

TROY WINS!

or,

The Sunday Painter

A Play

2005

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In Memory of

Bevya Rosten

"Difficult friend . . . "

Characters

HERMES

The TROJAN PRAYER

The SUNDAY PAINTER

DRAMATURGICAL PAGE

Cat. #27. Dosso Dossi, Jupiter, Mercury and Virtue (1523-24), oil on canvas, 112 x 150 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Based on a literary dialogue attributed in the sixteenth century to the Greek author Lucian (but actually written by the humanist Leon Battista Alberti in 1430), this splendid canvas depicts the ruler of the Olympian gods seated at an easel, holding palette, mahlstick, and brushes, painting a picture of butterflies. His discarded thunderbolt lies at his feet. On the platform of clouds beside Jupiter sits Mercury, with winged feet and cap; turning to an approaching maiden, he places his finger on his lips, as if to signal that the painter is not to be disturbed at his work.

Peter Humfrey

I had long hours of utterly unwonted leisure in which to contemplate the frightful unfolding of the War. At a moment when every fibre of my being was inflamed to action, I was forced to remain a spectator of the tragedy, placed cruelly in a front seat. And then it was that the Muse of Painting came to my rescue--out of charity and out of chivalry, because after all she had nothing to do with me--and said, 'Are these toys any good to you? They amuse some people.'

Winston Churchill

Prayers are also daughters of Zeus, the father almighty.  
They cast their eyes sidelong.  
Slowly they toil on their way, yet are left  
far behind Ruin.  
For she is strong and sound on her feet, and hence  
she can always  
Far outrun mere Prayers.

The Prayers

Follow as healers after her.

Homer, Iliad, IX. 502-7

The so-called Parable of the Prayers is an allegory (as we should call it), a figure rarely employed in Greek epic because in Homer's time it was not understood what abstractions are. Ruin (Atē) is swift and strong. The placating Prayers (litai), by contrast, always arrive too late. They look sideways because their goal is aslant; they wish to steer the stubborn man away from his unbending path.

Bryan Hainsworth/Hermann Fränkel

DRAMATURGICAL PAGE (cont.)

The essence of religion is the immediate, involuntary, unconscious contemplation of human nature as another nature, separate and indeed counterposed to man's own.  
Ludwig Feuerbach

Sarastro's arias in The Magic Flute, the only music it is possible to imagine issuing from the mouth of God. . . .

George Bernard Shaw

When we hear the Ninth Symphony, we are listening to the voice of God.

William Lyon Phelps

Only is order othered. Nought is nulled.  
James Joyce

All this is of course wildly anachronistic, but that did not bother the Athenian audience, which was accustomed to seeing its own fears, anxieties and problems embodied in the heroes and villains of the mythic past.

Bernard Knox

Where specific gods came from, what form they took, and whether they had always been there--these things the Greeks learned just the day before yesterday, as it were.

Herodotus

Troy, it seems, could mean almost anything to almost anyone.

Matthew Fox

Every moment may be your next.  
James Joyce

(Scene: The heights of Olympus as a studio/gallery space.

What scenery there is--a large oil painting and a scattering of stars--hangs from above.

The oil painting, a numbingly conventional "classical" landscape-with-walled-city (Troy), is suspended over upstage-right. By one scenographic convention this canvas may be read as, simply, the object it is: a hung painting. Alternately, it could be viewed as a piece of scene-painting, a "drop," meant to place the stage action against a Trojan background. This "painted scene" (as the picture will henceforth be called) must be rendered and hung in such a manner as to keep both these readings in play.

The stars--some twenty or so, of a dirty brass color--hang from slightly kinked, all-too-visible wires at various heights (some quite low) and in no obvious pattern of distribution above the stage-floor. Kitschy and two-dimensional after the fashion of shopwindow or christmastree ornaments, these "stars" are, in fact, picturehooks--each has a tiny, same-color, easy-to-miss hook protruding from its midpoint--but this will only become apparent the first time a picture is hung from one of them. (The "painted scene" is not suspended from one of these star-picturehooks. It hangs, to all appearances, in midair.) Each "star" also has a tiny, unlit lightbulb embedded near its center.

The single piece of non-hanging scenery is a waist-high section of wooden guard-rail--3-4 narrow uprights joined at the top by a horizontal crossbar--of the same dirty brass color as the star-picturehooks. This stretch of railing, which bears some resemblance to the front of a witness box, stands off by itself, far down-left of the principal playing-area.

Onstage at rise: the Greek god HERMES, right, and left, a SUNDAY PAINTER.

The SUNDAY PAINTER, who wears a long, vaguely Edwardian houndstooth cape, is seated before a narrow, collapsible easel, the three legs of which are each edged with a pattern of jagged silver trim. On the easel rests the small canvas--an oilsketch--which he is currently completing. In his free hand he carries a "viewfinder," a black cardboard pictureframe,



about the size of a postcard, which he occasionally holds up between his eye and the canvas, in order to isolate some portion of it for closer inspection.

HERMES is clad in his traditional costume: winged sandals, broad-brimmed traveler's hat and a serpent-twined staff (the caduceus), conveniently suspended by a cord from his waist.

All the while he is onstage, HERMES is posing--or rather, "trying on" one after another pose. He does not so much strike these poses as allow an impulse (one of his own or one he has picked up from another actor) to "happen out" along his body; he then checks the result. Some of these physicalizations will be specified in the text; the actor will no doubt wish to devise others for himself.

HERMES does not appear to be posing for the SUNDAY PAINTER: he shifts positions too often and too fluidly for that. Nor does the SUNDAY PAINTER, for his part, give any indication that he is painting HERMES: his gaze (whenever he is not peering at his canvas through the viewfinder) seems fixed far away. In fact, it is not altogether clear if the SUNDAY PAINTER and HERMES are meant to be in the same place--though certainly they are beneath the same "stars."

Suddenly, from the left, the TROJAN PRAYER, a handsome woman of a certain age dressed in a skyblue peplos, comes sweeping on.

She advances, all urgency, oblivious of everything in her path . . . )

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus!

( . . . and immediately collides with the SUNDAY PAINTER, sending his palette, brushes, etc., flying in all directions.)

I beg your--

(She drops to her knees to help the SUNDAY PAINTER retrieve his scattered implements, a task that will occupy him during much of the ensuing dialogue between the other two characters.

But then straight off, reaching out to arrest the course of a still-rolling mahlstick, she comes face to face with the posing HERMES--and immediately all thought of the SUNDAY PAINTER flies out of her head.)

Hermes! This very night Troy falls if Zeus put not forth his hand to destroy the Wooden Horse. I am Troy's prayer that Zeus avert her fall. I must be heard. Hermes!  
Bring me to Zeus!

#### HERMES

(leaves off posing just long enough to size up the TROJAN PRAYER, then replies evasively:)

Unavailable at present.



(The TROJAN PRAYER, as will occur many times over the course of the action, finds her attention attracted away by developments "below" and "peers down at Troy." Now and on each subsequent occasion this action is executed as follows:

1. The TROJAN PRAYER "enters the witness box," i. e., steps up behind the narrow stretch of railing set far off down-left away from the rest of the playing-area (see p. 1).
2. She places her left hand on the railing.
3. She raises her right hand, not as if swearing an oath but in a sort of visionary hailing-gesture.
4. She looks intently out over the heads of the audience (looking out = looking down) and reports back what she sees.
5. Her account of events "below" once delivered, she comes out of--steps away from--the "witness box" and rejoins the stage action.

Each time the TROJAN PRAYER thus peers "down" (i. e., out) at Troy, a glow comes up around the "painted scene," as if the landscape-with-city it portrays were, for the duration of her focus on it, being "illuminated" by her gaze.)

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

See! where, from the immense underbelly of the Horse,  
a hatch swings down to receive the killers. Bring me to Zeus!

#### HERMES

Currently indisposed.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(looking "down," i. e., out)

And now, from out the hatch, the rope ladder by which  
Troy's rubblers shall mount up is tossed down. Bring me  
to Zeus!

HERMES

Otherwise engaged.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(looking "down," i. e., out)

Upon the first rung is placed the first foot of the first  
killer: in piles Diomed, piles Ajax, piles Nestor. . . .  
Bring me to Zeus!

HERMES

Not just now at liberty.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Not at--?

(steps away from the "witness box")

How comes the Supreme Presider over the Greek scene to be,  
at this moment of moments, anything short of "disposed,"  
"engaged," "available" to the world in his care?  
What might supervene?

HERMES

Skyfather is . . . about a task.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

What "task" so pressing--?

(The SUNDAY PAINTER, having tracked down the last of his scattered brushes to within an inch or so of the TROJAN PRAYER's foot, snatches it up and, in doing so, attracts her notice.)

Ought we be having this conversation in the presence of--?

(jerks her head toward the SUNDAY PAINTER)

HERMES

Oh, his mind's a thousand miles away.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

It never ceases to amaze me that they allow Sunday painters on Olympus.

HERMES

You try and keep them off!

(He returns to his posing, with a stab at "a mind a thousand miles away.")

The SUNDAY PAINTER, all his materials now once more in hand, sits back down at his easel and resumes painting.)

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Argeiphontēs, I implore you, courier to courier--

(HERMES seems to gesture an appeal to someone standing just behind the TROJAN PRAYER. (In fact, he is trying out the TROJAN PRAYER's own just-executed "imploring" pose.) The TROJAN PRAYER whirls round to see whom HERMES is addressing, sees no one, resumes:)

Hermes! As one who has conveyed an urgency or two in your day--

## HERMES

Orison, the Thunderer could not have spoke plainer:  
 on pain of bolt, I am bid neither to intrude myself  
 nor permit other intrusion--

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

"Intrusion" upon what?

(Her attention suddenly attracted "below,"  
 she re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand  
 in the visionary hailing-gesture, and peers  
 "down," i. e., out.

A glow comes up around the "painted scene.")  
 In clambers Neoptolemus, in Glaukos. All now are safely  
 stowed, but for Odysseus, who tarries without, one foot on  
 the lowest rung, to make trickster Sinon perfect in the ruse  
 by which he shall destroy my town.

(comes out of the "witness box"; to  
 HERMES:)

What can Zeus possibly have in hand that trumps--?

## HERMES

He's . . . affixing some touches.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

To?

## HERMES

His current project.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Which is?

HERMES

Of utmost importance in his eyes.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

To the point where he averts his eyes

(vigorous "averting of eyes" gesture)

from the chief event ever to befall his world?

(HERMES, much taken with the TROJAN PRAYER's "averting of eyes" gesture, tries out several variants of it.)

Do you suppose you might leave off mimicking one long enough to--?

HERMES

Leave off . . . ? Oh, you mistake! Mimicry about the last thing . . . ! No, what I'm going for is--

(Her attention once again attracted "below," the TROJAN PRAYER re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture, and peers "down," i. e., out.

A glow comes up around the "painted scene.")

THE TROJAN PRAYER

But see! One brief moment of inattention and Odysseus is gone, shot up into the Horse and banged the hatch after him. Meantime trickster Sinon, as by Odysseus bid, lays torch to the Grecian tents to lull Troy's fears. Nor are these the last sparks he shall strike this night.

(comes out of the "witness box"; to HERMES:)

Do you imagine Zeus will be content to learn of these developments from the savor of burnt canvas obtruding upon his "current project"?

HERMES

You are a prayer; naturally you expect to prevail.  
And yet, my instructions are: for nothing, for nobody.

(gesture of exasperation from the  
TROJAN PRAYER)

He's . . . evolving a whole new conception.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Indefatigable Allfather! What's back on the drawing board today? Conic sections? Arthropods? The moral law?

HERMES

A new visual conception--or better: a new conception of the visible. . . .

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, surely, whatever upgrade of cloudform or tailfeather he has in view may await the outcome of--

(gestures "below")

HERMES

I'm not making myself clear. It's nothing to do with clouds or feathers. Look. Zeus has, at a certain distance out before him, this . . . surface. At intervals along this surface, he has disposed . . . regions.

These regions may be distinguished, each from last,  
on the score of hue--

THE TROJAN PRAYER

He's painting?

HERMES

Your word.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus, an artist?

HERMES

Why should not a god be an artist? Hephaestus is an artist,  
six different kinds of artist, actually: get Achilles  
to show you his world-on-a-plate. Apollo is an artist.  
I say nothing of his long-time association with the Muses;  
but have you never caught him on the lyre--itself,  
I may just add, the brainchild of yet another  
Face-in-the-Clouds . . . .

(takes a self-deprecating bow, then repeats  
it as a "self-deprecating bow" pose)

THE TROJAN PRAYER

But, the supreme god--?

HERMES

A supreme artist. A master among masters. A painter  
such as none.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Painter of what? What scene need Zeus, of whose thought all is already image, stoop to image--never mind steal off in the middle of the Trojan War to image?

## HERMES

I'm not privy to his latest efforts. I only wish he'd wrap it up.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, so, then, you do share something of my sense of urgency--

## HERMES

You bet I do! He's painting me next. I can't wait. I've never been painted before.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

What are you talking about? You're all over Greek art! On frieze and metopē, wall-panel and vase, red-figure and black. The Amasis painter lets us see you entrusting the Golden Apple to Paris. On sixth-century Etruscan stoneware you are shown escorting a shattered Priam to Achilles' tent. Praxiteles has modeled you cradling the infant Bacchus. And (looking ahead a little) Botticelli will one day set you down among the Graces, their leader and love. Why, you even turn up



in certain fourteenth-century Italian Tarot packs as a figure of cosmic guidance. To say nothing of the half-dozen-or-so roadside herms I passed just on the way up here. "Never been painted"? Why, you're everywhere I look!

(points to the SUNDAY PAINTER)

He's probably doing you now!

HERMES

Not yet!

(The TROJAN PRAYER puzzled)

I mean, yes, of course, one's been . . . tossed off, who of us not, in all the old, accustomed-- "Hermes, Spirit of Boundary-Stones," "Hermes, God of the Turning Hinge" . . . . And will be tossed off again; indeed, from all I hear, one's fairest hours lie all ahead, involving as they do the aftermaths, triumphal or otherwise, of these present--

(barely nods "below")

"Hermes Leads Down the Souls of Penelope's Slain Suitors to Hades," "Hermes Spurs on Aeneas to Refound the Trojan"-- But this is to speak of rope in the house of the hanged man. It is all very grand and there is not a one of these . . . cameos I would willingly forgo.

And yet, to be rendered always on mission: to her,  
on behalf of those . . . . Zeus . . . has other ideas.  
 He will, he says, put me before myself in my own colors,  
upon my own errand, to my own end. This will be  
 a huge step up for me. And, listen, no less for him.  
 He's never painted a god before. Never, apparently,  
 felt equal to it. I'll be his first. Of course,  
 from the hour he grabbed a brush, the entire  
 Pantheon--Ganymede, Ceres, Mars--have been all over him  
 to sit for him, each one clamoring to be the first.  
 'Tina drops round his studio every morning in a  
 garland and smock . . . .

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

"'Tina"?

#### HERMES

'Tina. You know: Pallas Athene. But she's wasting  
 her time. They all are. "Hermes," Zeus has repeatedly  
 promised me--and not merely promised but sworn on his  
 bolt--"Hermes, when at last I come to image a god,  
 the god I'm imaging is you." He means, I gather, to  
 set me before broader horizons, other skies . . . .

(strikes a pose "before broader horizons,  
 other skies")

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Might you possibly give over striking one after another of these absurd--?

## HERMES

But I'm not striking poses; I'm in quest of a pose.  
For him to paint me in. That's to be my contribution.

(During the following exchange, the SUNDAY PAINTER puts the finishing touches to his oilsketch, lays down his brush, pockets his "pictureframe" viewfinder, and lifts the completed canvas off the easel to view it from different angles and distances.)

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Well, you're a god; surely imposing a vision of yourself raises no insuperable--

## HERMES

Yes, but you see, the thing is, it must be a vision of myself that speaks to him, that sets his juices flowing. Otherwise . . . no picture. Them's the terms.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

And is it, then, for the subject-matter to dictate--?  
Hm, I suppose it is, actually. Well, so, and have you . . . ? Are you . . . ?

## HERMES

Ready for the brush? I am abrim with suggestions.

No situation I find myself in but, I find, adds to  
the store. This cut-and-thrust between thee and me,  
for example . . . .

(reprising several of the phrases spoken  
earlier by the TROJAN PRAYER or by himself to  
the TROJAN PRAYER, each with its accompanying  
attitude:)

"Argeiphontēs, I implore . . . "

("imploring" pose)

"Broader horizons, other skies . . . "

(pose "against the sky")

Or shall it be "with averted eyes"

(imitates the TROJAN PRAYER's p. 8  
"averted eyes" gesture)

that Zeus will in the end be minded to put me before myself?

(Her attention suddenly attracted "below,"  
the TROJAN PRAYER re-enters the "witness box,"  
raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture,  
and peers "down," i. e., out.

A glow comes up around the "painted scene.")

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

See! One by one my Trojans wander out to behold the  
Greek camp in flames, little dreaming that this is not  
the last or greatest conflagration they shall witness ere dawn.

Only now do they first mark the Wooden Horse.

(turns back to HERMES)

Ah, let him save Troy and then "put you before yourself"!

(The SUNDAY PAINTER hangs his completed picture from the nearest star-picturehook, and steps back, head cocked appraisingly, to consider the effect.)

HERMES

(to the TROJAN PRAYER)

But, were he once more to immerse himself in

(dismissive "downward" gesture)

all that down there, who can promise me that he should ever again take up a brush? No, I'm sorry, it's

too risky, I can't possibly allow--

(catches himself)

THE TROJAN PRAYER

You can't--? I knew it. Allfather gave no orders to shut me out: it's your idea--you, who will brook no intrusion upon the present labors of a hand that turns next to you.

(with an immense gesture:)

And for this, Troy--! Ah, Zeus!

(She pushes past HERMES in the direction she imagines Zeus is to be found.)

HERMES, very taken with the pose the TROJAN PRAYER has struck on her italicized words, makes several stabs at reproducing it:)

HERMES

"And for this, Troy--!"    "And for this--!"    "For this, Troy--!"

(Meanwhile, the SUNDAY PAINTER, having apparently caught the TROJAN PRAYER's final "Ah, Zeus!", looks round from his canvas in the direction he evidently hears these words as coming from (not necessarily the actual point on the stage where the TROJAN PRAYER spoke them).

And now the SUNDAY PAINTER simultaneously

1. with a single motion of his left hand flips inside out his houndstooth cape, transforming it into a magnificent silver-trimmed chlamys that floats down onto his shoulders (beneath the cape/chlamys, it can now be seen, he has on a matching silver-trimmed himation)

and

2. with a single motion of his right hand snaps shut his narrow, silver-trimmed easel, transforming it into a javelin with a pattern of silver snags along the shaft, which he now raises overhead like a spear.

Before us stands Zeus Asteropētēs--"Zeus, Hurler of Lightning"--as depicted in the great fifth-century bronze of Artemisium.

An immense thunderclap.

The TROJAN PRAYER whirls round toward ZEUS (as the transformed SUNDAY PAINTER will hereafter be designated) and drops to one knee. Her lips are parted **to address him** when HERMES, who has also spun round toward ZEUS at the sound of thunder, interposes himself between the TROJAN PRAYER and ZEUS.)

HERMES

Zeus! Mark!

(And he proceeds to strike, in rapid succession, the three poses he earlier (p. 15) demonstrated to the TROJAN PRAYER, namely:

- pose of appeal
- pose against the sky
- pose of averted eyes

Between poses he reverts to a "neutral," hands-at-sides posture, so as to set each new pose off from the last.)

Oh, and--

(He strikes the pose he has just picked up from the TROJAN PRAYER's "And for this, Troy--!"

ZEUS, contemptuous and preoccupied, waves HERMES off and is just returning to contemplation of his recently hung canvas when the TROJAN PRAYER interposes herself between his picture and him.)

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus!

(Reluctantly, ZEUS turns his attention to the TROJAN PRAYER--attention, it may be felt, more of the sort a painter might bestow on a sitter than a deity on a suppliant.

Over the course of the long speech which the TROJAN PRAYER now addresses to him, ZEUS's attention gradually wanders back to his own star-hung picture until by the end he is totally absorbed in it.)

This very night Troy falls if you put not forth your hand to destroy the Wooden Horse. I am Troy's prayer that you avert her fall. Zeus! Put forth your hand! Avert Troy's fall!

To now, never have you put forth hand. You stood by while fir plank to plank was lashed to create the immense courser. You placed no bar as one after another killer scrambled up the rope into the belly of the beast. You looked on unmoved as Odysseus taught Sinon the trick by which he should undo my town. Nor on these nor on any earlier occasion when you might have brought things out differently to spare Troy did you spare Troy. Stood her towers firm, except Rhesus' mares drank of Scamander's waters? They drank of Scamander's waters. Firm, did but Troilus attain his twentieth year? Fair youth, dead at nineteen. Firm, so but Herakles' bow be not drawn against them? What's that in Philoctetes' hand? Indeed, Allfather, had you not in the first instance palmed off on Paris the conferring of the Golden Apple-- But that is all so much, as it were, dried fresco.

(Startled, ZEUS looks round at her for a moment, then resumes perusal of his hanging oilsketch.)

No one now expects that you will bid Helen reconsider her elopement or press Aphrodite to hand back her gilded prize. Truce to all the other times you might have spared Troy and didn't: Spare Troy now! For, Zeus, you have but to send fire upon that Horse and Troy wins. Zeus! Send fire upon that Horse!

(She pauses for a reply, but ZEUS is lost in contemplation of his oilsketch.)

Zeus?



(ZEUS lifts the oilsketch down off the star-picturehook and regards it from several angles.)

ZEUS

Greenish, distinctly. I should have underpainted in a less saturated hue--viridian, perhaps, or possibly emeraude . . . .

(The TROJAN PRAYER is about to renew her assault when her attention is suddenly distracted by developments "below.")

She re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture, and peers "down," i. e., out.

As always when she does so, a glow comes up around the "painted scene.")

THE TROJAN PRAYER

But who is this now shoulders her way through the swarm of my townsmen come out to gawk at the vast palfrey? Hark! She speaks.

ZEUS

(his eye always on his picture)

Or maybe if I had primed the canvas a second time.

Or laid down a subtler ground . . . .

THE TROJAN PRAYER

(her eye--and now ear--fixed "below")

"A gift, say you? Aye, gift of swords, gift of tears, gift of death to Troy!"--why, it's Cassandra; even by her words being unmarked of all you may mark her.

ZEUS

(his eye still on his picture)

Or just possibly, if I had better placed the holding darks  
between beak, fruit and--

(The TROJAN PRAYER comes out of  
the "witness box.")

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus! Let me not, another Cassandra, vainly join  
plea to plea . . . .

(No reply)

Zeus?

(With immense reluctance, ZEUS hangs  
his completed picture back up on the  
star-picturehook from which he removed it  
on p. 20.

He gives a majestic, contemptuous wave  
and the star-picturehook shoots up into the  
flies, leaving ZEUS's picture hanging, like  
the "painted scene"(see p. 1), in midair.

With a few additional hand-motions  
and passes, ZEUS magically adjusts the  
relative midair positions of the "painted  
scene" and his newly hung work. Only then  
does he turn to the TROJAN PRAYER.)

ZEUS

You know, you are not the first. Achilles' sea-nymph  
mother was up here pleading for a postponement of Troy's  
rout, so as to give her hero-son more of an hour . . . .  
I got off a nice little charcoal of her: "Thetis  
At Strife With Heaven's Decree."

(Here, as on the many subsequent occasions when HERMES hits on a pose he wishes to lay before ZEUS, he simultaneously strikes the pose and calls out its title, thus:)

HERMES

"At Strife With Heaven's Decree."

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus! I am not a prayer for the postponement of Troy's rout. I am a prayer that Troy win.

ZEUS

Troy? Win? From whose lips, in what heart, rises a suit so flat-out contrary to the whole course of Western---? Who prayed you? Criseyde? Hecuba? Helen?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus! That is not so easily answered. Wafting above the Greek camp in quest of embassy, I saw strife flare between two of them toiling away on

(gestures "overboard")

yonder colt. First hammer was of the view that Troy, once taken, might be spared. Far otherwise deemed the second Greek. "Nay," urged he, "if but a single brick of her come through unscathed, Troy wins."

(pause)

ZEUS

Yes; and---?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus! "Troy wins" . . . . I was struck, fascinated.  
I thought: why not? I rose at the word.

## ZEUS

Wait a minute. You're putting yourself forward as  
a Greek prayer for Troy's victory?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

I but adduce the circumstances under which I was . . . how  
to say? "Hefted"? "Breathed"? Went up--that's it.  
I caught the drift and went up from their midst.

## ZEUS

So, then . . . nobody's prayer? You're working on your **own**?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Zeus! All I know is: I heard the words "Troy wins" and  
the wind was at my back.

## ZEUS

"The wind at my back"--I'd like to paint that some day.

## HERMES

Hey! I'm next, remember?

## ZEUS

I said, "some day." There'd be mountains of drapery-studies  
to be slogged through first.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, Zeus, surely it is not for a god to make art of such prayers as rise his way but to answer them.

ZEUS

(looking toward his recently (p. 21) re-hung canvas)

And to them who might advance art as the answer to our prayers, your riposte would be . . . ?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

That the numen to whom their hest is heaved cannot be of their number. That the rector of earth and sky has other cares than the mere imaging of earth and sky.

ZEUS

But has (on this, our polytheistic premise) ever others at hand to partake those cares, to "spell" the Head Boy. Need dawn break? Eos very much at her station. Must seas roil? Poseidon's pitchfork is raised . . . .

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

And yet, for the Head Boy to neglect his world--viewed, even, as a system of relegations--for mere beauty's sake . . . .

ZEUS

Here is no neglect! A world to which a further fairness has been added is, by even so much, a fairer world.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Many have been the descents of Zeus. He has come down to Alcmena, come down to Leda . . . . But that he should, in the end, come down to an aesthete--!

## ZEUS

On the contrary, it is my time at the top that appears to me, at least in retrospect, as so much paring of fingernails. Only now, before the canvas, do I first experience myself as up to the elbows in reality--and in the reality of what it is to be a god, first of all.

## HERMES

(striking, and calling out the title of, a pose:)

"To Be a God, First of All."

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(to ZEUS)

As a Sunday Painter? A hobbyist?

## ZEUS

Truth to tell, I feel I am only now beginning to do serious work.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

But

(gestures toward the hanging oilsketch)

this is pastime! Trifling! A mere refuge taken against the rigors of being Zeus.

ZEUS

I am never more Zeus than brush-in-hand! True, it  
began as a refuge from the . . . uh,

(gestures vaguely "overboard")

Trouble Below.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Trouble, Zeus, which you have done as much as anyone  
 to promote or, what comes to the same thing, precious  
 little to avert.

ZEUS

What was one to do? Where interpose oneself?  
 The main lines of your . . . dust-up with Hellas--pretext,  
 duration, aims--are set in stone. What scope is here  
 for even the sovereignest? I sought, and on canvas found,  
 a realm where one makes the rules, not merely rules.  
 I began to paint.

HERMES

It took him a while to get the hang . . . .

ZEUS

(smiles and shakes his head ruefully)

One's youthful efforts . . . .

HERMES

The first time, he labored for days upon a still life,

at length drew back the curtain, and there, pinned to the canvas, was an actual nasturtium.

ZEUS

Whereupon, informed that this was scarcely an "organic" solution, I shut myself back up in my studio and some while later brought forth--a canvas with a nasturtium growing out of it. "Representation," I'm afraid, was not a very living category for me in those days. All, it seemed, I could manage was the thing itself--

HERMES

Yet see you now: on the point of essaying your very first god!

ZEUS

In short, I began in an unreflecting realism. And there I might have remained, had I not set about to study human painters--and in particular one human painter, from whom I picked up all manner of pointers: how to lay a graded wash or tonk out overpainted highlights, when to avail myself of the occasional contre-jour effect . . . . But above all I looked to him for that overall freedom of handling, those large-motioned swinging rhythms by which I saw his, wished my, work to be characterized. It was from this mortal maker,



to whom, clearly, objects presented themselves as but so many planes in a tensional relationship, that I first gleaned by how much making images exceeds mere making. Is it any wonder if I feel something of the reverence which those who packed you off here feel toward me, toward Makros of Ilium?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Makros of--? It was a Trojan artist who taught you the mysteries of your craft? Then, spare Troy for his sake--if only that he may live to paint "The God Sparing Troy."

HERMES

(striking, and calling out the title of, a pose:)

"The God Sparing Troy."

ZEUS

(shrugs)

He was but one of several. I have sat at the feet of Phoenician glass-blowers, Etruscan potters, Bay Area neo-figurativists. Many truths at many hands. The Niobid Painter taught me to begin with a modest central arrangement of middle tones and build down toward the darker darks. From Epoisen I learned that a painting is a long-sustained interlocking argument; from Egrapsen, the counterview of a canvas as a single, instantaneous impression

held steadily before the mind. And it was the celebrated wall-painter Polygnotus who gave me to glimpse the true eternity (not otherwise accorded us Attic numina) of "a craft so long in the learning."

HERMES

Well, Allfather, I must say, if it was art lessons you wanted, you need scarcely have "looked below." There's one or two of us might have shown you the ropes. Could any mortal metalworker boast a fairer way with a burin than your son, Hephaestus? What flesh-and-blood lyre player is more master of his instrument than your other son, Apollo?

ZEUS

To say nothing of my daughters, the Muses. Talk about one's children having all the advantages one never had!

THE TROJAN PRAYER

(to HERMES)

You do not sufficiently reflect how humbling it must be for the Creator of Earth and Sky to sit student to his offspring.

ZEUS

Ah, what is "humbling" is precisely not to be the "Creator of Earth and Sky"--which, of course, no Greek god,

not even the supremest, ever is. One arrives, unlike one's opposite number in other traditions, at a banquet already laid. What Hephaestus brought off on his famous shield--a world after his own image--nor I nor any Attic deity can bring off in fact. Anything but a creator, your Greek god is fettered by tradition at every turn.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Fetters which, it seems, he might shake off simply by re-imagining that tradition at every turn. On this point of Troy's Fall, for example . . . .

ZEUS

(gloomily)

Gods don't get to re-imagine tradition; we are, in every such effort, the to-be-reimagined thing. Only the artist--or, as in the case of my clever boy, Hephaestus, a god comporting himself as one--can re-awaken such traditional motifs as we supply.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ever and always this abjection before mortal masters!

ZEUS

Oh, you mistake! I dream of nothing but to surpass them.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

And do you not, as their god, already surpass them?

ZEUS

I am . . . in train! What do I seek to learn of them if not the surpassing of them foreshadowed--but, alas!, only foreshadowed--in my godhead, namely, to be chief of them I foreshadow, first among feres, the painter of painters.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, by how infinitely much, on his slowest day, must even such a second-tier dabbler as Hephaestus excel --to say nothing of the King of Gods, should he set his mind on excelling--some mere, paltry, limited--

ZEUS

It's true! They are hobbled, these human makers of mine, by supposing they but hobble along after me. Whereas I, all too aware that it is myself who hobble after-- Here, if anywhere, resides my great advantage over them whose powers of invention, in all but this, outsoar my own.

(The TROJAN PRAYER is about to reply when her attention is suddenly attracted "below.")

She re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture, and peers "down," i. e., out.

As on previous such occasions, a glow comes up around the "painted scene.")

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Hark! Now Sinon, left behind to confound the Trojans,  
sets about confounding them. The jade? A ploy.

Why thus left? In the hope . . . . Why thus huge?

In the fear . . . .

(to ZEUS, gesturing "below")

Is it to such "powers of invention" that you aspire?  
Follow out that logic and you are like to find yourself  
a man among men.

## ZEUS

But surely that is where a god who follows out logic  
must always find himself. What is a "god" but an artist  
who could not bear the burden of being one, cast it off,  
and now staggers along under the weight of that  
disburthening? What is an artist but a "god" who has  
shouldered his burthen again--

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

--And proceeds to carry it off. Shall you carry it off,  
Zeus?

## ZEUS

(gloomily)

Of myself as bearing what is upon me, as bearing up  
under what I bear, I can form no image. Here another  
than I must instruct my eye.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

All right, let's have a look.

ZEUS

What?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Let's see some of this artwork you appear so bent on tossing aside the world for.

(She lifts down ZEUS's recently completed picture from the midair position it has occupied since p. 21 and holds it out, at different angles and distances, with an appraising air.)

Hm . . . . An oilsketch, 25 x 38 cm, on loom-state canvas, with Conté crayon highlights, depicting, sotto in su, a girl with green eyes feeding slivers of apple to her pet bird, perhaps a hoopoe or plover, that pecks eagerly at the fruit bits in its mistress' hand. The apple from which the slices have been cut, perhaps a Granny Smith or Golden Delicious (its color wavers a little between greenish gold and golden green), inevitably owes something to Cézanne, perhaps still more to Chardin. The sitter's open, extended pose full of easy asymmetries, the mutually inclining postures of girl and bird, the rhyming glitter of green in eyes and fruit--all this pulls the picture surface together,

even while countering a certain static quality in the design. Not, it must be said, altogether successfully. The great, ragged gaps that the artist has left around--and especially above--his figures muffle the interplay between them; a tension between decoration and narrative is felt at every turn; line comes to count for everything, mass for nothing, until in the end all trace of dramatic interest forsakes the scene. In short,

(re-hangs the picture at the very spot  
in midair from which she lifted it down)

a decently executed genre-piece, well enough in its way, though falling far short of what the Greek artworld might expect of a major talent at a crucial juncture.

#### HERMES

You see, Allfather? I told you to stick to gods. An artist should paint what he knows.

#### ZEUS

(to the TROJAN PRAYER, stung in his  
painter's pride, gesturing toward the  
re-hung oilsketch)

You understand, this is really only a kind of warm-up for my next big project: my "Fall of Troy" cycle. I envision 6 to 8 large canvases on such themes as (in no particular order) "Priam Struck Down at the Altar of Athene," "Aeneas Quits Troy With Papa Anchises in Tow,"

"Zeus Weighs the Fate of Troy in His Golden Scales"--something of a self-portrait, that last, a thing I've been groping my way toward for some time . . . . All this by way of a sequel to my maiden effort, there:

(gestures toward the "painted scene," around which, as usual, a glow obligingly comes up)

"Troy As Was." But if I'm going to paint Troy's Fall, I need to see Troy fall. So please! Don't in the same breath urge me to do major work and to spare Troy. The "major work" you would have of me I may achieve only when The Fall of Troy presents me with my great theme.

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

Surely a still greater--since hitherto untouched--theme awaits you if Troy wins. Think of the opportunities!

#### ZEUS

For? Canvas: "The Happy Old Age of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra"? Canvas: "Penelope Ties the Knot With Her Last Surviving Swain"?

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, Zeus, you're not using your imagination! For the whole world coming out differently! A world where, for example, Cassandra is credited (Canvas: "Pythia Receives Homage of Grateful Town"), where Trojan pathos finds a niche in the Greek spirit (Canvas: "Laocoon Assumes the Headship of the Platonic Academy").



Chime these outlandish? Yet how often do the mortal masters you emulate depict scenes not otherwise known to tradition: Odysseus and Ajax hunched forward over a board game they never played; the centaur Chiron teaching young Achilles to shape letters he never glimpsed. . . .

#### ZEUS

Not known to the tradition, perhaps, but not destructive of it. You seem to be forgetting that if Troy wins, Greece loses. Which means we lose . . . well, for starters, the lion's share of Greek Tragedy--Agamemnon and The Trojan Women, to cite only the most obvious examples. We lose all those sagas of return and reverberation, the so-called nostoi (no manuscript of which, it is true, makes it past the Byzantine era in any case): Helen never now to be reunited with Menelaus, Odysseus nevermore to set foot on his isle . . . .

(HERMES suddenly appears to lose his footing, grow dizzy. He passes his hand across his brow . . . . )

And, above all, if Troy wins, we lose that Troy-sprung-from-the-ashes: we lose Rome.

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

Which, once safely lost, shall now never surpass the achievements of your cherished Greece.

## ZEUS

The only wrinkle being that, brought low by Troy, my "cherished Greece" shall never achieve her achievements. Let Troy win and we can say goodbye to my temple cult at Sounion, to the great statue of Me-as-Thunderer by Phidias, to the entire corpus of Attic red-figure vase-decoration I am striving to subsume--and, need I add, to any projected "Fall of Troy" paintings from my brush.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Actually, you know, the greater part of them could be salvaged. Instead of "Priam Struck Down at the Altar," make it Menelaus. "Aeneas Fleeing With Anchises in Tow" becomes: "Diomed Hoists Nestor." Some wouldn't ask all that much salvaging. Your intended self-portrait, for example--"Zeus Weighs the Fate of Greece in His Golden Scales"--might go forward pretty much as planned, freshly titled, to be sure, but otherwise untouched.

## ZEUS

How "untouched," when at every turn I should see my vision revised, my version reversed: every prior foreshadowing of triumph now a foreglimpsed loss, each upcoming disaster now looking more and more-- I should have created a world I no longer recognize.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, Zeus, and wasn't it your inability to create a world  
you were but now lamenting? Here's your chance!

Take the plunge!

(ZEUS, despite himself, seems tempted. . . .)

Suddenly HERMES, as if shoved from  
behind, plunges forward a step. He whirls  
round to see who pushed him.)

ZEUS

(to HERMES, vexed)

Was ever moment less---? All at present hangs--  
I cannot now entertain pose-proposals.

HERMES

That was no-- I am all at once from my place, or rather,  
do not see what place is mine in the emerging  
world-picture . . . .

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Surely, Lord Hermes, you have often enough, under the  
present dispensation, re-created yourself to meet new  
circumstances: now Patron of Market Squares, now  
Demon of Crossways, now Conductor of Souls . . . .  
What, then, prevents that you should now, as so often  
in the past, knock together a conception a godlike creator  
could contemplate with pride?

(This last expression does, in fact, suggest a pose to HERMES, who, as usual, simultaneously strikes it and calls it:)

#### HERMES

"A Godlike Creator Contemplates His Conception With Pride."

(Casting about for something to stand, in his dumbshow, for the "godlike creator's conception," HERMES (literally) seizes upon ZEUS's recently (p. 34) re-hung oilsketch, lifts it down off its midair perch, and sets about "contemplating it with pride."

Gradually, over the course of the ensuing dialogue between ZEUS and the TROJAN PRAYER, HERMES' pose of intently perusing the oilsketch evolves into actual perusal of it.

Once more the TROJAN PRAYER's attention is suddenly attracted away by developments "below."

She re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture and peers "down," i. e., out.

As always, a glow comes up around the "painted scene.")

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

See! Stern Laocoon drives a spear into the Horse's side, all but pinning Glaukos of Lykia to an inner wall.

The crowd wavers, the King wavers . . . . But already a sent serpent has got round the prophet's first boy, other boy. Soon Laocoon himself will feel the brush of scales. Priam has seen enough. He orders that the broodmare be led within.

(steps away from the "witness box")

Zeus! Troy's ruin stands at her gate. Come in aid!

Spare Troy!

(Again, as on p. 38, ZEUS appears  
tempted . . . . )

In how many lesser hours, against how many poorer scenes,  
have you not let fly? Once more let fly! Send but  
one last bolt slamming into Dobbin, there, and Troy has  
survived Greece!

ZEUS

But--there it is! I am, however later tradition may  
paint me, a Greek god, not a cosmocrat; or, cosmocrat,  
yes, but of a Greek cosmos, on a Greek view of things--

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Who has done more for Troy, god of Greece, than the gods  
of Greece? Your brother, Poseidon, reared her walls,  
soon now to be riven. Your son, Hercules, placed on  
his throne her present King, this night to be cut down  
at the fane of your daughter, Athene--this but the first  
of numberless sacrileges which you should, in sparing  
Troy, be sparing your precious Greeks. Zeus! Father of  
Gods and Men! Don't spare Troy for the Trojans.  
Don't spare Troy for me. Spare Troy for Greece!

(Once more ZEUS seems tempted,  
tightens his grip on the easel/thunderbolt,  
lifts it part way off the ground . . . .)

Just at this moment HERMES, whose  
mere pose of perusing the oilsketch in his  
hand has somewhere along the line become  
actual perusal, suddenly sees what he has  
been looking at.)

HERMES

(gesturing toward the oilsketch)

But--it's of 'Tina!

THE TROJAN PRAYER

What?

HERMES

(thrusting forth the oilsketch)

This "girl with green eyes slipping apple slices  
to her bird"? That's not just any girl with green eyes;  
that's Athene glaukōpis, "green-eyed Athene." And  
that's not any pet bird: that's Athene's own,  
attributive owl. And--hold on! this isn't some random  
Granny Smith or Golden Delicious the bird pecks at,  
it's the Golden Apple, the one, I ought to know,  
wasn't it I who laid it on Paris?

(to ZEUS, accusingly)

You've gone and taken my sister ahead of me! You were  
supposed to paint me first and you painted her!

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(squinting at the oilsketch)

How could I have missed . . . ? Wait a minute.

(snatches the oilsketch out of  
HERMES' hand)

This green-eyed girl may be Athene. This bird pecking  
at the fruit may be Athene's owl. But this is not  
the Golden Apple. It's not golden. It's green!

## ZEUS

(embarrassed)

A small lapse on the part of the Sunday painter.  
So as to bring out the intense sea-green of my sitter's  
eyes, I underpainted the apple with what turns out to be  
an awfully insistent terre verte. All, you understand,  
in the interest of capturing the scene before me  
in its true colors.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(flourishing the oilsketch)

This scene can never have been before you!

(to HERMES)

Your sister wasn't "taken out of turn" to be his sitter.  
At no time can Athene have sat for a portrait of herself  
with the Golden Apple because Athene was never awarded  
the Golden Apple; Aphrodite was!

## HERMES

Actually, as I recall, for a moment there Paris did seem to be tilting 'Tina's way--

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

--but, in the end, came down for Aphrodite, Helen and war. Here,

(indicating the oilsketch)

and not for the first time, we behold Pallas Athene sprung full-blown from her creator's head.

(to ZEUS)

This tableau of your "sensible child" making so light of her golden prize that she feeds it to her pet never did, never can have taken place; for such prize, in the world we know, was never hers. Zeus! Here is no study from life but the first imagining of another life, of a world where all plays out differently--

ZEUS

(to HERMES)

It's true . . . .

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah!

ZEUS

I did have a sudden fancy to show 'Tina in a certain light--we artistes, what to say?--and bumped her to the head of the line.



But I feel absolutely ready to paint you now.

HERMES

Ah! Liked that last one, did you?

(sketchily re-creating his p. 39 pose)

"Godlike Creator Contemplates Own Conception with Pride" . . .

ZEUS

Well, it . . . opened the gates. Look now. If  
The Orison, here,

(indicates the TROJAN PRAYER)

speaks true, vast hosts of but-now-slain Trojans will  
soon be wanting a guide to the Farther Shore. Go change  
into your psychopomp aspect. I have a feeling that

(thrusts a painterly, distance-gauging  
thumb out toward HERMES)

"Hermes, Conductor of Shades Below" is the view  
I now need to take of you. But rest assured: on that  
view or another, I take you next.

HERMES

(as usual, "captioning" his pose  
as he strikes it)

"Hermes Conducts . . . the Shades of Troy . . .  
Below . . . . "

( . . . and, conducting all the way,  
he exits)

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(holding forth the oilsketch)

A "sudden fancy to show 'Tina in a certain light"?

## ZEUS

I had undertaken to paint the god. How does one paint a god? Where does one start? This little genre-scene with wildfowl offered a way in.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Come on, Zeus! If you're going to be an "artiste," you're going to have to acknowledge yourself a teeny bit in the grip of an obsessive theme or two. What your little genre-scene "offers a way into" is a world where (thanks to Athene's upset victory in the bathing-suit competition) Helen keeps quietly at home, the Greek host never musters, and, if Troy does not win the Trojan War, it is only because

(re-hangs the oilsketch in midair)

there'll be no Trojan War. Not long since, you pressed me to say whose prayer for Trojan victory I was, from what lips I rose. Might the answer possibly be (or might only that gods don't pray prevent its being): "from his lips who urged the question"? So much, at least, is sure: that Zeus--who has ever favored the altar of Priam and of late grants Hector field upon field--is, if a stranger to the prayer, surely no stranger to the hope, that Troy win.

ZEUS

(quietly)

I think about it. I'm not sure why.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Couldn't possibly have anything to do with one's role or lack of it in a certain beauty pageant? Or maybe--given your current aesthetic tilt--with Troy's being the more sympathetic to art?

ZEUS

Actually, Troy has the more pro-art lustre, but the preponderance of surviving monumental evidence favors the Greeks.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Of course "the preponderance of surviving monumental evidence favors the Greeks"; only the Greeks survive!

ZEUS

Ah, well, a bird in the hand . . . .

THE TROJAN PRAYER

But then, I suspect you have deeper reasons for wishing Troy victorious than the dynamism of her gallery-scene. It could be your only chance.

ZEUS

Only chance . . . ?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

To become the master you always knew you had it in you to be. To enter upon your own. To outstrip all those mortal painters who haunt your dreams. For, bring Troy out on top and you display an audacity of conception that leaves them all--Skopas, Telephos, Polygnotus himself--painting in the dust.

ZEUS

(sneeringly)

A "divine intervention"?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

I know you aspire, beyond everything, to leave "god" behind for "artist." But how if, to transcend the god, one had, briefly, to reassume him, since only by a god's freedom of handling may you hope to equal, if not surpass, the godlike freedom of your human peers.

ZEUS

Surely the true freedom here would be to make art that shows Troy winning while leaving the realities of the situation untouched. To sketch out, though with every circuit of the walls his corpse grow dustier, a Hector Triumphant Over Achilles. To lay in a Cassandra Paid Heed, even while the prophetess herself raves on, unmarked.

To depict

(gestures toward the oils sketch)

a Victorious Athene Feeding Her Bird a golden prize  
all the while safe in Aphrodite's halls. Does not art  
most truly show us the world by showing itself unaffected  
by the world it shows? Shall I not paint Troy Wins--and  
let win who will?

(At a loss for an answer, THE TROJAN  
PRAYER is temporarily relieved of the  
necessity of supplying one by the glow  
now once more coming up around the  
"painted scene.")

She enters the "witness box," raises  
her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture,  
and peers "down," i. e., out.

This time, the glow that comes up  
around the "painted scene" remains on.)

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

But what's this? Halfway through the city gates, the  
Wooden Mount jams! Wedged fast! Aground! Nor even now  
will my townsmen read the writing on the wall but rather  
set about to open the wall. It gives us a moment . . . .

(comes out of the "witness box"; to  
ZEUS:)

Paint Troy Wins and let win who will? Make not peace  
but a piece? Well, so--fine! Only, when you say:  
"paint Troy Wins" . . . Surely you don't literally  
mean: 'paint'?

(ZEUS mystified)

I mean, what point innovating this high new theme only to go on rendering it in the same old medium?

To convey so revolutionary a conception, you'll be wanting a revolutionary new form. For in what, if not the unending, fruitful quest for new forms, does the mastery of the human masters you vie with, consist?

#### ZEUS

Surely I have been--as befits my leading role in the Attic pantheon--a force for innovation in Greek art second to none. I pioneered the use of glazed broken washes in watercolor, introduced the "Velázquez palette" some decade or two before Velázquez, and, if I was not actually the first to do pastels on sansfix paper, no one, I think, will dispute my having raised the technique to new heights. Who before me ever thought to show a seascape from above, to fill the tondo and lower registers of a krater with matter of independent visual interest, to represent the human frame, in all its complexity, along the curvature of a pyx? Yes, and when the Greek brush first ventured out beyond representation, who but Zeus led the way into Luminism, into Gesturalism, into Anarchofuturism?



ZEUS

Well, when you say: of pre-charred pine, since the Horse is pine . . . Isn't theatre the place where tonight the role of pine will be played by other pine?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Hm . . . that's rather a confining definition. Certainly I don't rule out some elements of spectacle: rear-projected battle scenes, tape-looped oral testimonies and the like. But . . . theatre? Where's the flesh-and-blood characters?

ZEUS

(cowed, like them all)

Oh, yes, well, then, of course--not theatre. But, if not theatre--?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Imagine, if you will, a kind of site-specific, multimedia performance installation--something, I may just point out, that not a one of your mortal rivals has yet hit upon. I envision a series of found spaces, laid out as stations on an interactive tour, which the spectator, moving at his or her own pace, visits in sequence:  
 Station: Site of the Destroyed Greek Camp (an earthwork).  
 Station: Blinded Ulysses Tramps Out His Days at the Mill.



Station: Scorched Remains of the Unmasked Wooden Horse--  
 Or, you know, maybe--in deference to that slightly  
 shopworn critical virtue, concision--maybe only a  
single station: the Scorched Remains of the Horse.  
 Or perhaps--metonyms being, as always, powerful beyond  
 all reason ("the art of the fragment," and so forth)--maybe  
 dial it back to the immense, wooden leg of the horse,  
 shown pastern to hock, still a-smolder with flames  
 she shall never now bring upon Troy.

ZEUS

Let me get this straight. You're urging me, for my  
 Final Studio Project, to clap together an immense  
 wooden horse's leg?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Actually, you've already got an immense wooden horse's  
 leg, all you need to do is get rid of the dead wood.

(ZEUS mystified)

I mean, dispose of the rest of the horse.

ZEUS

And this beats building the leg . . . how?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

More of a personal statement. The god--or godlike  
 maker--most surely glimpsed in his absentsings, in the aftermath.

Gives your project distinct memoiristic resonances.

ZEUS

Yes, I see . . . .

THE TROJAN PRAYER

The Horse once out of the picture, picture the scene.  
It is morning. Against a troubled east, doing its  
orange best to dawn--

ZEUS

Ha . . . . !

(With his free hand ZEUS whips out the small, black "pictureframe" viewfinder he pocketed back on p. 14 and, in response to this and subsequent phrases of the TROJAN PRAYER, sets about "framing off" views of the stage, the audience, the "painted scene," his interlocutor--it is not always clear what ZEUS is putting a frame around.)

THE TROJAN PRAYER

--there rises a vast, silhouetted tower of char--

ZEUS

Yes!

THE TROJAN PRAYER

--still a-amolder, and only just still recognizable  
as an immense single foreleg--

ZEUS

But there!

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

--all that remains of the vast wooden charger  
but now fed to the flames.

ZEUS

I could do the smolder in smolder, the circumambient  
haze in circumambient haze . . . .

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Of course, it's the barest outline, it leaves any number  
of profound questions unexplored, indeed, untouched.  
And yet . . .

ZEUS

As for those streaks of orange cloud on the horizon,  
I think I'll go with streaks of orange cloud. The only  
problem being . . .

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(going on with her own previous speech)  
. . . Could anything more clearly proclaim "Troy's won"?

ZEUS

(going on with his own previous speech)  
. . . How on earth does one boil down an entire horse  
to its leg?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, the perennial aesthetic challenge of reduction to essentials. Never a simple matter--although perhaps in this instance simpler than most. You hold in your hand a powerful instrument

(gestures toward the easel/thunderbolt)

which you have only to let fall on

(gestures "below")

Old Paint, and--see if you have not shorn away all but the gist of your conception.

## ZEUS

(scrutinizing with distaste through the "pictureframe" viewfinder in one hand the easel/thunderbolt in the other)

Lob a bolt? I don't know. As you're aware, I consider myself pretty well past my Zeus-the-Thunderer phase.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

Who said anything about lobbing a bolt? I'm drawing your attention to an untapped expressive resource.

## ZEUS

You mean,

(He lifts the easel/bolt slowly into the air and aims it experimentally at the "painted scene," all the while continuing to observe his own actions through the "pictureframe" viewfinder in his other hand)

do the consuming flame . . . ?

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

. . . In consuming flame. Exactly. One can only applaud your ongoing engagement with real-world materials.

(Her attention once again attracted "below," she re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture and peers "down," i. e., out.)

The breach widens! A mass of Trojans lay shoulder to steed and--Pony is afoot! They have him moving. They have him moving faster. They are bringing him in. Another moment, and he will be out of your range. Throw in fire now--!

(Decisively, ZEUS pockets the "pictureframe" viewfinder and brings the raised easel/lightning bolt fully to bear on the "painted scene.")

At the exact spot on the "painted scene" toward which he aims the bolt (somewhere high up in its sky section), a circle of red light--a "burn mark"--appears on the canvas.)

Zeus! Down and in!

(ZEUS attempts to comply. But he cannot quite handle the easel/bolt. It wobbles in his hand and, as it does so, the "burn mark" jumps around the canvas.)

At last, by an Olympian effort, ZEUS manages to tilt the bolt downward a little and thereby shifts the "burn mark" a little downward along the "painted scene" to a point in its sky just above Troy's city wall.

He pauses for breath.

Left to linger on this one spot of canvas, the circle of red light begins to spread like a cigarette burn across the "painted scene"'s depiction of the sky over Troy.)

Zeus! It must come down to the Horse. Spare Troy!

Bring it down to the Horse!

(As if against resistance, ZEUS manages to get the easel/bolt--and thereby the "burn mark" on the canvas--moving slowly downward . . . .)

Re-enter HERMES as "psychopomp"  
( = conductor of souls to the underworld).  
He wears exactly the same costume as before but each of its elements--winged sandals, traveler's hat, etc.--is now jet black.

Seeing ZEUS with bolt (apparently) raised against, but not yet hurled toward, Troy, HERMES supposes that he takes in the situation at a glance.)

HERMES

Hangs yet in air? Let fall, Zeus! Here is your  
Conductor of Souls Below, poised to take down such  
shades of Troy as your bolt may fell--and, of course,  
be painted in the act. What need more stay?  
Send fire on Troy!

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Not against Troy, but against the cobbled mare and all  
who from within her aim at Troy's fall, Zeus's shaft is  
raised. It is the flower of Greece--Diomed, Ajax,  
Odysseus--whom this night you shall escort below.

HERMES

Odysseus? You're telling me Odysseus never makes it home?

(to ZEUS)

But all my best scenes are in the Odyssey!

(The TROJAN PRAYER, her attention attracted "below," re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture and peers "down," i. e., out.)

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Mark, Zeus! The Nag has cleared the breach! They're wheeling her through the starlit streets, onto the palace lawn . . . .

ZEUS

(still struggling to wield and aim the bolt; to HERMES:)

Oh, come! You have had a fair run of "scenes"! One might instance your fetching of Koré back from, or Eurydice back to, Hades. And, closer to home, your recent, poignant conveyance of Priam to Achilles by night in Iliad 24 is, once read, not soon forgot.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

(continuing to peer "below," i. e., out)

And--lo! with Dan Patch now drawn up at Priam's door, my Trojans retire to (shall it prove their final?) rest.

HERMES

(to ZEUS)

Ah, what is all that compared to the mighty passages you, by sparing Troy, wrest from me? Never now shall I transmit to Calypso your hest--yours, Zeus!--that Odysseus depart her isle.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(always peering "below," i. e., out)

And here is Helen, who, having somehow caught wind that the Horse is full of Greeks, wheedles each warrior in the accents of his far-off spouse. "Diomed!" she whispers, "Diomed!"

## HERMES

(to ZEUS)

Never now shall I furnish Odysseus with a charm against Circe's charms.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(her ear, as well as eye, now fixed  
"below," i. e., out)

"Ajax!" purrs Helen in the voice of Ajax's left bride, "Ajax!"

## HERMES

(to ZEUS)

Never now lead down the souls of Penelope's suitors to Hell.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

(looking, and listening, "down,"  
i. e., out)

"Odysseus!"--now it is the broken tones of Penelope Helen brings forth--"Odysseus!", and, receiving no answer, laughs and leaves.



HERMES

(to ZEUS)

But worst of all, spare Troy--and there shall want founding no second Troy. Which means: no Aeneid (whose hero must now quietly eke out his span at home). Which means: I can forget about perhaps the grandest of all my descent-passages: Never now shall I present Aeneas with your edict that he quit Dido and turn prow for Rome. For the loss of these, my best vignettes--Homerian and Virgilian--it only just compensates that you'll be painting me next.

ZEUS

Ah, well, now, as for that--

HERMES

I mean, of course, after you've . . . shot your bolt and are free to redirect your energies toward art.

ZEUS

To have shot my bolt looks to be the new direction in my art. Let me explain.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

(with ear cocked "downward," i. e., out)

Those rumblings--hark! What can this be but the first stirrings of them within the Horse to unbar and emerge?

(She remains in the "witness box," listening and peering intently "down," i. e., out.)

ZEUS

(to HERMES)

Painting is yesterday. At least in my view. If Phryno or the Leagros Group imagine that there is yet blood to be wrung from that stone, they are welcome to try. Myself, I have moved on. To what? you may ask.

To projects more on the scale of . . . in materials more of a piece with . . . . For example: say the maquette calls for a bolt from on high: do I

reach for the yellow ochre? I do not! no, but rather

(attempts to hold forth the easel/thunderbolt, which, however, he can still barely manipulate)

bring this fellow to bear upon . . . oh, say, a structure of burnt planks (which I do in burnt plank), from which arise, rendered in whiffs-of-char, whiffs of char.

HERMES

But--that's not art! Or rather, it's the art of a god, that can't help being the thing it is--the nasturtium pinned to the canvas all over again. Don't talk about "new forms" to me: You're reverting! Well--I won't let you. An oil painting I was promised--by that very bolt you're now tossing around so freely you swore it--and painted I shall be! If I'm fated to kiss all my best lyric and epic moments goodbye, I damn sure mean to persist as a subject for Western art. Know, therefore,

that I shall come between you and this newfound project of yours. Urge not the fate of Troy. Troy is nothing to me. Sink Troy or soar, I intend to be represented. I put myself before Troy.

( . . . and he literally does so, i. e., he places himself before the "painted scene" that depicts Troy--between it and ZEUS's raised bolt--in a posture of heroic intervention.)

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

(still peering "down" (out) from the "witness box")

And now, from the underbelly of the Beast, the hatch that swung wide to receive the murderers, swings wide to disgorge them. Down drops a rope ladder upon which, any moment now, the first of Troy's harriers shall plant heel. Help, Zeus!

(For the first time since he transformed his easel into a lightning bolt back on p. 17, ZEUS raises the bolt over his head with the perfect ease and confidence of his prototype, the fifth-century Artemisian bronze statue of Zeus Asteropētēs, "Zeus, Hurler of Lightning.")

Only, he does not hurl it.

Instead, he abruptly lowers the bolt and, with a single, deft, baton-twirler's flick of the wrist, turns it back into an easel, which he sets down on the stage-floor. (He does not, however, turn his Zeus-costume--the silver-trimmed chlamys--back into the houndstooth cape it was prior to being turned inside out on p. 17.)

His easel now once more in place, he prepares to resume painting.

Alarmed, the TROJAN PRAYER abandons her post at the "witness box.")

Zeus? What--?

ZEUS

(pointing to HERMES)

But mark him there, mid-realization . . . .

Fervent to avert, he interposes--and, interposing,  
has his pose at last:

(blocking out the words in air:)

Hermes Puts Himself Before the Trojan War--from his  
own lips drop (and not for the first time) his title.

(to HERMES)

Didn't I tell you you'd come on your pose in the  
end--not this or this other, but the thing itself?

And didn't I undertake to know it when I saw it?

(His easel now fully deployed,  
he plunges back into painting.)

HERMES

(luxuriating in his "pose")

It feels so right . . . .

ZEUS

(luxuriating in his own activity of  
painting)

So . . . right!

THE TROJAN PRAYER

You're turning back to painting now? What about the world  
coming out differently? What about Troy snatched from  
the flames? What about our installation?

ZEUS

Wasn't making a whole bunch of headway there, was I?  
 Couldn't rightly seem (as can scarcely have escaped you)  
 to manage the bolt. Only now, though, do I see  
 what the trouble was. Plainly, I must

(gestures toward the easel)

venture a portrayal of myself at this stage before  
 passing on to the next.

THE TROJAN PRAYER

But what you're "venturing a portrayal" of is--HIM!

(points to HERMES)

ZEUS

Yes, but of him as emblem of one's own earlier stance.

(painting furiously as he speaks)

Under the figure of Hermes "putting himself before" Troy,  
 shall I not recognize my own "art before everything"  
 posture, till now held deepest truth, but now presenting  
 itself as, merely, a guide to further depths?

(turns to HERMES)

Conductor Beyond! Leader-On of the imagination--and  
 even by this known for a figure of imagination as,  
 before everything, self-led-on! Let 'Tina have  
 stolen her march, this

(indicates HERMES)

is the First God I paint.

(to HERMES)

Unsealer of the Eyes! I advance upon my own with none but thee, my self-outpaced, for guide; for, even in thus pointing beyond yourself, you offer instance of an art that points beyond itself, of art as a pointing beyond itself.

(An impatient gesture from the TROJAN PRAYER.

ZEUS rounds on her.)

Was it not yourself urged me to let through the "memoiristic resonances"?

THE TROJAN PRAYER

Ah, when all's said, you do but add to the pile one more Hermes as Psychopomp, that most worked, tiredest theme in all Greek art. Kleitas, Douris, Timanthes--who of your mortal masters has not been there before you?

ZEUS

And who but their supernal 'prentice has glimpsed there an image even of those masters' own quest--thus at a stroke eclipsing them?

(to HERMES)

Didn't I promise to "set you before broader horizons"?

( . . . and he returns to his painting.)

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

But all the while you are setting him there--

(She re-enters the "witness box," raises her hand in the visionary hailing-gesture, and peers "down," i. e., out.)

On the topmost rung of the rope ladder let down from the Horse's flank, a greaved foot appears. I recognize those greaves. It is Odysseus!

(She looks to ZEUS for a response--and finds him already wholly caught up in his painting. His brush flies.)

## ZEUS

See with what ease! How ever could I have supposed this hand stayed, of bolt incapable? It was just, you see, I couldn't be on to the next thing until I'd painted myself out--that is, painted myself in, that is, painted Hermes. Well, I paint him now; which done, bring on the earthworks and countermonuments: I am for you.

## THE TROJAN PRAYER

But by then--

(gesturing "overboard")

Troy is lost!

## ZEUS

How, if my brush capture her? And be certain,

my brush, no less surely than my Greeks, shall capture her, if only as stepped-out-before, if only as . . . backcloth. Or I shall

(godlike gesture)

put forth my hand or

(brush-wielding gesture)

put forth my hand--what matter? Perduring town or perduring image of a fated town--Troy wins either way! Either way Troy wins! Your prayer is--or rather, the prayer you are is--you are--answered.

#### THE TROJAN PRAYER

But--

(Her attention is caught by something she glimpses "below.")

In a bound, Odysseus is down the rope and stands on Trojan soil, his sword drawn. After him now drops Diomed, drops Ajax, drops Nestor--each with sword drawn . . . Zeus! Do I have to paint you a picture? Very well--

(She comes out of the "witness box" and plants herself smack in between ZEUS and his "model," HERMES.)

I shall paint you a picture.

It is evening in a city. A weary bay drinks from her trough. The smoke of cookfires, over which joints of meat turn slowly, lifts skyward. Cries of children



at play ring out from the next street. In this street, a Sunday painter yet plies his brush. He has set himself to capture a square of late-afternoon sun on his garden wall. The Sunday painter works quickly, for night nears and the light he paints, and paints by, must soon fail.

But say it fail: shall he not return to his painting next Sunday afternoon, and next, even as the sun returns to the wall? At thought of all these many sabbaths of labor before him, the Sunday painter's hand slows; then quickens. The thirsty bay drinks from her trough. The smoke of cookfires diffuses. The cries of children in the next street grow faint. Stars appear.

(The tiny lightbulbs at the center of each star-picturehook flicker on.)

The light the Sunday painter paints, and paints by, lessens. The painter paints on.

It is, in truth, an ordinary scene, such as might be met with any place, any time. But this is not any place. And it is not any time. It is tomorrow in Troy.

(The TROJAN PRAYER concludes her speech in a graceful posture of appeal.)

Apparently much moved, ZEUS leaves off painting, goes to the TROJAN PRAYER, and lays his hand on her shoulder--a gesture of pure compassion, it would seem.

But then, abruptly, he uses the hand he has placed on her shoulder to reposition her shoulder slightly.

He steps back to compare the relative positions of the TROJAN PRAYER and HERMES, who is (from ZEUS's point of view) a little out beyond the TROJAN PRAYER, still "interposing for Troy."

On the basis of what he sees, ZEUS makes a further adjustment in the stance of the TROJAN PRAYER; again checks it against that of HERMES; once more re-adjusts; and again checks . . . the fine-tuning goes on for some time.

By now it is clear that what ZEUS is doing is working the TROJAN PRAYER into the composition of his "Hermes Puts Himself Before Troy"-painting, which, it seems, is now also to depict the TROJAN PRAYER, in her present posture of appeal, interposed between ZEUS and a HERMES himself shown interposing between ZEUS and "Troy" (i. e., the "painted scene").

At length, satisfied with the placement of his two "sitters," ZEUS leaves off manipulating the TROJAN PRAYER, returns to his easel, and resumes painting.

Tape-loop of clashing swords and death-cries from "below."

Lights down, except for the "burn mark" of red light near the center of the "painted scene," which now spreads rapidly in all directions over the picture surface, nearly attaining the limits of the canvas before flaring off.)

END