

# The Iliad

## Book Twenty One Achilles Fights the River

*[Achilles attacks the Trojans hiding in the river Xanthus (also called Scamander); takes twelve young men alive to sacrifice for Patroclus; Achilles meets Lycaon, who begs for mercy; Achilles replies and then kills Lycaon; Achilles fights and kills Asteropaeus, then slaughters many Paeonian leaders; the river objects to the slaughter; the river rises against Achilles, who appeals to the gods for help; Hera appeals to Hephaestus to fight the river; Hephaestus launches his fire against the flooding river; the river gives up, so Hephaestus withdraws his fire; the gods begin to fight each other; Athena fights Ares and then Aphrodite; Poseidon offers to fight Apollo, who declines; Hera and Artemis fight; Apollo moves into Ilion; Apollo deceives Achilles, enabling many Trojans to reach the city]*

When the Trojans reached the ford across the Xanthus,  
lovely swirling river born of immortal Zeus,  
Achilles split them in two groups, chasing one  
across the plain towards the city, where the previous day  
Achaeans had fled in terror, when glorious Hector  
had prevailed. Some Trojans fled back there in panic.  
Hera sent fog in front of them to slow them down.  
But half the Trojans were crammed in along the river,  
trapped by its deep currents and its silver eddies.  
[10] They fell in there, making a huge commotion.  
The noise roared down along the rushing river banks  
amplifying the din. Men thrashed around, back and forth,  
as they were sucked down in the current screaming.  
Just as fire drives flights of locusts to seek refuge  
in some river, when the tireless flames attack them  
in a sudden onrush and they sink below the water—  
that's how, faced with Achilles' attacking charge,  
a confused mass of chariots and men filled up  
the deep and swirling waters of the river Xanthus.  
[20] Then divinely born Achilles left his spear  
beside a tamarisk bush and jumped into the stream,  
like an inhuman thing, armed only with his sword,  
his heart intent on killing. Turning in all directions,  
he kept on striking. The men his sword slaughtered

cried out in terror. The water turned blood red.  
Just as other fish swim off from a huge dolphin  
filling safe corners of some sheltered harbour,  
fearful because the beast eats all it captures—  
that's how Trojans huddled then, under hanging banks,  
[30] all along the stream edge of that murderous river.  
When Achilles' arms grew weary from the killing,  
he plucked out of the river twelve young men alive,  
as blood payment for the killing of Patroclus,  
Menoetius' son. He led them up onto dry land,  
like stupefied fawns, tied their hands behind them,  
using belts they wore around their woven tunics,  
and gave them to his men to lead back to the ships.  
Then he jumped in again, eager to keep killing.  
But then Achilles met someone fleeing the river—  
[40] Lycaon, a son of Dardanian Priam,  
whom he'd captured once before in a night attack,  
taking him against his will from his father's orchard.  
With his sharp bronze Lycaon had been cutting  
young shoots from off a fig tree to make chariot rails.  
He'd had the bad luck to meet godlike Achilles.  
That time, Achilles took him in his ship and sold him  
in well-built Lemnos, where the son of Jason  
had paid the purchase price. From there, Eëtion,  
a friend and guest from Imbros, had ransomed Lycaon,  
[50] paying a huge sum, then sent him on to Arisbe.  
He'd escaped from there in secret and gone home,  
back to his father's house. Once he returned from Lemnos,  
for eleven days his heart enjoyed his friends.  
On the twelfth, some god threw him back again  
into Achilles' hands, who was about to ship him,  
against Lycaon's wishes, down to dwell with Hades.  
When swift-footed, godlike Achilles saw Lycaon  
totally unarmed, without his helmet, shield, or spear,  
for he'd thrown these on the ground, exhausted  
[60] after he'd escaped the river, worn out and sweating  
in all his lower limbs, Achilles, much surprised,

spoke to his own courageous heart:

“What’s this?

My eyes are witnessing something amazing.  
Great-hearted Trojans I’ve just slaughtered  
will rise again, up out of murky darkness,  
if this man’s avoided death, returned like this,  
after I’d sold him off in sacred Lemnos.  
The grey sea, which holds many people back  
against their will, hasn’t seemed to stop him.

[70] But come, let him taste my spear point. I’ll see—  
and in my heart confirm—if he’ll return,  
as he’s just done, or if life-giving earth,  
which keeps even strong men down, will hold him.”  
That’s what Achilles thought, as he stood there waiting.  
Lycaon, dazed with fear, approached Achilles,  
eager to clasp his knees in supplication,  
heart desperate to escape dark fate and evil death.  
Godlike Achilles raised his long spear, prepared to strike.  
But Lycaon, stooping down, slipped underneath the spear,  
[80] then clasped Achilles’ knees. Flying above his back,  
the spear stuck in the ground, hungry for human flesh.  
With one hand, Lycaon grabbed Achilles’ knee.  
His other clutched the spear, refusing to let go.  
He begged for mercy, addressing Achilles  
with these winged words:

“By your knees, Achilles,  
I beg you to respect me as a suppliant.  
Have pity on me. I claim that sacred right,  
my lord, because it was at your table  
I first ate Demeter’s grain the very day  
[90] you seized me in that well-built orchard.  
You led me far from father and my friends,  
then sold me off in sacred Lemnos. For me  
you got the value of a hundred oxen,  
but I was ransomed for three times that price.

It's now twelve days since I reached Ilion,  
after my ordeal. Once more, deadly Fate  
has placed me in your hands. I do believe  
Father Zeus must hate me, to give me to you  
for a second time. My mother, Laothoë,  
[100] daughter of old Altes, gave birth to me  
to live a shortened life. Altes rules over  
war-loving Leleges, in steep Pedasus,  
by the river Satnioeis. His daughter  
married Priam, who has many other wives.  
She had two sons. Now you'll have slaughtered both.  
You killed fine Polydorus with those men  
fighting at the front, when your sharp spear  
sent him to die. Now death comes for me, as well.  
I don't expect to escape your hands this time,  
[110] since some god has guided me right to them.  
But I'll say one more thing—take it to heart—  
don't kill me. I'm not from the same womb  
as Hector, the man who killed your comrade,  
that kind and powerful warrior.”  
So Lycaon begged for mercy from Achilles.  
But the response he got was brutal:

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

[130] the mother who gave birth to me a goddess.  
Yet over me, as well, hangs Fate—my death.  
There'll come a dawn, or noon, or evening,  
when some man will take my life in battle—  
he'll strike me with his spear or with an arrow  
shot from his bowstring.”

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

“Lie there, among the fish.  
They'll lick blood from your wound with no respect.  
Your mother won't set you on your funeral bed,  
lamenting over you. No, Scamander,  
the swirling river, will carry you away  
to the broad lap of the sea. Many fish  
[150] will swim up to the darkly rippled surface  
to eat white fat from Lycaon. So die,  
all you fleeing Trojans, until we reach  
that sacred city Ilion, with me there,  
right behind you, fighting and killing you.  
Your flowing river with its silver eddies  
won't help, for all those bulls you've sacrificed  
all these years, all the sure-footed horses  
you've thrown alive into its swirling pools.  
No matter—you'll suffer an evil fate,  
[160] till every one of you has paid in full  
for Patroclus' death, for Achaea's dead,  
the men you slaughtered by our swift ships,

when I was not among them there.”

Achilles’ words enraged the heart in river Xanthus,  
who wondered how he might stop godlike Achilles  
from his slaughter and protect the Trojans from disaster.  
Meanwhile, Peleus’ son, gripping his long-shadowed spear,  
still eager to kill more, charged Asteropaeus,  
son of Pelegon, born to the broad river Axius

[170] and Aecessamenus’ eldest daughter, Periboea.

The deep swirling river had had sex with her.  
Achilles went at Asteropaeus, who stood there,  
facing him, holding two spears. In his anger  
at the slaughter of young soldiers in the battle,  
whom Achilles kept butchering along the stream,  
showing no pity, Xanthus then put fighting strength  
into Asteropaeus. But when the two men  
had approached each other, moving close together,  
godlike Achilles was the first to speak:

[180] “Who are you that dares to come against me?

Where are you from? Children who confront me  
leave their parents full of sorrow.”

The glorious son of Pelegon then said in reply:

“Great-hearted son of Peleus, why ask me  
my lineage? I come from Paeonia,  
a fertile country far from here, leading  
Paeonians, men carrying long spears.  
It’s now eleven days since I came here,  
to Ilion. I’m born from Axius,

[190] the wide-streaming river, whose waters  
are the loveliest which flow upon this earth.

Axius fathered a famous spear man,

Pelegon, whose son they say I am.

But now, splendid Achilles, let us fight.”

In response to that speech from Asteropaeus,  
godlike Achilles raised his Pelian ash spear.

But then Asteropaeus, an ambidextrous man,  
threw two spears at once. One hit Achilles’ shield,

but did not break through. The gold, gift of a god,  
[200] had checked it. The other hit Achilles a glancing blow  
on his right arm at the elbow. Dark blood flowed out.  
But the spear passed over him and struck the ground,  
still eager to taste flesh. Then Achilles, in his turn,  
threw a straight-flying spear at Asteropaeus,  
hoping to kill him. But he missed the man, hitting  
the high river bank, driving half that ash spear  
deep in the ground. Drawing the sharp sword by his thigh,  
Peleus' son, enraged, went after Asteropaeus,  
who was trying to pull the spear Achilles threw  
[210] out of the river bank with his huge fist. He failed.  
Three times he shifted it in his frantic haste to grab it,  
but three times he had to abandon the attempt.  
The fourth time his heart was keen to bend and break  
the ash spear of Achilles, but before he could,  
Achilles himself charged in and took his life  
with a sword thrust in the belly by the navel.  
His guts fell out onto the ground. As he lay gasping,  
darkness veiled his eyes. Jumping on his chest,  
Achilles stripped his armour off, boasting aloud:  
[220] "Lie there. It's hard to compete with children  
of the mighty son of Cronos, even though  
you are descended from some river. You claim  
your family stems from a broad flowing stream,  
but I boast a family coming from great Zeus.  
The man who is my father, Peleus,  
son of Aeacus, rules many Myrmidons.  
Aeacus came from Zeus himself, and Zeus  
is stronger than rivers flowing to the sea,  
so Zeus' line is stronger than all those  
[230] descended from a river. Look beside you—  
there's a great stream there, but he can't help you.  
For there's no way to battle against Zeus,  
son of Cronos. Even lord Achelous  
cannot equal him, nor the great power  
of deep flowing Oceanus, from whom

all rivers, seas, fountains, and deep wells  
derive their water—even Oceanus  
is afraid of lighting from great Zeus  
and his thunder when it crashes in the skies.”

[240] Saying this, he pulled his bronze spear from the river bank.

Achilles left the corpse of Asteropaeus  
lying there in the sand, dark water lapping round him.  
Fish and eels then went at him, nibbling and chewing off  
the fat around his kidneys. Achilles moved away,  
attacking the Paeonian charioteers still crouched  
beside the flowing river, terrified once they’d seen  
their best man butchered in that desperate conflict  
on the powerful sword of the son of Peleus.

There Achilles killed Thersilochus, Mydon,

[250] Astypylus, Mnesus, Thrasius, Aenius,  
and Ophelestes. Swift Achilles would have killed  
still more Paeonians, but the deep-flowing river,  
in its anger, taking on a human form, called out,  
speaking from a deep swirling pool:

“Achilles,  
you may be the most powerful of men,  
but you’re inflicting too much damage here.  
Yes, the gods are always there to help you.  
And if Cronos’ son is now enabling you  
to kill all Trojans, at least drive them off

[260] far from my stream. Carry out your work—

this butchery—out there on the plain.  
Now corpses fill my channels, I can’t let  
my waters flow through anywhere to reach  
the glimmering sea. I’m choking on the dead,  
while you keep up these harsh atrocities.  
Come, you leader of your people, let me be.  
I find your actions here astounding.”

In reply,  
swift-footed Achilles then addressed the river:



“Divinely raised Scamander, it shall be  
[270] as you request. But I’ll not stop killing  
these proud Trojans till I have them cornered  
in their city and have tested Hector  
in a fight, and he kills me or I kill him.”  
Saying this, Achilles fell upon the Trojans,  
like something superhuman. Then Scamander,  
the deep-flowing river, cried out to Apollo:  
“What’s happening, lord of the silver bow,  
child of Zeus? You’re not following Zeus’ plans.  
He clearly told you to assist the Trojans,  
[280] to defend them until evening comes,  
casting its shadows on the fertile farm land.”  
The river spoke. Then famous spearman Achilles  
jumped from the bank into the middle of the stream.  
The river attacked him with a rising flood,  
stirring all his waters into seething turmoil,  
sweeping up many corpses crowded in the shoals,  
men slaughtered by Achilles. Roaring like a bull,  
the river hurled these bodies up onto the shore,  
preserving in its lovely stream those still alive  
[290] by hiding them in deep wide pools. Around Achilles,  
huge waves towered threateningly, beating down  
his shield. The breaking waters pushed him backwards.  
Achilles lost his footing. His hand reached out to grab  
a large elm tree, fully grown, but the tree came loose,  
roots and all, tearing the whole river bank away.  
As it fell in the river, its thick branches blocked  
that lovely stream, damming its flow. In terror,  
Achilles scrambled up out of the raging waters,  
trying on his swift feet to run out to the plain.  
[300] But the great god wasn’t done. With a dark wave,  
he went after godlike Achilles, to prevent  
the killing and to rescue Trojans from destruction.  
Peleus’ son ran off as far as one spear throw,  
moving as fast as a black eagle plummets,  
the hunting bird which is the strongest and the fastest

- of all flying things—that's how Achilles ran.  
The bronze armour on his chest was clanging fearfully  
as he swerved out from underneath the flooding river,  
desperate to escape. But with a tremendous roar,  
[310] Scamander's flood rushed on in pursuit behind him.  
Just as a man laying out a ditch from a dark spring  
to his plants and gardens digs a water channel,  
mattock in hand, removing what obstructs the flow,  
and the water, as it starts to run, pushes aside  
the pebbles, and then, gaining momentum, flows down  
and overtakes the man who's guiding it—  
that's how the flooding wave kept clutching at Achilles  
for all his speed, since gods have much more strength than men.  
Every time swift-footed, godlike Achilles  
[320] tried stopping to fight back, to see if all the gods  
who live in spacious heaven were forcing him to flee,  
a tremendous wave from that heaven-fed river  
would crash down around his shoulders. He'd jump clear,  
heart panicking, but the river kept tugging at his legs  
with a strong undertow, washing out the ground  
beneath his feet. Then gazing up into the wide sky  
the son of Peleus cried out:  
  
"Father Zeus,  
why is no god standing by me here,  
in this pitiful state, rescuing me  
[330] from this river? After this, I can endure  
everything. I don't blame any Olympian  
as much as I blame my own dear mother,  
who led me astray with lies, telling me  
I'd die from the swift arrows of Apollo,  
under Trojan walls and fully armed.  
Now I wish that I'd been killed by Hector,  
the best man of those native to this region.  
Then a fine man would have done the killing,  
another fine man would have been destroyed.  
[340] But now it's been ordained that I'm to suffer

an ignoble death, caught by this great river,  
like some child in care of pigs, swept away  
while trying to cross a torrent in a rain storm.”

Achilles spoke. Then Poseidon and Pallas Athena,  
coming up quickly, stood in human form beside him.  
They joined their hands with his, and with their words  
they pledged their help. Poseidon spoke out first:

“Son of Peleus,  
don’t be so afraid. You need have no fear.  
We two come from the gods, here to help you—

[350] me and Pallas Athena, and Zeus approves.

It’s not ordained that you’re to die here,  
killed by some river, which will soon recede,  
as you will see. We have advice for you,  
if you’ll listen. Don’t hold back your hands  
in murderous warfare till you’ve cornered  
inside the famous walls of Troy those men  
now in retreat before you. Once you’ve taken  
Hector’s life, return back to the ships.

We giving you a chance for glory.”

[360] With these words, the two gods went away. Achilles,  
greatly moved by what the gods had said, set off,  
running across the plain, now full of flooding water,  
with many lovely weapons of the slaughtered men  
floating there among their corpses. As he went,  
he raised his legs high, striving against the current.  
The broad flowing river couldn’t slow him down,  
once Athena had put great power in Achilles.  
But Scamander did not hold his fury back,  
growing even more enraged at Peleus’ son.

[370] He raised himself up in a high-crested wave  
and called out with a shout to Simoeis:

“Dear brother,  
let’s both together counter this man’s power,  
since he’ll soon demolish Priam’s city.

Trojans will not stand up to him and fight.  
Come quickly. Help me. Fill your streams  
with water from your springs. Whip up your torrents.  
Then stand in a huge wave, raising a din  
with rocks and tree trunks, so we can stop  
this violent man, now in a conquering rage,  
[380] like some god. I don't think his strength will help him,  
or his beauty, or that lovely armour—  
that will lie somewhere underneath the flood,  
buried in slime. I'll cover him in sand,  
with an massive layer of silt on top,  
beyond all measurement. I'll hide him there  
with so much mud, Achaeans will not know  
how to collect his bones. There where he'll lie,  
I'll make him a tomb—he won't need a mound  
when Achaeans organize his funeral.”  
[390] Saying this, Scamander crested high against Achilles,  
then charged, seething with foam and blood and corpses.  
The dark wave of the heaven-fed river rose, towering  
above Achilles, about to overwhelm him.  
But Hera, afraid for Achilles, cried out, fearing  
the great, deep, swirling river would sweep him off.  
She called out to Hephaestus, her dear son:

“Rouse yourself,  
my crippled child. We think that you're a match  
for swirling Xanthus in a fight. Come quickly.  
Help Achilles with a giant outburst  
[400] of your flames. I'll stir up some winds—  
West Wind's harsh sea blasts and white South Wind—  
to whip on your destructive fires, so they may burn  
dead Trojans and their weapons. You must go  
along the river banks, burning trees,  
attacking river Xanthus with your flames.  
Don't let him slow you down in any way,  
not with gentle words or making threats.  
Don't check your fury till I tell you to.

I'll give you a shout. Then you can pull back  
your inexhaustible fire."

[410] Hera spoke.

Hephaestus then prepared a prodigious blaze.  
First it burned up all the plain, incinerating corpses,  
the many bodies of men slaughtered by Achilles  
scattered everywhere. The entire plain dried up.  
The shimmering river waters were held back.  
Just as at harvest time North Wind quickly dries  
well-watered orchards, to the farmer's great delight,  
that's how the whole plain then grew dry, as Hephaestus  
burned up the dead. Then he turned his blazing flames

[420] against the river, burning elms, willows, tamarisks,  
clover, rushes, sedge, all growing in abundance  
along that lovely stream. In the river pools,  
eels and fish were much distressed—they jumped everywhere  
in that fine river, suffering the fiery blasts  
prepared by that resourceful god Hephaestus.  
The river, too, was burned. So Xanthus cried out,  
calling to the god:

"No god, Hephaestus,  
can stand against you. I can't fight you  
when you burn with flames like this. So stop.

[430] End this strife. Godlike Achilles can continue.

Let him drive the Trojans from their city.  
What do I care about assisting in this war?"  
The river spoke, still burning from the fire,  
his lovely waters seething. Just as a cauldron  
with hot flames heating it boils inside and melts  
the fat from off a well-fed hog, bubbling over,  
once dry split wood is set down under it—that's how  
the fire burned that lovely stream. Its seething waters  
would no longer flow downriver, held up there,

[440] defeated by the power of that fiery blast  
made by the skill of god Hephaestus. Then the river,

with a strong appeal to Hera, spoke these winged words:  
“Hera, why’s your son burning up my stream,  
doing it more injury than any other?  
I’m not as much to blame as all the rest,  
the ones who help the Trojans. If you say so,  
I’ll stop, if Hephaestus stops as well.  
And I’ll swear this oath—never again will I  
protect a Trojan from his evil death,  
[450] not even when all Troy itself is burning,  
ablaze with all-consuming fire, started  
by Achaea’s warlike sons.”

White-armed goddess Hera,  
as soon as she’d heard this, spoke to Hephaestus,  
her dear son:

“Hold off, Hephaestus, splendid child.  
It’s not right to hurt a deathless god like this,  
just for the sake of mortal men.”

When Hera spoke,  
Hephaestus extinguished his stupendous fire at once.  
The river’s stream flowed once more in its channel.  
When the fighting spirit in Xanthus had been broken,  
[460] the two gods fought no longer. Hera had stopped them,  
though she was still enraged. But now the other gods  
began a heavy conflict and a cruel fight  
among themselves. The spirits in their hearts  
pushed them in various directions. As they clashed,  
with a tremendous din, the wide earth cried out,  
and mighty heaven pealed, just like a trumpet.  
Sitting on Olympus, Zeus heard the sound—his heart  
laughed with delight to see these gods go at it  
in mutual conflict. They no longer stood aloof.  
[470] Shield-breaker Ares started it, attacking  
Athena first with his bronze spear and taunting her:  
“You dog fly, why is it you’re once again

inciting gods to fight each other,  
heart prompted by your own foolhardiness?  
Don't you recall the moment you provoked  
Diomedes, Tydeus' son, to wound me?  
We all saw it—you grabbed his spear yourself  
and drove it at me, scratching my fair skin.  
Well, now I think you'll pay for all you've done."

[480] Saying this, Ares struck Athena's tasselled aegis,  
that fearful aegis which not even Zeus' lightning  
can overcome. Bloodstained Ares' long spear struck it.  
Drawing back, Athena picked up in her strong hand  
a large, black, jagged rock, lying there on the plain.  
In earlier ages men had set it there to indicate  
the boundary of a field. With this rock Athena  
struck raging Ares in the neck. His legs collapsed.  
Ares fell. Stretched out he covered seven hundred feet.  
His hair was dirtied with the dust. His armour rang.

[490] Pallas Athena laughed, then cried in boastful triumph—  
her words had wings:

"You fool, still so ignorant  
of how much stronger I can claim to be  
than you, when you seek to match my power.  
This is the way you'll answer now in full  
your mother's vengeful rage. She's angry,  
planning nasty things for you, since you left  
Achaeans to support the arrogant Trojans."  
With these words, she turned her glittering eyes away.  
Zeus' daughter Aphrodite then took Ares

[500] and led him off by hand, as he kept groaning—  
he found it difficult to get his spirit back.  
When white-armed goddess Hera saw Athena,  
she spoke, addressing her with these winged words:  
"Look there, child of aegis-bearing Zeus,  
you tireless one, that dog fly once again  
is leading man-killing Ares through the crowd,  
away from battle. Go after her."

Once Hera spoke, Athena dashed off in pursuit,  
delighted in her heart. Charging Aphrodite,  
[510] she struck her in the chest with her powerful fist.  
Aphrodite's knees gave way, her heart collapsed.  
So both gods lay there, on the all-nourishing earth.  
Athena then spoke out winged words of triumph:  
"Let all those who assist the Trojans  
end up like this in warfare with Achaeans,  
with all the fortitude and boldness  
Aphrodite showed in helping Ares,  
standing up against my fighting power.  
We'll then soon end these hostile fights,  
[520] once we've destroyed well-peopled Ilion."  
As Athena spoke, white-armed goddess Hera smiled.  
Then the mighty Earthshaker spoke to Apollo:  
"Phoebus, why do we two stand aloof?  
That's not right, now that others have begun.  
It would be shameful if we both went back  
to Olympus, to Zeus' bronze-floored home,  
without a fight. Since you're the younger one,  
you must begin. It's not fair play if I do,  
since I'm your elder and thus I know more.  
[530] How foolish you are with your thoughtless heart!  
Don't you recall the trouble we two had  
around Troy, just the pair of us alone,  
with no other gods, that time when Zeus  
made us come here to work for a whole year  
at a fixed wage for proud king Laomedon?  
He was our master and told us what to do.  
I built the Trojans a wide and splendid wall  
around their city, to make it impregnable.  
You, Phoebus, worked with his cattle herds,  
[540] taking his shambling bent-horned livestock  
through Ida's wooded spurs and valleys.  
When the joyful seasons stopped our working there,  
that despicable Laomedon robbed us.  
He kept our wages and sent us off with threats.



He promised he'd tie up your hands and feet,  
then in some distant island sell you as a slave.  
He said he'd slice off both our ears with bronze.  
We came back really angry in our hearts,  
enraged about those promised wages  
[550] he'd withheld. That's the man whose people  
you're now keen to favour. You don't join us,  
so we destroy these arrogant Trojans  
once and for all, along with all their children  
and their honourable wives as well."  
Lord Apollo, who shoots from far, answered Poseidon:  
"Earthshaker, you'd never call me prudent,  
if I fought with you over human beings—  
those pitiful creatures are like the leaves,  
now full of blazing life, eating nourishment  
[560] the earth provides, then fading into death.  
No, let's quickly end our quarrel, leaving  
these mortal men to fight amongst themselves."  
Saying this, he turned away, thinking it shameful  
to fight in battle against his father's brother.  
But his sister, forest goddess Artemis,  
queen of all wild beasts, was furious with him.  
She spoke to him with scorn:

"So, far worker,  
you're running off, ceding total victory  
to Poseidon, giving him an easy glory.  
[570] You fool! Why do you carry such a bow,  
as useless as the wind? From now on,  
I never want to hear you boasting,  
the way you used to among deathless gods,  
how you could fight Poseidon face to face."  
Artemis spoke. Far-shooting Apollo did not answer.  
But Hera, Zeus' honoured wife, was angry.  
She went at the archer goddess, insulting her:  
"You shameless bitch, you dare stand against me?  
You'll find it hard to match my power,

[580] even if you have your bow and Zeus made you  
a lion among women, allowing you  
to kill whichever one of them you please.  
I say it's better to be slaughtering wild beasts,  
deer in the mountains, than to fight all out  
with those more powerful. Still, if you're keen  
to learn about this war, to understand  
how much more powerful I am, let's fight,  
since you are challenging my strength."

With these words, Hera caught both arms of Artemis  
[590] in her left hand. With her right she grabbed the bow,  
snatching it and its quiver off her shoulders.  
Then she slapped her with those weapons. As she did so,  
Hera smiled to see Artemis twist away and squirm.  
The swift arrows tumbled out. Artemis ran off,  
crying like a pigeon speeding from a hawk,  
flying to some hollow cleft among the rocks,  
for she's not fated to be caught—that's how Artemis  
escaped, in tears, leaving her bow lying there.  
Then Hermes, the guide, killer of Argus, spoke out,  
addressing Leto:

[600] "I'll not fight you, Leto.  
It's dangerous to come to blows with those  
married to cloud-gatherer Zeus. So you can tell  
immortal gods your great strength conquered me—  
and you can even boast about it."

Hermes finished.  
Leto then collected the curved bow and arrows,  
which had fallen here and there down in the swirling dust.  
Then she left, taking her daughter's weapons with her.  
Artemis returned then to Olympus, to Zeus' home,  
with its bronze floor. The girl sat on her father's lap,  
[610] her immortal garments shaking as she wept.  
Her father, Cronos' son, holding her to him,  
asked her with a gentle laugh:

“My dear child,  
which of the heavenly gods has treated you  
so nastily, as if you were committing  
some evil act in public?”

Then Artemis,  
with her beautiful headband, answered Zeus:  
“It was your wife who hit me, father,  
white-armed Hera. Now, thanks to her,  
immortal gods engage in fights and quarrels.”

[620] As these two talked together in this fashion,  
Phoebus Apollo went to sacred Ilion.  
He was concerned about that well-built city wall,  
afraid Danaans might breach it that very day,  
contravening what Fate ordained. The other gods,  
who live forever, went back to Olympus,  
some incensed and others relishing their triumph.  
They sat down by Zeus, lord of the dark cloud.  
Meanwhile, Achilles still kept on killing Trojans,  
both soldiers and their sure-footed horses, too.

[630] Just as smoke rises up, reaching spacious heaven,  
when a city burns from fires set by wrathful gods—  
that’s how Achilles brought Trojans death and danger.  
Then old Priam stood on that wall built by gods,  
observing huge Achilles as he drove the Trojans  
ahead of him in total panic, their spirit broken.  
With a groan, he left the wall, came down to the ground,  
and summoned the well-known sentries at the gates.  
“Hold the doors wide open with your hands,  
until the fleeing troops come to the city.

[640] For Achilles is coming closer, driving  
them in panic. I think disaster looms.  
When the men have gathered here inside the wall,  
able to get relief, then close the gates,  
these tight-fitting doors, once more. I’m afraid  
this murderer may jump inside our walls.”

Then the men pushed back the bars, opening the gates,  
and gave a saving light for those men on the run.  
Then Apollo charged out to meet Achilles,  
seeking to protect the Trojans from destruction,  
[650] as they ran back, straight for the high-walled city,  
suffering from thirst and dusty from the plain.  
Still in a rage, Achilles chased them with his spear,  
his heart filled with strong and unrelenting fury,  
still eager to win glory. At that moment,  
Achaean's sons would have captured Troy's high gates,  
if Phoebus Apollo had not intervened,  
by stirring up noble, godlike Agenor,  
Antenor's son, a powerful warrior. In his heart  
Apollo instilled courage and then stood by him,  
leaning against the oak tree, covered in thick mist,  
[660] so he might ward off the heavy hand of Death.  
When Agenor saw Achilles, sacker of cities,  
he made a stand, his heart pondering many things,  
as he stood there. In his agitation, he spoke out,  
addressing his proud heart:

“Here's trouble!  
If I rush away before Achilles  
where other men are running in their panic,  
he'll catch me, then kill me as a coward.  
But what if I let Achilles, son of Peleus,  
[670] drive them on, then dash away myself  
to some other place, distant from the wall,  
out in the Trojan plain, until I reach  
Ida's spurs, where there's a bush to hide in?  
When evening comes, I could wash in the river,  
get rid of all the sweat and then go back,  
return to Ilion. But why's my fond heart  
debating all these options? He might see me,  
as I moved off from the city for the plain,  
and catch me with a sprint of his swift feet.  
[680] I'd no longer have a chance to get away

from death, my fate. The man is really strong,  
much more powerful than other men.  
What if I go out to stand against him  
before the city? My sharp bronze, I think,  
can slice up his flesh, too. He's got one life,  
no more. And men say that he's a mortal,  
although Zeus, Cronos' son, gives him glory."  
Saying this, Agenor stood up straight and waited,  
the heart within him prepared for war and keen to fight.

[690] Just as a leopard emerges from thick undergrowth,  
to face a hunter, with no fear in its heart,  
no hint of flight when it hears the baying hounds—  
even if the hunter first hits it with his spear,  
the wounded beast won't lose its fighting spirit,  
until it closes with him or is killed itself—  
that's how godlike Agenor, noble Antenor's son,  
refused to run before fighting Achilles.  
Holding his round shield in front of him, he aimed his spear  
directly at Achilles, then shouted out:

[700] "Glorious Achilles, I'm sure you've set your heart  
on destroying the city which proud Trojans hold  
this very day. What foolishness! Much pain  
must still be suffered in that enterprise.  
We who live in Troy are men with courage,  
and there are lots of us. We'll guard Ilion,  
in front of our dear parents, wives, and sons.  
Here you'll meet your doom, though as a fighter,  
you are so formidable and brave."

Agenor spoke.

Then he threw his sharp spear from his massive hand.

[710] He hit Achilles on the shin, below the knee.  
The spear did not miss its man. The armour on his leg,  
newly hammered tin, gave out a fearful clang.  
But the spear just struck the metal and bounced off,  
without going through. The god's gift had protected him.

Then Peleus' son, in turn, went for godlike Agenor.  
But Apollo didn't let him win the glory there.  
He snatched Agenor up, hid him in dense mist,  
then sent him quietly away from battle.  
After that, he led the son of Peleus astray,  
[720] far from Trojan soldiers. The far shooter tricked him,  
by standing right before Achilles' feet, looking  
exactly like Agenor. Achilles charged off  
in pursuit, chasing Apollo out across the plain,  
past wheat fields, turning him towards the river,  
the deep, swirling Scamander. Apollo raced on,  
only a little bit ahead, using his cunning  
to trick Achilles with his pace, so he'd think  
he could catch up. Meanwhile, the other Trojans  
fleeing in confusion, came crowding in the city,  
[730] throngs of them, cramming the gates, happy to be there.  
They didn't dare to wait outside the wall, to check  
who made it back and who had perished in the fight.  
They streamed into the city in an eager rush,  
all whose legs and knees had brought them safely in.