

Lecture Series on Homer's *Iliad*: Lecture 6

By Dr. Pooja Agarwal

Department of English and Modern European
and Other Foreign Languages
(School of Languages)

Book 15

After Zeus wakes, he sees the results of Poseidon and Hera's actions. Hera attempts to pin all the blame on Poseidon. However, Zeus comforts her and communicates that he has no great interest in ensuring the Trojans are victorious over the Achaeans. He declares that he will assist them, but that it is still fated that Troy will fall and that Hector will be killed after he cuts down Patroclus. He then requests that Hera summon Apollo and Iris. Iris tells Poseidon to depart from the battlefield, and he is reluctant in agreeing to do so. Apollo looks for Hector and gives both him and his comrades greater strength. Hector is the leader of a charge against the Achaeans. Their leaders are at first able to hold their ground, but they eventually give in to their terror and retreat when Apollo comes onto the battlefield. The trench before the Greek fortifications are covered by Apollo. This lets the Trojans again beat down the ramparts.

The armies continue to fight the distance to the ships and even almost into the Greek camp. Violent fighting breaks out at the ships' base, and Hector and Great Ajax again face off. Teucer, the archer, kills numerous Trojans, but Zeus breaks his bowstring when he aims at Hector. Ajax urges his troops to leave the ship decks. The Trojans are rallied by Hector. The Trojans slowly advance until Hector becomes close enough to touch one of the ships.

Book 16

In the meantime, Patroclus visits Achilles' tent. He begs to be permitted to wear the armor of Achilles if Achilles continues to refuse going back into battle himself. Achilles refuses to fight but permits the armor exchange on the understanding that Patroclus will fight just as long as needed to protect the ships. The first ship is set on fire while Patroclus arms himself. Achilles dispatches his Myrmidon soldiers to go with Patroclus. The Myrmidon soldiers have not been taking part in battle since their commander went absent. Achilles prays to Zeus, asking that Patroclus return unharmed, with the ships intact. Homer declares, however, that Zeus will be willing to grant only one of these requests.

The course of the battle quickly changes when Patroclus appears in Achilles' armor. The Trojans opt to move away from the Achaean ships. Initially, the line is able to hold together. However, when Hector leaves, the other Trojans are trapped within the trenches. Patroclus now kills every Trojan he comes across. Zeus thinks about saving Sarpedon, his son, but Hera urges him to realize that his fellow gods would either think badly of him for it or attempt to save their own offspring among the mortals. Zeus resigns himself to the fact that Sarpedon is mortal. Sarpedon is quickly speared by Patroclus, and Sarpedon's armor is fought over by both sides. Hector makes a brief return to the front, hoping to get the armor back. Zeus decides that he will cut down Patroclus, in retribution for killing Sarpedon.

First, though, he allows him to rout the Trojans. Zeus then makes Hector temporarily cowardly, and Hector leads his men to retreat. In disobedience to Achilles, Patroclus chases the Trojans the full distance to Troy's gates. The poet explains that it is possible the city could have fallen at this point if Apollo had failed to intervene and push Patroclus away from the gates. Hector is persuaded by Apollo to charge Patroclus. However, Patroclus cuts down Cebriones, Hector's chariot driver. The Achaeans and Trojans fight over Cebriones' armor. In the midst of the chaos, Apollo comes up behind Patroclus. He sounds him, and Hector then kills him. Hector, who taunts Patroclus when he is wounded, is told by the dying man that he will die, as well.