*faber and faber*

Christopher Logue's *War Music*, his version of Books 16 to 19 of Homer's *Iliad*, has been a long time in the making. *Patrocleia* was first published by Scorpion in 1962, and even then attracted superlatives. Henry Miller, writing to Lawrence Durrell in the autumn of 1962, was forthright: 'Just tumbled on Chris Logue's "extra-ordinary" rendition of Book 16 of the *Iliad*. I can't get over it. If only Homer were anywhere near as good.'

Since then reviewers have been unanimous in their praise for this version of a classic text which is itself a modern classic.

'Translation of genius . . . A lasting harvest . . . ' George Steiner, *Sunday Times*

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WAR MUSIC Christopher Logue

# WAR MUSIC

## *Christopher Logue*

An Account of Books 16 to 19 of Homer's ILIAD

# Introduction

Either the translations of the *Iliad* on which *War Music* is based did not exist or they had had only a passing interest for me until 1959 when Donald Carne-Ross suggested I contribute to a new version of the poem he was about to commission for the BBC.

Knowing no Greek I began work on the passage he chose for me by studying the same passage in the translations published by Chapman (1611), Pope (1720), Lord Derby (1865), A. T. Murray (1924), and Rieu (1950).

While Pope was the most and Murray the least accomplished of these authors, Murray, according to learned gossip, possessed the most and Pope the least information about Homer's Greek —though Chapman had tried to abort the charge that his translation was based on a French crib by calling his judges "envious Windfuckers"; Lord Derby was high-Victorian- and Rieu mid-Windsor-steady.

Yet whatever these guides had known about the language in which the *Iliad* was composed, each of them gave me a quite dissimilar impression of the work that had inspired their own; and this variety, plus regular *On Homer* tutorials from Carne-Ross, supported my plan to retain the storyline of the passage he had chosen for me, but to cut or to amplify or to add to its incidents, to vary certain of its similes, and (mostly) to omit Homer's descriptive epithets, "ten-second-miler-Achilles," "thick-as-a-pyramid-Ajax," and so forth.

As the work progressed beyond its original limitation I paid less attention to my guides. Carne-Ross would provide me with a literal translation that retained the Greek word order; I would concoct a storyline based on its main incident; and then, knowing the gist of what this or that character said, would try to make their voices come alive and to keep the action on the move.

I was not, then, making a translation in the accepted sense of the word, but what I hoped would turn out to be a poem in English dependent upon whatever, through reading and through conversation, I could guess about a small part of the *Iliad*, a poem whose composition is reckoned to have preceded the beginnings of our own written language by fifteen centuries.

My reading on the subject of translation had produced at least one important opinion: "We must try its effect as an English poem," Boswell reports Johnson as saying, "that is the way to judge of the merit of a translation."

Even though it owes its life to ridicule or to the power of bad taste, any poem that survives outside professional literary circles for more than one generation is noteworthy.

For a poem of over 15,000 lines representing an age as remote from its own as it is from ours to survive the collapse of, not just one society (a serious critical test no poem in English has, as yet, had to pass), but two, could easily mean that those who have kept it alive are mad.

And if it follows that those who read the *Iliad* in translation are merely a bit touched, some of our national problems become clearer: Pope earned the equivalent of £100,000 from his Homer work; my edition of Lord Derby's *Iliad* is its fifth; two million copies of Rieu's version have been sold. In fact, any deficiencies of length or of vigour you may find in what follows may be ascribed to my concern for public health.

*War Music* comprises Books (as scholars call them) 16 to 19 of the *Iliad*.

My choosing these passages derives from the advice of Carne-Ross. "Book 16, or *Patrocleia*," he said, "might be described as a miniature version of the *Iliad*. It has a quarrel, a making-up, a concession, several battles, the death of a famous leader (Sarpedon), disagreement in Heaven, a human cheeking the Gods, and, as a result of that human's death, an irreversible change.



"In addition to these things, *Patrocleia* contains the *Iliad*'s crucial twist: through the death of Patroclus, Achilles returns to the fight, thereby assuring the destruction of Troy."

*Pax*, or Book 19, is its opposite: disaffected allies settling their differences in order to avoid defeat at the hands of a mutual enemy. *Pax* lacks fighting; it exemplifies the public confession of common sins righted by material compensation and absolved by formal sacrifice.

With *Pax* completed I realised that conflating Books 17 and 18 as *GBH* (Grievous Bodily Harm, an English legal term for serious forms of criminal assault) would allow me to try my hand at something new—600-odd lines devoted almost entirely to violent, mass action, which, once done, would unite *Patrocleia* and *Pax* into a narrative capable of being read independently of its guessed-at parent.

After *Patrocleia* was first published I started to get critical support not only from those connected with the composition and publication of verse but from those whom we may choose to count among the hopelessly insane: the hard core of Unprofessional Ancient Greek Readers, Homer's lay fans.

Welcome as the support of my like had been, as encouraging, and critically speaking more useful, were my contacts with such fans. "Quite good that bit of Homer you did," one might say. "If you do more of it, have a look at"—citing a favourite passage —"and in case you need any help with the words—take my card."

I took up three such offers. What I learned from those Homerniks clarified the guesses I made about the transmitted text, and my debt to them is considerable.

In addition to Carne-Ross I would like to thank Colin Leach, Peter Levi, Bernard Pomerance, Kathleen Raine, George Rapp, Stephen Spender, and George Steiner for their critical support; and the Bollingen Foundation and the Arts Council of Great Britain for their financial support.

# War Music

# Prologue

*In the ninth 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 protecting their fleet, and burned one of its ships. It looked as if the Greeks would be destroyed.*

*At this moment Patroclus came to Achilles and begged for his help.*

# Patrocleia

Now hear this:
While they fought around the ship from Thessaly,
Patroclus came crying to the Greek.

"Why tears, Patroclus?" Achilles said.
"Why hang about my ankles like a child
Pestering its mother, wanting to be picked up,
Expecting her to stop what she is at, and,
In the end, getting its way through snivels?
You have bad news from home?
Someone is dead, Patroclus? Your father? Mine?
But news like that is never confidential.
If such was true, you, me, and all the Myrmidons
Would cry together.
It's the Greeks, Patroclus, isn't it?
You weep because a dozen Greeks lie dead beside their ships.
But did you weep when those same Greeks condoned my wrongs?
If I remember rightly, you said—nothing."

And Patroclus:
"Save your hate, Achilles. It will keep.
Our cause is sick enough without your grudging it my tears.
You know Odysseus is wounded?
Orontes, too—his thigh: King Agamemnon, even. Yet
Still you ask: *Why tears?*
Is there to be no finish to your grudge?
No, no; don't shrug me off. Mind who it is that asks:
Not the smart Ithacan; not Agamemnon. Me.
And God forbid I share the niceness of a man
Who, when his friends go down, sits tight

And finds his vindication in their pain.
They are dying, Achilles. Dying like flies.
Think, if you cannot think of them, of those
Who will come after them; what they will say:
*Achilles the Resentful*—can you hear it?—
Achilles, strong? . . . *The Strongest of the Strong*—
And just as well, because his sense of wrong was heavy.
Shameful that I can talk to you this way."
All still.
"And yet, among the many who do not,
As I believe that God and she who bore
You to a mortal husband back your claim,
So I believe they will not censor mine:
Let me go out and help the Greeks, Achilles.
Let me command your troops. Part of them, then?
And let me wear your armour."
Still.
"Man—it will be enough!
Me, dressed as you, pointing the Myrmidons . . .
The sight alone will make Troy pause, and say:
'It's him,' a second look will check them, turn them,
Give the Greeks a rest (although war has no rest) and turned,
Nothing will stop us till they squat behind their Wall."

And so he begged for death.

"Better to ask yourself," Achilles said,
"If you would stay my friend or not
Than speculate which god, or whether God Himself,
Packaged the specious quibbles with my mouth
Your insolence delivers to my face.
Why not add Agamemnon to your whine?
King vain, king fretful, truthless Agamemnon,
Eager to eat tomorrow's fame today.
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."*
Staring each other down until he said:
"O love,
I am so glutted with resentment that I ache.
Tell me, have I got it wrong?
Did he not take the girl I won?—
And all my fine fair-weather friends agree
That she was mine by right of rape and conquest? Yet,
When it comes to it, they side with him; the royal slug
Who robs the man on whom his crown depends.
Yet done is done; I cannot grudge forever.
Take what you want: men, armour, cars, the lot."
Easy to see his loss was on the run;
Him standing, saying:
"Muster the troops and thrust them, hard,
Just here"—marking the sand—"between the enemy
And the Fleet.
Aie! . . . they are impudent, these Trojans . . .
They stroke our ships,
Fondle their slim black necks, and split them, yes—
Agamemnon's itchy digits make me absent,
My absence makes them brave, and so, Patroclus,
Dear Agamemnon's grab-all/lose-all flows.
All right: if not Achilles, then his vicar.
Forget the spear. Take this"—one half its length—"instead.
You say Odysseus is out? Bad. Bad. And Ajax, too?
No wonder all I hear is
Hector, Hector, Hector, everywhere Hector,
As if he were a god split into sixty!
Hurry, Patroclus, or they will burn us out . . .
But listen first. Hard listening? Good.
Hear what I want:
My rights, and my apologies. No less.
And that is all.

I want the Greeks saved, yes;
Thereafter—Agamemnon at my tent,
With her, Briseis, willing, at my feet;
And many gifts. Be clear about the gifts.
And one thing more 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.
But neither do I want to see you shine
At my expense.
So mark my word:
No matter how, how much, how often, or how easily you win,
Once you have forced the Trojans back, you stop.
There is a certain brightness in the air,
Meaning 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 our Father hesitates
To contradict Apollo . . .
O friend,
I would be glad if all the Greeks lay dead
While you and I demolished Troy alone."

Cut to the Fleet.

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 outspread his arms, turned his spear flat,
And simply *pushed*. Yet they came clamouring back until
So many Trojans had a go at him



The iron chaps of Ajax' helmet slapped his cheeks
To soft red pulp, and his head reached back and forth
Like a clapper inside a bell made out of sword blades.
Maybe, even with no breath left,
Big Ajax might have stood it yet; yet
Big and all as he was, Prince 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 skipped in range;
As Ajax readied, Hector bared his throat again;
And, as Ajax lunged, Prince Hector jived on his right heel
And snicked the haft clean through its neck,
Pruning the bronze nose off—Aie!—it was good to watch
Big Ajax and his spear, both empty topped,
Blundering about for— Oh, a minute went
Before he noticed it had gone.
But when he noticed it he knew
God stood by Hector's elbow, not by his;
That God was pleased with Hector, not with Ajax;
And, sensibly enough, he fled.

The ship was burned.

October.
The hungry province grows restive.
The Imperial army must visit the frontier.
Dawn.
The Captains arrive behind 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 pearl-fringed tent.
The Captains form a ring. They read.
The eldest one points north. The others nod.

Likewise his 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
Hustled a stag, then tore it into shreds.
And now that they have gorged upon its haunch
They need a drink to wash their curry down.
So, sniffing out a pool, they loll their long,
Thin, sharp-pointed tongues therein; and as they lap
Rose-coloured billows idle off their chops,
Drifting throughout the water like pink smoke.

Likewise his soldiers ready for his eye,
Their five commanders on his right,
Patroclus on his left,
And the onshore wind behind Achilles' voice:

"Excellent killers of men!
Today Patroclus leads; and by tonight,
You, behind him, will clear the Trojans from our ditch.
And who at twilight fails to bring
At least one Trojan head to deck
The palings of our camp, can sleep outside
With Agamemnon's trash."

The columns tightened.
The rim of each man's shield
Overlapped the face of his neighbour's shield



Like clinkered hulls—as shipwrights call them when they lay
Strake over strake, caulked against seas.
As they moved off, the columns tightened more;
Until, to one above, it seemed, five wide black straps,
Studded with bolts, were being drawn across the sand.

Before Achilles sailed to Troy
His women 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 from ivory and horn
Which he, and only he, used for Communion.
And having spoken to his troops he took it out,
Rubbed sulphur crystals on its inner face,
And washed and dried his hands before,
Spring water rinsed, brimming with altar-wine,
He held it at arm's length, and prayed:

*"Our Father, Who rules the Heaven,*
*Because Your will is done where will may be,*
*Grant me this prayer*
*As You have granted other prayers of mine:*
*Give my Patroclus Your victory;*
*Let him show Hector he can win*
*Without me at his side;*
*And grant, above all else, O Lord,*
*That when the Trojans are defeated, he*
*Returns to me unharmed."*

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 carefully you dried your cup,
As carefully replaced it in its box,
And stood outside your tent and watched
Your men and your Patroclus go by.

Hornets occasionally nest near roads.
In the late spring they breed, feeding their grubs
And feeding off the tacky sweat those grubs exude.
Ignorant children sometimes poke
Sticks into such a nest, and stir. The hornets swarm.
Often a swollen child dies that night.
Sometimes they menace passers-by instead.

No such mistake today.

Swarming up and off the beach
Patroclus swung Achilles' Myrmidons
Left at the ditch.
Keeping it on their right they streamed
Along the camp's main track; one side, the rampart;
On the other, ships.
Things were so close you could not see your front;
And from the footplate of his wheels, Patroclus cried:
"For Achilles!"
As the enemies 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 stoop.
But those above did.



In less time than it takes to dip and light a match
Achilles' helmet loomed above their cheeks
With Myrmidons splayed out on either side
Like iron wings.
Dropping the pitch
They reached for javelins, keelspikes, boat-hooks, Oh,
Anything to keep Achilles off—
Have he and Agamemnon patched things up?

Patroclus aimed his spear where they were thickest.
That is to say, around
The chariot commander, Akafact.
But as Patroclus threw
The ship's mast flamed from stem to peak, and fell
Lengthwise across the incident.
Its fat waist clubbed the hull's top deck
And the ship flopped sideways.
Those underneath got crunched.
And howling Greeks ran up
To pike the others as they slithered off.
This fate was not for Akafact:
Because the mast's peak hit the sand no more than six
Feet from Patroclus' car, the horses shied,
Spoiling his cast. Nothing was lost.
As he fell back, back arched,
God blew the javelin straight; and thus
Mid-air, the cold bronze apex sank
Between his teeth and tongue, parted his brain,
Pressed on, and stapled him against the upturned hull.
His dead jaw gaped. His soul
Crawled off his tongue and vanished into sunlight.

Often at daybreak a salty moon
Hangs over Ida; and the wind that comes
More than a thousand miles across Asia

Knocks a tile off Priam's roof.
About this time each day for nine long years
His men marched down the Skean road,
Their spears like nettles stirred by wind;
And round about this time each day
The Greek commanders shade their eyes
And squinny through the morning sun;
And since no battle has returned
All of its soldiers, the Trojans wave,
Look back towards the wall, and think
Of those who may require new 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. And then
The Trojans are eased back a little more;
The ship is cleared, the fire smothered, and who cares
That Hector's chariot opens a new way,
Now moving, pausing now, now moving on again,
And his spear's tip flickers in the smoky light
Like the head of a crested adder over fern?—
Always the Trojans shift towards the ditch.

Of several incidents, consider two:
Panotis' chariot yawed and tipped him
Back off the plate by Little Ajax' feet.
Neither had room to strike; and so the Greek
Knocked his head back with a forearm smash,
And in the space his swaying made, close lopped.



Blood dulled both sides of the leafy blade.
Fate caught Panotis' body; death his head.
Nearer the ditch Arcadeum met Lycon:
Catching each other's eye both cast, both missed,
Both ran together, and both struck; but
Only Lycon missed both times.
His neck was cut clean through
Except for a skein of flesh off which
His head hung down like a melon.

You will have heard about the restless mice
Called lemmings; how, at no set time, and why,
No one is sure, they form a grey cascade that pours
Out of the mountains, down, across the flat,
Until they rush into the sea and drown.

Likewise the Trojans as they crossed the ditch.

From the far bank Hector tried to help them.
Impossible . . .
He did not guess
So many cars, so many infantry, had crossed;
Engaged, there never seemed enough; but now
They crammed the edge,
The big-eyed horses rearing at the drop,
Their mouths wrenched sideways,
Neck yokes dragged back like saddles.
And though the drivers looped their reins,
Pegged themselves in, and hauled,
The teetering jam eased forward.
Only the soft edge held them;
And as the wheels notched into it, the dirt came up
Over the bolts that pinned the axles to the centre-poles,
Horses on one side of the rim,
Cars and men the other.

Stuck.
While other men, infantry,
Meant to be rearguard, climbed into, pulled friends into,
Shouted, struck at who tried to check them, jammed
Spear-poles through spokes—
Aie . . .
And Patroclus let them, let them,
Let them balance, let them, then cried:
"For Achilles!"
And drove in.

As you, Hector, drove off.

So the Trojans nearest to Patroclus squirmed
Away from him towards the ditch; and those
Near falling into it clawed back
Towards Patroclus; and those cram-packed 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 partway back to Priam's capital
The soft edge gave, and all your glittering soldiery
Toppled into the ditch like swill.

On certain winter days the land seems grey,
And the no-headroom left between it and the grey
Masses of downthrust cloud, fills with wet haze:
Lines of cold rain weld mile on sightless mile
Of waste to air: floods occupy the state; and still
The rains continue, grey on grey;
God's punishment, say some, on those who bear
False witness; and some say, on those
Judges divorced from justice by contempt
Of those they judge; plus the accomplices of both,
Perched on their fencing through the vacant day,



Until the water takes them all in all
In one enormous wave into the sea.

The Trojan horses made like this.
As they went 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
Scurried along the ditch and hid themselves
Among Scamander's fens.

Nothing was left of Hector's raid except
Loose smoke-swaths like blue hair above the dunes,
And Agamemnon's ditch stained crimson where
Some outraged god five miles tall had stamped on glass.

A movement in the air. Gulls lift;
Then sideslip; land again. No more.
Mindless of everything Achilles said
Patroclus went for Troy.

See if you can imagine how it looked:

An opened fan, held flat; its pin
(That marks the ditch) towards yourself; its curve
(That spans the plain) remote:
The left guard points at Troy; the right
Covers the dunes that front the Aegean coast:
Like crabs disturbed by flame the Trojans run
This way and that across its radiants.

Patroclus thrusts his soldiers at the mid
Point of the pleated leaf; a painted sun.

And it was here that Thestor, Enop's boy,
Met that circumstance in nature
Gods call fate, and on this day, men called Patroclus.
Thestor was not a Trojan.
But when King Priam's satraps came from Troy
And asked Sarpedon, Lycia's Prince, for aid,
And he said, "Yes"—Thestor, the apple of old Enop's eye,
Applied to leave his management and fight
With all his clan. And as he reined away, he called:
"Do not forsake me, O my seven meadows,
Until I conquer Greece!"
Though all he conquered was six foot of sand.

Fate's sister, Fortune, favours those
Who keep their nerve.
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 the horses baulk,
Leaving the reins to flow beside the car,
And cowered in its varnished basket,
Weeping.
They passed so close that hub skinned hub.
Ahead, Patroclus braked a shade, and then,
And gracefully as men in oilskins cast
Fake insects over trout, he speared the boy,
And with his hip his pivot, prised Thestor up and out
As easily as later 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 missed, Patroclus watched
Their white heels flutter up the plain through dust,
Picked a fresh haft, waited, and pinned his next.
The day seemed done; dust could be left to dust;
Flies had laid eggs in many of the dead;
Until Sarpedon wedged his car across the rout,
Pushed up his mask, and said:
"Well run, my soldiers, but from what?"—
Selecting two light javelins—"Who will wait
To see their known Prince spit
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 his points, and scuffed
Dirt toward Patroclus, who climbed down
More slowly; pleased beneath his iron.

It was noon.

God and His wife (who is His sister, too)
Watched them prepare. He, with regret; She,
With satisfaction heard Him out:
"Surely Fate has marked enough good men without Sarpedon?
Shall I return him to his waving plains
Or let . . ."
And She:
"Others beside Yourself have children due today.
If one God saves his bud—why not the rest?
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; then, when
Patroclus severs him from care and 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 stirs.

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

Likewise the human champions until
Patroclus' spear nosed past Sarpedon's busy heart
And the ground sense in his body leached away.
Kneeling at first, then laid full length,
Teeth clenched and saying: "Glaucos, be quick
Or they will strip me while I live.
And if they do it, Glaucos, if
My captured weapons prove their jubilee,
Shame on you, Glaucos, till your dying day.
So get our best.
Anaxapart, Aeneas, Hector, too—do not miss him-
And cover me with moving blades till sunset.
Then . . ." he was going,
"For my sake, Glaucos . . ." going,
"Kill!"
And he was gone.
Sunlight reflecting in his dry brown eyes.
Patroclus in his chariot again,
Wiping his neck, his smiling beard,
About to signal the advance.

*"Listen, Master!"*
Glaucos prayed to Lord Apollo,



*"Wherever You may be,*
*And You are everywhere,*
*And everywhere You hear*
*Men in their trouble;*
*Trouble has come to me.*
*Our best is dead and I*
*Am wounded, Lord! O Lord*
*Apollo hear my prayer!*
*You know me, and You know*
*That 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*
*My sword above Sarpedon's corpse*
*Until the sun obeys Your call to set."*

And Apollo, Mousegod, Lord of the Morning, He
Whose face is brighter than a thousand suns,
Mollified his wound with sacred thought,
And let delight in fighting warm his loins.
And He did more: as Glaucos fetched their best,
Apollo called:
"Sun, stand thou still over Ilium,
And guard Sarpedon's body till their blades
Move over it as grasses over stone."

Air into azure steel;
The daylight stiffens to translucent horn;
And through it,
Falling,
One sun's cord
Opening out into a radiant cone around Sarpedon's corpse;
And him inside that light, as if
A god asleep upon his outstretched hand.

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 raised banner;
The torn gold overwhelming the faded blue;
Blue overcoming gold; both up again; both frayed
By arrows that drift like bees, thicker than autumn rain.
The left horse falls. The right, prances through 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:
—AOI!
Lines of black ovals eight feet high, clash:
—AOI!
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 spear points flicker in between black hide
Bronze glows vaguely, and bones show
Like pink drumsticks.
And over it all,
As flies shift up and down a haemorrhage alive with ants,
The captains in their iron masks drift past each other,
Calling, calling, gathering light on their breastplates;
So stained they think that they are friends
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 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 the dunes. The flying white.
Larks soar above the soldiers, breathing haze.
And them above, their faces pressed against eternal glass,
The Gods . . .

"The one I fancy," Hera says, "is him."
"The Redhead?"
"Yes . . ." and whispered over space into his ear:
"King human. Menelaos. If you stick
*Him*, *him*, and *him*, I promise you will get your Helen back."

See how that Royal fights:
Flaking his blade on Python's hip,
He rakes its splintered edge down Cazca's back,
Tosses aside the stump,
And with his ever-vengeful, empty hands,
Grabs Midon, old King Raphno's eldest son
—Known as Count Suckle to his enemies—
Expert at dicing, good in bed, who once
(Just for a joke, of course) ate thirty vulture's eggs
At one of Helen's parties on the wall.
And later men recalled how he was slain;
One swearing "gutted," one "that he was ripped
Up the front until his belly grinned,"
And some were quite convinced he ran away
And lived ten thousand days beside a cool
And amethystine lake in Phrygia;

But if you want the truth, well . . .
King Menelaos got him by the ears
Bowed back his chubby neck and bit
A lump out of his jugular—
"Sweet God, his dirty blood is in my eyes!
Some Trojan runt will stick me . . ." but
She who admired him wiped the mess away.

If Hector waved,
His wounded and his sick got up to fight;
And if Patroclus called, the Myrmidons
Struck, and called back; with them, as with Patroclus,
To die in battle was like going home.

Try to recall the pause, thock, pause,
Made by axe blades as they pace
Each other through a valuable wood.
Though the work takes place on the far
Side of a valley, and the axe strokes are
Muted by depths of warm, still standing air,
They throb, throb, closely in your ear;
And now and then you catch a phrase
Exchanged between the men who work
More than a mile away, with perfect clarity.

Likewise the sound of spear on spear,
Shield against shield, shield against spear
Around Sarpedon's body.

And all this time God watched His favourite enemies:
Minute Patroclus, like a fleck
Of radium on His right hand,
Should he die now—or push the Trojans back still more?
And on His left, Prince Hector, like a silver mote,
Should he turn coward for an hour
And let Patroclus steal Sarpedon's gear?



The left goes down.
In the half-light Hector's blood turns milky
And he runs 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 on either side of their earth's agate)
You overreached yourself, Patroclus.
Yes, my darling,
Not only God was out that day but Lord Apollo.
*"You know Apollo loves the Trojans: so,*
*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,
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 violet iodine; and when these chrysms dry,
Fold him in miniver that never wears
And lints that never fade,
And call my two blind footmen, Sleep and Death,
To carry him to Lycia by Taurus,
Where, playing stone chimes and tambourines,
His tribe will consecrate his death,
Before whose memory 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 violet iodine; and when these chrysms dried
He folded him in miniver and lints

That never wear, that never fade,
And called God's two blind footmen, Sleep and Death,
Who carried him
Before whose memory the stones shall fade
To Lycia by Taurus.

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, sunstruck Aegean, the Mousegod's voice,
Loud as ten thousand crying together,
Cried:

"Greek,
Get back where you belong!"

So loud
Even the Yellow Judges giving law
Half-way across the world's circumference paused.

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

It was Patroclus' turn to run, wide-armed,
Staring into the fight, and desperate to hide
(To blind that voice) to hide
Among the stainless blades.



And as he ran
Apollo dressed as Priam's brother stood
Above the Skean Gate, and strolled
With Hector for a while, and took his arm,
And mentioning the ways of duty, courage, love,
And other perishable joys infecting men,
Dissolved his cowardice with promises.
Observe the scene:
They stand like relatives; the man, the God,
Chatting together on the parapet
That spans the 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 flesh.
Nor can he hear Apollo whispering:
"Achilles' heart will break . . ." And neither man
Thinks that a god discusses mortals with a mortal.

Patroclus fought like dreaming:
His head thrown back, his mouth—wide as a shrieking mask—
Sucked at the air to nourish his infuriated mind
And seemed to draw the Trojans onto him,
To lock them round his waist, red water, washed against his chest,
To lay their tired necks against his sword like birds.
—Is it a god? Divine? Needing no tenderness?—
Yet instantly they touch, he butts them,
Cuts them back:
—Kill them!
My sweet Patroclus,
—Kill them!
As many as you can,
For
Coming behind you through the dust you felt
—What was it?—felt creation part, and then

# APOLLO!

Who had been patient with you

Struck.

His hand came from the east,
And in his wrist lay all eternity;
And every atom of his mythic weight
Was poised between his fist and bent left leg.
Your eyes lurched out. Achilles' helmet rang
Far and away beneath the cannon-bones of Trojan horses,
And you were footless . . . staggering . . . amazed . . .
Between the clumps of dying, dying yourself,
Dazed by the brilliance in your eyes,
The noise—like weirs heard far away—
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 lay and stared;
And one, a boy called Thackta, cast.
His javelin went through your calves,
Stitching your knees together, and you fell,
Not noticing the pain, and tried to crawl
Towards the Fleet, and—even now—feeling
For Thackta's 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 fetch the ingots home?
I can imagine it!
You and your marvellous Achilles;



Him with an upright finger, saying:
*Don't show your face again, Patroclus,*
*Unless it's red with Hector's blood.*"
And Patroclus,
Shaking the voice out of his body, says:
"Big mouth.
Remember it took three of you to kill me.
A god, a boy, and, last and least, a hero.
I can hear Death pronounce my name, and yet
Somehow it sounds like *Hector*.
And as 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
Hector withdrew his spear and said:
"Perhaps."