

H O M E R

The
Iliad

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INTRODUCTION AND
NOTES BY
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H O M E R :
T H E I L I A D

BOOK ONE



The Rage of Achilles

Rage—Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses,
hurling down to the House of Death so many sturdy souls,
great fighters' souls, but made their bodies carrion,
feasts for the dogs and birds,
and the will of Zeus was moving toward its end.
Begin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed,
Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles.

What god drove them to fight with such a fury?
Apollo the son of Zeus and Leto. Incensed at the king
he swept a fatal plague through the army—men were dying
and all because Agamemnon spurned Apollo's priest.
Yes, Chryses approached the Achaeans' fast ships
to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom

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and bearing high in hand, wound on a golden staff,
 the wreaths of the god, the distant deadly Archer.
 He begged the whole Achaean army but most of all
 the two supreme commanders, Atreus' two sons,
 "Agamemnon, Menelaus—all Argives geared for war!
 May the gods who hold the halls of Olympus give you 20
 Priam's city to plunder, then safe passage home.
 Just set my daughter free, my dear one . . . here,
 accept these gifts, this ransom. Honor the god
 who strikes from worlds away—the son of Zeus, Apollo!"

And all ranks of Achaeans cried out their assent:
 "Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!"
 But it brought no joy to the heart of Agamemnon.
 The king dismissed the priest with a brutal order
 ringing in his ears: "Never again, old man,
 let me catch sight of you by the hollow ships! 30
 Not loitering now, not slinking back tomorrow.
 The staff and the wreaths of god will never save you then.
 The girl—I won't give up the girl. Long before that,
 old age will overtake her in *my* house, in Argos,
 far from her fatherland, slaving back and forth
 at the loom, forced to share my bed!
 Now go,
 don't tempt my wrath—and you may depart alive."

The old man was terrified. He obeyed the order,
 turning, trailing away in silence down the shore 40
 where the battle lines of breakers crash and drag.
 And moving off to a safe distance, over and over
 the old priest prayed to the son of sleek-haired Leto,
 lord Apollo, "Hear me, Apollo! God of the silver bow
 who strides the walls of Chryse and Cilla sacrosanct—
 lord in power of Tenedos—Smintheus, god of the plague!
 If I ever roofed a shrine to please your heart,
 ever burned the long rich bones of bulls and goats
 on your holy altar, now, now bring my prayer to pass.
 Pay the Danaans back—your arrows for my tears!"

His prayer went up and Phoebus Apollo heard him. 50
 Down he strode from Olympus' peaks, storming at heart
 with his bow and hooded quiver slung across his shoulders.
 The arrows clanged at his back as the god quaked with rage,
 the god himself on the march and down he came like night.
 Over against the ships he dropped to a knee, let fly a shaft
 and a terrifying clash rang out from the great silver bow.
 First he went for the mules and circling dogs but then,
 launching a piercing shaft at the men themselves,
 he cut them down in droves—
 and the corpse-fires burned on, night and day, no end in sight. 60

Nine days the arrows of god swept through the army.
 On the tenth Achilles called all ranks to muster—
 the impulse seized him, sent by white-armed Hera
 grieving to see Achaean fighters drop and die.
 Once they'd gathered, crowding the meeting grounds,
 the swift runner Achilles rose and spoke among them:
 "Son of Atreus, now we are beaten back, I fear,
 the long campaign is lost. So home we sail . . .
 if we can escape our death—if war and plague
 are joining forces now to crush the Argives. 70
 But wait: let us question a holy man,
 a prophet, even a man skilled with dreams—
 dreams as well can come our way from Zeus—
 come, someone to tell us why Apollo rages so,
 whether he blames us for a vow we failed, or sacrifice.
 If only the god would share the smoky savor of lambs
 and full-grown goats, Apollo might be willing, still,
 somehow, to save us from this plague."

So he proposed
 and down he sat again as Calchas rose among them,
 Thestor's son, the clearest by far of all the seers 80
 who scan the flight of birds. He knew all things that are,
 all things that are past and all that are to come,
 the seer who had led the Argive ships to Troy
 with the second sight that god Apollo gave him.
 For the armies' good the seer began to speak:

“Achilles, dear to Zeus . . .
 you order me to explain Apollo’s anger,
 the distant deadly Archer? I will tell it all.
 But strike a pact with me, swear you will defend me
 with all your heart, with words and strength of hand. 90
 For there is a man I will enrage—I see it now—
 a powerful man who lords it over all the Argives,
 one the Achaeans must obey . . . A mighty king,
 raging against an inferior, is too strong.
 Even if he can swallow down his wrath today,
 still he will nurse the burning in his chest
 until, sooner or later, he sends it bursting forth.
 Consider it closely, Achilles. Will you save me?”

And the matchless runner reassured him: “Courage!
 Out with it now, Calchas. Reveal the will of god, 100
 whatever you may know. And I swear by Apollo
 dear to Zeus, the power you pray to, Calchas,
 when you reveal god’s will to the Argives—no one,
 not while I am alive and see the light on earth, no one
 will lay his heavy hands on you by the hollow ships.
 None among all the armies. Not even if you mean
 Agamemnon here who now claims to be, by far,
 the best of the Achaeans.”

The seer took heart
 and this time he spoke out, bravely: “Beware—
 he casts no blame for a vow we failed, a sacrifice. 110
 The god’s enraged because Agamemnon spurned his priest,
 he refused to free his daughter, he refused the ransom.
 That’s why the Archer sends us pains and he will send us more
 and never drive this shameful destruction from the Argives,
 not till we give back the girl with sparkling eyes
 to her loving father—no price, no ransom paid—
 and carry a sacred hundred bulls to Chryse town.
 Then we can calm the god, and only then appease him.”

So he declared and sat down. But among them rose
 the fighting son of Atreus, lord of the far-flung kingdoms, 120

Agamemnon—furious, his dark heart filled to the brim,
 blazing with anger now, his eyes like searing fire.
 With a sudden, killing look he wheeled on Calchas first:
 “Seer of misery! Never a word that works to my advantage!
 Always misery warms your heart, your prophecies—
 never a word of profit said or brought to pass.
 Now, again, you divine god’s will for the armies,
 bruit it about, as fact, why the deadly Archer
 multiplies our pains: because I, I refused
 that glittering prize for the young girl Chryseis. 130
 Indeed, I prefer *her* by far, the girl herself,
 I want her mine in my own house! I rank her higher
 than Clytemnestra, my wedded wife—she’s nothing less
 in build or breeding, in mind or works of hand.
 But I am willing to give her back, even so,
 if that is best for all. What I really want
 is to keep my people safe, not see them dying.
 But fetch me another prize, and straight off too,
 else I alone of the Argives go without my honor.
 That would be a disgrace. You are all witness, 140
 look—*my* prize is snatched away!”

But the swift runner
 Achilles answered him at once, “Just how, Agamemnon,
 great field marshal . . . most grasping man alive,
 how can the generous Argives give you prizes now?
 I know of no troves of treasure, piled, lying idle,
 anywhere. Whatever we dragged from towns we plundered,
 all’s been portioned out. But collect it, call it back
 from the rank and file? *That* would be the disgrace.
 So return the girl to the god, at least for now.
 We Achaeans will pay you back, three, four times over, 150
 if Zeus will grant us the gift, somehow, someday,
 to raze Troy’s massive ramparts to the ground.”

But King Agamemnon countered, “Not so quickly,
 brave as you are, godlike Achilles—trying to cheat *me*.
 Oh no, you won’t get past me, take me in that way!
 What do you want? To cling to your own prize

while I sit calmly by—empty-handed here?
 Is that why you order me to give her back?
 No—if our generous Argives *will* give me a prize,
 a match for my desires, equal to what I've lost, 160
 well and good. But if they give me nothing
 I will take a prize myself—your own, or Ajax'
 or Odysseus' prize—I'll commandeer her myself
 and let that man I go to visit choke with rage!
 Enough. We'll deal with all this later, in due time.
 Now come, we haul a black ship down to the bright sea,
 gather a decent number of oarsmen along her locks
 and put aboard a sacrifice, and Chryseis herself,
 in all her beauty . . . we embark her too.
 Let one of the leading captains take command. 170
 Ajax, Idomeneus, trusty Odysseus or you, Achilles,
 you—the most violent man alive—so you can perform
 the rites for us and calm the god yourself."

A dark glance

and the headstrong runner answered him in kind: "Shameless—
 armored in shamelessness—always shrewd with greed!
 How could any Argive soldier obey your orders,
 freely and gladly do your sailing for you
 or fight your enemies, full force? Not I, no.
 It wasn't Trojan spearmen who brought me here to fight.
 The Trojans never did *me* damage, not in the least, 180
 they never stole my cattle or my horses, never
 in Phthia where the rich soil breeds strong men
 did they lay waste my crops. How could they?
 Look at the endless miles that lie between us . . .
 shadowy mountain ranges, seas that surge and thunder.
 No, you colossal, shameless—we all followed you,
 to please you, to fight for you, to win your honor
 back from the Trojans—Menelaus and you, you dog-face!
 What do *you* care? Nothing. You don't look right or left.
 And now you threaten to strip me of my prize in person— 190
 the one I fought for long and hard, and sons of Achaea
 handed her to me.

My honors never equal yours,
whenever we sack some wealthy Trojan stronghold—
my arms bear the brunt of the raw, savage fighting,
true, but when it comes to dividing up the plunder
the lion's share is yours, and back I go to my ships,
clutching some scrap, some pittance that I love,
when I have fought to exhaustion.

No more now—
back I go to Phthia. Better that way by far,
to journey home in the beaked ships of war. 200
I have no mind to linger here disgraced,
brimming your cup and piling up your plunder.”

But the lord of men Agamemnon shot back,
“*Desert*, by all means—if the spirit drives you home!
I will never beg you to stay, not on *my* account.
Never—others will take my side and do me honor,
Zeus above all, whose wisdom rules the world.
You—I hate you most of all the warlords
loved by the gods. Always dear to your heart,
strife, yes, and battles, the bloody grind of war. 210
What if you are a great soldier? That's just a gift of god.
Go home with your ships and comrades, lord it over
your Myrmidons!

You *are* nothing to me—you and your overweening anger!
But let this be my warning on your way:
since Apollo insists on taking my Chryseis,
I'll send her back in my own ships with *my* crew.
But I, I will be there in person at your tents
to take Briseis in all her beauty, your own prize—
so you can learn just how much greater I am than you
and the next man up may shrink from matching words with me, 220
from hoping to rival Agamemnon strength for strength!”

He broke off and anguish gripped Achilles.
The heart in his rugged chest was pounding, torn . . .
Should he draw the long sharp sword slung at his hip,

thrust through the ranks and kill Agamemnon now?—
 or check his rage and beat his fury down?
 As his racing spirit veered back and forth,
 just as he drew his huge blade from its sheath,
 down from the vaulting heavens swept Athena,
 the white-armed goddess Hera sped her down: 230
 Hera loved both men and cared for both alike.
 Rearing behind him Pallas seized his fiery hair—
 only Achilles saw her, none of the other fighters—
 struck with wonder he spun around, he knew her at once,
 Pallas Athena! the terrible blazing of those eyes,
 and his winged words went flying: “Why, why now?
 Child of Zeus with the shield of thunder, why come now?
 To witness the outrage Agamemnon just committed?
 I tell you this, and so help me it’s the truth—
 he’ll soon pay for his arrogance with his life!” 240

Her gray eyes clear, the goddess Athena answered,
 “Down from the skies I come to check your rage
 if only you will yield.
 The white-armed goddess Hera sped me down:
 she loves you both, she cares for you both alike.
 Stop this fighting, now. Don’t lay hand to sword.
 Lash him with threats of the price that he will face.
 And I tell you this—and I *know* it is the truth—
 one day glittering gifts will lie before you,
 three times over to pay for all his outrage. 250
 Hold back now. Obey us both.”

So she urged
 and the swift runner complied at once: “I must—
 when the two of you hand down commands, Goddess,
 a man submits though his heart breaks with fury.
 Better for him by far. If a man obeys the gods
 they’re quick to hear his prayers.”

And with that
 Achilles stayed his burly hand on the silver hilt
 and slid the huge blade back in its sheath.
 He would not fight the orders of Athena.

Soaring home to Olympus, she rejoined the gods 260
aloft in the halls of Zeus whose shield is thunder.

But Achilles rounded on Agamemnon once again,
lashing out at him, not relaxing his anger for a moment:
“Staggering drunk, with your dog’s eyes, your fawn’s heart!
Never once did you arm with the troops and go to battle
or risk an ambush packed with Achaea’s picked men—
you lack the courage, you can see death coming.
Safer by far, you find, to foray all through camp,
commandeering the prize of any man who speaks against you.
King who devours his people! Worthless husks, the men you rule— 270
if not, Atrides, this outrage would have been your last.
I tell you this, and I swear a mighty oath upon it . . .
by this, this scepter, look,
that never again will put forth crown and branches,
now it’s left its stump on the mountain ridge forever,
nor will it sprout new green again, now the brazen ax
has stripped its bark and leaves, and now the sons of Achaea
pass it back and forth as they hand their judgments down,
upholding the honored customs whenever Zeus commands—
This scepter will be the mighty force behind my oath: 280
someday, I swear, a yearning for Achilles will strike
Achaea’s sons and all your armies! But then, Atrides,
harrowed as you will be, *nothing* you do can save you—
not when your hordes of fighters drop and die,
cut down by the hands of man-killing Hector! Then—
then you will tear your heart out, desperate, raging
that you disgraced the best of the Achaeans!”

Down on the ground

he dashed the scepter studded bright with golden nails,
then took his seat again. The son of Atreus smoldered,
glaring across at him, but Nestor rose between them, 290
the man of winning words, the clear speaker of Pylos . . .
Sweeter than honey from his tongue the voice flowed on and on.
Two generations of mortal men he had seen go down by now,
those who were born and bred with him in the old days,
in Pylos’ holy realm, and now he ruled the third.

He pleaded with both kings, with clear good will,
 “No more—or enormous sorrow comes to all Achaea!
 How they would exult, Priam and Priam’s sons
 and all the Trojans. Oh they’d leap for joy
 to hear the two of you battling on this way, 300
 you who excel us all, first in Achaean councils,
 first in the ways of war.

Stop. Please.

Listen to Nestor. You are both younger than I,
 and in my time I struck up with better men than you,
 even you, but never once did they make light of me.
 I’ve never seen such men, I never will again . . .
 men like Pirithous, Dryas, that fine captain,
 Caeneus and Exadius, and Polyphemus, royal prince,
 and Theseus, Aegeus’ boy, a match for the immortals. 310
 They were the strongest mortals ever bred on earth,
 the strongest, and they fought against the strongest too,
 shaggy Centaurs, wild brutes of the mountains—
 they hacked them down, terrible, deadly work.
 And I was in their ranks, fresh out of Pylos,
 far away from home—they enlisted me themselves
 and I fought on my own, a free lance, single-handed.
 And none of the men who walk the earth these days
 could battle with those fighters, none, but they,
 they took to heart my counsels, marked my words.
 So now you listen too. Yielding is far better . . . 320
 Don’t seize the girl, Agamemnon, powerful as you are—
 leave her, just as the sons of Achaea gave her,
 his prize from the very first.
 And you, Achilles, never hope to fight it out
 with your king, pitting force against his force:
 no one can match the honors dealt a king, you know,
 a sceptered king to whom great Zeus gives glory.
 Strong as you are—a goddess was your mother—
 he has more power because he rules more men.
 Atrides, end your anger—look, it’s Nestor! 330
 I beg you, cool your fury against Achilles.

Here the man stands over all Achaea's armies,
our rugged bulwark braced for shocks of war."

But King Agamemnon answered him in haste,
"True, old man—all you say is fit and proper—
but this soldier wants to tower over the armies,
he wants to rule over all, to lord it over all,
give out orders to every man in sight. Well,
there's one, I trust, who will never yield to *him!*
What if the everlasting gods have made a spearman of him? 340
Have they entitled him to hurl abuse at *me?*"

"Yes!"—blazing Achilles broke in quickly—
"What a worthless, burnt-out coward I'd be called
if I would submit to you and all your orders,
whatever you blurt out. Fling them at others,
don't give me commands!
Never again, I trust, will Achilles yield to *you.*
And I tell you this—take it to heart, I warn you—
my hands will never do battle for that girl,
neither with you, King, nor any man alive. 350
You Achaeans gave her, now you've snatched her back.
But all the rest I possess beside my fast black ship—
not one bit of it can you seize against my will, Atrides.
Come, try it! So the men can see, that instant,
your black blood gush and spurt around my spear!"

Once the two had fought it out with words,
battling face-to-face, both sprang to their feet
and broke up the muster beside the Argive squadrons.
Achilles strode off to his trim ships and shelters,
back to his friend Patroclus and their comrades. 360
Agamemnon had a vessel hauled down to the sea,
he picked out twenty oarsmen to man her locks,
put aboard the cattle for sacrifice to the god
and led Chryseis in all her beauty amidships.

Versatile Odysseus took the helm as captain.

All embarked,

the party launched out on the sea's foaming lanes
 while the son of Atreus told his troops to wash,
 to purify themselves from the filth of plague.
 They scoured it off, threw scourings in the surf
 and sacrificed to Apollo full-grown bulls and goats 370
 along the beaten shore of the fallow barren sea
 and savory smoke went swirling up the skies.

So the men were engaged throughout the camp.
 But King Agamemnon would not stop the quarrel,
 the first threat he hurled against Achilles.
 He called Talthibius and Eurybates briskly,
 his two heralds, ready, willing aides:
 "Go to Achilles' lodge. Take Briseis at once,
 his beauty Briseis by the hand and bring her here.
 But if he will not surrender her, I'll go myself, 380
 I'll seize her myself, with an army at my back—
 and all the worse for him!"

He sent them off

with the strict order ringing in their ears.
 Against their will the two men made their way
 along the breaking surf of the barren salt sea
 and reached the Myrmidon shelters and their ships.
 They found him beside his lodge and black hull,
 seated grimly—and Achilles took no joy
 when he saw the two approaching.
 They were afraid, they held the king in awe 390
 and stood there, silent. Not a word to Achilles,
 not a question. But he sensed it all in his heart,
 their fear, their charge, and broke the silence for them:
 "Welcome, couriers! Good heralds of Zeus and men,
 here, come closer. You have done nothing to me.
 You are not to blame. No one but Agamemnon—
 he is the one who sent you for Briseis.
 Go, Patroclus, Prince, bring out the girl
 and hand her to them so they can take her back.

But let them both bear witness to my loss . . . 400
 in the face of blissful gods and mortal men,
 in the face of that unbending, ruthless king—
 if the day should come when the armies need *me*
 to save their ranks from ignominious, stark defeat.
 The man is raving—with all the murderous fury in his heart.
 He lacks the sense to see a day behind, a day ahead,
 and safeguard the Achaeans battling by the ships.”

Patroclus obeyed his great friend’s command.
 He led Briseis in all her beauty from the lodge
 and handed her over to the men to take away. 410
 And the two walked back along the Argive ships
 while she trailed on behind, reluctant, every step.
 But Achilles wept, and slipping away from his companions,
 far apart, sat down on the beach of the heaving gray sea
 and scanned the endless ocean. Reaching out his arms,
 again and again he prayed to his dear mother: “Mother!
 You gave me life, short as that life will be,
 so at least Olympian Zeus, thundering up on high,
 should give me honor—but now he gives me nothing.
 Atreus’ son Agamemnon, for all his far-flung kingdoms— 420
 the man disgraces me, seizes and keeps my prize,
 he tears her away himself!”

So he wept and prayed
 and his noble mother heard him, seated near her father,
 the Old Man of the Sea in the salt green depths.
 Suddenly up she rose from the churning surf
 like mist and settling down beside him as he wept,
 stroked Achilles gently, whispering his name, “My child—
 why in tears? What sorrow has touched your heart?
 Tell me, please. Don’t harbor it deep inside you.
 We must share it all.”

And now from his depths 430
 the proud runner groaned: “You know, you know,
 why labor through it all? You know it all so well . . .
 We raided Thebe once, Eetion’s sacred citadel,
 we ravaged the place, hauled all the plunder here

and the armies passed it round, share and share alike,
 and they chose the beauty Chryseis for Agamemnon.
 But soon her father, the holy priest of Apollo
 the distant deadly Archer, Chryses approached
 the fast trim ships of the Argives armed in bronze
 to win his daughter back, bringing a priceless ransom 440
 and bearing high in hand, wound on a golden staff,
 the wreaths of the god who strikes from worlds away.
 He begged the whole Achaean army but most of all
 the two supreme commanders, Atreus' two sons,
 and all ranks of Achaeans cried out their assent,
 'Respect the priest, accept the shining ransom!'
 But it brought no joy to the heart of Agamemnon,
 our high and mighty king dismissed the priest
 with a brutal order ringing in his ears.
 And shattered with anger, the old man withdrew 450
 but Apollo heard his prayer—he loved him, deeply—
 he loosed his shaft at the Argives, withering plague,
 and now the troops began to drop and die in droves,
 the arrows of god went showering left and right,
 whipping through the Achaeans' vast encampment.
 But the old seer who knew the cause full well
 revealed the will of the archer god Apollo.
 And I was the first, mother, I urged them all,
 'Appease the god at once!' That's when the fury
 gripped the son of Atreus. Agamemnon leapt to his feet 460
 and hurled his threat—his threat's been driven home.
 One girl, Chryseis, the fiery-eyed Achaeans
 ferry out in a fast trim ship to Chryse Island,
 laden with presents for the god. The other girl,
 just now the heralds came and led her away from camp,
 Briseus' daughter, the prize the armies gave me.
 But you, mother, if you have any power at all,
 protect your son! Go to Olympus, plead with Zeus,
 if you ever warmed his heart with a word or any action . . .

Time and again I heard your claims in father's halls, 470
 boasting how you and you alone of all the immortals

rescued Zeus, the lord of the dark storm cloud,
 from ignominious, stark defeat . . .
 That day the Olympians tried to chain him down,
 Hera, Poseidon lord of the sea, and Pallas Athena—
 you rushed to Zeus, dear Goddess, broke those chains,
 quickly ordered the hundred-hander to steep Olympus,
 that monster whom the immortals call Briareus
 but every mortal calls the Sea-god's son, Aegaeon,
 though he's stronger than his father. Down he sat,
 flanking Cronus' son, gargantuan in the glory of it all,
 and the blessed gods were struck with terror then,
 they stopped shackling Zeus.

480

Remind him of that,
 now, go and sit beside him, grasp his knees . . .
 persuade him, somehow, to help the Trojan cause,
 to pin the Achaeans back against their ships,
 trap them round the bay and mow them down.
 So all can reap the benefits of their king—
 so even mighty Atreides can see how mad he was
 to disgrace Achilles, the best of the Achaeans!"

490

And Thetis answered, bursting into tears,
 "O my son, my sorrow, why did I ever bear you?
 All I bore was doom . . .
 Would to god you could linger by your ships
 without a grief in the world, without a torment!
 Doomed to a short life, you have so little time.
 And not only short, now, but filled with heartbreak too,
 more than all other men alive—doomed twice over.
 Ah to a cruel fate I bore you in our halls!
 Still, I shall go to Olympus crowned with snow
 and repeat your prayer to Zeus who loves the lightning.
 Perhaps he will be persuaded.

500

But you, my child,
 stay here by the fast ships, rage on at the Achaeans,
 just keep clear of every foray in the fighting.
 Only yesterday Zeus went off to the Ocean River
 to feast with the Ethiopians, loyal, lordly men,

and all the gods went with him. But in twelve days
 the Father returns to Olympus. Then, for your sake,
 up I go to the bronze floor, the royal house of Zeus—
 I'll grasp his knees, I think I'll win him over."

With that vow 510

his mother went away and left him there, alone,
 his heart inflamed for the sashed and lovely girl
 they'd wrenched away from him against his will.
 Meanwhile Odysseus drew in close to Chryse Island,
 bearing the splendid sacrifice in the vessel's hold.
 And once they had entered the harbor deep in bays
 they furled and stowed the sail in the black ship,
 they lowered the mast by the forestays, smoothly,
 quickly let it down on the forked mast-crutch
 and rowed her into a mooring under oars. 520

Out went the bow-stones—cables fast astern—
 and the crew themselves swung out in the breaking surf,
 leading out the sacrifice for the archer god Apollo,
 and out of the deep-sea ship Chryseis stepped too.
 Then tactful Odysseus led her up to the altar,
 placing her in her loving father's arms, and said,
 "Chryses, the lord of men Agamemnon sent me here
 to bring your daughter back and perform a sacrifice,
 a grand sacrifice to Apollo—for all Achaea's sake—
 so we can appease the god 530
 who's loosed such grief and torment on the Argives."

With those words he left her in Chryses' arms
 and the priest embraced the child he loved, exultant.
 At once the men arranged the sacrifice for Apollo,
 making the cattle ring his well-built altar,
 then they rinsed their hands and took up barley.
 Rising among them Chryses stretched his arms to the sky
 and prayed in a high resounding voice, "Hear me, Apollo!
 God of the silver bow who strides the walls of Chryse
 and Cilla sacrosanct—lord in power of Tenedos! 540
 If you honored me last time and heard my prayer
 and rained destruction down on all Achaea's ranks,

now bring my prayer to pass once more. Now, at last,
drive this killing plague from the armies of Achaea!”

His prayer went up and Phoebus Apollo heard him.
And soon as the men had prayed and flung the barley,
first they lifted back the heads of the victims,
slit their throats, skinned them and carved away
the meat from the thighbones and wrapped them in fat,
a double fold sliced clean and topped with strips of flesh. 550
And the old man burned these over dried split wood
and over the quarters poured out glistening wine
while young men at his side held five-pronged forks.
Once they had burned the bones and tasted the organs
they cut the rest into pieces, pierced them with spits,
roasted them to a turn and pulled them off the fire.
The work done, the feast laid out, they ate well
and no man’s hunger lacked a share of the banquet.
When they had put aside desire for food and drink,
the young men brimmed the mixing bowls with wine 560
and tipping first drops for the god in every cup
they poured full rounds for all. And all day long
they appeased the god with song, raising a ringing hymn
to the distant archer god who drives away the plague,
those young Achaean warriors singing out his power,
and Apollo listened, his great heart warm with joy.

Then when the sun went down and night came on
they made their beds and slept by the stern-cables . . .
When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more,
they set sail for the main encampment of Achaea. 570
The Archer sent them a bracing following wind,
they stepped the mast, spread white sails wide,
the wind hit full and the canvas bellied out
and a dark blue wave, foaming up at the bow,
sang out loud and strong as the ship made way,
skimming the whitecaps, cutting toward her goal.
And once offshore of Achaea’s vast encampment
they eased her in and hauled the black ship high,

far up on the sand, and shored her up with timbers.
Then they scattered, each to his own ship and shelter. 580

But *he* raged on, grimly camped by his fast fleet,
the royal son of Peleus, the swift runner Achilles.
Now he no longer haunted the meeting grounds
where men win glory, now he no longer went to war
but day after day he ground his heart out, waiting there,
yearning, always yearning for battle cries and combat.

But now as the twelfth dawn after this shone clear
the gods who live forever marched home to Olympus,
all in a long cortege, and Zeus led them on.
And Thetis did not forget her son's appeals. 590
She broke from a cresting wave at first light
and soaring up to the broad sky and Mount Olympus,
found the son of Cronus gazing down on the world,
peaks apart from the other gods and seated high
on the topmost crown of rugged ridged Olympus.
And crouching down at his feet,
quickly grasping his knees with her left hand,
her right hand holding him underneath the chin,
she prayed to the lord god Zeus, the son of Cronus:
"Zeus, Father Zeus! If I ever served you well 600
among the deathless gods with a word or action,
bring this prayer to pass: honor my son Achilles!—
doomed to the shortest life of any man on earth.
And now the lord of men Agamemnon has disgraced him,
seizes and keeps his prize, tears her away himself. But you—
exalt him, Olympian Zeus: your urgings rule the world!
Come, grant the Trojans victory after victory
till the Achaean armies pay my dear son back,
building higher the honor he deserves!"

She paused
but Zeus who commands the storm clouds answered nothing. 610
The Father sat there, silent. It seemed an eternity . . .
But Thetis, clasping his knees, held on, clinging,
pressing her question once again: "Grant my prayer,

once and for all, Father, bow your head in assent!
 Or deny me outright. What have *you* to fear?
 So I may know, too well, just how cruelly
 I am the most dishonored goddess of them all.”

Filled with anger

Zeus who marshals the storm clouds answered her at last:

“Disaster. You will drive me into war with Hera.
 She will provoke me, she with her shrill abuse. 620
 Even now in the face of all the immortal gods
 she harries me perpetually, Hera charges *me*
 that I always go to battle for the Trojans.
 Away with you now. Hera might catch us here.
 I will see to this. I will bring it all to pass.
 Look, I will bow my head if that will satisfy you.
 That, I remind you, that among the immortal gods
 is the strongest, truest sign that I can give.
 No word or work of mine—nothing can be revoked,
 there is no treachery, nothing left unfinished 630
 once I bow my head to say it shall be done.”

So he decreed. And Zeus the son of Cronus bowed
 his craggy dark brows and the deathless locks came pouring
 down from the thunderhead of the great immortal king
 and giant shock waves spread through all Olympus.

So the two of them made their pact and parted.
 Deep in the sea she dove from radiant Mount Olympus.
 Zeus went back to his own halls, and all the gods
 in full assembly rose from their seats at once
 to meet the Father striding toward them now. 640
 None dared remain at rest as Zeus advanced,
 they all sprang up to greet him face-to-face
 as he took his place before them on his throne.
 But Hera knew it all. She had seen how Thetis,
 the Old Man of the Sea’s daughter, Thetis quick
 on her glistening feet was hatching plans with Zeus.
 And suddenly Hera taunted the Father, son of Cronus:
 “So, who of the gods this time, my treacherous one,

was hatching plans with you?
 Always your pleasure, whenever my back is turned, 650
 to settle things in your grand clandestine way.
 You never deign, do you, freely and frankly,
 to share your plots with me—never, not a word!”

The father of men and gods replied sharply,
 “Hera—stop hoping to fathom all my thoughts.
 You will find them a trial, though you are my wife.
 Whatever is right for you to hear, no one, trust me,
 will know of it before you, neither god nor man.
 Whatever I choose to plan apart from all the gods—
 no more of your everlasting questions, probe and pry no more.” 660

And Hera the Queen, her dark eyes wide, exclaimed,
 “Dread majesty, son of Cronus, what are you saying?
 Now surely I’ve never probed or pried in the past.
 Why, you can scheme to your heart’s content
 without a qualm in the world for me. But now
 I have a terrible fear that she has won you over,
 Thetis, the Old Man of the Sea’s daughter, Thetis
 with her glistening feet. I know it. Just at dawn
 she knelt down beside you and grasped your knees
 and I suspect you bowed your head in assent to her— 670
 you granted once and for all to exalt Achilles now
 and slaughter hordes of Achaeans pinned against their ships.”

And Zeus who marshals the thunderheads returned,
 “Maddening one . . . you and your eternal suspicions—
 I can never escape you. Ah but tell me, Hera,
 just what can you *do* about all this? Nothing.
 Only estrange yourself from me a little more—
 and all the worse for you.
 If what you say is true, that must be my pleasure.
 Now go sit down. Be quiet now. Obey my orders, 680
 for fear the gods, however many Olympus holds,

are powerless to protect you when I come
to throttle you with my irresistible hands.”

He subsided

but Hera the Queen, her eyes wider, was terrified.
She sat in silence. She wrenched her will to his.
And throughout the halls of Zeus the gods of heaven
quaked with fear. Hephaestus the Master Craftsman
rose up first to harangue them all, trying now
to bring his loving mother a little comfort,
the white-armed goddess Hera: “Oh disaster . . . 690
that’s what it is, and it will be unbearable
if the two of you must come to blows this way,
flinging the gods in chaos just for mortal men.
No more joy for us in the sumptuous feast
when riot rules the day.

I urge you, mother—you know that I am right—
work back into his good graces, so the Father,
our beloved Father will never wheel on us again,
send our banquets crashing! The Olympian lord of lightning—
what if he would like to blast us from our seats? 700
He is far too strong. Go back to him, mother,
stroke the Father with soft, winning words—
at once the Olympian will turn kind to us again.”

Pleading, springing up with a two-handled cup,
he reached it toward his loving mother’s hands
with his own winning words: “Patience, mother!
Grieved as you are, bear up, or dear as you are,
I have to see you beaten right before my eyes.
I would be shattered—what could I do to save you?
It’s hard to fight the Olympian strength for strength. 710
You remember the last time I rushed to your defense?
He seized my foot, he hurled me off the tremendous threshold
and all day long I dropped, I was dead weight and then,
when the sun went down, down I plunged on Lemnos,
little breath left in me. But the mortals there
soon nursed a fallen immortal back to life.”

At that the white-armed goddess Hera smiled
and smiling, took the cup from her child's hands.
Then dipping sweet nectar up from the mixing bowl
he poured it round to all the immortals, left to right. 720
And uncontrollable laughter broke from the happy gods
as they watched the god of fire breathing hard
and bustling through the halls.

That hour then
and all day long till the sun went down they feasted
and no god's hunger lacked a share of the handsome banquet
or the gorgeous lyre Apollo struck or the Muses singing
voice to voice in choirs, their vibrant music rising.

At last, when the sun's fiery light had set,
each immortal went to rest in his own house,
the splendid high halls Hephaestus built for each 730
with all his craft and cunning, the famous crippled Smith.
And Olympian Zeus the lord of lightning went to his own bed
where he had always lain when welcome sleep came on him.
There he climbed and there he slept and by his side
lay Hera the Queen, the goddess of the golden throne.



The Great Gathering of Armies

Now the great array of gods and chariot-driving men
slept all night long, but the peaceful grip of sleep
could not hold Zeus, turning it over in his mind . . .
how to exalt Achilles?—how to slaughter
hordes of Achaeans pinned against their ships?
As his spirit churned, at last one plan seemed best:
he would send a murderous dream to Agamemnon.
Calling out to the vision, Zeus winged it on:
“Go, murderous Dream, to the fast Achaean ships
and once you reach Agamemnon’s shelter rouse him,
order him, word-for-word, exactly as I command.
Tell Atrides to arm his long-haired Achaeans,
to attack at once, full force—
now he can take the broad streets of Troy.
The immortal gods who hold Olympus clash no more,

10

Hera's appeals have brought them round and all agree:
griefs are about to crush the men of Troy."

At that command

the dream went winging off, and passing quickly
along the fast trim ships, made for the king
and found him soon, sound asleep in his tent 20
with refreshing godsent slumber drifted round him.
Hovering at his head the vision rose like Nestor,
Neleus' son, the chief Agamemnon honored most.
Inspired with Nestor's voice and sent by Zeus,
the dream cried out, "Still asleep, Agamemnon?
The son of Atreus, that skilled breaker of horses?
How can you sleep all night, a man weighed down with duties?
Your armies turning over their lives to your command—
responsibilities so heavy. Listen to me, quickly!
I bring you a message sent by Zeus, a world away 30
but he has you in his heart, he pities you now . . .
Zeus commands you to arm your long-haired Achaeans,
to attack at once, full force—
now you can take the broad streets of Troy!
The immortal gods who hold Olympus clash no more,
Hera's appeals have brought them round and all agree:
griefs from Zeus are about to crush the men of Troy!
But keep this message firmly in your mind.
Remember—let no loss of memory overcome you
when the sweet grip of slumber sets you free." 40

With that the dream departed, leaving him there,
his heart racing with hopes that would not come to pass.
He thought he would take the city of Priam then,
that very day, the fool. How could he know
what work the Father had in mind? The Father,
still bent on plaguing the Argives and Trojans both
with wounds and groans in the bloody press of battle.
But rousing himself from sleep, the divine voice
swirling round him, Atrides sat up, bolt awake,
pulled on a soft tunic, linen never worn, 50
and over it threw his flaring battle-cape,

under his smooth feet he fastened supple sandals,
 across his shoulder slung his silver-studded sword.
 Then he seized the royal scepter of his fathers—
 its power can never die—and grasping it tightly
 off he strode to the ships of Argives armed in bronze.

Now the goddess Dawn climbed up to Olympus heights,
 declaring the light of day to Zeus and the deathless gods
 as the king commanded heralds to cry out loud and clear
 and muster the long-haired Achaeans to full assembly. 60
 Their cries rang out. Battalions gathered quickly.

But first he called his ranking chiefs to council
 beside the ship of Nestor, the warlord born in Pylos.
 Summoning them together there Atrides set forth
 his cunning, foolproof plan: “Hear me, friends—
 a dream sent by the gods has come to me in sleep.
 Down through the bracing godsent night it came
 like good Nestor in features, height and build,
 the old king himself, and hovering at my head
 the dream called me on: ‘Still asleep, Agamemnon? 70
 The son of Atreus, that skilled breaker of horses?
 How can you sleep all night, a man weighed down with duties?
 Your armies turning over their lives to your command—
 responsibilities so heavy. Listen to me, quickly!
 I bring you a message sent by Zeus, a world away
 but he has you in his heart, he pities you now . . .
 Zeus commands you to arm your long-haired Achaeans,
 to attack at once, full force—
 now you can take the broad streets of Troy!
 The immortal gods who hold Olympus clash no more, 80
 Hera’s appeals have brought them round and all agree:
 griefs from Zeus are about to crush the men of Troy!
 But keep this message firmly in your mind.’

With that
 the dream went winging off and soothing sleep released me.
 Come—see if we can arm the Achaeans for assault.

But first, according to time-honored custom,
I will test the men with a challenge, tell them all
to crowd the oarlocks, cut and run in their ships.
But you take up your battle-stations at every point,
command them, hold them back."

So much for his plan. 90

Agamemnon took his seat and Nestor rose among them.
Noble Nestor the king of Pylos' sandy harbor
spoke and urged them on with all good will:
"Friends, lords of the Argives, O my captains!
If any other Achaean had told us of this dream
we'd call it false and turn our backs upon it.
But look, the man who saw it has every claim
to be the best, the bravest Achaean we can field.
Come—see if we can arm the Achaeans for assault."

And out he marched, leading the way from council. 100
The rest sprang to their feet, the sceptered kings
obeyed the great field marshal. Rank and file
streamed behind and rushed like swarms of bees
pouring out of a rocky hollow, burst on endless burst,
bunched in clusters seething over the first spring blooms,
dark hordes swirling into the air, this way, that way—
so the many armed platoons from the ships and tents
came marching on, close-file, along the deep wide beach
to crowd the meeting grounds, and Rumor, Zeus's crier,
like wildfire blazing among them, whipped them on. 110
The troops assembled. The meeting grounds shook.
The earth groaned and rumbled under the huge weight
as soldiers took positions—the whole place in uproar.
Nine heralds shouted out, trying to keep some order,
"Quiet, battalions, silence! Hear your royal kings!"
The men were forced to their seats, marshaled into ranks,
the shouting died away . . . silence.

King Agamemnon
rose to his feet, raising high in hand the scepter
Hephaestus made with all his strength and skill.
Hephaestus gave it to Cronus' son, Father Zeus, 120

and Zeus gave it to Hermes, the giant-killing Guide
 and Hermes gave it to Pelops, that fine charioteer,
 Pelops gave it to Atreus, marshal of fighting men,
 who died and passed it on to Thyestes rich in flocks
 and he in turn bestowed it on Agamemnon, to bear on high
 as he ruled his many islands and lorded mainland Argos.
 Now, leaning his weight upon that kingly scepter,
 Atrides declared his will to all Achaea's armies:
 "Friends—fighting Danaans, aides-in-arms of Ares!
 Cronus' son has trapped me in madness, blinding ruin— 130
 Zeus is a harsh, cruel god. He vowed to me long ago,
 he bowed his head that I should never embark for home
 till I had brought the walls of Ilium crashing down.
 But now, I see, he only plotted brutal treachery:
 now he commands me back to Argos in disgrace,
 whole regiments of my men destroyed in battle.
 So it must please his overweening heart, who knows?
 Father Zeus has lopped the crowns of a thousand cities,
 true, and Zeus will lop still more—his power is too great.
 What humiliation! Even for generations still to come, 140
 to learn that Achaean armies so strong, so vast,
 fought a futile war . . . We are still fighting it,
 no end in sight, and battling forces we outnumber—
 by far. Say that Trojans and Argives both agreed
 to swear a truce, to seal their oaths in blood,
 and opposing sides were tallied out in full:
 count one by one the Trojans who live in Troy
 but count our Achaeans out by ten-man squads
 and each squad pick a Trojan to pour its wine—
 many Achaean tens would lack their steward then! 150
 That's how far we outnumber them, I'd say—Achaeans
 to Trojans—the men who hail from Troy at least.
 But they have allies called from countless cities,
 fighters brandishing spears who block my way,
 who throw me far off course,
 thwarting my will to plunder Ilium's rugged walls.
 And now nine years of almighty Zeus have marched by,
 our ship timbers rot and the cables snap and fray

and across the sea our wives and helpless children
 wait in the halls, wait for our return . . . And we? 160
 Our work drags on, unfinished as always, hopeless—
 the labor of war that brought us here to Troy.
 So come, follow my orders. All obey me now.
 Cut and run! Sail home to the fatherland we love!
 We'll never take the broad streets of Troy."

Testing his men

but he only made the spirit race inside their chests,
 all the rank and file who'd never heard his plan.
 And the whole assembly surged like big waves at sea,
 the Icarian Sea when East and South Winds drive it on,
 blasting down in force from the clouds of Father Zeus, 170
 or when the West Wind shakes the deep standing grain
 with hurricane gusts that flatten down the stalks—
 so the massed assembly of troops was shaken now.
 They cried in alarm and charged toward the ships
 and the dust went whirling up from under rushing feet
 as the men jostled back and forth, shouting orders—
 "Grapple the ships! Drag them down to the bright sea!
 Clean out the launching-channels!" Shrill shouts
 hitting the heavens, fighters racing for home,
 knocking the blocks out underneath the hulls. 180

And now they might have won their journey home,
 the men of Argos fighting the will of fate, yes,
 if Hera had not alerted Athena: "Inconceivable!
 Child of Zeus whose battle-shield is thunder,
 tireless one, Athena—what, is *this* the way?
 All the Argives flying home to their fatherland,
 sailing over the sea's broad back? Leaving Priam
 and all the men of Troy a trophy to glory over,
 Helen of Argos, Helen for whom so many Argives
 lost their lives in Troy, far from native land. 190
 Go, range the ranks of Achaeans armed in bronze.
 With your winning words hold back each man you find—
 don't let them haul their rolling ships to sea!"

The bright-eyed goddess Pallas lost no time.
 Down she flashed from the peaks of Mount Olympus,
 quickly reached the ships and found Odysseus first,
 a mastermind like Zeus, still standing fast.
 He had not laid a hand on his black benched hull,
 such anguish racked his heart and fighting spirit.
 Now close beside him the bright-eyed goddess stood 200
 and urged him on: “Royal son of Laertes, Odysseus,
 great tactician—what, is *this* the way?
 All you Argives flying home to your fatherland,
 tumbling into your oar-swept ships? Leaving Priam
 and all the men of Troy a trophy to glory over,
 Helen of Argos, Helen for whom so many Argives
 lost their lives in Troy, far from native land!
 No, don’t give up now. Range the Achaean ranks,
 with your winning words hold back each man you find—
 don’t let them haul their rolling ships to sea!” 210

He knew the goddess’ voice—he went on the run,
 flinging off his cape as Eurybates picked it up,
 the herald of Ithaca always at his side.
 Coming face-to-face with Atrides Agamemnon,
 he relieved him of his fathers’ royal scepter—
 its power can never die—and grasping it tightly
 off he strode to the ships of Argives armed in bronze.

Whenever Odysseus met some man of rank, a king,
 he’d halt and hold him back with winning words:
 “My *friend*—it’s wrong to threaten you like a coward, 220
 but you stand fast, you keep your men in check!
 It’s too soon to see Agamemnon’s purpose clearly.
 Now he’s only testing us, soon he’ll bear down hard.
 Didn’t we all hear his plan in secret council?
 God forbid his anger destroy the army he commands.
 The rage of kings is strong, they’re nursed by the gods,
 their honor comes from Zeus—
 they’re dear to Zeus, the god who rules the world.”

When he caught some common soldier shouting out,
 he'd beat him with the scepter, dress him down: 230
 "You *fool*—sit still! Obey the commands of others,
 your superiors—you, you deserter, rank coward,
 you count for nothing, neither in war nor council.
 How can all Achaeans be masters here in Troy?
 Too many kings can ruin an army—mob rule!
 Let there be one commander, one master only,
 endowed by the son of crooked-minded Cronus
 with kingly scepter and royal rights of custom:
 whatever one man needs to lead his people well."

So he ranged the ranks, commanding men to order— 240
 and back again they surged from ships and shelters,
 back to the meeting grounds with a deep pounding din,
 thundering out as battle lines of breakers crash and drag
 along some endless beach, and the rough sea roars.

The armies took their seats, marshaled into ranks.
 But one man, Thersites, still railed on, nonstop.
 His head was full of obscenities, teeming with rant,
 all for no good reason, insubordinate, baiting the kings—
 anything to provoke some laughter from the troops.
 Here was the ugliest man who ever came to Troy. 250
 Bandy-legged he was, with one foot clubbed,
 both shoulders humped together, curving over
 his caved-in chest, and bobbing above them
 his skull warped to a point,
 sprouting clumps of scraggly, woolly hair.
 Achilles despised him most, Odysseus too—
 he was always abusing both chiefs, but now
 he went for majestic Agamemnon, hollering out,
 taunting the king with strings of cutting insults.
 The Achaeans were furious with him, deeply offended. 260
 But he kept shouting at Agamemnon, spewing his abuse:
 "Still moaning and groaning, mighty Atrides—why now?
 What are you panting after now? Your shelters packed
 with the lion's share of bronze, plenty of women too,

crowding your lodges. Best of the lot, the beauties
 we hand you first, whenever we take some stronghold.
 Or still more gold you're wanting? More ransom a son
 of the stallion-breaking Trojans might just fetch from Troy?—
 though I or another hero drags him back in chains . . .
 Or a young woman, is it?—to spread and couple, 270
 to bed down for yourself apart from all the troops?
 How shameful for you, the high and mighty commander,
 to lead the sons of Achaea into bloody slaughter!
Sons? No, my soft friends, wretched excuses—
 women, not men of Achaea! Home we go in our ships!
 Abandon him here in Troy to wallow in all his prizes—
 he'll see if the likes of us have propped him up or not.
 Look—now it's Achilles, a greater man he disgraces,
 seizes and keeps his prize, tears her away himself.
 But no gall in Achilles. Achilles lets it go. 280
 If not, Atrides, that outrage would have been your last!"

So Thersites taunted the famous field marshal.
 But Odysseus stepped in quickly, faced him down
 with a dark glance and threats to break his nerve:
 "What a flood of abuse, Thersites! Even for you,
 fluent and flowing as you are. Keep quiet.
 Who are *you* to wrangle with kings, you alone?
 No one, I say—no one alive less soldierly than you,
 none in the ranks that came to Troy with Agamemnon.
 So stop your babbling, mouthing the names of kings, 290
 flinging indecencies in their teeth, your eyes
 peeled for a chance to cut and run for home.
 We can have no idea, no clear idea at all
 how the long campaign will end . . .
 whether Achaea's sons will make it home unharmed
 or slink back in disgrace.

But there you sit,
 hurling abuse at the son of Atreus, Agamemnon,
 marshal of armies, simply because our fighters
 give Atrides the lion's share of all our plunder.
 You and your ranting slander—*you're* the outrage. 300

I tell you this, so help me it's the truth:
 if I catch you again, blithering on this way,
 let Odysseus' head be wrenched off his shoulders,
 never again call me the father of Telemachus
 if I don't grab you, strip the clothing off you,
 cloak, tunic and rags that wrap your private parts,
 and whip you howling naked back to the fast ships,
 out of the armies' muster—whip you like a cur!"

And he cracked the scepter across his back and shoulders.

The rascal doubled over, tears streaking his face 310
 and a bloody welt bulged up between his blades,
 under the stroke of the golden scepter's studs.
 He squatted low, cringing, stunned with pain,
 blinking like some idiot . . .

rubbing his tears off dumbly with a fist.
 Their morale was low but the men laughed now,
 good hearty laughter breaking over Thersites' head—
 glancing at neighbors they would shout, "A terrific stroke!
 A thousand terrific strokes he's carried off—Odysseus,
 taking the lead in tactics, mapping battle-plans. 320
 But here's the best thing yet he's done for the men—
 he's put a stop to this babbling, foulmouthed fool!
 Never again, I'd say, will our gallant comrade
 risk his skin to attack the kings with insults."

So the soldiers bantered but not Odysseus.
 The raider of cities stood there, scepter in hand,
 and close beside him the great gray-eyed Athena
 rose like a herald, ordering men to silence. All,
 from the first to lowest ranks of Achaea's troops,
 should hear his words and mark his counsel well. 330
 For the good of all he urged them: "Agamemnon!
 Now, my king, the Achaeans are bent on making you
 a disgrace in the eyes of every man alive. Yes,
 they fail to fulfill their promise sworn that day
 they sailed here from the stallion-land of Argos:
 that not until you had razed the rugged walls of Troy

would they sail home again. But look at them now,
 like green, defenseless boys or widowed women
 whimpering to each other, wailing to journey back.
 True, they've labored long—they're desperate for home. 340
 Any fighter, cut off from his wife for one month,
 would chafe at the benches, moaning in his ship,
 pinned down by gales and heavy, raging seas.
 A month—but look at *us*.
 This is the ninth year come round, the ninth
 we've hung on here. Who could blame the Achaeans
 for chafing, bridling beside the beaked ships?
 Ah but still—what a humiliation it would be
 to hold out so long, then sail home empty-handed.
 Courage, my friends, hold out a little longer. 350
 Till we see if Calchas divined the truth or not.
 We all recall that moment—who could forget it?
 We were all witnesses then. All, at least,
 the deadly spirits have not dragged away . . .

Why,

it seems like only yesterday or the day before
 when our vast armada gathered, moored at Aulis,
 freighted with slaughter bound for Priam's Troy.
 We were all busy then, milling round a spring
 and offering victims up on the holy altars,
 full sacrifice to the gods to guarantee success, 360
 under a spreading plane tree where the water splashed,
 glittering in the sun—when a great omen appeared.
 A snake, and his back streaked red with blood,
 a thing of terror! Olympian Zeus himself
 had launched him into the clean light of day . . .
 He slid from under the altar, glided up the tree
 and there the brood of a sparrow, helpless young ones,
 teetered high on the topmost branch-tips, cowering
 under the leaves there, eight they were all told
 and the mother made the ninth, she'd borne them all— 370
 chirping to break the heart but the snake gulped them down
 and the mother cried out for her babies, fluttering over him . . .
 he coiled, struck, fanging her wing—a high thin shriek!

But once he'd swallowed down the sparrow with her brood,
 the son of crooked Cronus who sent the serpent forth
 turned him into a sign, a monument clear to see—
 Zeus struck him to stone! And we stood by,
 amazed that such a marvel came to light.

So then,

when those terrible, monstrous omens burst in
 on the victims we were offering to the gods, 380
 Calchas swiftly revealed the will of Zeus:
 'Why struck dumb now, my long-haired Achaeans?
 Zeus who rules the world has shown us an awesome sign,
 an event long in the future, late to come to birth
 but the fame of that great work will never die.
 As the snake devoured the sparrow with her brood,
 eight and the mother made the ninth, she'd borne them all,
 so we will fight in Troy that many years and then,
 then in the tenth we'll take her broad streets.'
 So that day the prophet revealed the future— 390
 and now, look, by god, it all comes to pass!
 Up with you, all you Argives geared for combat,
 stand your ground, right here,
 until we take the mighty walls of Priam!"

He fired them so

the armies roared and the ships resounded round them,
 shattering echoes ringing from their shouts
 as Argives cried assent to King Odysseus' words.
 And Nestor the noble horseman spurred them more:
 "What disgrace! Look at you, carrying on
 in the armies' muster just like boys—fools! 400
 Not a thought in your heads for works of battle.
 What becomes of them now, the pacts and oaths we swore?
 Into the flames with councils, all the plans of men,
 the vows sealed with the strong, unmixed wine,
 the firm clasp of the right hand we trusted!
 We battle on in words, as always, mere words,
 and what's the cure? We cannot find a thing.
 No matter how many years we wrangle here.

Agamemnon—

never swerve, hold to your first plan of action,
 lead your armies headlong into war! 410
 The rest of them? Let them rot, the one or two
 who hatch their plans apart from all the troops—
 what good can they win from that? Nothing at all.
 Why, they'd scuttle home before they can even learn
 if the vows of Zeus with his dark cloudy shield
 are false or not. Zeus the son of almighty Cronus,
 I remind you, bowed his head that day we boarded ship,
 all the Argives laden with blood and death for Troy—
 his lightning bolts on the right, good omens blazing forth.
 So now let no man hurry to sail for home, not yet . . . 420
 not till he beds down with a faithful Trojan wife,
 payment in full for the groans and shocks of war
 we have all borne for Helen.

But any soldier
 wild with desire to reach his home at once—
 just let him lay a hand on his black benched ship
 and right in front of the rest he'll reach his death!
 But you, my King, be on your guard yourself. Come,
 listen well to another man. Here's some advice,
 not to be tossed aside, and I will tell it clearly.
 Range your men by tribes, even by clans, Agamemnon, 430
 so clan fights by the side of clan, tribe by tribe.
 Fight this way, if the Argives still obey you,
 then you can see which captain is a coward,
 which contingent too, and which is loyal, brave,
 since they will fight in separate formations of their own.
 Then, what's more, if you fail to sack the city,
 you will know if the will of god's to blame
 or the cowardice of your men—inept in battle."

And King Agamemnon took his lead, saluting:
 "Again, old man, you outfight the Argives in debate! 440
 Father Zeus, Athena, Apollo, if only I had ten men
 like Nestor to plan with me among Achaea's armies—
 then we could topple Priam's citadel in a day,
 throttle it in our hands and gut Troy to nothing.

But Cronus' son, Zeus with his shield of storm
insists on embroiling me in painful struggles,
futile wars of words . . .

Imagine—I and Achilles, wrangling over a girl,
battling man-to-man. And I, I was the first
to let my anger flare. Ah if the two of us
could ever think as one, Troy could delay
her day of death no longer, not one moment.

450

Go now, take your meal—the sooner to bring on war.
Quickly—let each fighter sharpen his spear well,
balance his shield well, feed his horses well
with plenty of grain to build their racing speed—
each man look well to his chariot's running order,
nerve himself for combat now, so all day long
we can last out the grueling duels of Ares!

No breathing space, no letup, not a moment, not
till the night comes on to part the fighters' fury!
Now sweat will soak the shield-strap round your chest,
your fist gripping the spear will ache with tensing,
now the lather will drench your war-team's flanks,
hauling your sturdy chariot.

460

But any man I catch,
trying to skulk behind his long beaked ships,
hanging back from battle—he is finished.
No way for *him* to escape the dogs and birds!"

So he commanded

and the armies gave a deep resounding roar like waves
crashing against a cliff when the South Wind whips it,
bearing down, some craggy headland jutting out to sea—
the waves will never leave it in peace, thrashed by gales
that hit from every quarter, breakers left and right.
The troops sprang up, scattered back to the ships,
lit fires beside their tents and took their meal.
Each sacrificed to one or another deathless god,
each man praying to flee death and the grind of war.
But the lord of men Agamemnon sacrificed a fat rich ox,
five years old, to the son of mighty Cronus, Zeus,
and called the chiefs of all the Argive forces:

470

480

Nestor first and foremost, then King Idomeneus,
 the Great and Little Ajax, Tydeus' son Diomedes
 and Odysseus sixth, a mastermind like Zeus.
 The lord of the war cry Menelaus came uncalled,
 he knew at heart what weighed his brother down.
 They stood in a ring around the ox, took up barley
 and then, rising among them, King Agamemnon
 raised his voice in prayer: "Zeus, Zeus,
 god of greatness, god of glory, lord god
 of the dark clouds who lives in the bright sky, 490
 don't let the sun go down or the night descend on us!
 Not till I hurl the smoke-black halls of Priam headlong—
 torch his gates to blazing rubble—rip the tunic of Hector
 and slash his heroic chest to ribbons with my bronze—
 and a ruck of comrades round him, groveling facedown,
 gnaw their own earth!"

And so Agamemnon prayed
 but the son of Cronus would not bring his prayer to pass,
 not yet . . . the Father accepted the sacrifices, true,
 but doubled the weight of thankless, ruthless war. .
 Once the men had prayed and flung the barley, 500
 first they lifted back the heads of the victims,
 slit their throats, skinned them and carved away
 the meat from the thighbones and wrapped them in fat,
 a double fold sliced clean and topped with strips of flesh.
 And they burned these on a cleft stick, peeled and dry,
 spitted the vitals, held them over Hephaestus' flames
 and once they'd charred the thighs and tasted the organs
 they cut the rest into pieces, pierced them with spits,
 roasted them to a turn and pulled them off the fire.
 The work done, the feast laid out, they ate well 510
 and no man's hunger lacked a share of the banquet.
 When they had put aside desire for food and drink,
 Nestor the noble old horseman spoke out first:
 "Marshal Atrides, lord of men Agamemnon,
 no more trading speeches now. No more delay,
 putting off the work the god puts in our hands.
 Come, let the heralds cry out to all contingents,

full battle-armor, muster the men along the ships.
 Now down we go, united—review them as we pass.
 Down through the vast encampment of Achaea, 520
 the faster to rouse the slashing god of war!”

Agamemnon the lord of men did not resist.
 He commanded heralds to cry out loud and clear
 and summon the long-haired Achaean troops to battle.
 Their cries rang out. The battalions gathered quickly.
 The warlords dear to the gods and flanking Agamemnon
 strode on ahead, marshaling men-at-arms in files,
 and down their ranks the fiery-eyed Athena bore
 her awesome shield of storm, ageless, deathless—
 a hundred golden tassels, all of them braided tight 530
 and each worth a hundred oxen, float along the front.
 Her shield of lightning dazzling, swirling around her,
 headlong on Athena swept through the Argive armies,
 driving soldiers harder, lashing the fighting-fury
 in each Achaean’s heart—no stopping them now,
 mad for war and struggle. Now, suddenly,
 battle thrilled them more than the journey home,
 than sailing hollow ships to their dear native land.

As ravening fire rips through big stands of timber
 high on a mountain ridge and the blaze flares miles away, 540
 so from the marching troops the blaze of bronze armor,
 splendid and superhuman, flared across the earth,
 flashing into the air to hit the skies.

Armies gathering now
 as the huge flocks on flocks of winging birds, geese or cranes
 or swans with their long lancing necks—circling Asian marshes
 round the Cayster outflow, wheeling in all directions,
 glorying in their wings—keep on landing, advancing,
 wave on shrieking wave and the tidal flats resound.
 So tribe on tribe, pouring out of the ships and shelters,
 marched across the Scamander plain and the earth shook, 550
 tremendous thunder from under trampling men and horses
 drawing into position down the Scamander meadow flats

breaking into flower—men by the thousands, numberless
as the leaves and spears that flower forth in spring.

The armies massing . . . crowding thick-and-fast
as the swarms of flies seething over the shepherds' stalls
in the first spring days when the buckets flood with milk—
so many long-haired Achaeans swarmed across the plain
to confront the Trojans, fired to smash their lines.

The armies grouping now—as seasoned goatherds 560
split their wide-ranging flocks into packs with ease
when herds have mixed together down the pasture:
so the captains formed their tight platoons,
detaching right and left, moving up for action—
and there in the midst strode powerful Agamemnon,
eyes and head like Zeus who loves the lightning,
great in the girth like Ares, god of battles,
broad through the chest like sea lord Poseidon.
Like a bull rising head and shoulders over the herds,
a royal bull rearing over his flocks of driven cattle— 570
so imposing was Atreus' son, so Zeus made him that day,
towering over fighters, looming over armies.

Sing to me now, you Muses who hold the halls of Olympus!
You are goddesses, you are everywhere, you know all things—
all we hear is the distant ring of glory, we know nothing—
who were the captains of Achaea? Who were the kings?
The mass of troops I could never tally, never name,
not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths,
a tireless voice and the heart inside me bronze,
never unless you Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus 580
whose shield is rolling thunder, sing, sing in memory
all who gathered under Troy. Now I can only tell
the lords of the ships, the ships in all their numbers!

First came the Boeotian units led by Leitus and Peneleos:
Arcesilaus and Prothoënor and Clonius shared command
of the armed men who lived in Hyria, rocky Aulis,

Schoenus, Scolus and Eteonus spurred with hills,
 Thespia and Graea, the dancing rings of Mycalessus,
 men who lived round Harma, Ilesion and Erythrae
 and those who settled Eleon, Hyle and Peteon, 590
 Ocalea, Medeon's fortress walled and strong,
 Copae, Eutresis and Thisbe thronged with doves,
 fighters from Coronea, Haliartus deep in meadows,
 and the men who held Plataea and lived in Glisas,
 men who held the rough-hewn gates of Lower Thebes,
 Onchestus the holy, Poseidon's sun-filled grove,
 men from the town of Arne green with vineyards,
 Midea and sacred Nisa, Anthedon-on-the-marches.
 Fifty ships came freighted with these contingents,
 one hundred and twenty young Boeotians manning each. 600

Then men who lived in Aspledon, Orchomenos of the Minyans,
 fighters led by Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, sons of Ares
 whom Astyoche bore in Actor son of Azeus' halls
 when the shy young girl, climbing into the upper rooms,
 made love with the god of war in secret, shared his strength.
 In her two sons' command sailed thirty long curved ships.

Then Schedius and Epistrophus led the men of Phocis—
 two sons of Iphitus, that great heart, Naubolus' son—
 the men who held Cyparissus and Pytho's high crags,
 the hallowed earth of Crisa, Daulis and Panopeus, 610
 men who dwelled round Anemoria, round Hyampolis,
 men who lived along the Cephissus' glinting waters,
 men who held Lilaea close to the river's wellsprings.
 Laden with all their ranks came forty long black ships
 and Phocian captains ranged them column by column,
 manning stations along the Boeotians' left flank.

Next the Locrians led by racing Ajax, son of Oileus,
 Little Ajax—a far cry from the size of Telamonian Ajax—
 a smaller man but trim in his skintight linen corslet,
 he outthrew all Hellenes, all Achaeans with his spear. 620
 He led the men who lived in Opois, Cynus, Calliarus,

Bessa and Scarphe, the delightful town of Augeae,
Tarphe and Thronion down the Boagrius River.
In Oilean Ajax' charge came forty long black ships,
Locrians living across the straits from sacrosanct Euboea.

And the men who held Euboea, Abantes breathing fury,
Chalcis and Eretria, Histiaea covered with vineyards,
Cerinthus along the shore and Dion's hilltop streets,
the men who held Carystus and men who settled Styra. 630
Elephenor, comrade of Ares, led the whole contingent,
Chalcodon's son, a lord of the fierce Abantes.
The sprinting Abantes followed hard at his heels,
their forelocks cropped, hair grown long at the back,
troops nerved to lunge with their tough ashen spears
and slash the enemies' breastplates round their chests.
In Elephenor's command sailed forty long black ships.

Next the men who held the strong-built city of Athens,
realm of high-hearted Erechtheus. Zeus's daughter Athena
tended him once the grain-giving fields had borne him, 640
long ago, and then she settled the king in Athens,
in her own rich shrine, where sons of Athens worship him
with bulls and goats as the years wheel round in season.
Athenians all, and Peteos' son Menestheus led them on,
and no one born on the earth could match that man
in arraying teams of horse and shielded fighters—
Nestor his only rival, thanks to Nestor's age.
And in his command sailed fifty long black ships.

Out of Salamis Great Telamonian Ajax led twelve ships
drawn up where Athenian forces formed their line of battle.

Then men of Argos and Tiryns with her tremendous walls 650
and Hermione and Asine commanding the deep wide gulf,
Troezen, Eionae and Epidaurus green with vines
and Achaea's warrior sons who held Aegina and Mases—
Diomedes lord of the war cry led their crack contingents
flanked by Sthenelus, far-famed Capaneus' favorite son.

Third in the vanguard marched Euryalus strong as a god,
son of King Mecisteus son of Talaus, but over them all,
with cries to marshal men Diomedes led the whole force
and his Argives sailed in eighty long black ships.

Next the men who held Mycenae's huge walled citadel, 660
Corinth in all her wealth and sturdy, strong Cleonae,
men of Orniae, lovely Araethyrea and Sicyon,
Adrastus' domain before he ruled Mycenae,
men of Hyperesia, Gonoëssa perched on hills,
men who held Pellene and those who circled Aegion,
men of the coastal strip and Helice's broad headland.
They came in a hundred ships and Agamemnon led them on,
Atreus' royal son, and marching in his companies
came the most and bravest fighting men by far.
And there in the midst, armed in gleaming bronze, 670
in all his glory, he towered high over all his fighters—
he was the greatest warlord, he led by far the largest army.

Next those who held Lacedaemon's hollows deep with gorges,
Pharis, Sparta and Messe, crowded haunt of the wild doves,
men who lived in Brysiae and Augeae's gracious country,
men who held Amyclae, Helos the seaboard fortress,
men who settled Laas and lived near Oetylus:
Agamemnon's brother, Menelaus lord of the war cry
led their sixty ships, armed them apart, downshore,
and amidst their ranks he marched, ablaze with valor, 680
priming men for attack. And his own heart blazed the most
to avenge the groans and shocks of war they'd borne for Helen.

Next the men who lived in Pylos and handsome Arene,
Thryon, the Alpheus ford and finely-masoned Aepy,
men who lived in Cyparisseis and Amphigenia,
Pteleos, Helos and Dorion where the Muses met
the Thracian Thamyris, stopped the minstrel's song.
From Oechalia he came, from Oechalia's King Eurytus,
boasting to high heaven that he could outsing the very Muses,

the daughters of Zeus whose shield resounds with thunder. 690
 They were enraged, they maimed him, they ripped away
 his voice, the rousing immortal wonder of his song
 and wiped all arts of harping from his mind.
 Nestor the noble old horseman led those troops
 in ninety sweeping ships lined up along the shore.

And those who held Arcadia under Cyllene's peak,
 near Aepytus' ancient tomb where men fight hand-to-hand,
 men who lived in Pheneos and Orchomenos rife with sheep,
 Stratia, Rhipa and Enispe whipped by the sudden winds,
 men who settled Tegea, Mantinea's inviting country, 700
 men who held Stymphalus, men who ruled Parrhasia—
 the son of Ancaeus led them, powerful Agapenor
 with sixty ships in all, and aboard each vessel
 crowded full Arcadian companies skilled in war.
 Agamemnon himself, the lord of men had given them
 those well-benched ships to plow the wine-dark sea,
 since works of the sea meant nothing to those landmen.

Then the men who lived in Buprasion, brilliant Elis,
 all the realm as far as Hyrmine and Myrsinus, frontier towns
 and Olenian Rock and Alesion bound within their borders. 710
 Four warlords led their ranks, ten-ship flotillas each,
 and filling the decks came bands of Epean fighters,
 two companies under Thalpius and Amphimachus, sons
 of the line of Actor, one of Eurytus, one of Cteatus.
 Strong Diore the son of Amarynceus led the third
 and the princely Polyxinus led the fourth,
 the son of King Agasthenes, Augeas' noble stock.

Then ocean men from Dulichion and the Holy Islands,
 the Echinades rising over the sea across from Elis—
 Meges a match for Ares led their troops to war, 720
 a son of the rider Phyleus dear to Zeus who once,
 enraged at his father, fled and settled Dulichion.
 In his son's command sailed forty long black ships.

Next Odysseus led his Cephalenian companies,
 gallant-hearted fighters, the island men of Ithaca,
 of Mount Neriton's leafy ridges shimmering in the wind,
 and men who lived in Crocylia and rugged Aegilips,
 men who held Zacynthus and men who dwelled near Samos
 and mainland men who grazed their flocks across the channel.
 That mastermind like Zeus, Odysseus led those fighters on. 730
 In his command sailed twelve ships, prows flashing crimson.

And Thoas son of Andraemon led Aetolia's units,
 soldiers who lived in Pleuron, Pylene and Olenus,
 Chalcis along the shore and Calydon's rocky heights
 where the sons of wellborn Oeneus were no more
 and the king himself was dead
 and Meleager with his golden hair was gone.
 So the rule of all Aetolian men had passed to Thoas.
 In Thoas' command sailed forty long black ships.

And the great spearman Idomeneus led his Cretans, 740
 the men who held Cnossos and Gortyn ringed in walls,
 Lycos, Miletus, Lycastus' bright chalk bluffs,
 Phaestos and Rhytion, cities a joy to live in—
 the men who peopled Crete, a hundred cities strong.
 The renowned spearman Idomeneus led them all in force
 with Meriones who butchered men like the god of war himself.
 And in their command sailed eighty long black ships.

And Heracles' son Tlepolemus tall and staunch
 led nine ships of the proud Rhodians out of Rhodes, 750
 the men who lived on Rhodes in three island divisions,
 Lindos and Ialysus and Camirus' white escarpment,
 armies led by the famous spearman Tlepolemus
 whom Astyochea bore to Heracles filled with power.
 He swept her up from Ephyra, from the Selleis River
 after he'd ravaged many towns of brave young warlords
 bred by the gods. But soon as his son Tlepolemus
 came of age in Heracles' well-built palace walls

the youngster abruptly killed his father's uncle—
 the good soldier Licymnius, already up in years—
 and quickly fitting ships, gathering partisans, 760
 he fled across the sea with threats of the sons
 and the sons' sons of Heracles breaking at his back.
 But he reached Rhodes at last, a wanderer rocked by storms,
 and there they settled in three divisions, all by tribes,
 loved by Zeus himself the king of gods and mortals
 showering wondrous gold on all their heads.

Nireus led his three trim ships from Syme,
 Nireus the son of Aglaea and King Charopus,
 Nireus the handsomest man who ever came to Troy,
 of all the Achaeans after Peleus' fearless son. 770
 But he was a lightweight, trailed by a tiny band.

And men who held Nisyros, Casus and Crapathus,
 Cos, Eurypylus' town, and the islands called Calydnæ—
 combat troops, and Antiphus and Phidippus led them on,
 the two sons of the warlord Thessalus, Heracles' son.
 In their command sailed thirty long curved ships.

And now, Muse,
 sing all those fighting men who lived in Pelasgian Argos,
 the big contingents out of Alus and Alope and Trachis,
 men of Phthia and Hellas where the women are a wonder,
 all the fighters called Achaeans, Hellenes and Myrmidons 780
 ranked in fifty ships, and Achilles was their leader.
 But they had no lust for the grind of battle now—
 where was the man who marched their lines to war?
 The brilliant runner Achilles lay among his ships,
 raging over Briseis, the girl with lustrous hair,
 the prize he seized from Lyrnessus—
 after he had fought to exhaustion at Lyrnessus,
 storming the heights, and breached the walls of Thebes
 and toppled the vaunting spearmen Epistrophus and Mynes,
 sons of King Euenus, Selepius' son. All for Briseis 790
 his heart was breaking now . . . Achilles lay there now
 but he would soon rise up in all his power.

Then men of Phylace, Pyrasus banked in flowers,
 Demeter's closed and holy grove and Iton mother of flocks,
 Antron along the shore and Pteleos deep in meadows.
 The veteran Protesilaus had led those troops
 while he still lived, but now for many years
 the arms of the black earth had held him fast
 and his wife was left behind, alone in Phylace,
 both cheeks torn in grief, their house half-built. 800
 Just as he vaulted off his ship a Dardan killed him,
 first by far of the Argives slaughtered on the beaches.
 But not even then were his men without a captain,
 yearn as they did for their lost leader. No,
 Podarces a fresh campaigner ranged their units—
 a son of Iphiclus son of Phylacus rich in flocks—
 Podarces, gallant Protesilaus' blood brother,
 younger-born, but the older man proved braver too,
 an iron man of war. Yet not for a moment did his army
 lack a leader, yearn as they did for the braver dead. 810
 Under Podarces sailed their forty long black ships.

And the men who lived in Pherae fronting Lake Boebeis,
 in Boebe and Glaphyrae and Iolcos' sturdy ramparts:
 their eleven ships were led by Admetus' favored son,
 Eumelus, born to Admetus by Alcestis, queen of women,
 the most radiant daughter Pelias ever fathered.

Then men who lived in Methone and Thaumacia,
 men who held Meliboea and rugged ridged Olizon:
 Philoctetes the master archer had led them on
 in seven ships with fifty oarsmen aboard each, 820
 superbly skilled with the bow in lethal combat.
 But their captain lay on an island, racked with pain,
 on Lemnos' holy shores where the armies had marooned him,
 agonized by his wound, the bite of a deadly water-viper.
 There he writhed in pain but soon, encamped by the ships,
 the Argives would recall Philoctetes, their great king.
 But not even then were his men without a captain,
 yearn as they did for their lost leader. No,

Medon formed them up, Oileus' bastard son
whom Rhene bore to Oileus, grim raider of cities.

830

And men who settled Tricca, rocky Ithome terraced high
and men who held Oechalia, Oechalian Eurytus' city:
the two sons of Asclepius led their units now,
both skilled healers, Podalirius and Machaon.
In their command sailed forty curved black ships.

And men who held Ormenion and the Hyperian Spring,
men who held Asterion, Titanos' chalk-white cliffs:
Eurypylos marched them on, Euaemon's shining son.
In his command sailed forty long black ships.

And the men who settled Argissa and Gyrtone,
Orthe, Elone, the gleaming citadel Oloosson:
Polypoetes braced for battle led them on,
the son of Pirithous, son of deathless Zeus.
Famous Hippodamia bore the warrior to Pirithous
that day he wreaked revenge on the shaggy Centaurs,
routed them out of Pelion, drove them to the Aethices.
Polypoetes was not alone, Leonteus shared the helm,
companion of Ares, Caeneus' grandson, proud Coronus' son.
And in his command sailed forty long black ships.

840

And Guneus out of Cyphus led on two and twenty ships
and in his platoons came Enienes and battle-trying Peraebians
who pitched homes in the teeth of Dodona's bitter winters,
who held the tilled acres along the lovely Titaressus
that runs her pure crystal currents into Peneus—
never mixed with Peneus' eddies glistening silt
but gliding over the surface smooth as olive oil,
branching, breaking away from the river Styx,
the dark and terrible oath-stream of the gods.

850

And Prothous son of Tenthredon led the Magnesians,
men who lived around the Peneus, up along Mount Pelion

860

sloped in wind-whipped leaves. Racing Prothous led them on
and in his command sailed forty long black ships.

These, these were the captains of Achaea and the kings.
Now tell me, Muse, who were the bravest of them all,
of the men and chariot-teams that came with Atreus' sons?

The best by far of the teams were Eumelus' mares
and Pheres' grandson drove them—swift as birds,
matched in age and their glossy coats and matched
to a builder's level flat across their backs.
Phoebus Apollo lord of the silver bow 870
had bred them both in Perea, a brace of mares
that raced the War-god's panic through the lines.
But best by far of the men was Telamonian Ajax
while Achilles raged apart. The famed Achilles
towered over them all, he and the battle-team
that bore the peerless son of Peleus into war.
But off in his beaked seagoing ships he lay,
raging away at Atrides Agamemnon, king of armies,
while his men sported along the surf, marking time,
hurling the discus, throwing spears and testing bows. 880
And the horses, each beside its chariot, champing clover
and parsley from the marshes, waited, pawing idly.
Their masters' chariots stood under blankets now,
stored away in the tents while the rank and file,
yearning for their leader, the great man of war,
drifting here and there throughout the encampment,
hung back from the fighting.

But on the armies came
as if the whole earth were devoured by wildfire, yes,
and the ground thundered under them, deep as it does
for Zeus who loves the lightning, Zeus in all his rage 890
when he lashes the ground around Typhoeus in Arima,
there where they say the monster makes his bed of pain—
so the earth thundered under their feet, armies trampling,
sweeping through the plain at blazing speed.

Now the Trojans.

Iris the wind-quick messenger hurried down to Ilium,
 bearing her painful message, sent by storming Zeus.
 The Trojans assembled hard by Priam's gates,
 gathered together there, young men and old,
 and rushing closer, racing Iris addressed them,
 keying her voice to that of Priam's son Polites. 900
 He had kept a watch for the Trojans, posted atop
 old Aesyetes' tomb and poised to sprint for home
 at the first sign of Argives charging from the ships.
 Like him to the life, the racing Iris urged, "Old Priam,
 words, endless words—that is your passion, always,
 as once in the days of peace. But ceaseless war's upon us!
 Time and again I've gone to battle, fought with men
 but I've never seen an army great as this. Too much—
 like piling leaves or sand, and on and on they come,
 advancing across the plain to fight before our gates. 910
 Hector, I urge you first of all—do as I tell you.
 Armies of allies crowd the mighty city of Priam,
 true, but they speak a thousand different tongues,
 fighters gathered here from all ends of the realm.
 Let each chief give commands to the tribe he leads,
 move them out, marshal his own contingents—now!"

Hector missed nothing—that was a goddess' call.
 He broke up the assembly at once. They rushed to arms
 and all the gates flung wide and the Trojan mass surged out,
 horses, chariots, men on foot—a tremendous roar went up. 920

Now a sharp ridge rises out in front of Troy,
 all on its own and far across the plain
 with running-room around it, all sides clear.
 Men call it Thicket Ridge, the immortals call it
 the leaping Amazon Myrine's mounded tomb, and there
 the Trojans and allies ranged their troops for battle.

First, tall Hector with helmet flashing led the Trojans—
 Priam's son and in his command by far the greatest, bravest army,
 divisions harnessed in armor, veterans bristling spears.

And the noble son of Anchises led the Dardanians— 930
 Aeneas whom the radiant Aphrodite bore Anchises
 down the folds of Ida, a goddess bedded with a man.
 Not Aeneas alone but flanked by Antenor's two sons,
 Acamas and Archelochus, trained for every foray.

And men who lived in Zelea under the foot of Ida,
 a wealthy clan that drank the Aesepus' dark waters—
 Trojans all, and the shining son of Lycaon led them on,
 Pandarus, with the bow that came from Apollo's own hands.

And the men who held the land of Apaesus and Adrestia,
 men who held Pityea, Terea's steep peaks—the units led 940
 by Adrestus joined by Amphius trim in linen corslet,
 the two good sons of Merops out of Percote harbor,
 Merops adept beyond all men in the mantic arts.
 He refused to let his two boys march to war,
 this man-killing war, but the young ones fought him
 all the way—the forces of black death drove them on.

And the men who lived around Percote and Practios,
 men who settled Sestos, Abydos and gleaming Arisbe:
 Asius son of Hyrtacus led them on, captain of armies,
 Hyrtacus' offspring Asius—hulking, fiery stallions 950
 bore him in from Arisbe, from the Selleis River.

Hippothous led the Pelasgian tribes of spearmen,
 fighters who worked Larissa's dark rich plowland.
 Hippothous and Pylaeus, tested soldier, led them on,
 both sons of Pelasgian Lethus, Teutamus' scion.

Acamas and the old hero Pirous led the Thracians,
 all the Hellespont bounds within her riptide straits.

Euphemus led the Cicones, fighters armed with spears,
 son of Troezenus, Ceas' son, a warlord bred by the gods.

Pyraechmes led the Paeonians, reflex bows in hand, 960
 hailing from Amydon far west and the broad river Axios,
 Axios, clearest stream that flows across the earth.

That burly heart Pylaemenes led his Paphlagonians
 out of Enetian country, land where the wild mules breed:
 the men who held Cytorus and lived in range of Sesamus,
 building their storied halls along the Parthenius River,
 at Cromna, Aegialus and the highland fortress Erythini.

Odius and Epistrophus led the Halizonians out of Alybe
 miles east where the mother lode of silver came to birth.

Chromis led the Mysian men with Ennomus seer of birds— 970
 but none of his winged signs could beat off black death.
 Down he went, crushed by racing Achilles' hands, destroyed
 in the river where he slaughtered other Trojans too.

Ascanius strong as a god and Phorcys led the Phrygians
 in from Ascania due east, primed for the clash of combat.

Mesthles and Antiphus led Maeonia's proud contingent,
 Talaemenes' two sons sprung from the nymph of Gyge Lake
 led on Maeonian units born and bred under Mount Tmolus.

Nastes led the Carians wild with barbarous tongues, 980
 men who held Miletus, Phthires' ridges thick with timber,
 Maeander's currents and Mount Mycale's craggy peaks.
 Amphimachus and Nastes led their formations on,
 Nastes and Amphimachus, Nomion's flamboyant sons.
 Nastes strolled to battle decked in gold like a girl,
 the fool! None of his trappings kept off grisly death—
 down he went, crushed by racing Achilles' hands, destroyed
 at the ford where battle-hard Achilles stripped his gold away.

And last, Sarpedon and valiant Glaucus marched the Lycians on
 from Lycia far south, from the Xanthus' swirling rapids.