

# The Iliad

## Book Seventeen The Fight Over Patroclus

*[The men fight over the body of Patroclus; the exploits of Menelaus in that fight; Apollo rouses Hector to attack, Menelaus retreats; Ajax and Menelaus then move up over the body; Glaucus upbraids Hector; Hector attacks again, with Zeus' support; the battle goes back and forth over the body; Zeus spreads fog over the battle field; Apollo rouses Aeneas to fight; the horses of Achilles mourn Patroclus, refusing to move; Automedon takes them into battle with Zeus' help; Hector and Aeneas go after Achilles' horses, but are pushed back; Athena rouses Menelaus to fight on; Apollo does the same for Hector; Achaeans are driven back; Zeus lifts the fog from the battle; Menelaus goes to Antilochus, tells him to give Achilles the news of Patroclus' death; the Achaeans move off with the body of Patroclus, back towards the ships]*

In that battle, warlike Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
noticed that the Trojans had just killed Patroclus.  
Dressed in gleaming armour, he strode through the ranks  
of those fighting in the front, then made a stand  
over the corpse, like a mother beside her calf,  
lowing over her first born, with no experience  
of giving birth till then. In just that way,  
fair-haired Menelaus stood above Patroclus.  
In front of him he held his spear and a round shield,  
[10] eager to kill anyone who might come at him.  
But Euphorbus, son of Panthous, with his ash spear,  
also knew that brave Patroclus had been killed.  
Moving up close to the dead body, he spoke out,  
addressing warlike Menelaus:

“Divinely raised Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
leader of men—go back. Leave this corpse.  
Abandon these battle trophies. No Trojan  
and no famous ally hit Patroclus  
before I struck him with my spear  
[20] in that murderous fight. So let the Trojans  
give me the honour and the fame. If not,  
I’ll steal your sweet life with one spear throw.”

With a great scowl, fair-haired Menelaus then replied:

“By Father Zeus, such arrogant boasting  
has no great merit. The spirit in a leopard,  
lion, or ferocious boar, whose chest  
contains the fiercest and the strongest fury—  
none of these, it seems, can match the arrogance  
in sons of Panthous with their long ash spears.

[30] But not even horse-taming Hyperenor,  
strong as he was, got much enjoyment  
from his youthful vigour, once he’d mocked me,  
as he waited when I came against him,  
calling me the most unworthy warrior  
among Danaans. I don’t think he went home  
to cheer up his dear wife and worthy parents  
on his own two feet. So if you stand here  
against me, I’ll drain your strength as well,  
just as I did his. In fact, I’d advise you  
[40] to retreat, get back to your companions.  
Don’t oppose me, in case you run into  
something unwelcome. From experience  
there are lessons even fools can learn.”

Menelaus spoke,  
but he failed to sway Euphorbus, who replied:

“Now, indeed, divinely raised Menelaus,  
you’ll surely make up for my brother’s death,  
Hyperenor, whom you killed. You speak  
in triumph about widowing his wife  
in her new bridal home, bringing sorrow,  
[50] grief beyond enduring, to his parents.  
I may provide them with a way of easing  
their sad misery, if I bring home your head  
and armour and toss them in the hands  
of Panthous and queen Phrontis. In any case,

we won't delay our struggle long. Let's start—  
fight on, whether for victory or flight.”

Saying this, Euphorbus struck Menelaus' round shield.  
But the bronze did not break through. The powerful shield  
bent back the point. Then Menelaus, Atreus' son,  
[60] praying to Father Zeus, charged in clutching his spear,  
as Euphorbus was moving back. He struck him  
at the bottom of his throat, putting his full weight  
behind the blow, with confidence in his strong fists.  
The spear point drove straight through Euphorbus' soft neck.  
He fell with a thud, his armour clanging round him.  
His hair, as lovely as the fine curls on the Graces,  
with braids in gold and silver clips, was soaked in blood.  
Just as a man tends a flourishing olive shoot,  
in some lonely place with a rich source of water,  
[70] a lovely vigorous sapling stirred with the motion  
of every breeze, so it bursts out in white blossoms—  
but then a sudden stormy wind arising rips it  
from its trench and lays it out prone on the earth—  
that's how Menelaus, son of Atreus, cut down  
Panthous' son, Euphorbus of the fine ash spear.  
He then began to strip the armour off.

Just as a mountain lion, trusting its own strength,  
snatches the finest heifer from a grazing herd,  
seizing her first by the neck in its powerful jaws,  
[80] then breaks the neck and savagely rips that cow apart,  
gorging itself on blood and all the entrails,  
while around it dogs and herdsmen cry out in distress,  
again and again, but at a distance, unwilling  
to confront the beast, pale in the grip of fear—  
in just that way, no Trojan's heart was brave enough  
to move up and fight against fine Menelaus.  
Then Atreus' son would have easily carried off  
the celebrated armour of the son of Panthous,  
if Phoebus Apollo had not been offended.

[90] He urged Hector, swift Ares' equal, to challenge  
Menelaus. Taking on the likeness of a man,  
Mentes, leader of the Cicones, Apollo  
addressed Hector with these winged words:

“Hector,  
now you're going after something you'll not catch,  
chasing the horses of warrior Achilles,  
descendant of Aeacus. No mortal man,  
except Achilles, can control or drive them,  
for an immortal mother gave him birth.  
Meanwhile, warrior Menelaus, Atreus' son,  
[100] standing by Patroclus, has just killed  
the best man of the Trojans, Euphorbus,  
son of Panthous, ending his brave fight.”

With these words, Apollo withdrew again, a god  
among the toiling men. A bitter cloud of sorrow  
darkened Hector's heart. Looking through the ranks of men,  
he quickly noticed Menelaus stripping off  
the famous armour, with Euphorbus on the ground,  
lying there, blood flowing from his open wound.  
Armed in his gleaming bronze, Hector marched ahead  
[110] through those fighting in the front, with a piercing shout,  
like the inextinguishable fires of Hephaestus.  
Hearing that penetrating yell, Atreus' son  
grew worried. He spoke to his courageous heart:

“Here's trouble. If I leave this fine armour  
and Patroclus, who lies here because he tried  
to avenge my honour, some Danaan,  
seeing this, will call me a disgrace.  
But if I fight Hector and his Trojans  
all by myself out of a sense of shame,  
[120] then they'll surround me—many warriors  
against one man. Hector's gleaming helmet  
is bringing all the Trojans straight at me.

But why's my fond heart debating about this?  
When a man wants to cross what gods have willed,  
fighting a man the gods are honouring,  
then some disaster soon rolls over him.  
So none of the Danaans seeing me here  
moving back from Hector will find that shameful,  
seeing that Hector fights with gods' assistance.  
[130] But if I could find Ajax, skilled in war shouts,  
the two of us, drawing on our fighting strength,  
might come back, even against god's will,  
so we could find a way to save this corpse,  
for Achilles' sake, the son of Peleus.  
In this bad situation, that's what's best."

As Menelaus thought these matters over  
in his mind and heart, the Trojan ranks moved forward,  
with Hector in the lead. Menelaus then backed off,  
leaving the corpse behind. He kept looking round,  
[140] like a bearded lion which dogs and men chase off—  
their spears and shouts drive it from the farm. The beast's heart,  
though brave, grows cold, moving from that farmyard  
against its will—that's how fair-haired Menelaus  
backed off from Patroclus. He turned round, standing firm,  
once he'd reached the company of his companions.  
He looked for mighty Ajax, son of Telamon,  
and soon observed him on the left flank of the army,  
rallying his companions, urging them to fight.  
For Phoebus Apollo had made them all fall back  
[150] in an amazing panic. Going off on the run,  
Menelaus came up to Ajax, then spoke out:

"Ajax, my friend, come here. Let's hurry over  
to defend the dead Patroclus. Let's see whether,  
for Achilles' sake, we can at least retrieve  
the naked corpse. Hector with his bright helmet  
already has the armour."

Menelaus spoke,  
rousing the heart in warlike Ajax, who moved up  
among those fighting in the front. With him went  
fair-haired Menelaus. Once Hector had stripped off  
[160] the famous armour from Patroclus, he then tried  
to drag away the body, so with his sharp bronze  
he could hack Patroclus' head from off its shoulders,  
then pull back the corpse to give to Trojan dogs.  
But Ajax moved in close with his shield up, like a wall.  
So Hector gave ground, withdrawing to the company  
of his companions, then jumped up in his chariot.  
He gave the splendid armour to some Trojans  
to carry to the city, something that would bring him  
special glory. Ajax then covered Menoetius' son  
[170] with his broad shield and made his stand there, like a lion  
over its cubs, a beast which hunters run across  
in the forest as it leads its young along.  
The lion shows off its power and contracts its brows  
into fine slits which conceal its eyes—that's how Ajax  
defended warrior Patroclus. With him there,  
on the other side, stood war-loving Menelaus,  
son of Atreus, heart filled with utmost sorrow.

Then Glaucus, son of Hippolochus, commander  
of the Lycians, looking at Hector with a frown,  
criticized him harshly:

[180] "Hector, to look at you,  
you're the finest man we've got, but in battle  
you're sadly lacking. That fame you have  
as a courageous warrior is misplaced.  
You're a man who runs away. Consider now,  
how are you going to save your city  
only with those soldiers born in Ilion?  
For no Lycian will set out to fight  
against Danaans for your city's sake,  
since there's apparently no gratitude

[190] for taking on our enemies without a rest.

How can you rescue a lesser warrior  
from the thick of battle, ungrateful man,  
when Sarpedon, once your companion,  
your guest, you abandon to the Argives,  
to become their battle spoils, their trophy.  
He often served you well—both your city  
and you personally, while he was alive.

But now you lack the courage to protect him  
from the dogs. So now, if any Lycian man

[200] will listen to me, we'll go home, and Troy  
will witness its utter devastation.

If Trojans now could fill themselves with courage,  
a resolute and dauntless spirit, the sort  
men have when they defend their native land,  
struggling hard against a hostile army,  
then we'd haul Patroclus back to Ilion  
at once. If we pulled him from the battle  
and brought the corpse to Priam's mighty city,  
Argives would quickly trade the lovely armour

[210] belonging to Sarpedon, and we could then  
take his body back to Troy. Their dead man  
attended on the greatest of the Argives,  
who leads the best spear fighters by their ships.  
But you don't dare stand up to Ajax  
in the thick of battle, look that brave warrior  
in the eye, or confront him one on one,  
since he's a better man than you."

Hector of the gleaming helmet, looking angry, then replied:

"Glaucus, why would a man like you speak out  
[220] so arrogantly? My friend, I thought you had  
a better mind than any other man  
living in fertile Lycia. But now,  
on the basis of what you've just said,  
I find your thinking questionable.

You say I didn't stand to fight great Ajax.  
I'm not afraid of war, the din of chariots,  
but there's always something more powerful,  
the mind of Zeus, who bears the aegis.  
Zeus makes even brave men run away,  
[230] stealing their victory with ease, or in person  
rouses men to fight. But come, my friend,  
stand here beside me. Look at what I do,  
whether I'm a coward all day long,  
as you allege, or whether I'll prevent  
Danaans, for all their fighting frenzy,  
from defending dead Patroclus."

Hector spoke.  
Then, with a great shout, he called out to his Trojans:

"Trojans, Lycians, Dardan spearmen,  
be men, my friends. Recall your battle fury,  
[240] until I can put on the lovely armour  
of great Achilles, which I stripped off  
the great Patroclus, once I'd killed him."

With these words, Hector of the shining helmet  
left that furious conflict and strode quickly off  
with rapid strides, following his companions,  
the men taking the famous armour of Achilles  
towards the city. He caught them a short distance off.  
Then, standing apart from that dreadful fight,  
he changed his armour. He gave his own equipment  
[250] to war-loving Trojans to carry to the city,  
sacred Ilion, then put on the immortal armour  
of Achilles, son of Peleus, which heavenly gods  
had given to Achilles' well-loved father.  
Once he'd grown old, Peleus gave it to his son,  
who, for all his father's armour, did not reach old age.

From far away, cloud-gatherer Zeus gazed down on Hector,



as he dressed himself in the battle armour  
of Peleus' godlike son. Shaking his head, Zeus  
then spoke to his own heart:

“You poor wretch,  
[260] you're not considering your own death at all—  
it's getting closer. So you're putting on  
the immortal armour of the finest man,  
who makes other men afraid. You've just killed  
his comrade, a kind, courageous man,  
and then vainly stripped the armour off  
his head and shoulders. But for the moment,  
I'll give you great power, to compensate you,  
since you'll not be coming back from battle,  
or handing over to Andromache  
[270] the glorious armour of the son of Peleus.”

The son of Cronos spoke, then nodded his dark brow.  
He changed the armour so it suited Hector's body.  
Then the fearful war god Ares entered Hector,  
filling his limbs with strength and courage. He set off,  
to the tremendous shouts of all his famous allies,  
as he paraded there in front of them, dazzling them all  
with the armour of the great-hearted son of Peleus.  
Hector moved around with words of encouragement  
to everyone—Mesthles, Glaucus, Medon,  
[280] Thersilochus, Asteropaeus, Deisenor,  
Hippothous, Phorcys, Chroraius, and Ennomus,  
who read omens found in birds. Hector urged them on—  
his words had wings:

“Listen to me,  
you countless tribes of allies, you neighbours.  
I called you here, each from your own city,  
not because I wished a large display  
or needed it, but so you might help me  
rescue Trojan wives and little children

from warrior Achaeans. With this in mind,  
[290] I squander the resources of my people,  
with food supplies and presents, to strengthen  
hearts in each of you. So now let everyone  
turn round and face the enemy directly,  
whether to survive or die. For in that choice  
we find the joy which we derive from war.  
Patroclus is dead, but whoever pulls him  
to horse-taming Trojans here and makes Ajax  
move away—I'll give him half the spoils,  
keeping the other half myself, and he'll get  
[300] a share of glory equal to my own."

Hector finished. Trojans then threw their full weight  
straight at the Danaans, holding spears up high,  
their hearts hoping they would drag that body  
away from Ajax, son of Telamon. What fools!  
By that corpse Ajax took many of their lives.

Then Ajax said to Menelaus, skilled at war shouts:

"Divinely reared Menelaus, my friend,  
I don't expect we two will be returning  
from this battle. I'm not concerned so much  
[310] about Patroclus' corpse, which soon enough  
will be food for Trojan dogs and birds,  
but I fear for my own head, and yours, as well,  
which may be in danger. Hector's become  
a war cloud which envelops everything.  
And our complete destruction's plain to see.  
So come, call out to Achaea's finest men.  
One of them may hear."

Ajax finished.

Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, followed his advice.  
He shouted to Danaans with a piercing yell:

[320] “Friends, rulers and leaders of Achaeans,  
all you who drink your wine at public cost  
with Agamemnon and Menelaus,  
sons of Atreus, all you who rule your people,  
to whom Zeus has given honour and glory,  
it’s difficult for me to see precisely  
what each of you is doing—this conflict  
rages on so fiercely. But all of you  
must come here, even if not called by name,  
for you’ll feel shame and anger in your hearts,  
[330] if Patroclus should become a toy  
for Trojan dogs to play with.”

Menelaus stopped.

Swift Ajax, son of Oïleus, heard him clearly.  
He was the first to come running through the battle  
to meet Menelaus. After him came others—  
Idomeneus and his companion Meriones,  
the man-killing war god’s equal, and others, too.  
But what man has a mind which could name all those  
who came up behind these warriors in that conflict  
to reinforce Achaeans?

Trojans then drove forward

[340] in a single group with Hector leading them.  
Just as a huge wave roars into a flowing stream  
at the mouth of a river fed from heaven,  
with headlands on both sides of the shoreline  
echoing the boom of salt water surf beyond—  
that’s how Trojans roared as they came on in attack.  
Achaeans held firm around Menoetius’ son,  
united by a common spirit, behind a fence  
of their bronze shields. The son of Cronos  
cast a thick mist down on their glittering helmets,  
[350] for Zeus had not felt hostile to Patroclus  
in earlier days, when he was alive and comrade  
to Achilles. So Zeus did not want Patroclus

to become merely a plaything for the dogs  
of his Trojan enemies. Thus, he encouraged  
Patroclus' companions to defend him there.  
At first the Trojans drove bright-eyed Achaeans back,  
so they retreated from the body, leaving it behind.  
But the Trojans, though confident with their long spears,  
did not kill anyone, for all their eagerness.  
[360] Still, they did begin to drag away the body.  
But the Achaean pull back was only temporary,  
for Ajax quickly rallied them. Of all Danaans  
he was the finest in his looks and actions  
after the son of Peleus. Ajax strode around  
through those fighting in the front, like a mountain boar  
who scatters dogs and strong young men with ease,  
as it wheels through forest clearings—that's how Ajax,  
splendid son of noble Telamon, easily pushed back  
the Trojan ranks, as he moved among them. They stood there,  
[370] over Patroclus, wanting desperately to haul him off,  
back to their city, and win glory for themselves.

Then Hippothous, noble son of Pelasgian Lethous,  
began to drag the body by the feet back through the crowd.  
He'd tied his shield strap round both ankle tendons,  
eager to please Hector and the Trojans. But right away  
he faced a danger which no one could avert,  
no matter how much he might want to. For Ajax,  
moving quickly through the throng, struck him at close range  
on the bronze cheek piece of his helmet. The spear point  
[380] smashed through the helmet with its horsehair crest, driven on  
by the force of Ajax's mighty fists in that huge spear.  
Blood and brains gushed from the wound and oozed together  
along the socket of the spear. The strength drained out of him  
where he was standing. Hippothous let go the feet  
of brave Patroclus, allowing them to fall and lie there.  
Then he collapsed, falling face down on the body,  
far away from rich Larissa. He did not repay  
his parents for the work they'd done to rear him—

he did not live long enough, slaughtered on the spear  
of great-hearted Ajax.

[390] Hector then threw his shining spear  
at Ajax. But he was directly facing Hector,  
so he saw it coming. Ajax dodged the weapon,  
but only just. It hit Schedius, by far the best  
of men from Phocis, son of great-hearted Iphitus,  
who lived at home in celebrated Panopeus,  
ruling many men. Hector's spear struck this man  
right on the collar bone. The bronze point drove on through  
and came out by his shoulder. He fell with a crash,  
his armour rattling round him. Then Ajax struck,  
[400] hitting warlike Phorcys, Phaenops' son, in the gut,  
as he stood over Hippothous. Breaking the plate  
on body armour, the bronze sliced out his innards.  
Phorcys fell in the dust, fingers clawing at the earth.  
At that point glorious Hector and his foremost men  
drew back. With a tremendous shout, Argives dragged off  
the bodies of dead Hippothous and Phorcys.  
They began to strip the armour from their shoulders.

Right then war-loving Achaeans would have driven Trojans  
back to Ilion, conquered by their own cowardice,  
[410] with Argives winning glory beyond what Zeus decreed,  
through their own strong power. But Apollo himself  
stirred up Aeneas, taking on the form of Periphas,  
the herald, son of Epytos, who'd grown old  
serving as herald to Aeneas' old father.  
He was wise and well-disposed towards Aeneas.  
In this man's form, Apollo, son of Zeus, spoke up:

“Aeneas, can you not defend steep Ilion  
in defiance of some god? I've seen other men  
who trusted their strong power and courage  
[420] and with their numbers held their country  
against Zeus' will. But Zeus wants us to win

far more than the Danaans, and you all suffer  
countless fears and won't keep battling on."

He finished. Aeneas recognized Apollo,  
the far shooter, once he'd looked into his face.  
Aeneas then shouted out, addressing Hector:

"Hector and the rest of you commanders,  
both Trojans and allies, it would be shameful  
if war-loving Achaeans drive us back  
[430] all the way to Ilion, if we're beaten  
by our cowardice. Some god's just told me—  
he came and stood beside me—that even now  
in this fight high counsellor Zeus is helping us.  
So let's go straight at these Danaans,  
and not let them carry dead Patroclus  
back to their ships without a battle."

Aeneas finished.  
He strode far ahead of all the fighters at the front,  
then stood there. Trojans rallied round and made a stand,  
facing the Achaeans. With his spear, Aeneas  
[440] then struck down Leocritus, son of Arisbas,  
the courageous companion of Lycomedes.  
As he fell, war-loving Lycomedes pitied him.  
He moved in close, stood there, and threw his shining spear.  
It hit Apisaon, a son of Hippasus,  
shepherd of his people, below his abdomen,  
right in the liver. Apisaon's limbs collapsed.  
He'd come from fertile Paeonia, their best man  
in a fight after Asteropaeus, and his fall  
filled warrior Asteropaeus with sorrow.  
[450] He charged ahead, ready to fight Danaans.  
But that was now impossible. For they stood there,  
in a group around Patroclus, holding up their shields  
on every side, with their spears extending outward.  
Ajax moved around among them all, giving orders,

telling them that no man should move back from the corpse  
or stride out to fight in front of massed Achaeans.  
They must all stand firm around the body, fighting  
hand to hand. That's what mighty Ajax ordered.  
Dark blood soaked the earth. The pile of dead bodies grew,  
[460] as they fell—Trojans, proud allies, Danaans, too,  
all together. For as Danaans fought, they shed  
their own blood also. But far fewer of them died,  
for they were careful to protect each other  
from complete destruction in that fighting crowd.

So they fought on, like blazing fire. You couldn't tell  
whether sun and moon still shone, for in that fight  
a mist surrounded all the best men standing there  
beside Menoetius' dead son. Meanwhile, other Trojans  
fought other well-armed Achaeans undisturbed,  
[470] under a clear sky, bright sunshine all around them,  
no clouds above the entire earth or on the mountains.  
So they fought more casually, keeping their distance,  
staying out of range of each other's painful weapons.  
But soldiers in the centre were suffering badly  
in the fog and fighting. The pitiless bronze  
was wearing down the finest men.

But two warriors,  
Thrasymedes and Antilochus, well-known men,  
had not yet learned about the death of lord Patroclus.  
They thought he was still alive, fighting the Trojans  
[480] in the front ranks of the throng. These two were fighting  
some distance off, watching their companions, keeping track  
of who was killed or fleeing back, as Nestor had instructed,  
when he'd urged them into battle by their black ships.

Throughout that entire day the great combat raged,  
a bitter conflict. The men kept toiling on without a pause,  
sweat dripping on their knees and legs, under their feet,  
and running down men's eyes and hands, as both sides

battled over swift-footed Achilles' brave companion.  
Just as a man gives his people a huge bull's hide  
[490] to stretch, after soaking it in fat, and they stand,  
once they've picked it up, in a circle pulling hard,  
so the moisture quickly leaves the hide, as the fat  
soaks in under the tension of so many hands  
stretching the entire skin as far as it will go—  
that's how those men on both sides pulled at the corpse,  
back and forth in a narrow space, hearts full of hope—  
Trojans seeking to drag it back to Ilion,  
Achaean to their hollow ships. Around Patroclus  
the conflict grew intense. Neither Ares nor Athena,  
[500] who incite warriors to battle, if they'd seen that fight,  
would have disparaged it, not even if they'd been  
intensely angry. That's how destructive Zeus made  
the conflict for men and horses that day men fought  
over Patroclus.

Godlike Achilles, at this time,  
knew nothing of Patroclus' death, for they were fighting  
under the walls of Troy, away from the fast ships.  
He'd never imagined in his heart that Patroclus  
was dead. He thought he was alive and would return  
once he'd reached the gates. He didn't think  
[510] he'd lay waste the city with him or without him,  
for often Achilles had learned this from his mother,  
listening to her in private, when she'd told him  
what great Zeus had planned. But at that time, Thetis  
said nothing of the evil which had taken place,  
the death of his companion, his dearest friend by far.

But those beside the corpse kept holding their sharp spears,  
with no pause in the fighting. The mutual slaughter  
continued on. Bronze-armed Achaeans talked together,  
using words like these:

“My friends,



[520] there'd be no glory for us if we went back  
to the hollow ships. So let the black earth  
open here for each of us. That would be better  
for us all by far than if we leave this corpse  
for horse-taming Trojans to carry off,  
back to their city, winning glory."

Great-heated Trojans, too, spoke words like these:

"Friends, if we're all fated to be killed together  
by this man, let no one leave the battle."

Men talked like this to strengthen their companions.

[530] Then they fought on, the smash of iron rising up  
through the bronze sky. But the horses of Achilles,  
descendant of Aeacus, stood some distance from the fight,  
weeping from the time they first learned their charioteer  
had fallen in the dust at the hands of Hector,  
killer of men. Automedon, brave son of Diores,  
often lashed them with a stroke of his quick whip,  
and often spoke to them with soothing words or threats,  
but the two weren't willing to withdraw back to the ships  
by the broad Hellespont, or go towards Achaeans

[540] locked in battle. They stayed beside their ornate chariot,  
immobile, like a pillar standing on the tomb  
of some dead man or woman, heads bowed down to earth.  
Warm tears flowed from their eyes onto the ground,  
as they cried, longing for their driver. Their thick manes,  
covered in dirt, trailed down below their harnesses  
on both sides of the yoke. Looking at those horses,  
as they mourned, the son of Cronos pitied them.  
Shaking his head, Zeus spoke to his own heart:

"Poor horses!

Why did we give you to king Peleus,

[550] a mortal man, for you're immortal, ageless?

Was it so you'd experience sorrow

among unhappy men? For the truth is this—  
of all the things which breathe or move on earth,  
nothing is more miserable than man.  
But at least Hector, Priam's son, won't mount you  
or drive your finely decorated chariot.  
That I won't permit. Is it not enough  
he wears his armour and then brags about it?  
I'll put strength into your legs and hearts,  
[560] so you can carry Automedon safely  
from this battle back to the hollow ships.  
For I'll still grant glory to the Trojans,  
to keep on killing till they reach the ships,  
at sunset, when sacred darkness comes."

Saying this, Zeus breathed great strength into those horses.  
The two shook out their manes, so the dirt fell on the ground.  
They then set off towards the Trojans and Achaeans,  
quickly pulling the fast chariot along with them.  
Behind them Automedon joined the fighting,  
[570] though still grieving for his comrade, swooping down  
in that chariot like a vulture on a flock of geese.  
He easily escaped the Trojan battle noise  
and then with ease charged into the large crowd once more.  
But in these attacks he didn't kill a man,  
as he rushed to chase them down. It was impossible,  
for in the sacred chariot he was by himself.  
He couldn't wield a spear and manage those swift horses.  
But at last one of his companions noticed him,  
Alcimedon, son of Laerces, Haemon's son.  
[580] Standing behind the chariot, he cried to Automedon:

"Automedon, what god put inside your chest  
this useless plan, stealing your common sense?  
You're fighting against the Trojans by yourself,  
in the front ranks of the crowd. Your comrade  
has been killed, and on his shoulders Hector  
is now wearing the armour of Achilles—

he celebrates his glorious triumph.”

Automedon, son of Diores, replied:

“Alcimedon, what Achaean warrior  
[590] is better able to control and guide  
these strong immortal horses than yourself,  
except Patroclus, a man as wise as gods,  
while he was alive? Now he’s met his death,  
his fate. So take the shining reins and whip.  
I’ll get down from the chariot and fight.”

Automedon spoke. Then Alcimedon, springing up  
into that fast chariot, quickly grabbed the reins and whip.  
Automedon jumped out. Seeing this, glorious Hector  
at once spoke to Aeneas, who was close by:

[600] “Aeneas, counselor to bronze-armed Trojans,  
I see the two-horse team of swift Achilles  
coming to this fighting with poor charioteers.  
That pair I’d like to capture, if your heart  
is willing, since those men lack the courage  
to confront the two of us, if we attack,  
or to stand and fight against us both.”

Hector spoke. Anchises’ strong son was not unwilling.  
So the two moved straight ahead, guarding their shoulders  
under bull’s hide shields, tanned and tough, with thick bronze  
[610] hammered out on top. With them went Chromius,  
and godlike Aretus, fully hoping in their hearts  
they’d kill the men, then drive those strong-necked horses off.  
What fools! They would not return from Automedon  
without shedding their own blood. Then Automedon  
prayed to Father Zeus, and his dark heart was filled  
with strength and courage. Immediately he spoke out  
to Alcimedon, his loyal companion:

“Alcimedon,  
make sure you keep the horses close to me,  
so they breathe right on my neck. I don’t think  
[620] Hector, son of Priam, will check his fury,  
until he’s killed the pair of us and climbed  
behind the fine manes of these horses  
belonging to Achilles, then driven in flight  
the Argive ranks, or himself been slaughtered  
among the front-line fighters.”

Automedon finished,  
then shouted to both Ajaxes and Menelaus:

“You Ajaxes, both Argive leaders, Menelaus,  
leave that corpse to the rest of our best men,  
who’ll stand firm around it. Protect the two of us  
[630] from ruthless fate while we’re still living.  
For Hector and Aeneas, Troy’s best men  
in this harsh fight, are coming hard against us.  
But these things lie in the lap of the gods,  
so I’ll attempt a throw—whatever happens,  
it’s all up to Zeus.”

Saying this, Automedon  
hefted his long-shadowed spear and threw it, hitting  
the round shield of Aretus, which didn’t stop it.  
The bronze went straight on through, severed his belt,  
then drove low in his stomach. Just as a strong man  
[640] with a sharp axe strikes a farm ox right behind its horns,  
slicing clean through sinews, so the ox stumbles forward  
and falls down—that’s how Aretus jerked forward and then fell  
onto his back. Once that sharp spear impaled itself,  
quivering in his organs, his limbs gave way.  
Then Hector threw his bright spear at Automedon,  
but since he was directly facing Hector,  
he saw the bronze spear coming and evaded it  
by leaning forward. The long spear stuck in the ground

behind him, its shaft trembling until great Ares  
[650] stilled its force. Now they would have charged each other  
and fought hand to hand with swords, but the Ajaxes  
made them move apart for all their battle fury.  
They came through the crowd answering their comrade's shout.  
Hector, Aeneas, and godlike Chromius,  
afraid of both Ajaxes, moved back once again,  
leaving Aretus lying there with a mortal wound.  
Automedon, swift Ares' equal, stripped the armour,  
boasting in triumph:

"I've managed here  
to ease somewhat my heart's grief for the death  
[660] of Menoetius' son, though the man I've killed  
is a lesser man than he."

With these words,  
he took the blood-stained spoils and put them in the chariot.  
Then he got in, feet and upper arms all bloody,  
like a lion that's just gorged itself on cattle.

Then once more over Patroclus the bitter fight  
resumed—fierce and full of sorrow. Athena  
stirred up the conflict, coming down from heaven,  
sent by wide-seeing Zeus to urge on the Danaans.  
For his mind had changed. Just as for mortal men  
[670] Zeus bends his coloured rainbow down from heaven,  
an omen prophesying war or some harsh storm,  
upsetting flocks and stopping men from work  
upon the earth—that's how Athena then placed herself  
in the Achaean throng, wrapped in a purple mist.  
She stirred up all the men, giving encouragement  
first to courageous Menelaus, son of Atreus,  
who was close by her. Taking the form of Phoenix,  
in his untiring voice she said:

"Surely, Menelaus,

you'll be disgraced, have to hang your head in shame,  
[680] if Achilles' fine and loyal companion  
is ravaged by swift dogs beneath Troy's walls.  
So be brave. Stand firm. Encourage all your men."

Menelaus, expert in war shouts, answered her:

"Old Phoenix, you venerable old man,  
if only Athena would give me strength,  
defend me from this shower of weapons,  
I'd be happy to stand above Patroclus,  
protecting him. His death has touched my heart.  
But Hector has the power of deadly fire.  
[690] He won't stop cutting men down with his bronze,  
for Zeus is giving him the glory."

Menelaus' words pleased the bright-eyed goddess,  
Athena, for he'd first prayed to her of all the gods.  
She put strength into his shoulders and his knees.  
Then in his chest she set the persistence of a gnat,  
which, no matter how much one brushes it away  
from someone's skin, keeps on biting—it finds human blood  
so sweet—with that stamina she filled up his dark heart.  
Standing over Patroclus, he hurled his shining spear.  
[700] Among the Trojans was a rich, brave man called Podes,  
son of Eëtion, to whom Hector granted  
special honour among men as his companion,  
his good friend at a feast. Fair-haired Menelaus  
struck him with his spear, as he began to flee.  
He hit him on the belt. The bronze drove straight on through.  
Podes fell with a thud. Then Menelaus, Atreus' son,  
dragged the corpse away from Trojans into the crowd  
of his companions.

At that point, Apollo  
came up close to Hector to reinforce his spirit.  
[710] He took the form of Phaenops, son of Asius,

of all Hector's guests the one he liked the most.  
Phaenops lived at home in Abydos. In his shape,  
Apollo, son of Zeus, spoke out:

"Hector,  
which of the Achaeans will now fear you,  
since you're afraid of Menelaus,  
who so far has been a feeble spearman?  
But all by himself he's snatched a body  
from the Trojans and gone off with it.  
He's killed your trusty comrade Podes,  
[720] Eëtion's son, a noble front-line warrior."

As he spoke, black clouds of grief enveloped Hector.  
He strode by the foremost fighters, armed in gleaming bronze.  
Then the son of Cronos took his tasselled aegis,  
all glittering, hid Ida behind clouds, then flashed  
his lightning, with a tremendous peal of thunder,  
as he shook the aegis, awarding victory  
to Trojans and making Achaeans run away.

The first to begin the rout was Peneleus,  
a Boeotian. Standing there facing the enemy,  
[730] as usual, he was hit in the shoulder by a spear  
from Polydamas, who'd come in close to throw.  
It was a glancing blow, but the point of the spear  
sliced quite near the bone. Then at close quarters, Hector  
attacked Leitus, son of great-hearted Alectryon.  
Hector sliced his wrist, and so his fighting ended.  
Looking around him anxiously, Leitus drew back—  
he knew if he couldn't grip his spear, he had no hope  
of fighting Trojans. As Hector went at Leitus,  
Idomeneus threw and struck his body armour  
[740] on the chest, right beside the nipple. But the long spear  
broke at the socket. The Trojans gave a shout.  
Then Hector threw a spear at Idomeneus,  
Deucalion's son. He missed him, but not by much.

He did hit Coeranus, Meriones' comrade,  
his charioteer, who'd followed him from well-built Lyctus.  
Idomeneus had come from the curving ships that day  
on foot and would've given the Trojans a great triumph,  
if Coeranus hadn't quickly driven up  
with his swift-footed horses. For Idomeneus  
[750] he came as a saving light, protecting him  
from ruthless fate. But the act cost him his life  
at the hands of man-killing Hector, who struck him  
underneath his jaw and ear. The spear smashed his teeth,  
roots and all, splitting his tongue in half. Coeranus  
tumbled from the chariot. The reins fell on the ground.  
Meriones stooped down and scooped them from the plain  
with his own hands, then spoke to Idomeneus:

“Now lash these horses on until you reach  
our swift ships. For you recognize yourself  
[760] that Achaeans will not win this victory.”

Meriones finished. And so Idomeneus  
whipped the fair-maned horses back to the hollow ships,  
for by now a fear had fallen on his heart, as well.

Great-hearted Ajax and Menelaus also knew  
that Zeus had turned the tide of battle now, giving  
victory to the Trojans. The first one to speak  
was Telamonian Ajax:

“Here's a problem.  
Even a fool can see that Father Zeus  
is now personally helping Trojans.  
[770] All their flying weapons hit a target,  
whether a brave man throws them or a coward—  
Zeus makes them all fly straight. In our case,  
all our throws fall wasted on the ground.  
But come, let's sort out the best course of action,  
so we both can drag the corpse and then get back



in person to bring joy to our companions.  
They must be anxious as they watch us here,  
thinking we can't check the fighting frenzy  
of man-killing Hector, his all-conquering hands,  
[780] and we'll withdraw to our black ships. I wish  
some comrade would report back quickly  
to Peleus' son, for I don't think he's learned  
the dreadful news of his dear comrade's death.  
But I can't see any Argive who could do that.  
Men and horses are all shrouded in this mist.  
Father Zeus, rescue these Achaean sons  
from this fog, make the sky clear, let us see  
with our own eyes. Since it gives you pleasure,  
kill us, but do in the light of day."

[790] As he finished, Ajax wept. Father Zeus pitied him.  
At once he dispersed the mist, scattering the haze.  
The sun shone down, and all the fight came into view.  
Then Ajax spoke to Menelaus, skilled at war shouts:

"Look now, divinely raised Menelaus,  
see if you can spot Antilochus alive,  
son of great-hearted Nestor. Get him to go  
with speed to rouse up fiery Achilles,  
by telling him his companion, the man  
he loves the most by far, has just been killed."

[800] Ajax spoke. Menelaus, expert at war shouts, agreed.  
He went off like some lion moving from a farm,  
exhausted by his attacks on dogs and men,  
who prevent it tearing flesh out of some cow,  
keeping their watch all night—but ravenous for meat,  
the beast keeps charging in without success, for spears  
rain down, thrown by keen hands, then burning sticks,  
which, for all his fierce desire, make him afraid,  
so he slinks away at dawn in disappointment—  
that's how Menelaus, skilled at war cries,

[810] left Patroclus, much against his will—he feared  
Achaean might be pushed back in painful flight,  
leaving the corpse a trophy for the enemy.  
He issued many orders to Meriones  
to the Ajaxes, as well:

“You two Ajaxes,  
Argive leaders, and you, Meriones,  
let each man bear in mind the kindnesses  
of poor Patroclus, who, when he was alive,  
knew how to treat every man with care.  
Now fatal death has overtaken him.”

[820] With these words, fair-haired Menelaus went away,  
glancing warily in all directions, like an eagle,  
which, men say, has the sharpest sight of all the animals  
flying in the sky—a bird which, while soaring high,  
doesn’t miss the swiftly running hare crouched down  
under a leafy bush, and, swooping low, seizes it  
at once, and then tears out its life—that’s how, Menelaus,  
raised by gods, your bright eyes kept searching all around  
through groups of many comrades, seeking Nestor’s son,  
to see if he was still alive. Then Menelaus,

[830] quickly seeing him on the left flank of the battle  
encouraging his companions, urging them to fight,  
came up to him. Then fair-haired Menelaus said:

“Divinely raised Antilochus, come here,  
so you can learn the painful news, something  
I wish had never happened. You already know,  
I think, for your own eyes can see it,  
how some god is rolling this disaster  
over the Danaans, giving victory  
to the Trojans. The best Achaean,

[840] Patroclus, has been slaughtered, a huge loss  
for the Danaans, who miss him badly.  
You must run quickly to Achaean ships

to tell Achilles, so he can bring the corpse  
in safety to his ship—the naked body,  
for now Hector of the gleaming helmet  
wears his armour.”

Menelaus finished speaking.

Hearing that news, Antilochus was overwhelmed.

For a long time he stood in shock, speechless. His eyes  
filled up with tears, his strong voice failed. But even so,

[850] he did not neglect what Menelaus told him.

Giving his armour to his noble comrade

Laodocus, who drove the horses close beside him,

he set off on the run. As he wept, his swift feet

took him from the battle, bearing the bad news

to Achilles, son of Peleus. And then your heart,

divinely raised Menelaus, had no desire

to help defend the hard-pressed comrades left there

by Antilochus, men of Pylos, who felt his loss

severely. But to assist them, Menelaus

[860] sent godlike Thrasymedes. Then he went in person

to stand by warrior Patroclus. Running over,

he took up a position by both Ajaxes and said:

“I’ve sent Antilochus to our fast ships,

to swift Achilles. Still, I don’t expect

he’ll come out now, no matter how enraged

he is with godlike Hector. He can’t fight

at all against the Trojans without armour.

But now we should consider for ourselves

the best thing we should do, so we’ll be able

[870] to haul off the corpse and leave this Trojan tumult,

escaping our own death and our destruction.”

Great Telamonian Ajax then answered him:

“Glorious Menelaus, everything you say

is true enough. So you and Meriones

stoop down and lift the body quickly,  
as fast possible. Take it from this fight.  
We'll hold off the Trojans and godlike Hector,  
standing behind you with a single heart,  
just as we share one name. We've stood firm before,  
[880] holding our positions by each other,  
in the face of Ares, the fierce god of war."

Ajax spoke. Then they raised the body off the ground,  
lifting it high with one great heave. Behind them,  
Trojans soldiers gave a shout, as they saw Achaeans  
hoisting up the corpse. They went after them like hounds  
charging ahead of youthful hunters, as they chase  
some wounded wild boar, keen to rip it into pieces,  
but once it wheels around on them, sure of its strength,  
they run back in fear, scattering in all directions—  
[890] that's how groups of Trojans kept following them a while,  
thrusting at them with swords and double-bladed spears,  
but when both Ajaxes turned round to stand against them,  
their colour changed, and no one dared rush forward  
to battle for the dead.

So these men worked hard  
to bring that body from the battle to the hollow ships,  
in the face of a fierce conflict, like some fire  
suddenly rushing at a city full of people,  
setting it alight, so houses fall among the flames,  
as winds whip the inferno on. That's how the din  
[900] of chariots and spearmen coming up against them  
kept resounding as they moved along. But like mules  
throwing their great strength into their work, as they haul  
a beam or huge ship timber on an uneven path  
down from the mountains, hearts worn out with the strain,  
as they work on covered in sweat—that's how these men  
strove hard to carry off the corpse. Behind them,  
both Ajaxes held off the enemy. Just as  
a wooded ridge which cuts across a plain holds back

a flood, even the strong flow of some harsh rivers,  
[910] pushing their waters back to go across the plain,  
for the strength of their current cannot rupture it—  
that's how both Ajaxes held back the Trojans then  
in that fight. But Trojans kept up their pursuit,  
especially two of them—Aeneas, Anchises' son,  
and glorious Hector. Just as a flock of daws or starlings  
flies off in screaming fear, once they see a falcon  
as it comes after them, bringing death to all small birds—  
that's how the young Achaean soldiers ran off then,  
away from Hector and Aeneas, screaming in panic,  
[920] forgetting all their fierce desire for battle.  
As Danaans fled, plenty of fine weapons fell  
around the ditch. But there was no let up in the war.