

HOMER, ILIAD

TRANSLATION BY IAN JOHNSTON

Dr. D's note: These are excerpts from the complete text of Johnston's translation, available [here](#). The full site shows original line numbers, and has some explanatory notes, and you should use it if you use this material for one of your written topics.

Book I: The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon begins

The Greeks have been waging war against Troy and its allies for 10 years, and in raids against smaller allies, have already won war prizes including women like Chryseis and Achilles' girl, Briseis.

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.
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,
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.

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.
 Some distance off, he prayed to lord Apollo,
 Leto's fair-haired child:

"God with the silver bow,
 protector of Chryse, sacred Cilla,
 mighty lord of Tenedos, Sminthean Apollo,
 hear my prayer: If I've ever pleased you
 with a holy shrine, or burned bones for you—
 bulls and goats well wrapped in fat—
 grant me my prayer. Force the Danaans
 to pay full price for my tears with your arrows."

So Chryses prayed. Phoebus Apollo heard him.
 He came down from Olympus top enraged,
 carrying on his shoulders bow and covered quiver,
 his arrows rattling in anger against his arm.
 So the god swooped down, descending like the night.
 He sat some distance from the ships, shot off an arrow—
 the silver bow reverberating ominously.

First, the god massacred mules and swift-running dogs,
 then loosed sharp arrows in among the troops themselves.
 Thick fires burned the corpses ceaselessly.

For nine days Apollo rained death down upon the troops.
 On the tenth, Achilles summoned an assembly.
 White-armed Hera put that thought into his mind,
 concerned for the Danaans, seeing them die.
 The men gathered. The meeting came to order.
 Swift-footed Achilles rose to speak:

"Son of Atreus,
 I fear we're being beaten back, forced home,
 if we aren't all going to be destroyed right here,
 with war and plague killing off Achaeans.
 Come now, let's ask some prophet, priest,
 interpreter of dreams—for dreams, too, come from Zeus—
 a man who might say why Apollo is so angry,
 whether he faults our prayers and offerings,
 whether somehow he'll welcome sacrificial smoke
 from perfect lambs and goats, then rouse himself
 and release us from this plague."

Achilles spoke and took his seat.
 Then Calchas, Thestor's son, stood up before them all,
 the most astute interpreter of birds, who understood
 present, future, past. His skill in prophecy,
 Apollo's gift, had led Achaean ships to Troy.
 He addressed the troops, thinking of their common good:

"Achilles, friend of Zeus, you ask me to explain
 Apollo's anger, the god who shoots from far.
 And I will speak. But first you listen to me.
 Swear an oath that you will freely help me
 in word and deed. I think I may provoke
 someone who wields great power over Argives,
 a man who is obeyed by everyone.
 An angry king overpowers lesser men.
 Even if that day his anger is suppressed,
 resentment lingers in his chest, until one day
 he acts on it. So speak. Will you protect me?"

In response to Calchas, swift-footed Achilles said:

"Take courage. State what your powers tell you.
 By Apollo, whom Zeus loves, to whom you, Calchas,
 pray in prophesy to the Danaans, I swear this—
 while I live to look upon the light of day,
 no Achaean will raise violent hands against you,
 no, not even if you name Agamemnon,
 who claims he's by far the best Achaean."

Encouraged, the wise prophet then declared:

"Apollo does not fault us for prayers or offerings,
 but for his priest, disgraced by Agamemnon,
 who did not free his daughter and take ransom.
 That's why the archer god has brought disaster,
 and will bring still more. He won't remove
 this wretched plague from the Danaans,
 until we hand back bright-eyed Chryseis,
 give her to her beloved father, freely,
 without ransom, and offer holy sacrifice
 at Chryse. If we will carry out all that,
 we may change Apollo's mind, appease him."

So he spoke and sat back down. Then, Atreus' son,
 wide-ruling, mighty Agamemnon, stood up before them,
 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.
 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:

"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."

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,
 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
 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,
 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.
 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.
 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,
 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.”

As Agamemnon spoke, Peleus’ son, Achilles,
 was overwhelmed with anguish, heart torn two ways,
 debating in his shaggy chest what he should do:

Should he draw out the sharp sword on his thigh,
 incite the crowd, kill Atreus' son, or suppress his rage,
 control his fury? As he argued in his mind and heart,
 he slid his huge sword part way from its sheath.
 At that moment, Athena came down from heaven.
 White-armed Hera sent her. She cherished both men,
 cared for them equally. Athena stood behind Achilles,
 grabbed him by his golden hair, invisible to all
 except Achilles. In astonishment he turned.
 At once he recognized Pallas Athena,
 the dreadful glitter in her eyes. Achilles spoke—
 his words had wings.

“Child of aegis-bearing Zeus,
 why have you come now? Do you wish to see
 how overbearing Agamemnon is?
 I'll tell you where all this is going to lead—
 that arrogance will soon cost him his life.”

Glittery-eyed Athena then spoke in reply:

“I came down from heaven to curb your passion,
 if you obey. White-armed Hera sent me.
 She loves you both alike, cares equally.
 Give up this quarrel. Don't draw your sword.
 Fight him with words, so he becomes disgraced.
 For I say to you, and this will happen,
 because of Agamemnon's arrogance
 some day gifts three times greater than this girl
 will be set down before you. Control yourself.
 Obey.”

Swift-footed Achilles answered Athena:

“Goddess, men should follow your instructions,
 though angry in their hearts. It's better so.
 The person who's obedient to the gods,
 the gods attend to all the more.”

Obeying Athena's words,
 Achilles relaxed his huge fist on the silver hilt
 and pushed the massive sword back in its scabbard.
 Athena then returned to heaven, home of Zeus,
 who bears the aegis, and the other gods.

Achilles turned again on Agamemnon, Atreus' son,
 with harsh abuse, his anger still unabated:

“You drunken sot, dog-eyed, deer-timid coward,
 you're never strong enough within yourself
 to arm for war alongside other comrades,
 or venture with Achaea's bravest on a raid.

To you that smells too much like death.
 No. You'd much prefer to stroll around
 throughout the wide Achaean army,
 to grab gifts from a man who speaks against you.
 A king who gorges on his own people!
 You lord it over worthless men. If not,
 son of Atreus, this would be your last offence.
 I'll tell you, swear a great oath on this point,
 by this sceptre, which will never sprout
 leaves and shoots again, since first ripped away
 from its mountain stump, nor bloom any more,
 now that bronze has sliced off leaf and bark.
 This sceptre Achaea's sons take in hand
 whenever they do justice in Zeus' name.
 An oath on this has power. On this I swear—
 the time will come when Achaea's sons
 all miss Achilles, a time when, in distress,
 you'll lack my help, a time when Hector,
 that man killer, destroys many warriors.
 Then grief will tear your hearts apart,
 because you shamed Achaea's finest man."

So the son of Peleus spoke, throwing to the ground
 the sceptre with the golden studs. Then he sat down,
 directly facing furious Agamemnon.

Agamemnon gives Chryseis back, and sends two of his men to take Achilles' woman, Briseis, for his own use. Achilles addresses them:

"Cheer up, heralds, messengers for gods and men.
 Come here. I don't blame you, but Agamemnon.
 He sends you both here for the girl Briseis.
 Come, Patroclus, born from Zeus, fetch the girl.
 Give her to these two to take away.
 Let them both witness, before blessed gods,
 mortal men, and that unfeeling king,
 if ever there's a need for me again
 to defend others from a shameful death.
 That man's wits are foolish, disastrously so—
 he's not thinking about past or future,
 how Achaeans may fight safely by their ships."
 Patroclus did as his dear comrade had requested.
 He led out fair-cheeked Briseis from the hut
 and gave her up to be led off. The heralds went back,
 returning to Achaean ships, Briseis with them,
 but against her will.

Achilles then, in tears,
 withdrew from his companions, sat by the shore,
 staring at the wide grey seas. Stretching out his hands,]
 he cried aloud, praying repeatedly to Thetis,
 his beloved mother.

“Mother, since you gave me life—

390

if only for a while—Olympian Zeus,
 high thunderer, should give me due honour.
 But he doesn’t grant me even slight respect.
 For wide-ruling Agamemnon, Atreus’ son,
 has shamed me, has taken away my prize,
 appropriated it for his own use.”

As he said this, he wept.

His noble mother heard him from deep within the sea,
 where she sat by her old father. Quickly she rose up,
 moving above grey waters, like an ocean mist,
 and settled down before him, as he wept. She stroked him,

then said:

“My child, why these tears? What sorrows
 weigh down your heart? Tell me, so we’ll both know.
 Don’t hide from me what’s on your mind.”

Achilles tells her what has happened.

Thetis, shedding tears, answered her son, Achilles:

“O my child, why did I rear you,
 since I brought you up to so much pain?
 Would you were safely by your ships dry-eyed.
 Your life is fated to be short—you’ll not live long.
 Now, faced with a quick doom, you’re in distress,
 more so than any other man. At home,
 I gave you life marked by an evil fate.
 But I’ll tell these things to thunder-loving Zeus.
 I’ll go myself to snow-topped Mount Olympus,
 to see if he will undertake all this.
 Meanwhile, you should sit by your swift ships,
 angry at Achaeans. Take no part in war.
 For yesterday Zeus went to Oceanus,
 to banquet with the worthy Ethiopians.
 The gods all journeyed with him. In twelve days,
 when he returns and comes home to Olympus,
 I’ll go to Zeus’ bronze-floored house, clasp his knee.
 I think I’ll get him to consent.”

Thetis spoke.
Then she went away, leaving Achilles there,
angry at heart for lovely girdled Briseis,
taken from him by force against his will.

Book 3: Paris and Helen

Paris (aka Alexander) challenges Menelaus to single combat, and is saved by his patron goddess Aphrodite, who returns him safe to Troy and to his wife Helen.

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
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.*
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,
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.
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
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.
 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.
 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,
 [70]
 all her property. The one who triumphs,
 comes off victorious, the better man,
 let him take all the goods and lead her home,
 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.
 He went to the middle ground, between the armies,
 halted Trojan troops, grasping the centre of his spear shaft.
 The men sat.

Paris and Menelaus fight, but when Paris is about to lose, Aphrodite saves him and returns him to his wife, Helen.

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.

Then Aphrodite went to summon Helen.
 She found her on the high tower, in a crowd
 among the Trojan women. She clutched Helen

by her perfumed dress, twitched it, then addressed her,
 in the form of an old woman, a wool carder,
 someone who used to live in Lacedaemon,
 producing fine wool, a woman Helen really liked.
 In this shape, divine Aphrodite spoke to Helen:

“Alexander is asking you to come back home.
 He’s in the bedroom, on the carved-out bed,
 his beauty and his garments glistening.
 You wouldn’t think he’s just come from some fight.
 He looks as if he’s going to a dance,
 or if he’s sitting down right after dancing.”

Aphrodite spoke, stirring emotion in Helen’s heart.
 Noticing the goddess’ lovely neck, enticing breasts,
 her glittering eyes, Helen was astonished.

“Goddess, why do you wish to deceive me so?
 Are you going to take me still further off,
 to some well-populated city somewhere
 in Phrygia or beautiful Maeonia,
 because you’re in love with some mortal man
 and Menelaus has just beaten Paris
 and wants to take me, a despised woman,
 back home with him? Is that why you’re here,
 you and that devious trickery of yours?
 Why don’t you go with Paris by yourself,
 stop walking around here like a goddess,
 stop guiding your feet toward Olympus,
 and lead a miserable life with him,
 caring for him, until he makes you his wife
 or slave. I won’t go to him in there—
 that would be shameful, serving him in bed.
 Every Trojan woman would revile me afterwards.
 Besides, my heart is hurt enough already.”

Divine Aphrodite, angry at Helen, answered her:

“Don’t provoke me, you obstinate girl.
 I might lose my temper, abandon you,
 and hate you just as much as I have loved you.
 I could make Trojans and Danaans hate you, too.
 Then you’d suffer death in misery.”

Aphrodite spoke. Helen, born from Zeus, was too afraid.
 She covered herself in her soft white linen shawl,
 went off in silence, unnoticed by all the Trojan women.
 With goddess Aphrodite in the lead,
 they came to Alexander’s lovely house.
 There the attendants quickly set about their work.
 Helen, goddess among women, went to her room upstairs,

where laughter-loving goddess Aphrodite
 picked up a chair and carried it for Helen.
 She placed it facing Paris. Helen, child of Zeus,
 who bears the aegis, sat down. With eyes averted,
 she began to criticize her husband:

“You’ve come back from the fight. How I wish
 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.”

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
 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 6: Relationships in Troy

Hector has temporarily returned from battle to Troy, where he has encounters with his mother, brother and wife. (This is in contrast to the Greek warriors, who live in the all-male war camp by their ships.)

Meanwhile, Hector reached the Scaean Gates and oak tree.
 The Trojans’ wives and daughters ran up round him,
 asking after children, brothers, relatives, and husbands.
 Addressing each of them in turn, he ordered them
 to pray to all the gods. For many were to face great grief.

He came to Priam's splendid palace, with porticos
 of well-ground stone. It had fifty private bed rooms,
 all of polished rock, built close to one another,
 where Priam's sons slept with the wives they married.
 On the opposite side, within the courtyard,
 were twelve roofed rooms, all made of polished stone,
 for Priam's daughters, built near one another,
 where Priam's sons-in-law slept with their married wives.
 It was here Hector's gracious mother, Hecuba,
 met him, as she was going to the palace,
 with Laodice, loveliest of all her daughters.
 Taking his hand, she spoke to Hector:

“My child,
 why have you left hard battle to come here?
 The sons of Achaea—may gods curse them!—
 press us hard, eager to fight around our city.
 Your spirit has led you here to lift your hands
 in prayers to Zeus from our city heights.
 But wait. I can fetch some sweet wine for you,
 so you can start by pouring a libation
 to Father Zeus and other deathless gods.
 Then you may enjoy some, too, if you'll drink.
 Wine restores strength well in a weary man,
 and you've grown tired guarding your own family.”

Great Hector of the shining helmet then replied:

“My dear mother, don't bring me some sweet wine,
 for you'll weaken me. I'll lose my battle strength.
 And I'm ashamed to offer up to Zeus
 libations of bright wine with unwashed hands.
 It's not at all appropriate for a man
 spattered with blood and dirt to offer prayers
 to the son of Cronos, lord of the black clouds.
 But you must go to Athena's temple,
 goddess of battle spoils, with burnt offerings.
 First assemble the old women all together,
 then place in Athena's lap, that fair-haired goddess,
 the garment which you think is loveliest,
 the very finest you keep here at home,
 the one you like far better than the rest.
 You must promise you will give Athena
 twelve heifers in a temple sacrifice,
 yearlings, as yet untouched by any goad,
 if she will pity Troy, pity the wives
 and Trojan children, if she will keep
 Tydeus' son away from sacred Ilion,
 that fierce spearman, that mighty warrior,

who makes men so afraid. You must leave now—
 go straight to the temple of Athena,
 goddess of battle spoils. I'll find Paris
 and call him back, if he will to listen to me.
 If only the earth would open under him,
 swallow him up! Olympian Zeus raised him
 as trouble for the Trojans, for brave Priam,
 for his children. If I could see Paris die,
 heading down to Hades, then I could say
 my heart's sorrows were over and forgotten."

Hector spoke. His mother went into the house,
 calling her attendants, who brought together
 the matrons from the city. Then she went down
 into the sweet-smelling room which stored their gowns,
 fine embroidered work of women from Sidonia,
 which godlike Paris brought with him from Sidon,
 when he sailed across the broad sea, on that voyage
 where he carried high-born Helen off. Hecuba took out
 one of the gowns, the finest embroidery, the largest.
 Glittering like a star, it lay at the bottom of the chest.
 Taking that as Athena's gift, she walked away.
 The old ladies followed her. At Athena's temple
 fair-cheeked Theano, daughter of Cisseus,
 wife of horse-taming Antenor, let them in.
 Trojans had appointed her Athena's priestess.
 All the women raised their hands, praying to Athena,
 while Theano took that lovely robe and placed it
 in Athena's lap, the goddess with the lovely hair,
 then spoke out this prayer to great Zeus' daughter:

"Blessed Athena, sacred goddess,
 defender of our city, break the spear
 of Diomedes. Let him fall face down
 before the Scaean Gates. If so, right now
 we'll sacrifice twelve heifers in your temple,
 beasts untouched by any goad, if you'll pity
 our city, Trojans' wives and children."

The women prayed. But Pallas Athena refused their prayer.

As they made their plea to great Zeus' daughter,
 Hector went to the fine house of Alexander.
 He'd built it himself with fertile Troy's best craftsmen.
 They'd made a bedroom, living quarters, and a yard
 close to Priam and to Hector, on the city height.
 Hector, loved by Zeus, went in the house, holding his spear,
 sixteen feet long, bronze point glittering in front of him,
 a gold band running round it. He met Alexander,
 busy in his room with his fine weapons—shield

and body armour—polishing his curving bow.
 Argive Helen sat there, too, with her attendant ladies,
 directing servants in their famous handicrafts.
 Seeing Paris, Hector spoke some sharp words to him:

“Paris, you’re a worthless man.
 It’s quite wrong of you to nurse that anger
 in your heart, while men are being destroyed,
 fighting right by the city, its steep walls.
 It’s because of you the sounds of warfare
 catch fire round our city. You would fight
 any man you saw avoiding battle,
 fleeing war’s brutality. So up with you,
 or soon our city will go up in smoke,
 with fire consuming everything.”

Godlike Alexander then replied:

“Hector, your rebuke is not unfair—
 it’s reasonable. So I’ll speak plainly.
 Listen and remember what I’m saying.
 I’m not sitting in my bedroom here
 out of spite or anger with the Trojans.
 I want to grieve. Just now my wife urged me,
 using gentle words, to rouse myself to fight.
 And personally I think that would be best.
 Winning shifts from one man to another.
 Now, wait here, while I put on my armour.
 Or go, and I’ll come later, catch up with you.”

Hector of the shining helmet did not answer.
 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.
 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—
 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.
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."

Saying this, Hector of the shining helmet went away.
Soon afterwards he reached his well-built house.
He didn't find white-armed Andromache at home,
for she'd left with the infant child, going to the walls
with a finely dressed attendant, in tears, lamenting.
When Hector didn't meet his fair wife in the house,
he went and, standing in the doorway, asked his servant:

"Woman, tell me the truth. Where's Andromache?
At one of my sisters? With a well-dressed wife
of one of my brothers? Or is she at Athena's temple,
where the other fine-haired Trojan women
are praying to that fearful goddess?"

His busy housekeeper then answered him:

"Hector, you asked me to tell you the truth.
She didn't go to one of your sisters,
or one of your brothers' well-dressed wives,
nor did she go to Athena's temple,
where other fine-haired Trojan women
are praying to that fearful goddess.
No. She went to Ilion's great tower,
for she'd heard the Trojans were hard pressed,
the power of Achaeans was so great.
So she's hurrying off up to the walls,
like someone in a fit. A nurse went, too,
carrying the child."

Once the housekeeper spoke,
Hector left the house by the same route he'd come,
through the well-built streets, across the mighty city,
and reached the Scaean Gates, beyond which he'd go
out onto the plain. There his wife ran up to meet him,
Andromache, daughter of great-hearted Eëtion,
who'd included a large dowry with her.
Eëtion had lived below forested Mount Placus,

in Thebe, king of the Cilician people. She'd become
 married wife to Hector of the shining helmet.
 Now she met him there. With her came the nurse,
 holding at her breast their happy infant child,
 well-loved son of Hector, like a beautiful star.
 Hector had named him Scamandrius, but others
 called him Astyanax, lord of the city,
 because Hector was Troy's only guardian.
 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,
 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. I have no father,
 no dear mother. For lord Achilles killed
 my father, when he wiped out Thebe,
 city with high gates, slaying Eëtion.
 But he didn't strip his corpse—his heart
 felt too much shame for that. So he burned him
 in his finely decorated armour
 and raised a burial mound above the ashes.
 Mountain nymphs, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,
 planted elm trees all around his body.
 I had seven brothers in my home.
 All went down to Hades in a single day,
 for swift-footed lord Achilles killed them all,
 while they were guarding their shambling oxen
 and their white shining sheep. As for my mother,
 who ruled wooded Thebe-under-Placus,
 he brought her here with all his other spoils.
 Then he released her for a massive ransom.
 But archer goddess Artemis then killed her
 in her father's house. So, Hector, you are now
 my father, noble mother, brother,
 and my protecting husband. So pity me.
 Stay here in this tower. Don't orphan your child
 and make me a widow. Place men by the fig tree,
 for there the city is most vulnerable,
 the wall most easily scaled. Three times
 their best men have come there to attack,

led by the two Ajaxes, the sons of Atreus,
famous Idomeneus, and Diomedes,
Tydeus' courageous son, incited to it
by someone well versed in prophecy
or by their own hearts' inclination."

Great Hector of the shining helmet answered her:

"Wife,

all this concerns me, too. But I'd be disgraced,
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
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,
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,
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
 and set it on the ground. Then he kissed his dear son
 and held him in his arms. He prayed aloud to Zeus
 and the rest of the immortals.

“Zeus, all you other gods,
 grant that this child, my son, may become,
 like me, pre-eminent among the Trojans,
 as strong and brave as me. Grant that he may rule
 Troy with strength. May people someday say,
 as he returns from war, ‘This man is far better
 than his father.’ May he carry back
 bloody spoils from his slaughtered enemy,
 making his mother's heart rejoice.”

He placed his son in the hands of his dear wife.
 She embraced the child on her sweet breast, smiling
 through her tears. Observing her, Hector felt compassion.
 He took her hand, then spoke to her.

“My dearest wife,
 don't let your heart be sad on my account.
 No man will throw me down to Hades
 before my destined time. I tell you this—
 no one escapes his fate, not the coward,
 nor the brave man, from the moment of his birth.
 So you should go into the house, keep busy
 with your proper work, with your loom and wool,
 telling your servants to set about their tasks.
 War will be every man's concern, especially mine,
 of all those who live in Troy.”

Having said these words,
 glorious Hector took his plumed helmet in his hands.
 His beloved wife went home, often looking back,
 as she went, crying bitterly. She quickly reached
 the spacious home of Hector, killer of men.
 Inside she met her many servants and bid them all lament.
 So they mourned for Hector in his own house,
 though he was still alive—they thought he'd not come back,
 he'd not escape the battle fury of Achaean hands.

Book 9: The Embassy to Achilles

As the Greeks continue to lose ground against the Trojans, Agamemnon realizes that the Greeks need Achilles, recognizes his folly in offending him, and delegates three men, Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix, to offer him magnificent prizes if he returns to battle.

Along the shore of the tumbling, crashing sea,
the envoys made their way, offering up their prayers
to world-circling Earthshaker Poseidon to help them
more easily convince the great heart of Achilles.
They came to the ships and huts of the Myrmidons.
There they found Achilles. He was easing his spirit
with a tuneful finely decorated lyre.
It had a silver cross-piece. He'd seized it as a prize
when he'd destroyed the city of Eëtion.
With the lyre he was bringing pleasure to his heart,
singing about the celebrated deeds of men.
Patroclus, his sole companion, sat there facing him,
waiting in silence until Achilles finished singing.
The envoys approached, lord Odysseus in the lead.
They stood in front of him. In astonishment,
Achilles got up off his chair and stood up quickly,
still holding the lyre. Patroclus did the same,
standing up as soon as he saw the embassy.
Swift-footed Achilles greeted them and said:

“Welcome.

My dear friends have come. I must be needed.
Among Achaeans you're the men I love the most,
even in my anger.”

With these words,
lord Achilles conducted them inside his hut
and seated them on chairs covered with purple rugs.
Moving up close to Patroclus, Achilles said:

“Son of Menoetius, set out for us
a larger wine bowl, and mix stronger wine.
Prepare a cup for everyone. These men,
my closest friends, are under my own roof.”

Achilles spoke. Patroclus obeyed his dear companion.
Then in the firelight he set down a large chopping block,
placed on it slabs of mutton, goat, and the chine
of a plump hog, swimming in fat. Achilles carved,
while Automedon held the meat. He sliced up
small pieces, then got them ready on the spits.
The son of Menoetius, godlike man, stoked the fire,
a huge one. Once the blaze died down and flames subsided,
Patroclus spread the glowing embers, laid the spits

lengthwise on top, setting them in place on stones
and sprinkling on the sacred salt.

When the meat was cooked,
he laid it out on platters. Patroclus took the bread,
then passed it in fine baskets round the table.
Achilles served the meat and sat down by the wall,
directly opposite godlike Odysseus.
Achilles told Patroclus, his companion,
to sacrifice to all the gods. Patroclus threw the offerings
into the fire. Then each man helped himself,
eating the food prepared and set before him.
They all ate and drank to their full heart's content.
Then Ajax gave a nod to Phoenix. Seeing that,
lord Odysseus filled up his cup with wine
and proposed a toast:

“Good health, Achilles.
We have not had to go without our share
of feasts, either in Agamemnon's hut,
Atreus' son, or here, for you've prepared
a richly satisfying meal. But now
our business is not pleasant banqueting.
For we are staring at a great disaster.
And, my lord, we are afraid, in a quandary,
whether we can save our well-decked ships,
or whether they will be destroyed, unless
you put on your warlike power once again.
For haughty Trojans and their famous allies
have camped close to the ships and barricade
and lit many fires throughout their army.
They claim nothing can prevent them now
from attacking our black ships. And Zeus,
son of Cronos, has sent them his signal,
on their right a lightning flash. Hector,
exulting hugely in his power,
in a terrifying manic frenzy,
puts his faith in Zeus, fears neither man nor god.
A killing passion now possesses him.
He prays for holy dawn to come quickly,
vowing he'll hack apart the high sterns
of our ships, burn them in destructive fire,
and by those very ships kill the Achaeans
driven out in desperation by the smoke.
I have a dreadful fear deep in my heart
that the gods will make good all his boasting,
seal our fate, to perish here in Troy,
far away from Argos, where horses breed.
So rouse yourself, late though it may be,

if you've a mind to save Achaeans
 from their suffering at this Trojan onslaught.
 If not, you'll suffer future agonies.
 You won't find any cure for such despair.
 Before that happens, you should think about
 how to help Argives at this evil hour.
 My friend, that day your father, Peleus,
 sent you off, away from Phthia,
 to join Agamemnon, didn't he say this,

'My son, Athena and Hera will give you
 power, if they so wish, but you must check
 that overbearing spirit in your chest.
 It's better to show good will, to give up
 malicious quarrelling. Then Achaeans,
 young and old, will respect you all the more'

That's what your old father said, advice
 which you've forgotten. So even now
 you should stop, cease this heart-corroding rage.
 For if you will mitigate your anger,
 Agamemnon will give you worthy gifts.
 If you will hear the list, then I'll repeat
 what Agamemnon has promised to you.
 All gifts are in his huts—seven tripods
 which fire has not yet touched, ten gold talents,
 twenty shining cauldrons, twelve strong horses
 whose speed has triumphed, earned them prizes—
 a man who's won as much as Agamemnon
 from racing these sure-footed animals
 would not be poor or lack possessions
 or precious gold. Then he will add to this
 seven women of Lesbos, skilled in crafts,
 whom he chose for himself when you captured
 well-built Lesbos. They surpass all women
 for their beauty. These he will present to you,
 with them the one he seized from you, Briseis,
 daughter of Briseus. He'll solemnly swear
 he never once went up into her bed
 or had sex with her, as is men's custom,
 where men and women are concerned.
 All these things you will receive immediately.
 If gods grant that we destroy Priam's great city,
 when we Achaeans allocate the spoils,
 you may come and load your ship with gold,
 with bronze, as much as you desire. You may choose
 twenty Trojan women for yourself,
 the loveliest after Argive Helen.
 If we get back to the rich land of Argos,

you can then become his son-in-law.
 He'll honour you just as he does Orestes,
 his son, whom he dearly loves. He's being raised
 in great prosperity. In his well-built home
 he has three daughters—Chrysothemis,
 Iphianessa, and Laodice.
 You can take whichever one you choose
 back home as your wife to Peleus' house
 and pay no bridal gift. He'll give much more
 to bring about your reconciliation,
 a dowry bigger than any man so far
 has ever handed over with his daughter.
 He'll give you seven populous cities,
 Cardamyle, Enope, grassy Hire,
 holy Pherae, fertile Antheia,
 lovely Aepea, and vine-rich Pedasus,
 all near the sea, beside sandy Pylos.
 People living in these places possess
 many sheep and cattle and will honour you
 and give you gifts, as if you were a god.
 Under your laws and sceptre they'll do well.
 He will give all this, if you will abate
 your anger. But if your heart still resents
 Atreus' son and his gifts, then take pity
 on all Achaeans, our exhausted soldiers.
 They will pay you honours like a god.
 Among them you'll earn enormous glory,
 for now you might kill Hector, who may well
 approach you—he's so obsessed with slaughter,
 he thinks there's not a warrior his equal
 among Danaans brought here in our ships."

Swift-footed Achilles then answered Odysseus:

"Divinely born son of Laertes,
 resourceful Odysseus. I must be blunt
 about what I think, where all this will lead,
 so you do not sit there and, one by one,
 try to entice me with sweet promises.
 I hate like the gates of Hell any man
 who says one thing while thinking something else
 which stays hidden in his mind. So I'll declare
 what, in my view, it's best for me to say—
 I don't believe that Agamemnon,
 Atreus' son, or any other Argive
 will persuade me, for no thanks are given
 to the man who always fights without rest
 against the enemy. Whether one fights
 or stays behind, the shares are still the same

Coward and brave man both get equal honour.
Death treats idle and active men alike.
I've won nothing for all I've suffered,
battling on, pain in my heart, with my life
always under threat. Just as a bird
takes scraps of food, whatever she can find,
to her fledglings, but herself eats little,
so have I lain without sleep many nights,
persevered through bloody days of fighting,
in battling men in wars about their wives.
With ships, I've seized twelve towns and killed their men.
On land, in the area of fertile Troy,
I claim eleven more. From all these
I took fine treasure, lots of it, brought it
to Agamemnon, Atreus' son—I gave it
all to him. He stayed back, at the swift ships.
He shared very little of what he got,
keeping most of it for his own use.
He gave prizes to the best of men, the kings,
and they hung on to them. From me alone
he stole away a prize, a woman I love.
Let him have his pleasure in bed with her.
Why must Argives fight against the Trojans?
Why did Atreus' son collect an army
and lead it here if not for fair-haired Helen?
Are Atreus' sons the only mortal men
who love their wives? Every good and prudent man
loves his wife and cares for her, as my heart
loved that girl, though captured with my spear.
Since he's taken my prize out of my hands
and cheated me, let him not try to take
another thing from me. I know him too well.
He'll never persuade me to agree.
But, Odysseus, let him rely on you
and other kings as well to save his ships
from fiery destruction. He has done much
without me already. He's built a wall,
constructed a large wide ditch around it,
and fixed stakes inside. But for all these things,
he's not been able to check the power
of man-killing Hector. When I fought
beside Achaeans, Hector wasn't eager
to push the battle far from his own walls.
He came out only to the Scaean Gates
and to the oak tree. Once he met me there
alone. He barely got away from my attack.
But now I don't want to fight lord Hector.
Tomorrow I'll make holy sacrifice

to Zeus, to all the gods, and load my ships,
 once I've dragged them down into the sea.
 You'll see, if you wish, if you're interested,
 tomorrow my ships will be sailing off,
 on the fish-filled Hellespont, men rowing
 with great eagerness. And if Poseidon,
 famous Earthshaker, gives us fair sailing,
 in three days I'll reach fertile Phthia.
 There I own many things I left behind
 when I made this disastrous trip to Troy.
 I'll take back from here more gold, red bronze,
 fair women, and grey iron—all I captured.
 But mighty Agamemnon, Atreus' son,
 in his arrogance, seized back from me
 the prize which he awarded. Tell him that.
 Repeat in public everything I say,
 so other Achaeans will grow angry,
 if he, still clothed in shamelessness, hopes
 at any time to deceive some Argive.
 Cur that he is, he doesn't dare confront me
 face to face. I'll discuss no plans with him,
 no actions. He cheated me, betrayed me.
 His words will cheat no more. To hell with him!
 Let him march to his death by his own road,
 for Counsellor Zeus has stolen his wits.
 I hate his gifts. And he's not worth a damn.
 Not even if he gave me ten times, no,
 twenty times more than all he owns right now,
 or will possess in future, not even
 all the wealth amassed in Orchomenus,
 or Egyptian Thebes, where huge treasures sit
 piled up in houses—that city of gates,
 one hundred of them, through each can ride
 two hundred men, horses and chariots
 all together—not even if he gave me
 gifts as numerous as grains of sand
 beside the sea or particles of dust,
 not for all that would Agamemnon win
 my heart, not until he satisfies me
 in full for all my heartfelt bitter pain.
 I'll never take as wife any daughter
 of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,
 not even if her beauty rivals that
 of golden Aphrodite, or her skill
 in crafts equals bright-eyed Athena's.
 I will not marry her. Let him select
 another Achaean, someone like himself,
 a more prestigious king than me. For me,

if the gods keep me safe and I get home,
 Peleus himself will find me a wife.
 There are plenty of Achaean women
 in Hellas and in Phthia—daughters of lords,
 men who govern cities. From them I'll choose
 the one I want to make my cherished wife.
 My heart has often felt a strong desire
 to take a woman there as my own wife,
 someone suitable for marriage, to enjoy
 the riches which old Peleus has acquired.
 Life is worth more to me than all the wealth
 they say was stored in well-built Ilion
 some time ago, when they were still at peace,
 before the sons of Achaea came here,
 more than all the treasures of the archer,
 Phoebus Apollo, stacked on the stone floor
 in rocky Pytho. Men can steal cattle,
 fat sheep, get tripods, herds of sorrel horses.
 But no man gets his life back, not by theft
 or plunder, once it has flown out from him,
 passed beyond the barrier of his teeth.
 My goddess mother, silver-footed Thetis,
 has said two fates may bring about my death.
 If I remain here, continuing the fight
 against the Trojans' city, that means
 I won't be going home, but my glory
 will never die. But if I go back home,
 my fame will die, although my life will last
 a long time—death will not end it quickly.
 And so I encourage all the rest of you
 to sail back home. You'll not attain your goal,
 steep Ilion, because far-seeing Zeus
 shields that city with his hand. Its people
 have confidence in that. Thus, you should go.
 Report this message to Achaean leaders—
 that's the privilege of senior men—
 their minds must come up with some better plan
 to save the Achaean fleet and army
 beside the hollow ships. The one they've got
 won't work, since anger still keeps me away.
 Let Phoenix stay here with me, sleep here,
 so tomorrow he may join our voyage
 to his dear native land, if that's his wish.
 For I will not take him back by force."

Achilles spoke. Astounded by his speech, they all sat there,
 in silence, stunned by the sheer force of his refusal.
 After a pause, old horseman Phoenix spoke:

“Glorious Achilles, if your mind
is really set on going back, if you
are totally unwilling to protect
our swift ships from destructive fire,
because that anger has consumed your heart,
how can I remain here, dear lad, alone,
away from you? Old horseman Peleus
sent me with you, on that day he shipped you
from Phthia to join Agamemnon.
You were young, knowing nothing about war,
which levels men, or about public debates,
where men acquire distinction. So Peleus
sent me to teach you all these things,
so you could speak and carry out great actions.
Given all this, dear lad, how can I wish
to be alone and separated from you?
No, not even if god himself promised
to cast off my old age, to make me young,
the man I was when I first left Hellas,
land of beautiful women, running off
from my angry father, Amyntor,
Ormenus’ son. He was incensed with me
about his fair-haired mistress. He loved her,
thus dishonouring his wife, my mother,
who begged me constantly—on her knees—
to have sex with that mistress, so she’d hate
my father. I obeyed, did what she asked.
My father soon found out what I had done—
he cursed me many times repeatedly,
praying to dread Furies that no dear son
born from me would ever sit upon his knees.
The gods made sure his curses took effect,
underworld Zeus and dread Persephone.
I planned to murder him with my sharp bronze.
Some god checked my anger, putting in my heart
what men would say, their great contempt—
how among all Achaeans I’d be called
the man who’d slaughtered his own father.
My heart no longer felt the slightest wish
to stay in my father’s house with him so angry.
My friends and relatives who lived around me
begged me repeatedly to stay right there.
And then they butchered many well-fed sheep,
shuffling cattle with crumpled horns, and laid out
many hogs, swimming in fat, to be singed
in Hephaestus’ flames. They drank many jugs
of the old man’s wine. For nine nights,
they kept watch over me throughout the night,

taking turns as guards. Fires always burned,
 one underneath the enclosed portico,
 another in the hallway right outside
 my bedroom doors. Ten nights later, as night fell,
 I broke through the tight-closed bedroom doors,
 went out, and jumped with ease across the wall
 around the outer court, without being seen
 by men and women checking up on me.
 I ran away through all of spacious Hellas,
 then came a suppliant to fertile Phthia,
 where flocks are bred, to king Peleus.
 He received me hospitably, loved me,
 as a father dearly loves his only son,
 heir to all his goods. He made me wealthy,
 assigning me to govern many people.
 I lived in the borderlands of Phthia,
 reigning as king over the Dolopes.
 And I was the one, godlike Achilles,
 who raised you up to be the man you are.
 You would refuse to attend a banquet
 with anyone or eat in your own home,
 unless I set you on my knees, fed you,
 cut the meat, and held the wine cup for you.
 Often you soaked the tunic on my chest,
 slobbering your wine, a helpless baby.
 I've gone through a lot for you, worked hard,
 bearing in mind that gods had taken care
 I'd never have some children of my own.
 Godlike Achilles, I made you my son,
 so that if I ever met disaster,
 you'd protect me. So, Achilles, subdue
 your giant passion. It's not right for you
 to have an unyielding heart. Gods themselves
 are flexible, and they have more honour
 than we possess, more power, too. Men pray
 when they go wrong or make mistakes,
 propitiating gods with offerings,
 gentle prayers, libations, and sacrifice.
 Prayers are the daughters of almighty Zeus.
 Lame, wrinkled, cross-eyed, they try to follow
 behind Folly, who, because she's strong and quick,
 runs far in front of them, appearing
 all over the world, bringing harm to men.
 Far behind, Prayers carry on their healing.
 If a man honours these daughters of Zeus
 as they come near, they will help him greatly,
 paying attention to him as he prays.
 If someone spurns them, rudely rejecting them,

they go to Zeus, son of Cronos, begging
 for Folly to pursue that man, who then
 harms himself and suffers punishment.
 For that reason, Achilles, you should give
 Zeus' daughters your respect. They have changed
 the minds of other men, even great ones.
 If Agamemnon were not bringing gifts—
 and naming more to come—but persisting,
 inflexibly angry, I wouldn't tell you
 to cast aside your rage and help the Argives,
 no matter how painful their distress.
 But he's giving plenty now, more later.
 He has sent out his greatest warriors,
 selected from the whole Achaean army,
 your finest friends among the Argives.
 Don't show contempt for what they have to say
 or insult their coming here. Up to now,
 your resentment has been justified.
 But we learn this from previous actions
 of heroic men—when furious anger
 came over some of them, they were swayed
 by gifts and by persuasive speeches.

Phoenix supports his pleas with a mythic story that parallels Achilles' situation, then continues:.

Don't let some god make you choose that way.
 Once the ships catch fire, it will be harder
 to defend them. So accept the gifts.
 Achaeans are honouring you like a god.
 If you return to man-killing battle
 without the gifts, you'll never get such honour,
 even though you may push the conflict back."

Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:

"Phoenix, dear old father, noble lord,
 I don't need such honours, for I possess
 honour in the will of Zeus. That will keep
 me here beside my own hollow ships,
 so long as there is breath within my body,
 strength in my limbs. But I'll say this to you—
 bear it in mind—do not confuse my heart
 with these laments, these speeches of distress,
 all serving that heroic son of Atreus.
 You should not love him, in case I hate you,
 who are now my friend. You would be noble
 to join with me, and so injure the man
 who injures me. Be equal king with me.

Take half my honours. These men report back.
 You stay here. Sleep in your soft bed. At dawn,
 we shall consider whether to go back
 to our own land, or whether to remain."

Achilles spoke. His eyebrows gave a silent signal
 to Patroclus to set a firm bed out for Phoenix,
 so the others would quickly think of leaving.
 But Ajax, godlike son of Telamon, spoke up:

"Noble son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus,
 let's be off. I don't think we'll bring this talk
 to a successful end, not on this trip.
 We must report this news, though it's not good,
 to the Danaans waiting to receive it.
 For Achilles has turned his great spirit
 into something savage in his chest.
 He's cruel and doesn't care for friendship
 of his comrades, how we honoured him
 above all others there beside the ships.
 He has no pity. Any man accepts
 reparations for a murdered son or brother.
 The man who killed them pays a large amount
 to stay there in his own community.
 The other man's angry heart and spirit
 are checked, once he takes the compensation.
 But with you, gods have put inside your chest
 unchanging evil passions, and all this
 over a single girl. Now we are offering
 seven of the best we have and much more.
 You should turn your passion into kindness,
 the hospitality of your own house.
 For we are guests here under your own roof,
 chosen from the Argive host. We believe
 that we, of all Achaeans, are the ones
 most dear to you, your closest friends,
 far more so than all the others."

Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:

"Ajax, noble son of Telamon, your people's leader,
 everything you say matches what I feel.
 But my heart chokes with rage when I recall
 how that son of Atreus behaved towards me
 with contempt, as if he were dishonouring
 some vagrant. But you'd better go, take back
 this message—I shall not concern myself
 with bloody war until lord Hector,
 murderous son of Priam, comes against
 the huts and sea ships of the Myrmidons,

killing Achaean soldiers as he goes,
 until he starts to burn our ships with fire.
 I think that Hector will be held in check
 around my hut, around my own black ship,
 for all his eagerness to battle on.”

So Achilles spoke. The men each took a goblet
 with two handles, gave offerings, and went back to the ships,
 with Odysseus in the lead. Patroclus ordered
 his companions and the women slaves to set up
 a sturdy bed without delay for Phoenix.
 They obeyed his orders and prepared a bed,
 with sheepskin fleece and rug and fine linen sheets.
 The old man lay down, to stay till morning.
 Achilles slept in a corner of the well-built hut.
 Beside him lay a woman he'd seized from Lesbos,
 fair Diomedes, one of Phorbas' daughters.
 Patroclus slept opposite Achilles. Beside him
 lay lovely Iphigeneia, whom Achilles gave him
 after capturing steep Scyros, Enyeus' city.

Book 16: Patroclus

As the Greeks continue to lose ground, until the Trojans have made their way to their camp and threaten to burn their ships, Patroclus speaks to Achilles.

While the men kept on fighting at the well-decked ships,
 Patroclus went to Achilles, his people's shepherd,
 shedding warm tears, like a fountain of dark water
 whose stream flows over the lip of a sheer rock face.
 Looking at him, swift-footed, godlike Achilles
 felt pity. So he spoke to him—his words had wings:

“Why are you crying, Patroclus, like some girl,
 an infant walking beside her mother,
 asking to be picked up. She pulls the robe
 and stops her mother strolling on ahead,
 looking up at her in tears, until the mother
 lifts her up. You're crying just like that girl,
 Patroclus. Is there something you need to say
 to the Myrmidons or me? Some news
 from Phthia that only you have heard?
 People say Menoetius, Actor's son,
 is still living, and Peleus is alive,
 Aeacus' son, among his Myrmidons.
 If these two had died, then we'd have something
 real to grieve about. Or are you feeling sad
 for Argives as they're being obliterated

among the hollow ships for all their pride?
 Speak up. Don't conceal what's on your mind.
 Then we'll both understand."

With a heavy sigh,
 horseman Patroclus, you then replied:

"Achilles,
 Peleus' son, by far the strongest of Achaeans,
 don't be angry with me. Such great despair
 has overcome the Argives. For all those
 who used to be the bravest warriors
 are lying at the ships with sword and spear wounds—
 powerful Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
 hit by a spear, famous spearman Odysseus
 with a stab wound, and Agamemnon, too.
 An arrow struck Eurypylus in the thigh.
 Many healers, exceptionally skilled
 in various medicines, are with them now,
 tending their wounds. But it's impossible
 to deal with you, Achilles. I hope anger
 like this rage you're nursing never seizes me.
 It's disastrous! How will you be of use
 to anyone in later generations,
 if you won't keep shameful ruin from the Argives?
 You're pitiless. Perhaps horseman Peleus
 was not your father, nor Thetis your mother—
 the grey sea delivered you, some tall cliff,
 for you've an unyielding heart. If your mind
 shuns some prophecy, or your noble mother
 has told you news from Zeus, at least send me,
 and quickly, with the others in our troop
 of Myrmidons. I could be a saving light
 for the Danaans. Give me your armour
 to buckle round my shoulders, so Trojans,
 mistaking me for you, may stop the fight.
 Then Achaea's warrior sons could get some rest.
 They're worn out. War doesn't offer much relief.
 We're fresh, so we should easily repulse
 the Trojans tired of the battle noise
 back from our ships and huts towards the city."

Patroclus finished his entreaty. How wrong he was!
 He was praying for his own death, his dreadful fate.
 Swift-footed Achilles, with some heat, replied:

"My dear divinely born Patroclus,
 what are you saying? I'm not concerned
 with any prophecy I know about,
 nor has my noble mother said a thing

from Zeus. But dreadful pain came in my heart
and spirit when that man wished to cheat
someone his equal and steal away that prize,
and just because he's got more power.
That really hurt, given that I've suffered
in this war so many pains here in my chest.
Achaea's sons chose that girl as my prize.
I won her with my spear, once I'd destroyed
her strong-walled city. Lord Agamemnon
took her back, out of my hands, as if I were
some stranger without honour. But let that be—
it's over, done with. Besides, my spirit
didn't mean to stay enraged for ever,
although I thought I wouldn't end my anger
until the cries of warfare reached my ships.
Come, put my famous armour on your shoulders
and lead war-loving Myrmidons to battle,
since black clouds of Trojans now surround the ships,
expecting victory, and Argives stand
crammed in by the sea shore, with little space,
while a city full of Trojans comes at them
without fear, because they don't see near them
my helmet with its glittering front. Soon enough,
they'd be running back, filling the gullies
with their dead, if mighty Agamemnon
treated me with kindness—but now they fight
all through our camp. For there's no spear raging
in the fists of Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
to protect Danaans from disaster.
I've not heard the voice of Agamemnon
crying out in his vile head. As for Hector,
that man-killer's voice echoes everywhere,
shouting at Trojans, who fill all the plain
with their noise, as they defeat Achaeans
in this battle. Even so, Patroclus,
you must stave off disaster from the fleet.
Go after them in force—they may fire those ships
and rob us of the journey home we crave.
Now, pay attention to what I tell you
about the goal I have in mind for you,
so you'll win me great honour and rewards,
so all Danaans will send back to me
that lovely girl and give fine gifts as well.
Once you push Trojans from the ships, come back.
If Zeus, Hera's mate, who loves his thunder,
gives you the glory, don't keep on battling
those war-loving Trojans with me absent.
You would decrease my honours. Don't let

the joy of fighting and of killing Trojans
 lead you on to Ilion, just in case
 some deathless Olympian god attacks you.
 Apollo, the far-worker, loves his Trojans.
 So make sure you come back here again,
 once your saving light has reached our ships.
 Let others keep on fighting in the plain.
 O Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo—
 if only no single Trojan or Achaean
 could escape death, and just we two alone
 were not destroyed, so that by ourselves
 we could take Troy's sacred battlements!"

Achilles agrees, and Patroclus puts on Achilles' armor. After encouraging his men to follow Patroclus and fight bravely, Achilles makes a prayer.

Achilles went into his hut and opened up the lid
 on a beautifully decorated chest
 placed on board his ship by silver-footed Thetis
 for him to take. She'd packed it with cloaks and tunics,
 and woollen blankets, too—protection from the wind.
 There he kept an ornate goblet. Other than Achilles
 no one used it to drink gleaming wine. With this cup
 Achilles poured libations to no god but Father Zeus.
 Taking this out of the chest, first he purified it
 with sulphur, then rinsed it out in streams of water.
 He washed his hands and drew some gleaming wine.
 Standing in the middle of the yard, he poured it out,
 gazing up at heaven. Thunder-loving Zeus looked on.

"Zeus, king, lord of Dodona, Pelasgian,
 you who live far off, ruling cold Dodona,
 around whom live the Selli, your prophets,
 with unwashed feet, who sleep upon the ground,
 you heard me when I prayed to you before.
 You gave me honour then by striking hard
 at the Achaean army. So grant me now
 what I still desire. I intend to stay
 beside this group of ships, but I'm sending out
 my comrade and my many Myrmidons.
 Send glory with him, all-seeing Zeus.
 Strengthen the heart inside his chest, so Hector
 sees if Patroclus can fight on alone
 or if his hands are always conquering
 only when I'm with him in the raging war,
 in the centre of the havoc Ares brings.
 But when he's pushed the fight and battle noise
 back from the ships, let him return to me,
 here at my hollow ships, without a scratch,

with all his weapons and companions,
men who battle in the killing zone.”

So Achilles prayed.

Counsellor Zeus heard his prayer. He granted part of it,
part he denied. Father Zeus agreed that Patroclus
should drive the battle fighting from the ships,
but not that he’d return in safety from the war.
Once Achilles had made his libation and prayed
to Father Zeus, he went back into his hut,
put the goblet in the chest, came out, and stood there,
before his hut, still wishing in his heart
to see the fatal clash of Trojans and Achaeans.

Although Achilles had warned him to just put the Trojans in retreat and not to take the battle to the city’s walls, in the heat of battle Patroclus forgets and leads the army forward. There the god Apollo strikes and weakens him, leaving him open to Hector’s attack.

But when Hector noticed brave Patroclus going back,
wounded by sharp bronze, he moved up through the ranks,
stood close to Patroclus and struck him with his spear,
low in the stomach, driving the bronze straight through.
Patroclus fell with a crash, and Achaea’s army
was filled with anguish. Just as a lion overcomes
a tireless wild boar in combat, when both beasts
fight bravely in the mountains over a small spring
where they both want to drink, and the lion’s strength
brings down the panting boar—that’s how Hector,
moving close in with his spear, destroyed the life
of Menoetius’ noble son, who’d killed so many men.
Then Hector spoke winged words of triumph over him:

“Patroclus, you thought you’d raze our city,
robbing our women of their life of freedom,
taking them in ships to your dear native land.
You fool! In front of them, Hector’s horses,
swift of foot, came out to fight. With the spear
I’m the very best war-loving Trojan,
and I’ve saved them from their fatal day.
Now vultures will eat you here. You poor wretch,
even Achilles, for all his courage,
was no use to you. Though he stayed behind,
he must have given you strict orders as you left,

‘Don’t return to me, horseman Patroclus,
at the hollow ships, until you’ve slashed blood
all over man-killing Hector’s tunic
from his own chest.’

That’s what he must have said
to win you over to such foolishness.”

Then you, horseman Patroclus, your strength all gone,
replied:

“Boast on, Hector, for the moment.
Zeus, son of Cronos, and Apollo
have given you victory. They overcame me
easily, for they personally removed
the armour from my shoulders. If twenty men
came to confront me, just like you,
all would have died, slaughtered by my spear.
But deadly Fate and Leto’s son have slain me—
and Euphorbus. So you’re the third in line
at my death. But I’ll tell you something else—
bear this in mind—you’ll not live long yourself.
Your death is already standing close at hand,
a fatal power. For you’ll be destroyed
at brave Achilles’ hands, descendant of Aeacus.”

As Patroclus said these words to Hector,
the finality of death flowed over him.
His spirit fluttered from his limbs and went to Hades,
lamenting its own fate, the loss of youthful manhood.
As Patroclus died, splendid Hector spoke to him:

“Patroclus, why predict my own death for me?
Who knows? It may happen that Achilles,
son of fair-haired Thetis, is hit first
by a spear of mine and gives up his life.”

Iliad 18: Achilles gets the news of Patroclus’ death

The Greeks and Trojans battle fiercely over Patroclus’ body, while a young prince returns to the Greek camp to tell Achilles what has happened.

As the men fought on like a blazing fire raging,
swift-footed Antilochus came to Achilles
with his news. He found Achilles by his beaked ship,
sensing in himself what had already happened,
speaking with a troubled mind to his own great heart:

“Why are long-haired Achaeans once again
retreating to their ships, being beaten back
across the plain in terror? I hope the gods
have not done something that will break my heart.
My mother told me once they’d do that,
when she told me that while I was alive
the best man of the Myrmidons would leave
the sun’s light at the hands of Trojans.

So it must be the case that the fine son
of Menoetius is dead, that reckless man.
I told him to return back to the ships,
once he'd saved them from consuming fire,
and not face up to Hector man to man."

As Achilles in his mind and heart was thinking this,
noble Nestor's son approached, shedding warm tears.
He told him the agonizing truth:

"Son of warlike Peleus,
you must hear this dreadful news—something
I wish weren't so—Patroclus lies dead.
Men are fighting now around the body.
He's stripped. Hector with his gleaming helmet
has the armour."

Antilochus finished speaking.
A black cloud of grief swallowed up Achilles.
With both hands he scooped up soot and dust and poured it
on his head, covering his handsome face with dirt,
covering his sweet-smelling tunic with black ash.
He lay sprawling—his mighty warrior's massive body
collapsed and stretched out in the dust. With his hands,
he tugged at his own hair, disfiguring himself.
The women slaves acquired as battle trophies
by Achilles and Patroclus, hearts overwhelmed
with anguish, began to scream aloud. They rushed outside
and beat their breasts around warlike Achilles.
Then all the women's legs gave way, and they fell down.
Across from them, Antilochus lamented,
eyes full of tears, as he held Achilles by the hand.
Achilles' noble heart moaned aloud. Antilochus
feared he might hurt himself or slit his throat
with his own sword. Achilles gave a huge cry of grief.
His noble mother heard it from the ocean depths
where she was sitting by her ancient father.
She began to wail. Then around her gathered
all the divine daughters of Nereus deep in the sea...
Nereus' daughters living in the ocean depths.
They filled the glistening cave, beating their breasts.
Thetis led them all in their laments:

"Sister Nereids, listen,
so all of you, hearing what I say,
will understand my heart's enormous sorrow.
Alas, for my unhappy misery,
that to my grief I bore the best of men.
For when I gave birth to a fine strong boy
to be an excellent heroic warrior,

when he'd grown as tall as some young sapling,
 for I'd raised him like a lovely orchard tree,
 I sent him out in the beaked ships to Ilion,
 to war against the Trojans. But now,
 I'll never welcome him back home again,
 returning to the house of Peleus.
 While he's still alive and sees the sunlight,
 he lives in sorrow. When I go to him,
 I can provide no help. But I shall go
 to look on my dear child, to hear what grief
 has overtaken him while he remains
 detached from all the fighting."

With these words,
 Thetis left the cave. Her sisters went with her in tears.
 Around them sea waves parted, until they came
 to fertile Troy. They emerged, climbing up on shore,
 one after another, right where the Myrmidons
 had dragged up their ships in close-packed formation
 near swift Achilles. Then his noble mother moved
 beside him, as he was groaning bitterly.
 With a sharp cry, she cradled her son's head, then spoke.
 As she grieved, she talked to him—her words had wings:

"My child, why are you crying? What sorrow now
 has come into your heart? Speak out. Hide nothing.
 Zeus has given you what you begged him to
 when you stretched your hands out to him—
 all Achaea's sons by their ships' sterns
 are hemmed in there, desperate for your help,
 suffering a terrible ordeal."

With a heavy groan,
 swift-footed Achilles then answered
 Thetis:

"Yes, Mother,
 Olympian Zeus has indeed accomplished
 what I asked. But what pleasure's there for me,
 when Patroclus, my beloved companion,
 has been destroyed, the man I honoured
 as my equal, above all my comrades.
 I've lost him and the armour, which Hector took,
 once he'd killed him, that massive armour,
 so wonderful to look at, which the gods
 gave as a priceless gift to Peleus
 on that day they placed you in the bed
 of a mortal man. If only you had stayed
 among the eternal maidens of the sea
 and Peleus had married a mortal wife.

But now there'll be innumerable sorrows
 waiting for your heart, once your child is killed.
 You won't be welcoming him back home again.
 My own heart has no desire to live on,
 to continue living among men,
 unless Hector is hit by my spear first,
 losing his life and paying me compensation
 for killing Menoetius' son, Patroclus."

Through her tears, Thetis then answered Achilles:

"My son, from what you've just been saying,
 you're fated to an early death, for your doom
 comes quickly as soon as Hector dies."

Swift-footed Achilles answered her with passion:

"Then let me die, since I could not prevent
 the death of my companion. He's fallen
 far from his homeland. He needed me there
 to protect him from destruction. So now,
 since I'm not returning to my own dear land,
 and for Patroclus was no saving light
 or for my many other comrades,
 all those killed by godlike Hector while I sat
 here by the ships, a useless burden
 on the earth—and I'm unmatched in warfare
 by any other Achaean armed in bronze,
 although in council other men are better—
 so let wars disappear from gods and men
 and passionate anger, too, which incites
 even the prudent man to that sweet rage,
 sweeter than trickling honey in men's throats,
 which builds up like smoke inside their chests,
 as Agamemnon, king of men, just now,
 made me enraged. But we'll let that pass.
 For all the pain I feel, I'll suppress the heart
 within my chest, as I must. So now I'll go
 to meet Hector, killer of the man I loved.
 As for my own fate, let it come to me
 when Zeus and the other deathless gods
 determine. For not even strong Hercules,
 the man lord Zeus, son of Cronos, loved the most,
 escaped his death. He was destroyed by Fate
 and by malicious Hera's anger, too.
 And so for me. If a like fate has been set,
 then once I'm dead, I'll just lie there. But for now,
 let me seize great glory—let me make
 so many Trojan and Dardan matrons weep,
 and with both hands wipe tears from their soft cheeks,

and set them on to constant lamentation,
 so that they'll know I've long refrained from war.
 Don't keep me from battle. Though you love me,
 you'll not convince me."

Silver-footed Thetis
 then said to Achilles:

"My child, what you say is true—
 it's no bad thing to protect companions
 when they're in trouble from complete disaster.
 But now the Trojans have your lovely armour,
 all your glittering bronze. It's on the shoulders
 of Hector with the shining helmet—
 he boasts about it. But I don't think
 his triumph will last long, since his death
 is coming closer."

Book 19: Achilles mourns Patroclus and prepares to return to battle

Thetis has brought him miraculous armor forged by Hephaestus, the metalsmith god to replace the armor Hector took from Patroclus, so now Achilles is able to return to battle. But first he must make his peace with Agamemnon – though peace might not be the word for it.

... Thetis filled [Achilles] with fearless power.
 Then she inserted ambrosia and red nectar
 into Patroclus, through his nostrils, so his flesh
 would stay uncorrupted.

But Achilles, like a god,
 strode down along the seashore, raising fearful shouts,
 stirring Achaean warriors into action.
 So even those who up to now used to remain
 with the assembled ships—helmsmen who worked
 ships' steering oars and stewards who stayed with the ships
 rationing provisions—these men all showed up
 for the assembly, because Achilles had appeared
 after his long absence from that painful war.
 Two associates of the war god Ares came in limping,
 the brave offspring of Tydeus and lord Odysseus,
 leaning on their spears—their wounds still pained them.
 They came and sat down at the front of the assembly.
 Last to arrive was Agamemnon, king of men,
 still suffering from the wound Coön had given him,
 Antenor's son, who in deadly conflict stabbed him
 with his bronze-tipped spear. Once all Achaeans
 were assembled, swift-footed Achilles rose to speak:

“Son of Atreus, has it been good for us,
 for you and me, to continue squabbling
 in a heart-rending quarrel full of grief
 for both of us, over some girl
 she’d been killed by Artemis’ arrow
 right beside my ships, the day I got her
 as my prize, after we destroyed Lyrnessus.
 Fewer Achaeans would have sunk their teeth
 into this wide earth at enemy hands,
 if I’d not been so angry. That’s really helped
 lord Hector and his Trojans. But Achaeans,
 will, I think, long recall this argument
 you and I have had. Still, though it hurts,
 we should let all this pass, repressing hearts
 within our chests—we must do that. So now,
 I end my anger. It’s not appropriate
 for me to remain enraged for ever.
 But come, quickly urge long-haired Achaeans
 on to battle, so I may go out once again
 to face the Trojans and see if they still wish
 to spend the night beside our ships. I think
 many of them will be glad to get some rest,
 the ones who escape this deadly warfare
 and who evade my spear.”

Achilles finished speaking.
 The well-armed Achaeans then were full of joy
 that Peleus’ great-hearted son had set aside
 his anger. Next, Agamemnon, king of men,
 addressed them:

“My friends, Danaan warriors ...
 I’m going to address the son of Peleus,
 but you other Argives pay attention—
 let every one of you mark my words well.
 You Achaeans have often criticized
 and spoken ill of me. But I’m not to blame.
 It’s Zeus’ fault and Fate—those Furies, too,
 who walk in darkness. In our assembly,
 they cast a savage blindness on my heart,
 that day when on my own I took away
 Achilles’ prize. But what was I to do?
 It is a god who brought all this about.
 ... I could not forget Ate, who blinded me
 when all this started. But since I was blind,
 since Zeus robbed me of my wits, I will agree
 to make amends, to give priceless gifts.
 But prepare yourself for battle, rouse up
 all your other men. As for me, I’m ready

to give every gift which lord Odysseus
 promised you in your hut yesterday.
 Or, if you prefer, don't turn right now to war.
 Though you're keen to go, let my servants fetch
 those presents from my ship and bring them here,
 so you can see if you approve of them."

Swift-footed Achilles then answered Agamemnon:

"Most glorious son of Atreus, Agamemnon,
 king of men, if you wish to give me presents,
 as is appropriate, or to withhold them,
 that's up to you. Now we must think of war,
 and with all speed. We should not be wasting time
 in conversation or with such delays.
 We have great work to do, so once again
 men see Achilles with the front-line warriors,
 destroying Trojan ranks with his bronze spear.
 Keep this in mind when you confront your man."

Resourceful Odysseus then addressed Achilles:

"Though you're a brave man, god-like Achilles,
 don't encourage Achaea's sons to fight
 against the Trojans on empty stomachs.
 If so, the fight won't last for long if troops
 engage right now, once some god infuses strength
 into both sides. No. Instruct Achaeans
 to have some food and wine by their swift ships.
 For they give strength and courage. No soldier
 can fight the enemy all day till sunset
 without some food. However fierce his heart
 may be for battle, his limbs grow heavy
 without his knowledge. Once thirst and hunger
 overtake him, his knees get tired as he moves.
 But the man who's had sufficient food and wine
 fights all day long against his enemies
 with a courageous heart. His limbs don't tire
 until all warriors have left the battle.
 So dismiss your men. Tell them to make a meal.
 Let Agamemnon, king of men, present his gifts,
 so all Achaeans here in our assembly
 can see them first hand and delight your heart.
 Let him stand up there among the Argives,
 swear an oath to you he's never climbed
 in that girl's bed to have sex with her,
 as is usual, my lord, with men and women.
 Let the heart in your own chest be open
 to reconciliation. Then, Agamemnon
 should offer you a fine and pleasing dinner

in his hut, so there'll be nothing due to you which remains unsatisfied. As for you, son of Atreus, you should be more righteous with others from now on. There's no shame when a king pays someone compensation, if the king was the first to lose his temper."

Agamemnon, king of men, answered Odysseus:

"Son of Laertes, I am glad to hear what you've just said. You've explained this well, exploring all these matters very fairly. I'm prepared to swear the oath, as my heart bids, and, before the gods, I'll not swear falsely. But let Achilles stay here a little while, though he desires to fight, and let others stay gathered here, until the gifts are brought out of my hut and we can sacrifice to seal our oaths. To you I assign this task—select from the entire Achaean force the five best young men to carry from my ships all those gifts we promised yesterday to give Achilles—that includes the woman. Let Talthybius at once prepare for me in the middle of this wide Achaean camp a sacrificial boar to offer up to Zeus and Helios, god of the sun."

Swift-footed Achilles then replied to Agamemnon:

"Mighty son of Atreus, Agamemnon, ruler of men, it would be far better to worry about all this some other time, when there's a let up in the fight, when the heart here in my chest is less enraged. For now, all those killed by Hector, son of Priam, when Zeus gave him glory, are lying there, all mangled, and you are urging us to eat! For my part, I'd lead Achaea's sons to war right now, unfed, with empty stomachs, then at sunset make them a great dinner, when we've avenged our shame. Until that time, no drink or food will pass my throat, at least, while my dead comrade lies inside my hut, mutilated by sharp bronze, with his feet still pointing at the door, while his companions mourn there around him. That's why my heart cannot concern itself with what you've said, only with killing, blood, men's dying groans."

While the other Greeks slughter oxen and have a restorative feast, Achilles still refuses to eat or rest, eagerly looking forward to battle. Meanwhile:

Briseis, looking like golden Aphrodite,
then saw Patroclus mutilated by sharp bronze.
With a cry, she threw herself on him, hands tearing
at her breast, her tender neck, her lovely face,
fair as a goddess, lamenting:

“Patroclus,
you who brought the utmost joy to my sad heart,
I left you here alive, when I went off,
taken from these huts. But now, at my return,
I find you dead, you, the people’s leader.
Again for me, as always, evil follows evil.
I saw the husband I was given to
by my father and my noble mother killed
by sharp bronze before our city. My brothers,
three of them, whom my own mother bore,
whom I loved, have all met their fatal day.
But when swift Achilles killed my husband,
you wouldn’t let me weep. You told me then
you’d make me lord Achilles’ wedded wife,
he’d take me in his ships back to Phthia,
for a marriage feast among the Myrmidons.
You were always gentle. That’s the reason
I’ll never stop this grieving for your death.”

As Briseis said this, she wept. The women joined her
in wailing for Patroclus, although each of them
had her own private sorrows. The Achaean elders
gathered round Achilles, urging him to eat.
But he refused, continuing his laments:

“If any of my dear companions here
wishes to obey me, then I beg you
don’t ask me to satisfy my heart
with food or drink when painful sorrow
grips me. I’ll remain like this till sunset,
enduring everything.”

Achilles finished speaking.
Then he sent away the leaders. But some remained—
both sons of Atreus, lord Odysseus, Nestor,
Idomeneus, and old horseman Phoenix,
each trying to console him in his painful grieving.
But his heart would find no joy until he’d entered
the bloody mouth of war. Thinking of Patroclus,
he sighed repeatedly, then said:

“Poor man,
 most loved of all my comrades, in the past
 you used to set out tasty meals right here,
 making them well and quickly in my hut,
 when we Achaeans were in such a rush
 to set out against horse-taming Trojans
 in wretched war. Now you lie disfigured,
 my heart refuses meat and drink, though both
 are in this hut, because I miss you so.
 I could suffer nothing worse than this,
 not even if I learned my father’s died—
 he must be shedding gentle tears in Phthia,
 missing a son like me, while I stay here
 among strange people, fighting Trojans
 over Helen, whom I detest, or if I heard
 my dear son had died, who’s being raised for me
 on Scyros, if, in fact, he’s still alive,
 godlike Neoptolemus. Up to now,
 the heart here in my chest hoped I alone
 would perish here in Troy, so far from Argos,
 where horses breed. You’d return to Phthia,
 taking my child in your swift black ship
 away from Scyros, show him all my things,
 possessions, servants, my high-roofed palace.
 For by now Peleus is either dead and gone,
 I must assume, or just barely living,
 afflicted with hateful old age, waiting
 all the time for distressful news of me,
 when he finds out that I have died.”

As he spoke, Achilles wept. The elders also mourned,
 each one remembering what he had left at home.
 As they lamented, the son of Cronos saw them.
 Feeling pity for them, Zeus spoke to Athena—
 his words had wings:

“My child, here’s a man
 you seem to be neglecting totally,
 a special favourite of yours—Achilles.
 Does your heart no longer care for him at all?
 There he sits in front of his beaked ships,
 mourning his dear companion. Other men
 have all gone off to dinner, but he’s fasting
 and won’t eat. Go now. Put into his chest
 some nectar and beautiful ambrosia,
 so hunger won’t consume him.”

With these words,
 Zeus spurred Athena, already eager, into action.

She swooped down through the air, screaming shrilly,
like a broad-winged hawk. Then as Achaeans, with all speed,
armed themselves throughout the camp, she inserted
nectar and beautiful ambrosia in Achilles' chest,
so his limbs would not suffer pangs of hunger.
Then she left for her mighty father's well-built home.

Iliad 20: Achilles slaughters the Trojans

Achilles, returning to battle, goes on a rampage and the Trojans are beaten back. Although previously he has been more merciful, he is now too enraged to want anything but the deaths of his enemies. After he kills Hector's young brother, Polydorus, he and Hector have a brief encounter on the battlefield.

When Hector saw his brother Polydorus there,
down on the ground, collapsed and holding his own entrails,
a mist flowed right across his eyes. He could no longer
bear to keep his distance. He moved against Achilles,
waving his sharp spear, just like a flame. Achilles,
when he saw him, jumped out and roared in triumph:

“He’s getting closer—the very man
who scarred my heart more than all other men.
We won’t be evading one another
in the battle lanes much longer.”

As he said this, Achilles scowled at godlike Hector,
then yelled at him:

“Come closer,
so you can meet your fatal doom more quickly.”

Hector of the shining helmet, quite unafraid,
then cried out to Achilles:

“Son of Peleus,
don’t try to frighten me with words, as if
I were some child. I, too, know well enough
how to shout out taunting words and insults.
I know you’re brave, stronger than me by far.
But these things are in the lap of the gods.
Though I’m the weaker man, I’ll take your life,
with one throw of my spear, for in the past
it’s proved it’s sharp enough.”

With these words,
Hector raised his spear and threw it. But Athena,
with the slightest puff of breath, blew it aside,
away from glorious Achilles, turning it back
to godlike Hector. It landed there beside his feet.

Then, with a terrifying shout, Achilles charged,
 lusting to kill. But Apollo snatched up Hector,
 something a god can do with ease, then hid him
 in thick cloud. Swift-footed, godlike Achilles
 charged that cloud three times, striking hard each time
 with his bronze spear. When for the fourth time
 he came on like a god with a terrific shout,
 Achilles cried out these winged words to Hector:

“You dog—once more you’re evading death for now.
 But you’ve narrowly escaped disaster.
 Phoebus Apollo has saved you one more time.
 No doubt you always pray to him as you go
 out into the sound of thudding spears.
 Next time we meet, I’ll surely finish you,
 if some god is there to assist me, too.
 For now I’ll fight the others, any man
 I chance to meet.”

Achilles finished shouting.
 Then he struck Dryops with his spear right in the neck.
 Dryops fell at Achilles’ feet. But he left him there.
 Next, Achilles stopped Demouchus, Philetor’s son,
 a big brave warrior, with a spear thrust in his knee.
 Then he hit him with his massive sword, taking his life.
 After that, he went at Dardanus and Laogonus,
 both sons of Bias, throwing them out of their chariot
 onto the ground. He hit one of them with his spear
 and slashed the other at close quarters with his sword.

Then Tros, Alastor’s son, fell at Achilles knees,
 clutching them, begging him to spare his life,
 to capture him alive, instead of killing him,
 moved by pity for a man the same age as himself.
 What a fool! He did not know there was no way
 to change Achilles’ mind—he was not a tender man
 with a soft heart, but full of fighting rage. With his hands
 Tros tried to clutch Achilles’ knees, desperate
 to plead for mercy, but Achilles’ sword struck him
 in his liver, which slid out from the wound.
 Black blood, pouring from the gash, filled up his lap.
 Then darkness veiled his eyes, and his spirit left him.

This sort of thing goes on for a long time – the ancient equivalent of an action sequence. In any case, the list of Achilles’ victims grows; no one can stand against him.

Book 21: Merciless, godlike

Achilles, slaughtering Trojans by the river Scamandrus, encounters one young Trojan prince in a scene that shows how Patroclus’ death has changed him as a warrior.

But then Achilles met someone fleeing the river—
 Lycaon, a son of Dardanian Priam,
 whom he'd captured once before in a night attack,
 taking him against his will from his father's orchard.
 With his sharp bronze Lycaon had been cutting
 young shoots from off a fig tree to make chariot rails.
 He'd had the bad luck to meet godlike Achilles.
 That time, Achilles took him in his ship and sold him
 in well-built Lemnos, where the son of Jason
 had paid the purchase price. From there, Eëtion,
 a friend and guest from Imbros, had ransomed Lycaon,
 paying a huge sum, then sent him on to Arisbe.
 He'd escaped from there in secret and gone home,
 back to his father's house. Once he returned from Lemnos,
 for eleven days his heart enjoyed his friends.
 On the twelfth, some god threw him back again
 into Achilles' hands, who was about to ship him,
 against Lycaon's wishes, down to dwell with Hades.
 When swift-footed, godlike Achilles saw Lycaon
 totally unarmed, without his helmet, shield, or spear,
 for he'd thrown these on the ground, exhausted
 after he'd escaped the river, worn out and sweating
 in all his lower limbs, Achilles, much surprised,
 spoke to his own courageous heart:

“What's this?

My eyes are witnessing something amazing.
 Great-hearted Trojans I've just slaughtered
 will rise again, up out of murky darkness,
 if this man's avoided death, returned like this,
 after I'd sold him off in sacred Lemnos.
 The grey sea, which holds many people back
 against their will, hasn't seemed to stop him.
 But come, let him taste my spear point. I'll see—
 and in my heart confirm—if he'll return,
 as he's just done, or if life-giving earth,
 which keeps even strong men down, will hold him.”

That's what Achilles thought, as he stood there waiting.
 Lycaon, dazed with fear, approached Achilles,
 eager to clasp his knees in supplication,
 heart desperate to escape dark fate and evil death.
 Godlike Achilles raised his long spear, prepared to strike.
 But Lycaon, stooping down, slipped underneath the spear,
 then clasped Achilles' knees. Flying above his back,
 the spear stuck in the ground, hungry for human flesh.
 With one hand, Lycaon grabbed Achilles' knee.
 His other clutched the spear, refusing to let go.

He begged for mercy, addressing Achilles
with these winged words:

“By your knees, Achilles,
I beg you to respect me as a suppliant.
Have pity on me. I claim that sacred right,
my lord, because it was at your table
I first ate Demeter’s grain the very day
you seized me in that well-built orchard.
You led me far from father and my friends,
then sold me off in sacred Lemnos. For me
you got the value of a hundred oxen,
but I was ransomed for three times that price.
It’s now twelve days since I reached Ilion,
after my ordeal. Once more, deadly Fate
has placed me in your hands. I do believe
Father Zeus must hate me, to give me to you
for a second time. My mother, Laothoë,
daughter of old Altes, gave birth to me
to live a shortened life. Altes rules over
war-loving Leleges, in steep Pedasus,
by the river Satnioeis. His daughter
married Priam, who has many other wives.
She had two sons. Now you’ll have slaughtered both.
You killed fine Polydorus with those men
fighting at the front, when your sharp spear
sent him to die. Now death comes for me, as well.
I don’t expect to escape your hands this time,
since some god has guided me right to them.
But I’ll say one more thing—take it to heart—
don’t kill me. I’m not from the same womb
as Hector, the man who killed your comrade,
that kind and powerful warrior.”

So Lycaon begged for mercy from Achilles.
But the response he got was brutal:

“You fool,
don’t offer me a ransom or some plea.
Before Patroclus met his deadly fate,
sparing Trojans pleased my heart much more.
I took many overseas and sold them.
But now not one of them escapes his death,
no one whom god delivers to my hands,
here in front of Ilion, not one—
not a single Trojan, especially none
of Priam’s children. So now, my friend,
you too must die. Why be sad about it?
Patroclus died, a better man than you.

And look at me. You see how fine I am,
 how tall, how handsome? My father's a fine man,
 the mother who gave birth to me a goddess.
 Yet over me, as well, hangs Fate—my death.
 There'll come a dawn, or noon, or evening,
 when some man will take my life in battle—
 he'll strike me with his spear or with an arrow
 shot from his bowstring."

Achilles finished.

Then Lycaon's knees gave way, his heart collapsed.
 He let go of the spear and crouched there, both his hands
 stretched out. Achilles pulled out his sharp sword and struck,
 hitting him on the collar bone, beside his neck.
 The whole two-edged blade sliced into him. Lycaon fell,
 lying face down on the earth. His dark blood flowed out
 and soaked the ground. Achilles seized him by the foot,
 then flung him in the river, shouting out in triumph—
 his words had wings:

"Lie there, among the fish.
 They'll lick blood from your wound with no respect.
 Your mother won't set you on your funeral bed,
 lamenting over you. No, Scamander,
 the swirling river, will carry you away
 to the broad lap of the sea. Many fish
 will swim up to the darkly rippled surface
 to eat white fat from Lycaon. So die,
 all you fleeing Trojans, until we reach
 that sacred city Ilion, with me there,
 right behind you, fighting and killing you.
 Your flowing river with its silver eddies

[130]

won't help, for all those bulls you've sacrificed
 all these years, all the sure-footed horses
 you've thrown alive into its swirling pools.
 No matter—you'll suffer an evil fate,
 till every one of you has paid in full

160

for Patroclus' death, for Achaea's dead,
 the men you slaughtered by our swift ships,
 when I was not among them there."

After this, Achilles chokes the river Scamandrus with so many bodies that the river himself rises up to battle him. Even Achilles can't fight a river, and it is close to overwhelming him, when some of the gods intervene: at Hera's request, Hephaestus dries the river until it admits defeat. Meanwhile the gods, who are divided in which side they favor, have joined the battle, fighting one another and helping mortal warriors as well.

Book 22: Achilles' Revenge

Finally, having driven the Trojans to the gates of the city, Achilles comes after Hector, in full sight of Hector's parents.

With these words, Achilles set off towards the city,
his heart full, charging on like a prize-winning horse
pulling a chariot at full speed across the plain
with little effort—that's how fast Achilles ran,
sprinting with his legs and feet.

Meanwhile, old Priam
was the first to catch sight of Achilles....

With a cry, old Priam
struck his head with his hand, then, reaching up,
with many groans, he called out, pleading with his son,
who was still standing there before the gates,
firmly resolved to fight Achilles. The old man,
hands outstretched, appealed to Hector's sense of pity:

“Hector, my dear son, don't stand out there alone,
facing that man with no one else to help you,
or you will quickly meet your death, slaughtered
by Peleus' son, who's much more powerful.
Don't be obstinate. If only the gods
would love Achilles just as much as I do,
then dogs and vultures would soon gnaw at him
as he lay there. And then my heart might shed
its dreadful sorrow, for he's taken from me
many valiant sons. Some he's butchered.
Others he's sold in islands far away. ...
.But that's a briefer sorrow
for other people, unless you die as well,
slaughtered by Achilles. Come here, my child,
inside the walls, so you can help to save
Trojan men and women. Don't give that man,
that son of Peleus, great glory. He'll take
your own dear life. Have pity on me, too.
Though full of misery, I still can feel.
Father Zeus will kill me with a cruel fate
on the threshold of old age, once I've seen
so many dreadful things—my sons butchered,
my daughters hauled away, their houses ransacked,
their little children tossed down on the ground
in this murderous war, my daughters-in-law
led off captive in hard Achaean hands.
In the end, I'll be ripped by ravenous dogs,
in front of my own doors when some man strikes me

with his sharp bronze or throws his spear in me,
robbing my limbs of life—the same dogs I raised
at home beside my table to guard the doors.

...

As the old man spoke,
his hands tugged his grey hair and pulled it from his head.
But he could not sway Hector's heart. Beside Priam,
Hector's mother wept. Then she undid her robe,
and with her hands pushed out her breasts, shedding tears.
She cried out, calling him—her words had wings:

"Hector, my child, respect and pity me.
If I ever gave these breasts to soothe you,
remember that, dear child. Protect yourself
against your enemy inside these walls.
Don't stand out there to face him. Stubborn man,
if he kills you, I'll never lay you out
on your death bed or mourn for you, my child,
my dearest offspring—nor will your fair wife.
Far away from us, beside Achaean ships,
their swift dogs will eat you."

So these two, both crying, spoke to their dear son,
pleading with him incessantly. But Hector's heart
would not budge. He stood awaiting huge Achilles,
who was getting closer. Just as a mountain snake
waits for some man right by its lair, after eating
poison herbs so that a savage anger grips him,
as he coils beside his den with a fearful glare—
that's how Hector's dauntless heart would not retreat.

Hector, seeing Achilles' unstoppable approach, decides that he has to try to make a stand, since retreating inside the city walls would be too shameful. But at the last minute, his strength fails him, and he runs from Achilles, who pursues him around the walls of Troy three times. Then:

But when they ran past those springs
the fourth time, Father Zeus raised his golden scales,
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.
Then Athena, goddess with the glittering eyes,
came to Peleus' son. Standing close to him, she spoke—
her words had wings:

"Glorious Achilles,
beloved of Zeus, now I hope the two of us

will take great glory to Achaeon ships,
 by killing Hector, for all his love of war.
 Now he can't escape us any longer,
 even though Apollo, the far shooter,]
 suffers every torment, as he grovels
 before Father Zeus, who bears the aegis.
 Stay still now. Catch your breath. I'll go to Hector
 and convince him to turn and stand against you."

Once Athena had said this, Achilles obeyed,
 rejoicing in his heart, as he stood there, leaning
 on his bronze-tipped ash spear. Athena left him.
 She came to Hector in the form of Deïphobus,
 with his tireless voice and shape. Standing beside him,
 she spoke—her words had wings:

"My brother,
 swift Achilles is really harassing you,
 with his fast running around Priam's city
 in this pursuit. Come, we'll both stand here,
 stay put, and beat off his attack."

Then Hector of the shining helmet answered her:

"Deïphobus, in the past you've always been
 the brother whom I loved the most by far
 of children born to Hecuba and Priam.
 I think I now respect you even more,
 since you have dared to come outside the wall,
 to help me, when you saw me in distress,
 while the others all remained inside."

Goddess Athena with her glittering eyes replied:

"Dear brother, my father, my noble mother,
 and my comrades begged me repeatedly
 to stay there. They all so fear Achilles.
 But here inside me my heart felt the pain
 of bitter anguish. Now, let's go straight for him.
 Let's fight and not hold back our spears,
 so we can see if Achilles kills us both,
 then takes the bloodstained trophies to the ships,
 or whether you'll destroy him on your spear."

With these words, Athena seduced him forward.
 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
 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.
 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,
 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
 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
 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.
 This war would then be easier on Trojans
 with you dead, for you'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
 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,
 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
 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
 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,
 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.
 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,
 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,
 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.
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
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.”

With words like this, they came up close and wounded Hector.
When swift-footed godlike Achilles had stripped the corpse,
standing among Achaeans, he spoke these winged words:

“My friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives,
since gods have granted that this man be killed,
who’s done much damage, more than all the rest,
let’s test these Trojan by attacking them
with armed excursions round their city,
to see what they intend—whether they’ll leave
their lofty city now that Hector’s dead,
or stay there, still keen to fight without him.
But why’s my fond heart discussing this?
By our ships lies a dead man—unwept,
unburied—Patroclus. I’ll not forget him,
as long as I remain among the living,
as long as my dear limbs have motion.

If down in Hades men forget their dead,
 even there I will remember my companion.
 Come, young Achaeans, sing a victory song,
 as we're returning to our hollow ships.
 We'll take the body. We've won great glory,
 killing noble Hector—Trojans prayed to him
 in their own city, as if he were a god."

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,
 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
 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.
 He begged them all, grovelling in the dirt, calling out,
 naming each of them:

"My dear friends,
 leave me alone. I know you care for me,
 but let me leave the city by myself,
 go to the Achaean ships, then beg him,
 that ruthless man, that violent monster.
 He may feel shame in front of comrades.
 He may pity my old age. For he, too,
 has a father, one just like me, Peleus,
 who sired and raised him to butcher Trojans.
 On me especially he's loaded sorrow,
 more than on any other man. He's killed
 so many of my sons, all in their prime.
 But, despite that sorrow, I don't grieve
 for all of them as much as I do for one,
 for Hector. The sharp pain I feel for him
 will bring me down to the house of Hades.

If only he had died here in my arms,
 we could have had our fill of weeping,
 of lamentation—me and his mother,
 who gave birth to him, to her own sorrow.”

As he said this, Priam wept. The townsfolk mourned.
 Hecuba led Trojan women in their loud laments:

“My child, how can I live with this misery,
 such wretched sorrow, now that you are dead?
 You were my pride and joy, night and day,
 and in the city, a blessing to us all,
 to Trojan men and women in the state,
 who received you like a god. To them
 you were great glory when you were alive.
 Now Death and Fate have overtaken you.”

Andromache, hearing Hecuba mourning, is overcome with anxiety about Hector's fate, and rushes out to find out what has happened.

Saying this, she hurried through the house, heart pounding,
 like some mad woman, accompanied by servants.
 Once she reached the wall crowded with men, she stopped,
 stood there, and looked out from the wall. She saw Hector
 as he was being dragged past before the city,
 with swift horses pulling him ruthlessly away
 to the Achaeans' hollow ships. At the sight,
 black night eclipsed her eyes. She fell back in a faint,
 gasping her life away. From her head she threw off
 her shining headdress—frontlet, cap, woven headband,
 the veil that golden Aphrodite gave her
 when Hector of the shining helmet led her
 from Eëtion's house as his wife, once he'd paid
 an immense price for his bride. Around her
 stood her husband's sisters and his brother's wives.
 They all helped pick her up, almost dead from shock.
 When she'd recovered and her spirit had returned,
 she started her lament. In a sobbing voice,
 she cried out to the Trojan women:

“Ah, Hector,
 how miserable I am. We both seem born
 to a single fate, you in Priam's house
 in Troy, and I in Eëtion's home
 in wooded Thebe. He raised me from childhood,
 an ill-fated father and a child who's doomed.
 How I wish he'd never fathered me!
 Now you go to Hades' house deep underground,
 abandoning me to bitter sorrow,

widowed in our home. Our son's an infant,
 born to wretched parents, you and me.
 No good will come to him from you, Hector,
 now that you're dead, nor will he help you.
 Even if he gets through this dreadful war
 with the Achaeans, his life will always be
 a constant pain and sorrow.

Saying this, she wept. The women added their laments.

Book 23: Patroclus' Funeral

Having killed Hector, Achilles brings the Greeks back to camp rather than pursuing their advantage and trying to take the city itself.

.... But Achilles didn't let his Myrmidons disband.
 He spoke out to his warrior companions:

“Fast-riding Myrmidons, trusty comrades,
 let's not loose our sure-footed horses yet,
 untying them from their chariots. We must go
 with horse and chariot up to Patroclus,
 to mourn for him. For that's a dead man's right.
 Once we've had our fill of sorrowful tears,
 we'll unyoke our horses, then all eat here.”

At these words, they all began their group lament,
 led by Achilles. Three times around the body
 they drove their well-groomed horses, mourning as they went.
 Thetis stirred up in them a strong desire to weep.
 Their tears made the sands wet, men's armour, too,
 for they were mourning the loss of a great warrior,
 who'd made men flee. Peleus' son led their loud lament,
 placing his man-killing hands on his comrade's chest:

“Rest in peace, Patroclus, even though
 you're in Hades house, for I'm completing here
 all I promised you before—to drag in Hector,
 then give him to the dogs to eat up raw,
 and cut the throats of twelve young Trojans,
 splendid children, on your funeral pyre,
 in my rage that you've been slaughtered.”

He finished. Then he continued to dishonour
 noble Hector, stretching his body out face down
 in the dirt, beside the bier of Menoetius' son.
 Then each man took off his glittering bronze armour.
 They untied their loud-neighing horses and sat down,
 thousands of them, by swift-footed Achilles' ship.
 He prepared a funeral feast to ease their spirits.

Many sleek oxen bellowed underneath the knife,
as they were butchered. Many sheep, bleating goats,
and white-tusked pigs rich in fat were laid out
to roast over Hephaestus' fires. All around the corpse,
blood ran so thick men scooped it up in cupfuls.

Then Achaean leaders led the swift-footed prince,
son of Peleus, to lord Agamemnon.
They had trouble convincing him to go there—
his heart was still so angry for his comrade.
Reaching Agamemnon's hut, they issued orders
for clear-voiced heralds to heat up a large cauldron,
to see if they could persuade Peleus' son to wash,
to rinse off the spattered blood. In his stubbornness,
he refused to do that, swearing this oath:

“By Zeus,
highest and most excellent of all gods,
it's not right that water touch my head,
until I've laid Patroclus on his fire,
piled up a burial mound, and shaved my hair,
since such grief will never reach my heart
a second time, not while I still remain
among the living. But for the moment,
let's agree to dine, though I hate to eat.
In the morning, Agamemnon, king of men,
you must urge men to gather wood, arrange
all things required for a man who's died,
as he goes below to murky darkness,
so tireless fires can cremate him quickly
and remove him from our sight. Then soldiers
can resume their duties.”

Achilles spoke.
They all listened to him and readily agreed.
Men all rushed out, prepared a meal, and dined,
eating to their heart's content and sharing equally.
Once they'd satisfied their need for food and drink,
each man returned to his own hut to get some rest.
But Peleus' son lay moaning loudly on the shore,
beside the crashing sea, with many Myrmidons,
in an open spot, where waves washed up on shore.
When sleep took hold of him and eased his aching heart
by sweetly flowing round him—for his splendid limbs
were tired out from chasing after Hector
by wind-swept Ilion—then poor Patroclus
came to him as a ghost, looking exactly like him
in all respects—in stature, handsome eyes, and voice.
He stood there, above Achilles' head, body covered

with the same clothes he used to wear over his skin.
The ghost spoke to Achilles, saying:

“You’re asleep, Achilles.
You’ve forgotten me. While I was alive,
you never did neglect me. But now I’m dead.
So bury me as quickly as you can.
Then I can pass through the gates of Hades.
The spirits, ghosts of the dead, keep me away.
They don’t let me join them past the river.
So I wander aimlessly round Hades’ home
by its wide gates. Give me your hand, I beg you,
for I’ll never come again from Hades,
once you’ve given me what’s due, my funeral fire.
We’ll no more sit together making plans,
separated from our dear companions.
The jaws of dreadful Fate are gaping for me,
ready to consume me—my destiny
from the day that I was born. You, too,
godlike Achilles, you have your own fate,
to die under the walls of wealthy Troy.
I’ll say one more thing, one last request,
if you will listen. Achilles, don’t lay your bones
apart from mine. Let them remain together,
just as they were when we grew up in your home,
once Menoetius brought me as a youngster
into your land from Opoeis, for I’d done
a dreadful murder on that day I killed
Amphidamas’ son, in my foolishness.
I didn’t mean to, but I was enraged
over some game of dice. Horseman Peleus
welcomed me into his home, raised me
with love, then made me your attendant.
So let the same container hold our bones,
that gold two-handled jar your mother gave you.”

Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:

“Dear friend, why have you come to me here,
telling me everything I need to do?
I’ll carry out all these things for you,
attend to your request. But come closer.
Let’s hold each other one short moment more,
enjoying a shared lament together.”

Saying this, Achilles reached out with his arms,
but he grasped nothing. The spirit had departed,
going underground like vapour, muttering faintly.
Achilles jumped up in amazement, clapped his hands,
and then spoke out in sorrow:

“How sad!

It seems that even in Hades’ house,
some spirit or ghost remains, but our being
is not there at all. For this entire night
the ghost of poor Patroclus stood beside me,
weeping, lamenting, asking me to do things,
in every detail amazingly like him.”

Achilles’ words stirred the desire to keep mourning
in all of them. When rose-fingered Dawn appeared,
they were still lamenting by that cheerless corpse.

Agamemnon’s men prepare a huge funeral pyre, and Achilles’ men dress in armor to bear the body to it.

Then came the men on foot
in their thousands. In the middle, his companions
bore Patroclus, whose corpse they covered with the hair
they’d cut from their own heads and thrown onto the body.
Godlike Achilles came behind them, cradling
Patroclus’ head and grieving. For he was sending
down to Hades’ home a comrade without equal.
When they reached the spot Achilles chose for them,
they set the body down and quickly piled up wood
as he directed. Then swift-footed lord Achilles
thought of something. Standing some distance from the pyre,
he cut a lock of his own fair hair, one he’d grown
as a rich offering to the river Spercheus.
Looking out over the wine-dark sea, he spoke out
in passionate distress:

“Spercheus, my father Peleus
promised you that, once I came back home
to my dear native land, I’d cut my hair
for you, then make a holy sacrifice,
offering up fifty uncastrated rams
to your waters, where you have your own estate
and fragrant altars. That oath was useless.
It’s what the old man swore, but you failed
to bring about what he desired. So now,
since I’ll not be returning home again,
let me give this lock to warrior Patroclus
to carry with him.”

Having said these words,
Achilles placed his hair in the hands of his dear comrade,
stirring up in each of them desire to lament.
Now they would have mourned till sunset, but Achilles
soon got up and said to Agamemnon:

“Son of Atreus,
Achaean troops will listen to your words

more than to anyone. Men can grieve too much.
 So dismiss them from the pyre for now.
 Tell them to prepare a meal. Those of us
 with special cause to mourn will take care of this.
 But let the leaders remain here with us.”

Achilles slaughters horses, Patroclus’ dogs, and twelve Trojan prisoners to burn on the pyre with Patroclus.

After that, he lit the fire to work its iron force
 and burn up everything. With a groan he called out,
 addressing his companion:

“Rest in peace,
 Patroclus, though you’re in Hades’ house.
 For I’m now completing everything
 I promised you before. Flames will burn
 twelve noble sons of great-hearted Trojans,
 all cremated with you. But as for Hector,
 Priam’s son, I’ll not feed him to the fire,
 but to the dogs.”

Achilles made this threat,
 but dogs would not touch Hector. For Aphrodite,
 Zeus’ daughter, kept them away, day and night.
 She covered him with immortal oil of roses,
 so Achilles would not wear away his body
 by dragging him around. Phoebus Apollo
 brought a dark cloud from the sky across the plain,
 shadowing the entire place where Hector lay,
 to stop Sun’s power from shrivelling up the flesh
 on limbs and sinews.

Achilles then holds funeral games (athletic contests to celebrate and honor the departed warrior). Amazingly, despite his rage and grief, he manages them with fairness and generosity, settling disputes, awarding prizes beyond those won by the victors, and being a gracious and magnificent host for the games that honor his friend.

Book 24: Resolution

Once the funeral gathering broke up, the men dispersed,
 each one going to his own ship, concerned to eat
 and then enjoy sweet sleep. But Achilles kept on weeping,
 remembering his dear companion. All-conquering Sleep
 could not overcome him, as he tossed and turned,
 longing for manly, courageous, strong Patroclus,
 thinking of all he’d done with him, all the pain
 they’d suffered, as they’d gone through wars with other men
 and with the perilous sea. As he kept remembering,
 he cried heavy tears, sometimes lying on his side,
 sometimes on his back or on his face. Then he’d get up,
 to wander in distress, back and forth along the shore.

He'd see Dawn's approach across the sea and beaches,
 then he'd harness his fast horses to their chariot,
 tie on Hector and drag him behind, driving
 three times around the tomb of Menoetius' dead son.
 Then in his hut he'd rest again, leaving Hector
 stretched out, face down in the dust. But Apollo,
 feeling pity for Hector, though he was dead,
 guarded his skin from any lacerations,
 covering his whole body with the golden aegis,
 so as Achilles dragged him, he did not tear his skin.
 Still Achilles kept dishonouring godlike Hector.

Then the blessed gods, looking on, pitied Hector.

The gods hold a council and decide to tell Achilles to
 give Hector's body back to the Trojans, and to put an
 end to his own excessive mourning.

Silver-footed Thetis did not disagree with Zeus.
 She went speeding from Olympus' peak to her son's hut.
 She found him there, still mourning endlessly.
 Around him, his close companions were all busy,
 in a hurry to get their morning meal prepared.
 Inside the hut they'd butchered a large woolly sheep.
 His noble mother sat close by him, caressed him
 with her hand, then spoke to him, saying:

"My son,
 how long will you consume your heart with tears,
 with this grieving, not thinking about food
 or going to bed. To have sex with a woman
 would do you good. I won't see you still alive
 much longer—for at this moment, Death,
 your powerful fate, is standing close at hand.
 But quickly, listen to me. For I'm here
 as messenger from Zeus. He told me this—
 the gods are angry with you. Zeus himself
 is the angriest of all immortals,
 because, in your heartfelt fury, you keep
 Hector by your beaked ships, won't return him.
 So come, now. Give him back, and for that corpse
 accept a ransom."

Swift-footed Achilles
 then replied to Thetis, saying:

"So be it.
 Whoever brings the ransom, let that man
 have the corpse, if that's what the Olympian
 in his own heart truly desires."

Thus, among the assembled ships, mother and son
spoke to each other many winged words.

Now the gods also tell Priam to take a fortune from his storehouses and go to the Greek camp to ransom his son's body so he can be given a proper burial. Hecuba tries to dissuade him, despite the fact that in her hatred she wants to eat Achilles' heart. Priam's sons also think he's crazy to risk his life this way. This only enrages the king:

Priam went at the people with his staff,
lashing out. They moved off, beyond the old man's rage.
Then he began shouting at his sons, cursing them—
Helenus, Paris, noble Agathon, Pammon,
Antiphonus, Polites, skilled in war shouts,
Deïphobus, Hippothous, and proud Dios.
To these nine, the old man yelled his orders.

“Hurry up, you useless children, my shame.
I wish you'd all been killed instead of Hector
by those swift ships—the entire bunch of you!
My life's so miserable and empty.
I fathered sons, the best in spacious Troy.
I don't think a single one of them is left—
not Mestor, or horseman Troilus, or Hector,
that god among men. He didn't seem to be
the child of any mortal man, but of a god.
Ares destroyed all those sons of mine.
The ones still left here are disgraceful—
liars, prancing masters of the dance floor,
who steal lambs and goats from their own people.
Will you not prepare a wagon for me—
and quickly? Put all those items in it,
so we can start out on our way.”

Priam finished.

The sons, shaken by their father's torrent of abuse,
brought out the sturdy, well-made wagon, a new one.

With Hermes, disguised as a sympathetic Greek warrior,
accompanying him, Priam makes his way to the Greek camp.

[Hermes] led in Priam with the wagon load of priceless gifts.
They then reached the lofty hut of Peleus' son,
which Myrmidons had built there for their king, cutting
pine beams for it, then roofing it with downy reeds
gathered from the meadows. They'd built around it
a large courtyard for their king, strongly fenced with stakes.

A single beam of pine kept the gate securely closed.
 It needed three Achaeans to push it into place,
 and three to draw that great bolt from the door,
 three of the rest of the Achaeans, for Achilles
 could push it into place alone. Helper Hermes
 opened the gate himself for old man Priam,
 then brought in those splendid gifts for swift Achilles.
 He climbed down from the chariot and said:

“Old man,
 I am Hermes, an immortal god. I’ve come,
 because my father sent me as your guide.
 But I’ll go back now. I won’t approach
 within sight of Achilles. There’d be anger
 if an immortal god greeted mortal men
 face to face. But you should go inside,
 appeal to him in his father’s name,
 his mother with her lovely hair, his child,
 so you may stir his heart.”

With these words,
 Hermes went on his way, back to high Olympus.
 Priam then climbed from his chariot to the ground.
 He left Idaios there to tend the mules and horses.
 The old man went directly in the hut
 where Achilles, dear to Zeus, usually sat.
 He found Achilles there, with only two companions,
 sitting some distance from him—warrior Automedon
 and Alcimius, offshoot of the war god Ares—
 busy attending him. He’d just completed dinner.
 He’d had food and drink, but the table was still there.
 The men did not see great Priam as he entered.
 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
 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
 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.
 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,
 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
 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,
 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.
 On Zeus' floor stand two jars which hold his gifts—
 one has disastrous things, the other blessings.
 When thunder-loving Zeus hands out a mixture,
 that man will, at some point, meet with evil,
 then, some other time, with good. When Zeus' gift
 comes only from the jar containing evil,
 he makes the man despised. A wicked frenzy
 drives him all over sacred earth—he wanders
 without honour from the gods or mortal men.
 Consider Peleus. The gods gave him gifts,
 splendid presents, right from birth. In wealth,
 in his possessions, he surpassed all men.
 And he was king over the Myrmidons.
 Though he was a mortal, the gods gave him
 a goddess for a wife. But even to him
 the gods gave evil, too, for in his palace
 there sprang up no line of princely children.
 He had one son, doomed to an early death.
 I'll not look after him as he grows old,
 since I'm a long way from my native land,
 sitting here in Troy, bringing pain to you
 and to your children. Think of yourself, old man.
 We hear that you were fortunate in former times.
 In all the lands from Lesbos to the south,
 where Macar ruled, and east to Phrygia,
 to the boundless Hellespont, in all these lands,
 old man, they say that you surpassed all men
 for wealth and children. But from the time
 you got disaster from the heavenly gods,
 man-killing battles round your city
 have never ceased. You must endure it all,
 without a constant weeping in your heart.
 You achieve nothing by grieving for your son.
 You won't bring him to life again, not before
 you'll have to suffer yet another evil."

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.
 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.
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.
Not alone—his two attendants went out with him,
warrior Automedon and Alcimius, 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,
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
on the polished wagon. Achilles, with a groan,
called to his dear companion:

“O Patroclus,
don’t be angry with me, if you learn,
even in Hades’ house, that I gave back
godlike Hector to his dear father.
He’s brought to me a fitting ransom.

I'll be giving you your full share of it,
as is appropriate."

Godlike Achilles spoke,
then went back once more into the hut and sat
on the richly decorated chair he'd left
by the opposite wall. Then he spoke to Priam:

"Old man, your son has been given back,
as you requested. He's lying on a bier.
You'll see him for yourself at day break,
when you take him. We should think of eating.
Even fair-haired Niobe remembered food,
with twelve of her own children murdered in her home,
her six young daughters and her six strong sons.
Apollo was so enraged at Niobe,
with his silver bow he killed the sons. The daughters
Artemis the Archer slaughtered, for Niobe
had compared herself to lovely Leto,
saying the goddess only had two children,
while she had given birth to many. Even so,
though only two, those gods killed all her children.
For nine days they lay in their own blood—
there was no one there to give them burial.
Cronos' son had turned the people all to stone.
The tenth day, the gods in heaven buried them.
That's when, worn out with weeping, Niobe
had thoughts of food. And now, somewhere in the rocks
in Sipylus, among the lonely mountains,
where, men say, goddess nymphs lie down to sleep,
the ones that dance beside the Achelous,
there Niobe, though turned to stone, still broods,
thinking of the pain the gods have given her.
But come, royal old man, let's think of food.
Later you can lament for your dear son,
when you have taken him to Ilion,
where you'll shed many tears for him."

Swift Achilles finished. Then, jumping up, he killed
a white-fleeced sheep. His companions skinned it,
then prepared the meat, slicing it skilfully
and putting it on spits. They cooked it carefully,
then pulled spits from the pieces. Taking bread,
Automedon set it in fine baskets on the table.
Achilles served the meat. Then their hands went to it,
taking the food prepared and set beside them.
When they'd satisfied their need for food and drink,
then Priam, son of Dardanus, looked at Achilles,
wondering at his size and beauty, like gazing

face to face upon a god. Achilles looked at Priam,
marvelling at his royal appearance and the words he heard.
Once they'd had their fill of looking at each other,
the first to speak was the old man, godlike Priam:

“My lord, show me my bed now with all speed,
so we may lie down and enjoy sweet sleep.
For since your hands took my son's life away,
my eyelids have not closed my eyes, not once.
I always weep, brooding on my sorrows,
my endless grief. I grovel in the dung
inside my closed-in courtyard. Now I've eaten,
tasted meat, and let myself drink gleaming wine.
Before this, I'd eat nothing.”

Priam spoke.

Achilles told his comrades and the servants
to set beds out on his portico, laying on them
fine purple rugs with blankets spread on top,
placing above them wool-lined cloaks for clothing.
Women slaves went from the hall with torches.
Right away they spread out two beds, working quickly.
Then swift-footed Achilles spoke to Priam,
in a joking tone:

“Sleep here outside, my dear old man,
in case some Achaean counsellor arrives.
They always come to see me to make plans,
as is our custom. If one of them saw you
on this pitch black night, he might run off
to tell Agamemnon, his people's shepherd.
Then giving back the corpse might be delayed.
But come, tell me—and speak truthfully—
how many days do you require to bury
godlike Hector, so I can stop that long
and keep the troops in check?”

Old godlike Priam

then said in answer to Achilles:

“If you're willing
for me to give lord Hector a full burial,
then, Achilles, as a personal favour,
there is something you could do for me.
You know how we're restricted to our city.
It's a long way to the mountains to get wood.
Besides, the Trojans are especially fearful.
We'll mourn Hector for nine days in our home.
On the tenth day we'll have his funeral.
Then there'll be a banquet for the people.

On the eleventh, we'll make his burial mound.
The twelfth day, if we must, we'll go to war."

Swift-footed Achilles then said to Priam:

"All right, old Priam, things will be arranged
as you request. I'll suspend the fighting
for the length of time you've asked for."

As he said this, Achilles took the old man's wrist
on his right hand, in case his heart was fearful.
So by that house on the porch they lay down to sleep,
Priam and his herald, both men of wisdom.
Achilles slept in a corner of his well-built hut,
with lovely Briseis stretched out there beside him.

Hermes comes in the night, wakes Priam (who is after all literally sleeping with his enemy) and escorts him back to Troy, where the women mourn for him.

Andromache,
who held in her arms the head of man-killing Hector.

"My husband—you've lost your life so young,
leaving me a widow in our home,
with our son still an infant, the child
born to you and me in our wretchedness.
I don't think he'll grow up to adulthood.
Before that, our city will all be destroyed.
For you, who kept watch over for us, are dead.
You used to protect our city, keeping
its noble wives and little children safe.
Now, soon enough, they'll all be carried off
in hollow ships. I'll be there among them.
And you, my child, you'll follow with me,
to some place where you'll be put to work
at menial tasks, slaving for a cruel master.
Or else some Achaean man will grab your arm
and throw you from the wall—a dreadful death—
in his anger that Hector killed his brother,
or his father, or his son. For Hector's hands
made great numbers of Achaeans sink their teeth
into the broad earth. In wretched warfare,
your father was not gentle. So in our city
they now weep for him. O Hector, what sorrow,
what untold grief you've laid upon your parents.
What painful sorrows will remain for me,
especially for me. As you were dying,
you didn't reach your hand out from the bed,
or give me some final words of wisdom,
something I could remember always,
night and day, as I continue my lament."

Andromache said this in tears. The women all wailed with her.
Then Hecuba took her turn in leading their laments:

“Hector, dearest by far of all my children,
loved by the gods, as well, when you were living.
Now, at your death, they still take care of you.
When swift Achilles took my other sons,
he’d ship them off across the boundless seas,
to Samos, or Imbros, or foggy Lemnos.
When his long-edged bronze took away your life,
he dragged you many times around the mound
for his comrade Patroclus, whom you killed.
Yet even so, he could not revive him.
Now you lie here in our house, fresh as dew,
like someone whom Apollo of the silver bow
has just come to and killed with gentle arrows.”

As she spoke, Hecuba wept. She stirred them on
to endless lamentation. Helen was the third
to lead those women in their wailing:

“Hector—of all my husband’s brothers,
you’re by far the dearest to my heart.
My husband is godlike Alexander,
who brought me here to Troy. I wish I’d died
before that happened! This is the twentieth year
since I went away and left my native land,
but I’ve never heard a nasty word from you
or an abusive speech. In fact, if anyone
ever spoke rudely to me in the house—
one of your brothers or sisters, some brother’s
well-dressed wife, or your mother—for your father
always was so kind, as if he were my own—
you’d speak out, persuading them to stop,
using your gentleness, your soothing words.
Now I weep for you and for my wretched self,
so sick at heart, for there’s no one else
in spacious Troy who’s kind to me and friendly.
They all look at me and shudder with disgust.”

*After the women have sung their lamentations, the Trojans prepare Hector’s funeral, and
The Iliad ends after it has taken place.*