

# Lecture Series on Homer's *Iliad*: Lecture 7

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## Book 17

Men fight over Patroclus's body. The Trojan who speared him for the first time, Euphorbus, attempts to take Achilles' armor off his body but is cut down by Menelaus. Hector, encouraged by Apollo, witnesses the fall of Euphorbus and offers assistance. Menelaus obtains the help of Great Ajax, who pushes Hector to back down and stops the body from being desecrated or removed. He arrives late and is unable to save the armor, though, and Hector decides to put it on himself. Glaucus chides Hector for abandoning Patroclus's body and says that they could have exchanged it for that of Sarpedon. Hector again comes into the fray, and promises to bestow half of the spoils of the war to any Trojan who is able to drag away Patroclus's corpse.

Zeus is aware of what Hector's fate will be and it is possible that he pities it. He gives Hector temporarily powers that are great in nature. Menelaus and Ajax bring more Achaeans to assist them, and they promptly push the Trojans, including Hector, to flee for the walls of the city. Aeneas, who is energized by Apollo, rallies the men who are fleeing and makes them go back to fight. However, after a great deal of effort they stay unable to steal the corpse. Automedon, Achilles' charioteer, gets involved in the battle. Zeus gives his team new strength. Hector attempts to kill Automedon so that he is able to take the chariot, but Automedon moves out of the way of Hector's spear and kills a Trojan while doing so. He takes the Trojan's armor, stating that in so doing so he helps to ease Patroclus's spirit's grief. He points out, however, that the present victim could never compare to Patroclus, who was great.

While disguised as Phoenix, Athena gives Menelaus strength. Apollo, who is disguised as a Trojan, encourages Hector. Menelaus dispatches Antilochus to get help from Achilles, who is still unaware of the death of Patroclus. Zeus starts making the battle fall in the Trojans' favor, but he stops for long enough that Menelaus and Meriones are able to take Patroclus's body.

## Book 18

When the news of Patroclus's death is brought by Antilochus, Achilles loses control of his emotions. He beats the ground and weeps, and he uses dirt to cover his face. A "terrible, wrenching cry" arises from him. It is so moving that Thetis overhears it and arrives with water-nymphs from the ocean to find out her son's troubles (18.39). Achilles informs her of what has happened and declares that he will take his revenge on Hector despite the fact he knows that if he chooses to have a warrior's life, he will be fated to die young. Thetis says that as Hector is now wearing Achilles' armor, she will ask Hephaestus, the divine metalsmith, to create a new set. She will do this if Achilles will put off taking his revenge for a day. Thetis leaves. Sent by Hera, Iris arrives to tell Achilles that he should go outside and appear on the battlefield.

His appearance alone is expected to frighten the Trojans and make them run away from the fight for Patroclus's body. Achilles departs from the tent with Athena. He cries in emotional agony, and this makes the Trojans flee. That evening, both armies individually hold an assembly to make plans for what it will do next. In the Trojan ranks, Polydamas pushes his comrades to go back to the city now that Achilles is returning to battle. The idea is dismissed by Hector, who says it is cowardly. He insists on a repeat of the assault of the previous day. His plan is foolhardy but it gains Trojan support. This is because they have been robbed of their wits by Athena. In the meantime amongst the Achaeans, the men start to mourn Patroclus. Achilles instructs men to clean Patroclus's wounds to get him ready for burial. He vows that Patroclus will not be buried until he has killed Hector. Thetis ventures to Hephaestus's mansion and asks him to create a new set of armor for Achilles. Hephaestus makes a helmet, a breastplate, and a wonderful shield that is embossed with images of dancing children, pastures, constellations, and cities of men.

## Book 19

The armor forged for him by Hephaestus is presented by Thetis to Achilles. She undertakes to take care of Patroclus's body and prevent it from rotting while Achilles goes to fight. Achilles makes his way alongside the shore, calling to his men to have them assemble. Agamemnon and Achilles reconcile with one another at the meeting. Agamemnon bestows gifts on Achilles, the ones he promised he would give him if she should ever return to battle. He also gives back Briseis. Achilles declares that he intends to go to war immediately. Odysseus urges him to allow the army to eat before they go, but Achilles himself refuses to take any food until he has killed Hector. As breakfast progresses, he sits and mourns Patroclus. Briseis even mourns, as Patroclus has treated her well when she was taken away from her homeland. Zeus is emotionally moved by the scene, and he sends Athena to put nectar and ambrosia directly in Achilles' stomach.

This is to stop him from getting hungry. Achilles puts on his armor. As he mounts his chariot, he chides his horses, Charger and Roan Beauty, for abandoning Patroclus on the battlefield. Roan Beauty says that it was a god and not him who allowed Patroclus to die. He says that Achilles will have the same fate. However, Achilles doesn't need any reminders of what his fate will be, as he is already aware of it.