

What god was it then set them together in bitter collision?
Zeus' son and Leto's, Apollo, who in anger at the king drove
the foul pestilence along the host, and the people perished,
since Atreus' son had dishonored Chryses, priest of Apollo,
when he came beside the fast ships of the Achaians to ransom
back his daughter, carrying gifts beyond count and holding
in his hands wound on a staff of gold the ribbons of Apollo
who strikes from afar, and supplicated all the Achaians,
but above all Atreus' two sons, the marshals of the people:
"Sons of Atreus and you other strong-greaved Achaians,
to you may the gods grant who have their homes on Olympos
Priam's city to be plundered and a fair homecoming thereafter,
but may you give me back my own daughter and take the ransom,
giving honor to Zeus' son who strikes from afar, Apollo."

Then all the rest of the Achaians cried out in favor
that the priest be respected and the shining ransom taken;
yet this pleased not the heart of Atreus' son Agamemnon,
but harshly he drove him away with a strong order upon him:
"Never let me find you again, old sir, near our hollow
ships, neither lingering now nor coming again hereafter,
for fear your staff and the god's ribbons help you no longer.
The girl I will not give back; sooner will old age come upon her
in my own house, in Argos, far from her own land, going
up and down by the loom and being in my bed as my companion.
So go now, do not make me angry; so you will be safer."

So he spoke, and the old man in terror obeyed him
and went silently away beside the murmuring sea beach.
Over and over the old man prayed as he walked in solitude
to King Apollo, whom Leto of the lovely hair bore: "Hear me,

lord of the silver bow who set your power about Chryse
and Killa the sacrosanct, who are lord in strength over Tenedos,
Smintheus, if ever it pleased your heart that I built your temple,
if ever it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces
of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for:
let your arrows make the Danaäns pay for my tears shed.”

So he spoke in prayer, and Phoibos Apollo heard him,
and strode down along the pinnacles of Olympos, angered
in his heart, carrying across his shoulders the bow and the hooded
quiver; and the shafts clashed on the shoulders of the god walking
angrily. He came as night comes down and knelt then
apart and opposite the ships and let go an arrow.

Terrible was the clash that rose from the bow of silver.

First he went after the mules and the circling hounds, then let go
a tearing arrow against the men themselves and struck them.

The corpse fires burned everywhere and did not stop burning.

Nine days up and down the host ranged the god’s arrows,
but on the tenth Achilles called the people to assembly;
a thing put into his mind by the goddess of the white arms, Hera,
who had pity upon the Danaäns when she saw them dying.

Now when they were all assembled in one place together,

Achilleus of the swift feet stood up among them and spoke forth:

“Son of Atreus, I believe now that straggling backward
we must make our way home if we can even escape death,
if fighting now must crush the Achaians and the plague likewise.”

The Iliad, trans. Richmond Lattimore (l.8-61).

“if a Sparrow come before my Window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.”

Letter to Bailey, 11-22-1817.

“I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds—No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a King’s bodyguard—then “Tragedy with sceptred pall comes sweeping by.” According to my state of mind I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches, or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily. Or I throw my whole being into Troilus, and repeating those lines, “I wander like a lost Soul upon the stygian Banks staying for waftage,” I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone.”

Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 10-13-1818.

“the poet has none, no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s creatures.—If then he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops?^[83] It is a wretched thing to confess; but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical Nature—how can it, when I have no Nature? When I am in a room with people, if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then, not myself goes home[Pg 185] to myself, but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me, so that I am in a very little time annihilated.”

Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 10-27-1818.

“Let [a man] on any certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and dream upon it—untill it becomes stale—but when will it do so? Never—When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all “the two-and thirty Pallaces” How happy is such a “voyage of conception,’ what delicious diligent Idnolence!”

Letter to Reynolds.

“He has affirmed that he can conceive of a billiard Ball that it may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness volubility. & the rapidity of its motion.”

Richard Woodhouse, “Notes on a letter from Keats.”

“Satan having entered the Serpent, and inform’d his brutal sense—might seem seem sufficient—but Milton goes on “but his sleep disturb’d not’ &c. Whose spirit does not ache at smothering and confinement—the unwilling stillness---the ‘waiting close’? Whose head is not dizzy at the prosiable speculations of satan in this serpent prison—no passage of poetry ever can give a greater pain of suffocation.”

Marginalia to *Paradise Lost*, 9.179-91.

On first looking into Chapman's Homer

MUCH have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told 5
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies 10
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

“To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and as reservedly as they were written.”

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*.