

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
Are swarming down on him.*

30

It was Paris all right,
Who could have passed for a god,
And Menelaus grinned as he hefted his gear
And stepped down from his chariot. He would
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
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:

40

"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 Talthylus 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 Maconia? 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 Craneae.
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

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
The left shoulder of Diomedes, 20
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

And, without breaking stride, slashed
At the man's shoulder with his sword

90

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