



**English**

**Homer**  
**The Iliad**  
**Translated by E. V. Rieu**  
**Harmondsworth 1950**  
**[Revised and Updated by Peter**  
**Jones and D. C. H. Rieu]**

**Sample from the Opening of the**  
**Poem**

Which of the gods was it that made them quarrel? It was Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, who started the feud because he was furious with Agamemnon for not respecting his priest Chryses. So Apollo inflicted a deadly plague on Agamemnon's army and destroyed his men.

Chryses had come to the Greeks' swift ships to recover his captured daughter. He brought with him an immense ransom and carried the emblems of the Archer-god Apollo on a golden staff in his hands. He spoke in supplication to the whole Greek army and most of all its two commanders, Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus:

'Sons of Atreus and you other Greek men-at-arms; you hope to sack Priam's town and get home in safety. May the gods that live on Olympus grant your wish. Now respect the Archer-god Apollo son of Zeus, accept this ransom and release my beloved daughter.'

Then all the other Greeks shouted in agreement. They wanted to see the priest respected and the splendid ransom taken. But this was not at all to Agamemnon's liking. He cruelled and bluntly dismissed the priest . . .

**REVIEW COMMENT**

Rieu's translation is a personal favourite of mine, because it was the first to awaken my imagination to the wonders of Homer. Hence, I am perhaps somewhat biased in its favour. Rieu's prose is direct, accurate, clear, and for the most part free of deliberate archaisms and traditional chivalric paraphernalia. He also handles the direct speech well, producing language that sounds as if it is something someone might actually say (in marked contrast to a few other modern translations). Here's a short sample from an impassioned speech at the opening of the poem:

'We joined your expedition, you shameless swine, to please you, to get satisfaction from the Trojans for Menelaus and yourself, dog-face—a fact you utterly ignore. And now comes this threat from you, of all people, to rob me of my prize, in person, my hard-earned prize which was a tribute from the army. It's not as though I am ever given a prize equal to yours when the Greeks sack some prosperous Trojan town. The heat and burden of the fighting fall on me, but when it comes to dealing out the spoils, it is you that takes the lion's share, leaving me to return to my ships, exhausted from battle, with some pathetic portion to call my own. (From the revised edition)

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Place this dialogue alongside, say, Hammond's doggedly literal attempts to produce something that sounds like colloquial prose, and the preference is clear.

True, some critics have voiced the opinion that Rieu makes Homer's poems sound like a Victorian novel, but if that criticism has some merit (and I'm not sure that it does), well-written Victorian prose is vastly preferable to English wrenched out of all idiomatic shape or to some ersatz artificial Arthurian dialect. This translation has been around a long time and is still popular—deservedly so. It is still a translation to consider carefully if one is looking for Homer rendered into modern English prose, especially now that the text has been revised by Rieu's son, D. C. H. Rieu, and Peter Jones.

Readers who would like the preview the revised Rieu translation should use the following link: [Rieu Iliad](#).