Book Twenty Three
The Funeral Games for Patroclus

[Achilles keeps his troops together to mourn Patroclus; Patroclus' ghost visits Achilles, requesting a burial; Achaeans gather wood and prepare Patroclus' funeral pyre; Achilles cuts the hair dedicated to the river Spercheus; Achilles sacrifices animals and humans on Patroclus' pyre; Achilles gets the help of the winds to get the fire to light under Patroclus; Achilles brings out prizes for the Funeral Games, which then take place in series: the chariot race, boxing, wrestling, foot-racing, armed duelling, throwing a weight, archery, and spear throwing; Achilles awards Agamemnon the prize for the last event without any contest]

Meanwhile, as Trojans were lamenting in the city,
Achaeans reached their ships beside the Hellespont.
There they scattered, each man going to his own ship.
But Achilles didn't let his Myrmidons disband.
He spoke out to his warrior companions:
"Fast-riding Myrmidons, trusty comrades,
let's not loose our sure-footed horses yet,
untying them from their chariots. We must go
with horse and chariot up to Patroclus,
to mourn for him. For that's a dead man's right.
Once we've had our fill of sorrowful tears,
we'll unyoke our horses, then all eat here."
At these words, they all began their group lament,
led by Achilles. Three times around the body
they drove their well-groomed horses, mourning as they went.
Thetis stirred up in them a strong desire to weep.
Their tears made the sands wet, men's armour, too,
for they were mourning the loss of a great warrior,
who'd made men flee. Peleus' son led their loud lament,
placing his man-killing hands on his comrade's chest:
"Rest in peace, Patroclus, even though
you're in Hades house, for I'm completing here
all I promised you before—to drag in Hector,
then give him to the dogs to eat up raw,
and cut the throats of twelve young Trojans,
splendid children, on your funeral pyre,

in my rage that you've been slaughtered."
He finished. Then he continued to dishonour
noble Hector, stretching his body out face down
in the dirt, beside the bier of Menoetius' son.
Then each man took off his glittering bronze armour.
They untied their loud-neighing horses and sat down,
thousands of them, by swift-footed Achilles' ship.
He prepared a funeral feast to ease their spirits.
Many sleek oxen bellowed underneath the knife,
as they were butchered. Many sheep, bleating goats,
and white-tusked pigs rich in fat were laid out
to roast over Hephaestus' fires. All around the corpse,
blood ran so thick men scooped it up in cupfuls.
Then Achaean leaders led the swift-footed prince,
son of Peleus, to lord Agamemnon.
They had trouble convincing him to go there—
his heart was still so angry for his comrade.
Reaching Agamemnon's hut, they issued orders
for clear-voiced heralds to heat up a large cauldron,
to see if they could persuade Peleus' son to wash,
to rinse off the spattered blood. In his stubbornness,
he refused to do that, swearing this oath:

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

and remove him from our sight. Then soldiers
can resume their duties."

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

"You're asleep, Achilles.
You've forgotten me. While I was alive,
you never did neglect me. But now I'm dead.
So bury me as quickly as you can.
Then I can pass through the gates of Hades.
The spirits, ghosts of the dead, keep me away.
They don't let me join them past the river.
So I wander aimlessly round Hades' home
by its wide gates. Give me your hand, I beg you,
for I'll never come again from Hades,
once you've given me what's due, my funeral fire.
We'll no more sit together making plans,
separated from our dear companions.
The jaws of dreadful Fate are gaping for me,
ready to consume me—my destiny

from the day that I was born. You, too,
godlike Achilles, you have your own fate,
to die under the walls of wealthy Troy.
I'll say one more thing, one last request,
if you will listen. Achilles, don't lay your bones
apart from mine. Let them remain together,
just as they were when we grew up in your home,
once Menoetius brought me as a youngster
into your land from Opoeis, for I'd done
a dreadful murder on that day I killed
Amphidamas' son, in my foolishness.
I didn't mean to, but I was enraged
over some game of dice. Horseman Peleus
welcomed me into his home, raised me
with love, then made me your attendant.
So let the same container hold our bones,
that gold two-handled jar your mother gave you."
Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:
"Dear friend, why have you come to me here,
telling me everything I need to do?
I'll carry out all these things for you,
attend to your request. But come closer.
Let's hold each other one short moment more,
enjoying a shared lament together."
Saying this, Achilles reached out with his arms,
but he grasped nothing. The spirit had departed,
going underground like vapour, muttering faintly.
Achilles jumped up in amazement, clapped his hands,
and then spoke out in sorrow:

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

Achilles' words stirred the desire to keep mourning
in all of them. When rose-fingered Dawn appeared,
they were still lamenting by that cheerless corpse.
Then mighty Agamemnon sent out men and mules,
from huts in every quarter, to gather wood.
The man who supervised was Meriones,
brave attendant to kind Idomeneus. They set off,
grasping axes to chop wood and well-woven rope.
The mules went on ahead. The men kept going,
up and down the slopes, sometimes tracking sideways,
sometimes doubling back, till they reached Ida's foothills
with their many springs. At once they started working—
cutting high-branched oak trees with their long-edged bronze.
Men worked hard, falling each tree with a mighty crash.
Achaeans then split the trees into convenient lengths,
tied logs behind the mules, whose feet ploughed up the ground
as they strained through thick underbrush towards the plain.
Woodsmen all carried logs as well, under orders
from Meriones, attendant to kind Idomeneus.
Men threw these logs down in a line along the shore,
where Achilles planned a massive burial mound
for Patroclus and himself. When they'd piled up
immense amounts of wood on every side, they sat
all together there and waited. Then Achilles
quickly told war-loving Myrmidons to dress in bronze,
ordering each man to get his horses harnessed
in their chariots. They leapt up to put on armour.
The warriors and charioteers climbed in their chariots
and moved out first. Then came the men on foot
in their thousands. In the middle, his companions
bore Patroclus, whose corpse they covered with the hair
they'd cut from their own heads and thrown onto the body.
Godlike Achilles came behind them, cradling
Patroclus' head and grieving. For he was sending
down to Hades' home a comrade without equal.
When they reached the spot Achilles chose for them,
they set the body down and quickly piled up wood

as he directed. Then swift-footed lord Achilles
thought of something. Standing some distance from the pyre,
he cut a lock of his own fair hair, one he'd grown
as a rich offering to the river Spercheus.
Looking out over the wine-dark sea, he spoke out
in passionate distress:

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

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

"Son of Atreus,
Achaean troops will listen to your words
more than to anyone. Men can grieve too much.
So dismiss them from the pyre for now.
Tell them to prepare a meal. Those of us
with special cause to mourn will take care of this.
But let the leaders remain here with us."
When Agamemnon, king of men, heard these words,
he quickly sent the troops off to their balanced ships.
The chief mourners stayed behind. They piled up wood,
making a square pyre, each side one hundred feet in length.

On that pyre's highest point they laid out the corpse,
hearts full of sorrow. Then, in front of the pyre,
they flayed and made ready many sturdy sheep
and shambling cattle with twisting horns. From all these,
great-hearted Achilles took the fat, using it
to cover up the corpse from head to foot, piling
skinned carcasses around it. Next, he placed on top
two-handled jars of oil and honey, leaning them
against the bier. Then, crying with grief, Achilles
threw four strong-necked horses quickly on the pyre.
Patroclus had owned nine dogs who ate beside his table.
Slitting the throats of two of them, Achilles
tossed them on the pyre. Then, with his bronze, he butchered
those twelve noble sons of the courageous Trojans,
his feelings grimly set on this atrocity.
After that, he lit the fire to work its iron force
and burn up everything. With a groan he called out,
addressing his companion:

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

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

on limbs and sinews.

But now the pyre of dead Patroclus
would not catch fire. So swift-footed Achilles
thought of something else. Standing away from the pyre,
he prayed to the two winds—Boreas of the north,
Zephyrus of the west—promising fine offerings.
Pouring frequent libations from a golden cup,
he begged them to come quickly to ignite the wood,
so flames might incinerate the corpses quickly.
Hearing his prayer, Iris at once took his message
to the winds, who were feasting all together
in blustery West Wind's home. Iris raced up there,
then stood on the stone threshold. Their eyes soon saw her.
They all jumped up, each one inviting her to sit
beside him. Iris declined their invitation,
saying to them:

"I can't sit down. I must return
to Oceanus' stream, back in the land
of Ethiopians, where there's a sacrifice
to the immortals. I'd like to be there
for that sacred feast. But now Achilles
prays that North Wind and loud West Wind will come.
He's promising you splendid offerings
to stir the flames, so they burn up the pyre
where Patroclus lies, whom all Achaea mourns."
After saying this, Iris left. The two winds rose up.
With an astounding roar, driving clouds before them,
they quickly stormed across the sea, whipping up waves
with their howling breath. They came to fertile Troy,
then fell upon that pyre. The fire crackled up
into a prodigious blaze. All night long they howled,
blowing their shrill blasts together on the flames.
And all night long with a two-handled cup in hand
swift Achilles kept drawing wine from a golden bowl
and pouring it upon the earth, soaking the ground

and calling on the spirit of poor Patroclus.
Just as a father mourns his son, when he burns his bones,
his newly married son, whose death brings parents
dreadful sorrow—that's how Achilles kept crying then,
as he burned his companion's bones, dragging himself
round and round the pyre, lamenting endlessly.
But at that hour when the Morning Star appears,
announcing that light is coming to the earth,
the star after which Dawn in her yellow robe
moves out across the sea, by then the fire was dying.
The flames went out. So the winds returned once more,
back to their homes, going across the Thracian Sea,
where a seething storm roared out. Then Peleus' son,
moving away from the smouldering pyre, lay down
exhausted. Sweet Sleep quickly slipped around him.
But then the troops came up with Agamemnon,
all together. The noise they made, as they marched in,
woke up Achilles. Sitting bolt upright, he said:
"Sons of Atreus and you other leaders
of Achaean forces, you must first douse
the smouldering pyre with gleaming wine—
everything the powerful flames have touched.
Then we'll collect bones from Patroclus,
Menoetius' son, separating them with care
from all the rest. They're easy to distinguish,
for he lay in the centre of the pyre—
the others burned some distance from him
on the edges, the humans and the horses.
Let's place his bones inside a golden urn,
in a double layer of fat, until the time
I myself am hiding there in Hades.
I'm asking you to build a burial mound,
nothing excessive—what seems appropriate.
You Achaeans must build it high and wide,
but later, once I'm gone, those who still remain
beside our ships with many oars."

Once Achilles spoke,
they did as the swift-footed son of Peleus wished.
First, they doused the smoking pyre with gleaming wine,
wherever flames had reached or ash was deep.
Weeping, they picked the white bones of their comrade out
and put them in a double layer of fat inside a golden urn.
They placed the urn under soft linen in a hut.
Then they traced out the dimensions of a mound,
using stones to mark its base around the pyre,
and then piled earth on top.

When they'd made the mound,
they started to return. But Achilles checked them,
keeping soldiers there. He asked them to sit down
in a wide group. Then he brought prizes from his ship—
cauldrons, tripods, horses, mules, powerful oxen,
as well as fine-dressed women and grey iron.
First, he set out prizes for swift charioteers—
for the winner, a woman skilled in fine handicrafts
and a tripod with handles holding twenty measures.
For second place he led out a mare six years old,
unbroken and with a mule foal in her womb.
For the man who came in third, he set out a cauldron
untouched by fire, a fine piece which held four measures.
For fourth place he set a prize of two gold talents,
while the fifth-place prize was a two-handled bowl,
not yet put on the fire. Then Achilles stood up
and spoke directly to the Argives:

"Sons of Atreus,
you other well-armed Achaean warriors,
these prizes lie set out here for a contest
among the charioteers. If Achaeans
were now hosting these games for someone else,
then I myself would surely win first prize
and take it to my hut, since, as you know,
my horses are far better than the rest,

for they're immortal, Poseidon's gift
to Peleus, my father, who gave them to me.
But I and my sure-footed horses now
will stand down, for they've lost their charioteer,
a strong, brave man, so kind he'd often pour
soft oil all through their manes, while washing them
in clean water. They stand there mourning him,
manes trailing on the ground. So they won't race.
[340] Their hearts feel too much grief. But you others,
get yourselves prepared all through the camp,
any Achaean who has faith in his own horses
and his well-made chariot."

Once Achilles finished speaking,
swift charioteers rushed into action. First to move,
well before the rest, was Eumelus, king of men,
dear son of Admetus and excellent with horses.
After him came forward mighty Diomedes,
son of Tydeus, driving those yoked horses
from Tros' herd, which he'd just taken from Aeneas,
[350] though Apollo had snatched away their owner.
After Diomedes came fair-haired Menelaus,
royal son of Atreus, driving a yoked team,
two fast creatures—his own horse Podargus
and Agamemnon's mare Aethe, which Echepolus,
Anchises' son, had given to Agamemnon
as a gift, so he wouldn't have to go with him
to wind-swept Ilion, but could remain at home,
enjoying himself, for Zeus had given him great wealth.
He lived in spacious Sicyon. This was the mare
[360] Menelaus now led up in harness, a racehorse
filled with a desire to run. The fourth contestant,
Antilochus, got his fair-maned horses ready.
He was a noble son of proud king Nestor,
son of Neleus. Swift-footed horses bred at Pylos
pulled his chariot. His father came up to him
to give him practical advice, a wise man speaking

to one who could appreciate another's skill:
"Antilochus, you may still be quite young,
but Zeus and Poseidon have been fond of you.
They've taught you all sorts of things with horses,
so there's no need to issue you instructions.
You understand well how to wheel around
beside the turning post. But your horses
are the slowest in the race, and so I think
you've got some problems here to deal with.
The others' horses may be faster runners,
but the drivers are no better skilled than you.
So, dear boy, fix your mind on all that skill,
so those prizes don't elude you. You know,
skill in a woodsman matters more than strength.
It's skill that lets a helmsman steer his course,
guiding his swift ship straight on wine-dark seas.
And it's skill, too, that makes one charioteer
go faster than another. Some racing drivers,
trusting their chariot and horses, drive them
carelessly, moving back and forth, weaving
on the course. They don't control their horses.
But a cunning man, though he's got worse horses,
keeps his eye on that turning point, cutting
the pillar close. Such a man also understands
how to urge his horses on, right at the start,
using leather reins. But he keeps control.
His mind doesn't wander, always watching
the man in front. Now I'll tell you something—
there's a marker, so clear you cannot miss it.
It's a dry stump of oak or pine standing
about six feet high. Rain hasn't rotted it.
On both sides of that stump, two white stones
are firmly fixed against it. At that spot
the race course narrows, but the ground is smooth,
so a team can wheel around that stump.
It may be a memorial to some man
long dead, or perhaps men placed it there

to serve as a racing post in earlier times.
Swift-footed lord Achilles has made that stump
his turning point. You need to shave that post,
drive in really close as you wheel around
your chariot and horses. You should lean out
from that well-sprung platform, to your horses' left,
giving the right-hand horse the lash, calling
to him with a shout, while with your hands
you let him take the reins. The inside horse
must graze the post, so the well-built wheel hub
seems to scrape the pillar. But be careful—
don't touch the stone, because if you do,
you'll hurt the horses, you'll smash the chariot,
which will delight the others but shame you.
So, dear boy, take care and pay attention.
If you can pass them by as you catch up
right by the turning post, then none of them
will reach you with a sudden burst of speed,
much less overtake you, no, not even
if he were driving godlike Arion
behind you, that swift horse of Adrestus,
from heavenly stock, or the very horses
of king Laomedon, the finest ones bred here."
Nestor, Neleus' son, spoke and sat down in his place,
once he'd gone over all the details with his son.
Then Meriones, the fifth contestant in the race,
harnessed his fine-maned horses, and all the racers
climbed in their chariots. They gathered up the lots,
which Achilles shook. The first to tumble out
was for Antilochus, Nestor's son. Mighty Eumelus
was next, then came spearman Menelaus,
son of Atreus. After him, Meriones
drew his place. Last of all, and by far the best,
Tydeus' son drew for his horses' lane.
They took their places in a line. Then Achilles
showed them the turning point far out on the plain.
Beside it he'd placed an umpire, godlike Phoenix,

his father's follower, to observe the racing
and report back truthfully. Then all together,
they raised their whips above their horses, lashed them
with the reins, and shouted words of encouragement
to urge them forward. The horses raced off quickly,
galloping swiftly from the ships. Under their chests
dust came up, hanging there like storm clouds in a whirlwind.
In the rushing air their manes streamed back. The chariots,
at one moment, would skim across the nourishing earth,
then, at another, would bounce high in the air.
Their drivers stood up in the chariots, hearts pounding,
as they strove for victory. Each man shouted out,
calling his horses, as they flew along that dusty plain.
When the swift horses were starting the last stretch,
racing back to the grey sea, their pace grew strained.
Then the drivers each revealed his quality.
The swift-footed horses of Eumelus raced ahead,
followed by Diomedes' team from Tros' breed
not far behind—really close, almost as if they'd charge
right up the back of Eumelus' chariot.
Their breath felt hot on his broad shoulders and his back,
for, as they ran ahead, they leaned right into him.
Now Tydeus' son would have passed Eumelus,
or made the issue doubtful, if Phoebus Apollo,
angry at him, hadn't struck the shining whip
out of his hand. Then from Diomedes' eyes
tears of rage streamed out, once he saw Eumelus' team
running even faster than before, while his own
were at a disadvantage, running with no whip.
But Athena had observed Apollo as he fouled
the son of Tydeus. She came running at top speed
after that shepherd of his people, then gave back
his whip, putting strength into his horses.
Then, in anger, she went after the son of Admetus.
The goddess snapped his chariot yoke. The horses swerved,
running all around the course. The shaft dropped down
and hit the ground—this threw Eumelus from the chariot

beside the wheel. On his elbows, mouth, and nose
the skin was badly scraped. Above his eyebrows,
his forehead had a bruise. His two eyes filled with tears,
his strong voice failed him. Tydeus' son swerved aside,
then drove his sure-footed horses far ahead,
outdistancing the rest, for Athena had put strength
into his team, to give Diomedes glory.
Behind him came Atreus' son, fair-haired Menelaus.
But then Antilochus called to his father's horses:
"Get going, you two. Push yourselves. Move up now,
as fast as you can go. I'm not asking you
to try to beat those horses up ahead,
the team of that warlike son of Tydeus,
whom Athena has just helped run faster
to give their driver glory. But overtake
those horses of the son of Atreus—
quick now—don't let them get too far ahead.
You don't want to suffer shame from Aethe,
who's just a mare. Why are you falling back,
you strong horses? Let me tell you something
which is sure to happen—if you slack off now
and I win some inferior prize, then Nestor,
his people's shepherd, will stop feeding you.
He'll take out his sharp bronze and kill you both,
here and now. So keep on after them.
Pick up the pace—as fast as you can run!
My task will be to think of something,
devise a way of getting past them there,
where the road narrows. I won't miss my chance."
Antilochus finished. His horses, frightened
by their master's threat, ran faster for a stretch.
Suddenly brave Antilochus saw up ahead
a place where the road was hollowed out and narrow,
with a channel in the ground where winter rains
had backed the water up, washing out some of the road
and making all the ground subside. Menelaus
was coming to this spot, leaving no space at all

for a second chariot to move along beside him.
But Antilochus guided his sure-footed horses
off the track, charging up a little to one side.
Atreus' son, alarmed, shouted at Antilochus:
"Antilochus, you're driving like an idiot!
Pull your horses back! The road's too narrow.
It gets wider soon—you can pass me there!
Watch you don't hit me. You'll make us crash!"
Menelaus shouted, but Antilochus kept going,
moving even faster and laying on the whip,
as if he hadn't heard. They raced on like this
about as far as a discus flies when tossed
with a shoulder swing by a powerful young man
testing his strength. But then the son of Atreus' team
slowed down and fell behind, reined in deliberately,
in case the sure-footed teams somehow collided
and overturned their well-sprung chariots in the road,
leaving their drivers, for all their eagerness to win,
sprawling in the dust. Then fair-haired Menelaus,
in anger at Antilochus, yelled out:

"Antilochus,
you're more reckless than any man alive!
Damn you! Achaeans were all wrong to think
you were a man with some intelligence.
But even so, you still may not win the prize,
without the need to swear you won it fairly."
Menelaus yelled this, then called out to his horses:
"Don't slow down or stand there sad at heart.
Their feet and limbs will tire before yours do,
for those two horses are no longer young."
Menelaus spoke. Excited by their master's shout,
his horses ran on even faster.

Meanwhile, the Argives,
sitting all together, kept watching for the horses
racing on the dusty plain. The first to spot them

was Idomeneus, leader of the Cretans.
He sat some distance from the crowd, in a higher spot,
a fine lookout. The man in front was still far off,
but when he called his horses, Idomeneus
recognized his voice and could see quite clearly
the horse in front—it was all brown, with a mark
as round and white as a full moon on his forehead.
Idomeneus stood up and called out to the Argives:
"My friends, leaders and rulers of Argives,
am I the only one to see those horses,
or can you glimpse them, too? It seems to me
that another team is now in front,
with another charioteer approaching.
Going out, Eumelus' mares were in the lead,
but they must have run into some trouble
out there, somewhere on the plain. I saw them
wheeling round the turning post in front.
Now I can't see them anywhere, though my eyes
keep searching the entire Trojan plain.
Perhaps the charioteer let go the reins
and couldn't guide his chariot round the post
and failed to make the turn. I think he fell
out there somewhere and smashed his chariot.
His horses must have panicked in their hearts
and run away. But stand up. Look for yourselves.
I can't see all that clearly, but the man
seems to be of Aetolian descent,
an Argive king, mighty Diomedes,
son of horse-taming Tydeus."

At that point,
swift Ajax, son of Oïleus, mocked Idomeneus
with these insulting words:

"Idomeneus,
why are you always nattering? Those prancing mares
are still far distant, with a lot more ground

to race across. And of all the Argives here
you're not the youngest—those eyes in your head
don't have the keenest vision. But for all that,
you still chatter on. You don't need to babble,
when there are better men than you around.
Those same mares as before are out in front,
Eumelus' team, and he's standing there, as well,
holding the reins."

The leader of the Cretans,
furious with Ajax, then replied:

"You're great at insults,
Ajax, but really stupid. In everything,
you're the most useless Argive of them all,
because your mind is dull. Come on then,
let's bet a tripod or a cauldron on it—
which horses are in front—so you'll learn
by having to pay up. As our umpire,
let's have Agamemnon, son of Atreus."
At Idomeneus' words, swift Ajax, son of Oïleus,
jumped up at once, in a rage, ready to answer
with more angry words. At that point, their quarrel
might have got much worse, but Achilles himself
stood up and said:

"No more of this,
Idomeneus and Ajax, no more angry words,
no more insults—that's not appropriate.
You'd both feel angry if another man
behaved this way. So sit down with the group
and watch for horses. It won't be long
before their eagerness to win brings them here.
Then you can both see the Argive horses,
who's in the lead and who's behind."
As Achilles spoke, Tydeus' son came charging in
really close to them. He kept swinging his whip

down from the shoulder, so his horses raced ahead,
raising their hooves up high as they ran the course.
Clouds of dust kept falling on the charioteer,
as his chariot made of gold and tin raced on,
drawn by swift-running horses, who left behind
only a slight trace of wheel rims in the dust,
as the team flew speeding by. Diomedes pulled up
right in the middle of the crowd. Streams of sweat
dripped from the horses' necks and chests onto the ground.
He jumped down from his gleaming chariot, leaning the whip
against the yoke. Strong Sthenelus didn't wait for long
to get the prizes—he retrieved them right away,
giving the woman to his proud comrades to lead off
and the two-handled tripod to carry with them.
Then he untied the horses from their harnesses.
Next in came the horses driven by Antilochus,
grandson of Neleus, who just beat Menelaus—
he won by cunning, not by his horses' speed.
But Menelaus was bringing his swift horses in
very close behind. The space between the two
was as far as a horse is from the chariot wheel,
when it strains to pull its master fast across the plain—
its tail ends touch the spinning wheels behind it—
there's not much space between them, as they move
at top speed on the plain—that's about how far
Menelaus lagged behind noble Antilochus.
At first, he'd been about a discus throw behind,
but he was quickly catching up, for the spirit
in Agamemnon's mare, the fair-maned Aethe,
kept getting stronger. Had the course been longer
for both contestants, he'd have surely passed him,
without leaving the result in doubt. The next one in
was Meriones, Idomeneus' brave attendant,
a spear-throw length behind splendid Menelaus.
His horses were the slowest, and he himself
had the least skill at driving in a chariot race.
Last one in was Admetus' son, well behind the rest,

driving his horses in front of him and pulling
his chariot behind. Seeing Eumelus coming in,
swift-footed lord Achilles felt sorry for him.
Standing among Argives, he spoke his words had wings:
"The best man brings up his sure-footed horses
in last place. Come, let's give him a prize,
as seems fitting—the award for second place.
Let Diomedes take the first-place prize."
Achilles spoke. They all agreed with his suggestion.
So now he would have given Eumelus the mare,
as Achaeans had agreed, but Antilochus,
great-hearted Nestor's son, stood up to claim his right.
Addressing Achilles, son of Peleus, he said:
"Achilles, I'll be angry with you,
if you carry out what you've proposed.
For you want to rob me of my prize,
claiming that his chariot and swift horses
ran into trouble—as he did himself,
though he's an excellent charioteer.
But he should have prayed to the immortals—
in the race he would not have finished last.
If you're feeling sorry for Eumelus,
if he's someone your heart is fond of,
in your hut there's lots of gold. You've got bronze,
sheep, women slaves, and sure-footed horses.
Why not take some of that and then give him
an even greater prize sometime later on?
Or do it now. Achaeans will applaud you.
But I won't give up the mare. If someone
wants her, let him try doing battle with me,
hand to hand."

Antilochus finished speaking.
Swift-footed, god-like Achilles smiled, delighted
with Antilochus, who was a close companion.
In reply, he spoke these winged words:

"Antilochus,
if you're telling me to give Eumelus
some other prize inside my huts, I'll do it.
I'll give him the breastplate I took away
from Asteropaeus. It's made of bronze,
with a casting of bright tin around it.
For Eumelus it will have great value."
After saying this, Achilles ordered Automedon,
his close companion, to fetch the breastplate from the hut.
He went and brought it back and gave it to Eumelus,
who was delighted to receive the armour.
But then Menelaus stood up before them all.
His heart was bitter with unremitting anger
against Antilochus. A herald put the sceptre
in Menelaus' hand, then shouted out for silence
among the Argives. God-like Menelaus spoke:

"Antilochus, you used to have good sense,
before all this. Now look at what you've done.
You've brought my skills here into disrepute,
fouling my horses when you hurled your team
in front of me out there, that team of yours
which is far inferior to mine. Come now,
you leaders and rulers of the Argives,
judge between the two of us—and fairly,
so Achaeans armed in bronze will never say,
'Menelaus beat Antilochus with lies,
when he received that mare. Though his horses
were much slower, he used his influence,
his rank and power.'

In fact, I myself
will judge the case, and no Danaan,
I claim, will find fault with me in any way,
for justice will be done. Antilochus,
come here, my lord, and, as our customs state,
stand there before your chariot and horses,

holding that thin whip you used before.
With your hand on your horses, swear an oath,
by the god who surrounds and shakes the earth,
that you didn't mean to block my chariot
with some trick."

[720] Antilochus, a prudent man, replied:
"Don't let me offend you, king Menelaus.
I'm a younger man than you—you're my senior
and my better. You know how a young man
can do foolish things. His mind works quickly,
but his judgment's suspect. So be patient
in your heart. That mare I was awarded
I freely give you. And if you requested
something greater from my own possessions,
I'd want to give it to you right away,
[730] rather than lose your good will, my lord,
for ever and offend against the gods."
The son of great-hearted Nestor finished speaking.
He led out the horse, then placed it in the hands
of Menelaus, whose heart melted like the dew
on ripening ears of corn, when fields are bristling
with the crop—that's how, Menelaus, your heart
softened in your chest. He spoke to Antilochus—
his words had wings:

"Now, indeed, Antilochus,
I'll give up my anger with you. Before now,
[740] you haven't been too reckless or a fool.
This time your youth overcame your judgement.
In future, you shouldn't try to do such tricks
against your betters. Another Achaean
would not have won me over quite so fast.
But you've worked very hard, endured a lot—
you, your noble father, and your brother—
in my cause. So I'll agree to your request.
What's more, though she's mine, I'll give you the mare,

so all these people here will recognize
my heart's not arrogant or unyielding."
Saying this, Menelaus gave the mare to Noëmon,
a comrade of Antilochus, to lead away.
Menelaus carried off the shining cauldron.
Meriones then collected the two talents
for his fourth-place finish. But the prize for fifth place,
the two-handled jar, went unclaimed. So Achilles
awarded it to Nestor. Carrying the prize
into the crowd of Argives, he stood beside him.
Then Achilles said:

"Take this now, old man.
Let it be your treasure, in memory
of Patroclus' burial. For you'll see him
no more among the Argives. This prize
I'm giving you without a contest.
For you won't be competing as a boxer,
or in wrestling, or the spear throw.
Nor will you be running in the foot race.
For old age now has you in its cruel grip."
With these words, Achilles placed the jar in Nestor's hands.
He was happy to accept it. Then Nestor spoke,
saying these winged words to Achilles:
"Indeed, my son, you've made a valid point.
For my limbs and feet are no longer firm,
my friend. Nor do I find it as easy
to extend my arms out from my shoulders,
as I did before. Would that I were young,
my strength as firm, as it was that day
Epeians buried lord Amarynceus
at Bouprasium. His sons awarded prizes
in honour of their king. No man could match me,
none of the Epeians, my own Pylians,
nor any of the brave Aetolians.
In boxing I defeated Clytomedes,
Enops' son, in wrestling Ancaeus,

from Pleuron, who fought against me.
In the footrace, I outran Iphicles,
who was outstanding, and in the spear throw,
I beat Phyleus and Polydorus.
I was beaten only in the chariot race
by the two sons of Actor. They pushed ahead,
for there were two of them, both really keen
to win, because they'd set the greatest prize
for that particular race. They were two twins.
One always held the reins—he was the driver.
The other used the whip. That's the man I was,
back then, but now let younger men compete
in events like these. For I must follow
the dictates of a cruel old age these days,
though as a warrior I once excelled.
But come, you must continue with these games
to honour your companion. As for this gift,
I accept it gladly. It delights my heart
that you think of me always as your friend.
You don't forget the honours due to me
among Achaeans. May the gods grant you,
as a reward for that, your heart's desires."
Nestor finished. Once he'd heard all of Nestor's story,
Peleus' son moved through the large Achaean crowd.
Then he set out prizes for the painful contest—
the boxing. To the group he led out a sturdy mule,
an unbroken female, six years old, the hardest
to break in. For the loser, he put out a cup,
one with two handles. Then Achilles, standing up,
addressed the Argives:

"Son of Atreus,
all you other well-armed Achaeans,
for these prizes here we need two good men,
the best there are, to put up their fists and box.
The one to whom Apollo gives endurance
and Achaeans all acknowledge winner,

let him then take this mule back to his hut.
The beaten man gets this two-handled cup."
Achilles' words at once stirred into action
a strong, brave man, well skilled in boxing—Epeius,
son of Panopeus. Putting his hand on the mule,
Epeius said:

"Let whoever's going to get
the two-handled cup step forward. For I say this—
no Achaean will beat me with his fists
and take this mule. I claim I'm the winner.
I may not be the best in battle. So what?
A man can't be well skilled in everything.
But I'll say this—and what I say will happen—
I'll break apart the skin and crush the bones
of the man who fights me. Those close to him
had better stay here in a single group
to help him off, once my fists have thrashed him."
Epeius' words reduced them all to silence.
The only one to stand up to oppose him
was godlike Euryalus, son of Mecisteus,
son of Talaus. He'd once come to Thebes,
for the funeral games of fallen Oedipus.
There he'd triumphed against all the sons of Cadmus.
Famous spearman Diomedes helped him prepare,
encouraging Euryalus with his words—
he really wanted him to win the contest.
First, he set the loin cloth on him, then gave him
leather thongs, fine hide cut from a farmyard ox.
When the two men had laced up their hands, they strode
into the middle of the group. Raising their arms,
their powerful fists, they went at one another.
Their hands exchanged some heavy punches, landing
with painful crunches on their jaws. From their limbs
sweat ran down everywhere. Then Euryalus feinted,
but godlike Epeius moved and punched his cheek bone.
Euryalus could not keep his feet for long.

His splendid limbs collapsed there on the spot—
as a fish jumps through the rippling surface water
in a forceful North Wind breeze near a weed-filled shore,
before a black wave hides it—that how Euryalus
jerked up as he was hit. But great-hearted Epeius
grabbed him and set him on his feet. Around him,
his close comrades gathered. They led him through the crowd
spitting gobs of blood, dragging his feet behind him,
with his head down on one side. They took him off,
set him down with them, still semi-conscious,
then went themselves to collect the two-handled cup.
For the Danaans, Peleus' son then set out
a display of prizes for the third contest,
the hard-fought wrestling match. The winning prize
was a huge tripod to place above a fire,
whose value among themselves Achaeans set
at twelve oxen. Into the middle of the crowd
he then brought out the loser's prize, a woman
skilled in every kind of work, worth four oxen.
Standing up among the Argives, Achilles said:

"Step up now the two who'll try this contest."
At these words, great Telamonian Ajax got up,
as did Odysseus, the crafty master of deceit.
They strapped on their belts and strode out to the crowd,
then, with their powerful hands gripped each other's elbows—
locked together like rafters on some lofty house,
fitted by skilled craftsmen to keep out blasts of wind.
Their backs cracked as their strong hands applied the pressure.
Streams of sweat poured down, and red blood welts appeared
across their ribs and shoulders, as both contestants
kept up their struggle to prevail and get the prize,
that well-made tripod. But it was impossible
for Odysseus to trip up Ajax or throw him down,
or for Ajax to do the same thing to Odysseus,
for Odysseus' strength prevented him from that.
But when well-armed Achaeans started to get bored,

great Telamonian Ajax said to Odysseus:
"Divinely born son of Laertes,
resourceful Odysseus—try lifting me,
or I'll try lifting you. And we'll let Zeus
decide the outcome."

Saying this, Ajax tried a lift.
But Odysseus did not forget his various tricks.
He kicked Ajax behind the knee, taking out his leg.
Ajax toppled backward, with Odysseus falling
on his chest. The spectators got excited then.
Next resilient, godlike Odysseus tried a lift.
He managed to move Ajax off the ground a bit,
but couldn't lift him. Then Ajax hooked him
with his leg around the knee, so the two men fell
close together on the ground, covered both in dust.
Now they would have jumped up to wrestle a third fall,
but Achilles himself came up and held them back.
"You two need not continue wrestling.
Don't let the pain exhaust you. For both of you
are winners. You must take equal prizes.
Once you leave, other Achaeans can compete."
Hearing these words, both men agreed. The two of them
cleaned their bodies of the dust and put on tunics.
After that, Peleus' son quickly set out other prizes
for the footrace—a finely crafted silver mixing bowl,
holding six measures. It was very beautiful,
the loveliest object in the world by far.
Sidonian experts in skilled handicrafts who made it
had shaped it well. Then Phoenician men had brought it
over the dark sea, unpacked it in the harbour,
and given it as a gift to Thoas, as ransom
for Lycaon, Priam's son, paid by Euneus,
son of Jason, to warrior Patroclus. This bowl
Achilles set out as a prize to honour his companion,
a trophy for the man who in the footrace
proved he was the fastest. As prize for second place,

he led out a huge ox, rich in fat. For third place,
he offered half a talent. Then Achilles stood up
and announced to the Achaeans:

"Up all those of you
who want to make the effort for this prize."
At that, swift Oïlean Ajax jumped up at once.
Next came resourceful Odysseus and Nestor's son
Antilochus, who, of all the young men there,
could run the fastest. These men stood in line,
as Achilles pointed out the turning post—
the race course was the distance there and back.
The son of Oïleus quickly raced in front,
with godlike Odysseus really close behind,
as close as the weaving bar comes to the breast
of a well-dressed woman when she deftly pulls it
in her hands to pass the weaving spool through thread,
keeping the rod against her chest—that's how close
Odysseus ran behind, his feet hitting Ajax's footprints
before the dust could settle there. Godlike Odysseus
ran so close, his breath touched the back of Ajax's head.
All the Achaeans were cheering on Odysseus,
as he strove to win the race, yelling at him
to push his energy right to the limit.
While they were running the last section of the course,
Odysseus in his heart prayed to Athena,
goddess with the glittering eyes:

"Hear me, goddess!
Be good to me. Help me. Speed up my feet."
Odysseus prayed, and Pallas Athena heard him.
She made his legs, feet, and upper arms feel lighter.
Then, as they were about to sprint in for the prize,
Ajax slipped in mid stride—for Athena fouled him—
right where the bellowing cattle had dropped their dung
as they were slaughtered, the ones which swift Achilles
had killed in honour of Patroclus. So Ajax

finished with his mouth and nostrils full of dung,
as resilient Odysseus raced on ahead,
came in first, and won the prize. Ajax got the ox.
He stood there, hands on the horn of that farmyard beast,
spitting out cow dung, and then said to the Argives:
"So the goddess played tricks with my feet—
the one that always helps Odysseus out,
taking care of him, just like a mother."

Ajax spoke.
They all had a good laugh at him. Antilochus
took the prize for coming last. He smiled, then said,
as he spoke to the Argives:

"Friends, I'll tell you this,
something you already know—immortal gods
still honour older men, even today.
Ajax is just a little older than myself,
but Odysseus comes from another time,
an older generation. But his greater age,
so people say, is green. Thus it's difficult
for Achaeans to beat him in a race—
all except Achilles."

Antilochus finished speaking.
He'd acknowledged the swift-footed son of Peleus,
so Achilles answered him and said:

"Antilochus,
you've not paid that tribute here for nothing.
I'll add a gold half-talent to your prize."
With these words, Achilles handed him the gold.
Antilochus was very pleased to get it.
Next, the son of Peleus brought to the gathering
a long-shadowed spear. He set it down, and with it
a shield and helmet. It was Sarpedon's armour,
which Patroclus had taken from him. Standing there,

Achilles then said to the Argives:

"We're calling for two men,
two of the best, to battle for these prizes,
clothed in armour, wielding their sharp bronze,
testing each other here before this crowd.
Whichever man hits the other's fair skin first,
under the armour, drawing his dark blood,
will get from me this silver-studded sword,
a lovely one from Thrace, which I seized
from Asteropaeus. Both men will take
this armour here, sharing it in common.
And in my hut we'll get a banquet ready
for both of them."

Achilles finished.
Then great Telamonian Ajax moved out front,
and strong Diomedes, son of Tydeus, got up.
On each side of the crowd they armed themselves,
then both strode to the middle, prepared to fight,
both glaring fearfully. All Achaeans were then gripped
with anxious expectation. Once the two men
approached each other at close quarters, they attacked,
charging three times, three times going at it hand to hand.
Ajax struck through the even circle of the shield
of his opponent, but did not touch his flesh.
The breastplate kept his body guarded from the spear.
Tydeus' son was trying to aim his gleaming spear point
over the huge shield, to get Ajax in the neck.
But then Achaeans, in their fear for Ajax,
called for a halt and an award of equal prizes.
So Achilles gave the great sword to Diomedes—
the scabbard and the well-cut strap as well.
Then Peleus' son put out a lump of rough-cast iron,
which, in earlier days, Eëtion had used for throwing.
Godlike, swift-footed Achilles had slaughtered him,
then taken his iron and all his other goods

away in his swift ship. Achilles then stood up,
and addressed the Argives:

"Step up all those
who want to try this competition.
Whoever wins this iron can use it
to serve his needs for five successive years,
even though his rich fields are far away.
His herders and his ploughman will not need
to travel to the town through lack of iron.
This will give them all that they require."
Achilles spoke. Then up came Polypoetes,
a strong fighter, and godlike Leonteus,
a powerful man, then Telamonian Ajax,
and godlike Epeius. They stood there in a line.
Godlike Epeius gripped the weight, swung it round,
then threw. The Achaeans all laughed at the result.
The second one to throw was Leonteus,
offshoot of Ares. Great Ajax, son of Telamon,
was third to throw. His strong hand tossed the weight,
hurling it beyond the marks of all the others.
But then that strong warrior Polypoetes
picked up the weight and threw it even further
than all those in the contest, by the same distance
a herdsman throws his staff, so it flies spinning
in among his cattle herd. The crowd all shouted.
Then the comrades of strong Polypoetes stood up
and carried off their king's prize to the hollow ships.
Next, Achilles set out the prizes for the archers,
things made of blackened iron—ten double axes
and ten with single blades. Then he set up,
far off in the sands, the mast of a dark-prowed ship.
Attached to it with a slender cord, he placed
a quivering dove with the cord tied to its foot.
He then told competitors to shoot the dove.

"The man who hits it,

that quivering dove, can carry off
all these double axes. He can take them home.
If he misses the bird and hits the cord,
he'll be less successful, but he'll take as prize
these single-bladed axes."

Achilles finished speaking.
Powerful lord Teucer then got up, and Meriones,
courageous attendant to lord Idomeneus.
They took lots and shook them in a helmet made of bronze.
Teucer's lot gave him first attempt. He loosed an arrow,
a powerful shot, but he'd made no promise
to Apollo that he'd give a splendid offering
of new born lambs. So he failed to hit the bird—
Apollo wouldn't give him that. But he hit the cord
tethering the bird near its foot and cut it.
The keen arrow sliced right through. The dove escaped,
flying up into the sky, chord dangling down
towards the ground. Achaeans then all cheered the shot.
But Meriones quickly snatched the bow from Teucer.
He'd been holding an arrow ready for some time,
as Teucer aimed. He offered up a rapid prayer
to Apollo, the far shooter, promising
he'd make a splendid sacrifice of new-born lambs.
He saw the trembling dove high up, under the clouds.
As she circled there, he shot her through the middle,
under the wing. The arrow passed straight through, falling
back to earth again. It struck by Meriones' foot.
The dove fluttered to the mast of the dark-prowed ship,
her head hung down, her wings drooped, as life
fled quickly from her limbs. She fell from the mast
a long way to the ground. The crowd looked on amazed.
So Meriones carried off ten double axes,
while Teucer took back to his hollow ships
the single-bladed ones.

Then Peleus' son

brought out a long-shadowed spear and set it down
before the gathering and a brand new cauldron,
not yet touched by fire, with a floral pattern on it.
Its value was one ox. Then warriors got up
for the spear-throw competition—the son of Atreus,
wide-ruling Agamemnon, and Meriones,
courageous attendant to lord Idomeneus.
But then swift-footed, godlike Achilles spoke:

"Son of Atreus,
we know how you surpass all others,
how in the spear throw you're much stronger,
better than anyone. So take this prize,
as you go to your hollow ships. Let's give
the spear to warrior Meriones, if your heart
is pleased with that. It's what I'd like to do."
Achilles spoke. Agamemnon, king of men, agreed.
The warrior king gave the spear to Meriones,
then handed his own prize, the lovely cauldron,
over to Talthybius, his herald.