

WULF: LIBRETTO

compiled by Vic Hoyland

[Since most of this score uses modern English, it will be acceptable to perform this work using a translation in the country of performance, as well as using segments in the original French, Icelandic, Anglo-Saxon, Latin, ancient Greek and Scottish Gaelic. Please contact UYMP to discuss any translation of the English text.]

Iliad, chapter 18 (of 24): Patroclus, Achilles' companion, is killed in battle. Achilles' emotional reaction is extreme. His screams are heard by his mother, Thetis, from the depths of the sea. She calls on her nymphs (Nereids) to come to her son's aid.

*"With these the bright cave was filled, and the nymphs all alike,
beat their breasts, and Thetis led the lament."*

The names of ancient Greek sea nymphs are recalled throughout the work.

Part I – WULF

1. *Glauke te Thaleia te Kymodoke te
Nesaie Speio te Thoe Halia te
Kymothoe te kai Actae kai Limmoria
Kai Melite kai Iera kai Amphithoe kai Agave
Doto te Proto te Pherusa Dynamene te
Dexamene te Amphinome kai Kallineira
Doris kai Panope kai te Galateia
Nemertes te kai Apseudes kai Kallinassa
Te Klymene Ianeira te kai Ianassa
Maera kai Oreithyia te Amatheia.¹*

5. *Protesilaus, Echepolus, Elephenor, Simoisius, Leukos, Democoon, Diores, Pirous, Phegeus, Idaeus, Odios, Phaestus, Scamandrius, Pherecles, Pedaeus, Hypsenor, Astynooos, Hyperion, Abas, Polyidos, Xanthus, Thoon, Echemmnon, Chromius, Pandarus, Deicoon.²*

6. Sigmund took his weapons, but Skarphedinn waited the while. Skyolld turned against Grim and Helg', and they fought violently. Sigmund had a helmet on his head and a shield at his side and was girt with a sword, his spear was in his hand; he turns against Skarphedinn, and thrusts at him with his spear, and the thrust struck the shield. Skarphedinn hews through the spear shaft with his axe and lifts his axe again and hews at Sigmund, and it struck the shield and split it down below the handle.

Sigmund drew his sword with his right hand and struck Skarphedinn. And the sword cuts the shield which stuck fast. Skarphedinn gave the shield a quick twist, so Sigmund lost his grip on the sword. Then Skarphedinn hews at Sigmund. Sigmund had on a corselet, the axe came down on his shoulder. Skarphedinn cleft through the shoulder-blade and pulled the axe so that Sigmund fell down on both his knees, but sprang up again at once. Skarphedinn struck him on his helmet and then dealt the death-blow. Grim cut off Skyolld's foot and took it off at the ankle. Skarphedinn saw one of halberd's shepherds, just as he had hewn off Sigmund's head. He handed the head to the shepherd, and bade him bear it to Hallgerda, and said she would know that head.³

7. Hunted down, torn to pieces,
Oh we are apart⁴

9. *Doamni, di cînd îi lumea
î, Dulci mai ieste viața,
Cu câmpurile-nflorite⁵*

¹ Homer, *Iliad*, Book 18, lines 39-48. c. 700 BC (Troy c. 1182BC), written down c. 500BC.

² *Iliad*. Broken parts of names of the dead as they occur in order.

³ Sir George Webbe Dasent (trans.). *The Story of Burnt Njal, From the Icelandic of the Njals Saga*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1911. Chapter 45, THE SLAYING OF SIGMUND AND SKYOLLD. The *Njal Saga* was written in the late 1200s, recalling Iceland AD870 – 1014.

⁴ *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Anglo-Saxon, c. AD960.

⁵ *Doina*. Fragment of a Romanian village hymn of resurrection, expanded into a lament "made for the Revolution, for those who died for freedom", by a village housewife, Elena Brustureanu-Cucu, born in the Horodniceni commune, Suceava county, Romania. Transcribed and cited by Steluța Popa in "The Revolution in December 1989 Reflected in the Musical Folklore", published in Marin Marian Bălașa (ed.), *East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology*, Volume 1, 1994, pp. 76-80. Translation: 'Oh, Lord, ever since the world existed/Sweet has been the life,/Among bloomed fields.'

10. Hunted down, torn to pieces,
Oh, we are apart.⁶

haima kata cthonos apo [...blood on the ground...]⁷

11. Gunnar Greedy wealds weapons wounded sixteen
Brought death to two⁸

12. Rather die for battle Freja.

20. *haima kata cthonos apo* [...blood on the ground...]

21. Now they turn down along the Fleet and see a tongue of ice bridging the stream.
Skarphedinn runs right down the Fleet. But the river was so deep that there was no fording it for a long way.
A great sheet of ice had been thrown by the flood on the other side of the river.
Thrain and his men stood in the midst of the sheet.
Skarphedinn takes a spring into the air and leaps over the stream, between the ice banks.
He rushes still onwards with a slide.

Thrain was just about to put on his helmet; and now Skarphedinn bore down them, and hews at Thrain with his axe, and smote him on the head, and clove him to the teeth, so that the jaw-teeth fell out on to the ice.

This feat was done with such a quick sleight that no one could get a blow at Skarphedinn.
He glided away from them at full speed.

Tjorvi threw his shield before him on the ice, but Skarphedinn leapt over it and still kept his feet, and slid to the end of the slab.

And they went at Hrapp. Arms cut off, axe falls.⁹

22. *haima kata cthonos apo*

23. As I watch, figures appear out of the dark, bent double, under sacks. It's a shock. Families hold hands, moving past us like heavy ghosts, not looking left or right.¹⁰

Segue Part II

PART II – NJAL

25. About that time, Hauskuld, the Priest of Whiteness, awoke; he put on his clothes, and threw over him his cloak, Flosi's gift.¹¹

30. Skarphedinn and his band had agreed
that they would give him a wound.

Skarphedinn sprang up from behind the fence.
When Hauskuld saw him he wanted to turn away.
Skarphedinn ran up to him and said: "Don't bother! Hvitanes Godi [The Priest of Whiteness]."

Hauskuld: "May God help me and forgive you!"

⁶ *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

⁷ Numbered 44 example. Berlin papyrus 6870, line 23. "A snatch of song"; the play and its writer are not identified.

⁸ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 76, GUNNAR'S SLAYING.

⁹ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 91, THRAIN SIGFUS' SON'S SLAYING.

¹⁰ Drawn from an article by A.A. Gill, 'Long day's journey into night', published on <<http://stories.unhcr.org/aa-gill-long-days-journey-night-p4837.html>> and in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 31 March 2013.

¹¹ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 110, THE SLAYING OF HAUSKULD, THE PRIEST OF WHITENESS.

They ran at him and finished him off!¹²

34. At dawn the next morning, the Carthaginians applied themselves to collecting the spoils and viewing the carnage, which even to an enemy's eyes was a shocking spectacle. All over the field Roman soldiers lay dead in their thousands, horse and foot mingled, as the shifting phases of the battle, or the attempt to escape, had brought them together.¹³
35. Here and there men, covered in blood, who had been roused to consciousness by the morning cold, were dispatched by a quick blow as they struggled to rise from among the dead; others were found still alive with the sinews in their thighs and behind their knees sliced through, baring their throats and necks and begging who would spill what little blood they had left. Some had their heads buried in the ground, having apparently dug themselves holes and by smothering their faces with earth had choked themselves to death. Most strange of all was a Numidian soldier, still living... who, when his useless hands had no longer been able to grasp his sword, had died in the act of tearing apart his enemy, in bestial fury, with his teeth.¹⁴
36. Ride a horse with hoarfrost mane
And dripping locks bringing evil
The torch ends burn, the middle brings bane
Flosi's plans are like a flung torch
Flosi's plans are like a flung torch¹⁵
37. *Skarphedinn*: "No! Avenge us, and we shall avenge you, if we live after."
Yes! Kari said it should be (so).

Flosi: "Now they are all 'fey' since they've gone indoors."¹⁶

Then they came with fire.¹⁷

38. *Njal*: "I will not go out.
For I am an old man and little fitted to avenge my sons.
I do not want to live in shame. We will go in."

Now Njal must be dead.¹⁸

From Njal's house
One lived
When fire
Burned the rest
The blaze burned
Through the house
Bright flames
In the house¹⁹

42. Gold given a good return.
Raw flesh ravens, to tear.²⁰
43. A fastness that island, a fen prison.
On that island, fierce men roam.²¹
45. *Kymothoe*²²

Segue Part III

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Livy, cited on p.120 in J.M.G. Le Clézio. *War*. London: Vintage, 2008.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Flosi's ride. *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 124, OF PORTENTS.

¹⁶ Tarkovsky. *Ivan's childhood*. & *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 127, THE ONSLAUGHT OF BERGTHORSKNOLL.

¹⁷ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 128 "NJAL'S BURNING."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 129, SKARPHEDINN'S DEATH.

²⁰ Valkyrie; Njal avenged. *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 154, GUNNAR LAMBI'S SON'S SLAYING.

²¹ *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

²² *Iliad*, remembered by a Syrian boy.

PART III – YSÉ

The female voices restate, in slow motion, the names of the sea nymphs, as listed in the Iliad. Here they can represent Ysé, the only female character in Paul Claudel's play, Partage de Midi (first version completed 1906 then substantially revised for its first complete performance in post-war Paris, 1948).²³ 'Partage' can mean both divided and shared equally. Ysé resembles the biblical Isaiah.

The spoken texts are drawn from published war records concerning 1917, Oppy Wood.²⁴ My grandmother's first husband died there.

49. The weather broke in April, it was cold, and on the 2nd it began to snow. At the end of the day the snow lay an inch deep in Arras.

Numerous troops had been moved to this point of the line and found easy accommodation in the cellars. They were dark and damp, but stoves made them a little more comfortable.

Zero was at 5.30am on Easter Monday. Wire-cutting had begun nearly three weeks before and on April the 4th the bombardment began.

On the 8th, a fine cold day, the shelling seemed to die down; but in the dark of Monday morning it began with extraordinary intensity, and the troops moved forward.

On the Arras battle front there were a number of Fusilier battalions waiting to take their part in the struggle. Farthest north were the 8th and 9th Battalions (12th Division), just above the Arras-Cambrai road. The 8th and 9th Battalions reached their objectives, and with small losses took a considerable number of prisoners. The front German line was reached without a single casualty. The enemy put up a strong resistance at two strong points, but they were outflanked, and at 10am the whole objective was taken with two machine-guns and 129 prisoners. The total casualty list was 175 killed, wounded and missing.

50. On the right, the 9th Battalion also gained all objectives and captured 2 machine guns and 220 prisoners, C Company captured 150 of these in one dug-out. But the dug-outs were unhealthy places. One of them was suddenly blown up by the explosion of a mine, and as a consequence German dug-outs were afterwards forbidden.

These positions, the "Blue Line", were at once consolidated.

The 4th Battalion moved off with the 9th Brigade. Advancing at 7am the Battalion came under heavy fire as they moved across the open; but they kept on until they had covered about a mile. In their path lay the highly organised defensive system below Tilley, and in conjunction with other battalions, they swept across it. Such a position in the Battle of the Somme frequently remained a stumbling block for days and weeks. W Company, leading on the right, suffered heavily from rifle and machine-gun fire, also partly from our own barrage. All our officers were wounded.

51. At String Trench, with its wire only partially cut, many losses were sustained. The Battalion gained little support from the ranks and lost 225 officers and men. The Territorials had more obvious objectives and carried out their tasks well. For a short time they were held up at a belt of uncut wire where they lost heavily.

About noon on April 10th the Royal Fusiliers moved forward. These and other units combined to advance under a heavy barrage, until they were only 600 yards west of Monchy. The losses had been very heavy.

A provisional line of trenches were dug, west of Monchy. The 10th Battalion stormed the village itself and occupied it under heavy barrage. The cavalry entered the village about 9am and were heavily shelled. It was a memorable day. At one time there was a blinding storm, ignored by the troops. Although the Arras front changed considerably in the subsequent operations, the positions at this point were little changed.

²³ Paul Claudel, trans. Wallace Fowlie. *Partage de Midi*. Chicago: Gateway Edition, 1960.

²⁴ Reports of Field Officer Joseph Alfred Smith from WW1, Arras, Easter 1917.

54. [WW1 reports continue over the barely heard, broken limbed names of Trojan War dead.]

In December the line was not a 1,000 yards further east than had been achieved on April the 9th by the Fusiliers. By April the 13th, a line was established at the east of the village and patrols were sent forward to Oppy. A platoon of C Company, misinterpreting orders, went out to attempt the capture of Oppy and was itself captured, after a spirited fight before the village. The 23rd captured 4 guns in this advance. But they lost heavily, for in addition to the platoon cut off, the adjutant was killed by a shell as he walked towards the railway.

55. The 24th continued the advance, despite heavy artillery and machine-gun fire, succeeded in getting within 500 yards of the Arleux en Gohelle - Oppy line. This was a formidable sector of the German front.

April 15th (Guemappe). The 4th Battalion was sent forward against Guemappe. The attack was launched hurriedly and was unsuccessful. Zero was to be 6.20pm. The Battalion was formed up about 10 minutes before the barrage lifted and they advanced slowly. When they approached the spur lying about 750 yards northwest of Guemappe, they came under a very sustained gunfire from both flanks, but particularly from the direction of Wancourt. They continued to advance and cross the spur. But by this time most of the officers who had gone into action had been wounded, some severely, some killed. Still, the Battalion advanced and the sunken road was reached. They had pushed forward 3,000 yards, an apparently irresistible advance in defiance of all the enemy could do.

8pm. Only 3 officers left. The King's Liverpools who had started off 15 minutes before the 4th Fusiliers had not been seen since. The 12th West Yorkshire whom it was intended to support with was not seen at all. However, this advance launched almost at a moment's notice, without any time for preliminary reconnaissance, was considered a "very wonderful performance".

April 13th, 9am left flank. German trenches were found to be almost smashed out of all recognition by our fire, and unoccupied. The Germans were observed to be shelling their own line.

April 16th, Oppy. Another attempt was made to test the strength of the Oppy line. A daylight raid was ordered to be made by the 17th Battalion. It was not the sort of adventure that encourages the soldier.

The initial small party were sniped from Arleaux and never had a chance. Only one returned to report that the wire was thick and unbroken. Four separate brigades attempted to take this line and all failed. In their preparatory stages of battle the battalion fared badly.

56. [*Iliad*, names of the fallen. WW1 report continues.]

Protesilaus, Ekepolus, Elephenor, Simoisius, Leukos.

A new line, about 200 yards from the German position was dug; but it was no sooner ready than a sustained bombardment beat the trenches to pieces, and a new line had to be constructed during the night. The battalion proceeded to take up positions for attack at 8.30pm on the night of the 22nd and at 4.45am, zero, the infantry began to advance. The men followed the barrage closely, but on reaching the front line found that the wire was cut only in one place, forming a narrow, north-easterly lane. The men were congested and lost direction; and they encountered bombing parties and a very heavy machine-gun fire.

Democoon, Diores, Pirous, Phegeus, Idae-

Many casualties were sustained from this cause until a party was organised to attack and capture them. Guns were rushed and 23 prisoners were captured.

Odios, Phaestus, Scamandrius, Pherecles, Pedaeus, Hypsenor, Astynooos, Hyperion, Abas, Polyidos, Xanthus, Thoon, Echemmon, Chromius, Pandarus, Deicoon, Orsilochus, Crethon, Pylaemenes, Mydon, Menesthes, Anchialos

The number going into action was 18 officers; other ranks 358. 12 officers were either killed or wounded. The Battalion was practically wiped out.

April 24th, Monchy. The position was consolidated and many German dead bodies were found on the ground, with much equipment, packs, rifles etc.

April 29th, Oppy Wood. A furious bombing attack took place on the left flank, and such were the losses that it was decided to swing the right flank to the Oppy Trench, west of the sunken road, and gradually retire along it. This was successfully accomplished.

The 2nd Highland Light Infantry, immediately north of Oppy Wood, had suffered terribly from the fire at Oppy Wood. The 17th Battalion, who had been supporting the 24th during the day, finding their right in the air, formed an offensive flank. The line along this front was pitted with gaps.

Amphius, Tlepolemus, Coeranus, Chromius, Alcastor, Alcander, Halius, Pyrtanis, Noemon, Teuthras, Orestes, Trechus, Oenomaus, Helenus, Oresbius, Periphas, A-

Farther south the 22nd Battalion advanced in perfect order, but were held up by dense wire, and when this was cut came under heavy machine-gun fire.

57. [Chorus: singers with Whitby pebbles employ rhythmic patterns of the named Trojan War dead (from 56 onwards).]

Segue Part IV

PART IV – BHATA

58. High the shields
Broad orb aloft
Raw flesh ravens feasted²⁵

*Akham Iah*²⁶

We wind and wind swiftly
We wind and wind swiftly
Ravens feasted on flesh²⁷

Akham Iah

61. *Othmoi Ka*²⁸

62. Shafts shall flash, shields crash and shatter sword.
Shatter sword “dog bites helmets” devours shields
Valkyries decide who lives or dies
We wind and wind swiftly, war win²⁹

63. – 67. [Text reversals; running the piece backwards.]

67. Hunted down, torn to pieces
Oh we are apart³⁰

68. Gunnar, Greedy Gunnar wields weapons wounded sixteen
Brought death to two.³¹

²⁵ Valkyrie. *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 154, GUNNAR LAMBI'S SON'S SLAYING.

²⁶ Fragmented text reversals: not meant to be understood.

²⁷ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 156, BRIAN'S BATTLE.

²⁸ Fragmented text reversals: not meant to be understood.

²⁹ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 156, BRIAN'S BATTLE.

³⁰ *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

³¹ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 76, GUNNAR'S SLAYING.

69. & 70. [*Iliad*: a fast mixture of broken, ancient Greek names.]

71. *Patroclus*³²

72. *Doamni, di când îi lumea
î, Dulci mai ieste viața,
Cu câmpurile-nflorite*³³

Wild.

From dark inside, a cloud drifts out.

These are the dead from below.

Wheel-bound Ixion remains at the bottom of the river.

Tantal(us) stays these spirits, immediately.

And Phrygian women drop their swords.

Be brave, Deidameia.

Then an epiphany: Achilles appears and comes into the light.

And the Trojan spirits abandon their swords.

And I heard a voice, an echo of epigrammatic Sappho, once well known.

And it passes, and sinks ...

Near Pyrrhou... Seen no longer...

In the Agora, they place ... And I know it.³⁴

73. *haima kata cthonos apo* [...blood on the ground...]

A wide warp for warriors' fall,

Weft in loom, wet with blood;

We wind, wind swiftly, warwin woof.

We wind, wind swiftly, warwin woof, our warwin woof.³⁵

74. Hunted down, torn to pieces

Oh we are apart³⁶

75. *...kai Agave,*

*Doto te Proto*³⁷

76. The last fall: the tambourines, and the beating feet cover the sounds of the lute. The sounds of words are lost and forgotten.

All nature is empty, desolate, uninhabited.³⁸

77. zero point: ...

perhaps I was asleep had I never stopped sleeping eyes wide open in broad daylight lulled by the monotonous hammering of the shoes of the five horses trampling their shadows not walking at quite the same gait so that it was like a crepitation alternating catching up with itself superimposing mingling at moments as if there were now only one horse, then breaking apart again disintegrating starting over apparently running after itself and so on over and over, the war somehow stagnant, somehow peaceful around us, the sporadic cannon fire landing in the deserted orchards with a muffled monumental and hollow sound like a door flapping in the wind in an empty house, the whole landscape empty uninhabited under the motionless sky, the world stopped frozen crumbling collapsing gradually disintegrating in fragments like an abandoned building, unusable, left to the incoherent, casual, impersonal and destructive work of time.³⁹

³² *Iliad*.

³³ *Doina*. See footnote no. 5.

³⁴ Translation by Vic Hoyland, 2015. Numbered 30 example, Oslo papyrus 1413, lines 1-15. Cited in: Martin Litchfield West. *Ancient Greek Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

³⁵ 'The Woof of War.' *The Story of Burnt Njal*, Chapter 156, BRIAN'S BATTLE.

³⁶ *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

³⁷ *Iliad*. Book 18, lines 42-3.

³⁸ Ovid's description of a likely end to civilisation.

³⁹ Claude Simon, trans. Richard Howard. *The Flanders Road*. London: Oneworld Classics Ltd, 2010, p. 193. First published as *La Route des Flandres* in 1960.

78. *Is tric mi 'sealltainn o'n chnoc a's a's airde
Dh'fheuch am faic mi fear a'bhata
An tig thi an dough no'n tig thu a-maireach
'S mur tig thu idir gur truagh a ta mi*

*Fhir a' bhata, 's na ho ro eile
Fhir a' bhata, 's na ho ro eile
Fhir a'bhata, s na ho ro eile
Mo shoraidh slan leat's gach ait an teid thu⁴⁰*

[Translation: From the highest hill I look out often
to try if I can see the Boatman
come you today, or come you tomorrow
And sad am I if you come never

Oh, the boatman, 's na ho ro eile
my long farewell where you may go to]

END.

⁴⁰ Jane Finlayson of Tong, Lewis. *Fhir a' Bhata* [Scottish Gaelic: 'Oh the boatman']. c. 1780.