

"designing into the blood-red fabric / The trials that the Trojans and Greeks had suffered / For her beauty under Ares' murderous hands" (3.128–30).

The most extensively described work of art in the poem is itself a weapon, the shield that Achilles carries into battle on his return. Achilles' shield is decorated with a series of images that seem to comprise the whole of human experience, presenting in a systematic arrangement the various activities that are evoked in a scattered way throughout the poem: farming, hunting, settling disputes, celebrating weddings, dancing, and singing, as well as fighting. Strikingly, only a relatively small portion of this is devoted to warfare, which occurs in one scene surrounded by images of mostly peaceful pastimes. Here the *Iliad* seems to offer a kind of alternative to itself, a work with the scope of epic in which war is only one aspect of human experience, but also to underscore its own deliberately restricted focus. When the characters in this poem see that shield, they think of war. For Achilles' comrades, it is a source of awesome terror. For Achilles it is a source of aesthetic pleasure; he feels "pangs of joy at all its intricate beauty" (19.29); but it also intensifies his rage for battle: "But Achilles, / When he saw it, felt his rage seep / Deeper into his bones . . ." (19.22–24).

These depictions link art like the poet's own to the realm of warfare, narrowing the separation between the activity of combat and the work that represents it. For the poet of the *Iliad*, poetry and war are bound up with one another, and, in one of his most direct comments on his momentous and terrible subject, he presents warfare as already itself a beautiful spectacle: "It was glorious to see—if your heart were iron, / And you could keep from grieving at all the pain" (13.355–56).

### The Historical Context

In considering the self-presentation of the *Iliad*'s poet and his stance toward the story he tells, it would obviously be helpful to know something about the person who composed the poem and the circumstances under which it was produced. In fact, we know much less than we would like to about how and when the *Iliad* came into being. Ancient tradition attributed the poem to Homer, who was also considered responsible for another epic about the

Trojan legend, the *Odyssey*, which tells about the return of the Greeks from Troy, and several shorter poems about the gods; but we have no reliable information about Homer that can contribute to an understanding of these works.

Where questions of chronology are concerned, it is not really possible to pin the poem to a single historical period. There is a strong—but far from complete—scholarly consensus that the *Iliad* was first written down in something like the form in which we now have it in the last half of the eighth century B.C.E., the time at which the Greeks acquired the art of alphabetic writing and written literature thus became possible. At the same time, we know the *Iliad* to be the result of a long tradition of earlier poetry, stretching back over many centuries, to which we have no direct access, because it was never written down, and which we can approach only through the traces it has left on the *Iliad* and other early Greek literature. The immense scholarly effort devoted to Homeric poetry over the last several centuries has made it clear that the *Iliad* reflects several historical periods, in a complicated amalgam whose layers we can only approximately distinguish.

First, it is important to recognize that the *Iliad* is itself a work of history, that it presents its story as a recollection of long-past events taking place in a time very different from that in which those events are being recalled. The characters in the story are seen as belonging to a superior, even semidivine breed that no longer exists, and they perform actions that no living person could duplicate. This sense of a gap between the world of the poem and the poet and his audience surfaces in occasional comments, as when the poet describes how Diomedes in the middle of combat "levered up in one hand a slab of stone / Much too large for two men to lift— / As men are now . . ." (5.328–30). It also informs the poem's frequent use of similes, which assimilate the distant world of heroic combat to a more ordinary, everyday world familiar to the poem's audience.

The Trojan legend is a story of large-scale destruction. It includes not only the annihilation of Troy, but the many disruptions, almost as devastating as what they have inflicted on the Trojans, experienced by the Greeks as they return: they are blown off course and lost at sea, or they make it back, only to find their homes in turmoil and their own positions there under attack. For the ancient Greeks, this legend recorded the passing of an age of

heroes that was understood to precede the drearier world of the present. To a modern historian, it reflects the end of the first stage of ancient Greek history, which is known as the Bronze Age, after the widespread use of bronze during that time, or the Mycenaean period, after the city of Mycenae, one of the main power centers of that era.

Mycenaean civilization developed in the centuries after 2000 B.C.E., which is approximately when Greek-speaking people first arrived in the area at the southern end of the Balkan peninsula that we now know as Greece. Those Greek-speakers gradually established there a rich civilization dominated by a few powerful cities built around large, highly organized palaces. These palaces were at once fortified military strongholds and centers for international trade, in particular trade with the many islands located in the Aegean Sea, to the east of the Greek mainland. On the largest of those islands, the island of Crete, there was already flourishing, by the time the Mycenaeans arrived in Greece, the rich and sophisticated Minoan civilization, by which the Mycenaeans were heavily influenced and which they came ultimately to dominate.

From the Minoans the Mycenaeans gained, along with many other crafts and institutions, a system of writing: a syllabary, in which each symbol stands for a particular syllable, as opposed to an alphabet—like the Roman alphabet now used to write English—in which each symbol stands for a particular sound. The Mycenaeans adapted the syllabary which the Minoans used to write their own language (a language which, although we have examples of their writing, still has not been deciphered) and used it to write Greek. This earliest Greek writing system is known to present-day scholars as Linear B, and archaeologists excavating at the mainland centers of Mycenae and Pylos have recovered examples of it incised on clay tablets. These tablets contain not—as was hoped when they were found—political treaties, mythological poems, or accounts of religious rituals—but detailed accounts of a highly bureaucratic palace economy: inventories of grain or livestock and lists of palace functionaries assigned to perform such specialized roles as “unguent boiler,” “chair-maker,” or “bath-pourer.”

Mycenaean civilization reached its height at about 1600 B.C.E. and was essentially destroyed in a series of natural disasters and

political disruptions about four hundred years later, around 1200 B.C.E. We do not really know what happened, but all of the main archaeological sites show some evidence of destruction, burning, or hasty abandonment at about that time, and a sharp decline thereafter in the ambition and complexity of their material culture. Among these is the site of Troy itself, which was discovered in the late nineteenth century by Heinrich Schliemann, who followed the topographical details given in the *Iliad*; through this discovery, Schliemann both vindicated the historical validity of Homer and helped to found the field of archaeology.

Related in some way to the disruptions that ended the Bronze Age was the emergence of a new group of Greek-speakers as the dominant people on the mainland. The Classical Greeks referred to these people as the Dorians and believed that they had invaded Greece from the north. Modern historians are uncertain whether they were new migrants or people already present in Greece who newly came to power in the upheavals of this period. In any case, many people left the mainland as a consequence and moved east, settling on various islands of the Aegean and along the coast of Asia Minor, in the area that is now western Turkey but which then became, in its coastal region, as much a part of the Greek world as was the mainland itself.

Both the Greeks who remained on the mainland and those who migrated to Asia Minor lived in conditions that involved less material prosperity and less highly organized concentrations of political and military power than had been characteristic of the Mycenaean period, and their period is traditionally known as the Dark Age, both because their physical remains suggest a less magnificent level of civilization and because we know relatively little about it. One result of the transition to the Dark Age was that writing, which was probably practiced in the Mycenaean period only by a small class of professional scribes, fell out of use, and the Greeks became once again a culture without writing. On the other hand, they had always relied, and they continued to rely, on oral communication as their central means of recalling, preserving, and transmitting the historical memories, religious beliefs, and shared stories that in our culture would be committed to writing—or now to various forms of electronic media. In particular, the Greeks of Asia Minor, known as the Ionians, developed a tradition of heroic poetry through which they recalled

their own history, looking back and recounting the experiences of that earlier, lost era. This poetry centered on certain legendary figures and events, among them the events surrounding the Trojan war, which, as mentioned above, appear to reflect the final moments of Mycenaean civilization.

The so-called Dark Age came to an end during a period roughly corresponding to the eighth century—the 700s—B.C.E. The cultural shift that we label the end of the Dark Age and the beginning of the Archaic Period involved not a series of upheavals, as with the end of the Bronze Age, but the emergence of new activity in a variety of fields. A growth in population led to a wave of colonization, with established Greek centers sending out colonies to such places as the Black Sea, Sicily, southern Italy, and southern France. There was also greater contact among the various Greek communities, which were politically distinct and remained so for centuries. This led to the development of institutions designed to unite those communities culturally and to reinforce a shared Greek, or Panhellenic, heritage, such as the oracle of Apollo at Delphi and the Olympic Games (founded in 776 B.C.E.). Around this time, the Greeks began to build large-scale temples and to make large-scale statues and a new kind of pottery decorated with elaborate geometric patterns. Many of the features of Greek culture that we associate with the Classical Period—the period that loosely corresponds to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.—had their origins in the eighth century.

In addition to colonization, this was also a time of renewed trade and thus of encounters with other Mediterranean cultures. One consequence of this trade was that the Greeks came into contact with the Phoenicians, a Semitic people whose culture was centered in present-day Lebanon, and learned from them a system of writing—not a syllabary like Linear B, but an alphabet, the alphabet which, with some modification, is still used to write Greek and which eventually was adapted to become the Roman alphabet, now widely used for many languages, including English.

This new way of writing Greek quickly became much more widespread than Linear B had been, and it was put to a greater variety of uses, among them the writing down of poetry. Thus the *Iliad* and other early Greek poems (including the other Homeric epic, the *Odyssey*; two poems by Hesiod, the *Theogony* and the

*Works and Days*; and a group of hymns that were also attributed to Homer in antiquity) came into being in the written form in which we know them. But, as mentioned already, while these poems were written down in the eighth century, they claimed to describe events that had taken place approximately five hundred years before. For the Greeks of the eighth century and afterward, these were works of history, authoritative records of their own past. A modern historian might be more inclined to label them historical fiction, thinking that whatever conflict lies behind the story of the Trojan War is more likely to have been fought over trade routes to the Black Sea than—as Homer tells it—over the Trojans' theft from the Greeks of the world's most beautiful woman, Helen of Troy. In any case, like most works of historical fiction—or indeed of history—the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* reflect the time (or, in this case, the times) of their telling at least as much as the time in which they are set.

Historians and archaeologists who have tried to match the culture described in the Homeric epics to what we know of Greek history from other sources have found that that culture unself-consciously combines elements of the Bronze Age with elements of the Dark Age: memories of the earlier time in which the Trojan legend is set have been woven together with circumstances borrowed from the period during which the legend evolved. This can be seen in the depictions of combat that are a major feature of the *Iliad*. While it is repeatedly mentioned that the weapons being used are made of bronze—which fell out of use for weapons after the Bronze Age, being replaced by iron—some of the specific implements and fighting practices belong to a later time. Some of the fighting practices described there seem not to be fully understood by the poet—for example, the use of chariots, which are mentioned mainly as transportation to and from the battle, when they must in fact have been used in the actual fighting.

The peacetime world, described more fully in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*, centers on kingdoms that are much smaller and much less highly organized than those of the Mycenaean Period, and many details of their material culture and social organization accord more closely to what we know of Dark Age life. There are also ways in which the world of Homer reflects the emerging concerns and conditions of the eighth century: for example, some scholars draw a connection between the fact that the Homeric

poems omit certain religious practices that were tied to particular localities and the unifying, Panhellenic impulses reflected in the Delphic Oracle and the Olympic Games. There is surely a connection to be made between the *Iliad's* focus on the hard-won success of the Greeks in overcoming internal dissension to achieve the common goal of taking Troy and that period's concern with the development of a shared cultural identity. It is also clear that some of the practices of Homeric culture are entirely artificial, conditioned by the aims of the poem itself; for example, the habit that the *Iliad's* heroes have of pausing in the middle of battle to talk, reflecting, as Sarpedon does, on the meaning of what they are doing—a fatal lapse in real combat, but an effective strategy for a poem.

### The Poetic Tradition

Just as the society described in the Homeric epics reflects the centuries-long period during which the Trojan legend evolved, so the poems themselves—in their language, their style, and their modes of narration—also reflect that period and that process of evolution. The *Iliad* is manifestly the product of a long tradition within Greek culture and follows on many previous tellings of the same legendary material. Beyond that, the poem has roots in the traditions of the ancient Near East, which we can recognize but not trace precisely. This can be seen in the parallels between episodes in the *Iliad* and many Near Eastern myths, such as the story told in the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which also concerns a hero who is the son of a goddess and who causes the death of his dearest companion, for whom he passionately grieves.

The *Iliad's* debt to tradition is revealed in the way in which it tells its story, plunging into the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon with confidence that its audience will already be familiar with these characters and the legends to which they belong. Similarly, the characters in the poem—especially older characters like Nestor and Phoenix—habitually refer to other similar legends, apparently drawing on a related fund of inherited stories. The traditional character of Homeric poetry is also deeply embedded in the language and style of the original Greek text, as the scholarship of the last century has made increasingly clear. In particular, it has been demonstrated that the diction and phraseology of

Homeric Greek are not those of written literature, but rather of the kind of orally composed and recited poetry that preceded our written *Iliad* and that still exists in some cultures today. Generally speaking, rather than reciting a fixed, memorized text, an oral poet composes a new telling of the story while speaking, always fitting the words into the patterns of a metrical scheme. To do this requires a different and larger set of verbal resources than those of writing or ordinary speech. A major achievement of Homeric scholarship—and especially of an American scholar of the 1920s and 1930s, Milman Parry, who did comparative work with the practicing oral poets of the Balkan region—has been to identify the peculiarities of Homeric Greek, which include an expanded vocabulary and a huge repertory of repeated phrases and lines, with the resources of the oral poet.

The identification of Homeric style as that of oral poetry has solved some of the problems that students of Homer wrestled with for centuries, as they tried to make sense of the ways in which the Homeric epics are unlike later written poems, in particular their continual use of repetition and their occasional rough edges and narrative inconsistencies. But it does not, of course, explain the *Iliad* we have, which is not an oral recitation, but a written text, although it should be stressed that, even after the *Iliad* was written down, it continued to be recited for centuries, at least into the Classical Period, and oral performance continued to be the medium through which this poem reached its primary audience, despite the existence of a written text.

Certain characteristics of the *Iliad* cannot easily be referred to the poem's oral origins, particularly its monumental scale. A performance of the *Iliad* would take at the absolute minimum about twenty hours, whereas the bards studied by modern scholars, like the several bards who are portrayed in the *Odyssey* as entertaining groups of people at banquets, all sing songs lasting about an hour. It is difficult, even impossible, to imagine an occasion when the *Iliad* could have been sung through for an audience from beginning to end. Clearly, it is significant that the final stages of the poem's composition coincide with the reintroduction of writing in the eighth century, but the exact role of writing in shaping the poem that we have remains mysterious, especially since marks of oral composition such as those found in Homer tend to disappear quite quickly once poets begin to use

passes and subsumes the world in which the *Iliad's* plot takes place.

Making use of what spotty evidence they have, scholars have attempted to reconstruct earlier versions of the stories or types of stories told in the *Iliad*, in order to show how they have been adapted to the *Iliad's* distinctive purposes. Other versions of the Meleager story told by Phoenix in Book 9 allow us to see that there it has been reworked to provide a pointed parallel to the story of Achilles. Some critics have speculated that there may have been many traditional accounts of powerful heroes who felt dishonored and withdrew from their armies until their honor was restored, but that the surprising development of Achilles' continued withdrawal even after Agamemnon's embassy may have been unique to the *Iliad*. Our evidence suggests that other poems in the tradition out of which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* emerged contained many more supernatural and miraculous elements, including the achievement of immortality by the most successful heroes. By contrast, the Homeric epics seem distinctive in their unremitting insistence on the constraints of mortal existence and the inescapability of death.

In making this translation, Stanley Lombardo has located Homer in the performer or performers through whom the *Iliad* existed primarily as a spoken work, even after it was written down. Lombardo's version highlights the living connection that the poet builds between himself and his audience and his evocation of the spontaneous and idiosyncratic accents of the individual speakers whom he impersonates. In doing so, Lombardo brings out yet another way in which the concerns of the poet intersect with those of his characters, for in his recreation of heroic warfare, Homer has made it a realm not only of forceful action, but also of powerful speaking. The characters of the *Iliad* use speech constantly, to further their competitions through insults, to confer honor on one another through praise, to reflect on what they are doing, to bring the traditions of the past to bear on their present dilemmas, to lament their dead. In this way they fulfill the vision of heroism that Phoenix instilled in Achilles on the instructions of his father, Peleus: "To be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds" (9.455).

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# ILIAD 1

## RAGE:

Sing, Goddess, Achilles' rage,  
Black and murderous, that cost the Greeks  
Incalculable pain, pitched countless souls  
Of heroes into Hades' dark,  
And left their bodies to rot as feasts  
For dogs and birds, as Zeus' will was done.

Begin with the clash between Agamemnon—  
The Greek warlord—and godlike Achilles.

Which of the immortals set these two  
At each other's throats?

10

Apollo,  
Zeus' son and Leto's, offended  
By the warlord. Agamemnon had dishonored  
Chryses, Apollo's priest, so the god  
Struck the Greek camp with plague,  
And the soldiers were dying of it.

Chryses  
Had come to the Greek beachhead camp  
Hauling a fortune for his daughter's ransom.  
Displaying Apollo's sacral ribbons  
On a golden staff, he made a formal plea  
To the entire Greek army, but especially  
The commanders, Atreus' two sons:

20

"Sons of Atreus and Greek heroes all:  
May the gods on Olympus grant you plunder  
Of Priam's city and a safe return home.  
But give me my daughter back and accept  
This ransom out of respect for Zeus' son,  
Lord Apollo, who deals death from afar."

A murmur rippled through the ranks: 30  
"Respect the priest and take the ransom."  
But Agamemnon was not pleased  
And dismissed Chryses with a rough speech:

"Don't let me ever catch you, old man, by these ships again,  
Skulking around now or sneaking back later.  
The god's staff and ribbons won't save you next time.  
The girl is mine, and she'll be an old woman in Argos  
Before I let her go, working the loom in my house  
And coming to my bed, far from her homeland.  
Now clear out of here before you make me angry!" 40

The old man was afraid and did as he was told.  
He walked in silence along the whispering surf line,  
And when he had gone some distance the priest  
Prayed to Lord Apollo, son of silken-haired Leto:

"Hear me, Silverbow, Protector of Chryse,  
Lord of Holy Cilla, Master of Tenedos,  
And Sminthian God of Plague!  
If ever I've built a temple that pleased you  
Or burnt fat thighbones of bulls and goats—  
Grant me this prayer: 50  
Let the Danaans pay for my tears with your arrows!"

Apollo heard his prayer and descended Olympus' crags  
Pulsing with fury, bow slung over one shoulder,  
The arrows rattling in their case on his back  
As the angry god moved like night down the mountain.

He settled near the ships and let loose an arrow.  
Reverberation from his silver bow hung in the air.

He picked off the pack animals first, and the lean hounds,  
But then aimed his needle-tipped arrows at the men  
And shot until the death-fires crowded the beach. 60

Nine days the god's arrows rained death on the camp.  
On the tenth day Achilles called an assembly.  
Hera, the white-armed goddess, planted the thought in him  
Because she cared for the Greeks and it pained her  
To see them dying. When the troops had all mustered,  
Up stood the great runner Achilles, and said:

"Well, Agamemnon, it looks as if we'd better give up  
And sail home—assuming any of us are left alive—  
If we have to fight both the war and this plague.  
But why not consult some prophet or priest 70  
Or a dream interpreter, since dreams too come from Zeus,  
Who could tell us why Apollo is so angry,  
If it's for a vow or a sacrifice he holds us at fault.  
Maybe he'd be willing to lift this plague from us  
If he savored the smoke from lambs and prime goats."

Achilles had his say and sat down. Then up rose  
Calchas, son of Thestor, bird-reader supreme,  
Who knew what is, what will be, and what has been.  
He had guided the Greek ships to Troy  
Through the prophetic power Apollo 80  
Had given him, and he spoke out now:

"Achilles, beloved of Zeus, you want me to tell you  
About the rage of Lord Apollo, the Arch-Destroyer.  
And I will tell you. But you have to promise me and swear  
You will support me and protect me in word and deed.  
I have a feeling I might offend a person of some authority  
Among the Greeks, and you know how it is when a king  
Is angry with an underling. He might swallow his temper  
For a day, but he holds it in his heart until later  
And it all comes out. Will you guarantee my security?" 90

Achilles, the great runner, responded:

Hector's helmet flashed as he turned and said:

"Deïphobus, you've always been my favorite  
Brother, and again you've shown me why,  
Having the courage to come out for me,  
Leaving the safety of the wall, while all  
Priam's other sons are cowering inside."

260

And Athena, her eyes as grey as winter moons:

"Mother and father begged me by my knees  
To stay inside, and so did all my friends.  
That's how frightened they are, Hector. But I  
Could not bear the pain in my heart, brother.  
Now let's get tough and fight and not spare  
Any spears. Either Achilles kills us both  
And drags our blood-soaked gear to the ships,  
Or he goes down with your spear in his guts."

270

That's how Athena led him on, with guile.  
And when the two heroes faced each other,  
Great Hector, helmet shining, spoke first:

"I'm not running any more, Achilles.  
Three times around the city was enough.  
I've got my nerve back. It's me or you now.  
But first we should swear a solemn oath.  
With all the gods as witnesses, I swear:  
If Zeus gives me the victory over you,  
I will not dishonor your corpse, only  
Strip the armor and give the body back  
To the Greeks. Promise you'll do the same."

280

And Achilles, fixing his eyes on him:

"Don't try to cut any deals with me, Hector.  
Do lions make peace treaties with men?  
Do wolves and lambs agree to get along?  
No, they hate each other to the core,  
And that's how it is between you and me,

290

No talk of agreements until one of us  
Falls and gluts Ares with his blood.  
By God, you'd better remember everything  
You ever knew about fighting with spears.  
But you're as good as dead. Pallas Athena  
And my spear will make you pay in a lump  
For the agony you've caused by killing my friends."

With that he pumped his spear arm and let fly.  
Hector saw the long flare the javelin made, and ducked.  
The bronze point sheared the air over his head  
And rammed into the earth. But Athena  
Pulled it out and gave it back to Achilles  
Without Hector noticing. And Hector,  
Prince of Troy, taunted Achilles:

300

"Ha! You missed! Godlike Achilles! It looks like  
You didn't have my number after all.  
You said you did, but you were just trying  
To scare me with big words and empty talk.  
Did you think I'd run and you'd plant a spear  
In my back? It'll take a direct hit in my chest,  
Coming right at you, that and a god's help too.  
Now see if you can dodge this piece of bronze.  
Swallow it whole! The war will be much easier  
On the Trojans with you dead and gone."

310

And Hector let his heavy javelin fly,  
A good throw, too, hitting Achilles' shield  
Dead center, but it only rebounded away.  
Angry that his throw was wasted, Hector  
Fumbled about for a moment, reaching  
For another spear. He shouted to Deïphobus,  
But Deïphobus was nowhere in sight.  
It was then that Hector knew in his heart  
What had happened, and said to himself:

320

"I hear the gods calling me to my death.  
I thought I had a good man here with me,  
Deïphobus, but he's still on the wall.

Athena tricked me. Death is closing in  
 And there's no escape. Zeus and Apollo  
 Must have chosen this long ago, even though  
 They used to be on my side. My fate is here,  
 But I will not perish without some great deed  
 That future generations will remember."

330

And he drew the sharp broadsword that hung  
 By his side and gathered himself for a charge.

*A high-flying eagle dives  
 Through ebony clouds down  
 To the sun-scutched plain to claw  
 A lamb or a quivering hare.*

Thus Hector's charge, and the light  
 That played from his blade's honed edge.

340

Opposite him, Achilles exploded forward, fury  
 Incarnate behind the curve of his shield,  
 A glory of metalwork, and the plumes  
 Nodded and rippled on his helmet's crest,  
 Thick golden horsehair set by Hephaestus,  
 And his spearpoint glinted like the Evening Star

*In the gloom of night,  
 Star of perfect splendor,*

A gleam in the air as Achilles poised  
 His spear with murderous aim at Hector,  
 Eyes boring into the beautiful skin,  
 Searching for the weak spot. Hector's body  
 Was encased in the glowing bronze armor  
 He had stripped from the fallen Patroclus,  
 But where the collarbones join at the neck  
 The gullet offered swift and certain death.  
 It was there Achilles drove his spear through  
 As Hector charged. The heavy bronze apex

350

Pierced the soft neck but did not slit the windpipe,  
 So that Hector could speak still.

360

He fell back in the dust.

And Achilles exulted:

"So you thought you could get away with it  
 Didn't you, Hector? Killing Patroclus  
 And ripping off his armor, *my* armor,  
 Thinking I was too far away to matter.  
 You fool. His avenger was far greater—  
 And far closer—than you could imagine,  
 Biding his time back in our beachhead camp.  
 And now I have laid you out on the ground.  
 Dogs and birds are going to draw out your guts  
 While the Greeks give Patroclus burial."

370

And Hector, barely able to shake the words out:

"I beg you, Achilles, by your own soul  
 And by your parents, do not  
 Allow the dogs to mutilate my body  
 By the Greek ships. Accept the gold and bronze  
 Ransom my father and mother will give you  
 And send my body back home to be burned  
 In honor by the Trojans and their wives."

380

And Achilles, fixing him with a stare:

"Don't whine to me about my parents,  
 You dog! I wish my stomach would let me  
 Cut off your flesh in strips and eat it raw  
 For what you've done to me. There is no one  
 And no way to keep the dogs off your head,  
 Not even if they bring ten or twenty  
 Ransoms, pile them up here and promise more,  
 Not even if Dardanian Priam weighs your body

390

Out in gold, not even then will your mother  
Ever get to mourn you laid out on a bier.  
No, dogs and birds will eat every last scrap."

Helmet shining, Hector spoke his last words:

"So this is Achilles. There was no way  
To persuade you. Your heart is a lump  
Of iron. But the gods will not forget this,  
And I will have my vengeance on that day  
When Paris and Apollo destroy you  
In the long shadow of Troy's Western Gate."

400

Death's veil covered him as he said these things,  
And his soul, bound for Hades, fluttered out  
Resentfully, forsaking manhood's bloom.

He was dead when Achilles spoke to him:

"Die and be done with it. As for my fate,  
I'll accept it whenever Zeus sends it."

And he drew the bronze spear out of the corpse,  
Laid it aside, then stripped off the blood-stained armor.  
The other Greeks crowded around  
And could not help but admire Hector's  
Beautiful body, but still they stood there  
Stabbing their spears into him, smirking.

410

"Hector's a lot softer to the touch now  
Than he was when he was burning our ships,"

One of them would say, pulling out his spear.

After Achilles had stripped the body  
He rose like a god and addressed the Greeks:

"Friends, Argive commanders and counsellors,  
The gods have granted us this man's defeat,

Who did us more harm than all the rest  
Put together. What do you say we try  
Laying a close siege on the city now  
So we can see what the Trojans intend—  
Whether they will give up the citadel  
With Hector dead, or resolve to fight on?

But what am I thinking of? Patroclus' body  
Still lies by the ships, unmourned, unburied,  
Patroclus, whom I will never forget  
As long as I am among the living,  
Until I rise no more; and even if  
In Hades the dead do not remember,  
Even there I will remember my dear friend.

430

Now let us chant the victory paeon, sons  
Of the Achaeans, and march back to our ships  
With this hero in tow. The power and the glory  
Are ours. We have killed great Hector,  
Whom all the Trojans honored as a god."

But it was shame and defilement Achilles  
Had in mind for Hector. He pierced the tendons  
Above the heels and cinched them with leather thongs  
To his chariot, letting Hector's head drag.  
He mounted, hoisted up the prize armor,  
And whipped his team to a willing gallop  
Across the plain. A cloud of dust rose  
Where Hector was hauled, and the long black hair  
Fanned out from his head, so beautiful once,  
As it trailed in the dust. In this way Zeus  
Delivered Hector into his enemies' hands  
To be defiled in his own native land.

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Watching this from the wall, Hector's mother  
Tore off her shining veil and screamed,  
And his old father groaned pitifully,  
And all through town the people were convulsed  
With lamentation, as if Troy itself,  
The whole towering city, were in flames.  
They were barely able to restrain

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