

## ACHILLES REFUSES TO ATONE FOR HIS CRIMES

Remorse arrived like a summer of crows.  
He shooed the birds as if they were the plague,  
thought to recall the envoys, then banished them.

*Athena, commisure of my journey, you,  
I longed for when I took that woman, raped her.  
I only sought your counsel, your consortium.  
Athena, you ignored me, so I had her.  
Fate dealt me her, her death, my swag, escape.  
Return and educate me—lead me out  
of impulse, as I writhe naked in the slough.*

He closed his eyes and sought the woman he  
had known since second grade and always loved—  
the woman nested in him by his manhood,  
that residue of fire trusted to him,  
the boyish, gray-eyed goddess, virgin temptress  
whose face and smile surged within him though  
a thousand layers down. His psyche's keep  
impeded her, not willing to accede  
to Cronus' soul-submerging, evil sway,  
as if to say, "Bend first to me, renounce  
your unchecked rage and I will give you access  
to the goddess. Now you cannot hear her."  
A riptide of desire had swept him out  
to sea, but she remained hard-wired in him,  
offline but ready in his circuitry.

*I won't atone, I won't. I know it's wrong,  
but you deserted me. I'm lost and still  
search every pretty face for you, Athena,  
commisure and journey—limbic you,  
nebulous anchor of clarity, deceit.*

He thought, *Look, give it up. The will-o'-the-wisp  
is not worth chasing. There's Briseis waiting.  
Why dredge regret up from the swamp?*

—Michael Lieberman, M.D.

In this excerpt from Michael Lieberman's forthcoming book, *The Houstiliad, An Iliad for Houston* (Texas Review Press, fall 2015), we get a look at the rage of Achilles. Like Homer's *Iliad*, *The Houstiliad* is driven by Achilles' rage. Book I opens with Achilles, accompanied by his white macaw Patroclus, killing Mestor, Hector's brother, and abducting, raping, and murdering Mestor's wife. Towards the end of Book I it appears that Achilles has gotten away with his crimes. After several days he suffers momentary remorse but then tries to lay the blame on Athena, his inner guide and mentor.