

## Frederick Smock

### ON READING HOMER

*Nectar and ambrosia Athena instilled  
within Akhilleus to keep his body whole  
—the Iliad, XIX*

All day, I have been reading Homer  
at the table, the old wine-tasting table in the kitchen,  
its dark cracked wood gouged, burned, stained,  
scarred like a map of the world.  
(O, spilled drop of a wine-dark sea!)

Reading, actually, an old girlfriend's copy  
of Robert Fitzgerald's translation from the Greek,  
those great men and their rage  
annotated in her slant lavender hand,  
as in a water-color her strength and her wit  
brushed momentarily over the pages,  
a palimpsest on the ancient art of warfare.  
Fair Athena, the hope of old soldiers.  
Fair redhead, o, we had some rows of our own, didn't we?  
I was foolish of heart, and proud,  
you evinced a talent for winging crockery,  
and together we made our love zing!

All day, rain has streamed down the windows,  
rushed in torrents past the kitchen door.  
Now, the storm clouds are breaking up, drifting off  
into the rosy-fingered dusk. A watery light  
dimples these pages, where battlefields have been  
abandoned for the cooking-fires,  
and libations are raised to the gods. . . .  
I catch myself rubbing a pensive circle in  
the table-wood. ~Any regrets?  
She gave me a bottle of '75 Lafite Rothschild

and I did not open it at once and drink it with her,  
but stored the bottle away, for what?  
Years later, when my wife and I hauled it out  
to celebrate some occasion,  
the wine had of course gone sour.