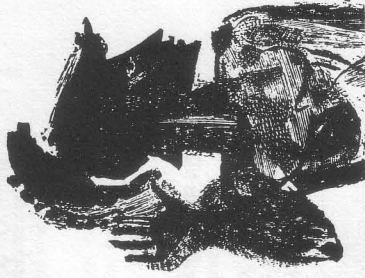


THE DEATH OF PATROCLUS

FROM HOMER'S ILIAD CHAPTER 16

An English Version by CHRISTOPHER LOGUE
READ BY: ROBERT PAUL SONKOWSKY



The Iliad of Homer is one of the ancient Greek epic poems which tell the story of the fall of Troy. However, this poem is no mere chronicle of the whole Trojan war. Instead, it concentrates dramatically on a few weeks of the tenth year of the fighting and its main subject is the Wrath of Achilles.

The poet-translator Christopher Logue and the performer Robert Paul Sonkowsky have tried to get the spirit and fire of the original Greek Logue's translation as performed by Sonkowsky is a poem in its own right, not slavishly faithful to the letter of the original, but bringing the ancient epic to its own rightful and enormous dramatic life for the modern listener.

ROBERT PAUL SONKOWSKY lives in St. Paul and works at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where he combines a scholarly interest in the Classics with his activity in the theater. Holding a split appointment as an associate professor in the Department of Classics and the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts, he teaches

Greek and Latin in one department and classical rhetoric and drama in the other. He is the author of numerous studies and articles on classical subjects, and he is at the same time an actor of wide experience.

He was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, where he acquired his earliest education and his first theater experience, having studied there at Lawrence College and having performed in The Attic Theater as well as in school theaters. However, since graduating from Lawrence, his studies, teaching, and theater roles have taken him to: the University of North Carolina, where he earned a Ph.D. in Classics and worked with the Carolina Playmakers; Durham, N.C., with the Durham Theater Guild; Italy, on a Fulbright Scholarship; Berea, Kentucky, in The Wilderness Road theater company; Virginia Beach, where he completed his doctoral dissertation and performed, under the pseudonym Robert Stanton, the role of Robert E. Lee in Paul Green's The Confederacy; The University of Texas; The University of Wisconsin on a postdoctoral research fellowship; the University of Missouri.

Characters in Book XVI of the Iliad

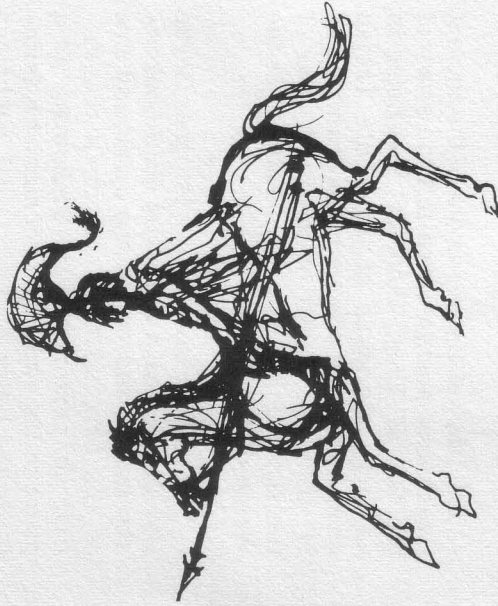
ACHILLES ... the hero of the poem
PATROCLUS ... Achilles' beloved friend
MYRMIDONS ... the tribe of fighting men under Achilles
Odysseus ('the smart Ithacan'),
Diomedes, Eurypylus ... Greek heroes
AGAMEMNON ... commander-in-chief of the Greek forces, King of Argos, brother of Menelaus
Peleus ... the (mortal) father of Achilles
Thetis ... a sea-goddess, mother of Achilles
GOD ... Zeus
AJAX ('Big Ajax') ... next to Achilles mightiest and bravest of the Greeks
HECTOR ... prince and mightiest defender of Troy
BRISEIS ... the girl Achilles won
APOLLO ... divine son of Zeus, chief Olympian protector of Troy
PYRAECHMES ... Macedonian chariot commander, one of Troy's best
Priam ... the king of Troy, father of Hector (and of Paris)
Cleobulus ... Trojan hero
Little Ajax ... Greek hero, next to Achilles the most swift-footed of the Greeks
Peneleos ... Greek hero, leader of the Boeotian forces
Lycon ... Trojan hero
Scamander ... river of Troy and a god
Thester, son of Enops ... Trojan hero
SARPEDON ... son of God (Zeus), King of Lycia, fought for Troy
CLAUCUS ... companion of Sarpedon, second in command of the Lycians
Bathycles ... a Myrmidon conspicuous for wealth
Sleep
Death ... twin brother of Sleep
Eckelus, Perimos, Sistor, Keth, San, Crates, Doron, Pilarty, Fanes, Geyan, Mastor, Toris ... in the Trojan army
Euphorbus ... Trojan spearman

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An English Version

Christopher Logue



PROLOGUE: *In the tenth summer of the Trojan War Achilles withdrew his forces from the Greek Confederacy because Agamemnon appropriated one of his female slaves. Thereafter the Trojans gained the upper hand. Hector raided the Greek beach-head, crossed the ditch surrounding their fleet, and burned one of their ships. For a moment it looked as though he would burn them all; so Patroclus came to Achilles and begged for his help.*

Now hear this:

While they fought around the ship from Thessaly,
Patroclus came crying to the Greek.

'Why tears, Patroclus?' Achilles said.
'Why hang around my ankles like a child
Pestering mother, wanting to be picked up,
Expecting her to stop what she is doing, and,
In the end, getting its way through snivels?
You have had news from home?

Is someone dead, Patroclus? Your father? Mine?

But news like that is never confidential.
If it was true, you, me, and all the Myrmidons
Would cry together.

It's the Greeks, Patroclus, isn't it?
You weep because some Greeks are beaten dead beside their
ships!

But did you weep when those same Greeks condoned my wrongs?
If I remember rightly you said nothing . . . Yes?

And Patroclus:

'Save your hate, Achilles. It will keep.
Our cause is sick enough without your grudging it my tears.
You know Odysseus and Diomedes are wounded!
Eurypylus, too—his thigh—and even Agamemnon.
And you still ask 'Why tears?' Ach,

Is there no end to your obdurate grudge, Achilles?
No. Don't shrug me off. Remember who is asking.
Not Agamemnon. Not the smart Ithacan. No one save me—
And God forbid I share the niceness of a man who,
When his friends go down, sits tight
And claims their punishment as just amends
For the wrongs they did him.

They are dying, Achilles. Dying like flies.
If you can't think of them, think for a moment
Of those who will come after them, what they will say:
'Achilles The Strong'—can't you hear it?—or,
'Achilles The Strong'—and just as well for that,
Because his sense of wrong was very heavy—or,
'Some people say Lord Peleus and Thetis,
Lovely among the loveliest of women,
Were his folk. But if you want the truth,
His father was a long bleak rock
That after centuries was moved
By the even bleaker, always disconsolate
Pestering of the Sea, until she had a son,
Achilles.

Why make me talk to you this way?
If it is true that God or your sainted Mother
Whisper persuasive justifications for desertion in your heart,
It's also true they do not mention me.
Let me go out and help the Greeks, Achilles?
Let me take our troops? Half of them, then!—
And let me wear your weapons . . .
Man, it will be enough!

Me, dressed as you, leading the Myrmidons . . .
The sight of us will make Troy hesitate and say
'It's him', a second look will check them, turn them,
Give the Greeks a rest (although war has no rest)
And, once they have turned, nothing will stop us till
They squat inside their walls.'

In this way, in words

Something like those written above,
Patroclus begged for death.

And Achilles:

'Better to ask yourself if you're my friend or not,
Than speculate which god, or whether God himself,
Or could it be my Mother has put
The cheap excuses in my mouth?—that you see fit
To mention to my face.

Excuses? What excuses? And you,

You mind your tongue,
And not make God sound like a fool
Servicing my resentment.

Why not add Agamemnon to your arguments?
Vain, fretful, insolent King Agamemnon!
Why don't you mention him, Patroclus—eh? Go on . . .
He was a sick man at the time, Achilles.
He did it to avoid unpleasantness, Achilles.
Achilles, he was not too well advised.'

And they stared each other down until he said:

'O, Patroclus,
I'm so full of resentment that I ache.
Tell me, have I got it wrong?
Didn't he take the girl I won?

And didn't all my so-called friends agree that she was mine
Who cut a town in half to get her?—
(That was something!)—yet,

The Royal thief
Who robs the man on whom his commonwealth depends.

But done is done; I cannot grudge forever, love.
Take what you want: men, horses, cars, the lot.
You could see the grudge was almost gone,
Him saying:

'Muster the troops and thrust them, hard,
Just here—marking the sand—'between the enemy
And the fleet. Aie! . . . they are impudent,
These golden Trojans.

They stroke our ships,
Fondle their slim black necks and split them—
Yes! Agamemnon makes me absent.

My absence makes them brave. And so, Patroclus,
Dear Agamemnon makes his enemies secure. All right:
If not Achilles, then his vicar.

Forget the spear. It's not your weight. Take this'—
Choosing one half as long—'instead.
You say Diomedes is out? That's bad. And Ajax too?
He's all that's left then . . . No wonder all I hear is
Hector, Hector, Hector, Hector, everywhere Hector,
As if he was a god split into sixty!

Hurry, Patroclus, or they will burn us out—
No. Wait. Listen to me. You're listening? Good.
Here's what I want.

Win my apologies. My rights and my apologies.
That's all. You hear? I want the Greeks saved, yes,
And then I want to see them at the tent here,
Every single one, with Briseis, virgin, in the front.
And many other gifts. You're clear on that?
Good. And one more thing before you go:

Don't overreach yourself, Patroclus.
Without me you are something, but not much.
Let Hector be. He's mine—God willing—
In any case he'd make a meal of you
And I don't want you killed, you hear?
But neither do I want to see you shining
At my expense. So, here's my order.

No matter how, how much, how often, or how easily you win,
Once you have forced the Trojans back, you stop. That's clear?
The mercenaries can do the mopping up.

There is a certain brightness in the air

Which means the Lord Apollo is too close
For you to disobey me and be safe.
You know Apollo loves the Trojans, and you know
That even God the Father hesitates
To tamper with him . . .
O, my sweet friend,
How splendid it would be if all of them—
Greeks, Trojans, Allies, Confederates—were dead.
And thou and I were left to rip Troy down alone!

And while he talked Ajax was beaten.

The air near Ajax was so thick with arrows that,
As they came, their shanks tickered against each other;
And under them the Trojans swarmed so thick,
Ajax could spread his arms, turn his spear flat,
And simply *push*. Yet they came clamouring back until
So many little Trojans had a go at him,
The iron chaps of Ajax' helmet slapped his cheeks
Into a soft red pulp, and his head reached to and fro
Like a clapper inside a bell made out of sword blades.
Maybe, even with no breath left,
Big Ajax could have stood it more; but
Big and all as he was, Hector meant to burn that ship.
And God was pleased to let him.
Pulling the Trojans out a yard or two,
He baited Ajax with his throat, and Ajax took.
As the spear lifted, Hector stepped into its range;
As Ajax steadied, Hector showed his throat again;
And, as Ajax lunged, Hector jived on his heel
And snicked the haft clean through its neck,
Pruning its bronze nose off—Aie!—it was marvellous to see
Big Ajax blundering about with an empty-headed spear
For—oh, a good half minute went
Before he noticed it was gone.
But when he noticed it
Big Ajax knew God stood by Hector's elbow, not by his;
That God was pleased with Hector, not with Ajax;
And very sensibly he fled.

The ship was burned.

October.
The hungry province grows restive.
The Imperial army must go to the frontier.
Dawn.
The Captains ride in with their standards,
A tiger's face carved on each lance-butt.
And equipment for a long campaign
Is issued to every soldier.
First-light.
Men stand behind the level feathers of their breath.
A messenger runs from the gold-edged tent,
And the Captains form a circle: reading.
The eldest one points north. The others nod.

Likewise the Captains stood around Achilles: listening.
And the Myrmidons began to arm and tramp about the beach.
First sunlight off the sea like thousands of white birds.
Salt haze.

Imagine wolves: an hour ago the pack
Smelt out a stag and tore it into shreds.
Now they have snuffed through its corpse.
They want a drink to wash the curry down; so,
They sniff out a pool and lol their long
Thin, sharp-pointed tongues in it; and as they lap
Little crimson billows drift off their chops,
Spreading through the water like red smoke.

Likewise the Myrmidons as they stood for Patroclus,
While Achilles moved along their ranks; here,
Tightening a shoulder strap; there, dressing a sword.

Over in the north the ship was burning.

Achilles led fifty ships to Troy.
Fifty swift ships, each holding fifty men,
And the force divided into five, under five Commanders.
First was Menesthus, Achilles' nephew.
Far and away of all the Greeks (excepting Nestor)
He was the best tactician, and could judge
The enemy's numbers by the accompanying cloud
Of dust. Once he had courted Helen; now
He fought to get her back, aiming a thousand men
As easily as others aimed their bows.
Next was Eudorus, Polyemele's bastard.
When young this woman was so beautiful
She joined Artemis' dancing nuns
Who lived together in the House of Spindles.
One day while she was dancing
Hermes caught her eye, and beckoned.
And looking neither right nor left
She left the dance and went upstairs
And had the God in her own bedroom.
Sold her to a local man for a small fortune,
But kept the boy for himself.
About the other Commanders we know little.
Peisander led the third contingent, Phoenix—
Once Achilles' guardian—the fourth, and
Alcimedon, nicknamed 'Smiler', led the fifth.

The Myrmidons paraded.
The five Commanders on Achilles' right;
Patroclus on his left; in front of him, the troops.
And the onshore wind carried his voice:
'Myrmidons!
In the last few weeks you have been jeering at the Trojan soldiers
and gossiping about myself.
When I was called self-righteous, none of you denied it. When it
was said that the hardness of my heart proved that I was weaned
on acid, most of you smiled wisely. And some of you said that if
I kept heroes like yourselves out of the fight much longer, you'd
sail home.

However, more men are threatened than struck; and now that
you are going to be employed, I hope that none of you will find it
more difficult to beat the Trojans than to threaten them.
You will clear the enemy from our camp by dusk.'

And he turned his back on them and walked into his tent.
The columns tightened.

The rim of each man's shield
Overlapped the face of his neighbour's shield
Like ashlar work—as masons call it when they lay
Bonded walls, proof against wind.
As they moved off
The columns tightened more, till, from far off,
It seemed five wide black straps studded with bolts
Were being drawn across the sand.

The speech had been well timed.

As they advanced behind their shields
Their armoured mouths encouraged one another
With reproaches, and all their plumes bobbed up and down
Acknowledging the fault.

When Achilles sailed to Troy,
His mother packed and put aboard his ship
A painted oak box filled with winter clothes—
Rugs for his feet, a fleece-lined windcheater,
You know the sort of thing—and in this box
He kept an eye-bowl made of ivory and horn
Which he, and he only, used for communion.
When he had spoken to the troops he took it out,
Rubbed its inside with sulphur crystals,
And washed and dried his hands before
He rinsed it with fresh water and filled it with red wine.
Then, he prayed:

Our Father, who rules in Heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Because your will is done in Earth and Heaven,
Grant me this prayer,
As you have granted other prayers of mine,
As you did grant me Agamemnon
Humble in my stead.
I ask that you stay by me now,
Even as you go with my men,
And my Patroclus.
Give him this day your victory.
And let him show Prince Hector he can win
Without me at his side.
And grant, above all else, O Lord,
That when the Trojans are defeated, he
Shall come home safe to me. Amen.



God heard his prayer and granted half of it.
Patroclus would rout the Trojans, yes.
But not a word was said about his safe return.
No, my Achilles, God promised nothing of the kind,
As you carefully dried your cup, carefully
Put it away and stood outside your tent and watched
Your Myrmidons and your Patroclus go by.

*Hornets occasionally build their nests near roads.
In the late Spring they breed; feeding their grubs
And feeding off the sticky spit the grubs exude.
Now and again a child pokes a stick into the nest
And stirs. The hornets swarm. Jab, jabbing their
Insect poison in its eyes and flesh.
Often the swollen child dies that night.
Sometimes they menace passers-by instead.*

But the Myrmidons made no mistake.

Swarming up and off the beach Patroclus swung them left
At the ditch: keeping it on their right they streamed
Along the camp's main track; on one side, the embankment;
On the other, ships—a line of slender necking
With the huts clutched under the tense black hulls.
Things were so close a man could hardly see in front of him,
And Patroclus on the foot-plate of his chariot, cried—
'FOR ACHILLES!'
As the two sides closed.

The Trojans lay across the ship,
Most of them busy seeing that it burned.
Others slid underneath and were so occupied
Knocking away the chocks that kept it upright
They did not see Patroclus swoop
Out of nowhere on their necks.
But those above did.
Between the time it takes to dip and light a match
Achilles' helmet boomed under their wretched chins,
With Myrmidons played out on either side
Like iron wings.

Dropping the pitch
They grabbed up javelins, knives—boat-hooks, too—oh,
Anything to keep Achilles off!
Had he and Agamemnon patched things up?
Likely enough . . .
And are we covered from the rear?
Too late to ask.

Patroclus aimed where they were thickest.
That is to say, around a Macedonian
Chariot commander called Pyraechmes.
Tough, one of Troy's best. But, just as Patroclus aimed
The ship's mast split from stem to peak—Aoi!—and fell
Lengthwise across the incident.
Its fat waist clubbed the hull's top strake,
And the whole ship flopped sideways.
Those underneath got crunched.
And howling Greeks ran in
To stick the others as they slithered down
Into their lap.

Catching each other's eye both cast, both missed,
Both ran together and both struck, but
Only Lycon missed each time.
His neck was cut clean through
Except for a skein of flesh off which
His head hung down like a melon.

And the Trojans are pressed back,
And the sun like the head of a gold bolt
Nears its zenith, and by a pool two soldiers
Drink from their cupped hands and watch
Each other over their thumbs, and do not see
Hector cross the ditch, defeated,
And the rout begin.

*You will have heard about the restless mice
Called lemmings. How, at no set time, and why,
No one is sure, after years of living
As patiently as any other mouse,
They join in one long column and they march
(Sleeping all day and moving all night long)
Out of the mountains, down, across the land,
Straight as a die until they reach the sea,
Walk into it and drown. And yet
However many of them die before they reach the sea
These yellow vermin are so prodigal
They multiply, and more of them exist
To drown than started off.*

Likewise the Trojans when they crossed the ditch.

From the far bank Hector tried to help them.
Impossible . . .

He did not guess
So many cars, horses, infantry had crossed.
Engaged, there never seemed to be enough, now,
They crammed the edge,
Horses rearing over the drop, big-eyed,
Their mouths wrenched sideways, whimmying,
Neck yokes dragged back like saddles,
And though the drivers looped their reins,
Pegged themselves in and strained.
The teetering mass eased forwards . . .

Only the soft rim held them.
As the wheels notched into it the dirt came up
Over the bolts that pinned the axles to the centre-poles,
Horses lay one side of the rim,
Cars and men the other.
Stuck.

While other men, infantry,
Meant to be rear-guard, climbed into, pulled friends into,
More and more packed in the slipping chariots,
Shouted, struck anyone who checked them, jammed
Spear-poles through spokes —
Aii . . .

And Patroclus let them, let them
While the Myrmidons got back their breath
(Resting musicians among exhausted dancers)
Let them balance, let them, then cried
'For Achilles!'
And drove in.

But not you, Pyraechmes; no.
Heaven had something special up its sleeve for you.
Because the mast's peak hit the ground no more than six
Foot from Patroclus' chariot hub, the horses shied,
Spoiling his cast. Nothing was lost. God blew the javelin straight
At Pyraechmes as he pitched downwards twenty feet,
Headfirst, back arched, belly towards the Greeks—who laughed—
The tab-ends of his metal kilt dangling across his chest.

Whether it was the fall that scared him,
Or the vague flare Patroclus' javelin made
As it drifted through the morning air towards
His falling body like a yellow-headed bird.
We do not know. Suffice to say he shrieked until,
Mid-air, the cold bronze apex sank

Between his teeth and tongue,
Parted his brain, pressed on, and skewered him
Against the upturned hull.

His dead jaw gaped. His soul
Crawled off his tongue and vanished into sunlight . . .
Aoi! It was good to kill him!

*Often at daybreak a salty moon
Hangs over Mount Ida, and the wind that comes
More than a thousand miles across Asia
Knocks a tile off Priam's roof. He yawns.
About this time each day for nine long years
His men marched down the Scaean road, their spears—
Bright nettles stirred by the wind.
And round about this time each day
The Greek commanders shade their eyes
And squint through the sun. Estimating.
And since no battle has ever returned.
All of its soldiers, the Trojans turn, look back,
Think of behind the wall and think
Of those who will need other men next day.*

The battle swayed.

Half-naked men hacked slowly at each other,
As the Greeks eased back the Trojans. They stood close;
Closer; thigh in thigh; mask twisted over iron mask
Like kissing.

One moment fifty chariots break out; head for the ditch;
Three cross; the rest wheel back; vanish in ochre dust.
For an instant the Greeks falter. One is killed. Then
The Trojans are eased back a little more,
The ship is cleared, the fire smothered. Who cares
That Hector's chariot opens a new way,
Now moving, now pausing, now moving on again,
And his spear flickers along the smoky light
Like the head of a crested adder over ferns,
Always the Trojans are eased back towards the ditch.

Out of many battles, consider two.
Cleobulus' chariot yaved and tipped him
Backwards off the plate into Little Ajax' arms.
Neither had room to strike, and so the Greek
(Who only came up to the middle of Cleobulus' ear)
Knocked his head back with a forearm smash
And in the space his swaying made, lopped,
Blood coated both sides of the short blade.
Fate caught Cleobulus' body. Death his head.
Nearer the ditch Peneleos met Lycon:

As you, Hector, drove off.
 So the Trojans nearest to Patroclus squirmed
 Away from him towards the ditch, and those
 Near falling in the ditch clawed back
 Towards Patroclus; and those packed in between
 Just clawed and squirmed and —
 Why did you leave them, Hector? You
 Who had generals like clouds, soldiers like drops of rain,
 As you were halfway back to Priam's windy capital,
 The soft edge gave and all your glittering soldiery
 Topped into the ditch like swill.

*On certain Autumn days the land is grey,
 And the little sky between it and the grey
 Masses of falling cloud, fills with wet haze.
 Cold lines of rain join mile after mile
 Of heaven to earth; floods cover everything;
 And few land animals, save man, survive.
 But the rain continues like God's punishment
 On those who bear false witness, and on those
 Judges divorced from justice by contempt
 For those they judge, and the accomplices
 Of both these sorts of men, who sit
 Quietly on a fence in the storm's eye.
 The flood covers them equally. And then,
 When the rain is over the water drains
 Everything civil off the land in one
 Enormous wave that roars into the sea.*

The Trojan horses made like this.
 As they bolted up the far side of the ditch
 They dragged behind them dead or half-dead charioteers
 Who had looped themselves inside their reins.
 Better like this, perhaps, than left to Greeks.
 Patroclus split the rump.
 Some (only a few) followed their horses up
 Onto the plain and ran for Troy. The rest
 (More, but only a few) scurried along the ditch
 And hid themselves in the fens beside Scamander.
 Poor birds!

No sooner were you half a step from one death
 Than another, worse death, trod on your necks.
 Cooks, farriers, camp-followers, some dogs, all
 The plausible vermin heroic armies carry in their seams
 (Even a poet Diomedes had brought for evening work)
 Nipped down into the ditch to strip the dead
 And cosh the wounded into hell.
 Nothing was left of Hector's raid except
 Loose smoke-swaths drifting over the Aegean like dark hair,
 And the ditch stained perfect crimson where
 Some outraged god, five miles tall, had stamped on glass.
 Movement in the air. Gulls lift.
 Sideslip. Land again. No more.
 Mindless of everything Achilles said
 Patroclus went for Troy.

Try to imagine how it looked.

*In your right hand
 A paper fan three-quarters open.*



*Outward, along the leading edges
 Of the two primary blades,
 The Trojans run towards the rim.
 The blade that follows off your thumb
 Points towards Troy. The other blade,
 Played horizontally across your palm,
 Marks the ditch where the rump was butchered.
 And Patroclus aims his forces at the point
 Where all the blades are pinned
 By a tiny swivel.*

It was here that Thestor, Enops' only son,
 Met the circumstance in his own nature
 Gods call Fate, and on this day
 Men called Patroclus.
 Fate's sister, Fortune,

Favours those who keep their nerve.
 Alas! — Thestor was not like this.

He lost his head first. Then his life.
 His chariot bucked too slow over the rutted corpses,
 And as Patroclus drew abreast of him
 The terrified boy let his horses balk.
 Better to fight until the end, Thestor —
 Who knows, you might have nicked him! — but,
 With the reins flowing out of his hands
 He cowered inside the varnished cradle
 Weeping.

They passed so close that hub skinned hub.
 Ahead, Patroclus braked a shade, and then and gracefully
 As patient men cast fake insects over trout,
 He speared the boy, and with his hip as pivot
 Prised Thestor out of the chariot's basket
 As easily as lesser men
 Detach a sardine from an opened tin.

Nine more Lycians died on the long run for Troy.
 And they were no great trouble.

If a spear slipped, Patroclus watched
 Their white heels flutter up the plain through dust
 While he wiped its haft, waited, and picked his next.
 The day seemed over. Dust could be left to settle.
 But when their prince, Sarpedon, smelt the Lycians' panic,
 He wedged his chariot across the rout, pushed up his mask,
 And laughed:

'Well run, comrades; but what from?' —
 Selecting two light javelins — 'Who will wait
 To see a known Prince fix
 Once and for all this big anonymous Greek?' —
 And vaulted off his chariot plate —
 'That makes you sweat?' And flexed himself,
 Running his thumb across the points, and scuffed
 Dirt towards Patroclus who climbed down
 More slowly, grinning under his iron.

It was noon.

God and His wife (who is his sister too)
 Watched them prepare. He, with regret. She,
 With a certain womanly satisfaction heard him out.
 'Surely Fate has marked enough good men without Sarpedon?
 Shall I lift him up and away
 To the clear meadows he rules in Lycia?
 Or shall I let Patroclus have him?'

And she:

'I'm sure I don't know why you're asking me.
 You'll do what suits you best — as usual.

But remember this:

Others besides yourself have loved ones due today.
 If one god saves his child, all of them will be doing it.
 And then where will we be? My Dear,
 I know you love Sarpedon and I know
 His death goes hard. Why not do this:
 Let him fight bravely for a while and when
 Patroclus severs him from care and human misery,
 Sleep and Death shall carry him to Lycia by Taurus,
 Remembered by wise men throughout the world,
 And buried royally.

Noon. Striped mosquitoes. Nothing stirring.

*Under the white sun, back and forth
 Across a disk of yellow earth, midway
 Between the ditch and the closed stone capital,
 The heroes fought like Pharaoh's bare-necked hens
 Wrangling over carrion in mid air.
 They sight each other, stand on their tails, stoop,
 Lock claws, lie back inside their wings and hang
 High in between the white-faced pyramids,
 Savaging each other's craws.*

Likewise the human champions,
 Until Patroclus' spear nosed past Sarpedon's busy heart
 And the ground sense in his body seeped away.

*He fell as a tree falls — oak, say, or pine —
 Slowly at first and then, with the bright
 Commercial axes thocking at its heart,
 The tall hurt trunk lies down and settles
 Resentfully among its leaves.*

Sarpedon kneeled at first, then lay full length
 Teeth clenched and calling 'Glaucus!' behind them.
 'Glaucus, be quick, or they will strip me
 Even before I'm dead.

And if they do it, Glaucus, if
 My captured weapons prove their jubilee,

Shame on you, Glaucus, till your dying day.
So get our best.
All of them — Hector, too — you'll not miss him?
And cover me with moving blades till sunset,
Then . . . he was going,
For my sake . . . going,
'Kill!'

And he was gone.
Sun reflected in his dry green eyes.
Patroclus in his chariot again,
Wiping his neck, his smiling beard,
About to signal the advance.

Listen Master!
Glaucus prayed to the Lord Apollo,
Wherever you may be,
And you are everywhere,
And everywhere you hear
Trouble has come to me.
Our best is dead and I
Am wounded, Lord!
Lord, hear my prayer!
You know me and you know
I shall fight until I die,
But I can barely lift my arm!
Lord, put my pain to sleep,
And grant me strength enough to keep
Swords flickering across
Sarpedon's ruined body,
Until you lead the Sun away.

And Apollo, Mousegod, Lord of the Morning, He
Whose face is brighter than a thousand suns,
Mollified his wound with precious ointment,
And let delight like flame rise through his loins,
And more, for, as Glaucus ran for Hector,
Aeneas, the rest, Apollo called:
'Sun, stand thou still over Ilium,
And guard Sarpedon's ruined body till their blades
Move over it like grasses over stone.'

Air into azure steel.
The daytime like translucent bronze.
And through it all
One sun's cord falling, opening out
A radiant cone around Sarpedon's body,
And him inside it,
Lying like a waxen god asleep on his outstretched hand.
And his blood broke into hyacinths,
And the sand congealed as moss,
While Glaucus asked:

'Do you forget your friends so quickly, Hector?
They bleed. You sun your knees. While you are safe,
They die, are stripped, yes, mutilated too,
And the upshot of your caution is
The humiliation of our dead and O, how easily
Ares — the pig-brained butcher god —
Prods his bronze Greek instruments to put
More of us down!

Sarpedon's dead, my Hector. Achilles' boy-friend killed him.
And you do nothing? Yet
Not so very long ago you came to him for help,
And all you brought was 'We would be obliged.'
And 'Thankyou, thankyou,' when he promised it —
And kept his promise with half Lycia!
And on the day he came, before your father
Could finish multiplying thanks by previous thanks,
Sarpedon had put out his weapons,
Gotten his troops together and engaged your enemies.
That day and every long successive fighting day
He was first out, last home, with laughter,
Golden words, good words, always the first,
First across Agamemnon's ditch today,
And now he's dead and has no fellow
How do you fill your obligations, Hektor?
Moep? Worry? Count heads? . . .

But they had gone.
Rolling across the plain together
Like an arrowhead from a kneeling bowshot.
Hector, leaning over the horses
As if the chariot was fastened to his belly,
As if his eyes, not horses, drew the Trojans in
Towards the boiling spiral.

Dust like red mist.
Pain like chalk on slate. Heat like Arctic.
The light withdrawn from Sarpedon's body.
The enemies swirling over it. Bronze flak.
Man against man; banner behind slatted banner;
The torn gold overwhelming the faded blue,
Blue overwhelming gold, both up again, both frayed
By arrows that drift like bees, thicker than autumn rain.
The left horse falls. The right prances on blades,
Tearing its belly like a silk balloon,
And the shields inch forward under bowshots,
And under the shields the half-lost soldiers think,
'We fight when the sun rises. When it sets we count the dead.
What has the beauty of Helen to do with us?' Half-lost,
With the ochre mist swirling around their knees
They shuffle forward, lost, until the shields clash

— AOII
Lines of black ovals eight feet high, clash
— AOII
And in the half-light who will be first to hesitate,
Or, wavering, draw back, and, Yes! . . . the slow
Wavering begins and, Yes! . . . they bend away from us
As the spears flicker between the black hides,
The bronze glows vaguely, and bones show
Like pink drumsticks.
And over it all,
As fires shift up and down a haemorrhage alive with ants,
The captains in huge iron masks drift past each other,
Calling, calling, gathering light on their breastplates,
So stained they think that they are colleagues
And do not turn, do not salute, or else salute their enemies.
But we who are under the shields know
Our enemy marches at the head of the column,
And yet we march!
The voice whose orders we obey is the voice of the enemy.



Yet we obey!
And he who is forever talking about enemies
Is himself the enemy!

Light circling over the dunes. The flying white.
And far above the soldiers the larks soar,
Treading the cloud, breathing the haze!

Where is Sarpedon's body? Nobody knows.
But Glaucus found a man called Bathycles.
He was the richest Greek to sail for Troy.
(Skins and Leathers, a small sword factory, numerous farms)
And thought how very proper it would be
If Glaucus' death became a part of his estate.
So, to oblige him, Glaucus ran,
And Bathycles (poor fool!) ran after him.
And Glaucus jumped a broken chariot shaft,
And Bathycles jumped — Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh! —
And like a woman wets and puts the cotton
Through a needle's eye, Glaucus spun on his pads
And let his javelin through Bathycles.

If Hector waved,
His wounded and his sick got up to fight again;
And if Patroclus called, the Myrmidons
Laughed and called back — with them, as with Patroclus,
To die in battle was like going home.
Inside the yellow spiral
The enemies jammed cheek to cheek,
And both, because they could do nothing else,
Looked up and thought they saw the moon —
Was it so long? — and wondered to themselves,
'Who will be left to praise us if we win?
And if we lose, who will there be to bury us?'
Yet it was not the moon they saw but the sun
Turning a day longer than autumn
Above the dust.

You must recall the pause, thock, pause,
Sounds that are made when axeblades follow
Each other through a valuable wood.
Though the work is going on on the far
Side of the valley, and the axeblades are
Muted by a mile of clear, still standing air,
They throb, throb gently in your ears.
And occasionally you can hear a phrase
Spoken between the men who are more
Than a mile away, with perfect clarity.



Likewise the sounds of
Spear against spear, shield against shield, shield
Against gleaming spear around Sarpedon's body.
And nobody, including those who saw him lie
Like a waxen god asleep on his outstretched hand,
Could know him now.

*But if you can imagine how
Each evening when the dairy pails come in
Innumerable flies throng around
The white ruff of the milk,*

You will have some idea of how the Greeks and Trojans
Clouded about Sarpedon's body.
And all this time God watched his favourite enemies:
Considering. Minute Patroclus, a fleck
Of spinning radium on his right hand —
Should he die now? Or push the Trojans back still more?
And on his left, Prince Hector, like a golden mote —
Should he become a coward for an hour
And run for Troy while Patroclus steals Sarpedon's gear
That glistens like the sea at early morning?

The left goes down.
In the half-light Hector's blood turned milky
And he ran for Troy.

It is true that men are clever.
But the least of gods is cleverer than their best.
And it was here, before God's hands
(Moons poised either side of the world's agate)
You overreach yourself, Patroclus.
Yes, my darling,
Not only God was out that day but Lord Apollo.
*You know he loves the Trojans, so,
No matter how, how much, how often, or how easily you win,
Once you have forced them back, you stop.*
Remember it, Patroclus? Or was it years ago
Achilles cautioned you outside his tent?
**Remembering or not you stripped Sarpedon's gear,
Ordered your borrowed Myrmidons to drag him off
And went for Troy alone.**
And God turned to Apollo, saying:
'Mousegod, take my Sarpedon out of range
And clarify his wounds with mountain water.
Moisten his body with tinctures of white myrrh
And the sleeping iodine; and when the chrysms dry,

Fold him in minivers that never wear
And hints that never fade,
And call my two blind footmen, Sleep and Death,
And let them carry him to Lycia by Taurus,
Where his tribe, playing stone chimes and tambourines,
Will consecrate his royal death as fits a man
Before whose memory even the stones shall fade.'
And Apollo took Sarpedon out of range,
And clarified his wounds with mountain water.
Moistened his body with tinctures of white myrrh
And the sleeping iodine, and when the chrysms dried
The Mousegod folded him in minivers that never wear
And hint that never fades,
And fetched the two blind footmen, Sleep and Death,
And saw they carried him, as fits a man
Before whose memory even the stones shall fade,
To Lycia by Taurus.

While this was done Achilles' overreaching vicar killed:
Eckelus, of whom nothing is known; Perimos, the son of Megas; Sistor,
an Egyptian horse dealer; Keth and San, slaves to the former; Crates,
a silversmith from Cyne; Doron, a regular; Pilarty, a cook; Fanes,
Geyan, & Masstor, farriers; Totis, a merchant slaver.

Three times Patroclus climbed Troy's wall.
Three times his fingers scraped the parapet.
Three times and every time he tried it on
The smiling Mousegod flicked him back.
But when he came a fourth, last time,
The smile was gone.
Instead, from parapet to plain to beach-head, on,
Across the rucked, sunlit Aegean, the Mousegod's voice —
Loud as ten thousand crying together —
Cried

**'Greek,
Get back where you belong!'**

So loud
Even the Yellow Judges passing sentence
Half of the world away, paused —

**'Get back where you belong!
Troy will fall in God's good time,
But not to you!'**

Banner behind slatted banner,
Blue overwhelming gold, gold over blue,
It was Patroclus' turn to run
Wide-armed, staring into the fight, and desperate
To hide (to blind that voice), to hide
Behind the moving blades.

And as he ran
Apollo dressed as Priam's brother
Settled beside the inner gates
And strolled with Hector for a while, and took his arm
And, mentioning the ways of duty, love, good-conduct,
And the other perishable joys infecting men,

Dissolved his cowardice with promises.
Think of it: they stand like brothers, man and god,
Chatting together on the parapet that spans the inner gate.
The elder points. The other nods. And the plumes nod
Over them both: Patroclus cannot see
The uncle's finger leading Hector's eye
Towards his heart. Nor does he hear Apollo whispering
'*Achilles' heart will break . . .*' And neither man
Imagines that a god discusses mortals with a mortal.

So Hector mounts. Half of each pair of gates swings in,
And with the sun across his shoulders like a metal stole
Hector comes out.

The light weakens. Up on the hillside
Women waist-deep in dusk sing while working.
The first movement of sunset turns the blue air
Darker blue.
Patroclus fought like dreaming.
His head thrown up, his mouth — wide as a shrieking mask —
Sucked at the air to nourish his infuriated body,
And the Trojans seem to be drawn to him.
Locked round his waist, red water, washed against his chest,
And laid their tired necks beside his sword like birds,
— Is it a god? Divine? Needing no tenderness? —
Yet, instantly, they touch he butts them,
Cuts them back.

*You know from books and talking pictures,
How people without firearms set about
Killing a tiger that had grown too old
To prey on antelope or zebra and
Must confine its diet to the slower
Animals like man. Following its spoor,
They rig a long funnel of netting up,
On spikes (like pointed clothes-props) and the lean
Striped beast is driven down its throat by gongs.
The net is shut. And when the beast is tired out
The humans kill it in their own good time.
But if the net breaks many humans die.*

Likewise Patroclus broke among the Trojans.
A set of zealous bones covered with flesh,
Finished with bronze, dipped in blood,
And the whole being inspired by ferocity.

— Kill them!
My sweet Patroclus,

— Kill them!
As many as you can,
For

Coming behind you in the dusk you felt
— What was it? — felt the darkness part and then

APOLLO!

Who had been patient with you,
Struck.

His hand came out of the east,
And in his wrist lay eternity.

And every atom of his mythic weight
Was poised between his fist and bent left leg,
And it hit the small of your back, Patroclus . . .

Your eyes leant out. Achilles' helmet rang
Far and away beneath the cannon-bones of enemy horses,
And Achilles' breastplate (five copper plates
Mastered with even bronze) split like a pod.

And you were footless . . . staggering . . . amazed
Between the clumps of dying, dying yourself,
Dazed by the brilliance in your eyes
And the noise, like weirs heard far away.

So you staggered, blind eyes open,
Dabbling your astounded fingers in the vomit
On your chest.

And all the Trojans lay and stared at you,
Propped themselves up and stared at you,
Feeling themselves as blest as you felt cursed.
All of them just lay and stared

Except a boy called Euphorbus.

He took his chance and cast. Straight.
The javelin went through both calves,
Stitching your knees together, and you fell
(Not noticing the pain) and tried to crawl
Towards the fleet, and — even now — snatching
Euphorbus' ankle, Ah! and got it? No . . .
Not a boy's ankle that you got,
But Hector's

Standing above you,
His bronze mask smiling down into your face,
Putting his spear through . . . ach, and saying,
'Why tears, Patroclus?'

Did you hope to melt Troy down
And make our women carry home the ingots for you?
You can just imagine it!
You and your marvellous Achilles sitting,
Him with his upright finger wagging, saying,



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'Don't show your face in here again, Patroclus,
Unless its red with Hector's blood.'

You fool.
You weak, impudent, silly little fool.
And Patroclus,
Shaking his voice out of his body, says
'Big mouth,

Remember it took three of you to kill me.
A god, a boy, and last of all, a hero!
I can hear Death

Calling my name and yet
Somehow it sounds like Hector
And when I close my eyes
I see Achilles' face with Death's voice coming out of it.

Saying these things Patroclus died.
And as his soul went through the sand like water,
Hector drew out his spear and said,
'Perhaps.'

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