Book 1

Bk I:1-21 **Invocation and Introduction**

Goddess, sing me the anger, of [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles), [Peleus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Peleus)’ son, that fatal anger that brought countless sorrows on the [Greeks](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achaeans), and sent many brave souls of warriors down to [Hades](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hades), leaving their bodies as spoil for dogs: for thus was the will of [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) brought to fulfilment. Sing of it from the moment when [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon), that king of men, parted in anger from noble Achilles.

          Which of the gods set these two to quarrel? [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo), angered by the king, brought an evil plague on the army, so that the men were dying, for Agememnon had dishonored [Chryses](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Chryses) the priest. He it was who came to the swift [Achaean](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achaeans) ships, to free his daughter, bringing a wealth of ransom, carrying a golden staff decorated with the ribbons of far-striking Apollo, and called out to the Achaeans, above all to the two leaders of armies, Agememnon and Menaleaus:  ‘Atreides, and all you bronze-greaved Achaeans, may the gods who live on Olympus grant you to sack [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Priam)’s city, and sail back home in safety; but take this ransom, and free my darling child; show reverence for Zeus’s son, far-striking Apollo.’

Bk I:101-147 **The argument begins**

When he had finished speaking, [Calchas](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Calchas) sat down, and [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon), the warrior, leapt up in anger; his mind was filled with blind rage, and his eyes blazed like fire. First he rounded on Calchas, with a threatening look: ‘Evil prophet, your words have never yet favored me; you only ever love to foretell evil, never a word of good is spoken or fulfilled! And now you prophesy to the [Danaan](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Danaans) assembly, claiming the far-striker troubles them because I refused fine ransom for a girl, [Chryses](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Chryses)’ daughter, and would rather take her home. Well I prefer her to my wife, [Clytaemnestra](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Clytaemnestra), since she’s no less than her in form or stature, mind or skill. Yet, even so, I’d look to give her up, if that seems best; I’d rather you were safe, and free of plague. So ready a prize at once, for me, I’ll not be the only one with empty hands: that would be wrong: you see for yourselves, my prize now goes elsewhere.’

          Then swift-footed Lord [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) spoke in answer: ‘Agememnon, greedy as ever, how can the brave [Achaeans](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achaeans) grant a prize? What wealth is there in common, now we have shared our plunder from the cities which cannot be reclaimed? Give up the girl, as the god demands, and we Achaeans will compensate you, three or four times over, if [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) ever lets us sack high-walled [Troy](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Trojans).’

          Then Lord Agamemnon answered him: ‘Brave you may be, godlike Achilles, but don’t try to trick me with your cleverness. You’ll not outwit me or cajole me. Do you think, since you demand I return her, that I’ll sit here without a prize while you keep yours? Let the great-hearted Achaeans find a prize, one that’s to my taste, so the exchange is equal. If not, then I myself will take yours, or seize and keep that of [Ajax](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Ajaxgreater) or [Odysseus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Odysseus). Whoever it is, he’ll be angered.

Bk I:148-187 **Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel**

Then, with an angry look, swift-footed [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) replied: Why, you shameless traitor, why should any [Achaean](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achaeans) leap to obey your orders to march or wage war? No disagreement with [Trojan](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Trojans) spearmen brought me here to fight: they have done me no wrong. No horse or cow of mine have they stolen, nor have my crops been ravaged. No, for your pleasure, you shameless dog, we followed to try and win payment, for you and [Menelaus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Menelaus), from the Trojans. And you neither see nor care; and even threaten to rob me of my prize, reward for which I labored. When the Achaeans sack some rich Trojan city, it’s not I who win the prize. My hands bear the brunt of the fiercest fight, but when the wealth is shared, yours is the greater, while I return, weary with battle, to the ships, with some small fraction for my own. So now I’m for Phthia, since it’s better to lead my beaked ships home than stay here dishonoured piling up wealth and goods for you.’

          Agamemnon, king of men, answered him then: ‘Be off, if your heart demands it; I’ll not beg your presence on my account. Others, who’ll honour me, are with me: [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus), above all, the lord of counsel. Of all the god-beloved princes here you are most hateful to me, since war, contention, strife are dear to you. If you are the greatest warrior, well, it was some god I think who granted it. Go home, with your ships and men, and lord it over the [Myrmidons](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Myrmidons): I care nothing for you, or your anger. And here’s my threat: since Phoebus [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo) robs me of [Chryses](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Chryses)’ daughter, a ship and crew of mine will return her, but I’ll pay your quarters a visit myself, and take that prize of yours, fair-faced [Briseis](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Briseis), so that you know how my power exceeds yours, and so that others will think twice before claiming they’re my equal, and comparing themselves to me, face to face.’

Bk I:188-222 **Athena counsels Achilles**

While [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon) spoke, Achilles was gnawed by pain, and the heart in his chest was torn; whether to draw the sharp blade at his side, scatter the crowd, and kill the Agememnon, or curb his wrath and restrain his spirit. As he pondered this in his mind, his great sword half-unsheathed, [Athena](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene) descended from the sky, sent by [Hera](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hera), the white-armed goddess, who loved and cared for both the lords alike. [Athena](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene), standing behind Achilles, tugged at his golden hair, so that only he could see her, no one else. [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles), turning in surprise, knew [Athena](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene)at once, so terrible were her flashing eyes. He spoke out, with winged words, saying: ‘Why are you here, daughter of [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus)? Is it to witness Agamemnon’s arrogance? I tell you and believe that Agememnon will pay soon with his life for his disrespectful acts.’

          The goddess, bright-eyed [Athena](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene), replied: ‘I came from the heavens to control your anger, if you’ll but listen: I was sent by the goddess, white-armed Hera, who in her heart loves and cares for you both alike. Come, end this quarrel, and sheathe your sword. Taunt him with words of prophecy; for I say, and it shall come to pass, that three times as many glorious gifts shall be yours one day for this insult. Restrain yourself, now, and obey.’

          Then swift-footed Achilles, in answer, said: ‘Goddess, a man must attend to your word, no matter how great his heart’s anger: that is right. Whoever obeys the gods will gain their hearing.’

          So saying he thrust the long sword back into its sheath, obeying the word of [Athena](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene); she meanwhile had left for [Olympus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Olympus), for the palace of Zeus, and rejoined the other gods.

Bk I:223-284 **Nestor speaks**

But, angered still, Achilles, once more turned on [Atreides](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon) with bitter taunts: ‘You drunkard with a dog's mask and the courage of a doe, you’ve never dare to take up arms and fight beside your men, or join the Achaean leaders in an ambush. You’d sooner die. You’d rather steal the prize from any [Achaean](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achaeans) in this great army who contradicts you. Devourer of your own people you are, because they are weak, or else you, Agememnon would have perpetrated your last outrage. But I say true, and swear a solemn oath See this staff, that will never leaf or sprout again now it is severed from its mountain branch, doomed never to be green again, stripped by the bronze adze of its foliage and bark. I swear, on this, a solemn oath to you, that a day will surely come when the Achaeans, one and all, shall long for Achilles, a day when you, despite your grief, are powerless to help them, as they fall in rows at the hands of man-killing [Hector](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hector). Then you will feel a gnawing pang of remorse for failing to honour the best of the Achaeans.’

          So spoke Achilles, flung down the gold-studded staff, and resumed his seat; while, opposite, Agememnon raged at him. But then soft-spoken [Nestor](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Nestor) rose, the clear-voiced orator of [Pylos](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Pylos), from whose tongue speech sweeter than honey flowed. He had already seen the passing of two mortal generations born and reared with him in holy Pylos, and now he ruled the third. He spoke to the assembly, then, with kind intent: ‘Well, here is grief indeed to plague Achaea. How [Priam](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Priam) and his sons would rejoice, and the hearts of the Trojan throng be gladdened, if they could hear this tale of strife between you two. You are both younger than I, so listen, for I have fought beside warriors, better men than you, who ever showed me respect. They were the mightiest of earth-born men; the mightiest and struggled with the mightiest, the [Centaurs](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Centaur) that lair among the mountains, whom they utterly destroyed. They summoned me, and I joined them, travelling far from Pylos. I held my own among them, though against them no man on earth could fight. Yet they listened to my words, and followed my advice. You too should do the same, for that is wise. Great as you may be, Agememnon, do not seek to rob him of the girl, leave him the prize that the Achaeans granted; and you [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles), do not oppose the king blow for blow, since the kingly sceptre brings no little honour to those whom Zeus crowns with glory. You have your power, a goddess for a mother, yet he is greater, ruling over more. Agamemnon, quench your anger, relent towards Achilles, our mighty shield against war’s evils.’

Bk I:285-317 **Nestor’s advice ignored**

‘Old man, indeed you have spoken wisely’, replied [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon). But this man wants to rule over others; to lord it, be king of all, and issue orders, though I know one who will disobey him. What though the immortal gods made him a spearman; does that give him the right to utter such insults?’

[Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) then interrupted, saying: ‘A coward, and worthless, I’d be called, if I gave way every time to you no matter what you say. Command the rest if you wish, but give me no orders, I’ll no longer obey. And here’s another thing for you to think on: I’ll not raise a hand to fight for the girl, with you or any other, since you only take back what you gave. But you’ll take nothing else of mine by the swift black ships, against my will. Come, try, and let these men be witness: your blood will flow dark along my spear.’

          When their war of words was over, they both rose, and so ended the gathering by the Achaean ships. Achilles left for his fine fleet and his huts, with [Patroclus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Patroclus), and his men; while Agamemnon launched a swift ship in the waves, chose twenty oarsmen, and embarked an offering for the god, then sent the fair-faced daughter of [Chryses](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Chryses) aboard, with Odysseus, that man of resource, to take command.

          While they embarked and set sail on the paths of the sea, Atreides ordered his men to purify themselves, and wash the dirt from their bodies in salt-water, and offer [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo) a sacrifice of unblemished bulls and goats, by the restless waves; and the savour went up to heaven with trails of smoke.

Bk I:318-356 **Agamemnon seizes Briseis**

Though the camp was busy with all this, [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon) did not forget his quarrel with Achilles, or his threats, and he summoned his heralds and trusty attendants saying: ‘Go to [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles)’ hut, seize the fair-faced [Briseis](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Briseis) and bring her here. If he refuses to release her, I’ll go in force to fetch her, and so much the worse for him.’

          With this stern command, he sent them on their way, and unwillingly the two made their way along the shore of the restless sea, till they came to the ships and huts of the [Myrmidons](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Myrmidons). They found Achilles seated by his black ship, by his hut, and it gave him no pleasure to see them. Seized by fear and awe of the king, they stood silently; but he in his heart knew their unspoken request, and said: ‘Welcome, heralds, you ambassadors of [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) and men, approach me. You bear no guilt, only Agamemnon, who sends you here for Briseis. Come, [Patroclus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Patroclus), divinely born, bring out the girl, and hand her to these men. If ever there is need of me to save the Greeks from disaster, let them bear witness to this before the blessed gods, mortal men and that shameless king. His mind raves destructively, indeed, and he fails to look behind him or foresee what might save his Achaeans in the coming fight beside the ships.’

          At this, Patroclus obeyed his order, and leading fair-faced Briseis from the hut, handed her to the heralds, who returned beside the line of Achaean ships, with the unwilling girl. But Achilles withdrew from his men, weeping, and sat by the shore of the grey sea, gazing at the shadowy deep; and stretching out his arms, passionately, prayed to his dear [mother](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Thetis): ‘Since you bore me to but a brief span of life, Mother, surely Olympian Zeus the Thunderer ought to grant me honour; but he grants me none at all. I am disgraced indeed, by that Agememnon, imperious Agamemnon, who in his arrogance has seized and holds my prize.’

Bk I:357-427 **Achilles complains to Thetis, his mother**

Tearfully, he spoke, and his lady mother heard him, in the sea’s depths, where she sat beside her aged father. Cloaked in mist she rose swiftly from the grey seawater, and sitting by her weeping son caressed him with her hand, and spoke to him calling him by name: ‘Child, why these tears? What pain grieves your heart? Don’t hide your thoughts; speak, so I may share them.’

          Then swift-footed [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) sighed heavily and spoke: ‘You must know; why need I tell the tale to you who know all? We sacked [Thebe](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#ThebesMysia), the sacred city, and brought back all the spoils, which the Achaeans shared out fairly between them, choosing the fair-faced daughter of [Chryses](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Chryses) for Agamemnon. Then Chryses, the priest of far-striking [Apollo](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Apollo), came to the swift ships of the bronze-clad Greeks to free his daughter with a rich ransom, bearing far-striking Apollo’s ribbons on a golden staff, and begged her freedom of the Achaeans, chiefly Agememnon, leaders of armies. The Greeks called out their wish, to respect the priest and accept the fine ransom, but this displeased [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon) who sent him packing, and with a stern warning. So, angrily, the old man returned, and Apollo, who loved him dearly, heard his prayer, and fired arrows of evil at the Argives. Then men died thick and fast and the god’s darts rained down on the broad camp. At last a seer with knowledge uttered the archer god’s true oracle. I was the first to urge them, there and then, to propitiate the god, but anger gripped that son of Atreus, swiftly he rose and threatened what now has come to pass. Bright-eyed Achaeans in a fast ship are bearing the girl to Chryse with offerings for the god; while heralds have taken from my hut another girl, [Briseis](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Briseis), my prize from the army, and led her away. If you have power, come now, to your son’s aid; ask help from Zeus on Olympus, if ever you warmed his heart by word or deed. Often I heard you, in my [father](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Peleus)’s halls, claim proudly that you alone of the immortals saved [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) from a vile fate when those other Olympians, [Hera](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hera), [Poseidon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Poseidon), [Athena](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Athene), planned to bind him fast. Kneel beside Zeus, and clasp his knees, remind him of that, in hope he might now choose to help the Trojans, pin down the Achaeans among their ships, slaughter them on the shore, so they may reap their king’s reward, and imperious Agamemnon may realize his blindness in dishonouring the best of the Greeks.’

Bk I:488-530 **Thetis pleads with Zeus**

But swift-footed [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles) still nursed his anger beside the swift ships. He avoided the assembly where men win renown, and kept from battle, eating his heart out where he was, longing for the noise of battle.

          At dawn on the twelfth day, the company of immortal gods, led by [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus), returned to [Olympus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexOP.htm#Olympus). [Thetis](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Thetis) had not forgotten her promise to her son, and at morning, emerging from the waves, she rose to the broad sky and Olympus. There she found Zeus, he of the far-thundering voice, sitting apart on the highest peak of ridged Olympus. She sank in front of him, clasped his knees with her left arm, raised her right hand to touch his chin, and so petitioned the son of [Cronos](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexBCDE.htm#Cronos): ‘Father Zeus, if ever I helped you by word or deed, grant me this wish, honour my son, who is doomed to die young. For [Agamemnon](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Agamemnon) the king shows disrespect, arrogantly seizing his rightful prize. Avenge my son, Olympian Zeus, lord of justice; enhance the Trojans’ power, till the Greeks honour and respect my son and make amends.’

          Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, made no reply to her words, he sat there silently. But Thetis, still clasping his knees, clung to him and pleaded again: ‘Make me this promise faithfully, and nod your head, or else refuse, for I am powerless, then I shall know how little I am honoured here.’

          Zeus, the cloud-lord, deeply troubled, said: ‘This is a sorry business, indeed, and you will force a quarrel with [Hera](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hera). She will taunt and rile me. As it is, she scolds me endlessly before the other gods, claiming I aid the Trojans in battle. Go now, before she notices, while I think the matter through. Come, I will nod my head, to reassure you, since you immortals know this as my sure pledge; once I give the nod, my word can never be recalled, it proves true and is fulfilled.’

Bk I:531-567 **Hera opposes Zeus**

So ended their meeting, and [Thetis](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Thetis) plunged from gleaming Olympus to the sea, while [Zeus](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexRSTUWXZ.htm#Zeus) left for his palace. There the company of gods rose to their feet in deference to their father; none daring to stay seated at his entry, all standing as one. He took his royal place, but [Hera](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexFGHILMN.htm#Hera), watching, could not fail to know that silver-footed Thetis, daughter of the Old Man of the Sea, had pleaded with him. At once she goaded Zeus: ‘What immortal has sought your counsel, arch-deceiver? It’s ever your delight to work behind my back, and make all your decisions in secret. When did you ever openly discuss your plans with me?’

          ‘Hera’ replied the father of men and gods, ‘do not expect to know all my thoughts: though you are my wife you would find it a burden. Whatever it is right for you to hear, no immortal, no human, shall know before you; but of what I plan without reference to the gods, make no question, do not ask.’

          ‘Dread son of Cronos,’ the ox-eyed queen replied, ‘what is this? I have never questioned you, nor asked: you have ever peace to think on what you wish. But now my heart fears silver-footed Thetis, has swayed you; for she knelt by you at dawn and clasped your knees. Dare I imagine that you bowed to her, gave her a firm pledge of support for [Achilles](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/IlindexA.htm#Achilles), and promised slaughter by the Greek ships?’

          Then cloud-gathering Zeus replied: ‘You’re obsessed, forever brooding. I can hide nothing from you, yet you’ll achieve nothing too, only estrange us, and so much the worse for you. If things are as you think, then is it not because I wish them so? Now sit there, quiet, and obey me; lest I set my all-powerful hands on you, and all the gods of Olympus lack the strength save you.’