

Troilus and Cressida

1.3

*Sennet. Enter Agamemnon, Nestor, Ulysses,
Diomedes, and Menelaus, with others*

AGAMEMNON

Princes, what grief hath set the jaundice on your
cheeks?

The ample proposition that hope makes
In all designs begun on earth below
Fails in the promised largeness. Checks and disasters
Grow in the veins of actions highest reared, 5
As knots, by the conflux of meeting sap,
Infects the sound pine and diverts his grain
Tortive and errant from his course of growth.
Nor, princes, is it matter new to us
That we come short of our suppose so far 10
That after seven years' siege yet Troy walls stand,
Sith every action that hath gone before,
Whereof we have record, trial did draw
Bias and thwart, not answering the aim
And that unbodied figure of the thought 15
That gave't surmiseAd shape. Why then, you princes,
Do you with cheeks abashed behold our works,
And think them shames, which are indeed naught else
But the protractive trials of great Jove
To find persistive constancy in men? 20
The fineness of which mettle is not found
In fortune's love±±for then the bold and coward,
The wise and fool, the artist and unread,
The hard and soft, seem all affined and kin.
But in the wind and tempest of her frown 25
Distinction with a loud and powerful fan,
Puffing at all, winnows the light away,
And what hath mass or matter by itself
Lies rich in virtue and unmingleAd.

NESTOR

With due observance of thy godly seat, 30
Great Agamemnon, Nestor shall apply

Thy latest words. In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men. The sea being smooth,
How many shallow bauble-boats dare sail
Upon her patient breast, making their way 35
With those of nobler bulk!

But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
The strong-ribbed barque through liquid mountains
cut,

Bounding between the two moist elements 40
Like Perseus' horse. Where's then the saucy boat
Whose weak untimbered sides but even now
Co-rivalled greatness? Either to harbour fled,
Or made a toast for Neptune. Even so

Doth valour's show and valour's worth divide 45
In storms of fortune. For in her ray and brightness
The herd hath more annoyance by the breese
Than by the tiger; but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks
And flies flee under shade, why then the thing of
courage, 50

As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathize,
And with an accent tuned in selfsame key
Retorts to chiding fortune.

ULYSSES

Agamemnon,

Thou great commander, nerve and bone of Greece,
Heart of our numbers, soul and only spirit 55
In whom the tempers and the minds of all
Should be shut up, hear what Ulysses speaks.

Besides th'applause and approbation
The which, (*to Agamemnon*) most mighty for thy place
and sway,

And thou, (*to Nestor*) most reverend for thy stretched-
out life, 60

I give to both your speeches±±which were such
As, Agamemnon, every hand of Greece
Should hold up high in brass, and such again
As, venerable Nestor, hatched in silver,
Should with a bond of air, strong as the axle-tree 65
On which the heavens ride, knit all Greeks' ears

To his experienced tongue±±yet let it please both,
Thou (to Agamemnon) great, and (to Nestor) wise, to
hear Ulysses speak.

AGAMEMNON

Speak, Prince of Ithaca, and be't of less expect
That matter needless, of importless burden, 70
Divide thy lips, than we are confident
When rank Thersites opes his mastic jaws
We shall hear music, wit, and oracle.

ULYSSES

Troy, yet upon his basis, had been down
And the great Hector's sword had lacked a master 75
But for these instances:
The specialty of rule hath been neglected.
And look how many Grecian tents do stand
Hollow upon this plain: so many hollow factions.
When that the general is not like the hive 80
To whom the foragers shall all repair,
What honey is expected? Degree being vizarded,
Th'unworthiest shows as fairly in the masque
□.
The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre 85
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Infixture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order.
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and sphered 90
Amidst the other, whose med'cinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil
And posts like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad. But when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander, 95
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny?
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth?
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states 100
Quite from their fixture. O when degree is shaken,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,

Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
 Peaceful commerce from dividable shores, 105
 The primogenity and due of birth,
 Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
 But by degree stand in authentic place?
 Take but degree away, untune that string,
 And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets 110
 In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
 Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
 And make a sop of all this solid globe;
 Strength should be lord of imbecility,
 And the rude son should strike his father dead. 115
 Force should be right±±or rather, right and wrong,
 Between whose endless jar justice resides,
 Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
 Then everything includes itself in power,
 Power into will, will into appetite; 120
 And appetite, an universal wolf,
 So doubly seconded with will and power,
 Must make perforce an universal prey,
 And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,
 This chaos, when degree is suffocate, 125
 Follows the choking.
 And this neglection of degree it is
 That by a pace goes backward in a purpose
 It hath to climb. The general's disdained
 By him one step below; he, by the next; 130
 That next, by him beneath. So every step,
 Exemplified by the first pace that is sick
 Of his superior, grows to an envious fever
 Of pale and bloodless emulation.
 And 'tis this fever that keeps Troy on foot, 135
 Not her own sinews. To end a tale of length:
 Troy in our weakness lives, not in her strength.

NESTOR

Most wisely hath Ulysses here discovered
 The fever whereof all our power is sick.

AGAMEMNON

The nature of the sickness found, Ulysses, 140
 What is the remedy?

ULYSSES

The great Achilles, whom opinion crowns
The sinew and the forehead of our host,
Having his ear full of his airy fame
Grows dainty of his worth, and in his tent 145
Lies mocking our designs. With him Patroclus
Upon a lazy bed the livelong day
Breaks scurrile jests
And, with ridiculous and awkward action
Which, slanderer, he 'imitation' calls, 150
He pageants us. Sometime, great Agamemnon,
Thy topless deputation he puts on,
And like a strutting player, whose conceit
Lies in his hamstring and doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound 155
'Twixt his stretched footing and the scaffoldage,
Such to-be-pitied and o'er-wrested seeming
He acts thy greatness in. And when he speaks
'Tis like a chime a-mending, with terms unsquared
Which from the tongue of roaring Typhon dropped 160
Would seem hyperboles. At this fusty stuff
The large Achilles on his pressed bed lolling
From his deep chest laughs out a loud applause,
Cries 'Excellent! 'Tis Agamemnon just.
Now play me Nestor, hem and stroke thy beard, 165
As he being dressed to some oration.'
That's done as near as the extremest ends
Of parallels, as like as Vulcan and his wife.
Yet god Achilles still cries, 'Excellent!
'Tis Nestor right. Now play him me, Patroclus, 170
Arming to answer in a night alarm'.
And then forsooth the faint defects of age
Must be the scene of mirth: to cough and spit,
And with a palsy, fumbling on his gorget,
Shake in and out the rivet. And at this sport 175
Sir Valour dies, cries, 'O enough, Patroclus!
Or give me ribs of steel. I shall split all
In pleasure of my spleen.' And in this fashion
All our abilities, gifts, natures, shapes,
Severals and generals of grace exact, 180

Achievements, plots, orders, preventions,
Excitements to the field or speech for truce,
Success or loss, what is or is not, serves
As stuff for these two to make paradoxes.

NESTOR

And in the imitation of these twain 185
Who, as Ulysses says, opinion crowns
With an imperial voice, many are infect.
Ajax is grown self-willed and bears his head
In such a rein, in full as proud a place
As broad Achilles, and keeps his tent like him, 190
Makes factious feasts, rails on our state of war
Bold as an oracle, and sets Thersites,
A slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint,
To match us in comparisons with dirt,
To weaken and discredit our exposure, 195
How rank so ever rounded in with danger.

ULYSSES

They tax our policy and call it cowardice,
Count wisdom as no member of the war,
Forestall prescience and esteem no act
But that of hand. The still and mental parts 200
That do contrive how many hands shall strike
When fitness calls them on, and know by measure
Of their observant toil the enemy's weight,
Why, this hath not a finger's dignity.
They call this 'bed-work', 'mapp'ry', 'closet war'. 205
So that the ram that batters down the wall,
For the great swinge and rudeness of his poise
They place before his hand that made the engine,
Or those that with the finesse of their souls
By reason guide his execution. 210

NESTOR

Let this be granted, and Achilles' horse
Makes many Thetis' sons.

Tucket

AGAMEMNON

What trumpet?

Look, Menelaus.

MENELAUS

From Troy.

Enter Aeneas [and a trumpeter]

AGAMEMNON What would you fore our tent?

AENEAS

Is this great Agamemnon's tent I pray you? 215

AGAMEMNON Even this.

AENEAS

May one that is a herald and a prince

Do a fair message to his kingly ears?

AGAMEMNON

With surety stronger than Achilles' arm,

Fore all the Greekish heads, which with one voice 220

Call Agamemnon heart and general.

AENEAS

Fair leave and large security. How may

A stranger to those most imperial looks

Know them from eyes of other mortals?

AGAMEMNON

How?

AENEAS

Ay, I ask that I might waken reverence 225

And on the cheek be ready with a blush

Modest as morning when she coldly eyes

The youthful Phoebus.

Which is that god in office, guiding men?

Which is the high and mighty Agamemnon? 230

AGAMEMNON *(to the Greeks)*

This Trojan scorns us, or the men of Troy

Are ceremonious courtiers.

AENEAS

Courtiers as free, as debonair, unarmed,

As bending angels±±that's their fame in peace.

But when they would seem soldiers they have galls, 235

Good arms, strong joints, true swords±±and great

Jove's acorn

Nothing so full of heart. But peace, Aeneas,

Peace, Trojan; lay thy finger on thy lips.

The worthiness of praise distains his worth,

If that the praised himself bring the praise forth. 240

But what, repining, the enemy commends,

That breath fame blows; that praise, sole pure,

transcends.

AGAMEMNON

Sir, you of Troy, call you yourself Aeneas?

AENEAS

Ay, Greek, that is my name.

AGAMEMNON

What's your affair, I pray you?

AENEAS

Sir, pardon, 'tis for Agamemnon's ears.

245

AGAMEMNON

He hears naught privately that comes from Troy.

AENEAS

Nor I from Troy come not to whisper him.

I bring a trumpet to awake his ear,

To set his sense on the attentive bent,

And then to speak.

AGAMEMNON

Speak frankly as the wind.

250

It is not Agamemnon's sleeping hour.

That thou shalt know, Trojan, he is awake,

He tells thee so himself.

AENEAS

Trumpet, blow loud.

Send thy brass voice through all these lazy tents,

And every Greek of mettle let him know

255

What Troy means fairly shall be spoke aloud.

The trumpet sounds

We have, great Agamemnon, here in Troy

A prince called Hector±±Priam is his father±±

Who in this dull and long-continued truce

Is resty grown. He bade me take a trumpet

260

And to this purpose speak: `Kings, princes, lords,

If there be one among the fair'st of Greece

That holds his honour higher than his ease,

That seeks his praise more than he fears his peril,

That knows his valour and knows not his fear,

265

That loves his mistress more than in confession

With truant vows to her own lips he loves,

And dare avow her beauty and her worth

In other arms than hers±±to him this challenge.

Hector in view of Trojans and of Greeks

270

Shall make it good, or do his best to do it:

He hath a lady wiser, fairer, truer,

Than ever Greek did compass in his arms,

And will tomorrow with his trumpet call

Midway between your tents and walls of Troy 275
To rouse a Grecian that is true in love.
If any come, Hector shall honour him.
If none, he'll say in Troy when he retires
The Grecian dames are sunburnt and not worth
The splinter of a lance.' Even so much. 280

AGAMEMNON

This shall be told our lovers, Lord Aeneas.
If none of them have soul in such a kind,
We left them all at home. But we are soldiers,
And may that soldier a mere recreant prove
That means not, hath not, or is not in love. 285
If then one is, or hath, or means to be,
That one meets Hector. If none else, I'll be he.

NESTOR *(to Aeneas)*

Tell him of Nestor, one that was a man
When Hector's grandsire sucked. He is old now,
But if there be not in our Grecian mould 290
One noble man that hath one spark of fire
To answer for his love, tell him from me
I'll hide my silver beard in a gold beaver
And in my vambrace put this withered brawn,
And meeting him will tell him that my lady 295
Was fairer than his grandam, and as chaste
As may be in the world. His youth in flood,
I'll prove this truth with my three drops of blood.

AENEAS

Now heavens forbid such scarcity of youth.

ULYSSES Amen. 300

AGAMEMNON

Fair Lord Aeneas, let me touch your hand.
To our pavilion shall I lead you first.
Achilles shall have word of this intent;
So shall each lord of Greece, from tent to tent.
Yourself shall feast with us before you go, 305
And find the welcome of a noble foe.

Exeunt all but Ulysses and Nestor

ULYSSES

Nestor!

NESTOR What says Ulysses?

ULYSSES I have a young
Conception in my brain; be you my time
To bring it to some shape.

NESTOR What is't?

ULYSSES This 'tis:
Blunt wedges rive hard knots. The seeded pride 310
That hath to this maturity blown up
In rank Achilles must or now be cropped
Or, shedding, breed a nursery of like evil
To overbulk us all.

NESTOR Well, and how?

ULYSSES
This challenge that the gallant Hector sends, 315
However it is spread in general name,
Relates in purpose only to Achilles.

NESTOR
The purpose is perspicuous, even as substance
Whose grossness little characters sum up.
And, in the publication, make no strain 320
But that Achilles, were his brain as barren
As banks of Libya±±though, Apollo knows,
'Tis dry enough±±will with great speed of judgement,
Ay with celerity, find Hector's purpose
Pointing on him. 325

ULYSSES
And wake him to the answer, think you?

NESTOR
Yes, 'tis most meet. Who may you else oppose,
That can from Hector bring his honour off,
If not Achilles? Though't be a sportful combat,
Yet in this trial much opinion dwells, 330
For here the Trojans taste our dear'st repute
With their fin'st palate. And trust to me, Ulysses,
Our imputation shall be oddly poised
In this wild action: for the success,
Although particular, shall give a scantling 335
Of good or bad unto the general±±
And in such indices, although small pricks
To their subsequent volumes, there is seen
The baby figure of the giant mass

Of things to come at large. It is supposed 340
He that meets Hector issues from our choice,
And choice, being mutual act of all our souls,
Makes merit her election, and doth boil,
As 'twere, from forth us all a man distilled
Out of our virtues±±who miscarrying, 345
What heart from hence receives the conqu'ring part
To steel a strong opinion to themselves?
Which entertained, limbs are e'en his instruments,
In no less working than are swords and bows
Directive by the limbs.

ULYSSES Give pardon to my speech: 350
Therefore 'tis meet Achilles meet not Hector.
Let us like merchants show our foulest wares
And think perchance they'll sell. If not,
The lustre of the better yet to show
Shall show the better. Do not consent 355
That ever Hector and Achilles meet,
For both our honour and our shame in this
Are dogged with two strange followers.

NESTOR

I see them not with my old eyes. What are they?

ULYSSES

What glory our Achilles shares from Hector, 360
Were he not proud we all should wear with him.
But he already is too insolent,
And we were better parch in Afric sun
Than in the pride and salt scorn of his eyes,
Should he scape Hector fair. If he were foiled, 365
Why then we did our main opinion crush
In taint of our best man. No, make a lott'ry,
And by device let blockish Ajax draw
The sort to fight with Hector. Among ourselves
Give him allowance as the worthier man±± 370
For that will physic the great Myrmidon,
Who broils in loud applause, and make him fall
His crest, that prouder than blue Iris bends.
If the dull brainless Ajax come safe off,
We'll dress him up in voices; if he fail, 375
Yet go we under our opinion still

That we have better men. But hit or miss,
Our project's life this shape of sense assumes:
Ajax employed plucks down Achilles' plumes.

NESTOR

Now, Ulysses, I begin to relish thy advice,
And I will give a taste of it forthwith
To Agamemnon. Go we to him straight.
Two curs shall tame each other; pride alone
Must tarre the mastiffs on, as 'twere their bone.

Exeunt