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Achilles Nearing the Walls of Troy

by

Berrien C. Henderson

The cloud-wrined sky is my tent.
My hearth, the battleground,
Plains soaked in Helios' golden rays.
The all-knowing gods have their ambrosia--
Mine I call the copper taste of war, delicacy indeed.

Slay the choicest ram.
Seal both oaths and covenants
With Bacchus' dark wines.
As for me, I shall offer more sprinklings,
Libations of Trojan blood and the thigh pieces
Of my enemies for the dogs.

Armor and spear, sword and shield,
Glancing in the sunlight.
Scents of sweat and metal greet me.

"I smell your fear, Trojan cubs!"

This I vow,
To carve fame with each thrust of Pelian ash.
All I know of life lies in a well-forged blade.
And like a babe fresh from its mother's womb,
The child blood-soaked and choking for breath,
So, too, am I born--reborn--each battle
And swaddled in the gleaming gear of Hephaestus,
Cunning with fire and hammer and anvil.

The dust of combat may choke others,

But to me--incense for dark-stalking Ares.

I see Trojans arraying themselves upon Ilium's walls
And readying their arrows for me.
Let them cast the feathered shafts,
So much chaff, I say.
Greet me as one, or together,
So long as spear and sword meet--
Wrath to wrath, will to will.

"You've *my* armor, Hector,
And I am *not* Patroclus.
Remember whom you meet today!"

Come and face me, enemies . . . kindred.
Let us pray strange prayers together
In the savage tongue of war
While Zeus bears the scales of our fates.

But consider--I have forgotten more of war
Than most warriors know, and I learn a new verse
In another day's clangor on the plains.

And today, I seek song.

Tell the women to offer lamentations.
Go and ready the poets,
For Ares approaches with a bronze smile.

This poem was published in MC #29 with some verses missing and out of order. We now print the version the author intended.