is conveyed. So too it is with translation, to a greater extent, even. The force of the text is nothing if the reader is not swept away with it.

As for how to achieve this, I was baffled. Though Lattimore (1951) was my reference for most matters, here in a discussion of tone, I turned to Fagles (1990). It was the first translation I read, and combing over passages again, I still felt the force that Weil spoke of. Section by section, I asked myself what was missing—why I had felt strongly enough that my own work might add something—and I had no answer. Then, one day, I took a different approach. Rather than look at a single simile or monologue, I read a book aloud. The first page was honey, rich and shimmering, but with the second, the third, the fourth it changed. I noticed less its sweetness and its gleam; now, I was agonized by its slow drip. On the final page of Book I, I realized that the 611 lines of Greek now sprawled out in 735 of translation. It felt overdone. Slow. As a contrast, I picked up Lombardo (1997). Though he does not match the Greek line for line, his first book is a mere 643 lines, and the shorter, almost iambic meter drives them along. I felt myself swept in the current of the text; the lines carried me forward. But, here and there, his curtness veered into the colloquial. Again, I was dissatisfied. Something was off.

I realize now that “forceful” is an imprecise term to apply to these translations, for, as Newton first articulated, force is a not a metric, but a product: mass times acceleration. Now, in the virtual age, where digital copies of translation circulate, it is strange to talk of a text’s mass. Acceleration, certainly, should also not apply (excluding the case where a frustrated student hurls their copy). Yet, in a broader sense, I believe
this transformation helps apply Weil’s comments to the disparate pair of translations. Fagles’ (1990) copy is not so much *forceful* as it is *weighty*; that weight imbues passages with incredible majesty, but if they move sluggishly along, the overall effect is diminished. Conversely, Lombardo’s (1997) verse has great speed, but is thematically lighter in its abruptness. Though the Homeric qualities in Matthew Arnold’s essay *On Translating Homer* (1861) are different enough from my own conceptualizations that I will largely avoid them here, it would be remiss not to note structural similarities. Of the four values he seeks in translation—rapidity, plainness, directness, and nobility—he catalogues a comparable interaction between the first and the fourth, which are analogous to the ideas of speed and weight above. He says that F. W. Newman’s (1856) translation, “while it avoids the faults of being slow and elaborate, falls into a fault in the opposite direction, and is slip shod…[rather than] being noble (Arnold, 43).” As much as I enjoy Lombardo’s work, I find the same issue.

If I am not to use Arnold’s terms, however, I am left with the issue still of parsing Weil’s force, and finding what might be analogous to mass and acceleration. I turn then to Aristotle’s writing on tragedy, which is said to apply to epic as well:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action of serious stature and complete, having magnitude, in language made pleasing in distinct forms in its separate parts, imitating people and not using narration, accomplishing by means of pity and fear the cleansing of these states of feeling. By “language made pleasing” I mean that which has rhythm and harmony, and by “in distinct” forms I mean accomplishing this in some parts through meter alone and in others in turn through song. (Aristotle, 1449b)

The imitative work of epic—the weight of the text—is already wrought for me. I have only the task of transferring it in such a way to convey it properly: of bearing across, as all translation means to do. My focus, then, is on how to recreate in English the
“language made pleasing in distinct forms” that Aristotle speaks of, “that which has rhythm and harmony...in some parts through meters alone and in others in turn through song.” Although I do not expect any of my translation to be set to music like the choral odes mentioned above, this reference to song has been especially formative in my approach. In fact, to explain my decisions, to trace the path towards the eventual clarification of this quality I seek, I may instead explain another choice: why I have chosen not to translate another *Iliad*, but rather to sing *A Song of Ilium*.

It was a while before I settled on this title. Since the beginning, I had known this as a valid translation. After all, the Greek Ἰλιάς (*Iliās*, “Trojan”) is only a part of a title, a feminine adjective from the noun Ἴλιον (*Ilium*, “Troy”). The full phrase it implies by ellipsis is ἡ ποίησις Ἰλιάς or “The Trojan Poem.” This is a well-known fact; several translators before me even use some variation of it as a subtitle. Still, the text has remained *Iliad* in my head, and first and foremost on every title page, the word *Iliad* spreads. It has lost its music. In the vaguest sense, my goal was to restore this quality. That began on the level of specificity: I wanted monologues to ripple with plosives p’s and roll with liquid r’s. I wanted cacophony in the clashing of armor, and euphony in the river’s course. But I gradually realized that the whole poem, to me, is a song, and that conception has led me to view one passage very differently from others: the conclusion. The end of the text, to many, is underwhelming. After suffering, triumph, joy, and despair, suddenly it all just dissipates. Surely, so grand a story should have a grand conclusion? I thought so, too. But on my second reading, when I fell deeply in love with the poem, I realized my error. I did not hear the music of silence.
In any piano piece, it is rare for me to seek out a rendition not by Horowitz or Rubenstein. I was raised on their playing, and their styles are ones I have become accustomed to. But, when I first encountered Lang Lang’s *La Fille aux cheveux de lin*, I made an exception, for the sheer rapture he portrayed. His playing has always been divisive. Some view him as overwrought, too expressive in his face and in his movement. For others, this expressiveness is an extension of the music. Here, in his rendition of Debussy, I can see no argument; his visage augments his playing. When he reaches delicately for the final chord and gently plucks, all his expectation rises and is held, ringing in the air. The note dies but leaves behind a silence still drenched in its color; the audience hesitates to clap. This is but one example of silence’s power. The hesitations in jazz, the pause between Symphonic movements, the heroics of a fermata, fighting to keep sound alive—all rely on their relation to quiet. In 1952, John Cage synthesized this understanding in his famous 4’33”, a three-movement composition without a single note. Roughly three minutes of silence would drive anyone in the age of smartphones crazy; but presented properly, it takes on a beautiful, almost magic quality.

In the *Iliad*, after 15,692 lines, among tumult and uncertainty, one final phrase appears:

\[
\omegaς \, \omegaι \, \gamma’ \, \alphaμφίεπον \, \tauάφον \, \varepsilonκτορος \, \iotaποδάμιον.
\]

Thus they buried Hector, breaker of Horses

And that is all. There is quiet. Before, at all the turning points of war, in between the speeches of generals and kings, a formula appears: \[\omegaς \, \varepsilonφαθ’, \, \omegaι \, \delta’ \, \alphaρα \, \piάντες \, \acute{\alpha}κήν \, \grave{\epsilon}γένοντο \, \sigmaιωπῆ, \] “he spoke, and all were still in silent hush.” Silence is the marker of imminent change. Without fail, some leader will arise to give direction to the ranks. But now, the poet leaves us without guidance. If this silence is mere void, mere ending, mere
lack, of course, it is lackluster. But if it can transform this quiet, as Cage does, it takes on new meaning. More specifically, it finds meaning lost in our memory. Somewhere in the single words, the strokes of verse, the run-on lines that Weil mentions, we recall the bitterness of death. Wretched, ugly, crawling from behind, they wash over us: soldier after soldier, broken by force, dead and gone. Finally, when we are allowed rest, they haunt us. We wait for a resolution that will not come. In the silence, we are left with our own torturous thoughts. What could be more a fitting end to epic or to war? This moment, to me, is the measure of a great translation. This silence defines the song. But for it to have its full effect, even as the weight of the piece is present, some measure of speed must join it, must drive us along relentlessly, preserving the tension of the piece until this moment. For the remainder of this essay, I will focus on how I have attempted to do just this: my decision to use line for line iambic pentameter, and the underlying principle that solidified the choice—the pursuit of tempo, rather than speed.

At the most basic level, as Aristotle notes, what I call tempo comes from a certain quality of “language made pleasing” known as meter. This, to me, is the most clear-cut issue. In generations past, poetry was taught with a greater frequency. One could rely on a certain familiarity with metrics, in the same way that in the 19th century, one could assume a rudimentary exposure to Greek language (or at the least, a more extensive knowledge of the classics.) Times have changed; although I hope that the Iliad remains relevant, I have to account for the exposure that my reader will have had to poetry and to epic. The subtleties of dactylic hexameter, I feel, are lost—were it not formatted in a certain way on the page, it is even conceivable modern readers would register it as prose. One might argue they will become acquainted with the meter as they read, but its
versatility—its greatest strength—becomes its downfall. With so many possible combinations of dactyl and spondee, it is difficult to find one’s bearing, even in a sea of such lines. But iambic pentameter is the heartbeat. It is Shakespeare, it is Milton, it is Keats. For many, I would imagine, iambic pentameter is not just an aspect of poetry, it is poetry itself—so great is its prominence in our time. This prominence, then, assures a certain familiarity and comfort with most readers, and for the rare exceptions who never read *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth* in high school, iambic has its own insurance policy: it is consistent. Whereas two adjacent lines of dactylic hexameter can vary wildly, so much so that a reader may never fully grasp it, pentameter repeats over and over again, just as it is. Those unaccustomed are sure to become familiar, and once acquainted, it has a way of driving them along. Well before I knew what tempo might be—before I even had a word to describe it—I was certain, at least, of one thing: no meter could be more fitting than this.

In addition to its regularity and widespread recognition, iambic pentameter also has the advantage of being a shorter meter, in that it has fewer syllables per line than most. This would imply less for the reader to process, and thus result in a faster pace, in a certain sense. But again, as with force, the syllabic length of a text is not its own metric, but rather a product—just as it rests upon meter, so too it varies with lineation, the arrangement of lines. Consider, for example, Fitzgerald’s (1974) translation: iambic pentameter, with 96 added lines in Book I, for a total of 707. At 10 syllables per line—ignoring briefly the frequent feminine endings and other additions I will discuss below—this totals 7,070 syllables, which serves as some rough measure of length. Now, as for Lattimore’s (1951) translation, his hexameter contains 15 syllables on average, but, by
matching the Greek’s lineation, spans a mere 611 lines. Consequently, though each
individual line is 1.5 times the syllabic length, the whole text is only about 1.3 times
longer—a significant decrease. As must be apparent by this point, such a rudimentary
conception of length is grossly inadequate in assessing the intricacies of poetry. Yet,
from a distance, the numerical allows us to see the consequence of additions. With a line
added here and another there, suddenly the swiftness of iambic can stall and dissipate.
For fear of this very effect, in addition to using pentameter as Fitzgerald (1974) does, I
have composed line-for-line as Lattimore (1951).

Tempo cannot exists with just one or the other: both line-for-line and pentameter
are necessary in creating a swift meter, and a swift meter is essential. To show this, a
single perspective as syllabic length is insufficient. Perhaps, another abstract theory
might help explain this belief, but, for the purposes of this project, a demonstration seems
most efficient. Consider the opening lines of Fitzgerald’s (1974) translation:

Anger be now your song, immortal one, 10
Akhilleus’ anger, doomed and ruinous, 10
that caused the Akhaian loss on bitter loss 11
and crowded brave souls into the undergloom, 11
leaving so many dead men — carrion 10
for dogs and birds; and the will of Zeus was done. 11
Begin it when the two men first contending 11
broke with one another — 6
the Lord Marshal 4
Agamémnon, Atreus’ son, and Prince Akhilleus 14

On the right, I have noted the syllables in each line. Out of the first 8 lines (if we
consider the 6 and 4 together), only 4 are 10 syllables long. Look closer, even, at those

1 To be precise in this terminology, I should say that this is an approximate matching of the Greek, rather
than an exact one. If one line in Greek must occupy 1 and ½ in translation, I may shrink a nearby line to
allow for extra space. There are brief moments, then, were the text is slightly misaligned—though only
briefly, and by a small measure.
that are perfect pentameter. “Anger” begins the first line with a trochee, as does “leaving” in line 5. For an experienced reader, this may pose few issues—in fact, they may appreciate how the forcefulness of a trochaic beginning matches the conceptual power of anger. But, as with the variation in dactylic hexameter, I worry this deviation will lead to confusion. Read aloud from the seventh line onward. “Begin it when the two” falls nicely in rhythm, driving you along, but then it falters. “Men” lingers a bit too long in the mouth, and the feminine end of “contending” discombobulates the line. The next phrase, “broke with one another,” is actually perfectly trochaic, which, coming off the prior feminine ending, makes sense. However, we must realize that there is so much more to meter than the number of lines and syllables—there is the matter of line breaks and transitions in between. A confident reader, well-versed in poetry or having practiced this exact passage before, will know to accent “broke,” after which everything falls nicely into place. But an inexperienced reader will be lost as they move their eye from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. As they stumble, the crescendo of the opening lines is broken. The speed is lost. Rather, I should say, it is sacrificed.

Though Fitzgerald (1974) writes in a swifter iambic verse, I find he suffers from the same issue as Fagles: putting weight before speed. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the first line. Compare his own beginning, “Anger be now your song, immortal one,” to a slight variation, “Let anger be your song, immortal one.” The second rendition with a small change to the original is immensely faster. It flies by in a perfect pentameter, and the jussive construction, though still archaic, is nowhere near as obscure as the first. However, despite these advantages, Fitzgerald prioritizes keeping “anger” at
the line’s beginning.\textsuperscript{2} I understand his motivation, I respect his choice, but to me, this goes too far. Consequently, it would be hypocritical of me not to notice the ways in which I, like Lombardo, may err in the opposite direction: maintaining speed at the cost of weight, as I call it, or nobility in Arnold’s terms. Certainly, I have struggled with this balance. In the pursuit of a perfect meter, I too have used my share of strange and archaic constructions. I have been as stubborn as Fitzgerald, if not more. Now more than ever I understand the wisdom of Augustine:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Multi quidem facilis se abstinent ut non utantur, quam temperent ut bene utantur.}
To many, total abstinence is easier than complete moderation.
\end{quote}

Saint Augustine, \textit{De bono coniugali}

As I endeavor not to be totally fixated on meter, however, I am wary still to be focused. In keeping proper cadence or phrasing, in retaining the detail and majesty of the Greek, still I am determined not to sacrifice speed. Somewhere between strictness and flexibility, I feel, this perfect moderation lies. To find it, I have endeavored to follow Marcus Aurelius’ paradoxical advice: νῆφε ἀνειμένως, \textit{be carelessly constrained}.\textsuperscript{3} More precisely, I have tried to see this advice not as paradox, but an opportunity for synthesis.

The above translation of the Augustine paraphrases a more pedantic line. Most literally, he says:

Many, certainly, more easily abstain themselves so as not to use, rather than being \textbf{temperate} so as to use well.

\textsuperscript{2} Many translators choose to begin with the word corresponding to μῆνιν, as the initial positioning of this in the Greek is a defining characteristic of the proem. Nevertheless, others as myself choose not to, citing that while it is elegant in an inflected language such as Greek, the attempt in English is inherently awkward.

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Meditations}, 4.26
I make this distinction because in all things I think in terms of etymology, and the verb here, “temperent,” is cognate with the “tempo” I have so far used interchangeable with speed. It is about time I define that term. Rather, it is about time I derive it:

In English musical parlance, *tempo*, as the equivalent Italian term, conveys all that speed does. But, through its cognates, tempo suggests so much more. First, there is its relation to *tension*, the narrative concept, as well as *temperance*, the quality of being measured and in balance. In the initial Newtonian parsing of Weil’s force, speed existed alongside but separate from weight. Tempo allows me to consider how the two might not only interact with and augment each other, but how, at some level, they are inseparable. Rather than view weight and speed as coming together in some form of moderation, I may understand them all as component parts of tempo.

Now, while I might show this by analyzing textual examples, the easiest proof is in the move to absurdity. Consider the following nonsense line:

duh DUH duh DUH duh DUH duh DUH duh DUH

Repeat it 14 times, and it is a sonnet. 5 more, a villanelle. In multiples of 4, a pantoum.
Surely, this is the ultimate feat of metered poetry! What versatility and what coherence! Of course, I jest—none who have read Milton, Shakespeare, or Keats would gravitate towards it. Yet, all the same, I have said nothing false. In all my pursuit of a more rigorous meter I have never come close to this example. It has no irregularities of rhythm, no strange consonant clusters, no instances of hiatus. Imagine, for a second, reading a sonnet of such lines. You would drag, slower and slower, and without question give up before its end. Why though? If you choose to, there is nothing stopping you from reading this faster than any meaningful line of iambic pentameter. However, without perceivable meaning in the line, you are not inclined to. This is remarkable in that speed, though a complicated concept, has thus far relied on matters of form alone. Here, we see it is also a matter of content: no matter how fast a line may be mechanically, with no tension, it cannot speed along. This need for tension is the mark temperance within tempo, the complexity that differentiates it from mere speed.

In a sense, this restates and revisits several previous points. The magical quality of silence, essentially, is a matter tension. In jazz, the pattern of rhythm establishes expectation in our mind, but our knowledge of the genre foretells variation. We know where a note should fall, but know better than to think that is where it will. Hesitations and swung starts affect us precisely because we are engaged, because there is tension. The same is true of fermate. We know, at some point, that the singer will run out of breath; the music must continue or conclude after this note. But for a moment, we are

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4 Though it does not pertain to my work enough to go into great detail, the Chinese poem “Lion-Eating Poet in the Stone Den” ("Shī Shī shì shī shì") or English equivalents such as the infamous sentence “Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo” challenge the idea that such extremes, necessarily, are absurd or meaningless.
gripped—how long can Pavarotti hold his “vincerò” in *Nessun Dorma*?\(^5\) How high can he crescendo? Our fascination with riffs in vocal performance makes a lot of sense, in that they are complex, darting, and intricate. A fermata, on the other hand, is just singing a single note; by all means, it feels as though it should be boring. Yet we find quite the opposite—simple as it may be, it is still tense.

To solidify this point, I have always found an unlikely analogy best explains the dynamic of tempo: horror movies. Recall those moments that have truly frightened you. What is there to the scene? Often, really, nothing. Usually, the protagonist stands in front of some ominous but plain door. The music, full orchestration throughout the film, might be a mere violin trill. There is motion, but not much to speak of—the hand reaching for the doorknob does so at an agonizing pace. Stillness, quiet: overall, these are the defining features of a jump scare. Yet if I were to disturb you in a scene of this sort—if you have the fortitude not to jump—how would you describe this moment, as fast or slow? To me, without question, it is the former. Even in the stillness and the quiet, our minds race frantically with expectation. On a more literary note, the same phenomenon is shown in Keats’ *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Though all objects are still, the telos of each thing gives it motion. In the space between a lover’s kiss, the weight of a tree’s leaves before fall, or the chase of some maiden, expectation bubbles over in our minds. Stillness can be quick, silence can be deafening—such is the power of tension.

This power, nonetheless, has its prerequisites. The irregularity of jazz can only exist against an expected rhythm. The tension of the piece shapes its perceived tempo, but that tension could not exist without tempo in the first place. The two concepts, then, exist in a symbiosis we have termed temperance. Though jump scares in horror movies

\(^5\) 12-15 seconds, depending on the recording, if you were wondering.
are not often examined with the same rigor as poetry and jazz, one will quickly find the same to be true: the juxtaposition of repetition and variation is at the core of the genre, and success comes from impeccable balance. Here, then, the many pieces of tempo have found their orbit around each other, and their interplay might well explain the idea of force that began this discussion. However, in this synthesis, a new problem arises. If we are to view tempo as a complex network of considerations, as opposed to a more one-dimensional speed, then we must revisit earlier discussion from new perspectives. In the analyses of Fitzgerald (1974), I showed how mechanical aspects could affect speed—now we must consider how issues of content may also contribute. In the extreme case, this came into play with the nonsense line: utter senselessness grinded motion to a halt. Within all poetry, however, we must examine what matters of content prompt the reader to pause, give them difficulty, or altogether force them out of the text.

Before enumerating such examples and addressing them, it is crucial to note the devastating effect of such moments. To demonstrate this, one need only revisit the hypothetical framework of the horror movie: what happens when one pauses a jump scare? Earlier, my concern was only the moment—to survey, at that instant, how an audience member perceived speed, and how that feeling revealed the complexities of tempo. Now, I wonder what happens next. If I pause a scene at its height, ask you to describe it, and then continue, what occurs afterwards? What changes? Nothing is lost in a certain sense. You see as much as someone who watched without interruption, and what you see, though piecewise, proceeds at the same rate and pacing. All the same, in that break, when the lights come on and you have the chance to breathe and relax and remember what is reality and what is fiction, the tension is lost. Though I may not
control many factors of a reader’s engagement with the *Iliad*—how much they read in one sitting, when they choose to take breaks, etc—I can choose never to force them out of the text by my own decisions. I will explore this dynamic with two examples, names and vocabulary, but this is a discussion that inevitably points towards paratextual decisions: work which I will continue after this thesis in the hope of eventual publication.

Greek names, invariably, are difficult. They can stretch for more syllables than one thought possible, with never before seen consonant clusters. In a certain sense, the *Iliad* would still be the *Iliad* if I referred to Achilles as Andrew and similarly renamed the rest of the characters, but this, for obvious reasons, is not viable. How then shall I help the reader? For Fagles, the answer is simple: paratext. Of the 683 pages of his text, the last 45, aptly named a “Pronouncing Glossary,” walk a reader through almost everything. In no way do I find this satisfactory, however. Battle scenes in the *Iliad* are littered with corpses, and for each corpse, there is a name. These sections, already prohibitively obscure for those who do not know the biographies of certain characters, are made comical if one expects the reader to constantly flip back and forth between text and glossary. To address this issue properly, then, one must do so in the text—not supplementing with paratextual addition, but instructing via meter itself. Earlier, I harped on Fitzgerald’s (1974) inconsistency with iambic: the trochaic beginnings, the feminine endings, the lines that balloon out to 13 or 14 syllables. Although I nominally write in the same meter, I must differentiate myself from him and even from the recent *Odyssey* translation of Emily Wilson, which is line-for-line in addition to using pentameter. Not only is my meter iambic pentameter: it is a rigorous one. In the thousands of lines to follow, you will not find a single feminine ending. Not a single line is a syllable more or
less than 10. Trochaic substitutions are few and far between. Certainly, this makes an already restrictive task almost prohibitively constrained, but the rewards are great. If I am strict enough in the meter, I don’t need to explain how to pronounce Patroclus. One need only read as they have every other word—the pulse of the meter will reveal the shape of the name. Here and there, something may require outside reference, but most issues are solved as they arise.

All the same, whether or not you can pronounce the name, there is a certain question of what meaning it retains. Consider, for example, the first two lines of the Fitzgerald (1974) translation mentioned earlier:

Anger be now your song, immortal one,
Akhilleus’ anger,

Compare this to Fagels’ (1990) rendition, and the Greek text:

Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles

The patronymic Πηληΐάδεω (“son of Peleus”) clearly appears, and yet, while Fagles renders it, Fitzgerald chooses not to. Surely, then, the former is more accurate than the latter? Not necessarily. For a Greek listener, the word Peleus summons a certain understanding, both generic and particular. In the general case, it is that of kingship. The mention of the father signals that the son, Achilles, is of some prominence, much in the same way that the word “prince” might. As for the particular, the word carries with it the history of the man himself. Achilles is not only son of a king, but of the specific one known as Peleus. The virtues of this father, the exploits, the character—in his identification with the man, Achilles is painted with these same strokes, beyond general
regality. This only occurs, however, if an audience knows who Peleus is. Certainly, they will learn. Several times, Achilles is implored by his aged father, and the specific context of this exhortation is stated explicitly in the text. Here, however, there is no explanation. Furthermore, in that this is the first line, there are no prior instances of explanation. The name Peleus cannot mean what it is meant to mean, unless we are to assume (as I refuse) that readers come to the text with extensive prior knowledge. For this reason, one might settle to call him “prince,” evoking the general concept alone. Or perhaps, as Fitzgerald, a translator might ignore this word all together.

On a larger scale, this logic has caused me to do something more drastic: to remove sections, rather than words. Before I can translate a section, always, I must learn to read it. I must understand before I can convey. To begin, my greatest impediment was ignorance. I had much to learn, of poetry, of Greek, and of epic. Now, my downfall is love. I know too well the obscurities, the nuances, the puns that will never survive the passage to English. Darling as they are, I must kill them. Usually, as with Peleus above, it is a matter of bits and pieces, but in a text so focused on precise listed detail, it was inevitable that something larger appear. So it was that I came to the Catalogue of Ships, and so it was I made the painful decision to cut it. No matter how I strategized, I could not find a way to convey its meaning—too much is a matter of context and too much is lost outside recitation, where it marks a truly remarkable feat of memory. I have done my best to salvage what is best of it, and to include, through my own additions, the spirit of the piece. Much to my chagrin, I feel this is how it must be.

The inevitability of this excision, in part, is what fueled my attitude towards another facet of translation: vocabulary choice. Here, with the Catalogue, my hands were
tied. The text presented material that did not resonate in the modern medium with a modern audience. It began to lose its tension, tending more and more towards the nonsense syllable line as time past. In theory, it would have been possible to update it—in place of the ancient names, I might have substituted modern characters, or at least, recognizable ones from literature or history. This, in fact, was done frequently throughout the ages; the decision is justifiable. All the same, as with Theseus’ ship, it no longer seemed like itself. I was at an impasse, forced to give in. Precisely because of this, it baffles me how so many translators, surely aware their work will end up in the hand of students, use such cumbersome words. Take, for example, lines 3 to 4 of Book I, as rendered by Green (2015), Fagles (1990), and Fitzgerald (1974):

many the valiant souls it saw off down to Hādēs souls of heroes, their selves left as carrion for dogs Green (2015)

hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls, great fighters’ souls, but made their bodies carrion, Fagles (1990)

and crowded brave souls into the undergloom, leaving so many dead men — carrion Fitzgerald (1974)
for dogs and birds;

The word each translates as “carrion” is ἑλώρια (helōria), a noun deriving from the Greek verb “to take.” Anything from “spoil” to “booty” would suffice, and in the context of the scene, words such as “feast” might do. For some reason, however, each of them opts to use a word I have seen only 3 times in my life, the other two instances being in the other translations. To be fair, some have been less stuffy. Take Lombardo’s rendition:

And left their bodies to rot as feasts Lombardo (1997)

For dogs and birds,
All the same, I cannot understand why so many translators halt their motion through such unnecessarily literary word choice—that which forces the reader out of the text and into the dictionary. So many parts of the *Iliad*, by nature, require paratextual supplement to understand. There is no reason to create additional breaks in the flow of reading.

These last examples, of names and of word choice, are some of many ancillary considerations to tempo. Several others exist, from the way we might spell a character’s name (Hector, Hector, Hector, etc) to the title page and introductory material. Though my main focus in this essay is on my method of translation and the guiding principle known as tempo, it is crucial to note the eventual importance that paratextual material will play in all things. So much context is lost, and any way that I can retain it will allow me to move through at a high tempo while still conveying as much meaning as possible.

In the future, when I hope to publish this, I especially am going to be interested in integrating small amounts of background material book by book. Rather than have a large explanation of characters at the beginning, for example, I may have short dramatis personae lists (much like those found in contemporary editions of Shakespeare) at the beginning of each book. This, I hope, may help clarify who is who. Furthermore, I am considering providing brief notes on Greek words that are crucial to chapters at the beginning, to prime students with no Greek to still think in certain ways. Though my decisions in this process have been largely through acceptance of limitations—ideas of what an audience has been exposed to from poetry to epic to the Greek language itself—I very much hope to find ways, via paratext, to combat these constraints at their source. I may very well revisit some decisions, such as cutting the Catalogue, if I can make sufficient headway in paratext.
As a final note, on the topic of paratext, I must point out a happy accident: Lattimore, and the compatibility we share. So far I have traced my decisions through an understanding of tempo. The choice of iambic pentameter, line-for-line composition, and strict meter all follow from this goal. Consequently, though I have moved on from the topic of syllabic length, it bears revisiting. Before, I used this concept to question longer renditions, in hexameter. Now, I must accept the consequence of composing otherwise—I have far less space. With an extra 5 syllables on average per line and the seemingly indefinite ability to add lines, it is not surprising, in some sense, that Fagles (1990) can include the patronymic “Peleus’ son” while Fitzgerald cannot. Certainly, as I have explained, the patronymic might have little meaning—but with seemingly limitless space to fill in a line, why not put it in anyway? This attitude is a luxury I have forgone. Because I am working with iambic against the Greek’s hexameter, because I am working line-for-line, because Greek can simply be a more expressive language than English at times, I must pick and choose what to retain. Much is lost in translation, not because it would not be understood, but rather, because it would not fit. This is an issue.

Throughout, I endeavor to mitigate this problem. To determine what I must keep and what I can give up. I did not work in this essay to fully define the ideas of weight and nobility mentioned earlier, but, I have thought on them, and believe that I retain much, even as I focus on tempo. Still, certainly, I must make sacrifices: I have come to terms with this only as I feel I found a solution. While the more literary works of Fitzgerald (1974), Fagles (1990), and Lombardo (1997) leave me wanting, another translator took a different approach, a more literal one. I would not think to attempt his method because no hubris could possess me to: I see no way to supersede Richmond
Lattimore’s (1951) edition on its own grounds. I love the piece. In fact, as I worked, it was the translation I kept beside me—a used edition, so that I could see both Lattimore’s interpretation of the Greek, and an English student’s notes. If I am to be honest, it is dry at times. Certainly, a fan of poetry should opt for Fagles instead. But in it, I see the Greek with a clarity I never would have thought possible. I am amazed at the faithfulness with which he renders the text. It was a strange feeling, then, to be working on a version with such strict poetic constraints while admiring something so focused on literal meaning. Of all the translations of the text, excluding ones such as Logue’s (1981) interpretive work, I feel mine might be the most opposite to Lattimore’s. But this, to me, is the beauty of their union: between the two, a fuller picture is expressed. I did well to have it as my side as I worked.

It was well into the process before I realized that this union might exist beyond the translation process—that it might be present for any reader. After all, Lattimore’s translation, coincidentally, is also line-for-line. The texts then, opposite in one sense, are interchangeable in another. For example, line 591 of Book I in my edition is line 591 in Book I of his. If, for whatever reason, you are not satisfied, you are free to flip between. This is a small but monumental feature to my work—to me, it allows one to use Lattimore’s translation almost as a paratextual guide. Consider the applications in a classroom. For a first read through, Lattimore is almost impenetrable. It is too dry to stand by itself. However, if you are ever asking a specific question of the text, the only more appropriate version than Lattimore’s would be the Greek itself. The opposite applies with my rendition: I believe my pursuit of tempo makes it the best for a first read through, though, it necessarily forces me to cut things. Here is where interchangeability
comes in. You can read my version and enjoy the poetry, the flourish, the tempo of the piece, and then, if you need to write a paper, you can cross-reference it with Lattimore. You don’t have to pick a single Iliad, you can choose whichever is best for the moment. Early on, I was worried that line-for-line would not allow me the space I needed with iambic pentameter. How serendipitous to find it had the opposite effect. I can feel confident seeking the music of the Iliad, for I know Lattimore will keep track of the score.

At last I return to a question even before the beginning—before tension, tempo, or force. It is the first question I was ever asked in this process, and one I can never seem to escape: why another Iliad? Part of my answer is a matter of differentiation: the above, in many ways, is meant to justify what separates my work from another’s. But beyond that, I have come to different response—of wondering just what “another” means. I never noticed that this question, essentially, is: why read your Iliad rather than a different one? I could not tell you. I have 27 translations on my bookshelf and have thoroughly enjoyed each. To me, I see this work not as a new choice, but a further addition. While tempo and tension must exist within my own translation, a certain kind of temperance stretches across all things. I believe that my translation is richer because of contrasting renditions, and that it, itself, enriches its company. Of course, I understand that in a world where most will never read a single copy of the Iliad—let alone 27—this may appear irrelevant. Just the opposite: for you, in reading, bring your own difference. You enrich the text, just as it enriches you. In this way, as Weil notes, the Iliad is the “purest and the loveliest of mirrors.” In this way, to me, it has always been reminiscent of the Grecian Urn:
When old age shall this generation waste,
   Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
   "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

John Keats, 1820
Bibliography


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My goddess, sing of RAGE. Achilles’ rage.
That doom which wracked Achaeans hard with pains,
and sent such valiant souls to Hades’ crypt,
left heroes’ bodies corpses, spoil for hounds
and feasts for birds, as Zeus’ will ordained.
Revive them for us, one more fool than king
and one more god than man. Sing, goddess, sing!

What god was it that brought these two to strife?
Apollo, for he loathed the Argive king
and set a plague upon the host. They died
because Atrides shunned his sacred priest,
his Chryses, who approached the hollow ships,
to free his daughter at whatever cost,
who bore the sacred wreaths and golden staff
aloft, as he implored the Argive men,
but most the martial sons of Atreus:
“Well-greaved Achaeans, and you martial kings!
I pray the gods on high Olympus grant
you sack this city and go sailing home,
but spare my daughter! Ransom her to me
in awe of lord Apollo, son of Zeus!”
Then all Achaean men assented loud,
to honor him, and take the ransom brought,
but Atreus’ son, displeased in heart
spoke out with spite, and relished cruelty:
"Old man, let me not find you here again
returning later, or now tarrying,
nor let your wreath and scepter profit you.
I will not free her, no, she will grow old
within our house, in Argos, far from home,
ettangled in my bed or at the loom.
Now, leave at once, if you should value life.”
At this, most fearfully, the man obeyed, and walked beside the murmur of the sea in silence, far away, to speak a prayer to lord Apollo, Leto’s godly son:

“Hear me! O Silver Bow! You guard of Kreis and holy Killa, lord of Tenedos! O Sminthian! If ever I have roofed a temple for you, or have burned the thighs of goats and bulls, then grant this wish for me! With arrows let them pay back every tear!”

This was his prayer, and lord Apollo heard, and came down from Olympus, furious, a bow and teeming quiver at his back, that clanged with arrows as he shook with wrath. He fell like night, knelt opposite the ships and loosed a bolt, sent singing in the air, that struck the Argives with a wicked plague. The mules fell first, the watchdogs after them, and soldiers fared no better than the beasts: so many pyres burned throughout the night.

Nine days the arrows rained upon the ranks, but on the tenth Achilles gathered them, for white-armed Hera gave him the idea, distraught to see her Danaans brought low. And, when they came into assembly, Achilles stood among them, first in speech:

“Atrides, now I fear we must wind home, if we should hope to flee from certain doom, for war and plague shall damn us if we stay! Come then, and bring some prophet or some priest, or dream-seer, for dreams are born of Zeus: find someone who might know why Phoebus fumes, if some forgotten sacrifice brings blame, and if the fragrant smell of lambs or goats will satisfy him and avert this plague.”

With this he sat, and after him arose the augur Kalkas, Thesior’s brilliant son, who knew all fortunes, present, future, past, who guided them in ships to Ilium,
with prophesy, the gift Apollo gave.

Addressing them, he spoke kind-heartedly:
“Achilles! You have urged I reason out
this ceaseless fury that Apollo bears,
but if I answer, you must swear to me,
to shield me, whether with your hands or words,
for I foresee the man will seethe and fume:
a mighty king, what sorrow! For they say
a ruler’s ire is his subject’s woe.
And even if he swallows down his wrath,
hereafter he may bear a grudge, intent
to harm me. Promise you will aid me then.”
Replied to him, swift Achilles spoke:
“Have courage! Speak the future you have seen,
for by the very god to whom you pray,
Apollo, I will swear it here and now:
you have my word, and with it, my support,
no man shall harm you, long as I shall live,
not even Agamemnon, if it were,
who boasts to be the best of Argive men.”

Encouraged, thus the faultless prophet spoke:
“No such forgotten sacrifice brings blame,
but Agamemnon scorned the Archer’s priest,
refusing to accept the ransom brought:
for this, Apollo sends the wicked plague,
and unabated he will carry on,
until the glancing girl has been returned
unpaid for, and we make an offering
at Kreis, then, finally, he will he be pleased.”
With this he sat, and after him arose
Atrides, Agamemnon, famous king,
with groans, his heart ensnared with stygian bile,
his eyes ablaze, like furnace doors ajar.
And grimacing at Kalkas, he replied:
“O wicked prophet! Never seeing good,
delighting in atrocious prophecy!
You lack a single deed of martial note,
yet have the gall to claim among the host
Apollo pains us for some fault of mine?
I would not take the ransom brought for her:
yes, as you say, I kept her, I admit
I love her, value her just as my wife,
as Clytemnestra, no more fair than she,
in body, stature, heart, or any deed.
Still I will give her back if he should wish,
if it will steer destruction from the host.
But bring another girl, lest I alone
should suffer, as befits some vagabond,
and not a ruler of my prominence!”
But countering him, swift Achilles spoke:
“Atrides, far-famed glutton, tell me how
we might produce some prize to offer you?
I know of no lost storage or supply,
no, with each triumph we gave out the spoils
and it would not be right to take them back.
Return this girl now, someday soon the host
will pay you three times, four times for her loss,
if Zeus will grant we storm the walls of Troy.”

But Agamemnon spoke thus in return:
“Not so, Achilles, brave as you may be,
do not suggest this, you will anger me.
Or do you wish that even as you hold
your prize, my own is taken from my hands?
Come now, you great Achaean sons, produce
an equal maiden, suited to my taste:
for I will take her, if you will not give,
from you, or Ajax, or Odysseus,
and he will simmer, whom I pilfer from.
But such affairs are for another time,
come now, and draw the ships out on the salt,
bring stalwart oarsmen, gather offerings,
and let Chryseis walk into the hull.
Then, choose some man to oversee the work,
Odysseus or Ajax, they will do,
or you, Achilles, fiercest of us all,
yes, you might lead the expedition well.”
But grimly, swift Achilles answered him:

“O shameless, vile, profit hungry king!
How might one heed your orders readily
to journey homeward or to fight in war?
I did not sail for Troy to test my strength
against these men I bear no enmity:
they have not robbed my cattle or my steeds,
nor burned my farmlands, underneath the skies
of cloudy Phthia, sheltered all around
by shadow-casting peaks and ringing seas.
No, coward, as a favor we have come
to honor you and Menelaus, cur,
or have you since forgotten our support?
You threaten me, you wish to take my gift,
the girl I toiled for—my rightful prize —
now, even as you take the lion’s share
with every Trojan citadel we sack.
When by my hands the raging work of war
is done, and we divide the many spoils,
your gift is great, mine small, but dear to me:
I cherish it to ease my weariness.
No longer! I will sail for Phthia then:
far better
to go homeward, I should think,”

And, Agamemnon, lord of men, replied:

“Flee, then! If spirit moves you to retreat,
I will not beg you stay, for many here
will honor me, as Zeus himself has done.
Oh you, most hateful of Achaean kings!
War-worshiper, you paramour of Strife,
strong only by the favor of the gods:
head homeward with your comrades, on your ships,
rule Myrmidons, and leave the host to me.
I care not for your anger, mark my words,
as Phoebus takes Chryseis from my arms,
so I shall steal Briseis, lead her off,
that you may know how mightier I am
and others will be frightened later on
to claim to be my equal or my match.”
Thus, Agamemnon spoke in arrogance and grief erupted in Achilles’ breast, as he debated how he would respond: to charge him, draw his sword, and cut him down, dispatching any fool who crossed his path, or beat his fury down, and quell his rage.  While weighing each potential, as he drew the sword out from his sheath, Athena came down from Olympus—Hera sent her out—endeavoring to aid both equally. She stood behind him, took his flaxen hair, invisible to all but him alone, and he, alarmed, whirled round and knew at once the goddess by the wisdom of her eyes. So then his voice rang out, his words took flight: “Grey-eyed Athena, why have you appeared? To see the hubris Agamemnon holds? Then I will try my hand at prophecy: now death will claim him for his impudence.” But placidly Athena spoke to him: “I came to stop you—if you choose to yield—for Hera sends me down to make amends between the two she favors more than all. So cease from strife, and sheath your sword for now, but castigate him: I will promise you, someday, not so far off, with certainty you shall receive three times such plundering. Now heed us, and endure his pride for now.” Responding to her, swift Achilles spoke: “As you command me, thus I will comply, though anger fills my heart, for it is known that gods will hear the man who heeds their will.” He laid a heavy hand upon the hilt and sheathed his sword, obeying every word, then, heavenward again Athena climbed into the halls of Zeus, who bears the shield.

Once more Achilles spoke out in reproach of Agamemnon, nurturing his rage:
“You drunkard, sheep of battle, wolf of peace, who arms not for the onslaught with his host, nor braves the ambush with the strongest men: your every act betrays a fear of death. Yes, you prefer to range across the ranks and steal from those who speak against your crimes. You king of cowards, lord of avarice! But mark me, this will be your last offense, for I will swear a great and mighty oath now by this scepter, which no more shall bear a twig or leaf, which leaves a stump behind high on the mountain, barren, trimmed with bronze: the staff we raise in judgment any time we gavel out the law received from Zeus. This is my oath, and none shall change its course: when one day longing for Achilles comes, when, grieving, you are overwhelmed with pains, when Hector slaughters you, when death collects your spirits, torn asunder, bear in mind you sent away the best Achaean man.”

Thus spoke Achilles, dashing on the ground his golden scepter, promptly sitting down and as Atrides seethed, wise Nestor stood, the most sagacious of the Argive men, whose practiced tongue dripped speech as honey flows.

He had outlived two generations yet — his comrades and their children—now he ruled the third, in Pylos, still their sovereign lord. So, stopping them, he spoke kind-heartedly: “For shame! Great grief descends upon us now and Priam and his sons will cry aloud with joy, beside the Trojans, glad in heart, if they should learn you quarrel, you who are our very best in leadership and war. Now listen, you are younger than my sons and in my time far better men than you have heeded me and trusted in my words. Such men as we shall never see again: as martial Dryas and Perithoös,
as Polyphemus, Kaien, Exados,
and Theseus, a rival to the gods
the strongest men who ever walked this earth,
who fought the strongest foes, those mountain beasts,
the centaurs, and disposed of them with ease.
Once I set out from Pylos as their aid:
far off, from distant lands they called me forth.
I fought with them, myself, alone, though none
of mortal men could hope to best them now.
And they would heed my council and advice,
so you two, listen, hear your elder speak:

King Agamemnon, brave though you may be,
take not this girl that rightfully is his.
Achilles, do not quarrel with the king,
for no one may receive an equal share
to sceptered kings, whom Zeus himself brings fame.
Though you are stronger, born of godly stock,
this man is greater, ruling over more.
Atrides, cease your anger! I myself
will pray Achilles beat his fury down:
for he is our salvation in this war.”
Then to him Agamemnon made reply:
“Old man, you speak according to our lot,
but this man will not heed you, he is crazed
to vanquish all in strength, to conquer us,
commanding us about against our will.
The gods have made him fiercest in this war,
but who ordains him arbiter of men?”

And grimly, swift Achilles answered him:
“You call me coward, worthless vagabond,
for honoring your orders and commands.
Bid others do your deeds then, since no more
will I obey you, bearing such abuse.
But mark me, carve these words into your soul:
I will not fight to keep you from this girl,
not you, nor any other sent for her —
you gave her once, and take her back again.
But if you dare to touch some other thing,
grown ravenous for treasure and for wealth
then I will teach you modesty with steel.”
Thus, then, the two who clashed with violent words
stood up and parted, off to their affairs: 305
Achilles headed back to find his ship,
Patroclus and his men not far behind,
and Agamemnon gathered rowers round,
brought offerings on board, while in the hull
Chryseis walked, as they prepared to leave.
Odysseus was charged with leading them,
and through the water, winding as they went,
they sailed, till Troy grew distant and was gone.

Those left behind made lavish offerings
of sheep and goats, beside the barren sea. 310
The fragrant smoke curled up, gone heavenward,
and each had hope Apollo would be pleased.
Thus, soldiers went about the sacrifice,
while Agamemnon tended to his threat,
and called attendants forth, Talthybius
and swift Eurybates, his messengers:
“Go to the tent of Peleus’ son,
and bring fair-checked Briseis back to me,
if he refuses, I myself will go,
with soldiers at my back, and he will yield.” 325
So thus he ordered them, and they obeyed,
and off they went, beside the ocean’s bank
to reach the barracks of the Myrmidons:
there, then, they found Achilles by the ships,
though he rejoiced to see them coming near,
they both shrunk back, ashamed and terrified,
and stood in silence, looking pensively.

But he knew in his heart why they had come:
“Hail, heralds, messengers of Zeus and men!
Come nearer: you are not to blame in this,
I know that Agamemnon sends you here.
Patroclus! Bring the girl that they may lead
her off, and let them both be witnesses
before the blessed gods and mortal men
of this injustice, till, not long from now, some need of me arises in this war. For though his sacrifice delays demise, he has no hope of sacking Ilium, so long as I refuse to fight for him.” With this, Patroclus brought Briseis forth, and gave her to be led away with them. Thus then, the two returned to find their king, the girl in tow, unwilling as she went.

Then brave Achilles sat aloof to grieve, beside the banks that bound the endless sea, and speaking to his mother, thus he prayed: “Mother who bore me, as my life is short, at least some honor ought to have been mine, but now Zeus has forgotten me, and lets king Agamemnon shower me with shame: He took her, mother. Gone! My prize is gone.” And from the deepest waters of the salt, his mother heard his prayers and rose like mist that crawls up from the oceans with the dawn. She sat herself beside him, holding him, a hand upon his cheek as she began: “My child, why in tears? What brings this grief? Speak out, and tell me, that we both may know.” But swift Achilles answered, groaning deep: “Why ask of me what you already know? We went to Thebes to sack Eëtion, and carried off its many spoils home. Each was awarded something for his stores: to Agamemnon, fair Chryseis went, whose father Chryses came to ransom her. The holy priest Apollo cherishes would stop at nothing, if she might be free. He bore the sacred wreaths and golden staff aloft, as he implored the Argive men, but most the marshal sons of Atreus. And all Achaean men assented loud, to honor him, and take the ransom brought, but Atreus’ son, displeased in heart
spoke out with spite, and relished cruelty. Thus scorned, the old man left and spoke a prayer, which came to lord Apollo and was heard. For this offense, he set a plague on us, and many died throughout Achaean ranks, until a prophet came to prophesize and tell us why Apollo swelled with rage. I urged we supplicate him, and, incensed, king Agamemnon rose with hateful thoughts to threaten me, as now he brings to pass: since, as he sends Chryseis back to Kreis off on the hollow ships to be returned, he brings his messengers to take my prize, Briseis, whom Achaeans gave to me. So mother, if you can, protect your son, go to Olympus, supplicating Zeus, if ever he has valued your support as I so often heard you boast about within my father’s halls—how once you saved the son of Cronus from unseemly doom. That time, the other gods had shackled him, Poseidon, Hera, and Athena, too, but you came forth, the breaker of his chains, and called upon the Hundred Handed One, Briareus, as he is known to gods, but Aigaion among our mortal tongue. That day he sat by Zeus and fought them off: the gods shrunk back, no longer binding him.

Remind him of this now, and take his knees, ask that he aid the Trojans in their cause, and pin Achaeans, dying by their ships, so all may suffer for their king’s mistake. Let Agamemnon know his arrogance, for having shamed the best Achaean man!”

But Thetis answered him with heavy tears: “My son, what sorrows have I bore you to? If only you could sit untroubled here!”
For yours will be a short time on this earth, and now it will be miserable as well! Come, then, my child, we will make amends: I shall present your case to father Zeus, and he will be persuaded, I should think. Till then stay here, beside the hollow ships, far off from war, sit nurturing your rage. For all gods went off the prior morn to dine beside the Aethiopians— twelve days they shall be gone, then once again when they return, I will take Zeus’ knees, beseeching him, that he might honor you.” With this, she left him, sorrowful in heart, still grieving for the woman he had lost, unwilling to be taken from his arms.

By now Odysseus had come to Kreis, into the harbor, deep as open seas, and gave commands to have the sails drawn up, the rigging tied, the masts collapsed and stowed, that they might row the final stretch to port.

Out, then, the anchors flew, and cables sang, out walked the soldiers, grateful for the earth, out came the lambs to please the Archer god, and out, at last, Chryseis went along up to the altar, as Odysseus spoke thus, and left her in her father’s arms: “Good Chryses! Agamemnon sent me hence to bear your child with this offering for lord Apollo, that he might be pleased, the god who plagues us with his fiery wrath.”

Thus he rejoined them, and the pair rejoiced, and each in order brought the sacrifice, to fill the holy altar with their gifts. They washed their hands and picked up barley grains, as Chryses held his hands aloft to pray: “Hear me! O Silver Bow! You guard of Kreis and holy Killa, lord of Tenedos! If ever you have heard me at my prayer and honored me, and plagued the Danaans,
then once again, Apollo, grant my wish, 
call back your black destruction from their ranks!”
So Chryses spoke, and Phoebus heard him pray, 
and when each man had thrown the barley grains, 
they sliced the throats of cattle, skinned them bare, 
cut off the thighs and wrapped them in their fat: 
a double fold of meat cut from the flesh.
Then on a spit they roasted them and poured 
a burning wine, while men held five-prong forks.
But when they tasted innards, organs, all, 
they skewered every morsel with a spit, 
and taking them, still golden from the flame, 
they feasted, weary with their toilings— 
they ate, and spirit lacked no want or need.

Then, when they sated love of food and drink, 
the young men brought out kraters filled with wine 
poured out libations, filled the goblets high, 
and toasted to the god with song and dance. 
All day they revelled in the sacred hymns, 
and hearing them, Apollo smiled bright.
So then the sun slipped down and darkness came, 
as all lay down to sleep beside the ships, 
and primrose Dawn, the daughter of the morn, 
rose from the sea and shone across the land. 
Apollo sent a wind to blow them back, 
so down they furled the sails across the masts, 
which caught the breath of air and drove the ships 
out from their mooring, free from mother earth, 
to sea, the water lapping in their wake. 
And when they reached the shores of Troy again 
they drew the vessels out high on the sand, 
propped logs beneath to keep them in their place, 
and scattered to their tents to rest at last.

But still he raged, beside the nimble ships: 
Achilles, Zeus-born son of Peleus.
Not once he went into assembly, 
nor once in war, but lying there he longed for battle and for she that once was his.
Then when the twelfth day came around at last, the gods returned, Zeus leading them along, and Thetis did not soon forget the prayer her son had made, but, rising from the swell, she went up mount Olympus where she found, the son of Cronus, sitting off, aloof, atop the mountain, high on jagged peaks. With one hand Thetis took his knees and held his chin within the other as she prayed, so that their gazes locked, unwavering:

“Zeus! Father, if I ever brought you joy with word or deed, I beg you, grant this wish: bring honor to my son, whose life is short, whom Agamemnon has dishonored, shamed, in pilfering his prize, insulting him. Olympian! Redeem him, intercede and aid the Trojans, till the Danaans must honor him, and beg he fight again.”

She spoke, but not a word escaped the mouth of Zeus, in silent hush, so Thetis grabbed his knees and asked the god a second time:

“Unerring one, why might you hesitate? Incline your head, or at the least refuse that I may know how low you value me.”

Perplexed, then, Zeus spoke out in steady tones:

“Catastrophes are bound when I am set to fight with Hera, how she taxes me! And always she, the most of any god, accuses me of aiding Trojan men. So leave me now, lest Hera should suspect involvement, I will do what may be done. Now I will bow my head, so you are sure: no prize is worth the value of my word, my vow, unwavering, unchanged, unbent is never unaccomplished—be at ease.”

Thus then he nodded, and his godly hair swept down, ambrosial, flowing from the head, and all Olympus shook with his assent.

The confidants walked off their separate ways, she to the ocean, diving in the deep,
and he back to his home, as gods arose

to greet the Father—no one might have dared
to sit while he strode through the holy gates.

He sat, and Hera, never ignorant,

who saw him meet with Thetis just before

was dubious, so, acting on her fear,

she started scolding Zeus for his deceit:

“My traitor, which god joins you in this plot?

Why must you view my absence as a gift,

a chance for secrets? Do you ever think
to share your true intentions with your wife?”

The Father of the gods and men replied:

“Hera, do not be set to know my plans,

they would be hard for even you, my wife—

whatever is appropriate to know,

you will be first to know of gods and men,

so do not pry and question endlessly
to know what I deem best to leave unsaid.”

To him, the cow-eyed goddess made reply:

“Your majesty, what do you mean by this?

I have not pried or questioned you before,

but think what you may please to think of me.

I dread to guess she has persuaded you,

the silver-footed daughter of the Sea,

who came not long ago to take your knees.

I fear you nodded that you would destroy

Achaean ships, all for Achilles’ sake.”

Then Zeus, the lord of Thunder, spoke to her:

“My lady, I can never hide from you,

but you are powerless and may but grow

more distant from my heart resisting me.

If you are right, then it is as I wish.

Sit down, obey me, now that you have heard,

for fear that no alliance of the gods,
could stay my hand, if I should come for you.”

He spoke, and Hera, shaking with his words

sat down, contorting to obedience.

Then of the troubled gods and goddesses

Hephaestus was the first to rise in speech,
to comfort her, to ease his mother’s pain:
“Catastrophes are bound if you are set to quarrel for the sake of mortal men, if you should drive the gods to argument, unrest will smother and destroy this feast! I urge you, mother, as you know is right, to comfort father Zeus, so he will cease from scolding you, disquieting our peace. For if he wished to hurl us from this peak it would be so—he is superior! Obey him, then, and speak with gentle words, that he may look upon us graciously.”

But rising then, to bring a cup for her he leaned in, whispering another word:
“Endure it, mother, though you may be pained, lest I should see you, dearest of my heart, struck down, unable to prevent your fall. Sure grief will come to those who fight the Lord, I learned this once before, protecting you. He seized me by the foot and hurled me down all day I flew, and with the setting sun, I fell in Lemnos, broken, surely dead, had not the Sintians looked after me.”

He spoke, and white-armed Hera forced a smile, and took the chalice from her loving son, then through the other gods Hephaestus past and gave out cups of nectar, to the shouts and laughter of immortals as they saw the crippled Craftsman bustle through the halls. Then all day long, until the setting sun, they ate, and spirit lacked no want or need, Apollo plucked his lyre and in turns the muses sang, exchanging melodies.

But when the sun had set and darkness spread they wandered back to sleep within the homes the stalwart blacksmith, lame Hephaestus made, with skill befitting of divinity. Thus, Zeus went to the bed where he would rest whenever placid Sleep came over him, and there he lay, with Hera at his side.
The gods and horse-grooms slept the night, but Zeus lay not within the arms of luscious Sleep, instead, he pondered how to spread demise and bring Achilles honor as deserved. Then in his heart one plan appeared the best, to send a wicked dream unto the king, and so his voice rang out, his words took flight: “Make haste, malignant dream, out to the ships, find Agamemnon at his resting place, and speak these words, exactly as I bid: command he arm the great Achaean sons to siege and capture Troy with its broad roads. No longer will immortals argue on, for all are bent as Hera has implored to act, and now sure sorrows hang on Troy.” The dream departed when he heard this speech, and swiftly came upon the hollow ships, to Agamemnon, at his resting place, asleep, within the mist of slumbercloud. Then, in the shape of Neleus’ son, as Nestor, whom Atrides most revered, divine, the dream stood over him to speak: “In slumber, son of martial Atreus? Horsebreaker, kings have little time for Sleep while soldiers in their charge endure unrest. Pay heed! I bear the word of mighty Zeus, who pities you on high and sends his aid: he bids you arm the great Achaean sons to siege and capture Troy with its broad roads. No longer will immortals argue on, for all are bent as Hera has implored to act, and now sure sorrows hang on Troy from Zeus: remember well, and when you wake let not forgetting come as Sleep retreats.” The dream spoke out, and left him to believe
with confidence such fictions would be fate that on that day high Troy would crumble down. The fool! Oblivious to Zeus’s will! Not knowing how the air would ring with wails, as Trojans and Achaeans suffered war. But as he woke, and dream suffused the air he started, rose, and put his tunic on, then threw about his cloak, and stood to lay his sandals underneath his feet, and slung a silver-studded sword upon his back. Now, with the scepter of his ancestors, he left to meet the Argives by the ships.

As Dawn stepped off from high Olympus, down to spread the light of day across the skies, king Agamemnon sent for messengers, to bring Achaeans to the meeting place: the news was swift, as were the men to come. First sat the elders to assembly, by Nestor’s ship, the camp of Pylians. Then, when they settled down, the king began: ‘Hear me, dear friends! A dream divine has come, through honey night, alike to Nestor there, in visage and in stature, just the same, and over me, he spoke the following: ‘In slumber, son of martial Atreus? Horsebreaker, kings have little time for Sleep while soldiers in their charge endure unrest. Pay heed! I bear the word of mighty Zeus, who pities you on high and sends his aid: He bids you arm the great Achaean sons to siege and capture Troy with its broad roads. No longer will immortals argue on, for all are bent as Hera has beseeched to act, and now sure sorrows hang on Troy from Zeus.’ He spoke, and flying off, departed me then from sweet slumber’s grip I was released, so now, prepare to arm the Danaans, though I will test their resoluteness first
and feign commands to leave and make for home:
keep them in line, to prove their willingness.”
With this he sat, and Nestor next arose,
the king of Pylos, son of Neleus,
who spoke and answered him kind-heartedly:
“O kings and councilors, had someone else
professed their dream before the Danaans
we would ignore him, calling it deceit:
but he who claims to be our very best
has spoken thus, so let us go to arms.”
With this, he led them from assembly,
the herdsman Nestor, followed by the host
of sceptered kings, while soldiers thronged behind.

Like grapevine, grown in clustered canopy
or swarming bees, that burst from hollow rocks
to huddle on the blossoms of the spring,
one daring here, one darting there, so marched
the troops up from the shoreline camp in scores
to meet within the great assembly.
And with them Rumor, messenger of Zeus,
walked blazing, driving them along their way.
Disquieting the land they gathered round,
and as they sat the earth groaned with their weight,
nine heralds shouted, keeping them in line,
and urged they walk behind the Zeus-born kings.
So, soberly, they sat and were restrained,
but when the clamor of their movement stopped
king Agamemnon started, brandishing
the scepter that Hephaestus made for Zeus,
which Zeus bestowed on Hermes, and in turn,
which he had left for Pelops long ago,
from whom then Atreus had gotten it.
But, dying, he gave it to Thyestes
and now it fell in Agamemnon’s grasp,
as lord of Argos, sovereign of the land.

So, leaning on it, thus he spoke to them:
“Dear Danaans, you servants unto war,
Zeus chains me now in heavy Ruin’s doom.
Cruel god! He nodded as he promised me
that I would ravage Troy with its great walls.
But this was all deceit! He sends me home ungloried, counting loss on bitter loss.
This pleases Zeus, almighty king of gods,
who topples many cities and will fall
so many more—how could we fight his will?
So this will be our shame in later years:
that with so many and such valiant men,
in vain, we fought and waged a fruitless war,
and won no conquest, faced with fewer foes.
For if we ceased from war and held a feast
to celebrate our new camaraderie,
if ten Achaeans sat at every camp,
and one sole Trojan came to pour their wine
then still, with one attending every ten,
so many camps would lack a servant boy.
By such a measure we outnumber them,
those Trojans, but their allies swarm around
from many cities, bearing sturdy spears,
and thwart me in my earnest, fierce attempt
to make a ruin of this citadel!
Nine years have passed below the eyes of Zeus,
our ships have rotted, and their ropes gone slack,
somewhere our wives and children wait for us
within our houses, and yet far from home,
the work we came to do is unfulfilled.
So come, now let us flee and sail away.
To ships! Prepare to seek the fatherland,
we will not capture Troy with its broad roads.”
He summoned forth their longing with his words,
and all throughout the camp the earth convulsed,
with shouts and stamping, like the roaring sea
which Notos stirs, with Euris by his side,
sent down by Zeus, the monarch of the clouds.
Like Zephyrus sweeps through the fields of grain,
in mischief, spilling corn across the ground,
so they were swept, were stirred, and with a shout
y they raced to reach their ships beside the moors:
they darted, raising dust with fleeting feet,
each frantic to be homeward on the sea.
And as they made their vessels fit to sail,
their cries resounded, soaring heavenward.
So thus, against their fate, they might have left,
had Hera not addressed Athena then:
“For shame! Unwearied goddess, born of Zeus,
that thus the Danaans might head to sea,
to voyage back and seek their fatherland,
but leave the Trojans with their greatest prize:
queen Helen, for whom many men have died
in Troy, far from their homes and native lands.
So come now, race across their bronze-clad ranks,
and stay them, turning hearts with gentle words,
that they should not go flying to the sea.”
With this, Athena did not disapprove,
so stepping off Olympus, darting down,
she swiftly came upon the Argive fleet,
and found Odysseus, unmatched in wits,
there, stoic, racing not to reach the ships,
but mournful of the chaos which he saw.
And going nearer then, Athena spoke:
“Laertes’ wily son, O Zeus-born king,
Odysseus, now will you let them flee,
fly frantic to their ships to sail for home?
Will Helen, who has caused this very war,
for whom so many Danaans have died,
be thus forgotten, left in Trojan hands?
Come now, and marshal through the splintered ranks,
to stay them, turning hearts with gentle words,
that they should not go flying to the sea.”

At once, he knew goddess by her voice
and started, throwing off his princely cloak,
which brave Eurybates caught in his wake.
Then, reaching Agamemnon, lord of men,
he took the scepter of the ancestors,
and sped his way throughout the army ranks.
And every king he reached, he stopped to face,
and spoke with gentle words to marshal them:
“My lord! This fear does not become a king, sit down, and have your soldiers follow suit, for Agamemnon’s plans escape your mind: he tests us, afterwards he will reproach the spineless men who fail to prove their might. May all hold strong and not incur his wrath, for anger courses strong within the veins of Zeus-born kings, whom deities support.”
But when he saw some soldier crying out, he beat them with the scepter, bellowing: “Soldier! Sit still, and heed superiors for you are impotent, unbellicose: a nobody in council and in war. Not all may lead, nor is there profit to the rule of many—no, let one be king, one sovereign, who receives from father Zeus the scepter and the law, that he may reign.”
So thus he coaxed them to assembly, the throngs of boisterous men who longed to leave, and as the clawing rumble of the sea crescendos on the beach and crashes down, they sat, and earth resounded with their weight. But insubordinate Thercytes stood, the dogged rabble-rouser, scum of scum, who took his pleasure quarreling with kings to summon snickers from the Argive men. He was the ugliest of Danaans a cripple, one leg lame, the other bent, with hunchback shoulders, and a pointed head misshapen, nearly bald, with wiry hair, and both Achilles and Odysseus despised him most of all Achaean men. Now, standing, sounding shrill with scolding words he goaded the Achaeans, justly vexed, reproaching Agamemnon for his deeds: “Atrides, from what lacking comes your need? Your barracks brim with bronze, beside which stand the women you selected and we gave to you, before us all, with every siege. And if you pine for gold, a Trojan prince,
will surely bring some, ransoming his wife
or should I or some other Danaan
secure another women to your taste,
that you, alone, might hoard? What mockery!
For someone so inept to be our king.
My fools, you Trojan women, no such men!
Let us return, and leave this one behind
to count his treasures, stranded, pondering
the love he did not show his countrymen.
Not even great Achilles can escape
such shame: his prize is taken, honor smeared.
And were it not for his forgiving heart,
surely you would have died for this offence!”
But hearing these reproaches of the king,
Odysseus stepped forward, menacing,
and scowled as he spit a sharp reply:
“Thercytes, scoundrel, crooked orator,
restrain yourself, and quarrel not with kings,
I hold no man inferior to you,
of all who came to conquer Ilium.
So hold your tongue within assembly,
and cast no blame, nor goad the men to leave,
for bear in mind, there is no certainty
our homeward travels would be fortunate.
Yet, even so, you hound your king to go,
you mock him, grudge him for his share of spoils,
and sneer with every word that leaves your mouth.
It will be as it has been brought to pass,
but if you prattle on so senselessly,
as sure as I am called Odysseus
and call Telemachus my noble son,
I swear that I will catch you, strip you down —
your cloak, your tunic—till I leave you bare,
and I will beat you till you contemplate
what ails you more: your agony or shame.”
With this, he brought the scepter down to strike,
and bent him, sending tears across his face,
as blood-red welts grew swelling anywhere
the golden rod came falling on his back.
So, pained, and looking helplessly, he sat
while men laughed full, although they pitied him.
Then, somewhere, one man turned to tell the next:
“Odysseus does well to punish him
so let us follow now and arm for war.
Whoever keeps this slanderer at bay
has surely spared us troubles without end.
Now, truly, neither pride nor foolishness
could drive him once again to clash with kings.”
Just so they spoke, as sly Odysseus
held up the scepter, while Athena came
appearing as a herald, urging all
keep quiet, so that men both high and low
would hear him speak, and ponder what he planned.
Addressing them, he spoke, kind-heartedly:
“My lord, these men intend to make of you
a faulty king, that they will not feel shame
in breaking—of their own accord—the oaths
they swore when leaving from the pasturelands
of Argos: that we stay till taking Troy.
For just as children, or like widowed wives,
they all complain, and hunger to return.
And surely they are right to long as much,
a man gone months without his wedded wife
is anxious to be back, though rising seas
and storms may keep him from his swift return.
Nine years have passed now since we ventured here,
impatient thoughts are understandable.
But even so, I ask you, will you dare
to suffer so, and leave unrecompensed?
Endure it, friends! Stay here, till we may learn
if Kalkas prophesies our future well,
for each of us that death has yet to claim
bore witness, once before, and knows this well:
this prior day, beside the Aulan shores,
when, after fighting hard with Trojan men,
we gathered by the altar near the spring
and promised offerings to please the gods,
there by the sycamore, where waters flow
a sign appeared, a blood-soaked serpent came,
which Zeus himself cast down into the light,
and sent up from the altar to the trees, where fledgling sparrows perched, their mother gone. High in the branches, shaking in the leaves, eight sat, and with the mother they were nine. But he devoured all, despite their screams, and when the mother circled round and squawked, he caught her in his jaws and swallowed her so they were reunited in their death. Then, when his maw had closed, he turned to stone: Zeus did this, as a monument for us, and we, bewildered, marveled at the sight— no man could say what moved the god to act, till Kalkas spoke to us, interpreting: “Why are you silent, brave Achaean sons? This is an omen born of father Zeus, foretelling what no bard will soon forget: these nine who are devoured mark the years that we shall war against the Trojan men, but with the tenth come round, the gates will fall, and at that time the citadel is ours.” Thus, once he spoke, and thus it now shall be, so come then, stay, you brave Achaean men, until king Priam’s home has crumbled down.”

To this, Achaeans shouted their assent, and all around the ships their echo rang, applauding what Odysseus had said. Then Nestor, age-old horsemen, rose to speak: “For shame! Have children sat to council us? You are like infants, terrified of war. What weight is there to oaths and covenants? Shall promises be given to the flame, and cups spilled out, untoasted on the ground? We fight in words alone, no deeds arise to remedy the source of all our woes. So, Agamemnon, with unbroken will, bring out these men for battle and let die those one or two who might protest and wish, to venture homeward, knowing it is wrong, unsure if Zeus who bears the Aegis shield
deceives us or is honest in his sign.
For I say he, the Father of the gods had nodded on that day we sailed for Troy,
made clear, with lightning piercing through the sky,
that Ilium would fall to Argive hands.
Then let none think to sail off till each man has laid beside a shapely Trojan wife
to compensate for Helen’s kidnapping.
And if some man, hell-bent on going home should touch the ships, preparing them to sail,
that day will be his death, I promise you.
Come then, my lord, and take these words to heart,
this final measure I lay out for you:
divide the men by ranks of lineage,
with brother next to brother, rank by rank,
as each group fights then you will come to know,
which leader governs well, and which does not:
which cohort preserves and which retreats.
Thus, you will see if fate prevents your siege,
or if it is the cowardice of men.”

Replying to him, Agamemnon spoke:
“Old man, you guide me well, I am convinced.
O Zeus, Athena, and you other gods!
Would that I had ten councilors as he,
then surely Troy would fall this very day,
in ruins, outmaneuvered by our plans!
But, Zeus, it pleases you to give me pain,
to send on Strife, and conjure up these feuds.
Achilles and I quarrel for a girl
with violent words, which I was first to speak.
Now, if we can be reconciled yet
no force will slow the sorrows bound for Troy.
So eat now, that we may prepare for war!
Bring out the shields, and sharpen up our spears,
go feed the horses by the stable grounds,
inspect the chariots for battle use,
and let all serve the god of war today.
No soldier shall find rest until at last
the night creeps on and Sleep entangles us.
Till then, you men will furnish every greave and spear and rope and girdle with your sweat. The horses will pull hard against the carts, and any man I find malingering apart from us, off idle by the ships: his corpse will be the dinner of the hounds.” With this, the men gave thunderous applause as though the sea were beating on the cliffs and winds were blowing in from every side to drive the water on incessantly. So then they stood and scattered to the moors, and smoke rose from the barracks as they ate, then each man called his deity of choice, to ask that war, at last, might dissipate.

Now Agamemnon sacrificed a bull to Zeus, both fat and strong, five years of age, and called upon the elders and the kings: first Nestor, Idomeneus was next, the two Aiantes and Diomedes, Odysseus, the mastermind, was sixth, then Menelaus came, of his accord: for he was privy to his brother’s plans. So then, they stood around, with barley each, and Agamemnon spoke a solemn prayer:

“Almighty Zeus, who dwells on thunderclouds, let not the sun fall, setting in the east, till I have felled the citadel of Troy, not till the raging fires grasp their walls, and Hector lies with daggers in his heart—till those that followed him do so to death, and lie across the battle, motionless.” These were his words, but Zeus would not obey, he took their sacrifice, but left their woes. Still, when the barley oats were sprinkled round, they sliced the throats of cattle, skinned them bare, cut off their thighs and wrapped them in their fat: a double fold of meat cut from the flesh. Then, placing these on spits, they roasted them, and skewered innards on Hephaestus’ flame,
so when they tasted innards, organs, all,
they spitted every morsel with a stick.
And as they took them, golden from the flame,
they feasted, weary with their toilings:
all ate, till spirit lacked no want or need.
But when they sated love of food and drink,
thus Nestor, age-old horseman, rose to speak:
“Atrides, Agamemnon, famous king,
no longer let us feast here—now, to work!
Let us begin the deeds the gods command.
Come now, you heralds of the Danaans,
go gather all the men beside the ships,
and we will marshal through their clustered ranks
to call upon their rage and battlelust.”
He spoke, and Agamemnon heeded him:
as soon as he had sent the heralds out,
to bid the brave Achaeans into war,
promptly, they were assembled by the ships.
So, all the kings ran giving out commands
and owl-eyed Athena held aloft
the Aegis, treasure-shield of father Zeus
from which one hundred tassels float about,
all golden, worth one hundred oxen each.
With this in hand, she darted through the host,
and roused the men in spirit and in strength,
persuading them to fight on endlessly.
Then, for them, war seemed finer and more sweet
than even to be home again, at peace.

As flames incinerate a forest grove,
on mountaintops, and fire shines through smoke,
the bronze of armor glittered as they marched
and sent the sunbeams back up heavenward.
Then, like the many flocks of flying birds
as geese, or cranes, or long-necked, arching swans,
that roost in Asian meadows by the stream,
and fly, exalting in their wings, till when
they plummet down and settle with a clang:
so, too, the companies of soldiers marched
into Scamander’s plane, and underfoot
the earth resounded heavy with their steps.
So there they stood, within the flower fields,
as myriad as blossoms in the spring,
just as the swarms of buzzing insects roam
through sheepfolds or through stables in the heat,
when cattle low, and pails run full with milk:
so great a number of Achaean men
stood eager at the gates of Ilium.
And just as shepherds guide the teeming flocks
and order them across the pasturelands,
the kings of the Achaeans marshaled out
the ranks, as Agamemnon stood ahead.
His eyes and head were just as those of Zeus,
his shoulders, Ares, with Poseidon’s chest,
and as an ox struts out before the herd,
distinguished from the cattle that he leads,
so Zeus had furnished Agamemnon then,
foremost of heroes, standing like a god.

But tell me, Muses, daughter born to Zeus,
you goddesses, immortal, knowing things
we men could never even think to dream:
who were the leaders of the Danaans?
I could not list nor name them out in full
unless you deities of song allow:
remind me of them, by your charity.
Ah, though, I have no barley oats to throw,
no cup of honey wine, no sacrifice,
and even then, if you should tell me all,
I could not sing aloud their catalogue,
not if I had ten tongues and twenty lips,
an unabating voice and brazen heart.
Still I will speak them, slowly and in time,
for each man must be named upon his death,
and those I do not call will have their fame
when later bards sing after I am gone.
No soldier will be lost from memory,
for all must die, this is our lot as men:
but glory is eternal, like the gods.
For now, I will enumerate the best, 
those men and horses none could hope to match:

for horses, surely, those of Pheres’ son,  
Eumelos, who raised mares as swift as air, 
 alike in coat, in age, and eminence— 
Apollo bred them, by Pereia’s shores  
and both were well accustomed fighting war. 
Of men, the best was Greater Ajax, though, 
Achilles far surpassed him, if he fought, 
his horses, too, the steeds of Peleus,  
were matchless, but he raged, beside the ships 
for Agamemnon’s insolent demands.
And near him, all his men that gathered round 
amused themselves with discuses and spears 
and bows and riding, while, not too far off 
the horses chomped on clover and on grass 
by chariots with tarps flung over them.
Thus all the men awaited the return 
of their once warlike leader, now at peace. 
But all the rest advanced, as though the earth 
were clad in fire, and the valley shook 
as when Zeus strikes the ground with thunderbolts 
in Arima, where Typhon lies subdued. 
Thus, from beneath their feet the tremors rose 
from men who sped their way across the plain. 
And to the Trojans, nimble Iris came, 
to bear the grievous message sent by Zeus 
so all assembled out by Priam’s doors, 
both Trojans young and old, to strategize. 
Then nimble Iris, standing close, began, 
a-likened in her voice to Priam’s son, 
Polites, who looked off the Trojan wall 
on Aisyetes’ tomb—that ancient thing— 
in case the swift Achaean ships should come. 
Thus, in his voice, swift Iris spoke aloud: 
“Old sir, unnumbered words are dear to you 
in times of peace—but now we are at war. 
Through many battles I have ventured forth, 
but never has I seen so many man, 
like leaves in forests or as desert sands,
they come to fight before our citadel.
So, Hector, you I council most of all,
for many allies spread throughout the host,
with tongues almost as plentiful as men:

let each man lead his own battalions,
one leader, ordering the citizens.”

She spoke, and Hector did not disobey
but, swiftly, he dissolved the gathering
and opened up the gates to lead them out
on foot and horseback, steeled, but clamorous.

Now, near the walls a steep hill rises up
apart, with passages on either side
called Thorncrest in the tongues of mortal man,
but known as Myrina among the gods,
and here the Trojans and their allied men,
were marshaled, shining Hector leading them.
Behind him all the bravest and the best,
stood armed and eager, readying their spears.

Aeneas led the stout Dardanians,
Anchises’ son, whom Aphrodite bore
on Ida’s peak, a goddess with a man.
And following him went Antenor’s sons,
Archilochus, Akamas, soldiers both.
Book III: For Helen’s Hand

But when the ranks were ordered on their sides, the Trojans raised a din like giant birds, as cranes who beat their wings, gone heavenward, to flee the winters and torrential rains, that fly off, squawking, on the Ocean’s stream and bring about the death of Pygmaians, at daybreak, bringing strife upon their lands. Meanwhile the Argives went, in silence, calm, awaiting battle eagerly at heart.

As when the winds whirl fog on mountain peaks confounding shepherds, covering for thieves, when one sees not a stone’s throw through the mist, just so the dust rose thick from under feet, from those who hurried, passing by the plane. And as they came together, Paris leapt out from the Trojans, with a leopard skin across his shoulders, and a crooked bow, a sword, and bronze-tipped spears he brandished high, to call Achaeans forth to challenge him, in single combat, locked in bitter strife. So Menelaus, catching sight of him, came out to face him, joyful, striding long, as when a lion, overjoyed to find the carcass of a stag or wild goat, devours it, the muscle, marrow, bone, and meat together, leaving only dust: so ravenous was he to see the man, from whom at last he hoped to take revenge, that jumping from his chariot, he charged, but godlike Paris, seeing him approach within the vanguard, shuddered in his soul and sunk within the throng, to flee from death.

As someone starts when coming on a snake
within a mountain valley, trembling,  
retreating, as a paleness takes his cheeks,  
thus slithering within the Trojan ranks  
he went to quiver, overcome with fear.  
So Hector came to scold his cowardice:  
“Fair faced deceiver, woman-frenzied fool  
I wish you had been killed or never born,  
a favor to us, just as much to you:  
to die before becoming a disgrace.  
I often think of how Achaeans laugh,  
believing you to be our champion,  
for you are handsome, although varlorless.  
So then, what courage drove you to the ships  
across the oceans, bringing faithful men,  
to lead a foreign queen off to your bed,  
when many mighty lords were sure to chase?  
How do you feel to be a plague to kin,  
a disappointment, and a laughingstock?  
Why do you cower? Menelaus comes—  
go greet the former husband of your wife.  
But fret not your appearance! I should think  
the blood and grime of war will suit you well.  
In truth, no man should scold your cowardice,  
if they were brave, you would be long since dead.”  
Then to him, godlike Paris made reply:  
“Hector, you scold me rightly, by my lot,  
and yet your words come like a sharpened axe  
straight through a tree, swung by an carpenter,  
who hews it cleanly with tremendous force:  
so sharp, so keen, your heart is in your breast.  
But do no grudge me Aphrodite’s gift,  
for who are we, as mortals, to refuse  
what gods may give us, thoughtless of our will?  
Still if you wish for me to fight in war,  
then bid the Trojans and Achaeans sit,  
set me with Menelaus in their midst,  
to fight for Helen and her property:  
whoever of us proves the mightier  
will take them, and no man will intercede.  
Let all then part upon an oath of peace,
some back to Troy, the rest to Argive lands
where horses trot, and lovely maidens dance.”

Now hearing this, at last brave Hector grinned,
and through the ranks of Trojans he restrained
the battle-lines, and sat them with his spear,
but still Achaeans shot him as he went,
with arrows, throwing stones, and aiming true
till Agamemnon stopped them, shouting long:
“Achaeans, hold your fire and be still
for Hector seems intent to speak with us.”
And with his words, they waited silently,
evant, now, as Hector rose to speak:
“Hear from me, Trojan and Achaean men,
the words of Paris, source of all our woes:
he bids the Trojans and the Danaans
lay down their weapons on the fertile earth,
that he and Menelaus, in our midst,
may fight alone to vie for Helen’s hand,
whichever one will prove the mightier
shall take her, and no man will intercede:
but all will part upon an oath of peace.”
He spoke, and all were still in silent hush,
till from among them Menelaus rose:
“Hear me now, since these pains were mine to bear,
and now, at last, I feel they may be done:
Argives and Trojans, you have suffered much
for my sake—for the strife that Paris brought.
Let he who dies be sent to Hades’ dark,
and all become resolved with his demise.
Bring lambs, one white, one black, for Helios
and Gaia, and a ram for father Zeus,
then send for Priam, that he seal our oath
himself, since yet his sons have broken faith.
I fear another might bring mischief here,
as younger men are fickle, frivolous,
but when a solemn elder watches on
a beneficial outcome is assured.”
He spoke, and Danaans and Trojans cheered,
in hopes that this would end the woes of war,
so jumping from their chariots, they came
and stripping armor, laid it on the ground,
strewn all about them, covering the earth.
Then Hector sent two heralds up to Troy,
to bring the lambs, and bid that Priam come,
and Agamemnon sent Talthybius
to find some ram within the hollow ships—
he went, obedient to the command.

Now Iris, nimble messenger of gods
found Helen, in the visage of her kin,
a sister to her, now by marriage rite,
Laodike, loveliest of Priam’s girls.
Deep in the halls she found her, at the loom,
embroidering a tapestry with scenes
of Trojan princes fighting Danaans,
who suffered for her, at the hands of war.
And standing near her, nimble Iris spoke:
“Come hither, nymph, that you may see the deeds
of Trojan princes sieged by Danaans,
who yet have born the tragedies of war
in bloody battles, gambling their lives.
See now, in silence, how they sit and pause
and leave their weapons leaning on their shields:
with Paris, Menelaus will contend
with spears, in combat, vying for your hand:
and you will be the wife of he who wins.”
At this, the goddess summoned her to pine
for home—her parents, and her former love—
and throwing on her brightest linen dress,
she set off from the bedroom, pouring tears,
while after her two slave girls walked in tow:
sweet Aithra followed her with Clymene.
Soon, then, they reached the Skaean gates to find
the councilors of Troy by Priam’s chair,
Thymoites standing near to Panthous
Lampos and Hiketaon, Clytius,
Oukalegon, and wise Antenor, too.
No longer did they fight in skirmishes,
but like cicadas, perching on the trees
in forests, chirping with a ringing voice, they oversaw the Trojan strategy. And as they saw fair Helen come to them, softly, they spoke to one another thus: “Truly, no fault could lie with either side, to suffer for a woman such as she, for in her face I see the very gods, but even so, let her be gone at once, or else I fear she will be our demise.”  
But, gently, Priam beckoned Helen in: “My darling child, come and sit by me, that you may see your former love and kin, I do not blame you, no, I blame the gods for all the sorrows draped on Ilium. But tell me, then, this noble man I see, which hero of the Danaans is this? Some others stand a head above him, yet my eyes have never viewed such majesty: in seeing him, I know him as a king.” 
And Helen, envy of the heavens, spoke: “Most noble father, always dear to me, would I had died the very day I left my kith, my kinsmen, and my darling boy, to lie within the bedroom of your son! But all my crying cannot alter time, so I will tell you, what you ask of me: you know him, Agamemnon is his name, a stalwart soldier and a mighty king, once brother to me—or was that a dream?” 
And then the old man spoke, in wonderment: “Then, Agamemnon, fortune favored child, truly, you lead a great array of sons. Once coming up to vine-clad Phrygia, I saw their teeming forces and their steeds: the host that Otreus and Mygdon led, when they stood by the stream Sangarios. Once I, an ally, stood within in their rank, that day we battled with the Amazons: and we were but a scouting force to this!”
Then, next he asked her of Odysseus:
“My child, once more who might be this man?
Far shorter than king Agamemnon was,
but broader in the shoulders and the chest.
His armor has been strewn across the earth,
and like some mountain goat he trots the ranks,
unwearied, stalwart, like a thick-fleeced ram,
who saunters through the brilliant flocks of sheep.”
And to him Helen, Zeus’ daughter, spoke:
“This man has come from rocky Ithaca,
Laertes’ wily son, Odysseus,
an expert both of council and deceit.”
And then Antenor interrupted her:
“Woman, you speak unerringly in this,
for I have met this man in embassy—
with Menelaus—come concerning you.
I welcomed them within my very halls
and learned the ways and natures of these men.
So then, within the Trojan gathering,
though Menelaus loomed above his friend,
Odysseus was lordly as he sat.
Then, when they weaved their speeches in the court,
king Menelaus spoke out haltingly:
his words were few, and yet his voice rang clear,
nor was he clumsy, though he still was young.
But after him stood sly Odysseus,
who, speaking, kept his eyes upon the ground,
and made no gestures with his scepter, no,
he held it firm, as though an imbecile.
You would have thought he was a sullen fool,
but when that voice came pouring from his chest,
and words fell down like snowflakes dance the air,
no man would dare compete with him in words,
and none would scoff him for his oddities.”

Now, looking over Ajax, Priam asked:
“My daughter—could this be a mortal man?
This thing colossal, striding through the ranks?”
And Helen spoke, robe trailing with the wind:
“This one is Ajax, son of Telamon, and by him Idomeneus stands tall among the Cretans that he leads in war. Often, before, we welcomed him to come within our home, when he would visit us. Yet, I would think that they should be among the many warriors I recognize, those solemn soldiers, marshalers of men: Castor and Polydeuces, boxers both, and brothers to me, each my flesh and blood. Perhaps they stayed in Lacedaemon or they followed hither, on the seaborne ships, but could not bear to don their battlegear and know that I, their sister, brought this war.”

But they were gone, already buried deep, at home, below the earth that nurtured them.

Now heralds spread the news all through the town, fetched lambs, and poured the cheerful rustic wine, in goatskins, with a krater brought to mix, and golden cups for every man to drink. And soon a messenger bid Priam come: “Rise, Priam, and reply now to the best of Trojans and Achaeans, come along into the field and consecrate our oath, that Paris may fight Menelaus now, contending for her hand and property. Thus, both will be assured in the attempt, and all may part with solemn oaths of peace: the Trojans back to Troy, and off to sea Achaeans may wind back for Argive lands.” With this, the old man shuddered, but was swift to have his servants yoke his chariot. He mounted, bringing back the pliant reigns, and Antenor stepped up to navigate. Down to the Skæan gates they drove the steeds, and through them, to the soldiers on the field, next, jumping down upon the fertile earth, they marched between the armies on the sides.
Then up rose Agamemnon, lord of men, and up Odysseus, as heralds came to bring the sacrifices, mix the wine, and pour out water on the hands of kings. And Agamemnon drew a butcher’s knife, which he kept always sheathed above his sword, and cut the hair from lambs as heralds came to give them to the best of either side. Then Agamemnon prayed, his hands aloft: “Zeus, Father! Watching us from Ida’s peak, and Helios, who sees and hears all things, you rivers and the earth, and those below who punish men that break their solemn word: bear witness, and protect this bond of faith! If Paris should cut Menelaus down, let him hold onto Helen and be glad, for we will leave then, sailing on our ships. But if fair Menelaus should prevail let Helen be returned without delay, and may the Trojans pay a fitting price to ease the losses we have suffered here. If Priam and his sons should still refuse, to be compliant still, with Paris dead, then I myself will carve a path of blood to take her, and thus vengeance shall be ours!” With this, he cut the lambs with ruthless bronze, and left them startled, writhing on the ground, till breath escaped them and their bodies fell. Then pouring out the wine in every cup, they prayed to the immortal gods above, So, then, some Trojan or Achaean spoke: “Zeus! And you other great undying gods, let he who breaks this solemn oath fall dead, just as we pour this wine, let blood flow free from them, from all their children and their wives!” So prayed the men, but Zeus refused their pleas, and Dardanos-born Priam spoke to them: “Hear me, you Trojan and Achaean men, now I will leave you and head back to Troy, my heart is not so strong that I might watch
brave Menelaus fighting with my son.
Zeus knows, perhaps, already who shall win,
and who will soon sleep deep beneath the earth.”
Then, gathering the lambs he stepped aloft
into his chariot, and took the reigns,
and Antenor stepped up to navigate:
and thus they headed back for holy Troy.

Now Hector and Odysseus had come
to measure out the distance for the duel,
and then they gathered lots within a bag
and shook it, to decide the first to strike.
So round about the men reached up in prayer,
and some Achaean or some Trojan spoke:
“Zeus, Father! Watching us from Ida’s peak,
let he who dares defy our solemn oaths,
be killed, and sink within the halls of Death,
that we may part upon a lasting peace.”
So thus they prayed, as Hector shook the lots,
and then announced that Paris would strike first.
Then down the companies of soldiers sat,
beside their horses and discarded arms,
and Paris, fair-haired Helen’s current lord,
began to don his shining panoply:
first brilliant greaves, clamped fast around his shins,
with fastening to join them in-between,
and then about his chest a breastplate went,
once for his brother, but it fit him well.
A silver-studded sword of bronze was next
across his shoulders, then he grabbed a shield,
and last he placed a helmet on his head,
wrought fierce with horse-hair, trailing in the wind—
so, picking up his spear, he stood complete,
as Menelaus finished, arming thus.

Now through the throng of soldiers both advanced,
between the Trojan and Achaean men,
and each stared fiercely, bringing wonderment
to all who looked on them, expectantly.
Then standing at the measured distances,
they shook their weapons, craving violence. First Paris threw his shadow-casting spear, which struck the shield, dead center, ringing out, but holding, so it bent the spear tip back. But Menelaus, readying to throw, spoke out a prayer to Zeus, the general:

“Lord Zeus! Grant me revenge for what he did, and by my hand, at last, bring Paris low, so someone shudders, born in later years, to pilfer from the host who welcomes him.”

And swaying back and forth he cast the spear which struck the shield, dead center, running through and driving past it, burrowing to find the breastplate, passing which it came to flesh, between the ribs—the tunic could not hold—but bending back, Paris escaped his death.

So Menelaus drew his mighty sword and raising it, he struck the helmet’s horn, now three times, four times, but his weapon broke; it shattered, and his cry went heavenward:

“Zeus! Father, most destructive of the gods, I thought you would approve of my revenge, but now my sword is broken, and my spear though striking true, is fruitless in its aim.”

So, darting, Menelaus grappled him, and dragged him by the helmet, though he writhed. Then, with the chinstrap taught, he strangled him, and watched the spark of life fade from his eyes. He would have killed him and claimed victory but Aphrodite watched them from above, and with a word, the strap of leather broke, and off the helmet came, still in his hand. Then, as he saw how Paris slipped away, he hurled it off; and cursed it as it soared, and lunged again, now taking up a spear, but Aphrodite carried him away, on winds—with mist around him as he went—and set him down beside his perfumed bed. So off she went to call on Helen then, within the tower, where the women thronged.
And conjuring a robe to offer her, 385
she took the form of some old, withered maid,
a spinster, who had labored long ago, 390
in Lacedaemon, once beloved to her.
Thus, sounding like her, Aphrodite spoke:
“Come hither, Paris calls you to the home, 395
the rounded bed where you two sleep the night.
See how he glows! None viewing him would think,
he came from war, but rather that he went
or just had come from dancing merrily!”
So thus she spoke and drove her heart to go,
but Helen, when she saw her dainty neck
knew her to be a goddess by her grace.
Astounded, then, she spoke out, naming her:
“Why do you drive me to him, lady Love? 400
And tell me, how much further shall I go?
To Phrygia? Maionia, perhaps?
Might there be someone there you wish I wed?
Or now has Menelaus struck him down, and comes to fetch me, hateful as I am?
No, otherwise, what mischief do you wish?
If you should love another, go yourself
turn from the path of goddesses and gods,
and love him, keep him, mourn him when he dies,
go, serve him as his wife or lowly slave.
I will not wander further, shamefully, 410
attending to another master’s bed,
what more indignity could I endure?”

Grown angry with her, Aphrodite spoke:
“Ungrateful wench! Think not to anger me, 415
or hate will overcome my former love,
and I will leave you stranded and despised
by Trojans and Achaeans equally.”
And hearing this, dismay took Helen’s heart,
so putting on the linen robe she went
in silence, following the deity.
And when she wandered back into her home, 420
the slaves turned sharp to focus on their work,
but she walked past them, to her bedroom’s door.
Inside the goddess drew an armchair up
and placed it off by Paris, at his feet,
and there the girl sat down, but looked away,
to summon forth a stream of sharp rebukes:
“Returned? I hoped that you would perish there,
brought low before my former husband’s hand.
Oh, how you boasted you would better him
with spear or fist—that you were mightier!
To hold you to your word and bid you fight
would be a farce, far better that you stay
lest Menelaus bring about your death,
in single combat or in open war:
you would be impudent to challenge him.”
And hearing this, fair Paris made reply:
“My love, be gentle! Menelaus wins
but by Athena’s blessing, sometime soon
I will defeat him—for a goddess looms
with us, as well as he, now come to bed.
Since never yet has longing taken me
as now, not when I stole you from your home,
and sailed away across the ocean blue,
and stopped on Craniae to ravish you:
not even then did longing hold me so.”
So off he led fair Helen to the bed,
and lying down, they mixed themselves in love.

But through the ranks, king Menelaus swept
in search of Paris, moving furious,
still none among the Trojan men revealed
where Paris had gone off, though certainly,
they would have told him, if they only knew:
for he was hated to them just as death.

Then, shouting long, king Agamemnon spoke:
“Hear me, you Trojans and your allied men,
our victory is certain in this duel,
relinquish Argive Helen and provide
some added tribute for our many woes:
to ease the losses we have suffered here.”
And with this, all Achaeans roared assent.
Now all the gods sat counseling with Zeus in golden chambers, through which Hebe went to pour out nectar in their golden cups, and each gave toasts while watching over Troy. But Zeus had plans to break their merriment, provoking Hera, with malicious words: “Two goddesses hold Menelaus dear, Athena, Hera, shields of Argos both—look now, how they are pleased with these affairs! Still, Aphrodite wards off Troy’s demise, refusing to let Paris suffer woes, just now she sweeps him off from certain doom. So come, with his defeat, we must decide how we shall shape the war as we proceed: whether we rouse again their enmity, or settle them, and forge an armistice. If there is peace, both lasting and sincere, then Troy would stand, and Helen soon would be the wife of Menelaus once again.” With this, Athena groaned at Hera, soft, and plotted great calamities for Troy—the former held her silence, speaking not, though savage anger held her for these words, but Hera rose, and let her fury sound: “Your majesty, what do you mean by this? How could you leave in vain and profitless my sweat, my toil, my labor, and my plans, conspiring against the Trojan men? So be it! But no god would think it fair.” And darkling as the clouds, Zeus answered her: “My lady, how has Priam injured you? What brings your fury to him and his sons; what retribution could bring recompense? If you could waltz within the gates of Troy devouring them raw, with none left spared,
at last, with this, would you be satisfied?
So be it, then—but spare me quarreling,
let strife not part us for a mortal’s woes.
Now mark me, and attend what I will say:
when I am eager to destroy some town
that houses men beloved of your heart,
do not object, but suffer it to be,
since I have done so, through it tortures me.
For never has a city teemed with men
beneath the shining panoply of stars
more precious to my heart than Ilium,
which Priam and his sons hold, reverently.
Nor ever have they left my altar bare
of sacrifice: the honor of the gods.”
And to him, cow-eyed Hera made reply:
“Three cities I hold dearer than the rest,
Mycenae, Sparta, Argos: ruin them,
if hate wells in your heart to drive you so.
I will not stop you, nor will I object,
what purpose is there—how could I protest?
You will destroy them, you are mightier.
But let my work be fruitful, honor me!
I am as much a deity as you,
the eldest goddess crooked Cronus reared
and most majestic, for I married you
who are the mightiest of all the gods.
Let us give way to one another then,
and all the other gods will follow suit.
Go swiftly, send Athena off to find
the battle-din beside the citadels
and coax the Trojans, that they break their oath
against the Danaans, so war erupts.”
These were her words, and father Zeus was pleased,
and sent Athena flying with his speech:
“Go swiftly then, into the battle-ranks,
and coax the Trojans, that they break their oath
against the Danaans, so war erupts.”
At this Athena leapt, already bent
to fly off from Olympus, darting down.
As when the father Zeus casts down a star,
a sign to soldiers, or to fishermen,
a godspark, shimmering in black of night:
thus now Athena flashed across the sky
and wonder held the men who saw her fall,
the Trojan and Achaean soldiers both.

Thus, softly, they would murmur to themselves:
“As sure as sun will rise, war shall return
or friendship soon will reconcile us,
from Zeus, the god of peace and lord of war.”

So they would whisper on, on either side,
and from their number, out Athena came,
appearing then just as Laodokos did
in search of Pandarus, not far from her.

And soon she found him, faultless, standing off
with many lines of shieldmen gathered round,
who followed from the Aispan riverbeds.

So, drawing near, she spoke, her words took flight:
“Hear me, and be persuaded by my plot:
if Menelaus perished by your bow,
you would gain grace and glory in our ranks,
and Paris, most of all, would honor you
with shining gifts, beyond all other men,
if he should see his rival strike the ground
an arrow in him, lifeless on the pyre.

So come then! Shoot this haughty king at last,
and pray Apollo guides it on its course,
 promise a handsome sacrifice of lambs
when you return to Zeleia again.”

Thus, when Athena urged his foolishness,
he got his hornbow out, carved from a ram,
a savage beast that lurked on mountain peaks,
which he once conquered, striking at its chest.

Then from its horns, some sixteen palms in length,
a Bowman joined and polished out a bow,
and strung it tightly with a golden twine.

Thus, notching this now, Pandarus lay hid
behind a wall of soldiers, holding shields,
lest some Achaean saw and darted forth,
before the bolt soared out and found its mark.

And reaching for his quiver, drawing out
an arrow, feathered messenger of death, 
he strung it straight and drew it deftly back 
while promising Apollo he would give 
a handsome herd of lambs in sacrifice 
when he returned to Zeleia again.”

So, bending till the sinews had groaned taught, 
twine touching iron, string against the chest, 
he stretched the curving greatbow fully back. 
Then when the bowstring sang, the arrow screeched, 
and darted furious across the throng.

But, Menelaus, they remembered you, 
the gods, who sent Athena darting down 
to ward the arrow off and change its course. 
Just as a mother brushes off a fly, 
that lands upon her child, fast asleep, 
so then, she drove the arrow from its path 
to strike where belt and breastplate overlapped 
and there it pierced, the sharpened arrow tip, 
straight through the ornate, golden battle-belt 
through breastplate and through well-fit girdle, too, 
the very armor piece that served him best, 
and bent back many javelins before. 
Still though, through this, through that, through everything, 
it pierced till it found flesh and summoned blood.

As when some woman dyes the ivory red, 
to lay within a horse’s harnessing, 
and riders clamor at the king who takes 
the piece and keeps it in his treasuries: 
in such a shade of scarlet, just as fair 
king Menelaus, thus the blood stained red 
your thighs, your legs, and ankles down below.

And seeing this his brother shook with fear 
beholding blood still streaming from the wound, 
and grief came over Menelaus, too, 
until he saw the wound was not so deep— 
then spirit gathered back within his breast. 
Still, Agamemnon spoke out, groaning deep,
and holding Menelaus by the hand:
“Dear brother, I have sealed your death in this, 155
to send you to the Trojans all alone,
now, surely, they have trampled on our oaths,
yet, nonetheless, it shall not be in vain:
the unmixed wine we lifted in our hands,
for if Zeus watches over our affairs,
then they will pay, these men who wounded you,
with their lives, with their children’s, with their wives’.
For I am certain, though my heart and soul:
a day will come when Ilium shall fall,
and Priam and his people are destroyed,
then Zeus, the highborn monarch of the sky,
will shake out retribution on them all
for having lied—his will shall come to pass!
But tell me, brother, how could I rejoice
in victory, if it means losing you?
I would go wretched back to Argive shores
with soldiers eager to be home at last,
and Helen would be left in Trojan hands,
while worms eat at your once so kingly flesh:
you will be dead, with nothing come of it.
So then, some Trojan, proud and arrogant
shall leap above your tomb and make his boast:
‘May Agamemnon thus exact revenge
on all his foes, as fruitlessly as now,
and flee again into the fatherland
without his brother or his brother’s bones.’
So he shall speak, and let me perish then.”

But Meleaus spoke encouragement:
“Fear not, nor summon fear upon the ranks,
this arrow has not struck a mortal place 185
my war-belt turned it, and the flap beneath
has guided it away from killing me.”
So to him Agamemnon made reply:
“May it be as you say, my brother dear,
but let the doctor cater to your wound
and give you salves to ward the pain away.”
And then he turned to call Talthybius:
“Talthybius, quick, bring Machaon here, the healer god Asclepius’ son
let him attend the wound my brother bears
in having fallen to some Trojan’s bow,
much to their glory, but our suffering.”
The herald heard, and did not disobey,
but went his winding way throughout the host,
to find Machaon, whom he saw at last
still standing off among the shieldmens’ rank
with those who came from Trikkan pasturelands.
And, coming close beside him, he began:
“Rise now, divine-born doctor, for the king
would have you tend his brother, who is shot
and falls before some Trojan archer’s bow,
much to their glory, but our suffering.”
Thus, then, he spoke, and stirred Machaon’s heart.

So off they went, through soldiers gathered thick
but when they reached a clearing in the rank,
where Menelaus towered like a god
within a ring of anxious onlookers,
Machaon drew the arrow from his flesh
and broke the barbs that fastened it in place.
Then, carefully, he took the war-belt off,
that masterpiece that bronze-smiths cast for him,
and when he saw the dreadful wound beneath
he drained the blood and rubbed on healing salves
that Cheiron gave his father long ago.
But while the doctor tended to these wounds,
the Trojan battle ranks came surging on,
so once again Achaeans armed for war.

That day, if you saw Agamemnon fight,
you would not catch him resting or reserved,
but driving fiercely where the war was thick.
He left his chariots and painting steeds
beside Eurymedon, his trusted ward
whom martial Ptolemaios fathered once,
commanding they be kept till he returned
grown weary leading soldiers into war.
Then off on foot he went to range the ranks
and to whatever eager men he found
he drove them on with strong encouragement:
“Argives, retain your valor. Soldier on!
The father Zeus will not give aid to liars,
no, they who broke their oaths will meet their doom
and vultures soon shall feast upon their flesh,
as we lay claim upon their darling wives
and children, once we storm the citadel!”
But any man he saw retreat from war,
he would upbraid with fierce and bitter words:
“You cowards, arrow-fighters, have you shame?
Why are you dumbstruck, scared like frightened deer
that stop and stare across the meadowlands
too cowardly to run from predators?
Is there no shred of courage in your heart?
Or, are you waiting till the Trojans come
upon our ships beside this stretch of sea
to see what Zeus has in his plans for you?”
Thus, ranging through the ranks, he spurred them on.

Now, when he came across the Cretan men,
he saw them armed round Idomeneus—
that man, he led them like a mountain boar
while stout Meriones drove from the back.
So Agamemnon smiled seeing him,
and spoke with honey words of earnest praise:
“Beyond all Danaans I honor you,
whether it be in battle or in feast,
when all the greatest of the Argive men
blend gleaming wine within the royal bowls.
Though others may exhaust their portioned lot,
your cup, as mine, shall always overflow
that you may drink until your heart’s content.
Now, be the man you boasted once to be.”
And to him then the Cretan lord replied:
“As once I promised, son of Atreus,
I shall be—staunch and sturdy on the field.
Rouse rather all the other Argive men
so we may face the Trojans with all haste,
for they have trampled on our sacred oaths,  
and death must swallow them for their mistake.”

With this, the king went smiling on his way  
and came across the two Aiantes next,  
a cloud of soldiers wafting in their wake.  
As when a goatherd marks the storm clouds pass  
across the sea, roused up by Zephyrus,  
when, catching sight of them, as black as pitch,  
now nearing as the gales come inching on,  
he drives his frightened flocks to sheltered caves:  
so now the two Aiantes drove the ranks  
of sturdy soldiers and bewildered youth  
to battle, fumbling with shield and spear.  
And Agamemnon, watching them, was glad  
and let his words of praise go flying out:  
“Aiantes, leaders of our bronze-clad men,  
I give you no commands, none could presume  
to drive you, when you drive yourselves to war.  
Athena, Zeus, Apollo, all you gods,  
if only every man were half as bold!  
Then, surely Priam’s citadel would fall  
and we would loot the spoils of his keep.”  
With this, he left them to their ways and went  
in search of Nestor, leader of the men  
from Pylos, whom he ordered now for war.  
Tall Pelagon was there with him, beside  
was Haïmon with strong Bias near at hand,  
and Nestor, at their front, ranged through the ranks  
to station soldiers in their multitudes  
for battle, placing all the meeker men  
within the center, that they could not flee  
but would be forced to fight against their will.  
And to the horsemen first he gave commands  
to hold, and not be caught within the crowd:  
“Let none for pride of horsemanship go forth  
and face the Trojan forces by himself,  
nor turn and make retreat, so we are weak,  
but, all together, face the chariots  
and stab when they are squarely in your range.
Since long ago we have sacked cities thus, with courage and a single, strong resolve.”
So as the old man spoke encouragement
king Agamemnon smiled at his speech, and let his words go flying in reply:
“Wise elder, just as spirit fills your breast,
I wish that strength still flowed within your veins,
but age has grasped you—would that someone else
might bear your age, so you were young again!”
But Nestor, age-old horseman, only laughed:
“So too I wish to be as once I was
when Ereuthalion fell by my hands,
but everything must come within its time,
and I am old, as sure as I was young!
Now, even so I may command the ranks, and ride in battle—still, I have my place.
The young must bear the spears and trust their strength in combat, now is their time to be young.”
So Agamemnon grinned and went along.

Next, he found Menestheus standing still amidst Athenians who longed for War.
And by them sly Odysseus was seen beside the hearty Kephellenians,
but none of them could hear the din of war though ranks of Argives clashed with Trojan men just then set into motion, so they stood and waited for some sign, some other rank, to stir to action and announce the fight.
But seeing them, the son of Atreus let violent, scolding words fly from his mouth:
“Why, Menestheus and Odysseus—you trickster, always scheming up some plot—why do you stand and wait till others move?
You two belong among the foremost men enduring battle where it blazes bright, for you are first to hear the calls to feast whenever we hold banquets in the camp.
You fill yourselves with tender cuts of meat and drink your heart’s content of honey wine.
Why, then, do you stand back to watch from far?
Surely, you have not lost your appetite!”
And grimly, sly Odysseus replied:
“What words escape the boundary of your mouth?
You would accuse me of such cowardice
while men work under Ares, god of war?
Watch me, if it should please you, watch and see
Telemachus’’ father fight the best
of Troy—your talk is empty as the wind.”
And, grinning now, great Agamemnon spoke recanting all he said to anger him:
“Laertes’ wily son, O Zeus born king,
Odysseus, I could not lecture you,
I know the cunning spirit in your breast
has plans in store, and we are of like mind.
Go now, and if I have done wrong by you,
then gods forgive me, I shall make amends.”
With this, he left him, and went off again.

Next, then, he found Diomedes around
the chariots and horses, by the son
of Capaneus, mighty Sthenelus.
So, seeing him, again he spoke reproach
and let his scolding tongue lash out at him:
“By gods, Diomedes, strong horsebreaker,
why are you standing off away from war?
It never was your father’s way to lurk
behind the ranks, but blaze before us all.
So I am told, at least, I never saw
him fight, but his renown has reached my ear.
One time he was a guest at Mycenae
with Polyneikes, to assemble men
that he might march on Thebes and conquer it.
He begged us to give soldiers to his rank,
and our men wished to join him in the task,
but Zeus gave omens that they should not go.
So then, they went along and came at last
to Asopos, the river by the glen,
and they sent Tydeus to bear a note
to Cadmeians who feasted in the hall
of great Eteocles, the Theban king. And there, among so many enemies, great Tydeus showed not a shred of fear, but challenged each and overcame the lot in strength, according to Athena’s will. The Cadmeians, irate, then had conspired to ambush him as he would leave the house, with fifty men, and two to lead the group, Maion, the son of Haimon, godly, strong, and Polyphontes, son of Autophon. What tragedy they suffered at his hand! Great Tydeus destroyed them, killed them all, but Maion, whom the gods took pity on. This—this was Tydeus, who fathered you, a son more meant for council than for war.” So thus he spoke, and strong Diomedes gave no reply, but marveled at his words. But to him Sthenelus spoke out response:

“Do not speak falsehood, knowing well of truth. Our fathers both were great, but we have claim to be their better, for we stormed the gates of Thebes with fewer men, on thicker walls. Our course was sanctiﬁed by the gods, by Zeus, while they all perished for their foolishness. Do not compare us to our fathers, then.”

But, solemnly, Diomedes replied:

“My friend, keep quit, and pay heed to me: I cannot blame the shepherd of the host for driving us to battle as he does. His words will win him glory if they move our men to subjugate and conquer Troy, and if we die, then he shall bear our grief. Come, then, and let us turn our minds to war.”

With this, he vaulted from his chariot, and clattering, his armor echoed out so fierce that fear would grip the stoutest heart.

As when the clawing rumble of the waves beats on the shore, brought on by Zephyrus,
first cresting out at sea, and crashing down on beaches, bending back across the rocks that slice them, spewing salt on either side: so beating, beating on, the Argive throng went pouring into battle in their ranks. But listening to them you would not think an army marched before you, for they all kept silent, fearing their commander’s ire, and, hushed, they went, their armor glittering. But Trojans, as the multitudes of sheep within the pastures of a wealthy man stand waiting to be milked, and bleat to hear their kids—so now their men were clamorous. No common language bound them, so they squawked in dialects from near and distant lands.

Now Ares drove them on, Athena, too, and Terror, Fear, and Hate, with endless wrath, who first is small but grows and grows again until her head scapes heaven as she strides. Throughout the ranks she hurled down bitterness, and went about delighting in their pain. And when the sides were joined in bitter strife, when shield met shield, and spear came over spear, the brazen armor clattered as they clashed and raised a dreadful sound throughout the field. Their screams and bellows mixed and rose above from victors and the slain, as blood ran free. As rivers pour from thawing mountaintops and join their streams together as they rush into the valleys, churning, thunderous, so even far off shepherds hear the sound: thus, now, the armies clashed and armor rang.

Antilochus was first to fell his man, Echepolos, the valiant champion: the spear went boring through the horsehair helm, the tip held fast, and burrowed to the bone, then darkness took his eyes, and from his mount he fell as towers crumble to the ground.
Then Elpenor was quick to catch his feet,
Chalkodon’s son and the Abantes’ lord,
he dragged him from the onslaught, darting swift
to strip his armor off and claim the loot.
The fool! For soon Agenor would arrive
and drive a brazen spear into the ribs
he left unguarded, focused on his prize,
and he would crumble on the corpse below.
So then, as spirit left him, all around
the Trojans and Achaeeans battled on
and fought like wolves to claim the growing spoils.
Now, Greater Ajax killed Simoisios
the handsome son of great Anthemion,
whose mother bore him once upon the banks
of Ida, by the river of Simois,
surrounded by her parents and their flock.
For this, he got his name, but nevermore
would he return their kindness, for he fell
beneath the spear of Ajax, striking true
and catching in his breast as he went by
so that it lodged within his shoulder blade.
Thus, then, he tumbled down like poplar trees
which dot the lowlands, where the marshes form,
sleek trunked, with branches only at the top.
As such a tree, when chopped for timberwood,
to bend into a wheel for chariots,
that leaves a rotting trunk beside the bank:
thus lay Simoisios upon the ground.
Meanwhile a son of Priam, Anthiops,
thurled back his sharpened spear into the crowd,
but, missing Ajax, it struck Leukos down,
Odysseus’ man, who fell upon
the corpse he had been dragging back to camp.
At this, Odysseus grew furious,
and strode out, gleaming in his battle-gear,
then, coming close, he raised his javelin
and Trojans swayed to dodge its deadly path,
but poor Demokoön was not so swift
as to avoid it—no, the bastard son
of Priam who had come from Abydos
now fell—the spear tip nestled his head
and punctured through, as darkness came about
to swirl his eyes and cloak their fading light.
With this, the Trojans scuttled in retreat
with Hector, as Achaeans claimed the corpse
and soldiered onward, but Apollo spoke
from Pergamon to urge the Trojans on:
“Rise, Trojans, proud horsebreakers, do not bend
beneath the Argives, they are not of stone,
sharp bronze will rend their flesh if it should strike.
Nor does Achilles number in their rank,
but sits aloof from war to tend his rage.”
So spoke the dreadful deity on high,
while Zeus’ daughter, Tritogeneia,
drove straggling Argives back into the fray.
Then fate bound Diores as he ran past
when from above a jagged boulder fell
and crushed his foot—a Thracian cast the thing,
Peiros, the son of noble Imbrasos.
The rock torn tendon, smashed through brittle bone,
and left him helpless, crawling on the ground,
still reaching desperately for anyone
to aid him, as the thrower came above
his victim, thrust his spear into the ribs
and carved the innards from their resting place.
But Peiros, turning back, would also fall
to Thoas, the Aetolian, who pierced
his breast and lung below it with a spear,
then drawing back, brought down his mighty blade
and carved the spark of being from his chest.
Yet he would not have dared to loot the corpse,
for all about stood Thracians gripping spears,
so though he was a proud and stalwart man,
he left the body and retreated back.
Thus then, two lords lay sprawling in the dust
from Elis and from Thrace, and by and by
more fell beside to keep them company.
No man who fought that day was fortunate,
not even he unharmed by sharpened bronze,
who danced through raining spears and had his hand
directed by Athena’s holy charm.
For each who lived saw countless more that died,
Argive by Trojan, lying side by side.
Untouched, the war was left to wind its course,
and as the battle ran across the plain,
so spears ran through the hearts of dying men,
between the rivers Xanthus and Simois.
Then Ajax, great Achaean champion,
broke through the Trojan ranks, and left his mark
in striking down the strongest Thracian man,
Akamas, giant son of Eussoros.
Beneath his horsehair helm, straight through the eyes,
the spearhead caught and burrowed into bone:
Akamas fell, and darkness shrouded him.

Nearby Diomedes slew Axulos,
the son of Teuthras, once from Arisbe,
both rich and dear among his many friends
whom often he would welcome in his house.
But now he died alone, no friend drew close
to ward off death, his only company
was Kalesos, the faithful charioteer
who fell beside him, cold upon the earth.

Next Euralos slew Dresos and pursued
both Pedasos and Aispos, whom the nymph
Abarbare bore to Boukolion,
the eldest son of noble Laomedon,
conceived and born in midnight secrecy.
While shepherding, he mixed with her in love,
and she, grown pregnant, bore those shining twins
who now lay lifeless on the battleground.

As Euralos stripped off their panoplies,
fierce Polypoides slew Astyalos,
Odysseus impaled young Pidytes,
Aretaon fell prey to Teucer’s bow,
Antilochus speared Alberos with ease, and Agamemnon slaughtered Elaton, once from the riverside of Pedasos. Retreating, Phulakos was put to death as great Eurypylus killed Melanthos.

But Menelaus took his man alive, Adrestos, for his horses broke away and panicked, dashed into the underbrush so that his chariot was shattered whole, and they were free to flee the battlegrounds. Adrestos, though, was flung into the air and fell headfirst upon the dusty earth, beside the shadow Menelaus cast. So, then, he took his knees, to supplicate: “Take me alive, O son of Atreus! My father would be glad to ransom me, with bronze, or gold, or iron, wrought with care, and still whatever else you might desire, if he should learn I live within your ships.” He spoke these earnest words, convincing him, and presently attendants would have come to lead him down beside the hollow ships had Agamemnon not confronted them: “For shame! Why should you care for men as these? Did they show care in kidnapping your wife? No, let not one escape destruction here not even children in their mother’s arms. May all of Ilium reach their demise unseen, unloved, uncared for, and unmourned.” Prevailing justly on his brother’s will strong Agamemnon stabbed him in the ribs, stepped on his chest, and drew the spear back out. Then, when the tip was loose, Adrestos fell, and died, pathetic, writhing on the ground.

Now Nestor called the Argives, shouting far: “Dear Danaans, you servants unto war, let no concern for spoils draw your gaze, or cause you men to fall behind and loot,
no, let us kill! At leisure, later on, we will attend the corpses on the field!”
He roused their manly spirits with his words and Trojans thus, subdued and cowardly, would have retreated, had not Helenos the augur, son of Priam, come beside the Trojan princes, and addressed them both: “Aeneas, Hector, best among us all: the work of battle now is left to you, through spirit, or by fighting on this field, stay firm, and hold the men outside the walls, before they flee into their wife’s embrace, and galvanize our foes in their retreat. Then when the battle lines are drawn and set, we will remain, and fight the Danaans, through weakened—so Necessity ordains.

And you, brave Hector, head for Troy and bid our mothers bring the matrons of renown to owl-eyed Athena’s holy shrine, and with a key, unlock the sacred doors. Then let one bring her dearest dress from home the loveliest, and most luxuriant, and laying it upon Athena’s lap, pledge heifers soon to come in sacrifice, twelve yearlings, if she would take pity now on Troy, on Trojan children, Trojan wives! Ask that she ward off Tydeus’ son, the savage spearman, dread Diomedes, who now is strongest of our able foes, inspiring fear beyond what even once Achilles did—and he was born divine! Now he is cloaked in fury none can match.” He spoke, and Hector did not disobey, but jumping off his chariot, he went throughout the ranks, and brandishing his spear he drove the men to fight, and roused their cry.

They whirled around to face the Argive men, who turned, retreating, slaughtering no more,
convincing some god descended from the stars to guard the Trojan men as they resurged.
And Hector called those Trojans, shouting long:
“High-hearted Trojans, far-famed allies, too:
be men, dear comrades, valorous and brave,
until I reach the matrons back at Troy to tell our wives to bow their heads in prayer and promise deities a sacrifice.”
So speaking, Hector left, his helmet shone and armor shuddered, drumming with each step against the rim that ran about his shield.

Now Glaukus, son of Hippolochus, found Diomedes, the son of Tydeus, and drawing near, both eager to collide, Diomedes spoke first among the two:
“Strong soldier, who are you of mortal men? In glory-giving war your face is new to me, at least, but now you dare to stride beyond all others, shadowed by my spear. Woe to the children of my challengers! But if you are some god, descending down from heaven, I will not contend with you. For short he lived, Lycurgus, Dryas-son, the fool who quarreled with divinities. He drove the raving female followers of Dionysus down their holy hill, then with a butcher’s axe he slaughtered them. And Dionysus could but watch and flee into the salt, where Thetis welcomed him within her lap, to calm his trembling. For this, the gods, who live their life at ease, despised him, and by Zeus he was made blind. He lived a short time, hated by the gods. Thus, I would not contend with deities. But if you are a man of mortal make, come nearer and find death here by my hands.”

To him the son of Hippolochus said:
“Diomedes, you ask my lineage?”
Like leaves, the generations come around,
wind scatters them, but sturdy stands the trunk,
and foliage grows green the season next.
And thus with men, some grow as others die,
so if you ask the stalk from which I spring,
learn well what others know both near and far:
in Epher, horseland by the Argives’ edge,
there Sisyphus, Aeolus-son, was born
most shrewd, and bore next Glaukus, who in turn
brought up Bellerophon, endowed by gods
at birth with beauty and virility.
But Proitos schemed against him, and by force
expelled him from his people’s land, which Zeus
had given to him, that he might be king.
For Anteia, his queen, was mad in love
to lie beside the man, and by no course
would valorous Bellerophon be swayed.
So lying, then, she spoke to Proitos sweet:
“Love, would you die or kill Bellerophon?
For he covets me, though I stave him off.”
She spoke, and anger seized the king to hear.
He did not fight him, fearing such a plan,
but banished him to Lykia and gave
a letter marking him a criminal
to show his father, that he might be killed.
So in the blameless company of gods
he left for Lykia, and by their king
was honored and received most lavishly.

Nine days they slew nine oxen in respect,
but on the tenth, with rosy-fingered Dawn,
the king examined him and read the note
that had been carried to him from his son,
and seeing it, he sent Bellerophon
on tasks he thought would surely kill the man:
to kill the horrible Chimera first,
a lion-headed, snake-tailed, she-goat beast,
that bellowed scorching fire from its mouth,
and yet he slew it, guided by the gods.
Then next he fought the famous Solimoi,
the strongest men he ever dared to face, and after killed man-fighting Amazons. At last, the king wove out a trick for him, and gathered Lykians from far and wide to lie in ambush, waiting his return— but when he came, he killed them all with ease.

Now understanding that Bellerophon was blessed by gods, he gave his daughter's hand and with it, half the honors held as king. Each Lykian gave up some property: lush orchards mixed with ploughlands, all he pleased. And that same daughter bore him children soon, Isander, Hippolochus, and the third, Laodamia, whom Zeus himself lay with begetting Sarpedon, a man like gods. But when Bellerophon fell into hate among the gods, he wandered through the lands, wrenched out his heart, and shunned the path of men. Isander fell to Ares, god of war, while fighting with the famous Solimoi, and Artemis cut short his daughter’s life. But Hippolochus lived to father me, and sent me here to Troy, with this command: ‘Exceed all others on the battlefield, and bring no shame upon our noble line, the best in Epher and in Lykia.’ These are my fathers, this my noble blood.”

With this, Diomedes rejoiced to speak, and stuck his spear into the fertile ground, to speak to him with flowing, honeyed words: “My friend, you were my guest some decades past, for Oineus once kept Bellerophon within his halls for twenty days and nights, and shared with him the gifts of friendship, too: from Oineus, a war-belt, gleaming red, a golden goblet from Bellerophon, which still I keep, but left in coming here, a remnant of my father, Tydeus,
who died in Thebes when I was but a child.

Thus, by our fathers’ fathers you are free within my halls, as I will be in yours. So let us shun each other’s spears from now, for many Trojans spread across the field and I may kill whatever man I reach, and for you, too, are scores of Argive men. Now, as we part, let us exchange our gear, so all may know the friendship that we boast!” So speaking, darting down from horses each, they clasped their hands to mark their newfound trust, and Zeus struck Glaukus witless so that he would swap his armor with Diomedes, though he gave gold for bronze, oblivious.

Now then, as Hector passed the Skaean gates, the Trojan wives and daughters ran to him to ask about their sons, their brothers, friends, and husbands, and he answered as he could. He asked they pray, though sorrows were to come. Then on he marched, to Priam’s splendid home, with clean cut porticos, within which lay some fifty bedrooms, carved immaculate built near each other, where his children slept: his many sons, beside their wedded wives. And for his daughter, on the other side beside an open court twelve chambers stood, laid out adjacent, where his son-in-laws lay down in slumber with their modest wives. There, in this household, stood his mother with Laodike, the loveliest of all, and they embraced, as mother spoke to son: “Dear child, why have you returned from war? For certain, the Achaeans wear you down with all this fighting, and you seek repose and wish to pray to Zeus atop the walls. But linger, while I fetch some pleasant wine, that you may use to make your offerings, and which may give you strength, before you leave—
for weary men, wine brings vitality,
so drink, and may it take away your pains.”

Then Hector spoke, his helmet gleaming bright:
“Dear mother, spare me wine, however sweet,
lest I forget my valor and grow soft,
nor would I dare to toast the gods above
with unwashed hands, and pray to father Zeus
besmirched with grime and dripping crimson blood.
But rather go now to Athena’s shrine
burn offerings, and bring the matrons down,
and you, dear mother, bring your treasured dress,
the loveliest and most luxuriant,
then, laying it upon Athena’s lap,
pledge heifers soon to come in sacrifice,
twelve yearlings, if she would take pity now
on Troy, on Trojan children, Trojan wives!
Ask that she ward off Tydeus’ son,
the savage spearman, dread Diomedes.
Go mother! To the altar, I will find
my brother Paris, lead him into war—
if he will listen—oh, how I have dreamed
that mother Earth would yawn and swallow him!
But Zeus has spared him, much to our dismay.
If I only he would reach the shade of death,
these troubles of my heart would dissipate!”

With this, his mother called her handmaidens
to gather all the matrons of renown,
and she herself went down to pick a dress
from what she kept within her storage rooms:
the masterpieces of Sidonios,
which Paris brought her, sailing on the sea,
the journey that he captured Helen’s hand.
This very dress would be her offering,
embroidered beautifully, extravagant,
that twinkled as the stars in dark of night.
With this in hand, she left, and at her side
the matrons followed to Athena’s shrine.

Once there, Theano opened wide the gates,
Antinoros’ wife, the horsebreaker,
who was the priestess charged with these affairs. Then, with a wail the matrons raised their hands, in prayer, as fair Theano, took the robe, and laying it upon Athena’s lap, she begged the daughter of almighty Zeus:

“Athena, goddess, watcher on the walls, repel Diomedes, let him fall dead before our gates, his weapons shattering. If you will do this, heifers shall be yours twelve yearlings, if your pity will extend to Troy, to Trojan children, Trojan wives!”

But though Athena heard her, she refused, so thus in vain they prayed within her shrine.

Now Hector came to Paris at his home, which he had built beside the finest men of Troy, the master craftsmen of the land. His chambers lay beside the open court a sleeping room, a hall, and courtyard, too, near Priam’s room, with Hector’s close behind. And there strode Hector, holding in his hand a spear, eleven measures in its length, bronze-tipped, and rung with golden ornaments. He found him, polishing his panoply of armor, breastplate, mail, and crooked bow, and Helen sat beside the female slaves directing them in womanly affairs. So, seeing this, he spoke out, furious:

“How, brother, can you frolic in your room as men lay down their lives to guard the gates, while war surrounds us, all because of you! The city burns, and you yourself would ask a straggler as you to play his part. Stand up, while there is something left to save.”

And Paris spoke, appearing like the gods: “You scold me rightly, not beyond my lot, so I will tell you, what you ought to know: I sit here, not because I am despised, but so I may consign myself to grief. Yet now my wife has roused me with her words,
so I must rouse myself and make for war,
where victory will choose my foe or me.
Wait for me as I don my battle gear,
or go, and I will meet you at the gates.”
But Hector offered nothing in reply,
so Helen rose, to coax with honey speech:
“My brother, lowly dog that I may be,
who were as well swept off by evil winds
the day my mother bore me, far away
into the mountains or the barren sea
before I brought the world to suffering:
since I was left alive until this point,
I wish at least I wed a better man,
a husband with some shame or modesty.
But Paris wavers in his every deed,
for which I think there will be consequence.

Enough, though, come, sit down and rest a while,
as you have toiled much on our account,
we have brought ruin to the Trojan ranks
from Zeus, who sends destruction in its wake:
now one day bards will sing our tragedy.”
Then Hector spoke, his helmet gleaming bright:
“Ask not that I would sit, though meaning well,
already I am restless to return,
to aid the Trojans holding out for me.
If you would help me, rouse this man to move
and catch me while I still have yet to leave.
Till then, I will head back to find my home
to visit both my wife and infant son,
for what I know may be the final time
if gods ordain I fall to Danaans.”

So speaking, Hector left, his helmet gleamed,
and out he went to find his vibrant home
but, there, he could not find Andromache,
for she was gone, with handmaiden and child,
to grieve within the tower, pouring tears.
Bewildered at her absence, Hector stood,
and asked her handmaidens where she had gone:
“Come slaves, and tell me full and truthfully, where might Andromache have wandered off? Into her sisters’ or her brothers’ halls? Or to Athena’s shrine, with all the rest, to supplicate the goddess to our cause?”

To him, a nimble stewardess replied:

“Lord Hector, since you ask, she wanders not within her sisters’ or her brothers’ halls nor to Athena’s shrine with all the rest, to supplicate the goddess to our cause: no, she has climbed the tower over Troy, informed of how our fate is growing bleak, she wanders round the Skaean gates distraught, her infant child sleeping in her arms.”

Thus made aware, out Hector moved at once back as he came, through each and every hall then throwing wide the doors, he raced along the city, till he reached the Skaean gates. And there his wife came running to his arms, Andromache, born of Eëtion, who dwelled before her in the Plakan woods of Thebes, as king of mighty Kilikans, who gave her hand to Hector long ago. Behind her ran a handmaiden in tow, that held an infant closely at her breast, the son of Hector, whom he always called Scamandrius, though others knew him as Astyanax, the tiny Trojan king.

So, Hector smiled seeing him, at peace, just as Andromache arrived in tears, and they embraced, as husband spoke with wife:

“My soldier, worn from battle, pitiless for child and for all but widowed wife, since soon Achaeans, gathering their strength, will surely kill you, oh, and better then that I should sink into the ground, as yet I could not live if you are gone to death. I have no father, nor no mother now:
Achilles killed the former when he came
to sack the towns of mighty Kilikans,
and killed Eëtion outside of Thebes.
Though he was just—he left the body whole,
unlooted, burned with all his panoply.
And round the grave they dug to bury him,
the mountain nymphs grew elms for sheltering.
Once had I seven brothers in these halls,
but in one day Death came for everyone,
when that same man, Achilles, slew them all,
while they were tending to their cows and rams.
As for my mother, from the Plakan woods,
he led her off with other plunderings,
but soon released her, ransoming her off
before she fell by Artemis’ hands.

My Hector, you are husband to me now
and brother, father, mother all in one,
take pity on me, stay here in this tower,
make neither widowed wife nor orphaned child.
But by the holy fig tree place the host,
where they will doubtlessly lay siege to us:
three times they came to scale our sturdy walls,
the two Aiantes and Diomedes,
the Atreans, and Idomeneus.
Either some prophet gleaned this weakest point,
or instinct guides these men in their assault.”

Then Hector spoke, his helmet gleaming bright:
“You may be right, but I would be ashamed
before the Trojan men and women both
if I should shrink from battle out of fear.
Nor do I plan to, I was brought up strong,
and learned to lead the vanguard into war,
win glory for my fathers and my home.
I know this, in my spirit and my soul:
one day the citadels of Troy will fall,
and Priam and his people will be gone.
But my concern is not for Trojan men,
nor Hecuba, nor even Priam still,
not for my many brothers, honest men,
who lie within the dust by hostile hands.
What haunts me is to think some Argive man
will take you, tearful, bound for slavery,
to sit beside a loom in foreign lands,
and bring him water from exotic streams—
that you fall victim to Necessity,
and someday someone sees you and exclaims:
‘This was the wife of Hector, who was best
of all the champions of Ilium’
This they will say, and it will bring you pain,
there, desperate some man will rescue you.
But I will lie dead, deep beneath the earth,
before I see you taken from your home.”

Now Hector stretched his hand to hold his child,
but he drew back within the nurse’s breast,
grown fearful from his own dear father’s face,
alarmed to see the horsehair helmet move
as though a monster came to ravage him.
And Hector laughed out full, his mother joined,
then from his head he took the brilliant helm
and placed it by him, shining on the ground.
He kissed his son, he held him in his hands,
and unto Zeus he spoke a solemn prayer:
“Zeus, grant this boy, my child, will become
as noble and as strong as I have been,
that he will lead a good life, ruling well,
so they will say he far exceeds us all.
Let him come home from war with splendid spoils
beat down his foes, and make his mother proud.”
With this, he gave the child to his wife,
and even as she trembled, through her tears
a smile ran defiant on her face.
With pity, then, he held her, speaking soft:
“My lady, weep not for my sorry fate,
no man may strike me down before my time,
but Fate will take me—no man conquers Fate—
no father, brother, son, or husband yet.
Go back, and let the housework be your care
beside the loom and distaff guide the slaves
leave war to be the care of martial men,
all those of Ilium, but me the most.”
Still, as Andromache walked slowly back
she cast a frequent, longing look behind
and tears bloomed from her face until she came
back to their home, the dignified abode
of Hector, where she found her handmaidens,
and stirred them so they shared her misery.
The mourned for Hector, even as he lived,
convinced he would not come from war again
to greet them, fleeing from the Argive hands.

Now Paris tarried not within the homes,
but once he had his shining armor on,
he stirred to motion, driving through the town.
As horses caged in stables all their life
when they slip free of ropes and gallop off,
towards the flowing streams and meadowlands,
head high, mane-flowing with the wind’s embrace,
full certain that their hooves can carry them
to freedom, past the station of a horse:
thus Paris darted down from Pergamon
a-gleam with armor, shining in the sun.
Rejoicing, laughing as he sped his way
he reached his brother who was up ahead
about to turn again from Hearth and Home.
So Paris, when he reached him, shouted out:
“Dear brother! It would seem I have delayed
your leaving by my slowness—pardon me.”
But to him Hector spoke encouragement:
“Good soldier, no man would speak properly
critiquing you for courage and resolve.
Your leave from battle was not cowardice,
and my heart breaks to hear you slandered so
before the Trojans, though you cause them pain.
Now let us go and we will make amends,
if Zeus will grant it, later we shall set
a krater full of sweetly-flowing wine
to thank him when we drive these men from Troy.”
Book VII: Single Combat

Thus speaking, Hector surged beyond the gates his brother, Paris, trailing by his side: both eagerly awaited war in heart. As headwinds that some god may bring at last, to weary sailors, toiling at the oars, limbs limp and bodies broken by the sea, so they appeared to downcast Trojan men.

Each took a worthy foe, first Paris slew mace-wielding Menestheus, mighty son Phyllomedusa bore Areithoas. Then Hector speared Eonus, piercing him below the helm—his neck—and he was limp. Now Glaukus, born to Hippolochus, chief of Lykians struck down Iphinoas: the spear caught in his shoulder as he went to mount, he fell, he crumbled to the ground. And through it all Athena watched them both, in fearsome combat, slaying Argive troops. So then, she left Olympus, darting down to holy Troy. Apollo followed her from Pergamon, concerned for Trojan men: and thus, they met upon the field of war.

So then, Apollo, son of Zeus, began: “Tell me, dear sister, why do you descend down from Olympus, soaring in your heart? To turn the tides of battle, pitiless for Trojans you consign to their demise? You would do well to listen to my words: first let us stop the battle for today, for later they will fight and find their prize, in taking holy Troy, since it should please your heart that it be wasted in this war.”
And owl-eyed Athena made response,  
“Let it be so, Far-worker, as I came  
with such a mind among the phalanx ranks.  
But how, thereafter, shall we end the war?”  
To her replied Apollo, son of Zeus,  
“Let us incense horsebreaker Hector’s might,  
to call forth some Achaean from the host  
in single combat—let Achaeans send  
one man alone, among their brazen rank  
to fight with godly Hector to the death.”  
He spoke. Athena did not disapprove.

Now then, prince Helenos conveyed the troops  
in council, as was pleasing to the gods,  
and stood by Hector, where he made his speech:  
“Prince Hector, son of Priam, wise as Zeus,  
as we are brothers, heed me as I speak,  
make sit the Trojans and the Danaans,  
and call forth some Achaean from the host  
in single combat, fearing not your death,  
for Fate would not have you draw destiny—  
no, not today, I hear the voice of gods.”

Rejoicing, Hector heard his brother’s speech  
and in the middle of the Trojan throng,  
he formed the ranks, and sat his many men  
as Agamemnon bid his follow suit.  
Athena and Apollo perched to view,  
disguised as vultures, mighty birds of prey,  
atop the oak trees, eager for the fight.  
And rows of men sat down and huddled near  
spears, shields, and helmets, thronged and shimmering.  
As when the wind pours, rippling, on the sea,  
a sudden tempest, darkening the skies:  
so sat the Trojans and the Danaans,  
and Hector, in their middle, broke to speak:  
“Hear me, you Trojan and Achaean men  
that I may speak as spirit should command  
for Zeus on high has not upheld his oath,  
but wickedly ordains that we shall fight
till you should take the Trojan citadels
or we should subjugate your hollow ships.
But now your finest men are gathered here,
of which whomever spirit moves to stand,
I, godly Hector, will be glad to fight. 75
Let Zeus bear witness to the words I speak,
if he should run me through with sharpened bronze,
and strip my armor, let him claim his prize,
but give my body back unto my home,
that Trojans and their wives may bury me.
And if I slay him, as I pray to do,
and take his armor back to Ilium
to hang it by Apollo’s sacred shrine,
I will return his corpse, you have my word.
Thus, he may also have his dignity,
and be entombed beside the Hellespont
that someday someone born in later years
will say, beholding it by wine-dark seas:
‘This ancient mound commemorates the man,
who died—whom shining Hector fought and slew.’
This they will say, and glory shall be mine.”
He spoke, and all were still in silent hush,
afraid to fight, ashamed if they refused.

So looking round, king Menelaus spoke,
reproaching them, and groaning in his heart: 95
“You cowards, Trojan women, no such men!
We will not soon outlive such shamefulness
if none will face great Hector on the field.
Mere earth and water, soulless, feeble husks
unworthy, undeserving of your fame!
Now I myself will arm to fight this man,
and see what thread of Fate the gods portend.”
He spoke, and donned his shining panoply,
and Menelaus—here you would have died
by Hector’s hand, the stronger, better man,
had not king Agamemnon darted up
and called you by your name and grabbed your hand,
to speak with you and keep you from your plan:
“What foolishness! What cause, and for what need?
O Menelaus, hold your spirit back, and do not wish to fight a stronger foe, as this one, shining Hector, shield of Troy. Achilles trembles fighting with this man: sit down, you have no hope of victory. But as he sits, another now must rise, some champion who strides before to fight the fearless Hector, ravenous for war. We may not fell him now upon this field, but one of us at least must drive him back.” So speaking, he prevailed upon the man, and turned his brother from a sorry fate attendants stripped the armor from his back and Nestor rose, addressing Argive men: “For shame! What grief is come into our land, how age-old horseman Peleus would groan— that orator who leads the Myrmidons. Some time ago he sat me in his house, and spoke such praise of you Achaean sons: how can I tell him of this cowardice? Oh, he would throw his hands up to the sky cry out and sink into the Halls of Death. Athena, Zeus, Apollo, gods above! If only I were young, as when I fought in Celadon, by flowing Iardanos where Pylians engaged Akkadians. Their champion was Ereuthalion. He wore that sturdy armor, which before Areithoas had worn, the brilliant king renowned for wielding neither spears nor bows but rather at his side, a mace would swing: the final sight of all his enemies. Lycurgus killed this man, though not by force, since on a narrow road they met to fight a mace was useless, but a spear hit true, and so it was Areithoas was slain. Lycurgus stripped the armor, Ares’ gift, and wore it in the bloody toil of war, but when he had grown old within his halls, he passed it down to Ereuthalion,
who wore is many times when challenging
a champion, though all would shrink from him.
No, none but I would face him on the field,
none dared but I, though youngest of them all.
I fought him, and Athena heard my prayer:
I killed the strongest and the tallest man!
He fell before me, silent on the ground.
Would I were young as then, with youthful force,
for soon would Hector have a challenger!
How then, you men with claims of excellence,
do you sit down and flee from Hector’s might?”

Nine rose up then, just as he scolded them:
far first was Agamemnon, king of men,
then rose Diomedes, the war cry’s lord,
the two Aiantes, clad in bravery,
and Idomeneus, beside his friend
Meriones, just like a god of war,
Eumaion’s shining son, Eurypyllos,
and Thoas with divine Odysseus.
All yearned to take the challenge brought to them.
So Nestor, age-old horseman, rose to speak:
“Draw each a mark upon a lot, that we
may choose who shall bring joy upon the host,
and he himself rejoice, whoever fights
and comes back whole against so great a man.”
He spoke, and each drew marks upon a lot,
and threw them in Atrides’ dogsink cap.
each, praying, held their hands up to the gods.

Then, gazing into heaven, someone said:
“Zeus! Father, let it be Diomedes,
or Ajax, or some king of Mycenae!”
This was his prayer when Nestor shook the lots,
and from the dogsink sprung a single one,
which all wished bore the mark that Ajax made.
Now heralds showed it to the warriors,
and none who saw it knew it as their own,
but when at last they came through all the throng
to Greater Ajax, he who marked the lot,
they placed it in the hands he stretched to them, and he rejoiced to know it as his own.

He threw it at his feet and bellowed loud, “The honor, friends, is mine! And I am glad, for I expect to beat this godly man, so come, and while I don my battle-gear, beseech the son of Cronus, mighty Zeus, in silence, lest the Trojans hear your prayers.

No, publically! What cause have we for fear? He will not drive me back by force or trick. Our swords will speak! I think that you will find, the men of Salamis are not so weak.”

He spoke, and all the host said prayers as bid, and gazing into heaven, someone said:

“Most famous father Zeus, on Ida’s peak, grant victory to Ajax, hear our prayer! But if you should love Hector, at the least to each grant equal force and equal fame.”

He spoke, and Ajax donned his brazen helm, and when his armor was around his chest, he strode colossal, just as Ares strides when racing through the wars of mortal men, whom Zeus has cursed with bitter enmity.

So Greater Ajax strode, throughout the ranks with massive strides, and grinned his burly grin, all while he shook his shadow-casting spear. Achaeans catching sight of him were glad the Trojans, overcome with trembling, and Hector’s heart beat fast within his chest, but pride would not allow him to retreat, since he himself had called the challenge forth.

One man walked forward from Achaean ranks, one challenger, his tower shield in hand, that brilliant work the master tanner made, Tychos of Hyle, greatest of his kind. This very shield he held before his chest, with seven ox-hide layers and one bronze, and close by Hector, he began to boast:

“In single combat, Hector, you will learn
the mettle of the best Achaean men, behind Achilles, breaker of the ranks, who far from us lies off in burning rage for Agamemnon, shepherd of the host. Know then our strength and meet with your demise, Enough! Take up your arms, and let us fight.”

And to him Hector spoke a strong reply: “Great Ajax, Zeus-born soldier, king of men, do not provoke me as you would a child or as a woman, ignorant of war. I know of slaughter and of strategy, and how to ride a chariot or horse. I know the proper way to hold a shield, how best to navigate the din of war, and dance in time with Death, if I should choose. You may be strong, but do not think that I would tremble facing you on equal terms.”

So, balancing his spear, he hurled it off and pierced the tower shield through six thick layers of ox-hide, but the seventh skin held strong and separated two great works of bronze: the spearhead and the shield’s last metal plate. Then godlike Ajax threw his mighty spear and struck the shield of Priam's sturdy son. It punctured through it, piercing even to the armor and the tunic underneath, and so he would have died, had not he dodged escaping from the shadow-casting shaft. Then, drawing up a second spear they surged like lions, tearing flesh apart from bone, or savage boars, that start a violent charge. Great Hector's thrust struck squarely in the shield, but bending back, the spear-tip turned and broke. Then Ajax leapt, his spear hit deep and pierced through armor to find the flesh on Hector's neck and draw black blood beneath his shining helm. Unfazed, the godly son of Priam stood and heaved a jagged boulder from the ground to hurl against the sturdy tower shield:
but when it struck, the bronze sang out and held.
Then Ajax found a boulder twice as large,
and shifting forward all his massive weight,
he heaved it with such force that Hector thought
it might have been a pebble in the air.
It struck, his knees gave in, and down he fell
though from the ground Apollo raised him up.
So, with their swords they would have rended flesh,
had messengers of Zeus and men alike
not come from Troy and from Achaean camps:
Talthybius, and swift Idaios, too.
Then, in their center, holding scepter high,
the latter spoke to them with prudent words:
“No longer quarrel, soldiers, sheath your swords!
You both are dear to Zeus, the Thunder god,
and have already proved your bravery!
Be done! Night gathers, yield unto the night.”
And to him Greater Ajax made reply:
“Idaios, go have Hector answer you,
since he called forth our best in battle-lust:
let him decide, and I will follow suit.”
Then answered Hector, of the shining helm:
“Ajax, gods grant you strength and intellect:
your spear is mightier than all your peers.
So let us cease from fighting here for now,
someday we will contend again, until
some deity decides a champion:
night gathers, it is wise to yield to night.
Now go delight the men beside your ships,
your company and kindred most of all,
and I shall go to Priam’s citadel
to gladden Trojan men and Trojan wives, who join in prayer, awaiting my return.
Come then! Let us exchange some fitting gifts,
that they will say, Achaeans, Trojans both:
‘They fought as rivals, locked in bitter strife
but joined as friends before they parted ways.’”
And so he gave a silver studded sword,
a sheath, and leather-strap to hold it up,
and Ajax gave a war-belt, gleaming red.
They parted, one walked through Achaean camps, and one towards the din of Trojan shouts, which thundered, as he walked back, safe and sound, escaping Ajax, slipping through his hands: they led him home, once sure that he would die. Now Ajax, happy with his victory was brought to godly Agamemnon’s tent, where all Achaean men had gathered round. The king prepared to sacrifice a bull, a five year old male for almighty Zeus. They skinned and butchered it, laid out the meat, and masterfully they skewered every piece, then roasted it, and drew the skewers out. But when they ceased from labor and sat down, they ate, and spirit lacked no want or need.

Atrides, Agamemnon, king of men, rewarded Ajax with the finest cuts. But when they sated love of food and drink the eldest started weaving wisdom’s words: Nestor, whose plan had seemed the best to start, addressed and spoke to them, kind-heartedly. “Atrides and Achaean princes too, how many men have died among our ranks? Their blood into Scamander's flowing stream sharp Ares spills—their souls are gone to Death. You ought to cease from war when Dawn arrives that we may go and cart away the dead and burn their bodies, off beside the ships so each can give a child his father's bones when we return into the fatherland. Now, let us heap up one communal grave across the plain and quickly build beside high ramparts to defend our men and ships. Then, in these let us build some closing gates through which there might be roads for chariots, and outside let us dig deep ditches round encircling, to ward of horse and man lest Trojans bring their war upon our camp.” He spoke, and every king applauded him.
Meanwhile, a council sat on holy Troy, disturbed and anxious outside Priam’s door. First, then, Antenor rose to give a speech: “Hear me, you Trojans and Dardanians, that I may speak as spirit should command: let us return to Atreus’ sons both Helen and her property, for now in fighting we make lies where once were oaths. I see no profit if we shun this plan.” With this he sat, and Paris next arose. The godly prince, fair Helen’s husband, spoke, his speech went flying through the palace halls: “Antenor, do not mock me, start again: surely you have some better plan than this? But if in earnest you have spoken truth, the gods above put madness in your heart. Now Trojans, horsebreakers, I will reply: The girl is mine. Return her? I refuse. But her possessions—all I took, I give—I will give back her things with added gifts.” With this he sat, and Priam next arose. god-equal speaker, son of Dardanos, addressing them, he spoke kind-heartedly: “Hear me, you Trojans and Dardanians, that I may speak as spirit should command: throughout the town, have supper as before, but each remember he must take his watch. Idaios, at the ships, when Dawn shines bright, relay the words of he who caused our strife, for Menelaus, Agamemnon both. And in addition ask that they agree to stop this war, till we have burned our dead. Someday we will contend again, until some deity decides a champion.” So thus he spoke, and all who heard obeyed, took supper through the ranks, and held their watch, and Idaios approached the fleet at Dawn, to see the Danaans assembling, beside the stern of Agamemnon’s ship,
and in their midst, the herald cried aloud:
“Atrides and Achaean princes too,
king Priam and the Trojan people urge
I bring this message, if it pleases you,
from Paris, he who caused your strife and ours:
Regarding her possessions, what he took
he will return, and add on further gifts.
But Menelaus, still, he will not give
your wedded wife, although we beg him to,
and wish most earnestly that he would die.
Last, though, we ask—if it would please you to—
to stop this war, till we have burned our dead.
Someday we will contend again, until
some deity decides a champion.”

He spoke, and all were still in silent hush,
then spoke Diomedes, the war cry's lord,
“Let none accept his gifts or take her things,
my Danaans, a fool can see as much:
their end is near, sure sorrows hang on Troy.”
He spoke and all Achaean sons cried out
they cheered Diomedes, the horsebreaker,
so Agamemnon called Idaios forth:
“Idaios, you have witnessed our reply:
his words gives voice to all, and I am glad.
But we will heed the rites of burial,
no time is lost in honoring the dead:
to bring them peace within the holy flame.
Let Zeus bear witness to this solemn oath.”
He swore, and raised his scepter to the gods
and back to holy Troy Idaios sped
to see the Trojans and Dardanians
assembled, and awaiting his return.
So, in their midst he shouted out the news,
then splitting up, they went about the tasks:
some carried corpses, some found firewood
and so it was for Argives, by the ships.
They brought their dead and searched for kindling,
until the sun reached over meadowlands,
arising from the still and ragging tides:
until the night, the workers soldiered on.
So, men made indistinct with blood and dirt
anointed corpses, pouring earnest tears,
and hoisted them at last to cart away.
But Priam soon forbid their tears to fall,
so silently they heaped the pyre high,
then burning them, returned to holy Troy.
And opposite Achaeans did the same,
in silence, laying out the firewood
and lighting it, before they went away.

Not Dawn, but still in twilight, halfling dark,
a chosen host of Danaans arose,
to designate one great communal grave
across the plain and quickly build beside
high ramparts to defend their men and ships.
Within these, then, they fashioned closing gates
that through them might be roads for chariots.
And last, outside they dug a massive ditch
around themselves, immense, and stuck with stakes.
Thus the Achaeans toiled in the fields,
while gods on high, who sat by father Zeus,
beheld the work the mortal men devised.
And then, Poseidon, earthshaker, arose:
“Zeus, is there still some mortal in this land,
who shares his mind and plans before he acts?
Does it escape you, there, below us all,
Achaeans build a wall and drive a trench
around the ships, without due sacrifice?
There will be glory for this, sure as Dawn,
and men will soon forget the wall that I
built with Apollo, round Laomedon’s town.”
Zeus spoke to him, his patience wearing thin:
“For shame! The great Earthshaker come to this?
I might believe as much from other gods,
from lesser ones, more feeble in their strength.
But you, your glory soars, as sure as Dawn:
so come, and when the Danaans have left
and reach the fatherland upon their ships,
beat down and break the wall with ocean waves
and pile sand upon what may remain. Just so, their work will crumble and be gone.”
And as they spoke within assembly, the sun descended and the work was done.
Achaeans slaughtered bulls and took their meal as ships arrived from Lemnos, bearing wine:
the fleet that Euneos had sent to them, that carried in its hull the lavish gifts
for both the martial sons of Atreus:
one thousands measures of unweakened wine.
So, from these ships Achaeans passed out drinks, in cups of bronze or iron, finely wrought,
in skins, for even oxen and for slaves:
and with their wine they lay a kingly feast.

So nightlong dined the cheerful Danaans, while through the city Trojans took their meal,
But nightlong Zeus foreshadowed evil deeds in thunderclouds, and all were green with fear.
They poured out cups of wine, none daring drink before they toasted Zeus, the Thunderer.
Then leaving, each received the gift of Sleep.
As Trojans held their guard, so panic held
Achaean ranks when rout was near at hand,
and every king was clutched with crushing pain.
As when the winds ascend the fishful sea
from Thrace, when Zephyrus and Boreas
raise violent storms across the murky swell
to stir the salt and seaweed from the depths:
so spirits in Achaean breasts were churned.

Atrides, too, was clutched with pain in heart,
so, pacing, he bade heralds secretly
to call each man into assembly,
and even he himself ran messages.
Once all had come, king Agamemnon rose
and let flow tears like dusky springs that pour
on rocks too steep for even mountain goats.
Just so, he spoke to Argives, groaning deep:
“O kings and councilors, what tragedy!
Zeus chains me now in heavy ruin’s doom
Cruel god! He nodded as he promised me
that I would ravage Troy with its great walls.
But this was all deceit! He sends me home
ungloried, counting loss on bitter loss.
This pleases Zeus, almighty king of gods,
who topplies many cities and will fell
so many more—we cannot match his strength.
So come, now let us flee and sail away.
To ships! Prepare to seek the fatherland,
we will not capture Troy with its broad roads.”

He spoke, and all were still in silent hush,
and for a time they mourned their many woes.
then spoke Diomedes, the war cry's lord:
“What utter nonsense issues from your mouth?
While justice reigns, you should not anger me
for you deny my valor, best of men’s.
You think me impotent, unbellicose?
Both young and old, we Argives know to whom
the son of crooked Cronus grants two ways:
by scepter, you are honored above all,
but none would note you for your bravery.
So, king, perhaps you hope us impotent
that we may follow you and scurry home.
Well if your spirit moves you to return,
then go! The road is there, the ships that came
from Mycenae will bear you back again.
But we longhaired Achaean men will stay
till we have conquered Tory. If others wish,
they, too, may leave. Alone, if it must be,
we will remain, both Sthenelus and I,
till Troy is ours—some god is on our side.”

He spoke and all Achaean sons cried out
they cheered the horsebreaker, Diomedes,
then standing up, the horseman Nestor spoke:
“Good Tydides, you are the best in war,
in council too, at least, among your age
No man among Achaeans could deny
your speech, but you fall short in the account.
How young you are! You might have been my son,
my youngest, yet you speak to Argive kings
with reasoned words, and well in line with fate.
Now, he who calls himself your elder will
address and settle all—and none shall blame
my speech, no, Agamemnon, even you.
For kinless, lawless, heartless wanders he
who loves a horrid war among his own.
But let us heed the night and now prepare
our evening meal—let sentinels be placed
beside the trenches dug by outer walls.
I give this task to youths, as for yourself,
Atrides, rule! You are most kingly here.
Prepare a feast for elders, such is wise.
The barracks flow with wine that ships have borne
across from Thrace, and entertainment waits
to play at your command, for you are king. When we convene you will obey the man whose plan is best, now need descends on us of thoughtful council—who could well rejoice, that enemies build fires by our ships? This night will mark salvation or demise."

He spoke, and all who listened were convinced so then the sentinels all fell behind the herdsman Thrasymedes, Nestor’s son, Ascalaphus and great Ialmenus, too, Meriones, Deiphuros, and both Aphraus and divine Lycomedes. These seven led, by each one hundred youths were stationed holding hefty spears in hand. They sat mid walls and trenches, readying, they kindled flames, and each made evening meal

Meanwhile, Atrides gathered elders round and held a lavish feast beside his camp. They had their fill of all that was prepared, but when they sated love of food and drink the eldest started weaving wisdom’s words—Nestor, whose plan had seemed the best to start, addressed and spoke to them, kind-heartedly. “Atrides, Agamemnon, famous king! I will begin and end my speech with you, the lord of many men, to whom Zeus gives the scepter and the law, that you may rule. You ought to speak for us, to hear our words, and act as spirit bids your servant now to speak for common good. My king, pay heed! For you will bear whatever I shall say. No one will think a better thought than mine which I have held from long ago till now:

You took the maid Briseis, Zeus-born king, out from Achilles’ barracks—now he fumes. This was your will! I tried dissuading you, but pride, your valiant spirit, would not yield.
Now, as you take the girl, you have enraged
a fearsome man, whom gods have honored well.
But let us plan to make amends with him
with kindly offerings and honeyed speech.”

Then Agamemnon, king of men, replied:
“Our elder speaks no falsehood: I admit
my deeds were ruinous and I was wrong.
Those dear to gods are worth battalions,
Zeus honors him and subjugates us all.
Since I was blind and wrought this tragedy
I wish to make amends, to give to him
these famous gifts, which I will name for you:
Ten talents gold and seven tripod stands,
a score of cauldrons, tempered in the flames.
a dozen racing steeds so swift of foot
that he who races them shall find himself
in want of neither gold nor property:
what prize and treasure they have won for me!
And seven maids, possessing noble skills:
those Lesbians I snatched away from him,
when he besieged their heavenly abode.
And with them what was his will be again,
Briseis I return, and I will swear
that never did she share my bed with me
as was my right and man is wont to do.
All these I give to him, and if again
the gods may grant we plunder Priam’s home
then let him heap a ship with gold and bronze
when we divide our loot and sail away.
And let him take a score of Trojan maids
whichever after Helen are most fair.
Or if he come to Argos, to my home,
the richest lands and marriage would be his
for I would pay him equal to my son,
Orestes, who was raised in luxury.
And he should have my daughter’s hand as well,
Chrysothemis, Laodike, or the third,
Iphianassa, if he holds her dear.
I ask no dowry, no, and I would give
sweet marriage gifts and seven citadels
Kadamyle, Enope, Hiren, too,
blessed Phema and deep meadowed Antheia,
Aipeia and Pedasos, rich in vines,
far out in sandy Pylos, by the sea.
There men made rich with oxen and with sheep,
will honor him with gifts befitting gods,
and by his scepter carry out their laws.
This I would do, if he should cease from ire
and bow to me. Most hateful of the gods
is Hades, unsubdued, implacable.
Let him submit, and know me as his king:
in age and rank I am superior!”

Then Nestor, age-old horseman, answered him:
“Atrides, Agamemnon, famous king,
no man could blame the lavish gifts you give
to king Achilles. Come, and let us choose
which men are best to hasten for his camp.
and whom I choose, let him obey and go.
First, Phoenix, dear to Zeus, yes, let him lead,
divine Odysseus, Ajax the Great.
Come heralds—Odios, Eurybates—
bring water for their hands, and bid them keep
a holy silence, now we pray to Zeus.”
This was his speech, and all were rightly pleased.
the heralds all poured water on their hands,
and youths filled up the kraters, pouring each
libation drops, and then a cup to drink.
But when they drank unto their heart’s content
at once they left from Agamemnon's camp,
then Nestor, age-old horseman, stood again
and eying all, but most Odysseus,
he prayed that they might bring Achilles back.
They walked the shore by deep resounding sea,
and called the god who holds and shakes the earth,
that they might turn so great a heart with ease.

They found him at the camp of Myrmidons,
delighting in his heart to play the lyre,
ornately crafted, with a silver bridge: 
a spoil won from rich Eëtion. 
He sang of glory and his spirits rose. 
Patroclus saw the guests as they arrived 
but would not greet them till the song was done. 
Then, seeing them at last, Achilles rose, 
still carrying his lyre as he went 
to greet the heroes who had come for him, 
and now that it was time, Patroclus rose, 
as swift Achilles spoke out, flourishing: 
“Well met! My friends, who come in dire need, 
despite my rage, you still are dear to me.” 
At once he brought them in and sat them down 
on rich, deep-purple carpets, finely spun 
and called upon Patroclus, by his side: 
“Set down a larger krater, mix for us 
a stronger drink, and give each man a cup— 
for they are dear, who sit beneath my roof” 
He did as told, divine Achilles moved 
to set a rack upon the burning fire. 
He brought the finest cuts of ram and goat, 
the chine of fattened hogs made rich with lard. 
Automedon held fast the tender meat 
Achilles carved and skewered every piece. 
Patroclus tended to the glowing fire, 
but when the flame was quenched and burning low, 
he scattered embers, sprinkled holy salt, 
and laid the skewers over stones to roast. 
Then when the skin was brown he plated it. 

Patroclus doled out basketfuls of bread 
while great Achilles passed about the meat. 
He sat and faced divine Odysseus 
and bid Patroclus supplicate the gods 
by casting offerings into the flame. 
But when they had their fill of all prepared 
and each had sated love of food and drink 
Great Ajax signaled Phoenix; taking note, 
divine Odysseus began a toast: 
“Achilles, hail! How fortunate we are
to have our fill in Agamemnon’s tent
and here with you—so many goodly things
to feast upon! Yet feasts are not the cause
of our concern. O Zeus-born king, we fear
calamity: the ships we moored may burn
unless you rise in valor now to fight.
For near our walls and fleets they make their camps:
those Trojans and their many allied men.
At night they build their fires and think none
will hold them back from burning through our ships.
Zeus signals his support with thunderbolts
and Hector stirs, exulting in his might,
he trusts this sign and fears no god or man:
dark fury swirls around and cloaks him now.
And waiting, praying for the Dawn to come
he vows that he will sever every stern
and set the ships ablaze with raging fire
and slay each soldier fleeing through the smoke.
I fear the gods ordain his victory:
our fate may be to wither here in Troy
far off from Argive fields where horses graze.
If you have plans to save these men, then go
deliver them from Trojans crying war.
Soon all is lost, there is no remedy
once we have fallen to the Trojan charge:
so quickly rise and shield us from our doom!

Dear friend! Your father Peleus spoke well
in sending you to Agamemnon’s aid:
‘My son, Athena and the queen of gods
will grant you strength, if they should wish, but please
hold back the spirit soaring in your breast,
have kindness, cease from mischievous unrest,
that Argives young and old might honor you.’
These were the old man’s words—do you forget?
Come now, and put aside this quarrelling,
For this, king Agamemnon will give gifts,
which, should you listen, I have come to list.
Listen, he offers you the following:
Ten talents gold and seven tripod stands,  
a score of cauldrons, tempered in the flames.  
a dozen racing steeds so swift of foot  
that he who races them shall find himself  
in want of neither gold nor property:  
what wealth is Agamemnon's by these steeds!  
And seven maids, possessing noble skills:  
those Lesbians he snatched away from you,  
when you besieged their heavenly abode.  
And with them what was yours will be again,  
Briseis he will give, and even swear  
that never did she share his bed with him  
as was his right and man is wont to do.  
All these he gives to you, and if again  
the gods may grant we plunder Priam’s home  
then you may heap a ship with gold and bronze  
when we divide our loot and sail away.  
And you may take a score of Trojan maids  
whichever after Helen are most fair.  
Or if you come to Argos, to his home,  
the richest lands and marriage will be yours  
for he would pay you equal to his son,  
Orestes, who was raised in luxury.  
And you should have his daughter’s hand as well,  
Chrysothemis, Laodike, or the third,  
Iphianassa, if you hold her dear.  
He asks no dowry, rather he would give  
Sweet marriage gifts and seven citadels:  
Kadamyle, Enope, Hiren, too,  
blessed Phema and deep meadowed Antheia,  
Aipeia and Pedasos, rich in vines,  
far out in sandy Pylos, by the sea.  
There men made rich with oxen and with sheep,  
will honor you with gifts befitting gods,  
and by your scepter carry out their laws.  
This he would do, if you should cease from ire,  
but if you hate him so within your heart  
and scorn his gifts, take pity then on those  
who suffer on the field and honor you  
as gods—you might win fame among them all.
You might take Hector now, upon the field,
for near and nearer still he boldly comes,
with raging fury, thinking none could stand
against him of the men who sailed to Troy.”

Replied to him, swift Achilles spoke,
“Laertes’ wily son, O Zeus-born king,
Achilles, I must speak true to you:
it will be as it has been brought to pass,
so do not murmur on amongst yourselves.
I hate that man just as the Gates of Death
who says one thing and hides truth in his heart,
so I will speak what seems the best to me.
No man will turn me, Agamemnon least,
for where was our due gratitude before,
to battle ceaselessly with enemies?
One fate ensnares the man who wars or waits,
and in one honor bold and bashful share:
we die, accomplished or in idleness.
What point is there to suffer pains as these,
to give my life to waging horrid wars?
Just as the mother bird brings morsels home
and labors to provide her fledgling food,
so too have I spent many sleepless nights,
and many bloody days by battling
with men who suffer war to save their wives.

Twelve cities have I felled beside the sea,
on land, eleven, throughout fertile Troy,
and from these I brought many treasures back
to Agamemnon, stately king of men.
Then, waiting back beside the hollow ships,
he kept much for himself and parcelled out
what still remained to brave and noble men.
Their gifts are theirs, he steals my bride alone.
So be it, let him sleep with her. Be glad!
But why must Argives fight with Trojans still?
Why did Atrides lead us to this land?
Had it not been for fair-haired Helen’s sake?
Are they alone in loving wives, those sons
of Atreus? A good and prudent man
will love his woman—he will cherish her!
She had my heart, though taken by my sword,
so now that he has cheated her away,
the king be damned, I will not follow him!

Odysseus, with you and other kings,
let him take council how to keep the ships
from flame. Without me, much has yet been done:
he built a wall and drove a ditch beside,
around himself, immense, and stuck with stakes.
But this will fall! Man-killing Hector comes.
When I had fought within Achaeans ranks,
he did not venture far beyond the walls,
but only by the Skaean gates and oaks
would he endure me, just enough to flee.
Now, in my absence, he runs rampant! Wild!

Tomorrow I will sacrifice to Zeus
and load my ship to draw out on the salt,
there you will see, if you should wish to see,
at sunrise, on the fishful Hellespont,
my ships with men who row them eagerly.
And if Poseidon grants us passage home,
we would reach fertile Phthia in three days.
So much I left in winding my way here
gold, ruddy bronze, grey iron, shapely girls,
augmented with my spoils won in war.
Yet still, he cheated me, my prize is gone,
he gave and took her back, insulting me.
Announce this to the men within the camp,
so they disdain their king, so if he hopes
to cheat another man, then they will know
his shamefulness—tell them he would not dare
to look me in the eyes, that lowly dog.

I will not counsel him nor fight for him:
he cheated me already, and again
he hopes he might deceive me with his plans.
The fool! Zeus stole whatever wits he had.
I hate his gifts, care nothing for the man, no, not for tenfold, twentyfold as much as he possesses now or should possess, not for the wealth of all Orchomenos, or Thebes of Egypt, in its opulence: the city of one hundred gates, from which two hundred merchants leave in carriages. His gifts could number as the desert sands, and still my spirit would remain unmoved, until he will admit his insolence.

I will not wed his daughter, not if she is Aphrodite’s rival in her looks, or owl-eyed Athena’s match in deed. I will not marry her, so let him choose, some other suitor, kinglier than I. If gods should save me and I come back home, then Peleus will find a wife for me, through Hellas and in Phthia there are girls, whose noble fathers guard the citadels— and I would cherish any as my spouse. So many yet have moved my heart to wed to take my father’s scepter and to rule, inheriting the wealth he won for me. I hold my life more worthy than the spoils they say the citadel of Ilium had held in peace, before Achaeans came, nor do I value more the marble heaps Apollo keeps in rocky Pytho’s caves. For one may buy his flocks of cows and sheep, or win his share of tripods and of steeds, but life cannot return, once it is lost, no man can buy or win it back again. My mother Thetis tells of twofold dooms that carry me into the shade of Death: if I should stay, I perish fighting, yet undying glory is forever mine. If I should leave, I soon will find my home, longevity and ease are promised me, but though I live, my glory surely dies.
And so I would exhort the others, too, to sail away, go home! You will not win the prize of lofty Troy, for wide-eyed Zeus has raised his hand and made the Trojans bold. So go and tell the valorous, declare this message: for the office of the old is to contrive a better plan that might protect the hollow ships and save the men: since this attempt to bring me back to war is futile, while I rage far off from man. But Phoenix, come, remain and slumber here that you may sail tomorrow in my ship—if you should wish—I will not force you to.”

He spoke, and all were still in silent hush, they wondered at his forceful, flowing speech, till Phoenix, age-old horseman, rose to speak, a storm of tears, made fearful for the fleet: “Achilles, shining king, if anger’s hold is such that you would leave the ships to flames, how could I leave, dear child? Where could I go? Your father, age-old horseman Peleus, that day he sent you here, a boy, who knew not war on such a scale as now we face nor of debate, where men may make their name, he sent me here, that I might teach you now to be a speaker, armed with proper speech, to be a ruler, quick to honest deeds. And so I cannot leave you, dearest child, not if some god would scrape away my age, and make me young, as once I was among the lovely girls of Hellas, when I fled the hatred of my father Amyntor.

He had a mistress, to my mother’s shame, and so my mother asked I woo the girl, to bed her, and in doing so to spark a hatred in her for old Amyntor. I did as told, and when my father heard, he cursed me, by the stygian Furies, wished
that never on my knee would bounce a child
that I had sired—and they heard his curse,
Persephone and Zeus of undergloom.
I thought to cut him down with bronze, but then
A god restrained my ire, reminding me
how Rumor flies, and with it brings reproach:
that all who saw would call it patricide.
Still then, no longer could my heart abide,
to walk about the halls, and bear the hate
my father held. My cousins saw me flee,
and stopped me, so they thought, in begging me.

Then many sheep and cows, with curving horns,
they cooked alongside pigs made rich with lard,
and placed a portion on Hephaestus’ flame
and poured my father’s wine in every cup.
Nine nights I passed, through which they held a guard
exchanging posts to rest, but keeping bright
a fire always, both within the yard,
and antechamber by the bedroom doors.
But when the tenth black night enshrouded me,
I broke away, right through those very doors,
escaped and leapt the courtyard fence with ease,
unnoticed by the guards and woman slaves.
I fled through spacious Hellas, far away
and into fertile Phthia then I came
to Peleus—the man accepted me
in earnest, loved me like his only son,
and made me rich, with many men to rule,
in Dolopes, the edge of Phthia’s land.
Divine Achilles, there I raised you up
when you refused with anybody else
to go to feasts or eat within the halls,
when only perched upon my knee would you
take food: the meat that I had cut for you,
the wine I poured, which you so often spilled
upon my tunic—every time with such
a childishness no man could blame you for.
I thought, with every trouble, of the curse
that I would never sire a son, and yet
Achilles, you, my dear, my darling boy:
you were the child I could never have. 495
For me, then, subjugate your spirit, please,
have pity, even gods can be convinced.
They better us in virtue, honor, strength, and yet with sacrifice and gentle prayer libations, or the smell of offerings, they may be won, when men transgress or err.

For Zeus’ daughters, whom we know as Prayers, are lame and withered, gazing with their eyes, they follow Ruin, and take heed of her. since Ruin is sure-footed, strong, and thus outraces them, she comes to every land destroying us—then Prayers heal what they can. Whatever man is wise and honors them they profit him and hear him when he prays. but should one shun them, they are quick to Zeus, to ask that he send Ruin after him that he be hurt, brought low—that he will pay! Achilles, Zeus’ daughters come to you, they curb all other wills, however great, were Agamemnon giving you no gifts, if he remained indifferent, scornful, sore, I would not bid you throw away your rage or save the Argives, though in dire need, but give he does, and he may yet give more. He sends the best to supplicate you here, whom you yourself hold dearest of the ranks, do not turn them away because of spite, though none till now could blame your angered heart. In those great glories time has not forgot, so oft has anger clouded heroes’ minds, yet they were swayed by words, or won with gifts. Much time is past, still I recall their deeds, and for you, friends, I will recite them now:

Kouretes and Aetolian made war, by Kalydon, they pillaged and they slew, Aetolian, to keep their city safe,
Kouretes, laying waste to it in war,
for Artemis drove evil through their ranks
irate that she had not received first fruits
from Oineus—the other gods he pleased
but to her he had made no offering,
he did not think, he had forgot—the fool!
So Artemis begrudged his lineage
and sent a brutish boar with jagged teeth,
to raze the orchards Oineus possessed.
It came, uprooted trees, and hurled them down,
as scattered apples fell upon the ground,
then Oineus’ son, Meleager, came
and gathered hunters with their hounds to kill
the beast no man could overcome alone.
They slew it and built pyres for the dead,
but Artemis put war into their hearts,
between Kouretes and Aetolian.
concerning who should take the head and pelt
Meleager burned in battle as he fought,
against him no Kouretes dared to stand
outside their walls, though they were numerous.
But wrath would soon enthrall him—how it swells,
and clouds the mind!  He lay in hatred for
his mother Althaia, while by his side
sweet Cleopatra lay, his lovely wife,
whose mother had been fathered once before
by Idas, valiant hero of the time.
This man once raised his bow against the god,
Apollo, vying for a lovely nymph,
whose parents aptly named Alkyone,
because her mother cried in sorrow like
the halcyon, the vibrant kingfisher,
when lord Apollo stole the lovely child.

Now as Meleager lay, he nursed his pain,
for his own mother blamed him for the deaths
of all his brothers, and cursed him for this—
she struck the fertile earth with frantic hands,
and called on Hades and Persephone.
Then, crying and bent prostrate on the ground, she ruthlessly wished death upon her child and deep in Erebus the Furies heard.

The din of war was nigh, the towers sieged, so old Aetolian sent out their priests to supplicate the gods, while promising a kingly gift if great Meleager fought: whatever tithe of land he would desire, whatever richly plain of Kalydon of fifty acres, half for vineries, half barren land, made luscious by the plough. His father, age-old horseman Oineus, came up outside his chamber’s bolted doors and shook them, pleading with his son to fight; his mother and his sisters begged as well. But he refused them, and then, when his friends, his dearest, most beloved came to him, not even they could bend his iron will. He did not rise, till war approached his door, till all the city burned, until his wife entreated him, and wailing, counted out the sorry fate a fallen city sees: they kill whatever men should still survive then fire swallows all, and strangers take both wives and children—nothing else remains. On hearing this, at last, his heart was stirred he donned his shining battle gear and rose, thus giving in, he kept them from their doom, but no more would he have his proper share of gifts, for he was late to ward them off. Come now, my dear Achilles, compromise, before it is too late: it will be worse defending ships already set ablaze. Receive these gifts, and go, for like the gods Achaeans honor you. But tarrying less honor will be yours in victory.”

Replying to him, swift Achilles spoke, “Dear father Phoenix, Zeus-born, of what need
is honor for one honored yet by Zeus?
With his support, I tarry by the ships
while still my breath will come or legs keep strength.
I ask you this, heed well and take to heart:
do not confuse my spirit with your wails
for Agamemnon, whom you need not love,
when by such love you risk estranging me:
my enemy should have your enmity.
Come share my wealth, my honors, and my rule
these men will bring the news, so slumber here
upon a pleasant bed, with shining Dawn
we will decide to go or linger here.”

He nodded to Patroclus silently,
so he might spread a bed, that Phoenix sleep,
and that the others now might think to go,
and with this Greater Ajax made his speech:
“Laertes’ wily son, O Zeus-born king,
Odysseus, come now, he will not hear
we must go back and tell the Danaans
this gloomy news, however grave it be.
But you, Achilles, it is all too clear
you hold a savage spirit in your breast,
Cruel one! Who cares not for your comrades’ love,
although we honored you beyond the rest.
One takes the blood-price even from a man
who steals their brother’s life or kills their son,
and such a guilty man who pays this cost
they need not oust—his penance has been done.
But some god puts malevolence in you,
all for a single girl! When we would give
you seven, beautiful beyond the rest,
and more with that. Have mercy on us all!
Respect the roof that holds the dearest men
of all the Danaans, who do their best
to be your closest allies and your friends.”
Responding to him, swift Achilles spoke:
“Great Ajax, Zeus-born soldier, king of men,
you words have moved my heart the slightest bit,
but still it swells with anger for that man—
that Agamemnon—how he brought me shame,
dishonored me as though some vagabond!
Go now, and bring these messages to him:
I will not think to wade in bloody war
until when godly Hector should arrive
beside the hollow ships of Myrmidons,
slay Argives, and set fire to the fleet.
So then, despair, for no one else but me
could hold him back, so ravenous for war.”

At this the two raised goblets in their hands,
poured out an offering and took their leave,
and once they left, Patroclus ordered maids
to lay a bed, as swift as possible.
They did as he commanded, bringing out
wool blankets and the finest linen sheets:
and there the old man slept till godly Dawn.
Achilles lay within his well-built tent,
and next to him a girl from Lesbos slept,
Diomede, the daughter Phorbas bore.
Across from him Patroclus lay beside
Iphis, the shapely girl Achilles gave,
from Skyros, citadel of Enyes.

But when the other two came back and found
Atrides, all Achaeans toasted them
with golden goblets, asking them the news.
So, Agamemnon, lord of men, began:
“Speak out, you two, and famed Odysseus,
if he will come defend the ships from flame,
or if a burning anger holds him still.”
Much-suffering Odysseus replied:
“Atrides, Agamemnon, famous king,
that man retains his anger, rather still
he swells with rage, refuses every gift,
suggests you council with the Argive host
how we may save the ships and many men,
and threatens with the shining Dawn to draw
his beached ships saltward, oars on either side.
And further he exhorts all other men to sail away, no longer hoping for the prize of lofty Troy. For wide-eyed Zeus has raised his hand and made the Trojans bold. These were his words, the others can confirm Ajax, and both attentive messengers. But elder Phoenix lies, as he was urged that with the ship he may tomorrow sail—if he should wish—he is not forced to go”

He spoke, and all were still in silent hush they wondered at his forceful, flowing speech, and for a time they mourned their many woes then spoke Diomedes, the war cry's lord, “Atrides, Agamemnon, famous king! Would that you had not begged Achilles fight, or offered gifts—without them he is proud, and now in turn his pride may yet increase. Be done with him—think not if he should come or stay behind. He will return to fight when spirit or a god should drive him to. But as I speak let every man obey: retire for the night, well satisfied with bread and wine: for we have valor still. And when the rosy-fingered Dawn arrives, then, Agamemnon, by the ranks and ships, you should ride first, and lead the men to war.” These were his words, and all the kings agreed, the cheered the horsebreaker, Diomedes, and pouring out their offerings, they left to take the gift of slumber from the night.
The fighting crackled fierce like wildfire,  
when swift Antilochus set off and found  
Achilles, sitting silent by the ships.  
He knew somewhere within him what had passed,  
but greeted him while feigning ignorance:  
“Ah me, how could the strong Achaean sons  
be driven back from war into retreat?  
Bear me no mischief, everlasting gods!  
You had my mother tell me long ago  
that though I would exceed the Myrmidons  
my light would fade beside the walls of Troy.  
Take me! But my Patroclus should have lived!  
I warned him not to linger long enough  
that Hector would emerge and challenge him.”  
So then, as sorrow coursed within his chest,  
the son of Nestor huddled over him,  
to bear his message, through a stream of tears:  
“My dear Achilles, it is as you fear,  
I come to say Patroclus is no more,  
the armies fight to claim his naked corpse,  
for Hector stripped him bare when killing him.”  
So then black anguish clouded over him,  
and in each hand he grasped the filthy dirt,  
and poured it on his head, and smeared his face,  
and let it scatter down his princely robes.  
Then he, in all his splendor, laid himself  
within the grime, and tore his flaxen hair,  
as all the handmaidens about the place  
came wailing, learning of the travesty.  
There, at the center of Achilles’ camp,  
they beat their breasts until their limbs gave loose,  
while opposite Antilochus wept tears,  
and held Achilles back with all his might,  
for fear that he might slit his throat in grief.
So terribly he bellowed, and below
the ocean seas his mother heard him cry,
and raised her voice with all the Nereids,
in choruses of wild agony.
There Glauke stood bereft by Thaleia,
while Proto and Nessiaia sounded shrill
with Doris, Panope, Janassa,
and all the other stately goddesses.
Each voice was haunting, lush, and beautiful
but wove together in such disarray,
the horror hearing such disordered song
could drive a blissful man to misery.
So thus within the bowels of the sea
the lovely sea nymphs congregated round:
the daughters who were born to Nereus.
There, in a silver cave, they raised a howl
and beat their breasts, as Thetis urged them on:
“My sisters, hear me, that you all may know
the sorrows that are planted in my heart.
Oh wretched me! To have so great a son
consigned to ruin, though magnificent.
When he was young he sprouted tall and broad,
and I attended to my darling tree.
But on the crook-beak ships I sent him off
to Ilium, and never will he come
again within the halls of Peleus.
So now, although I see him yet alive,
his heart cries out, and I am powerless.
Still I shall go to see my dearest son,
and listen to the sorrows of his heart.”
Thus then she left the cave, while in her wake
the sisters followed, crying just as hard
so that their tears drove waves across the sea.
Then when they came to Troy they filed out
to where the ships curved round Achilles’ camp,
the mother stood beside her sighing son,
and cried out sharp, and held and kissed his head,
than waling, she let words fly from her mouth:
“My son, why do you cry? How comes this pain?
Tell me—these deeds were brought to pass by Zeus
just as you prayed that they might come to be. The Argives are shut back beside their ships and suffer hard defeats, in want of you.”

But sighing deeply, swift Achilles spoke: “Yes, mother, Zeus has granted my request, but now what pleasure could I take in it? The greatest joy of all my company, Patroclus, whom I valued as my life, lies dead, and Hector wears my armor now—that splendid gift the gods gave Peleus the day they tossed you to a mortal’s bed. Would that you never left the goddesses and Peleus has found some earthly maid! For now, despair must heap upon your heart to know your son will die, and nevermore come home—since, now, my spirits urges me to live no longer, not unless my spear can butcher Hector first, so that he pays for slaughtering the dearest of my friends.”

And to him Thetis spoke through pouring tears: “Then you are set to die, if you speak true: your Destiny must come soon after his.” And swift Achilles spoke as embers burn: “Then I shall die, for I could not protect my comrade in his need—for he was killed far from his home, because he lacked my aid. So then, I too shall lie in foreign lands, no beacon of salvation to my men or to my dear Patroclus, who was slain at Hector’s hand, while I sat useless here—yes, I, the greatest of Achaean men in war, unmatched in all but counseling. Oh, would that Strife be gone from gods and men! And Ire, too, which makes a fair man sore—which swirls like smoke within him and appears as dripping honey, somehow sweeter still.
Once, Agamemnon summoned forth my rage, but we will overlook his insolence, and subjugate our fury for a time. Now, let me be this miscreant’s demise—this Hector—then, whatever death may come may swallow me and bring about my doom. Not even Hercules could outrun death, although Zeus held him dearest of us all: still Fate subdued him, born of Hera’s ire. So, then, when Fate should hold me equally, I too shall die, and can but while I live win glory and drive sorrow through the hearts of Trojan women, whimpering through tears, and lost in lamentation for the men I send before me to the underdark! So let me die, although you cherish me.”

And then the goddess Thetis answered him: “True, child, none could call it cowardice to steer destruction from your company. But now, your splendid armor lies among the Trojans—Hector wears it on his back and gloats in all its brazen brilliance. But I should think he will not gloat for long, his death shall come—so wait a meager time until I have returned the morrow morn. For with the Dawn, when sun ascends the sky, I will bring armor from the Blacksmith’s forge.”

With this, she turned and left her darling child, and spoke among her sisters as she went: “Sink far beneath the waters, to the depths where father sits, and bring this news to him. Now I will scale Olympus to its peak and ask Hephaestus, god of metalwork, if he might furnish armor for my son.” At once, the sisters plunged into the sea, and silver-footed Thetis left again to meet the Blacksmith high upon his forge. And as she stepped upon Olympus, down
below her swelled a horrifying cry
as the Achaeans fled from Hector’s hand. 150

Then, even those that turned and made their stand
had little hope to win Patroclus back,
for past the rain of spears and cavalry,
they would find Hector, standing over him.

Three times, he seized the body and began
to draw it back and call for Trojan aid.
Three times, the two Aiantes surged as one
to steer him from the corpse, but he returned
exalting in his martial confidence,
ferocious, clawing, never giving ground. 160

As herdsman cannot keep a lion back
from tearing through a carcass in its sight,
so now the two were hopeless to avert,
the son of Priam, Hector, from the corpse.

Now, then, he would have dragged the body back,
triumphant, had not Iris intervened,
and bid Achilles arm, since Hera sent
her down in secret from the other gods.

So, standing by him, out her message flew:
“Rise now, Achilles, Dread in mortal form,
and save Patroclus from the enemy.
Destruction swirls around his body now:
Achaeans stand defiant by his side,
as Trojans race to drag the corpse away
to Ilium, for Hector is possessed
to cut it limb from limb, lop off the head,
and spike it on a stake beside the gates.
Rise, now, or soon he will be food for dogs
within the Trojan walls, and I should fear
not even you might recognize him then.” 180

In turn, Achilles spoke a swift reply:
“Who sent you, Iris? What divinity?”
And just as swift, then, Iris answered him:
“Queen Hera, wife of Zeus, although the son
of Cronus knows not of this embassy,
nor any other god who sits on high.” 185
And, ever-nimble, on Achilles went:
“But how might I do battle, when my gear
is gone, and mother bids no armor wrap
about my shoulder till she has returned
and brings the work Hephaestus hammers out?
And even then, how could I disobey?
I know no armor glorious enough
to wear, unless it were Ajax’s shield,
and that he holds himself against the charge
of Trojans mad to bear Patroclus off.”

But Iris, just as nimble, compromised:
“Quite so, you are unarmored, nonetheless
march forward and present yourself to both
the Trojans, to send panic through their rank,
and to Achaeans, that they breathe again
with valor, and have fire on their tongues.”

So when she left him there, Achilles rose
and down Athena came to hang the shield
of Zeus about his shoulders, as a cloud
of golden thunder flashed behind his head,
and crowned him with the halo of the Sky.
As when a signal fire blazes up
above a sturdy citadel besieged,
surrounded on all sides with countless men
who battle till the night comes creeping on,
a flair, which calls to allies near to them
that they might aid them with the enemy:
so from the crown of swift Achilles’ head
the light shot up, and promised victory.

Down from the walls he started, striding long
through ranks of soldiers, speaking not a word,
until, in silence, at the edge of war
he stopped, and fierce Athena filled his lungs.
He roared.

As trumpets ring to mark the fall
of citadels before the conqueror,
he roared. And heaven parted with his cry.
So, hearing him, Achaeans cheered aloud,
but Trojan forces shook, as horses bucked
and dread ensnared the riders when the saw
the never-ending flame come creeping near
atop the awesome son of Peleus—
the very crown Athena kindled there.
Thrice, then, war-bent Achilles bellowed long,
and thrice the Trojan ranks were overwhelmed,
a dozen of their best died shamefully,
thrown from their chariots and trampled down.
Meanwhile, Achaeans reached Patroclus’ corpse
and pulled him from the clamor of the field,
they bore him on a litter, and about
the body his compatriots came round
to mourn. Achilles, drawing close at last,
wept tears to see his dearest friend once more,
though lifeless, torn with bronze and black with filth—
the man he sent that morning into war,
to die, and never journey home again.
Now, ox-eyed Hera drove the sun below
the Ocean, to the bowels of the deep,
and when it sank Achaeans halted from
their fury, and let fighting cease till day.
Across from them, the Trojan ranks fell back,
and loosed their horses from the chariots,
but none could stomach any thought of food
nor wine nor rest—no man could be at ease
now that Achilles had returned to war.

So then, amidst the huddled masses, hunched
and trembling, wise Polydamas rose—
the friend of Hector, born the selfsame day,
more skilled in speech, but weaker with the spear—
now spoke to them, and comforted the ranks:
“Take heed, my friends, and let us journey back
within the walls of Troy until the dawn:
it is not wise to tarry so far out.
For while this man was absent from the war
we could contend with any in their rank,
those days I would sleep close beside the ships,
impatient to attack the morrow morn:
but now, I dread the thought of facing him. This man—this prodigy of violence—will not be held by ships or kept on plains. No, now that he returns we can but hope to keep our home and wives and children safe. Come now, believe me, this shall come to pass, since night delays him only for a time, and if he catches us when Dawn arrives and rushes through our ranks with vicious steel you will be lucky then, if you escape and see the walls of Ilium again: the hounds will eat their fill. But none of that! Come round and listen to what I propose: pull back to gather in the marketplace, now, let the walls and gateways of our home defend us through the perils of the night. Tomorrow, we will hold the battlements and have Achilles fight where we are strong. Let him race round our city with his steeds and drive them weary, so he must return. For though the man is great he will not breach our sacred walls, and when his strength runs out at last the hounds will feast upon his flesh.” But, looking grimly, Hector spoke reply: “However, Polydamas, could you think to tell these men to quiver in their homes and be constrained within, like prisoners? There was a time when mortal men revered our city for its wealth and prominence, now all the treasures we had piled high are gone, sold off to Phrygia and lush Maionia, as Zeus was furious. But now, when he shows favor to us, pins Achaeans by their ships, and brings me fame, you would have us retreat and run away? I will not have it! None shall follow you. So come then, and submit to my command: first, let each man take supper by the camps, remembering to keep a careful watch, then, as for those concerned about their wealth
let them divide it with the destitute:
far better it be shared among our own
than with Achaeans. And when Dawn arrives
we will set out and serve the god of war.
If it is true that great Achilles stirs,
then worse for him, for I will never flee.
So, on the battlefield we will contend
for glory, and who knows who may prevail:
the war god is impartial in these things.”
So Hector spoke, and all the Trojans cheered.
The fools! Athena robbed them of their wits.
So, captivated with a wicked plan,
the Trojans shunned more sensible advice,
and while they took their supper in the camps,
Achaean soldiers mourned Patroclus’ loss.
Achilles led their misery and laid
his lethal hands upon his friend in grief.

Just as a mountain lion grieves to find
some hunter killed his cubs while he was gone
and is distraught to have returned too late
but then lets fury rise in sorrow’s place
and hunts the man with never ending rage—
so now Achilles spoke out, groaning deep:
“Ah me! My word was empty on that day
I spoke assurance to Menoitios:
I said I would return his son again
with spoils from the height of Ilium!
But Zeus cares not for mortals and their plans,
it seems that we were doomed to perish here.
No more will I be welcomed in my home
by father or by mother, when I die
the earth of Troy alone will welcome me.
So, as I shall not linger far behind,
Patroclus, I will wait to bury you,
till Hector’s severed head adorns your tomb.
Distraught before your pyre, I shall slay
a dozen children caught from holy Troy.
Until then you shall lie beside my ships
and by you female slaves from Ilium
will spill their tears upon you day and night—
those very women we once toiled for
and captured, storming sturdy citadels.”
With this, Achilles bid his comrades set
a cauldron on the fire, that they might
remove the grime of battle from the corpse.
So then, they set it down, poured water in,
and gathered firewood for kindling,
and soon the cauldron reached a raging boil.
Then servants washed the body clean of filth,
anointed it with oil, closed the wounds
with precious salves, and laid the body out
upon a bed, and fetched a linen cloth
that shrouded him in white from head to foot.
And all night long the Myrmidons cried out,
Achilles, at their center, driving them.
Meanwhile, Zeus spoke to his wedded wife:
“So you have done it, Hera, queen of gods:
you drove Achilles back into the war.
Are the Achaean men so dear to you?”

But cow-eyed Hera made her sly response:
“Your majesty, what do you mean by this?
All mortal men will seek to have their way,
although they lack our wisdom and our strength.
So I, who claim to be the very best
of goddesses, for I am both your wife
and sister—you who are the strongest god—
how could I not bring pain to those I hate?”
And as they spoke, at last, fair Thetis came
to stand within the godly Blacksmith’s forge:
a thing immortal, starry like the sky
with bronze the crippled Craftsman wrought himself.
She found him sweating by the furnaces,
hunched over twenty tripods, still at work,
intending them to decorate his forge.
And underneath he fashioned golden wheels
so that the things might move as he should please
between his house and forge—what majesty!
Each one was almost finished, he had but
to place elaborate handles on the base:
just now, he had been hammering them out.

As Thetis came, fair Charis spotted her,
the wife of strong Hephaestus, and she spoke
holding the sea-nymph’s hand within her own:
“Sweet Thetis, what might bring you to our home?
We love you dearly, still you do not come
so frequently. No matter! First, come in.”
She spoke, and shimmering, she led the way
and sat down Thetis in a splendid chair
complete with silver nails and a footstool.
Then, calling to Hephaestus, she began:
“Hephaestus, Thetis comes to visit you!”
And hearing this, the Craftsman answered her:
“What news! To have a goddess in our house,
and not just any, but the very one
who saved me when I fell off from the heights
of mount Olympus, by my mother’s hand,
who wished to hide me, cripple that I am.
What suffering was fated as my lot
had not Eurynome and Thetis come
to catch me, saving me from certain doom.
Nine years I worked my craft below the sea,
within the hollow caves which Ocean wrapped
about, surrounding it with salt and foam.
None knew of me, save for the two alone,
my saviors, Thetis and Eurynome.

So then, now that she comes to my abode,
I would do anything as recompense—
attend her, while I put away my things,
then we shall ask her why she visits us.”
He spoke, and limped about returning tools,
his leg moved well, although it left him lame.
He moved the bellows from the fireplace,
and placed his implements within a box.
Then with a sponge he wiped his forehead clean,
and washed his hands and neck and hairy chest,
picked up a tunic and a walking stick
to hobble to the door, while under him
automatons rushed round, supporting him.
They looked like women, though they were of gold, intelligent, and capable of speech—the gods themselves had taught them many things. Now then, they followed where their master went as strong Hephaestus reached the splendid chair where Thetis sat, and took her hand to speak: “Fair Thetis, what might bring you to our home? We love you dearly, still you do not come to us so frequently—what troubles you? Speak, so that I may aid you, if I can.” And pouring tears, fair Thetis answered him: “Hephaestus, does some other goddess bear a weight of sorrow half so much as I am given by the will of father Zeus? Of all my sister nymphs, against my will, he gave me to a mortal, Peleus, who now declines in sorrowful old age, while I attend to further misery. For I have bore a famous son by him, who sprouted tall and broad when he was young: my darling tree, whom I attended on. But on the crook-beak ships I sent him off to Ilium, and never will he come again within the halls of Peleus. So now, although I see him yet alive, his heart cries out, and I am powerless. The girl Achaeans gave him for his work was taken—Agamemnon stole her off. His heart was ruined for this, and meanwhile the Trojans pinned Achaeans by their ships and gave no ground, so thus the Argive men hoped to win back my son with lavish gifts. But he would not be swayed to fight again: still, though, he let Patroclus wear his gear in battle, and sent men to fight with him. All day they clashed beside the Skaaean gates, and would that lord Apollo had not come to strike Patroclus down and give the fame he won himself to Hector with his death. So now, I take your knees, that you might make
a helmet and a shield for my poor son
and shining greaves to clad his ankles, too,
a breastplate, also, for his own was lost
when Trojans killed his friend and brought him grief.”
To this, Hephaestus gave a swift reply:
“Fear not, what you have asked, I will complete.
Oh, would that I could sweep him up from death
and sorrow, when his fate comes over him!
Instead, I will forge armor for the man,
as never has been seen or will be hence.”
With this he left, and picked the bellows up
and gave them orders, turning to the fire—
like magic, twenty blew the crucibles
from all directions, nourishing the flames,
and as he bustled on about the forge,
they followed him, and blew where he should wish.
Then in the forge he settled bronze and tin
and gold and silver, while, in perfect time,
he set the anvil and raised in one hand
the hammer, while his other gripped the tongs.
First then he forged a great and mighty shield
of silver, with a triple rim around,
that gleamed and glittered by the fireside.
Five folds made up the shield itself and on
its surface he carved intricate designs.
He made the earth, the sea, the sky above,
the rising sun beside the waxing moon,
and all the constellations in between:
the Pleiades, Orion, Hyades,
and Bear, who men describe as Wagon, too,
which turns in place beside the other stars
and never sinks into the Ocean’s depth.
Therein he set two cities filled with men,
in one were marriages and festivals,
where brides walked from their chambers, led along
by men with torches, singing bridal songs.
The men were dancing and musicians played
at flutes and lyres, while the women watched.
And in the marketplace a crowd was thronged:
a quarrel broke, two men were arguing
about the blood price for a murdered friend.
One promised payment for the great offense,
but still, the other man would not accept.
So then, they sought a third to arbitrate,
and people clamored, taking either side.
But heralds came along with staves held up
aloft, to quiet them, as elders sat
at council, in a sacred gathering.
The two men went in turn to plead their case
and in between them lay two talents gold
for he who judged their argument most fair.

But in the other city, armies camped
in shining armor: one sat counseling
perplexed whether to siege the citadel
or sue for peace and reach some armistice.
But in the city, ambush had been laid:
the wives and children manned the battlements
beside the elders, while the rest set out—
Athena and fierce Ares guided them.
These two were gold, with golden garments each,
magnificent and massive, being gods,
they stood, while tiny mortals dotted round.
Those mortals, then, were hid beneath the streams,
where wild animals bent down to drink,
and lay in wait to fight the enemy.
Apart from them, two scouts sat keeping watch
to signal when they saw the sheep approach,
and when they came, the shepherds leading them
thought nothing, playing songs on happy pipes.
The scouts were swift, once seeing them, to move
cut off the shining flock of wooly sheep
and kill the herdsman who were guiding them.
The other army, sensing the unrest
abandoned council and prepared for fight,
soon, then, they rode upon them by the banks.
There battle spread about on every side
and spears flew by between the ranks of men
while Hate and Panic drove them each to Death:
the first of which—that dreadful goddess—stood in bloody garb, and held a wounded man, a corpse, and yet another still unscathed. Around her countless brazen figures clashed and fell, as fierce as though they were alive.

Then next he carved a fertile, luscious field, thrice-ploughed, with many workers tending it who wheeled their teams across in every way. And at the farmlands edge, where they would pause a man held up a flask of honey-wine for them to drink, so that they sped along one way and back, to take another sip. The earth, though gold, was darker at the spots they plowed—so intricate was the design.

And then he carved a king’s estate on which were workers, reaping grain upon the fields. They bound the crop in bundles, as some spilled across the land, and tumbled on the ground. Three stood with scythes, behind which children went collecting what had fallen in their arms to carry it away. The king looked on in silence, beaming bright, with staff in hand. Apart from them, and shaded by the trees a herald trimmed an ox to cook a feast, as women gave the workers loaves of bread.

And then he carved a vineyard, rich with grapes, which shimmered in a darker shade of gold on vines he cast with silver spindling. Around them was a ditch of ruddy bronze, a fence of tin, with but one path that ran into the orchard, on which people walked: young men and women, blithe, all frolicking, with woven baskets for the grapes they picked, among which one man strummed a golden lyre and sang the songs of Linos longingly. Behind him, all the others followed suit and longed to join him in the merriment.
And then he carved a herd of oxen, gold and tin, wrought side by side within a throng. They sped from fertile farms to pasturelands beside a river and a bed of reeds. The herdsman by their side were also gold, four of them, with nine hounds for company. But at the front, two lions had arrived that caught a bull, which cried in agony, and dragged it back, as dogs and men pursued. These lions, tearing at the might beast, feasted upon its flesh with fearsome bites. And though the shepherds set the hounds on them, the dogs turned tail as soon as they were close, and, keeping clear, they howled frantically.

And then he carved a meadow, lush and rich, within a valley, plentiful with sheep in pens, by rural houses and abodes.

And then he carved a lovely dancing ground as that which Daedalus constructed once at Knossos, to make Ariadne glad. Young men wooed women there, and offered gifts of oxen, while some pairs got up to dance. The girls wore dresses, boys had tunics on of splendid fabric, touched with olive oil. And garlands crowned the women, while the men bore golden knives they sheathed in silver belts. Together, they spun splendid in the field, as when a gifted potter crouches down and spins his wheel to smooth the lump of clay. They danced in rows, and passed each other by, around them, on the outskirts, looking on a crowd had formed, content to merely watch the dancers and the pair that led the song.

And then at last the river Ocean ran around the shield, enfolding everything.
When he had finished with the shield at last he hammered out a breastplate, bright as flame, a helmet, massive in its wide expanse, yet intricate, with gold ridged over it, then out of tin he wrought a pair of greaves. So thus, when all the armor lay complete, he set it down for Thetis and was done. And, like a hawk, the goddess darted down to give her son the godly panoply.