On Reading Homer

Frederick Smock
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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.