

ILIAD

BOOK 1

RAGE:

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

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

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

10

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

Chryses
 Had come to the Greek beachhead camp

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

20

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

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

30

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

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

40

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

50

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

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

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

60

"Well, Agamemnon, it looks as if we'd better give up
And sail home—assuming any of us are left alive—

If we have to fight both the war and this plague.
But why not consult some prophet or priest
Or a dream interpreter, since dreams too come from Zeus, 70
Who could tell us why Apollo is so angry,
If it's for a vow or a sacrifice he holds us at fault.
Maybe he'd be willing to lift this plague from us
If he savored the smoke from lambs and prime goats."

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

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

Achilles, the great runner, responded: 90

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

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

And Calchas, the perfect prophet, taking courage:

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

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

"You damn soothsayer!

You've never given me a good omen yet.
You take some kind of perverse pleasure in prophesying
Doom, don't you? Not a single favorable omen ever!
Nothing good ever happens! And now you stand here
Uttering oracles before the Greeks, telling us
That your great ballistic god is giving us all this trouble
Because I was unwilling to accept the ransom
For Chryses' daughter but preferred instead to keep her

In my tent! And why shouldn't I? I like her better than
My wife Clytemnestra. She's no worse than her
When it comes to looks, body, mind, or ability.
Still, I'll give her back, if that's what's best.
I don't want to see the army destroyed like this.
But I want another prize ready for me right away.
I'm not going to be the only Greek without a prize,
It wouldn't be right. And you all see where mine is going."

120

And Achilles, strong, swift, and godlike:

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

130

The warlord Agamemnon responded:

"You may be a good man in a fight, Achilles,
And look like a god, but don't try to put one over on me—
It won't work. So while you have your prize,
You want me to sit tight and do without?
Give the girl back, just like that? Now maybe
If the army, in a generous spirit, voted me
Some suitable prize of their own choice, something fair-

140

But if it doesn't, I'll just go take something myself,
 Your prize perhaps, or Ajax's, or Odysseus',
 And whoever she belongs to, it'll stick in his throat.

But we can think about that later.

Right now we launch

150

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

"You shameless, profiteering excuse for a commander!

How are you going to get any Greek warrior

To follow you into battle again? You know,

160

I don't have any quarrel with the Trojans,

They didn't do anything to *me* to make me

Come over here and fight, didn't run off *my* cattle or horses

Or ruin *my* farmland back home in Phthia, not with all

The shadowy mountains and moaning seas between.

It's for *you*, dogface, for your precious pleasure—

And Menelaus' honor—that we came here,

A fact you don't have the decency even to mention!

And now you're threatening to take away the prize

That I sweated for and the Greeks gave me.

170

I never get a prize equal to yours when the army

Captures one of the Trojan strongholds.

No, I do all the dirty work with my own hands,

And when the battle's over and we divide the loot
 You get the lion's share and I go back to the ships
 With some pitiful little thing, so worn out from fighting
 I don't have the strength left even to complain.
 Well, I'm going back to Phthia now. Far better
 To head home with my curved ships than stay here,
 Unhonored myself and piling up a fortune for you."

180

The warlord Agamemnon responded:

"Go ahead and desert, if that's what you want!
 I'm not going to beg you to stay. There are plenty of others
 Who will honor me, not least of all Zeus the Counselor.
 To me, you're the most hateful king under heaven,
 A born troublemaker. You actually *like* fighting and war.
 If you're all that strong, it's just a gift from some god.
 So why don't you go home with your ships and lord it over
 Your precious Myrmidons. I couldn't care less about you
 Or your famous temper. But I'll tell you this:

190

Since Phoebus Apollo is taking away my Chryseis,
 Whom I'm sending back aboard ship with my friends,
 I'm coming to your hut and taking Briseis,
 Your own beautiful prize, so that you will see just how much
 Stronger I am than you, and the next person will wince
 At the thought of opposing me as an equal."

Achilles' chest was a rough knot of pain
 Twisting around his heart: should he
 Draw the sharp sword that hung by his thigh,
 Scatter the ranks and gut Agamemnon,

200

Or control his temper, repress his rage?
He was mulling it over, inching the great sword
From its sheath, when out of the blue
Athena came, sent by the white-armed goddess
Hera, who loved and watched over both men.
She stood behind Achilles and grabbed his sandy hair,
Visible only to him: not another soul saw her.
Awestruck, Achilles turned around, recognizing
Pallas Athena at once—it was her eyes—
And words flew from his mouth like winging birds:

210

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

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

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

220

Achilles, the great runner, responded:

"When you two speak, Goddess, a man has to listen

No matter how angry. It's better that way.
Obey the gods and they hear you when you pray."

With that he ground his heavy hand
Onto the silver hilt and pushed the great sword
Back into its sheath. Athena's speech
Had been well-timed. She was on her way
To Olympus by now, to the halls of Zeus
And the other immortals, while Achilles
Tore into Agamemnon again:

230

"You bloated drunk,
With a dog's eyes and a rabbit's heart!
You've never had the guts to buckle on armor in battle
Or come out with the best fighting Greeks
On any campaign! Afraid to look Death in the eye,
Agamemnon? It's far more profitable
To hang back in the army's rear—isn't it?—
Confiscating prizes from any Greek who talks back
And bleeding your people dry. There's not a real man
Under your command, or this latest atrocity
Would be your last, son of Atreus.
Now get this straight. I swear a formal oath:
By this scepter, which will never sprout leaf
Or branch again since it was cut from its stock
In the mountains, which will bloom no more
Now that bronze has pared off leaf and bark,
And which now the sons of the Greeks hold in their hands
At council, upholding Zeus' laws—

240

250

By this scepter I swear:

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

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

260

Opposite him, Agamemnon fumed.

Then Nestor

Stood up, sweet-worded Nestor, the orator from Pylos
With a voice high-toned and liquid as honey.
He had seen two generations of men pass away
In sandy Pylos and was now king in the third.
He was full of good will in the speech he made:

"It's a sad day for Greece, a sad day
Priam and Priam's sons would be happy indeed,
And the rest of the Trojans too, glad in their hearts,
If they learned all this about you two fighting,
Our two best men in council and in battle.
Now you listen to me, both of you. You are both
Younger than I am, and I've associated with men
Better than you, and they didn't treat me lightly.
I've never seen men like those, and never will,
The likes of Peirithous and Dryas, a shepherd to his people,
Caineus and Exadius and godlike Polyphemus,
And Aegeus' son, Theseus, who could have passed for a god,
The strongest men who ever lived on earth, the strongest,

270

280

And they fought with the strongest, with wild things
From the mountains, and beat the daylights out of them.
I was their companion, although I came from Pylos,
From the ends of the earth—they sent for me themselves.
And I held my own fighting with them. You couldn't find
A mortal on earth who could fight with them now.
And when I talked in council, they took my advice.
So should you two now: taking advice is a good thing.

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

290

And Agamemnon, the warlord:

"Yes, old man, everything you've said is absolutely right.
But this man wants to be ahead of everyone else,
He wants to rule everyone, give orders to everyone,
Lord it over everyone, and he's not going to get away with it.
If the gods eternal made him a spearman, does that mean
They gave him permission to be insolent as well?"

300

And Achilles, breaking in on him:

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

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

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

That was the order of the day. But Agamemnon
Did not forget his spiteful threat against Achilles.

He summoned Talthybius and Eurybates,
Faithful retainers who served as his heralds:

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

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

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

Patroclus,

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

Thus Achilles.

Patroclus obeyed his beloved friend

And brought Briseis, cheeks flushed, out of the tent
And gave her to the heralds, who led her away.
She went unwillingly.

360

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

"Mother, since you bore me for a short life only,
Olympian Zeus was supposed to grant me honor.
Well, he hasn't given me any at all. Agamemnon
Has taken away my prize and dishonored me."

370

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

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

And Achilles, with a deep groan:

"You already know. Why do I have to tell you?
We went after Thebes, Eëtion's sacred town,
Sacked it and brought the plunder back here.
The army divided everything up and chose
For Agamemnon fair-cheeked Chryseis.

380

Then her father, Chryses, a priest of Apollo,
Came to our army's ships on the beachhead,
Hauling a fortune for his daughter's ransom.
He displayed Apollo's sacral ribbons
On a golden staff and made a formal plea
To the entire Greek army, but especially
The commanders, Atreus' two sons.

390

You could hear the troops murmuring,
'Respect the priest and take the ransom.'
But Agamemnon wouldn't hear of it
And dismissed Chryses with a rough speech.
The old man went back angry, and Apollo
Heard his beloved priest's prayer.

He hit the Greeks hard, and the troops
Were falling over dead, the god's arrows
Raining down all through the Greek camp.

400

A prophet told us the Arch-Destroyer's will,
And I demanded the god be appeased.
Agamemnon got angry, stood up
And threatened me, and made good his threat.
The high command sent the girl on a fast ship
Back to Chryse with gifts for Apollo,
And heralds led away my girl, Briseis,
Whom the army had given to me.
Now you have to help me, if you can.

Go to Olympus

And call in the debt that Zeus owes you.
I remember often hearing you tell
In my father's house how you alone managed,
Of all the immortals, to save Zeus' neck

410

When the other Olympians wanted to bind him—
Hera and Poseidon and Pallas Athena.

You came and loosened him from his chains,
And you lured to Olympus' summit the giant
With a hundred hands whom the gods call
Briareus but men call Aegaeon, stronger
Even than his own father Uranus, and he
Sat hulking in front of cloud-black Zeus,
Proud of his prowess, and scared all the gods
Who were trying to put the son of Cronus in chains.

420

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

430

And Thetis, now weeping herself:

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

440

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

450

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

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

460

"Chryses, King Agamemnon has sent me here

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

470

Chryses received his daughter tenderly.

Moving quickly, they lined the hundred oxen
Round the massive altar, a glorious offering,
Washed their hands and sprinkled on the victims
Sacrificial barley. On behalf of the Greeks
Chryses lifted his hands and prayed aloud:

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

480

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

Thus the old priest, and Apollo heard him.

After the prayers and the strewing of barley
They slaughtered and flayed the oxen,
Jointed the thighbones and wrapped them
In a layer of fat with cuts of meat on top.
The old man roasted them over charcoal
And doused them with wine. Younger men
Stood by with five-tined forks in their hands.

490

When the thigh pieces were charred and they had
Tasted the tripe, they cut the rest into strips,
Skewered it on spits and roasted it skillfully.
When they were done and the feast was ready,
Feast they did, and no one lacked an equal share.
When they had all had enough to eat and drink,
The young men topped off mixing bowls with wine
And served it in goblets to all the guests.
All day long these young Greeks propitiated
The god with dancing, singing to Apollo
A paean as they danced, and the god was pleased.
When the sun went down and darkness came on,
They went to sleep by the ship's stern-cables.

500

Dawn came early, a palmetto of rose,
Time to make sail for the wide beachhead camp.
They set up mast and spread the white canvas,
And the following wind, sent by Apollo,
Boomed in the mainsail. An indigo wave
Hissed off the bow as the ship surged on,
Leaving a wake as she held on course through the billows.

510

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

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

His great heart yearning for the battle cry and war.

520

Twelve days went by. Dawn.

The gods returned to Olympus,

Zeus at their head.

Thetis did not forget

Her son's requests. She rose from the sea

And up through the air to the great sky

And found Cronus' wide-seeing son

Sitting in isolation on the highest peak

Of the rugged Olympic massif.

She settled beside him, and touched his knees

530

With her left hand, his beard with her right,

And made her plea to the Lord of Sky:

"Father Zeus, if I have ever helped you

In word or deed among the immortals,

Grant me this prayer:

Honor my son, doomed to die young

And yet dishonored by King Agamemnon,

Who stole his prize, a personal affront.

Do justice by him, Lord of Olympus.

Give the Trojans the upper hand until the Greeks

540

Grant my son the honor he deserves."

Zeus made no reply but sat a long time

In silence, clouds scudding around him.

Thetis held fast to his knees and asked again:

"Give me a clear yes or no. Either nod in assent

Or refuse me. Why should you care if I know
How negligible a goddess I am in your eyes."

This provoked a troubled, gloomy response:

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

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

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

But Hera

Had noticed his private conversation with Thetis,

The silver-footed daughter of the Old Man of the Sea,
And flew at him with cutting words:

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

The Father of Gods and Men answered:

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

580

And Lady Hera, with her oxen eyes wide:

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

590

And Zeus, the master of cloud and storm:

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

600

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

"This is terrible; it's going to ruin us all.
 If you two quarrel like this over mortals
 It's bound to affect us gods. There'll be no more
 Pleasure in our feasts if we let things turn ugly.
 Mother, please, I don't have to tell you,
 You have to be pleasant to our father Zeus
 So he won't be angry and ruin our feast.
 If the Lord of Lightning wants to blast us from our seats,
 He can—that's how much stronger he is.
 So apologize to him with silken-soft words,
 And the Olympian in turn will be gracious to us."

610

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

"I know it's hard, mother, but you have to endure it.

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

620

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

630

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

640

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

Book 2

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

10

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

The Dream listened and went. Shadows flew
Around the Greek ships. It found Agamemnon
Wrapped in deep, starlit slumber.
The Dream stood above his head. It looked

20

Like Nestor, the old man that Agamemnon
Respected the most, looked just like Nestor,
And this dream that was a god addressed the king:

"Asleep, son of Atreus, horsebreaker,
Wise man? You can't sleep all night.
All those decisions to make, so many people
Depending on you. I'll be brief. 30
I am a messenger from Zeus, who is
Far away, but loves you and pities you.
He orders you to arm your long-haired Greeks.
Now is your time to capture Troy
The Olympian gods are no longer divided;
Hera has bent them all to her will
And targeted Troy for sorrow from Zeus.
Think it over. Keep your wits about you,
And don't forget this when sleep slips away."

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

As he walked through the ships of the bronze-kilted Greeks.

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

Agamemnon ordered the heralds
To call the Greeks to assembly.
The call went out, and the people gathered.
Agamemnon seated the elders first
By Nestor's ship and unfolded his plan:

"Listen, my friends. A dream from Zeus
Came to me last night in my sleep. It looked
Just like Nestor, same face, same build,
And it stood above my head and spoke:
'Asleep, son of Atreus, horsebreaker,
Wise man? You can't sleep all night.
All those decisions to make, so many people
Depending on you. I'll be brief.

I am a messenger from Zeus, who is
Far away, but loves you and pities you.
He orders you to arm your long-haired Greeks.

Now is your time to capture Troy.
The Olympian gods are no longer divided;
Hera has bent them all to her will
And targeted Troy for sorrow from Zeus.
Think it over.' The dream said all this
And off it flew, and I awoke from a sweet sleep.
We'd better move if we're going to get the men in armor.
But I'm going to test them first with a little speech,

The usual drill—order them to beat a retreat in their ships.
It's up to each one of you to persuade them to stay."

80

He had his say and sat down. Then up rose
Nestor, king of sandswept Pylos.
He was full of good will in the speech he made:

"Friends, Argive councillors and commanders:
If any other Greek told us this dream
We would call it a lie and turn our backs on him.
But this is a man with a claim to be
The best of the Greeks. We'd better move
If we're going to get them in armor."

And he headed out. The other commanders stood up,
Convinced he was right.

90

The troops were moving now,

*Swarming like insects over the beach, like bees
That hum from a hollow rock in an endless line
And fly in clusters over flowers in spring,
Grouping themselves in aerial throngs.*

The Greeks made like that as they swarmed
Out of the ships and the huts clutched beneath them,
Filing through the deep sand into assembly,
Swept along by Zeus' emissary,
Wildfire Rumor. They milled about
In the assembly ground, and the earth
Groaned as the unruly crowd eased itself down,

100

And nine bawling heralds tried to stop their shouting
 And get them to listen to their Zeus-spawned kings.
 They settled down finally and kept their seats
 And stopped all the noise.

Up stood Lord Agamemnon,
 Holding a staff.

Hephaestus had crafted this staff 110
 And Hephaestus had given it to Cronion Zeus.
 Zeus in turn gave it to quicksilver Hermes
 And Hermes to Pelops, the charioteer.
 Pelops handed it on to Atreus,
 And when Atreus died he left it to Thyestes.
 Thyestes left it for Agamemnon to bear
 And rule over the islands and all of Argos.
 Leaning on it now he addressed the Greeks:

"Danaan heroes and soldiers,
 Zeus 120

Is a hard god, friends. He's kept me in the dark
 After all his promises and nods my way
 That I'd raze Ilion's walls before sailing home.
 It was all a lie, and I see now that his orders
 Are for me to return to Argos in disgrace,
 And this after all the armies I've destroyed.
 I have no doubt that this is the high will
 Of the god who has toppled so many cities
 And will in the future, all glory to his power.
 But it will be shame for generations to come, 130
 That such a large and powerful army of Greeks

Has fought this futile war against a few puny men.
There is no end in sight, nor has there ever been.
Look, if the Greeks and the Trojans
Agreed to a truce, and both sides counted off—
All of the Trojans who live in the city
And all of the Greeks—and if we Greeks formed up
In platoons of ten, and each platoon picked a Trojan
To pour our wine, there would be many platoons
With no one to pour. That's how much our Greek forces 140
Outnumber the Trojans who live in the city.
It's their allies, reinforcements from other cities,
Who keep hitting me hard and won't let me capture
Ilion's serried fortress no matter how hard I try.
Nine years of great Zeus have passed.
Our ships' timbers are rotten and their tackle loose.
Our wives and little children are no doubt
Sitting at home waiting for us. And here we are,
The job that we came to do unfinished.
Now this is what I say, and I want us all to obey: 150
Let's clear out with our ships and head for home.
There's no more hope we will take Troy's tall town."

This speech roused the spirits of the rank and file,
The masses who had not been in on the council.

The army started to move on the shore.

*Long waves form
On the Icarian Sea when winds East and South
Explode from the clouds of patriarch Zeus;*

*Or the West Wind rapes afield of deep wheat,
Rippling and tassling the ears as it blows.*

160

So too these troop lines.

Then the shouting began,
And the mad rush to the ships, dust rising
In plumes from their feet as confused yells—
To fasten boathooks, clear out launchways
And drag the ships down to the shining sea—
Rose to the sky. They were going home.

They had already begun to remove the chocks
From under the hulls, and there might have been
An unordained homecoming then for the Greeks
If Hera had not had a word with Athena:

170

"This is awful. Child of Zeus, Mystic Daughter
Of the Aegis-Holder, are we going to allow
The Greeks to go home just like that, rim away
To their own country over the sea's broad back?
They're just going to hand Priam and the Trojans
The glory, not to mention Helen of Argos,
For whose sake many a Greek has perished in Troy,
Far from his homeland. Go down there now
Along the ranks of the bronze-shirted Greeks,
And with your mild words restrain each man.
Don't let them haul their curved prows to the sea."

180

And Athena streaked down from Olympus' crags,
Her eyes like owls', grey in the blue air,

And came quickly to the ships in the beachhead camp.
She found Odysseus there, his mind like Zeus' own,
Standing in thought. He had not laid a hand
On his benched, black ship, and his heart was heavy.

The owl-eyed goddess stood close to him and said:

"Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus, wily Odysseus,
Are you Greeks going to run away just like that,
Home to your fatherland over the sea's broad back?
Are you just going to hand Priam and the Trojans
The glory, not to mention Helen of Argos,
For whose sake many a Greek has perished in Troy,
Far from his homeland? Now go down along
All the ships of the bronze-shirted Greeks,
And with your mild words restrain each man.
Don't let them haul their curved prows to the sea."

190

Odysseus knew that voice, and he set off at a run,
Throwing his cloak behind him—Eurybates
The herald, his man from Ithaca, gathered it up—
And he went up to Agamemnon and got from him
His ancestral staff, that splinter of eternity,
And with it went along the ships of the Greeks.
Whenever he encountered a chieftain or the like,
He tried to restrain him with gentle words:

200

"What's gotten into you? I don't mean to frighten you
As if you were a coward, but sit down here yourself
And make your men sit down. You don't really know

210

Agamemnon's mind. He's just testing us now,
 But before long he's going to come down on us hard.
 Didn't we all hear what he said in council?
 If he gets angry the whole army had better watch out.
 Kings are bred by Zeus and have tempers to match."

But if he caught any of the ordinary soldiers yelling,
 He would belt him with the staff and bawl him out:

"You there, who do you think you are? Sit still
 And listen to your betters. You're a weakling,
 Unfit for combat, a nothing in battle and in council. 220
 Do you think every Greek here can be a king?
 It's no good having a carload of commanders. We need
 One commander, one king, the one to whom Zeus,
 Son of Cronus the crooked, has given the staff
 And the right to make decisions for his people."

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

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

They had all dropped to the sand and were sitting there,
 Except for one man, Thersites, a blathering fool
 And a rabble rouser. This man had a repertory
 Of choice insults he used at random to revile the nobles,
 Saying anything he thought the soldiers would laugh at.

He was also the ugliest soldier at the siege of Troy,
Bowlegged, walked with a limp, his shoulders
Slumped over his caved-in chest, and up top
Scraggly fuzz sprouted on his pointy head.

Achilles especially hated him, as did Odysseus,
Because he was always provoking them. Now
He was screaming abuse at Agamemnon.

The Achaeans were angry with him and indignant,
But that didn't stop him from razzing the warlord:

"What's wrong, son of Atreus, something you need?
Your huts are filled with bronze, and with women
We Achaeans pick out and give to you first of all
Whenever we take some town. Are you short of gold?
Maybe some Trojan horse breeder will bring you some
Out of Ilion as ransom for his son

Whom I or some other Achaean has captured.
Maybe it's a young girl for you to make love to
And keep off somewhere for yourself. It's not right
For a leader to march our troops into trouble.
You Achaeans are a disgrace, Achaean women, not men!
Let's sail home in our ships and leave him here
To stew over his prizes so he'll have a chance to see
Whether he needs our help or not. Furthermore,
He dishonored Achilles, who's a much better man.
Achilles doesn't have an angry bone in his body,
Or this latest atrocity would be your last, son of Atreus!"

That was the abuse Agamemnon took
From the mouth of Thersites. Odysseus

Was on him in a flash, staring him down
 With a scowl, and laid into him:

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

And with that he whaled the staff down
 On Thersites' back. The man crumpled in pain
 And tears flooded his eyes. A huge bloody welt
 Rose on his back under the gold stave's force,
 And he sat there astounded, drooling with pain 290
 And wiping away his tears. The troops, forgetting

Their disappointment, had a good laugh
At his expense, looking at each other and saying:

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

That's what they were saying in the ranks.

300

Then Odysseus, destroyer of cities, stood up
Holding the staff. Owl-eyed Athena transformed herself
Into a herald and silenced the troops
So that every last man in the Greek army
Would listen closely to what he had to say:

"Son of Atreus, the Greeks are out to make you,
My lord, the most despised man on earth,
And they have no intention of keeping the promise
They made to you when they set out from Argos—
Not to return until you pulled down Ilion's walls.
They are like little children or widow women,
The way they whine to each other about going home.
God knows it's hard enough to make a man give up
And go back. A man gets discouraged when he spends
Even one month away from his wife on his ship,
Battling winter winds and the surging sea.
For us, it's nine years we've been here now.

310

I can't blame our men for getting discouraged
As they wait beside their beaked ships. But still,
It would be a disgrace to go home empty-handed 320
After all this time. So bear up, friends,
And let's stay long enough to find out whether
Calchas has prophesied truly or not.
Everyone here—and I'm talking about all of us
Not carried off by the wings of death—remembers it.
It seems like just yesterday when the ships
Were mustered at Aulis with their cargo of sorrows
For Priam and the Trojans. We were gathered
Around a spring, offering sacrifice on sacred altars,
Perfect hecatombs, beneath a beautiful plane tree 330
From under which the shining water flowed.
Then we saw it: a serpent, its back blood-red,
Horrible—the Olympian himself
Must have brought it into the daylight.
It slithered out from the altar and up the plane tree.
A sparrow's fledglings were nested
On the topmost branch, eight little birds
Trembling under the leaves, or nine, counting
The mother who hatched them, and the serpent
Devoured them all as they cheeped pitifully. 340
The mother fluttered around, mourning her nestlings,
But he coiled and got her by the wing as she shrieked.
After he had eaten the sparrow and her young,
The very god who revealed him turned him to stone,
An unmistakable portent from Zeus, son of Cronus.
We stood there in awe of what had happened,
This prodigy that crept into our sacrifice.

Calchas was quick to pronounce its prophetic meaning:
'Why are you silent, all you long-haired Greeks?
This great portent is a message from Zeus,
Whose glory shall never die—a portent late in coming,
And late to be fulfilled. As this serpent devoured
The sparrow's children and the bird herself,
Eight hatchlings, nine, counting the mother,
So will we for as many years wage this war,
But in the tenth year we will capture the city.'
That was his prophecy, and it has all come true.
So let's have every Greek who ever strapped on armor
Stay put, until we capture Priam's great city!"

350

He finished. And the Greeks cheered, so loud
That the wooden hulls of the ships boomed
With their approval of godlike Odysseus' speech.

360

Then Nestor, the Gerenian rider, addressed them:

"Bah, you're carrying on like silly boys
Who have no business at all fighting a war.
What will become of our compacts and oaths?
Into the fire with our resolutions and plans,
The pure wine we poured out, the handclasps
We trusted in! We are wrangling with words now
And will not find thereby the ways or means
To stay the course for long.

370

Son of Atreus,
Assert yourself, and resume your command
Of the Greek forces in all their grueling battles.

To hell with those one or two Achaeans
With private plans—which will come to nothing—
To return to Argos before we know for sure
Whether Zeus' promise was a lie or not.
I say that the Aegis-Holder nodded his assent
On that day when the Argives came in their ships 380
With their cargo of carnage and death for the Trojans.
Lightning on the right, favorable signs revealed.
No man here should be in a hurry to go home
Until he has spent the night with some Trojan's wife
As revenge for Helen's struggles and groans.
But if anyone is so almighty eager
To go back home, let him touch his black ship—
So he can seal his fate before the whole army.
But now, my lord, be prudent and take the advice,
Hardly negligible, that I am about to give. 390
Divide the men by tribes and clans, Agamemnon,
So that clans and tribes can support each other.
If you do this and the army complies,
You will know which of your captains is a coward
And which is brave, and so too with the soldiers,
For they will fight as units. You will know too
Whether it is heaven's will that you not take the city
Or that your men are cowards and witless in war."

He spoke, and Lord Agamemnon answered:

"Once again, Nestor, the best speech of all.
Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, give me
Ten such counsellors, and Priam's city 400

Would lay her head in our lap, taken and ravaged.
But Zeus, son of Cronus, has given me grief,
Embroiding me in pointless quarrels.
Yes, Achilles and I argued over a girl,
And it was I who grew angry first.
If we two could agree, there would not be
The slightest postponement of evil for Troy.
But go eat now, so we can get this battle together. 410
Sharpen your spears and dress your shields,
Lay out fodder for your horses,
And inspect your chariots. We're going to war.
We're going to fight all day and hate every minute
Without any breaks until it's too dark to see.
It's going to be chests sweating under shield straps,
Hands sore from gripping spears, horses sweaty
From pulling us around in our polished cars.
And if I catch anyone even thinking about
Staying out of the fight back here with the ships, 420
The dogs and birds will have him by nightfall."

The cheer that followed this speech came on like a wave

*That pounds a high cliff, a wave swollen by wind
Against a jutting crag that is constantly worried
By wind-driven waves from every direction.*

The men stood up and scattered to their ships,
Made fires in their huts and took their meal.
And each made sacrifice to his favorite god,
Praying to escape from battle alive.

The warlord Agamemnon sacrificed a fat bull,
430
Five years old, to Cronus' almighty son,
And he summoned the elders, the best of the Achaeans,
Nestor first of all, and the warlord Idomeneus,
Then the two Ajaxes, and Tydeus' son, Diomedes,
And as the sixth, Odysseus, Zeus' match in wisdom.
Menelaus, the rallier, came on his own,
Knowing what his brother was up against.
They stood 'round the ox and took up the barley grains,
And the warlord Agamemnon led them in prayer:

"Zeus, most glorious, most great,
440
Dark Cloud that art in heaven,
May the sun not set nor darkness gather
Until I have cast Priam's roof beam
Smoldering to the ground, and burned
His doorways with consuming fire.
And may I tear Hector's heart out with bronze,
And may many of his comrades
Fall headlong around him,
Face down in the dust."

But Zeus would not grant his prayer,
450
Not yet. He accepted Agamemnon's sacrifice
But blew upon his woes and increased them.

After the prayers and the strewing of barley
They cut the ox's throat and flayed it,
Jointed the thighbones and wrapped them
In a layer of fat with cuts of meat on top.

These they roasted over split kindling wood.
When the thigh pieces were charred and they had
Tasted the tripe, they cut the rest into strips,
Skewered it on spits, and roasted it carefully. 460
When they were done and the feast was ready,
Feast they did, and no one lacked an equal share.
When they had eaten and drunk to their heart's content,
Nestor the Gerenian horseman spoke:

"Son of Atreus, my lord Agamemnon,
Let us remain gathered here no longer
Nor delay the work that the gods have given us.
Have the heralds of the bronze-armored Greeks
Make proclamation all through the ships
And muster the army. We will patrol camp 470
In a group, to waken Ares more quickly."

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

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

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

490

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

Likewise from the ships and huts, tribe after tribe
Poured out onto the Scamander's floodplain,
And the ground groaned and reverberated
Under their feet and the hooves of their horses.
And they stood in the flowering meadow there,
Countless as leaves, or as flowers in their season.

500

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

Likewise the throngs of long-haired Greeks

Who stood on the plain facing the Trojans,
Intent on hammering them to pieces.

510

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

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

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

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

520

Tell me now, Muses,
Who live on Olympus—for you are
Goddesses, and are present,
And know all things, while we
Hear only reports and know nothing—
Who were the Greek captains and lords?
The rank and file I could never name,
Not even if I had ten tongues, ten mouths,
A voice that never broke, and a bronze heart,
Unless the Olympian Muses, daughters
Of Zeus, called to my mind

530

All those who came under Ilion's walls.

Now I will call the roll of the ships.

The Boeotians were led by PENELEUS and LEITUS,
With Arcesilaus, Protoenor, and Clonius.

Their towns were Hyria,

rocky Aulis,

and Schoenus,

Scolus,

540

ridged Eteoneus,

Thespeia,

Graea,

Broad Mycalessus,

Harma,

Eilesion,

Erythrae,

Eleon,

Hyle,

Peteon,

550

Ocalea,

Medeon,

Copae,

Eutresus,

Dovecoted Thisbe,

Coroneia,

grassy Haliartus,

Plataea,

Glisas,