

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.

A prophet told us the Arch-Destroyer's will,
And I demanded the god be appeased.

400

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.

410

I remember often hearing you tell
In my father's house how you alone managed,
Of all the immortals, to save Zeus' neck

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

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.

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

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

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. 400
Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, give me
Ten such counsellors, and Priam's city

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,

Lower Thebes,

560

Onchestus,

Posideon, with its grove,

and Arne, its vineyards,

Mideia,

sacred Nisa,

and on the coast, Anthedon.

Fifty ships, and aboard each ship,

One hundred and twenty young men of Boeotia.

The Minyans from Aspledon and Orchomenos

Were led by ASCALAPHUS and IALMENUS,

570

Sons of Ares, born to Astyoche, then a virgin,

In the palace of Actor, son of Azeus,

When she had the god in her upstairs room.

Their thirty vessels were drawn up in rows.

The Phocians were led by SCHEDIUS and EPISTROPHUS,

Sons of Iphitos, grandsons of Naubolus.

Their towns were Cyparissus

and rocky Pytho,

Sacred Crisa,

Daulis,

580

Panopeus,

Anemoria,

Hyampolis,

on the river Cephissus,

And Lilaea,

Forty black ships followed Elephenor.

Those who held Athens—the well-founded citadel
 And the land of Erechtheus, whom Athena fostered
 After the grain field bore him, and made him live
 In her own rich precinct, where Athenian youths
 Still propitiate him yearly with rams and bulls—
 These were led by **MENESTHEUS**, Peteos' son.
 This man had no equal anywhere on earth
 At marshalling chariots and infantry,
 Rivalled only by Nestor, who was his elder.

620

Fifty black ships followed Menestheus.

AJAX led from Salamis twelve ships
 And stationed them by the Athenian contingent.

Those who held Argos and walled Tiryns
 And Hermione and Asine, on the deep gulf,
 Troezen and Eionae and vine-clad Epidaurus,
 And the Achaean youths in Aegina and Mases—
 All these were led by **DIOMEDES** and **STHENELUS**,
 Son of Capaneus, with **EURYALUS** as a third.
 But the commander in chief was Diomedes,

630

And eighty black ships followed him.

Those who held Mycenae's citadel,

a citadel by the sea,
 And those in Laas
 and the environs of Oetylus—
 These were led
 by Agamemnon's brother,

MENELAUS,
 whose voice carried in battle,
 In sixty ships
 marshalled separately.

And he moved among them with confidence,
 Urging them into war. He wanted most of all
 Requital for Helen's struggles and groans.

Those who lived in Pylos and lovely Arene,
 In Thyron, ford of Alpheius, and Aipy,
 In Cyparisseis and Amphigeneia,
 In Pteleos and Helus and Dorium, where
 The Muses met Thamyris and stopped his song
 As he journeyed from Eurytus' house in Oechalia
 Boasting he would win even if the Muses,
 Daughters of Zeus, were to sing against him,
 And in anger they maimed him, took away
 His melody and silenced his lyre—

All these Gerenian NESTOR led, and had
 Ninety hollow ships drawn up in rows.

Those who held Arcadia in Cyllene's shadow
 Beside Aepytus' tomb, where men fight hand to hand,

And those in Pheneos and Orchomenos,
 In Rhipe and Stratia and windy Enispe,
 Those who held Tegea and Mantinea,
 Those who held Styμφalus and lived in Parrhasia—

All these AGAPENOR led, Ancaeus' son,
 Fifty ships, and each ship had on board
 Many Arcadians who knew how to fight.
 Agamemnon himself had given them ships
 To cross over the sea's grey wine,
 For the Arcadians knew nothing of sailing the sea.

690

Those from Buprasium
 and shining Elis,
 And the land that Hyrmine
 and Myrsinus enclose
 On the coast,
 and between Olen rock and Alesium—

700

All those had four leaders, each with ten ships
 With many Epeians aboard. The captains were
 AMPHIMACHUS and THALPIUS, both of Actor's line,
 One Cteatus' son, the other of Eurytus;
 Third was mighty DIORES, son of Amarynceus;
 Fourth was godlike POLYXEINUS, Augeias' son.

Those from Dulichium
 and the holy islands,
 The Echinaes,
 that lie in the sea offshore from Elis,

710

The Cretans were led by **IDOMENEUS**.

Their cities were Cnossus

and walled Gortys,

Lycus and Miletus

and lime-white Lycastus,

Phaestus and Rhytium,

well-peopled cities,

And all who dwelled in Crete's hundred towns.

740

Idomeneus, famed for his spear, was captain,

As was **MERIONES**, who could kill like Ares.

Eighty black ships sailed with them to Troy.

Heracles' son **TLEPOLEMUS**, a good man, and big,

Led nine ships from Rhodes. The Rhodians

Were divided into three contingents:

Lindos, Ialysus, and lime-white Cameirus.

They were led by the warrior Tlepolemus,

Born to great Heracles by Astyocheia,

Whom he had taken out of Ephyre

And away from the river Selleis, after

Pillaging the cities of many a hero.

But when Tlepolemus came of age in the palace,

He killed his father's dear uncle, Licymnius,

A scion of Ares, then getting on in years.

He quickly built a fleet, gathered a following,

And took flight on the sea, threatened by the other

Sons and grandsons of mighty Heracles.

750

760

He came to Rhodes in his painful wanderings,
 And his people settled in three regions by tribes.
 They were loved by Zeus, who rules gods and men,
 And the son of Cronus showered them with wealth.

NIREUS led three trim ships from Syme.

Nireus was the son of Aglaia and Charops,
 King of Syme, and was the handsomest man
 Of all the Danaans who came to Troy,
 After the flawless son of Peleus.
 But he was weak, and few men followed him.

770

Those who held
 Nisyros and Carpathus,
 Casus and Cos,
 Eurypylus' city,
 And the Calydnian islands,

Were led by PHEIDIPPUS and ANTIPHUS,
 The two sons of Thessalus, Heracles' son.

Their thirty vessels were drawn up in rows.

Those who inhabited

Pelasgian Argos

780

And lived in Alos,

Alope, and Trachis,

And held Phthia and Hellas,

land of fair women,

His house half-built. A Dardanian killed him
 As he leapt from his ship, the first Greek ashore.
 His men were not leaderless—though they missed
 Their leader—for **PODARCES** marshalled them,
 Son of **Ipichlus Phylacides**, rich in flocks, and
Protesilaus' brother. But **Protesilaus** was older
 And a better man, a hero, and though his men
 Did not lack a leader, they yearned for him.

Forty black ships followed **Protesilaus** to Troy

Those in **Pherae** beside **Lake Boebeis**,
 And in **Boebe**,

Glaphyrae,

and well-built **Iolkos**,

Were in eleven ships led by **EUMELUS**,
Admetus' son by a glorious woman,
Alcestis, loveliest of **Pelias'** daughters.

Those in **Methone** and **Thaumacia**,
 In **Meliboea** and rugged **Olizon**,

Came in in seven ships led by **PHILOCTETES**,

The great archer, and aboard each ship

Were fifty oarsmen skilled with the bow.

But **Philoctetes** now lay in pain on an island,

Sacred **Lemnos**, where the **Achaean**s stranded him,

Afflicted with a wound from a deadly snake.

He lay there in anguish, but the **Greeks** at **Troy**

Would soon remember **Lord Philoctetes**.

Nor were these men leaderless. **MEDON**
 Marshalled them, Oïleus' bastard son,
 Whom Rhene bore to the pillager Oïleus.

Those in Tricca and craggy Ithome, 840
 And those in Oechalia, Eurytus' city,
 Were led by the two sons of Asclepius,
PODALEIRIUS and **MACHAON**, good healers both,

With thirty vessels drawn up in rows.

Those who held Ormenios and the spring Hypereia,
 And Asterion and Titanos' white peaks,
 Were led by **EURYPYLUS**, Euaemon's great son.

Forty black ships sailed with him to Troy.

Those who held Argissa,
and lived in Gyrtone, 850
 In Orthe,
Elone,
and white-bricked Oloöson,

Were led by **POLYPOETES**, staunch in battle,
 Son of Peirithous, whom deathless Zeus begot.
 Gloried Hippodameia conceived Polypoetes that day
 When Peirithous punished the shaggy centaurs,
 Drove them from Pelion and to the Aethices.
 Leonteus shared the command, Caeneus' grandson.

Forty black ships sailed with them to Troy.

860

GOUNEUS led twenty-two ships from Cyphus,
And with him came the Enines and Paraebi,
Who had settled around wintry Dodona
And in the fields around the stream Titaressus,
A tributary of the Peneius. Its lovely water
Does not mingle with Peneius' silver eddies
But glides on its surface like olive oil,
A branch of Styx, the dread water of oaths.

The Magnetes, who lived around Peneius
And forested Pelion, were led by swift PROTHOUS,
Son of Tenthredon, in forty black ships.

870

These were the leaders of the Danaans.

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

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

The best warrior was Telamonian Ajax—
While Achilles was in his rage. For Achilles
Was second to no one, as were the horses
That bore Peleus' flawless son. But now he lay idle

880

Among his beaked, seagoing hulls, furious
 With Agamemnon, the shepherd of the people,
 The son of Atreus. Achilles' men
 Amused themselves on the shore, throwing
 The discus and javelin and shooting their bows.
 The horses stood beside their chariots
 Champing lotus and marsh parsley
 The chariots lay covered in their owners' huts.
 The men missed their leader. They tramped
 Through the camp and had no part in fighting.

890

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

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

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

900

Zeus notified the Trojans of all this
 By sending Iris streaking down to Ilion.
 She found the citizens assembled in one body,
 Young and old alike, near Priam's gate, talking.
 Iris positioned herself nearby
 And made her voice sound like Polites'—
 A son of Priam who, trusting his speed,
 Often sat as lookout on top of the barrow

Of old Aesytes, watching for any movement
Of Greek troops from their ships.

910

Using his voice, the goddess said to Priam:

"Sir, you are as fond of endless speeches now
As you were in peacetime. But this is war.
I have been in a battle or two, but never
Have I seen an army like this,
Covering the plain like leaves, or like sand,
As it advances to attack the city.

Hector, you're in charge of this operation.
But because there are so many allies here
With different languages from points abroad,
Each captain should give the word to his own men
And lead them out marshalled by cities."

920

Hector knew this was a goddess's speech
And dismissed the assembly. They rushed to arms.
All the gates were opened, and the troops
Poured through them, on foot and in war cars.

In front of the city there is a steep hill
Out in the plain, level terrain all around it.
Men call this hill Baticia. Immortals call it
The barrow of Myrine the Dancer.
It was here that the Trojans and their allies
Drew up their troops in companies.

930

The Trojans were led by great **HECTOR**,
Son of Priam, in his shining helmet.

His contingent was far the largest and the best,
Arrayed for battle, resolute with their spears.

The Dardanian troops were led by AENEAS,
Whom bright Aphrodite bore to Anchises,
A goddess lying with a mortal man
In the foothills of Ida. Sharing the command
Were Antenor's two sons, Archelochus
And Acamas, skilled in all forms of combat.

940

The Troes, who lived in wealthy Zeleia
At Ida's foot, and drank the Aesepus' dark water,
Were led by the glorious son of Lycaon,
PANDARUS, whose bow was a gift from Apollo.

Those who held Adrasteia and the deme Apaesus,
And Pityeia and the steep Mount Tereia,
Were led by ADRASTUS and AMPHIUS,
With linen corselets, sons of Merops and Percote.
This man knew divination, and forbade his sons
To go to war, but they would not listen,
For Death's black birds were calling them on.

950

Those who lived around Percote and Practios,
Who held Sestus and Abydus and bright Arisbe,
Were led by ASIUS Hyrtacides, a born leader,
Asius, whom his great chestnut horses
Had drawn from Arisbe and the river Selleis.

The Pelasgian tribes, ferocious spearmen

From fertile Larisa, were led by HIPPOTHOUS
With his brother PYLAEUS. They were sons
Of Pelasgian Lethus, grandsons of Teutamus.

ACAMAS and PEIROUS led all the Thracians
Beyond the strong current of the Hellespont.

EUPHEMUS captained the Ciconian spearmen,
Son of Troezenus and grandson of Ceas.

PYRAECHMES led the distant Paeonians,
With curved bows, from Amydon and the river
Axius, whose water flows fairest over the earth.

PYLAEMENES, shaggy heart, led the Paphlagonians
From the land of the Eneti, where the mules run wild.
Their cities were Cytoros and Sesamos,
And they lived around the river Parthenios
In Cromna, Aegialos, and high Erythini.

ODIUS and EPISTROPHUS led the Halizones
From distant Alybe, ancient source of silver.

The Mysians were led by CHROMIS
And ENNOMUS, who foretold the future
From the flight of birds, but could not ward off
The black birds of death. They would be slain in the river
By the terrible sword of swift Achilles,
Aecus' grandson, when he killed many there.

PHORCYS and ASCANIUS led the Phrygians
From distant Ascania, battle-hungry troops.

The Maeonians were led by MESTHLES and ANTIPHUS,
Talaemones' sons, whose mother was the nymph
Of Lake Gygaea, under Mount Tmolus.

NASTES led the Carians, who spoke a foreign tongue.
Their strongholds were Miletus, and Mount Phthires,
The streams of Maeander, and Mycale's steep crests.

990

AMPHIMACHUS shared the command with Nastes,
Who came to the war wearing gold like a girl,
The fool, but it could not save him from death.
Achilles killed him in his rush through the river
Without a second thought, and bore off the gold.

SARPEDON and GLAUCUS captained the Lycians
Who came from the faraway, swirling Xanthus.

BOOK 3

Two armies,
The troops in divisions
Under their commanders,

The Trojans advancing across the plain

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

10

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

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

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

And when they had almost closed—

20

Was it a god?—no, not a god

But Paris who stepped out from the Trojan ranks,

Leopard skin on his shoulders, curved bow, sword,

And shaking two bronze-tipped spears at the Greeks

He invited their best to fight him to the death.

When Menelaus, who was Ares' darling, saw him

Strutting out from the ranks, he felt

As a lion must feel when he finds the carcass

Of a stag or wild goat, and, half-starving,

Consumes it greedily even though hounds and hunters

30

Are swarming down on him.

It was Paris all right,

Who could have passed for a god,

And Menelaus grinned as he hefted his gear

And stepped down from his chariot. He would

Have his revenge at last. Paris' blood

Turned milky when he saw him coming on,

And he faded back into the Trojan troops

With cheeks as pale as if he had seen—

Had almost stepped on—a poisonous snake

40

In a mountain pass. He could barely stand

As disdainful Trojans made room for him in the ranks,

And Hector, seeing his brother tremble at Atreus' son,

Started in on him with these abusive epithets:

"Paris, you desperate, womanizing pretty boy!

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

And Paris, handsome as a god, answered him:

"That's only just, Hector. You've got a mind
Like an axe, you know, always sharp,
Making the skilled cut through a ship's beam,
Multiplying force—nothing ever turns your edge.
But don't throw golden Aphrodite's gifts in my face.
We don't get to choose what the gods give us, you know,
And we can't just toss their gifts aside. 70
So all right, if you want me to fight, fine.
Have the Trojans and the Greeks sit down,
And Menelaus and I will square off in the middle

To fight for Helen and all her possessions.
Winner take all.
And everyone else will swear oaths of friendship,
You all to live here in the fertile Troad,
And they to go back to bluegrass Argos
And Achaea with its beautiful women."

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

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

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

"Now listen to me, since my pain is paramount

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

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

There was not much space between the two armies.

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

While these human heralds were off on their missions,
Iris, the gods' herald (who is also the rainbow),
Came to white-armed Helen disguised as Laodice,

Her sister-in-law and Priam's most beautiful daughter.
She found Helen in the main hall, weaving a folding mantle
On a great loom and designing into the blood-red fabric
The trials that the Trojans and Greeks had suffered
For her beauty under Ares' murderous hands. 130
Iris stood near Helen and said:

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

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

Priam, Panthous, Thymoetes,
Lampus, Clytius, Hicetaon

(Who was in Ares' bloodline)
Ucalegon and Antenor,
Who lived and breathed wisdom—

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

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

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

160

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

"Her eyes are not human."

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

But Priam called out to her:

"Come here, dear child, sit next to me
So you can see your former husband
And dear kinsmen. You are not to blame
For this war with the Greeks. The gods are.
Now tell me, who is that enormous man

170

Towering over the Greek troops, handsome,
Well-built? I've never laid eyes on such
A fine figure of a man. He looks like a king."

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

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

The old man was lost in reverie and wonder:

"The son of Atreus. Born to power and wealth.
Blessed by the gods. Now I see
How many Greek lads you command.
I thought I saw it all when I went
To Phrygia once and saw thousands
Of soldiers and gleaming horses
Under the command of Otreus and Mygdon
Massed by the banks of the Sangarios, 200

An army in which I myself served
On that fateful day when the Amazons
Swept down to fight against men.
They were nothing compared to these wild-eyed Greeks."

Then he saw Odysseus and asked:

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

210

And Helen, Zeus' child:

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

Antenor turned to her and observed astutely:

"Your words are not off the mark there, madam.
Odysseus came here once before, on an embassy
For your sake along with Menelaus.
I entertained them courteously in the great hall
And learned each man's character and depth of mind.
Standing in a crowd of Trojans, Menelaus,

220

With his wide shoulders, was more prominent,
But when both were seated Odysseus was lordlier.
When it came time for each to speak in public
And weave a spell of wisdom with their words,
Menelaus spoke fluently enough, to the point
And very clearly, but briefly, since he is not
A man of many words. Being older, he spoke first.
Then Odysseus, the master strategist, rose quickly,
But just stood there, his eyes fixed on the ground.
He did not move his staff forward or backward
But held it steady. You would have thought him
A dull, surly lout without any wit. But when he
Opened his mouth and projected his voice
The words fell down like snowflakes in a blizzard.
No mortal could have vied with Odysseus then,
And we no longer held his looks against him."

230

240

The third hero old Priam saw was Ajax.

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

And Helen, shining in her long trailing robes:

"That is big Ajax, the army's mountain.
Standing beyond him is Idomeneus,
Like a god, with his Cretan commanders.
He used to come often from Crete
And Menelaus would entertain him
In our house. And now I can make out

250

All the other Greeks, those I know
And whose names I could tell you.
But there are two commanders I do not see,
Castor the horsebreaker and the boxer
Polydeuces, my brothers, born of one mother.
Either they didn't come here from lovely Lacedaemon,
Or else they did come in their seagoing ships
But avoid the company of the fighting men
In horror of the shame and disgrace that are mine."

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

260

And now the heralds came up to the town
With the sacrificial victims, the two rams,
And as fruit of the fields, hearty wine
In a goatskin bag. The herald Idaeus
Held a gleaming bowl and a golden chalice
And roused the old man with this speech:

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

270

And Achaea with its beautiful women."

The old man stiffened.

He ordered his companions to yoke his horses,

Then mounted himself and took the reins.

280

Antenor rode with him in the beautiful chariot

And they drove out through the Western Gate

And onto the plain. They pulled up in the space

Between the two armies and stepped down to the earth.

Agamemnon rose,

And Odysseus, deep in thought.

Heralds brought the animals for the oaths

And mixed wine in the great bowl.

They poured water over the kings' hands,

Then Agamemnon drew the knife

290

That hung by his sword scabbard

And cut hairs from the rams' heads.

The heralds gave these to the leaders on both sides,

And Agamemnon lifted his palms to the sky:

"Zeus, Father, Lord of Ida,

Greatest and most glorious;

Helios, who sees all and hears all;

Rivers and Earth, and Powers below

Who punish perjurers after death,

Witness and protect these sacred Oaths:

300

If Paris Alexander kills Menelaus,

Helen and all her goods are his,

And we will sail away in our ships.
But if Menelaus kills Paris,
The Trojans will surrender Helen
With all her goods and pay the Argives
A fit penalty for generations to come.
If Priam and Priam's sons refuse,
Upon Paris' death, this penalty to me,
I swear to wage this war to its end."

310

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

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

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

320

But Zeus would not fulfill their prayers.

Then Priam spoke his mind:

"Hear me, Trojans and Achaean soldiers:

I am going back now to windswept Ilion
 Since I cannot bear to see with my own eyes
 My dear son fighting with Menelaus,
 Who is dear to Ares. Zeus and the other immortals
 Doubtless know whose death is destined."

330

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

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

340

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

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

The armies
 Sat down, rank after rank, tooled weapons

350

And high-stepping horses idle by each man.

The heroes armed.

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

360

Likewise Menelaus' gear.

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

Veterans on both sides, horse-breaking Trojans
And bronze-kneed Greeks, just sat and stared.

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

370

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

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

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

As Menelaus spoke he lunged forward
And twisted his fingers into the thick horsehair
On Paris' helmet, pivoted on his heel,
And started dragging him back to the Greeks.
The tooled-leather chinstrap of Paris' helmet
Was cutting into his neck's tender skin,
And Menelaus would have dragged him
All the way back and won no end of glory.
But Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter, had all this 400
In sharp focus and snapped the oxhide chinstrap,

Leaving Menelaus clenching an empty helmet,
Which the hero, spinning like a discus thrower,
Heaved into the hands of the Greek spectators.
Then he went back for the kill.

But Aphrodite

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

410

A withered hand tugged at Helen's fragrant robe.

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

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

420

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

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

And Aphrodite, angry with her, said:

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

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

Opposite Paris. Helen, daughter of Zeus,
Sat down and, averting her eyes, said reproachfully:

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

460

Paris answered her:

"Don't insult me, Helen.
Menelaus beat me this time—with Athena's help.
Next time I'll beat him. We have gods on our side too.
Enough of this.

Let's go to bed now and make love.

I've never wanted you so much,
Not even when I first took you away
From Lacedaemon in my sailing ship
And made love to you on the island of Cranae.
I want you even more now than I wanted you then."

470

He walked to the bed, and Helen followed.

While the two of them slept in their bed,
Menelaus prowled the ranks looking for Paris.
The Trojan troops, as much as they would have liked to,

Could not produce him. To a man,
They hated Paris as they hated death itself.
So Agamemenon, as commander-in-chief, proclaimed:

480

"Hear me, Trojans, allied troops, and Dardanians:
The victory clearly belongs to Menelaus.
Surrender therefore Argive Helen
And all the possessions that come with her.
We will further assess a suitable penalty,
A tribute to be paid for generations to come."

Thus Agamemnon. And the Greeks cheered.

BOOK 4

The gods were seated with Zeus
On his golden terrace, and Hebe
Was pouring them nectar. They toasted
Each other with golden cups
As they looked out at Troy.

Zeus all at once
Started to provoke Hera with taunts:

"Well, Menelaus has a pair of goddesses
To help him, Hera of Argos
And Athena the Defender,
But they prefer to sit on the sidelines
Enjoying themselves. Aphrodite, now,
Smiling as always, stays with her hero
And manages to stave off his doom.
Did you see how she saved him just now
When it looked like he was about to die!
Still, Menelaus, Ares' favorite, clearly won.
But we should decide all this now.
Should we let war rage again
Or establish peace between the two sides?
If somehow we all could agree to do this
Priam's city might still be a place to live,
And Menelaus could take Argive Helen home."

He had no sooner finished
 Than Athena and Hera were whispering
 To each other with their heads together,
 Plotting trouble for the Trojans.

Athena

Didn't say a word, although she was furious
 With her father.

30

Hera, however,

Couldn't contain her anger, and said:

"Awesome son of Cronus! What a thing to say!
 How dare you undo all my hard work.
 The sweat I sweated driving my poor team
 To raise an army against Priam and his sons!
 Do it. But don't expect us all to approve."

Zeus brooded like a thunderhead, and answered:

"I don't understand you, woman. What have
 Priam and his children done to you
 That you are so fixed on demolishing
 Ilium's stronghold down to its last well-laid brick?
 Do you think if you were to enter its gates,
 Get inside its long walls, and chew up Priam
 And Priam's children raw, and the rest of the Trojans,
 You might find some relief from this livid hate?
 Do as you please. I don't want this quarrel
 To become a source of strife between us.
 But I'll tell you this, and you take it to heart.
 The next time I have a passion to smash a city

40

50

And I choose one with men dear to you in it,
Don't try to curb my anger. Just let me do it.
I've given in to you, though unwilling at heart.
For of all the cities under the sun and stars,
Of all the cities on earth that men inhabit,
Sacred Ilion is the dearest to my soul,
And Priam and the people of ashen-spear Priam.
My altar there has never lacked libations
Or the steamy savor that is our due worship."

And Hera, the queen, her eyes big as an ox's:

60

"There are three cities especially dear to me:
Argos, Sparta, and broad Mycenae.
Waste these if they ever annoy you.
I won't stand in the way or take it too hard.
Even if I begrudged you their destruction,
What could I do against your superior strength?
Still, it's not right to cancel all my hard work.
I too am a god, from the same stock as you,
The eldest daughter of devious Cronus,
And honored both by position of birth
And as the wife of the lord of all the immortals.
Let's call this a draw and yield to each other,
I to you, and you to me, and the other gods
Will all fall in line. Quickly now,
Dispatch Athena into the war zone
To maneuver the Trojans to break the truce
And do some damage to the exultant Greeks."

70

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

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

80

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

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

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

90

"We'll be fighting again soon."

"This could mean peace."

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

While they exchanged words to this effect,
Athena blended into the crowd, disguised
As a Trojan, Antenor's son Laodocus,
A good man with a spear, and went in search

Of Pandarus and found that son of Lycaon,
Strong and not a blemish on him, standing
With rank on rank of tough, shield-bearing troops
Around him, his men from the banks of Aesepus.
Athena stood next to him and her words flew fast:

100

"If you listened to me, wise son of Lycaon,
You would take a shot at Menelaus
And win glory and gratitude from the Trojans,
Especially from prince Alexander.
He would give you splendid gifts
If he saw Menelaus, Atreus' warrior son,
Felled by your arrow and laid on the pyre.
Come on, one swift arrow aimed at Menelaus,
And vow to Apollo, the Wolf-born Archer,
That you will offer a hundred firstling lambs
When you come home to your city, sacred Zeleia."

110

Athena spoke and convinced the fool.
He took out his polished bow, made of the horns
Of a wild ibex that he himself had killed
As it came from behind a rock. Waiting for it,
He shot it in the chest, and it fell back in a cleft.
The horns measured sixteen palms from the head,
And the worker in horn fitted them together,
Smoothed it all and tipped it with gold.
This was the bow he bent, bracing it
Carefully on the ground while his men concealed him
With shields, so the Greeks couldn't react
Before Menelaus was hit. He took the lid

120

From the quiver and drew out a feathered arrow,
Barbed with black pain, that had never been shot.
He fit the bitter arrow quickly to the string 130
And vowed to Apollo, the Wolf-born Archer,
He would offer a hundred firstling lambs
When he came home to his city, sacred Zeleia.
He drew back the notched arrow until the string
Reached his nipple and the iron arrowhead the bow,
Which bent until it arched into a circle,
Then snapped back twanging, and the string hummed
As the arrow needled over the crowded plain.

But the gods were watching you, Menelaus,
Yes, and especially Athena, who stretched out 140
Her immortal hand and whisked the arrow away
From your bare flesh as lightly as a mother
Sweeps a fly from her sleeping child.
The goddess redirected the arrow
To the golden clasps of your belt
Where the corselet had an extra fold.
The bitter arrow hit the buckled belt
And drove right through its rich design
And pierced the filigreed corselet
And penetrated even the kilt-piece beneath 150
That he wore as proof against javelins.
The arrow's tip just grazed the human skin,
And dark blood started to flow from the wound.

*In Maeonia and Caria women stain ivory
With scarlet, to be cheek pieces for horses.*

*Such a piece will lie in a treasure chamber,
And though many horsemen pray to use it
As an ornament for the horse and glory
For the driver, it lies there as a king's prize.*

That, Menelaus, was how your thighs were stained
With blood, and your fine shins and ankles beneath.

160

The warlord Agamemnon went numb
When he saw black blood flowing from the wound,
As did Menelaus himself, whom Ares loved.
But when he saw that the ferrule and barbs
Had not gone in, he breathed easier and revived.
Agamemnon, though, was still groaning deeply,
Holding Menelaus' hand, and his comrades
Added their groans. Agamemnon spoke for them all:

"Dear brother, my oath was your death,
Setting you up to fight the Trojans for us,
And now they've trampled their oath and hit you.
But oaths are not empty: we pledged lambs' blood,
Poured strong wine, and clasped our right hands.
If the Olympian does not act on this immediately
He will in good time, and they will pay heavily
With their heads, their wives, and their children.
Deep down inside I know this for sure:
There will come a day when holy Troy will perish,
And Priam and the people under Priam's ashen spear.
Zeus himself, throned in heaven on high,
Will shake his dark aegis over them all

170

180

In his wrath for this treachery. This shall be done.
But dreadful grief will be mine if you die,
Menelaus, and meet your destiny now.
I will return to Argos in utter disgrace,
For the Greeks will turn their minds homeward now,
And we will leave Priam and the Trojans to boast
They have Argive Helen. And your bones will rot
As you lie in Trojan soil, your work unfinished.
And some arrogant Trojan will say as he leaps
Onto the barrow of glorious Menelaus:
'So much for the wrath of Agamemnon,
Who led the Greek army here for nothing
And has now gone home to his native land
With empty ships, and without good Menelaus.'
On that day may the earth gape open for me."

190

And Menelaus, cheering him up:

"It's all right. Don't frighten the others.
The arrow didn't hit a fatal spot. My belt
Stopped it before it got in very far, that
And the banded kilt-piece the bronzesmiths made."

200

And lord Agamemnon's response:

"May it be so, dear Menelaus.
But our physician will palpate the wound
And apply medications to stop the pain."

And he said to Talthybius, the godlike herald:

"Talthybius, call Machaon here on the double,
Asclepius' son, our faultless physician,
To see Menelaus. Someone has shot him,
Someone really good with a bow, a Trojan
Or Lycian, to his glory and our grief."

210

Following his orders, the herald
Went through the welter of Greek bronze,
Looking for Machaon, and spotted him
Standing in the midst of his men, tough
Shield-bearing troops from Tricca's pastures.
He came up to him and spoke winged words:

"Son of Asclepius, lord Agamemnon calls you
To see Menelaus. Someone has shot him,
Someone really good with a bow, a Trojan
Or Lycian, to his glory and our grief."

220

Machaon's heart was pounding as he made his way
Across the crowded sand and through the troops
Until he came to where Menelaus lay wounded,
All the army's best gathered around him
In a circle, into which he stepped like a god
And quickly drew the arrow from the clasped belt.
As it came out the barbs were broken backward.
Then he undid the metallic belt and, beneath it,
The band with the beaten bronze kilt-piece.
When he saw the wound the arrow had made
He sucked out the blood and smeared on

230

Soothing ointments Chiron had given his father.

While they were attending to Menelaus,
The Trojans came on under their shields,
As the Greeks strapped on their gear,
And reminded themselves of the joys of war.

Agamemnon swung into action.
You could not have detected in him then
Any tendency toward sloth or cowardice.
He left his bronze-filigreed chariot
With his squire, Eurymedon, who held
The snorting horses off to the side,
And charged him to have them ready
Should he become fatigued. Then he set out,
On foot, to tour the ranks of his army.
He had two set speeches. When he saw men
Eager to fight, he used encouraging words:

240

"Soldiers of Greece, keep up your fighting spirit!
Father Zeus will not aid Trojan perjury.
Those who violated their sacred oaths
Will have vultures feeding on their pudgy flesh,
And their wives and children will be our cargo
After we have taken their city's high rock."

250

But when he saw men shirking the rigors of war,
He scalded their ears with words like these:

"You pansy archers, you're a disgrace to Greece!
Standing here like a bunch of knock-kneed fawns
Worn out from running across a wide field,
Gaping stupidly without an ounce of strength left.
Are you waiting for the Trojans to come over here
Where your pretty boats are lined up on the shore
So you can see if Zeus will lend you a hand?"

260

Thus Agamemnon, ranging through the troops,
And in his tour he came to where the Cretans
Were arming themselves around their commander,
Idomeneus, a man with a razor-sharp mind
And the imposing presence of a wild boar,
As he stood in the front ranks, while Meriones
Was busy marshalling the lines in the rear.
The warlord Agamemnon liked what he saw
And had some cordial words for Idomeneus:

270

"Idomeneus, I hold you in the highest regard,
Both in war and in every other activity,
Certainly in the feast, when the Argive lords
Mix wine in the bowl at the council of elders.
Even if every flowing-haired Greek chieftain
Drinks a fixed measure, your cup stays full,
And you drink, as I do, to your heart's content.
To battle then, and live up to your old boasts!"

280

And Idomeneus, the Cretan commander:

"Son of Atreus, you can count on me

To live up to my original pledge.
 But rouse the other flowing-haired Greeks
 So we can get into battle. The Trojans
 Have broken their oath. They will suffer and die
 For violating their sacred word."

Agamemnon smiled and moved on,
 Coming next to the two captains
 Who shared the name Ajax
 As they were strapping on their helmets.
 Behind them a cloud of infantry loomed.

290

*A goatherd standing on a rocky lookout
 Sees a cloud moving in over the purple sea.
 As a westerly gale sweeps it closer to land
 It looks blacker than pitch. The sea ruffles
 Beneath it, the air suddenly turns cold,
 And the goatherd drives his flock to a cave.*

So the dark battalions behind the two Ajaxes,
 Squall lines of young men nurtured under the sky,
 Bristling with shields and spears.

300

Agamemnon
 Was glad to see them, and his words flew out:

"Ajax, both of you, Achaean commanders,
 I would be out of line if I issued you orders.
 You push your men to fight hard on your own.
 By Father Zeus, by Athena and Apollo,
 If all of my men had your kind of heart,

King Priam's city would soon bow her head,
Taken and ravaged under our hands."

310

He spoke and moved on to the next contingent.

There he found Nestor, the clear-toned orator,

Urging his Pylians on to battle

And arraying them around his captains:

Great Pelagon, Alastor, Chromius,

Haemon, and Bias, shepherd of his people.

Nestor positioned the chariots in front

And massed the best foot soldiers at the rear.

Within this double wall he stationed the riffraff,

320

So that willing or not they would be forced to fight.

Nestor briefed his charioteers first,

Reminding them to control their horses

And not drive recklessly into the mêlée:

"Now don't get overconfident, any of you,

Or be too eager to fight the Trojans alone,

In front of the rest. But no falling back either.

Either course will weaken the line.

When you make contact with an enemy chariot,

Stay in your own and thrust with your spear.

330

These are battle-proven, time-tested tactics

Used by our ancestors to capture walled towns."

The old man had years of experience in battle.

The warlord Agamemnon was glad to see him

And addressed him with winged words:

"Nestor, old sir! If only your knees
 Were as strong as your spirit, but old age
 Has worn you down. I'd rather have
 Someone else old, and you among the young."

And Nestor, the Gerenian horseman, answered:

340

"Son of Atreus, I wish so myself! To be
 As I was when I killed Ereuthalion!
 But the gods do not give us all things at once.
 I was young then, and now I am old.
 Even so, I will be with the charioteers
 And urge them on with counsel and words,
 As is an elder's privilege. Spearwork
 Is for the young men, who trust their strength."

And Agamemnon moved on, glad in his heart.
 He found Menestheus next, Peteus' son, standing
 With his Athenians, masters of the war cry,
 And farther up the line crafty Odysseus
 With his tough Cephallenians. These troops
 Had not yet heard a signal—since the armies
 On both sides were just now starting to move—
 And were waiting for other Greek battalions
 To advance and begin the attack on the Trojans.
 When the warlord Agamemnon saw them,
 He sent a few barbed words winging their way:

350

"Son of Peteus—a king nurtured by Zeus—
 And you, with all your famous dirty tricks,

360

Why are you lagging back here, waiting for others?
You two should be taking your stand up front
And throwing yourselves into the heat of battle.
Both of you are first in line when you hear
I am giving a feast for the council of elders.
You like to eat roast meat well enough then
And drink cups of honeyed wine all night,
But now you'd be glad to see ten Greek battalions
Carving up the enemy ahead of you with bronze."

Odysseus scowled darkly as he answered:

"What kind of talk is that, Agamemnon?
How can you say we are slack in battle
Whenever the Greeks engage the Trojans?
You will have a chance to see, if you really care,
How Telemachus' father mixes it up
With the horse-whipping Trojans.
What you're saying now is a lot of hot air."

Agamemnon could see he was angry,
And, with a smile, he took back his words:

"Son of Laertes in the line of Zeus,
Odysseus, the master tactician,
I don't mean to give you a hard time.
You and I understand each other.
Go now. We will make it up later.
If there have been any hard words here
May the gods blow them away on the winds."

Leaving them there he went on
And found Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
Standing by his horses and chariot,
With Sthenelus, Capaneus' son, at his side.
When the warlord Agamemnon saw them,
He sent a few barbed words winging their way:

390

"What's this, the son of the hero Tydeus
Squinting down the lanes of battle from the rear?
It wasn't like Tydeus to cower like this.
He fought the enemy out front with his friends,
As those who saw him in action say. I never
Saw him myself, but they say he was the best.
He came to Mycenae once, not as an enemy
But as a guest, when he and Polyneices
Were taking the field against Thebes' sacred walls.
They needed allies, and the Mycenaeans
Were ready to accede to their request,
But Zeus changed their minds with unlucky omens.
So they left and came in their journey
To the Asopus' deep reeds and grassy banks,
And the Achaeans sent Tydeus out again
On another mission, north to Thebes.
So he went, and found a crowd of Cadmeians
At a feast in mighty Eteocles' house.
Alone as he was, and a stranger there,
The horseman Tydeus was not afraid.
He challenged them all to athletic contests
And easily won every single event,

400

410

So much help did Athena give him.
The Cadmeians were angry, and when he left
They laid an ambush along his route back,
Fifty young men under two commanders,
Maeon, son of Haemon, a match for the gods,
And Autophonus' son, staunch Polyphontes.
But Tydeus brought them to an ugly end,
Killing all but one. Maeon alone
He allowed to return, persuaded by portents.
That's what Tydeus the Aetolian was like,
But he had a son who cannot fight so well,
Though he speaks better in council."

420

He spoke, and Diomedes said nothing at all,
A mark of respect for the royal reproach.
But Capaneus' son, Sthenelus, responded:

430

"Son of Atreus, don't lie when you know
How to speak the plain truth. We are proud
That we are better than our fathers. We took
Thebes with its seven gates, a lesser army
Against a stronger wall, trusting in the gods.
But our fathers perished by their own recklessness.
So don't put them on a level with us."

Diomedes frowned at this and said:

"Take it easy there, and listen to me.
I don't hold anything against Agamemnon
For getting the troops into gear. After all,

440

He has more at stake here, greater glory
 If the Greeks win and capture Ilion,
 And greater grief if the Greeks are defeated.
 Let's you and I just keep our minds on fighting."

And he jumped down from his chariot
 In full metal. The clang of bronze on his chest
 As he moved out would have unnerved anyone.

*A swollen wave pushed by the West Wind
 Moves closer and closer to a thundering beach.
 It crests in deep water and then breaks
 Onto the shore with a huge roar and curls over
 And around the jutting rocks in a spray of brine.*

450

So too wave after wave of Greek battalions
 Moving into combat.

The captains

Issued commands; the rest marched on
 In such an eerie silence you would have said
 That not a soldier in the army had a voice,
 But in fact the silence was terror
 Of their commanders, and only the mute glow
 From their detailed weaponry signalled their advance.
 Not so with the Trojan army.

460

*More ewes than anyone could ever count
 Are penned in the court of a man of means,
 Waiting, waiting to give their white milk
 And bleating incessantly when they hear the lambs.*

Thus the clamor from the immense Trojan muster,
Not one voice, one language,
But a cacophony of tongues from different lands.

470

Behind them, Ares, as behind the Greeks
The goddess Athena with sea-grey eyes,
And on both sides Terror and Panic
And Ares' murderous sister, Eris,
Small when her crest first appears
But so ravenous and relentless in her ways
That she soon thrusts her head into the sky
Even while she keeps her feet on the earth.
This horror now infused equal parts of strife
Into both armies as she patrolled their ranks,
Swelling the volume of human suffering.

480

When the two sides closed with each other
They slammed together shields and spears,
Rawhide ovals pressed close, bronze thoraxes
Grinding against each other amid the groans
And exultations of men being slain
And of those slaying, as the earth ran with blood.

*Swollen winter torrents flow together
Where two valleys meet. The heavy water
From both streams joins in a gorge,
And far off in the mountains
A shepherd hears a single, distant roar.*

490

Equally indistinguishable the shrieking
Of these warriors laboring in union.

Antilochus drew first blood, killing
Echepolus, one of Troy's best.
The quick thrust of Antilochus' spear
Glanced off the rim of his plumed helmet,
But the bronze point pegged his forehead
And bored through the bone. Darkness
Enveloped him as he fell like a wall. 500
As he went down, Elephenor,
The Abantes' captain, grabbed him
By the feet and tried to drag him
Quickly out of range to strip the armor.
This effort was short-lived. As Elephenor
Stooped to haul the corpse, Agenor saw him,
And where his shield left his left side exposed
Agenor thrust, crumpling him with his spear.
The life drained out of him, and over his body 510
The fighting intensified, Greeks and Trojans
Battering each other like leaping wolves.
One early victim was Anthemion's son,
Simoeisus, a blossoming lad
Whom Telamonian Ajax marked and hit.
His mother bore him on the Simois' banks
On her way down from the slopes of Ida
Where she had gone to see her family's flocks.
So his parents called him Simoeisus,
But he died before he could pay them back 520
For rearing him. As he advanced

In the Trojan front lines, the bronze point
Of Ajax's spear pierced his right nipple
And ripped through his shoulder. He fell
Down to the ground and lay in the dust.

*A poplar that has grown up in rich bottom soil,
With a smooth trunk branching out at top,
Catches the eye of a wainwright, who wants
To curve it into a pole for a fine chariot.
He cuts it with a few flashing strokes of his axe,
And now it lies drying by the river bank.*

530

When Ajax had dispatched him, Antiphus,
One of Priam's sons, gleaming in his corselet,
Threw his javelin at him through the crowd,
Missing Ajax but hitting a man named Leucas,
One of Odysseus' companions, in the groin,
As he was hauling the body off to one side.
The corpse fell from his hands and he slumped over it.
Odysseus took his death hard. He strode forward
Through the front ranks glowing in his bronze
And, sweeping the enemy lines with his eyes,
Cast his javelin. The Trojans fell back
As the javelin homed in on Democoön,
Priam's bastard son from his horse farm in Abydos.
With the weight of Odysseus' anger behind it
The spearpoint entered one temple and came out
Through the other. Darkness enveloped
Democoön's eyes. He fell with a thud,
And his armor clattered on his back.

540

The Trojan front lines, and Hector with them,
Gave ground. The Greeks cheered, dragged off
The bodies, and charged far ahead.

Apollo,

Looking down at all this from Pergamum,
Was indignant, and yelled to the Trojans:

"Get back into the fight! Greek skin
Is not stone or iron. It will not deflect bronze.
Nor is Achilles, son of Thetis, in combat,
But nurses his rage in the beachhead camp."

Thus the dread god spoke from the city.

But the Greeks

Were urged on by Zeus' daughter
Wherever she saw them faltering.

Diores, though, was skewered by Fate.
Peirus, the Thracian leader, had caught him
Just above the ankle with a jagged stone
That crushed both tendons and bones.
He fell backward into the dust, hands stretched
Toward his friends, gasping out his life.
Peirus ran up and finished him off
With a slicing spear thrust near his navel.
His guts spilled out, and everything went black.
As Peirus jumped back, Thoas the Aetolian
Hit him in the chest above the nipple.
The bronze caught in his lung. Thoas closed,
Pulled the spear out, drew his sword

And slashed his belly open. This finished him,
But Thoas did not get to strip off Peirus' armor
Because his men, top-knotted Thracians
With long spears in hand, drove him off,
Big as he was, and sent him reeling.

580

And so the two lay side by side in the dust,
The Thracian leader stretched out by the Epeian,
And around them many others were killed.

No one could trust his immunity any longer,
Not even those who had danced their way through
Unscathed until now, led by the hand by Pallas Athena
Through the hail of whetted bronze instruments.
This was a day many Greeks and Trojans
Paired off with each other to lie in the dust.

590

Book 5

Pallas Athena now gave to Diomedes,
 Tydeus' son, the strength and courage
 That would make him shine
 Among the Greeks and win him glory.
 Starlight flowed from his helmet and shield,
 As if Sirius had just risen from the sea
 Before dawn in autumn, and that brightest of stars
 Was blazing from his torso and face
 Instead of from the sky.

Athena aimed him

To where the battle was thickest. 10

There was a Trojan named Dares,
 A rich man without a blemish on him
 And a priest of Hephaestus. He had two sons,
 Phegeus and Idaeus, trained warriors.
 These two now separated themselves
 From the crowd and went for Diomedes,
 They in their chariot, he on foot.
 When they closed, Phegeus threw.
 His spear sailed high, passing well over 20
 The left shoulder of Diomedes,
 Who kept on coming, launching a shot
 That hit Phegeus' chest between his nipples
 And knocked him from his rig. Idaeus

Jumped for it, abandoning his chariot
And his slain brother, whose prostrate corpse
He did not have the courage to defend.
He himself would not have escaped black death
If Hephaestus had not got him out of there,
Wrapping him in night, so that the old man,
His priest, would not be utterly bereaved.
Diomedes did get the horses though,
And had his men drive them back to the ships.
When the Trojans saw Dares' two sons,
One in flight, the other dead by his chariot,
Their hearts shrivelled. Athena's cold grey eyes
Bored in on Ares. She took his hand and said:

30

"Ares, you bloodthirsty marauder,
Why don't we let the Greeks and Trojans fight,
And see to which side Father Zeus gives glory.
We'd both best withdraw, and avoid his anger."

40

And with that she led Ares away from the battle
And made him sit on the Scamander's sandy banks,
While the Greeks pushed the Trojans back. Each leader
Took out his man. First, the warlord Agamemnon
Knocked Odius, the Halizones' commander,
Out of his chariot as he led the retreat,
Planting a spear between his shoulder blades
And driving it out through his chest. He fell
With a thud, and his armor clanged on his body.

50

Idomeneus killed Phaestus, the Maeonian

Who had come from Tarne's black soil,
Threading his spear through his right shoulder
As he tried to mount his chariot but instead
Fell back from it into the loathsome dark.
Idomeneus' squires stripped off his armor.

Menelaus killed Scamandrius.
This man had been taught to hunt
By Artemis herself, and could shoot
Any animal the mountain forest nourished. 60
But neither the goddess nor all his old skill
In archery could help him now. Menelaus
Planted a spear between his shoulder blades
And drove it out through his chest. He fell
With a thud, and his armor clanged on his body.

Meriones killed Phereclus, whose father
Was Tecton and grandfather Harmon
And who was himself a skilled craftsman,
For Pallas Athena loved him prodigiously.
He could build all sorts of intricate things, 70
And had built for Paris the doomed hulls
That first spelled evil for Troy, and for himself,
Since he had no inkling of the gods' oracles.
Meriones ran him down from behind
And hit him in the right buttock. The spearpoint
Slid beneath the bone clear through the bladder.
He fell to his knees, and groaned as death took him.

Meges took out Pedaeus, Antenor's son.

Though he was a bastard, Theano raised him
As one of her own, to please her husband.

80

Now Meges got close enough to him
To send his spear through the tendon
At the back of his neck and on into his mouth,
Cutting away the tongue at its root. He fell
Into the dust, his teeth clenched on cold bronze.

Eurypylus got Hypsenor, son of Dolopion
And honored priest of the River Scamander.

Euaemon's glorious son Eurypylus
Caught up with him as he sprinted away

90

And, without breaking stride, slashed
At the man's shoulder with his sword
And lopped off his arm, which fell
In a bloody mass to the ground. Death
Covered his eyes with a purple haze.

This was their labor in the crush of battle.
As for Diomedes, you could not tell
Which side he belonged to, Greek or Trojan,
As he boiled across the plain.

A winter torrent

*Will sweep away the thickset riprap
Meant to contain it, and flood over also
The vineyard walls, when the rain of Zeus
Makes its swollen waters suddenly rise
And obliterate many fine human works.*

100

So too before Tydeus' son were driven
Thick Trojan battalions. Many as they were,
They could not withstand this single human tide.

When Pandarus saw him storming across the plain
And driving entire battalions before him,
He bent his curved bow and, taking aim at Diomedes,
Hit him on the fly in his right shoulder,
The arrow piercing the corselet plate
And spattering it with blood as it punched through.
And Pandarus whooped:

110

"Got him! Take heart, Trojan horsemen,
The best of the Achaeans is hit! I don't think
He will hold up long under that stiff shaft
If Apollo in truth sent me forth from Lycia."

Half prayer, half boast. But the arrow didn't kill him.
Diomedes took cover next to his horses and car
And, still standing, said to Sthenelus, his driver:

120

"Son of Capaneus, get down from the car
And pull this arrow out of my shoulder."

Sthenelus vaulted down to the ground,
Steadied himself, and drew the arrow
Clean through his shoulder and out the other side.
Blood spurted through the linked tunic,
And Diomedes, good at the war shout, prayed:

"Hear me, daughter of Zeus! If ever
You stood by my father's side, a friend
In the heat of battle, stand by me now,
Goddess Athena. Deliver unto me
And place within the range of my spear
The man who hit me before I saw him
And boasted I would not see for long
The brilliant light of Helios the Sun."

130

Pallas Athena heard Diomedes' prayer.
She made his body lithe and light,
Then feathered these words into his ear:

"Go after the Trojans for all you're worth,
Diomedes. I have put into your heart
Your father's heroic temper, the fearless
Fighting spirit of Tydeus the horseman,
Tydeus the Shield. And I have removed
The mist that has clouded your eyes
So that now you can tell god from man.
Do not fight with any immortal
Who might come and challenge you,
Except Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus.
If she comes you may wound her with bronze."

140

150

With these words the grey-eyed one was gone,
And Diomedes returned to the front.
He had been eager before to fight the Trojans
But now his fury was tripled.

*A shepherd ivounds a lion as he leaps a pen's wall.
 But far from being weakened, the lion
 Gains in strength, and the unprotected flock
 Is little more than a pile of bloody fleece
 Before the angered lion leaps out again.*

So too Diomedes among the Trojans, 160
 Killing next Astynous and Hypeiron,
 One with a spearcast above his nipple,
 The other with a swordstroke to the collar-bone,
 Shearing off the entire shoulder
 From the neck and back. He let them lie
 And went after Abas and Polyidus,
 Sons of old Eurydamas, who read dreams,
 But read no dreams for them when they left home.
 Diomedes cut them down and moved on.
 There were two more brothers, Xanthus and Thoön, 170
 Sons of Phaenops, who loved them well.
 He was worn out with old age and its miseries
 And had no other son to be his heir.
 Diomedes killed them too, taking their lives
 And leaving for the father sorrow and grief.
 They would not live to be welcomed home,
 And others would divide their inheritance.

His next victims were two sons of Priam,
 Echemmon and Chromius, in one chariot.
 Diomedes jumped on them 180

as a lion

*Leaps on a heifer grazing peacefully
In a woodland pasture, and breaks her neck.*

It was a brutal dismount the son of Tydeus
Forced them to make. He then stripped their armor,
And his men drove their horses back to the ships.

Aeneas saw him wrecking the Trojan ranks
And made his way through the busy spears
Searching for Pandarus. When he found him,
Looking like the match for a god that he was,
He went up to him and had this to say:

190

"Pandarus, where are your arrows and bow,
And your fame? No one here or in all Lycia
Can compete with you or claim to be better.
Say a prayer to Zeus and take a shot at this man—
Whoever he is—who is beating the daylights
Out of the Trojans, some of our best too.
It could be he's a god, angry with the Trojans
Over some sacrifice. That would be tough."

Lycaon's splendid son came back with this:

200

"Aeneas, he looks like Diomedes to me,
His shield, his grooved helmet, his horses.
I'm not at all sure that he's not a god,
But if he is who I think he is, Tydeus' son,

He's not fighting like this without some god
Standing at his side and cloaked in mist.
I swear one of the immortals turned aside
An arrow I already shot at him
Just as it struck. It wound up hitting him
In the right shoulder, clean through his breastplate. 210
I thought I had sent him down to Hades,
But I didn't get him. *Some* god is sure angry.
Anyway, I don't have a chariot now,
Or horses to pull it—not that there aren't eleven
Beautiful new chariots back in Lycaon's palace,
Covered with cloths, and a yoke of horses
Beside each one eating white barley and spelt.
Yes, and Lycaon, the old spearman,
Told me as I left to go to war mounted,
Advice I should have taken but didn't, 220
Sparing the horses because I was afraid
That in an army this big they would lack feed,
And they had been used to eating all they wanted.
So I left them, and came to Ilion on foot,
Trusting my bow, for all the good it has done.
I've taken shots at two of their best,
Diomedes and Menelaus, and hit them both,
Drew blood for sure, and only made them madder.
Curse the day I took my bow from its peg
And led my Trojan troops to lovely Ilion 230
As a favor to Hector. If I ever return
And see my land, my wife, and my high-roofed home,
May my throat be cut by a thief in the night
If I fail to smash my bow in pieces

And throw it in the fire. It's been a piece of junk."

And Aeneas, the Trojan commander, replied:

"Don't talk like that. Things won't get any better
Until you and I take a chariot
And face him in combat. Come on, get in mine,
And you'll see what the horses of Tros can do.
They know how to eat up the plain, and how to
Cut and turn, in pursuit or flight,
And they will get us back to the city in safety
If Zeus gives Diomedes the glory again.
Get in and take the lash and the reins,
And I'll dismount to fight; or you
Take him on, and leave the horses to me."

240

Lycaon's splendid son came back with this:

"Keep the reins, Aeneas, and drive your own horses.
They will pull better for a driver they know
In case we have to run from the son of Tydeus.
I wouldn't want them to be spooked, and shy
From pulling us out because they miss your voice—
Not with Diomedes all over us. He'd kill us both
And make off with your horses. No, you drive them,
And I'll meet his charge with my spear."

250

So they mounted the chariot and drove off
Full speed ahead toward the son of Tydeus.

Sthenelus saw them coming and said to Diomedes:

"Here comes a duo now with muscle to spare
And hot to fight you. One is good with a bow,
Pandarus, who boasts he is Lycaon's son.
The other is Aeneas, who says his mother
Is Aphrodite, and Anchises his father.
Let's retreat in the chariot. Calm down
And get out of action or you'll get yourself killed."

260

Diomedes looked him up and down and said:

"Don't talk to me about retreating, Sthenelus.
It's not in me to dodge a fight. Besides,
I still have my strength. I'm not even going
To get in the chariot, much less retreat in it.
I'll take them on just like this. Pallas Athena
Won't *let* me back down. As for these two,
Their horses won't be carrying them both away,
Even if one of them manages to escape.
And one thing more. Athena has many plans,
But if she does give me the glory here
And I kill them both, hold our horses
On this spot, tying the reins to the chariot rail,
And rush Aeneas' horses. Drive them back
Away from the Trojans and to the Greek lines.
These horses come from the stock that Zeus
Gave to Tros as payment for his son Ganymede.
The finest horses under the sun. Anchises
Stole some of the breed from Laomedon

270

280

His javelin followed his voice, and Athena
Guided it to where the nose joins the eye-socket.
The bronze crunched through the pearly teeth
And sheared the tongue at its root, exiting
At the base of the chin.

Pandarus fell from the car,
His armor scattering the hard light
As it clattered on his fallen body.
His horses shied—

Quick movement of hooves—
As his soul seeped out into the sand.

Aeneas vaulted down with his shield and spear,
Afraid that the Greeks might drag the body away.
He straddled it like a lion sure of its strength,
Spear straight out, crouched behind his shield's disk,
Only too glad to kill whoever stood up to him,
His mouth open in a battle-howl.

But Tydeus' son
Levered up in one hand a slab of stone
Much too large for two men to lift—
As men are now—lifted it and smashed it
Into Aeneas' hip, where the thighbone turns
In the socket that medics call the cup.
The rough stone shattered this joint and severed
Both tendons, ripping open the skin. The hero
Sank to his knees, clenching the dirt with one hand,
While midnight settled upon both his eyes.

That would have been the end of Aeneas,
But his mother Aphrodite, Zeus' daughter
(Who bore Aeneas to Anchises the oxherd),
Had all this in sharp focus. Her milk-white arms
Circled around him and she enfolded him
In her radiant robe to prevent the Greeks
From killing him with a spear to the chest.

340

As she was carrying him out of the battle,
Sthenelus remembered the instructions
Diomedes had given him. He held his own horses
Away from the boiling dust, tying the reins
To the chariot rail, and, on foot, stampeded
Aeneas' beautiful horses toward the Greek lines,
Giving them to Deipylus, the boyhood friend
He valued most and whose mind was like his,
To drive back to the ships. Then he mounted
His own chariot, took the glossy reins in hand,
And drove his heavy-hooved horses off to find
Tydeus' son, who was himself in armed pursuit
Of Aphrodite. Diomedes knew

350

This was a weakling goddess, not one of those
Who control human warfare—no Athena,
No Enyo here, who demolishes cities—
And when he caught up to her in the mêlée
He pounced at her with his spear and, thrusting,
Nicked her on her delicate wrist, the blade
Piercing her skin through the ambrosial robe
That the Graces themselves had made for her.
The cut was just above the palm, and the goddess'

360

Immortal blood oozed out, or rather
The ichor that flows in the blessed gods' veins,
Who, eating no bread and drinking no wine,
Are bloodless and therefore deathless as well.
The goddess shrieked and let her son fall,
And Phoebus Apollo gathered him up
In an indigo cloud to keep the Greeks
From killing him with a spear to the chest.

370

And Diomedes, yelling above the battle noise:

"Get out of the war, daughter of Zeus!
Don't you have enough to do distracting
Weak women? Keep meddling in war and
You'll learn to shiver when it's even mentioned."

The goddess, in extreme distress now,
Went off in a daze. Wind-footed Iris
Took her and led her through the throng,
Throbbing with pain, her pale skin bruised.
After a while she found Ares, sitting
On the left of the battle, his spear propped
Against a bank of mist, his horses standing by
Aphrodite fell to her knees and begged
Her brother for his gold-frontleted horses:

380

"Brother dear, lend me your horses
And help me get to Olympus. I'm hurt,
Wounded by a mortal, Diomedes,
Who would fight even Father Zeus."

390

Ares gave her the gold-frontleted horses.
She mounted the chariot gingerly,
And Iris stepped in and took the reins.
She cracked the whip and the team flew off
And came in no time to steep Olympus,
The gods' homestead.

Iris, a blur of windy light,
Halted the team, unyoked them,
And cast before them their ambrosial fodder.

400

Aphrodite went in to her mother,
Dione, and fell in her lap.
And Dione,
Cradling her daughter in her arms,
And stroking her with her hand, said:

"Oh my poor baby, who did this to you?
To treat you like this! What did you do?"

And Aphrodite, the goddess who loved to smile:

"Tydeus' son wounded me, that bully
Diomedes, because I was carrying my son
Out of range, Aeneas, who is my dearest.
The war has gone far beyond Trojans and Greeks.
The Greeks are fighting the immortal gods."

410

Dione answered in her lustrous voice:

"You must bear it, my child. I know it hurts.
Many of us Olympians have suffered harm
From men, giving tit for tat to each other.
Ares did, when Otus and Ephialtes,
Those bullies, sons of Aloeus, kept him tied him up
In a bronze jar for thirteen months. 420
They would have destroyed the God of War
If their stepmother, beautiful Eëriboea,
Hadn't told Hermes. He got Ares out,
But the painful bonds had about done him in.
Hera suffered too, when Heracles shot her
Right in the breast with a triple-pronged arrow,
And there was no helping the pain she had then.
Hades too, formidable as he is, had to endure
An arrow the same man shot him with
Among the dead in Pylos, making him suffer. 430
He went to the house of Zeus on Olympus
In agony, pierced with pain. The arrow
Had driven right through his shoulder.
Paieon rubbed on an anodyne
And healed him, Hades being no mortal.
Heracles was simply outrageous and reckless
To provoke the Olympian gods with arrows.
And now Athena has set this man upon you,
This fool Diomedes, who doesn't understand
That a man who fights with gods doesn't last long, 440
His children don't sit on his lap calling him 'Papa'
To welcome him home from the horrors of war.
So as strong as he is, he had better watch out
Or someone braver than you might fight him,

And Aegialeia, Adrastus' heroic daughter,
The wife of Diomedes, tamer of horses,
Will wake her family from sleep with lamenting
Her wedded husband, the best of the Achaeans."

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

450

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

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

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

460

"Dear child, war isn't your specialty, you know.
You just take care of the pleasures of love
And leave the fighting to Ares and Athena."

While these gods were talking to each other,
Diomedes leapt upon Aeneas, even though
He knew Apollo's hands were there above him.

Great as Apollo was, Diomedes meant
To kill the Trojan and strip off his armor.
Three times he leapt in homicidal frenzy,
Three times Apollo flicked his lacquered shield,
But when he charged a fourth, last time,
He heard a voice that seemed to come
From everywhere at once, and knew it was
Apollo's voice, saying to him:

470

"Think it over, son of Tydeus, and get back.
Don't set your sights on the gods. Gods are
To humans what humans are to crawling bugs."

Even at this, Diomedes only backed up a little,
Just out of range of the wrathful god.

480

And Apollo took Aeneas from the swarm
Up to his temple on sacred Pergamum.
There Leto and arrowy Artemis healed him
In the great sanctuary, and made him glorious.
And silver-bowed Apollo made a phantom
To look like Aeneas, armor and all,
And over this wraith the Greeks and Trojans
Battered each other with their rawhide shields
Until the edges were tattered into leather fringe.
Apollo then called out to the God of War:

490

"Ares, you bloodthirsty marauder,
Would you be so kind as to take this Diomedes
Out of action, before he goes up against Zeus?"

He's already wounded Cypris on the wrist,
And came after me like a raging demon."

Apollo then sat down on Pergamum's height,
While Ares went to spur on the Trojans,
Disguised as Acamas, the Thracian commander.
He called out to the well-born sons of Priam:

"You sons of Priam, a king bred by Zeus,
How long will you allow your men to be killed
By the Achaean forces? Perhaps until
They are fighting right in front of our gates?
Aeneas is down, son of noble Anchises,
A man whom we honored as much as Hector.
Let's save our comrade from the boiling dust."

500

This caught their attention. And Sarpedon
Added his voice, scolding Hector sternly:

"Where has your will to fight gone, Hector?
You used to say you could hold the city
Without any allies, just yourself
Backed by your brothers and sisters' husbands.
I don't see a single one of them now
Who's not cringing like a dog before a lion.
The only ones fighting are us, the allies.
I'm only an ally myself, from a long way off.
It's a long way to Lycia, by eddying Xanthus,
Where I left my dear wife and baby boy,
And all my property and envied wealth.

510

And yet I press my Lycians into battle
And take on my man, with nothing of mine here
For the Achaeans to take or drive away.
But you can't even be troubled to urge your men
To take a stand and defend their own wives.
Watch out you're not caught like flies in a web,
An easy prey for your enemies,
Who will waste your populous city.
You should be worrying about this day and night
And begging the captains of your gallant allies
To hold their ground—or take the heat yourself."

520

530

Sarpedon's speech cut Hector to the quick.
He leapt to the ground with all his gear
And, brandishing a pair of sharp spears,
Roamed the ranks, urging everyone to fight.
The noise intensified, and with a roar
The Trojans whirled to face the Achaeans,
Who remained in tight formation and did not flinch.

*Wind carries chaff over the holy threshing floors
When men are winnowing, and Demeter herself,
Blonde in the blowing wind, separates
The grain from the chaff, and the piles of chaff
That accumulate grow whiter and whiter.*

540

So too the Greeks under the cloud of white dust
Their horses' hooves kicked up from the plain
As the chariots wheeled into action again
And men locked up in hand-to-hand combat.

The bronze sky paled. Ares, who was everywhere
At once now, covered the battle with night
To help the Trojans, honoring the request
Of sungold Apollo, who had asked him to rouse
The Trojans' spirit when he saw that Athena,
Who supported the Greeks, had gone off.
Apollo chose this moment to send forth Aeneas
From his rich sanctuary, infused with strength.
Aeneas took his place in the ranks. The men
Were glad to see him come back to join them,
Alive and well and in good fighting form.
But they did not have time to question him,
Busy as they were with what Apollo was doing
With the help of Ares and ravenous Strife.

550

560

The Greeks were rallied by the two Ajaxes
Along with Odysseus and Diomedes—
Not that they quailed before the Trojan attack.

*In still weather, when the winds that usually
Scatter the shadowy clouds are asleep,
Huge banks of mist lie absolutely steady
Where Zeus has set them on the mountain tops.*

The Greeks met the Trojans without a tremor.

Agamemnon ranged among them, commanding:

"Be men, my friends. Fight with valor
And with a sense of shame before your comrades.
You're less likely to be killed with a sense of shame.
Running away never won glory or a fight."

570

And with a quick throw of his spear he hit
One of Aeneas' men, Deicoön,
Son of Pergasus, whom the Trojans respected
As much as Priam's sons, quick as he was
To fight in the front lines. Agamemnon's spear
Hit his shield, which did not stop the bronze point
From penetrating all the way through
And into his belly, below his belt. He fell
With a thud, and his armor clanged.

580

Then Aeneas killed two of Greece's best,
Crethon and Orsilochus, the sons of Diocles,
A man of substance who lived in Pherae
And was descended from the river Alpheus,
Whose broad stream flows through the Pylians' land,
And who begot Ortilochus to rule over many.
This Ortilochus was the father of Diocles,
Who had twin sons, Crethon and Orsilochus,
Highly trained warriors. They had just reached
Manhood when they went with the Argives
On the black ships to Ilion, famed for its horses,
To win recompense for the sons of Atreus,
But death enfolded them both in that land.

590

Two cubs a mother lion has reared in the mountains,

*Where the woods are thick, will begin snatching
Cattle and sheep from human settlements
And continue ravaging the flocks for years
Until humans finally hunt them down.*

600

So these two brothers, beaten to the ground
By Aeneas.

They fell like tall fir trees,
And as they fell Menelaus pitied them.
He strode through the foremost fighters
Gleaming in his bronze and shaking two spears,
Spurred on by Ares, whose intention was
That Menelaus go down at Aeneas' hands.
But Antilochus, Nestor's son, saw him
And strode through the front lines, afraid
That if anything happened to Menelaus
The Greeks would be robbed of all their hard work.
The two had just squared off, their spears
Pointed directly at each other, when Antilochus
Took his place right next to Menelaus.
Aeneas, quick as he was in battle,
Did not stay around when he saw the two of them
Standing their ground together. They pulled
The dead brothers back to the Achaean lines
And put them in their comrades' arms,
Then returned to fight in the foremost ranks.

610

620

Working as a team, they killed Pylaemenes,
The great Paphlagonian commander,
And Mydon his charioteer. Menelaus

Put his spear through Pylaemenes' collarbone
As he stood stock-still. His squire Mydon
Was trying to turn the horses when Antilochus
Hit him with a stone on the elbow. The reins,
White with ivory, fell from his hands to the ground,
And Antilochus jumped him, driving his sword
Through his temple. He gasped and pitched forward,
Landing headfirst in the soft, deep sand,
Where he stuck up to his shoulders, feet upright,
And held that position for some time, until
His horses knocked him over with their hooves.
Antilochus drove them back toward the camp.

630

Hector saw all this from across the ranks
And charged them with a shout. Trojans
Poured after him in force, led by Ares
And Enyo in her power, who held in her hands
The deafening, shameless horror of War.
Ares cradled an enormous spear in his hands
And fell in with Hector, moving ahead of him
Or a pace or two behind. Diomedes
Stopped dead in his tracks when he saw him.

640

*A man crossing the great plains comes to a river
And is so startled when he sees the water
Churning to the sea that he takes a step backward.*

So Diomedes gave ground, and said to his men:

"Well, my friends, we always thought Hector

650

Was a good man with a spear, a real fighter.
It turns out a god is always at his side,
Ares right now, disguised as a mortal.
Keep your face toward the enemy and back up
Steadily. Don't be too eager to fight with gods."

Thus Diomedes, and the Trojans closed in.
Hector killed two men, good fighters,
Menesthes and Anchialus, riding together.
As they fell, big Ajax pitied them
And came to stand close by. He threw
His shining spear and hit Amphius,
Son of Selagus, a man from Paesus
Who had rich farms there, but Fate led him
To come to the aid of Priam and his sons.
Ajax's tree of a spear hit him in the belly,
Going right through the belt. He fell heavily,
And Ajax rushed up to strip his armor
But was met with a hail of Trojan missiles
Gleaming in the air, many of which
He collected on his shield. Still, big Ajax
Planted his heel upon the corpse and pulled out
His bronze spear. He was not able, though,
To get the armor unstrapped, pressed as he was
By the spears, and fearing a pincer movement
By the numerous and now confident Trojans.
Big as Ajax was, they pushed him back,
And he staggered as he gave ground.

660

670

While these struggles were going on,

Fate aroused Tlepolemus,
A son of Heracles, tall and handsome,
To go up against godlike Sarpedon.
When these two were in range of each other,
Son and grandson of Zeus in the clouds,
It was Tlepolemus who was first to speak:

680

"Well, well, Sarpedon the Lycian.
What are you doing skulking around here?
You wouldn't know what to do in a fight.
They lie when they say you're a son of Zeus.
You don't even come close to the heroes
Who were born from Zeus in the old days—
Like my father, lion-hearted Heracles,
Who came here once for Laomedon's mares
With only six ships and a few men
But sacked Troy and emptied her streets.
You have a coward's heart, and your race is dying.
Your coming from Lycia is not going to help
The men of Troy. I don't care how strong you are,
You're going through Hades' gates, beaten by me."

690

And Sarpedon, the Lycian commander:

"Tlepolemus, your father sacked Ilion
Because Laomedon was foolish enough
To deride the man who had helped him
And withhold the horses he had come so far to get.
As for you, I'm going to work out
A bloody death for you. You're going to give

700

Glory to me, and your soul to Hades."

Sarpedon spoke, and Tlepolemus lifted
His ash-wood spear. They both cast at once,
And the spears crossed in flight. Sarpedon's
Hit Tlepolemus full in the neck. The point
Passed completely, and painfully, through,
And ebony night enfolded his eyes.
Tlepolemus' spear hit Sarpedon's left thigh.
The point slashed through with a vengeance
And grazed the bone, but his father saved him, for now.

710

Sarpedon's men carried him out of battle,
The long spear trailing heavily. In their haste,
No one noticed it or thought to draw it out,
Which would have allowed him to use his legs.
It was difficult work tending him at all.

720

On the other side, the Greeks bore Tlepolemus
Away from the fighting.

Odysseus

Saw all this and longed for action.
He debated inwardly whether he should
Pursue the son of thundering Zeus
Or take instead many Lycian lives.
It was not Odysseus' fate to kill Sarpedon,
So Athena focussed his mind on the Lycians.
He killed Coeranus, Alastor, and Chromius,
Alcandrus, Halius, Noemon, and Prytanis,
And he would have killed more, but Hector

730

Was quick to see what was going on,
And strode through the foremost fighters,
Helmet shining above his flaming bronze,
Bringing terror to the Greeks and joy
To Sarpedon, who groaned as he spoke:

"Son of Priam, don't let me lie here
As prey for the Greeks. Help me.
If I must die, let me die in your city,
Since I will never return to my own land
To make glad my wife and infant son."

740

Hector did not waste any time answering
But sprinted past, helmet glancing in light,
In his passion to drive the Argives back
And kill as many of them as he could.

And godlike Sarpedon was made to sit
Beneath the beautiful oak sacred to Zeus,
And Pelagon, his comrade, pulled the spear
Out of his thigh. His spirit left him,
And a mist poured down over his eyes.
Then the North Wind blew upon him, and he
Breathed again, though he had gasped out his soul.

750

Under pressure from Ares and Hector,
The Greeks neither turned and made for their ships,
Nor held their own in the fight, but eased themselves
Backward, now that they knew the Trojans had Ares.
The killing began with certain Greeks

Distinguished as Hector's and Ares' victims:
Godlike Teuthras; Orestes, a horsedriver;
Oenomaus and Trechus, Aetolian spearmen;
Helenus, son of Oenops; and Oresbius,
A prosperous Boeotian with a gilded corselet.

The havoc continued, and when Hera noticed
That the Greeks were being crushed in battle,
Her words flew fast to Pallas Athena:

"This is a disaster, daughter of Zeus.
Our word to Menelaus that he would go home
With Troy demolished will come to nothing
If we allow Ares to rage on like this.
Come. It's time we remembered how to fight."

Athena, the grey-eyed goddess, agreed.
And Hera, queen of heaven, daughter of Cronus,
Got busy harnessing the horses, gold-frontleted,
While Hebe slid the bronze, eight-spoked wheels
Onto the car's iron axle, wheels with pure gold rims
Fitted with bronze tires, a stunning sight,
And the hubs spinning on both sides were silver.
The car's body was made of gold and silver straps
Stretched tight, and had a double railing.
From it projected a silver pole, and at its end
Hebe bound the golden yoke, and on that she hung
The golden harness. Hera led the quick-hooved horses
Beneath the yoke, her heart pounding for war.

Athena, meanwhile, Zeus' favorite daughter,
Let her supple robe slip down to her father's floor,
This embroidered garment her own handiwork.
She put on one of cloudy Zeus' tunics
And strapped on her armor. Around her shoulders
She flung the tasselled aegis, bordered with Rout
And inset with the blood-chilling horrors of War,
In the center of which was a Gorgon's head,
The dread insignia of Zeus Aegis-Holder.
On her head she put a gold helmet, knobbed and horned,
And embossed with a hundred cities' soldiery.
She stepped into the blazing chariot cradling a spear
Long and thick enough for heaven's daughter
To level battalions of heroes in her wrath.

790

Hera quickly flicked the horses with the lash,
And the automatic gates of heaven
Groaned open, as willed by the Hours,
Who control access to Olympus and heaven,
Opening and shutting the dense cloudbanks.
Through this gate they drove the patient horses
And found Zeus sitting apart from the other gods
On the highest peak of ridged Olympus.
White-armed Hera reined in the horses there
And put her questions to the Most High:

800

"Father Zeus, doesn't Ares infuriate you
With his reckless destruction of so many Greeks,
Much to my sorrow, while Cypris and Apollo,

810

Smug at their success, are lounging around
With this mindless bully who knows no law?
Father Zeus, will you be angry with me
If I knock Ares silly and out of the battle?"

And Zeus, clouds scudding around him:

"Better to put Athena onto him;
She's always been the best at giving him grief."

White-armed Hera did not disobey.
She lashed the horses and they flew with a will
Between the starry heavens and earth. 820
One bound of the gods' horses
Takes them as far into the misty distance
As a lookout can see over the wine-blue Aegean.
When they came to Troy and to the confluence
Of the Scamander and Simois rivers,
The white-armed goddess reined in the horses,
Unyoked them, and shed a thick mist around them.
Simois made ambrosia sprout up for them.

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

As fifty voices combined. And she yelled:

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

840

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

850

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

860

Or paralyzed with fear. No, you're no son
Of Tydeus or grandson of sharp old Oeneus."

And Diomedes, as tough as they come, answered:

"I know it's you, goddess, daughter of Zeus,
And so I will answer you frankly. No, I'm not
Paralyzed by fear, and I'm not slacking off.
But I am following the orders you gave me
When you told me not to fight face to face
With any of the gods except Aphrodite.
If she came, you said I could wound her with bronze.
That's why I've withdrawn and given orders
For all of the troops to fall back to this spot.
I know that Ares is controlling the battle."

870

And Athena, whose eyes were as grey as owls:

"Diomedes, son of Tydeus, I do love you.
You don't have to fear Ares or any other
Of the immortals. Look who is here beside you.
Drive your horses directly at Ares
And when you're in range, strike.
Don't be in awe of Ares. He's nothing but
A shifty lout. He promised Hera and me
He would fight against Troy and help the Greeks.
Now he's turned Trojan and abandoned us."

880

With that, she pulled Sthenelus back and pushed him
Off the chariot. Sthenelus went flying,

And Athena got in next to Diomedes,
Who seemed to glow beside the eager goddess,
And the solid-oak axle groaned under the load
Of an awesome deity and a hero at his best.
Pallas Athena handled the reins and whip
And drove the horses directly at Ares,
Who at that moment was stripping the armor
From a warrior named Periphas, a huge man,
Aetolia's finest and his father's glory.
Ares was busy removing the dead man's armor
And getting smeared with blood. Athena
Put on Hades' helmet so Ares couldn't see her.
But Ares did see Diomedes, and when he did,
He dropped Periphas to lie in his own gore
And headed straight for the hero.
As soon as they were in range of each other
Ares leaned out over his horses' backs
And thrust, frantic for a kill. Athena's hand
Deflected the spear in mid-air and sent it
Sailing harmlessly over Diomedes' chariot,
And when Diomedes thrust next,
She drove his spear home to the pit
Of Ares' belly, where the kilt-piece covered it.
The spearhead sliced right through to the flesh,
And when Diomedes pulled it out,
Ares yelled, so loud you would have thought
Ten thousand warriors had shouted at once,
And the sound reverberated in the guts of Greeks and Trojans
As if Diomedes had struck not a god in armor
But a bronze gong nine miles high.

890

900

910

*After a period of heat, when the low clouds
 Are massed like wool, you will sometimes see
 A darker clot of air whirling off
 On its way to becoming a tornado—*

920

That is how Ares appeared to Diomedes,
 Moving off through the clouds and up the big sky.

He quickly scaled the heights of Olympus,
 Sat down sulking beside Cronion Zeus,
 Showed him the immortal blood oozing
 From his wound, and whined these winged words:

"Father Zeus, doesn't it infuriate you
 To see this violence? We gods
 Get the worst of it from each other
 Whenever we try to help out men.
 Why did you have to give birth to that madwoman,
 Your marauding daughter who is always
 Breaking the rules? All the rest of us gods,
 Every one on Olympus, listen to you.
 But she can say or do whatever she wants.
 You even urge her on, your grey-eyed girl.
 Just now she's been egging on Diomedes
 To rampage against the immortal gods.
 He wounded Cypris first, got her on the wrist,
 Then charged at me like an avenging spirit.
 My fast footwork saved me, or I would be
 Lying in a heap of gruesome corpses,

930

940

Or barely alive from taking hits from his spear."

And Zeus, from under thunderhead brows:

"Shifty lout. Don't sit here by me and whine.

You're the most loathsome god on Olympus.

You actually like fighting and war.

950

You take after your hardheaded mother,

Hera. I can barely control her either.

One way or another, she got you into this.

Be that as it may, I cannot tolerate your being in pain.

Your mother did, after all, bear you to me.

But if you were born to any other god,

You'd be long buried in hell below the Titans."

And he called Paieon to doctor his wound.

Paieon rubbed on an anodyne to kill the pain.

And then,

960

As quickly as white milk

Thickened with fig juice

Curdles when stirred,

Paieon healed impetuous Ares.

And Hebe bathed him and dressed him handsomely,

And he sat beside Zeus exulting in glory.

Then back to the palace of great Zeus

Came Argive Hera and Athena the Protector,

Having stopped brutal Ares from butchering men.