

Ovid. *Met* 13.1-381 (speeches) 103ff (Ajax, followed by Odysseus):

“But why give them to the Ithacan, who always does things stealthily, always unarmed, relying upon tricks to catch the enemy off his guard? The very glint of the helmet gleaming with bright gold will betray his snares and discover him as he hides. But neither will the Dulichian’s head beneath the helmet of Achilles be able to bear so great a weight, nor can the spear-shaft, cut on Pelion, be otherwise than burdensome and heavy to his unwarlike arm. The shield also, a moulded picture of the vast universe, will not become his timid hand, the left one, made for stealing. Why do you seek a prize, you shameless fellow, that will overtax your strength; a prize which, if by some mistake the Greeks should give it to you, will be reason for the foe to spoil, not fear you? And flight, in which alone you surpass all others, most timid as you are, will prove but slow for you if you carry such a weight. Consider also that that shield of yours, so rarely used in battle, is quite uninjured; while mine, pierced in a thousand places by the thrusts of spears, needs a fresh shield to take its place. “Finally, what need of words? Let us be seen in action! Let the brave hero’s arms be sent into the enemy’s midst; bid them be recovered, and to their rescuer present the rescued arms.”

The son of Telamon finished, and the applause of the crowd followed his closing words. At length Laërtes’ heroic son stood up and, holding his eyes for a little on the ground, he raised them to the chiefs and broke silence with the words for which they waited; nor was grace of manner lacking to his eloquent speech.

“If my prayers and yours had availed, O Greeks, there would be no question as to the victor in this great strife, and you, Achilles, would still have your own armour, and we should still have you. But since the unjust fates have denied him to me and you” (and with his hand he made as if to wipe tears from his eyes), “who would better receive the great Achilles’ arms than he through whom the Greeks received the great Achilles? Only let it not be to this fellow’s profit that he seems to be, as indeed he is, slow of wit; and let it not be, O Greeks, to my hurt that I have always used my wit for your advantage. And let this eloquence of mine, if I have any, which now speaks for its owner, but often for you as well, incur no enmity, and let each man make the most of his own powers.

“For as to race and ancestry and the deeds that others than ourselves have done, I call those in no true sense our own. But the truth is, since Ajax claims to be great-grandson of Jove, Jove is the founder of my race as well, and I am just as many steps removed from him. For Laërtes is my father, Arcesius, his, and he, the son of Jupiter; nor in this line is there any exiled criminal. I have also on my mother’s side another claim to noble birth, Cyllenius. Through both my parents have I divine descent. But, neither because through my mother I am more nobly born, nor because my father is guiltless of his brother’s blood, do I seek the armour that lies there. Weigh the cause on desert alone. Only count it not any desert of Ajax that Telamon and Peleus were brothers, and let not strains of blood, but the honour of manhood be considered in the award. Or, if you seek for next of kin and lawful heir, Peleus is Achilles’ father, Pyrrhus his son. What room is there for Ajax? Bear the armour hence to Phthia or to Scyrus. And Teucer is no less Achilles’ cousin than he. Yet does he seek the arms, and if he did seek would he gain them? So then, since ’tis a sheer strife of deeds, I have done more deeds than I can well enumerate. Still I will tell them in their order.

“Achilles’ Nereid mother, foreseeing her son’s destruction, had disguised him, and the trick of the clothing that he wore deceived them all, Ajax among the rest. But I placed among women’s wares some arms such as would attract a man. The hero still wore girl’s clothing when, as he laid hands on shield and spear, I said to him: ‘O son of Thetis, Pergama, doomed to perish, is keeping herself for you! Why do you delay the fall of mighty Troy?’ And I laid my hand on him and sent the brave fellow forth to do brave deeds. So then, all that he did is mine. ’Twas I who conquered the warring Telephus with my spear and healed him, vanquished and begging aid. That Thebes fell is my deed; credit Lesbos to me, to me Tenedos, Chryse and Cilla, cities of Apollo, and Scyrus too. Consider that by my hand the walls of Lyrnesus were battered to the ground. And, not to mention others, ’twas I, indeed, who gave the man who could destroy the warlike Hector. Through me illustrious Hector lies low! These arms I seek in return for those by which Achilles was discovered. Arms I gave the living; after his death I ask them back.

... [268ff] "And what matters it if he says that he stood up in arms for the Greek fleet against the Trojans and the power of Jove? I grant he did; for it is not my way maliciously to belittle the good that he has done. But let not him alone claim the honour that belongs to all, and let him give some credit to you also. 'Twas the son of Actor [Patroclus], safe' neath the semblance of Achilles, who drove off the Trojans from the fleet, which else had burned together with its defender. He thinks that he alone dared to stand up against Hector's spear, ignoring the king, the chieftains, and myself, he but the ninth in proffered service and by the lot's grace preferred to us. But what was the outcome of your battle, bravest of men? Hector retired without a wound.

"Ah me, how grievous is the memory of that time when Achilles fell, the bulwark of the Greeks! And yet neither tears nor grief nor fear kept me from lifting up his body from the ground. On these shoulders, yes, on these very shoulders, I bore Achilles' body, armour and all, arms which now also I seek to bear. I have strength enough to bear their ponderous weight and I have a mind that can appreciate the honour you would do me. Was it for this, forsooth, that the hero's mother, goddess of the sea, was ambitious for her son, that those heavenly gifts, the work of heavenly art, should clothe a rough and stupid soldier? For he knows nothing of the relief-work of the shield: the sea, the lands, the deep starry heavens, the Pleiades, the Hyades, the Bear that never bathes in Ocean, and Orion with his glittering sword rotating opposite her. [He asks for armour which he cannot appreciate.]

"What of his chiding me with trying to shun the hardships of the war and of coming late when the struggle had begun? Does he not know that he is reviling the great Achilles also? If it is a crime to have pretended, we both pretended. If delay is culpable, I was the earlier of the two. A loving wife detained me; a loving mother detained Achilles. Our first time was given to them, the rest to you. I do not fear a charge, even if I cannot answer it, which I share with so great a hero. Yet he was discovered by Ulysses' wit; but not by Ajax' wit, Ulysses..."

*Met.* 13.382-3 "The company of chiefs was moved, and their decision proved the power of eloquence: to the eloquent man were given the brave man's arms."