Book One
The Quarrel by the Ships

*[The invocation to the Muse; Agamemnon insults Apollo; Apollo sends the plague onto the army; the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon; Calchas indicates what must be done to appease Apollo; Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles; Achilles prays to Thetis for revenge; Achilles meets Thetis; Chryseis is returned to her father; Thetis visits Zeus; the gods converse about the matter on Olympus; the banquet of the gods]*

 Sing, Goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus—
that murderous anger which condemned Achaeans
to countless agonies and threw many warrior souls
deep into Hades, leaving their dead bodies
carrion food for dogs and birds—
all in fulfilment of the will of Zeus.

Start at the point where Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
that king of men, quarrelled with noble Achilles.
Which of the gods incited these two men to fight?

That god was Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto. 10
Angry with Agamemnon, he cast plague down onto the

 troops—deadly infectious evil.
For Agamemnon had dishonoured the god’s priest,
Chryses, who’d come to the ships to find his daughter,
Chryseis, bringing with him a huge ransom.
In his hand he held up on a golden staff
the scarf sacred to archer god Apollo.
He begged Achaeans, above all the army’s leaders,
the two sons of Atreus:

       “Menelaus, Agamemnon, sons of Atreus, 20
all you well-armed Achaeans, may the gods
on Olympus grant you wipe out Priam’s city,
and then return home safe and sound.
Release my dear child to me. Take this ransom. Honour Apollo,

far-shooting son of Zeus.”

All the Achaeans roared out their support:

       “Respect the priest. Take the generous ransom.”

Displeased, Agamemnon dismissed Chryses roughly:

                                                              “Old man,
don’t let me catch you by our hollow ships,
sneaking back here today or later on. 30
Who cares about Apollo’s scarf and staff?
I’ll not release the girl to you, no, not before
she’s grown old with me in Argos, far from home,

working the loom, sharing my bed. Go away.
If you want to get home safely, don’t anger me.”

The old man, afraid, obeyed his words, walked off in silence,
along the shore by the tumbling, crashing surf.

*[Chryses returns home and prays that Apollo will bring vengeance down on the Greeks. The god obliges, raining down arrows of plague on the Greek army. In an effort to find a solution, Achilles brings in the soothsayer Calchas, who advises the Greeks that the daughter of the priest must be returned. Agamemnon is furious, both at the outcome and at Achilles, who brought the soothsayer in to begin with.]*

Then, Atreus’ son,
wide-ruling, mighty Agamemnon, stood up before them, 110
incensed, spirit filled with huge black rage.
Eyes blazing fire, he rounded first on Calchas:

“Prophet of evil, when have you ever said
good things to me? You love to predict the worst,
always the worst! You never show good news.
Now, in prophecy to the Danaans,
you say archer Apollo brings us pain because I was

unwilling to accept
fine ransom for Chryses’ daughter, Chryseis.
But I have a great desire to take her home. 120
In fact, I want her more than Clytaemnestra,
the wife I married. Chryseis is just as good
in her shape, physique, intelligence, or work.
Still, I’m prepared to give her back, if that’s best.
I want the people safe, not all killed off.
But then you’ll owe me another prize.
I won’t be the only Argive left without a gift.
That would be entirely unfair to me.
You all can see my spoils are going elsewhere.”

At that point, swift-footed Achilles answered the king: 130

“Noble son of Atreus, most acquisitive of men,
how can brave Achaeans give you a prize now?
There are none left for us to pass around.
We’ve divided up what we allotted,
loot from captured towns we devastated.
For men to make a common pile again
would be most unfair. Send the girl back now,
as the god demands. Should Zeus ever grant
we pillage Troy, a city rich in goods,
we’ll give you three or four times as much.” 140

Mighty Agamemnon then said in reply:

“Achilles, you’re a fine man, like a god.
But don’t conceal what’s in your heart.
You’ll not trick me or win me with your words.
You intend to keep your prizes for yourself,
while the army takes my trophy from me.
That’s why you tell me to give Chryseis back.
Let Achaeans give me another prize,
equal in value, something I’ll enjoy.
If not, then I’ll take a prize myself by force, 150
something from you or Ajax or Odysseus.
The man I visit is going to be enraged.
But let’s postpone discussion of all this. Let’s

drag a black ship to the sacred sea,
select a crew, load oxen on for sacrifice,
and Chryseis, that fair-complexioned girl.
Let’s have as leader some wise counsellor—
Idomeneus, Ajax, godlike Odysseus,
or you, Peleus’s son, most eminent of all,
so with a sacrifice we may appease 160
the god who shoots from far away.”

Scowling grimly, swift-footed Achilles interposed:

“You insatiable creature, quite shameless.
How can any Achaean obey you willingly—

join a raiding party or keep fighting
with full force against an enemy?
I didn’t come to battle over here
because of Trojans. I have no fight with them.
They never stole my bulls or horses
or razed my crops in fertile Phthia, 170
where heroes grow. Many shady mountains
and the roaring sea stand there between us.
But you, great shameless man, we came with you,
to please you, to win honour from the Trojans—
for you, dog face, and for Menelaus.
You don’t consider this, don’t think at all.

You threaten now to confiscate the prize
I worked so hard for, gift from Achaea’s sons.
When we Achaeans loot some well-built Trojan town,
my prizes never match the ones you get. 180
The major share of war’s fury rests on me.
But when we hand around the battle spoils,
you get much larger trophies. Worn out in war,
I reach my ships with something fine but small.
So I’ll return home now to Phthia.
It’s far better to sail back in my curved ships.

I don’t fancy staying here unvalued,
to pile up riches, treasures just for you.”

To that, Agamemnon, king of men, shot back:

      “Fly off home then, if that’s your heart’s desire. 190
I’ll not beg you to stay on my account.
I have others around to honour me,
especially all-wise Zeus himself.
Of all the kings Zeus cherishes, it’s you
I hate the most. You love constant strife—
war and combat. So what if you’re strong?
Some god gave you that. So scurry off home.
Take ships and friends. Go rule your Myrmidons.

I don’t like you or care about your rage.
But I’ll make this threat: I’ll take your prize, 200
fair-cheeked Briseis. I’ll fetch her in person.
You’ll see just how much I’m the better man.
And others will hate to speak to me as peers,
in public claiming full equality with me.”

*[Agamemnon follows through on his threat and takes Achilles’ prize, Briseis, as his own. Athena visits Achilles and advises him to put away his anger. She tells him that Agamemnon’s arrogance will one day cost him his life, but that Achilles will eventually be accorded greater honors than Agamemnon. Achilles agrees to obey. He then turns to Agamemnon and calls him a drunk who “gorges on his own people.” The two continue to argue, and Achilles ends by saying that he will not fight to keep Briseis, the prize he was given, if the Greeks choose to take her back again, but neither will he allow them to take one more thing from him. Agamemnon returns Chryseis to her home and father and then sends men to take Briseis from Achilles. Achilles goes to the shore to weep over the shame. His mother, Thetis, comes to him and advises him to stop fighting for the Greeks. Zeus agrees to help Thetis by making the Greeks lose without Achilles.]*

Book Three
 Paris, Menelaus, and Helen

*[The armies move together; Paris volunteers to fight Menelaus in single combat; both sides prepare make a truce; Iris visits Helen; Helen goes to the Scaean Gate, looks at the Achaean troops with Priam; Priam leaves Troy to visit the armies and administer the treaty oath; Agamemnon utters the prayer for the treaty; Paris and Menelaus fight in single combat; Aphrodite rescues Paris; Paris and Helen meet in Troy; Agamemnon demands compensation from the Trojans]*

Then godlike Paris stepped out, as Trojan champion,
on his shoulders a leopard skin. He had bow and sword.
Brandishing two bronze-tipped spears, he challenged
the best men in the whole Achaean force to fight—
a single combat, to the death. War-loving Menelaus
noticed Alexander striding there, his troops 20
bunched up in ranks behind him, and he rejoiced,
like a famished lion finding a large carcass—
antlered stag or wild goat—and devouring it at once,
though fierce young hunters and swift dogs attack.[**\***](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/homer/iliad3.htm#n2)
So Menelaus was pleased to see Paris there,
right before his eyes. Menelaus had in mind
taking revenge on the man who’d injured him.
At once Menelaus jumped from his chariot,
down to the ground, his weapons in his fists.
When godlike Alexander saw Menelaus there, 30
among the fighters at the front, his heart sank.
He moved back into the ranks, among his comrades,
avoiding death. Just as a man stumbles on a snake
in some mountainous ravine and gives way, jumping back,
his limbs trembling, his cheeks pale, so godlike Paris,
afraid of Atreus’ son, slid back into proud Trojan ranks.

Seeing this, Hector went at Alexander, insulting him:

“Despicable Paris, handsomest of men,
but woman-mad seducer. How I wish
you never had been born or died unmarried. 40

That’s what I’d prefer, so much better
than to live in shame, hated by others.
Now long-haired Achaeans are mocking us,
saying we’ve put forward as a champion
one who looks good, but lacks a strong brave mind.
Was this what you were like back on that day
you gathered up your faithful comrades,
sailed sea-worthy ships across the ocean,
went out among a foreign people,
and carried back from that far-off land  50
a lovely woman linked by marriage
to warrior spearmen, thus bringing on
great suffering for your father and your city,

all your people—joy to your enemies
and to yourself disgrace? And can you now
not face Menelaus? If so, you’d learn
the kind of man he is whose wife you took.
You’d get no help then from your lyre, long hair,
good looks—Aphrodite’s gifts—once face down,
lying in the dirt. Trojans must be timid men. 60
If not, for all the evil things you’ve done
by now you’d wear a garment made of stones.”

To Hector godlike Alexander then replied:

“Hector, you’re right in what you say against me.
Those complaints of yours are not unjustified.
Your heart is tireless, like a wood-chopping axe
wielded by a craftsman cutting timber for a ship.
The axe makes his force stronger. Your mind’s like that—
the spirit in your chest is fearless. But don’t blame me
for golden Aphrodite’s lovely gifts. 70
Men can’t reject fine presents from the gods,
those gifts they personally bestow on us,
though no man would take them of his own free will.
You want me now to go to battle.
Get others to sit down—Trojans and Achaeans.
Put me and war-loving Menelaus
in their midst to fight it out for Helen,
all her property. The one who triumphs,
comes off victorious, the better man,
let him take all the goods and lead her home, 80
as his wife. Let others swear a solemn oath,
as friends, either to live on in fertile Troy
or to return to horse-breeding Argos,
land of the lovely women of Achaea.”

So Paris spoke. Hearing those words, Hector felt great joy.

*[Hector tells the Greeks that Paris will fight. They make an agreement that the victor of the single combat will take the spoils, including Helen, and go home. This will mean a truce between the two armies. The messenger goddess Iris goes to Helen and tells her that her former husband and her current mate are about to fight to win her.]*

With these words the goddess set in Helen’s heart
sweet longing for her former husband, city, parents.

Covering herself with a white shawl, she left the house,
shedding tears…

…Priam then called out to Helen.

“Come here, dear child. Sit down in front of me,
so you can see your first husband, your friends,
your relatives. As far as I’m concerned,
it’s not your fault. For I blame the gods.
They drove me to wage this wretched war 180
against Achaeans. Tell me, who’s that large man,
over there, that impressive, strong Achaean?
Others may be taller by a head than him,
but I’ve never seen with my own eyes,
such a striking man, so noble, so like a king.”

Then Helen, goddess among women, said to Priam:

“My dear father-in-law, whom I respect and honour,
how I wish I’d chosen an evil death
when I came here with your son, leaving behind
my married home, companions, darling child, 190
and friends my age. But things didn’t work that way.
So I weep all the time. But to answer you,
that man is wide-ruling Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, a good king, fine fighter,
and once he was my brother-in-law,
if that life was ever real. I’m such a whore.”

*[Priam is shocked at Helen’s grief. He distracts her by asking her to identify the various heroes of the Greek army, and she obeys. Menelaus and Paris face each other on the battlefield.]*

 Paris, husband to Helen with the lovely hair,
hoisted his fine armour on his shoulders. On his shins,
he clipped leg armour fitted with silver ankle clasps.
Then he put around his chest the body armour
belonging to his brother Lycaon. It fit him well. 370
On his shoulder he looped his bronze, silver-studded sword,
his huge strong shield. On his handsome head he put
a fine helmet with nodding horse-hair plumes on top,
full of menace. Then he picked out a brave spear
which fit his grip. Menelaus prepared himself as well.
When the two men, standing on each side with their troops,
had armed themselves, they strode out to the open space
between the Trojans and Achaeans, staring ferociously.
As horse-taming Trojans and well-armed Achaeans
gazed at the two men, they were overcome with wonder. 380
The two men approached each other over measured ground,
brandishing their spears in mutual fury.
Alexander was the first to hurl his spear.
It struck Menelaus’ shield, a perfect circle,
but the bronze did not break through, the point deflected
by the powerful shield. Then Menelaus, Atreus’ son,
threw in his turn. First he made this prayer to Zeus:

“Lord Zeus, grant I may be revenged on this man,
who first committed crimes against me,
lord Alexander. Let him die at my hands, 390
so generations of men yet to come
will dread doing wrong to anyone
who welcomes them into his home as friends.”

Menelaus then drew back his long-shadowed spear,
and hurled it. It hit the son of Priam’s shield,
a perfect circle. The heavy spear pierced through it,
went straight through the fine body armour, through the shirt
which covered Alexander’s naked flesh.
But Paris twisted to the side, evading a black fate.

Pulling out his silver-studded sword, the son of Atreus  400
raised it and struck the crest of Paris’ helmet.
But the sword shattered into three or four pieces,
falling from his hand. The son of Atreus, in vexation,
looked up into wide heaven, crying out:

                                                    “Father Zeus,
what god brings us more trouble than you do?
I thought I was paying Alexander
for his wickedness, but now my sword
has shattered in my fist, while from my hand
my spear has flown in vain. I haven’t hit him.”

As Menelaus said these words, he sprang forward, 410
grabbing the horse hair crest on Paris’ helmet,
twisting him around. He began dragging Paris off,
back in the direction of well-armed Achaeans.

The fine leather strap stretched round Paris’ soft neck,
right below his chin, was strangling him to death.
At that point Menelaus would have hauled back Paris
and won unending fame, if Aphrodite, Zeus’ daughter,
had not had sharp eyes. Her force broke the ox-hide strap,
leaving Menelaus clutching in his massive hands
an empty helmet. Whipping it around, Menelaus  420
hurled the helmet in among well-armed Achaeans.
His loyal companions retrieved it. He charged back,
with his bronze spear, intent on killing Alexander.
But Aphrodite had snatched Paris up—for a god

an easy feat—concealed him in a heavy mist,
and placed him in his own sweetly scented bedroom.

*[Aphrodite goes to Helen, telling her to join Paris in the bedroom. Helen responds angrily, accusing the goddess of trying to trick her. She resents Aphrodite’s interference. The goddess is irritated and threatens to abandon Helen. Helen eventually goes to Paris, but she is angry and scornful of him.]*

With eyes averted,
she began to criticize her husband:

         “You’ve come back from the fight. How I wish  480
you’d died there, killed by that strong warrior
who was my husband once. You used to boast
you were stronger than warlike Menelaus,
more strength in your hands, more power in your spear.
So go now, challenge war-loving Menelaus
to fight again in single combat.
I’d suggest you stay away. Don’t fight it out
man to man with fair-haired Menelaus,
without further thought. You might well die,
come to a quick end on his spear.” 490

Replying to Helen, Paris said:

                                                         Wife,
don’t mock my courage with your insults.
Yes, Menelaus has just defeated me,
but with Athena’s help. Next time I’ll beat him.

For we have gods on our side, too. But come,
let’s enjoy our love together on the bed.
Never has desire so filled my mind as now,
not even when I first took you away
from lovely Lacedaemon, sailing off
in our sea-worthy ships, or when I lay with you  500
in our lover’s bed on the isle of Cranae.
That’s how sweet passion has seized hold of me,
how much I want you now.”

                                     Paris finished speaking.
He led the way to bed. His wife went, too.
The two lay down together on the bed.

 Book SixHector and Andromache

*[The battle continues; Menelaus captures Adrestus; Agamemnon refuses ransom; Helenus gives advice to Hector; Glaucus and Diomedes prepare to fight; Glaucus tells the story of Bellerophon; Glaucus and Diomedes exchange armour in friendship; Hector goes to Troy, talks with his mother; Hector talks to Paris and Helen; Hector goes home, talks to his housekeeper;  Hector meets Andromache and Astyanax; Hector prays for his son's future; Paris rejoins Hector at the gates]*

*[Hector comes to the palace and prepares to go back to battle. He sees Paris and berates him for being worthless, just lying around in his room while others fight. Paris agrees with Hector, saying Helen, too, has been telling him to go fight. He tells Hector he will go with him.]*

So Helen spoke to Hector with these soothing words:

“O Hector, you’re my brother, and me,
I’m a horrible, conniving bitch.
I wish that on that day my mother bore me
some evil wind had come, carried me away,
and swept me off, up into the mountains,
or to the waves of the tumbling, crashing sea.                                430
Then I would’ve died before this happened.
But since gods have ordained these evil things,
I wish I’d been wife to a better man,
someone sensitive to others’ insults,
with feeling for his many shameful acts.
This husband of mine has no sense now
and won’t acquire any in the future.
I expect he’ll get from that what he deserves.
But come in, sit on this chair, my brother,
since this trouble really weighs upon your mind—                        440
all because I was a bitch—because of that
and Paris’ folly, Zeus gives us an evil fate,
so we may be subjects for men’s songs
in human generations yet to come.”

Great Hector of the shining helmet answered Helen:

         “Don’t ask me to sit down, Helen. You’re kind,
but you won’t persuade me. For my heart’s on fire
to help Trojans, who really miss me when I’m gone.
But you must rouse Paris, and he should hurry,
so he can catch me here in the city.                                                   450
I’m going home, to visit my dear wife
and infant son, for I’ve no idea
if I’ll be coming back to them again,
or if the gods will kill me at Achaean hands.”

*[Hector prepares for battle, going to the walls to say good-bye to his wife and baby son, Astyanax.]*

Hector looked at his son in silence, with a smile.
Andromache stood close to him, weeping.
Taking Hector by the hand, she spoke to him.

“My dear husband, your warlike spirit
will be your death. You’ve no compassion
for your infant child, for me, your sad wife,                                     500
who before long will be your widow.
For soon the Achaeans will attack you,
all together, and cut you down. As for me,
it would be better, if I’m to lose you,
to be buried in the ground. For then I’ll have
no other comfort, once you meet your death,
except my sorrow.

*[Andromache reminds Hector of all her family who have been killed, mainly by Achilles (though he did give them all honourable burial), and urges Hector not to go to battle, for he is all she has left.]*

Great Hector of the shining helmet answered her:

                                                                         “Wife,
all this concerns me, too. But I’d be disgraced,                               540
dreadfully shamed among Trojan men
and Trojan women in their trailing gowns,
if I should, like a coward, slink away from war.
My heart will never prompt me to do that,
for I have learned always to be brave,
to fight alongside Trojans at the front,
striving to win fame for father and myself.
My heart and mind know well the day is coming
when sacred Ilion will be destroyed,
along with Priam of the fine ash spear                                             550
and Priam’s people. But what pains me most
about these future sorrows is not so much
the Trojans, Hecuba, or king Priam,
or even my many noble brothers,
who’ll fall down in the dust, slaughtered
by their enemies. My pain focuses on you,
when one of those bronze-clad Achaeans
leads you off in tears, ends your days of freedom.
If then you come to Argos as a slave,
working the loom for some other woman,                                       560
fetching water from Hypereia or Messeis,
against your will, forced by powerful Fate,
then someone seeing you as you weep
may well say:

 ‘That woman is Hector’s wife.
He was the finest warrior in battle
of all horse-taming Trojans in that war
when they fought for Troy.’

                               Someone will say that,
and it will bring still more grief to you,
to be without a man like that to save you
from days of servitude. May I lie dead,                                             570
hidden deep under a burial mound,
before I hear about your screaming,
as you are dragged away.”

                                                With these words,
glorious Hector stretched his hands out for his son.
The boy immediately shrank back against the breast
of the finely girdled nurse, crying out in terror
to see his own dear father, scared at the sight of bronze,
the horse-hair plume nodding fearfully from his helmet top.
The child’s loving father laughed, his noble mother, too.
Glorious Hector pulled the glittering helmet off                                     580
and set it on the ground. Then he kissed his dear son
and held him in his arms.

Book Twenty Two
The Death of Hector

*[The Trojans retreat into the city;  Apollo reveals his deception to Achilles; Hector remains outside the gates; Priam and Hecuba appeal to Hector to come inside the walls; Hector debates what to do, then panics and runs away; Achilles chases Hector around Troy; the gods look on; Zeus holds up his golden scales; Athena intervenes to advise Achilles; Athena takes on the form of Deïphobus to get Hector to fight Achilles; Hector and Achilles fight; Hector is killed; the Achaeans mutilate Hector and Achilles dishonors the corpse; Priam and Hecuba see the corpse of Hector being dragged past the city; Andromache reacts to the sight of her dead husband]*

*[Because Apollo has been interfering with Achilles, Achilles tries to chase and fight the god. Apollo points out the futility of this, as he is a god and Achilles will never be able to beat him. Achilles responds furiously, telling Apollo that, if he could, he would revenge himself upon the god. Hector prepares to face Achilles. When Priam and Hecuba see the godlike Achilles in his brightly shining armor, they beg their son not to face the Greek hero alone. Hector tells them he must. He has lost too many men in battle to refuse to fight Achilles now. Hector considers trying to make peace with Achilles, to face him with words instead of armor, but he realizes that Achilles would have no pity at all and would kill him even as Hector removed his armor.]*

But Achilles was coming closer, like Enyalius,
the warrior god of battle with the shining helmet.
On his right shoulder he waved his dreadful spear
made of Pelian ash. The bronze around him glittered
like a blazing fire or rising sun. At that moment,                                    170
as he watched, Hector began to shake in fear.
His courage gone, he could no longer stand there.
Terrified, he started running, leaving the gate.
Peleus’ son went after him, sure of his speed on foot.
Just as a mountain falcon, the fastest creature
of all the ones which fly, swoops down easily
on a trembling pigeon as it darts off in fear,
the hawk speeding after it with piercing cries,
heart driving it to seize the prey—in just that way
Achilles in his fury raced ahead. Hector ran                                             180
under the walls of Troy, limbs working feverishly...

 ... The men raced past there,
one in full flight, the other one pursuing him.
The man running off in front was a brave warrior,
but the man going after him was greater. They ran fast,
for this was no contest over sacrificial beasts,
the usual prizes for a race. They were competing
for horse-taming Hector’s life. Just as some horses,
sure-footed, prize-winning creatures, make the turn                              200
around the post and race quickly as they strive to win
some splendid prize—a tripod or a woman
honouring a man that’s died—that’s how these two men raced,
going three times round Priam’s city on their sprinting feet.
All the gods looked on. Among them the first one to speak
was Zeus, father of the gods and men:

                                                     “What a sight!
My eyes can see a fine man being pursued
around the walls. How my heart pities Hector,
who’s often sacrificed to me, burning
many thighs of oxen on the crests                                                     210
of Ida with its many spurs and valleys,
on the city heights, as well. And now,
godlike Achilles is pursuing him
on his quick feet round Priam’s city. Come,
you gods, think hard and offer your advice—
do we wish to rescue him from death,
or kill him now, for all his bravery,
at the hands of Peleus’ son, Achilles?”

                                                        Then Athena,
goddess with the glittering eyes, replied to Zeus:

         “Father, lord of lightning and dark clouds,                                      220
what are you saying? How can you want
to snatch the man back from his wretched death.
He’s mortal—his fate doomed him long ago.
Well, do as you wish, but we other gods
will not all approve your actions.”

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then answered Athena:

“Cheer up, Tritogeneia, my dear child,
I’m not saying how my heart intends to act.
I want to please you. So you can do
whatever your mind tells you. Don’t hold back.”

     Athena, who was already eager, was spurred on
by Zeus’ words. She rushed down from Olympus’ peak.

Swift Achilles was still pressing Hector hard
in that relentless chase. Just as in the mountains
a hound startles from its cover some young deer,
then goes after it through glens and valley gorges—
and even if the fawn evades it for a while,
cowering in some thicket, the dog tracks it down,
always running till he finds it—that’s how Hector
could not shake off the swift-footed son of Peleus.                                 240
Every time he tried to dash for the Dardanian gates
to get underneath the walls, so men on top
could come to his assistance by hurling spears,
Achilles would intercept him and turn him back
towards the plain, always making sure he kept
running a line between Hector and the city.
Like a dream in which a man cannot catch someone
who’s running off and the other can’t escape,
just as the first man can’t catch up—that’s how
Achilles, for all his speed, could not reach Hector,                                  250
while Hector was unable to evade Achilles.
But how could Hector have escaped death’s fatal blow,
if Apollo had not for one last time approached,
to give him strength and make his legs run faster?
Godlike Achilles, with a shake of his head,
prevented his own troops from shooting Hector
with their lethal weapons, in case some other man
hit Hector, robbed him of the glory, and left him
to come too late. But when they ran past those springs
the fourth time, Father Zeus raised his golden scales,                            260
setting there two fatal lots for death’s long sorrow,
one for Achilles, one for horse-taming Hector.
Seizing it in the middle, Zeus raised his balance.
Hector’s fatal day sank, moving down to Hades.
At once Phoebus Apollo abandoned him.

*[Athena begins to intervene on Achilles’ behalf. She tells Achilles to be still and wait. Then she goes to Hector, taking the form of his brother Deiphobus. In this guise, she convinces Hector to turn and face Achilles. Believing he has his brother’s help and a chance at beating Achilles, Hector meets the Greek hero.]*

When they’d approached each other, at close quarters,
great Hector of the shining helmet spoke out first:

“I’ll no longer try to run away from you,
son of Peleus, as I did before, going                                                           310
three times in flight around Priam’s great city.
I lacked the courage then to fight with you,
as you attacked. But my heart prompts me now
to stand against you face to face once more,
whether I kill you, or you kill me.
So come here. Let’s call on gods to witness,
for they’re the best ones to observe our pact,
to supervise what we two agree on.
If Zeus grants me the strength to take your life,
I’ll not abuse your corpse in any way.                                                        320
I’ll strip your celebrated armour off,
Achilles, then give the body back again
to the Achaeans. And you’ll do the same.”

Swift-footed Achilles, with a scowl, replied:

“Hector, don’t talk to me of our agreements.
That’s idiotic, like a faithful promise
between men and lions. Wolves and lambs
don’t share a common heart—they always sense
a mutual hatred for each other.
In just that way, it’s not possible for us,                                           330
for you and me, to be friends, or, indeed,
for there to be sworn oaths between us,
till one or other of us falls, glutting Ares,
warrior with the bull’s hide shield, on blood.
You’d best remember all your fighting skills.
Now you must declare yourself a spearman,
a fearless warrior. You’ve got no escape.
Soon Pallas Athena will destroy you
on my spear. Right now you’ll pay me back,
the full price of those sorrows I went through                                340
when you slaughtered my companions.”

With these words, he hefted his long-shadowed spear,
then hurled it. However, anticipating the throw,
splendid Hector saw it coming and evaded it
by crouching down, so the bronze spear flew over him,
then struck the ground. But Pallas Athena grabbed it
and returned it to Achilles, without Hector,
that shepherd of his people, seeing what she’d done.
Hector then called out to Peleus’ noble son:

         “You missed, godlike Achilles. So it seems                                      350
you learned nothing from Zeus about my death,
although you said you had. That was just talk.
You were telling lies to make me fear you,
so I might forget my strength and courage.
Well, with your spear you won’t be striking me
in my back as I run away in fear.
You’ll have to drive it through my charging chest,
as I come right at you, if a god permits.
Now, see if you can cope with my bronze point.
I hope you get this whole spear in your flesh.                                 360
This war would then be easier on Trojans
with you dead, for yyou’re their greatest danger.

With these words, Hector balanced his long-shadowed spear,
then threw it. It struck the shield of Peleus’ son,
right in the centre. That spear didn’t miss its mark.
But it bounced some distance off the shield. Hector,
angry that the spear had flown from his hand and missed,
stood dismayed, for he had no substitute ash spear.
So he shouted out, calling to Deïphobus,
who carried a white shield, asking him with a yell                                  370
to pass him his long spear. But Deïphobus
was nowhere to be seen. Then Hector in his heart
saw everything so clearly—he said:

                                          “This is it, then.
The gods are summoning me to my death.
I thought warrior Deïphobus was close by.
But he’s inside the walls, and Athena
has deceived me. Now evil death is here,
right beside me, not somewhere far away.
There’s no escape. For a long time now,
this must have been what Zeus desired,                                           380
and Zeus’ son, the god who shoots from far,
and all those who willingly gave me help
in earlier days. So now I meet my fate.
Even so, let me not die ingloriously
without a fight, but in some great action
which those men yet to come will hear about.”

Hector finished speaking. He pulled out his sharp sword,
that strong and massive weapon hanging on his thigh,
gathered himself, then swooped like some high-flying eagle
plummeting to the plains down through the murky clouds                   390
to seize a tender lamb or cowering rabbit—
that’s how Hector charged, brandishing his sharp sword.
Achilles attacked, as well, heart full of savage anger,
covering his chest with that richly decorated shield,
his shining four-ridged helmet nodding on his head,
the golden plumes Hephaestus had set there
shimmering around the crest. Just like that star
which stands out the loveliest among all those
in the heavenly night sky—the star of evening—
that’s how the sharp point then glittered on the spear                           400
Achilles hefted in his right hand, intent on
killing noble Hector. He inspected his fine skin,
to see where it was vulnerable to a blow.
But Hector’s entire body was protected
by that beautiful armour he had stripped off
powerful Patroclus, once he’d killed him,
except for that opening where the collar bones
separate the neck and shoulders, at the gullet,
where a man’s life is most effectively destroyed.
As Hector charged, noble Achilles struck him there,                              410
driving the spear point through his tender neck.
But the heavy bronze on that ash spear did not cut
his windpipe, so he could still address Achilles
and reply to him. Hector fell down in the dust.

Lord Achilles then cried out in triumph:

                                                         “Hector,
I suppose you thought you could safely strip
Patroclus, without giving me a thought,
since I was far away. That was foolish!
By our hollow ships he’d left me behind,
a much greater man, to take out my revenge.                                 420
I’ve drained strength from your limbs—now dogs and birds
will tear you into miserable pieces,
while Achaeans are burying Patroclus.”

His strength fading, Hector of the shining helmet
answered Achilles:

                                           “By your life, I beg you,
by your knees, your parents—don’t let dogs eat me
by Achaean ships. No, you should accept
all the bronze and gold you might desire,
gifts my father and lady mother give you,
if you’ll send my body home again,                                                   430
so Trojans and Trojans’ wives can bury me,
with all the necessary funeral rites.”

Scowling at Hector, swift-footed Achilles then replied:

“Don’t whine to me, you dog, about my knees
or parents. I wish I had the heart and strength
to carve you up and eat you raw myself
for what you’ve done to me. So there’s no one
who’ll keep the dogs from going at your head,
not even if they bring here and weigh out
a ransom ten or twenty times as much,                                            440
with promises of more, or if Priam,
son of Dardanus, says he’ll pay your weight
in gold. Not even then will your mother
set you on a funeral bed and there lament
the son she bore. Instead, the dogs and birds
will eat you up completely.”

                                                Then, as he died,
Hector of the shining helmet said to Achilles:

“I know you well. I recognize in you
what I expected— you’d not be convinced.
For your heart and mind are truly iron.                                            450
But think of this—I may bring down on you
the anger of the gods that very day
when Paris and Phoebus Apollo,
in spite of all your courage, slaughter you
beside the Scaean Gate.”

                                                       As Hector spoke,
death’s final end slid over him. His life slipped out,
flying off to Hades, mourning his fate to have to leave
such youthful manliness. Over dead Hector,
godlike Achilles then cried out:

                                     “Die there!
As for my own death, I accept it                                                        460
whenever Zeus and the immortal gods
see fit to bring it to me.”

                                                                      Saying this,
he pulled his bronze spear from the corpse, set it aside,
and stripped the blood-stained armour from the shoulders.
Then the rest of Achaea’s sons came running up.
They gazed at Hector’s stature, his handsome body.
All the men who came up to the corpse stabbed it,
looking at each other, saying:

                                                    “Look here,
it’s easier for us to deal with Hector now
than when his fire burned our ships.”

...Achilles finished. Then on noble Hector’s corpse
he carried out a monstrous act. He cut through
the tendons behind both feet, from heel to ankle,
threaded them with ox-hide thongs, and then tied these
onto his chariot, leaving the head to drag behind.
He climbed up in his chariot, brought on the splendid armour,
then lashed his horses. They sped off eagerly,                                          500
dragging Hector. A dust cloud rose above him,
his dark hair spread out round him, and Hector’s head,
once so handsome, was covered by the dust, for Zeus
had given him to his enemies to dishonour
in his own native land. So all his head grew dirty.

When she saw her son, his mother pulled her hair,
threw off her shining veil, and began to shriek.
His dear father gave a pitiful groan. Around them,
people were overwhelmed with wailing and laments
throughout the city. It was as if all Ilion                                                    510
were engulfed in flames, all over the summit
of that towering rock. The people then had trouble
restraining the old man in his frantic grief,
his desperate wish to go through the Dardanian gate...

Book Twenty Four
Achilles and Priam

*[Achilles continues to mourn and to dishonour Hector's corpse; the gods debate his action; Zeus resolves to deal with the problem; Iris goes off to fetch Thetis; Zeus instructs Thetis to visit Achilles; Thetis tells Achilles Zeus' instructions;  Achilles agrees to give up Hector's body for ransom; Iris visits Priam, telling him to go to the Achaean ships; Hecuba objects to the trip; Priam insults his sons, then collects the ransom and leaves with Idaios, the herald; Zeus sends Priam an omen and tells Hermes to guide Priam to Achilles; Hermes meets Priam on the road; Hermes takes Priam to the Achaean camp; Priam meets Achilles; Achilles agrees to give back Hector; Achilles and Priam have dinner; Priam sleeps overnight outside Achilles hut; Priam and Idaios return to Troy with Hector's body; the women lament over Hector; the Trojans bury Hector]*

*[Most of the gods pity Hector as his body is dishonored, and they propose to steal the body back. Only three gods oppose this plan: Poseidon, Hera, and Athena, who hate the Trojans and have no pity for their prince. Eventually, Hermes sneaks Priam into the Greek camp and to Achilles’ tent, where Priam, king of Troy, throws himself down before Achilles as a supplicant.]*

He came up to Achilles, then with his fingers
clasped his knees and kissed his hands, those dreadful hands,
man-killers, which had slain so many of his sons.
Just as sheer folly grips a man who in his own land                                590
kills someone, then runs off to a land of strangers,
to the home of some rich man, so those who see him
are seized with wonder—that’s how Achilles then
looked on godlike Priam in astonishment.
The others were amazed. They gazed at one another.
Then Priam made his plea, entreating:

                                                    “Godlike Achilles,
remember your own father, who’s as old as me,
on the painful threshold of old age.
It may well be that those who live around him
are harassing him, and no one’s there                                               600
to save him from ruin and destruction.
But when he hears you’re still alive,
his heart feels joy, for every day he hopes
he’ll see his dear son come back home from Troy.
But I’m completely doomed to misery,
for I fathered the best sons in spacious Troy,
yet I say now not one of them remains.
I had fifty when Achaea’s sons arrived—
nineteen born from the same mother’s womb,
others the women of the palace bore me.                                        610
Angry Ares drained the life of most of them.
But I had one left, guardian of our city,
protector of its people. You’ve just killed him,
as he was fighting for his native country.
I mean Hector. For his sake I’ve come here,
to Achaea’s ships, to win him back from you.
And I’ve brought a ransom beyond counting.
So Achilles, show deference to the gods
and pity for myself, remembering
your own father. Of the two old men,                                               620
I’m more pitiful, because I have endured
what no living mortal on this earth has borne—
I’ve lifted up to my own lips and kissed
the hands of the man who killed my son.”

Priam finished. His words roused in Achilles
a desire to weep for his own father. Taking Priam’s hand,
he gently moved him back. So the two men there
both remembered warriors who’d been slaughtered.
Priam, lying at Achilles’ feet, wept aloud
for man-killing Hector, and Achilles also wept                                        630
for his own father and once more for Patroclus.
The sound of their lamenting filled the house.

When godlike Achilles had had enough of weeping,
when the need to mourn had left his heart and limbs,
he stood up quickly from his seat, then with his hand
helped the old man to his feet, feeling pity
for that grey head and beard. Then Achilles spoke—
his words had wings:

                                        “You unhappy man,
your heart’s had to endure so many evils.
How could you dare come to Achaea’s ships,                                  640
and come alone, to rest your eyes on me,
when I’ve killed so many noble sons of yours?
You must have a heart of iron. But come now,
sit on this chair. Though we’re both feeling pain,
we’ll let our grief lie quiet on our hearts.
For there’s no benefit in frigid tears.
That’s the way the gods have spun the threads
for wretched mortal men, so they live in pain,
though gods themselves live on without a care...

... Old godlike Priam then answered Achilles:

“Don’t make me sit down on a chair, my lord,
while Hector lies uncared for in your huts.
But quickly give him back, so my own eyes
can see him. And take the enormous ransom
we’ve brought here for you. May it give you joy.                             690
And may you get back to your native land,
since you’ve now let me live to see the sunlight.”

With an angry look, swift-footed Achilles snapped at Priam:

“Old man, don’t provoke me. I myself intend
to give you Hector. Zeus sent me here
a messenger, the mother who bore me,
a daughter of the Old Man of the Sea.
And in my heart, Priam, I recognize—
it’s no secret to me—that some god
led you here to the swift Achaean ships.                                          700
No matter how young and strong, no living man
would dare to make the trip to our encampment.
He could not evade the sentries or push back
our door bolts—that would not be easy.
So don’t agitate my grieving heart still more,
or I might not spare even you, old man,
though you’re a suppliant here in my hut.
I could transgress what Zeus has ordered.”

Achilles spoke. The old man, afraid, obeyed him.
Then Peleus’ son sprang to the door, like a lion.                                      710
Not alone—his two attendants went out with him,
warrior Automedon and Alcimus, whom he honoured
the most of his companions after dead Patroclus.
They freed the mules and horses from their harnesses,
led in the herald, the old man’s crier, sat him on a stool.
Then from the polished wagon they brought in
that priceless ransom for Hector’s head, leaving there
two cloaks and a thickly woven tunic, so Achilles
could wrap up the corpse before he gave it back
for Priam to take home. Achilles then called out,                                    720
ordering his servant women to wash the body,
and then anoint it, after moving it away,
so Priam wouldn’t see his son, then, heart-stricken,
be unable to contain his anger at the sight.
Achilles’ own spirit might then get so aroused
he could kill Priam, disobeying Zeus’ orders.
Servants washed the corpse, anointed it with oil,
and put a lovely cloak and tunic round it.
Achilles himself lifted it and placed it on a bier.
Then together he and his companions set it                                             730
on the polished wagon.