

### Introduction

1. ἔγνωσ ἐννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι βουλήν  
ὧν ἔνεκα ξυνάγειρα· **μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ.** (*Il.* 20.20-21)

Earthshaker, you know the plan in my heart,  
the reason why I gathered you: **μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ.**

2. "I care for them, even though they die." (Lombardo)

### I. Previous Interpretations

- 3a. Hobbes (1675): 'of the Greeks distrest I have a care'.  
Pope (1715–1720): 'In care of the human race; e'en Jove's own eye sees with regret unhappy mortals die'.  
Macpherson (1773): 'Though they perish, my cares they employ.'  
Munford (1846): 'Wretched men, though perishing, are objects of my care'.  
Smith-Stanley (1864): 'they needs must die, but still they claim my care'  
Rose (1874): 'The men who perish are beloved by me'.  
Blakeney (1909–13): 'The Trojans in the day of destruction claim my care'.  
Rouse (1938): 'I do care about their killing one another like that'.  
Rieu (1950): 'They do concern me, even in their destruction'.  
Fitzgerald (1974): 'Men on both sides may perish, still they are near my heart'.  
Hammond (1987): 'I do care for them even as they die'.  
Fagles (1990): 'These mortals do concern me, dying as they are'.  
Lombardo (1997): 'I care for them, even though they die'.  
Johnston (2010): 'Yes, I am concerned for them'.  
Mitchell (2011): 'I *am* concerned: so many of them will die'.  
Verity (2011): 'I am concerned for them, dying as they are'.  
Powell (2014): 'These men are a concern of mine, even though they are about to die'.  
Green (2015): 'they're dying—yes, I'm concerned for them!'  
Alexander (2015): 'I am concerned about them, dying as they are'.
- 3b. Ebeling: cum cura cogito; cura me afficit; sollicitudini mihi est  
*Lfgre*: "ich mach mir Gedanken über sie." ['I worry about them.']
4. "He cast his eye upon the battle-field, and the sight calls out an exclamation most remarkable, indeed, yet who is brevity, and extreme simplicity, have caused it to be holy overlooked by the mirror verbal critics. Short as it is, **the feeling of divine compassion seems to overflow the few words in which it is uttered: μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ.** There is an **exquisite pathos** in that little particle περ, which no mode of translating in English will adequately reach. It represents a contrast between the divine permanency, the divine eternity, and the transitory frailty of man. Or it may be taken as intensifying the significance of the participle, and we can only render it by

adding to our words: 'poor perishing men—poor dying men.' **A still deeper touch of the pathetic is in the word μέλουσι: 'perishing though they be, they concern me.'** (Lewis 1871: 35)

5. "[Zeus in the *Iliad* is] an **august personage, who has regard to piety wherever it is found; 'Even in their perishing, I care for them' (xx. 21)**; and who works incessantly, effectively, and without noise for the permanent ends of justice among men, which were signally wrought out by the punishment and fall of guilty Troy." (Gladstone 1878: 67)
- 6a. "Although ordain'd | So soon to die, **they interest me still.**" (William Cowper 1791)
- 6b. "**I think of these men** though they are dying." (Richmond Lattimore 1951)
7. "**In translating μέλουσι we must avoid attributing any idea of genuine 'caring' to Zeus.** [...] I suggest that the context of the passage, as well as the role the gods actually play in the poem, require the use of the well attested nuance of 'to be an object of thought for' or 'to be of interest to' as the interpretation of μέλουσι. We can best express the meaning of the phrase here if we translate it as '**they are the object of my interest even while they are dying.**'" (Golden 1989: 10 n. 2)

## II. The Immediate Context

8. ἔγνωσ' ἔννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι βουλήν  
ᾧ ἔνεκα ξυνάγειρα· μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ.  
ἀλλ' ἦτοι μὲν ἐγὼ μενέω πτυχί Οὐλύμπιοι  
ἦμενος, **ἐνθ' ὀρώων φρένα τέρψομαι**· οἱ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι  
ἔρχεσθ', ὄφρ' ἂν ἵκησθε μετὰ Τρῶας καὶ Ἀχαιοὺς,  
ἀμφοτέροισι δ' ἀρήγεθ' ὅπηι νόος ἐστὶν ἐκάστου. (*Il.* 20.20–25)

Earthshaker, you know the plan in my heart,  
the reason why I gathered you: μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ.  
But I, for my part, will stay seated in a cleft of Olympus,  
**where I will delight my mind by watching.** As for you others,  
go until you reach the fray of Trojans and Achaeans.  
Support one side or the other, however each of you is inclined.

9. ἀλλ' ἦτοι μὲν ἐγὼ μενέω πτυχί Οὐλύμπιοι  
ἦμενος, ἐνθ' ὀρώων φρένα τέρψομαι. [...]

"here I stay, at ease upon a ridge. I'll have an ample view here." (Fitzgerald 1974)

- 10a. μεθ' ὄμιλον Ὀλύμπιοι ἦλυθον ἀνδρῶν (*Il.* 20.47)  
"...the Olympians entered the throng of men"
- 10b. βῆ ῥ' ἕμεν ἄν τε μάχην καὶ ἀνὰ κλόνον ἐγχειάων (*Il.* 20.319)  
"he went all through the battle and the fray of spears"

Bill Beck (Indiana University)

Harshing Zeus' μέλω: Reassessing the Sympathy of Zeus at *Iliad* 20.21

- 11a. "He himself sat on the peaks, reveling in his glory,  
looking at the city of the Trojans and the ships of the Achaeans" (*Il.* 8.51–52)
- 11b. "Apart from the others, he sat, reveling in his glory  
looking at the city of the Trojans, the ships of the Achaeans,  
the gleam of bronze, and men killing and dying" (*Il.* 11.81–83)
- 11c. "Athena and silverbow Apollo sat...delighting [τερπόμενοι] in the men" (*Il.* 7.58-61)
- 11d. "Grievous Eris enjoyed watching [ἔχαιρε...εἰσορώσα]" (*Il.* 11.73)
12. τοῖς δ' ἐγὼ ἀντὶ πυρὸς δώσω κακόν, ᾧ κεν ἅπαντες  
τέρπωνται κατὰ θυμὸν ἐὼν κακὸν ἀμφαγαπῶντες.  
ὥς ἔφατ· ἕκ δ' ἐγέλασσε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε. (Hes. *WD* 57-69)

'In exchange for fire I will give them an evil in which they'll all  
delight at heart, as they embrace their own evil.'

So he spoke. Then the father of men and gods **laughed out loud**.

### III. The Narrative Context

- 13a. "Zeus planned evils for them [sc. Trojans and Achaeans]" (*Il.* 7.478)
- 13b. "so that there might be the deadly toil of war" (*Il.* 16.568)
- 13c. "...to multiply sheer suffering for still even more men" (*Il.* 16.651)
- 13d. "stretching out wicked pain" (*Il.* 17.401)

### IV. The Meaning of μέλω

14. ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν νῦν αὖτις ἀπόστιχε μή τι νοήση  
Ἥρη· ἐμοὶ δέ κε ταῦτα **μελήσεται** ὄφρα τελέσω (*Il.* 1.522-23).

Go back now, so that Hera doesn't notice anything.

These things **will engage my attention** until I fulfill them.

→ *will preoccupy me.*

15. αὐτὸς γάρ σφιν δῶκεν ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων  
νῆας ἐϋσέλμους περάαν ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον  
Ἄτρεΐδης, ἐπεὶ οὐ σφί θαλάσσια ἔργα **μεμήλει**. (*Il.* 2.612-14)

For he himself—the lord of men Agamemnon, Atreus' son, gave them  
sturdy ships to cross the wine-dark sea

since works of the sea **hadn't engaged their attention**.

→ *hadn't interested them*

→ *hadn't mattered to them*

→ *hadn't concerned them*

16. ...πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι **μελήσει** ... (*Il.* 6.492)  
...war **will engage the attention of** men...  
→ *will preoccupy*  
→ *will be the responsibility of*

17. ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν μάστιγα καὶ ἠνία σιγαλόεντα  
δέξαι, ἐγὼ δ' ἵππων ἀποβήσομαι ὄφρα μάχωμαι·  
ἢ σὺ τόνδε δέδεξο, **μελήσουσιν δ' ἐμοὶ ἵπποι**. (*Il.* 5.226-28)

Come now, take the whip and gleaming reins,  
and I will dismount from the horses to fight.

Or you await him, and the horses **will engage my attention**.

→ *I'll mind the horses*

→ *I'll deal with the horses*

→ *the horses will be my responsibility*

18. [...] λύ' ἵππους·  
ἢ σὺ γ' ἄνδρας ἔναιρε, **μελήσουσιν δ' ἐμοὶ ἵπποι**.

[...] Untie the horses.

Or you kill the men, and the horses **will engage my attention**.

→ *I'll mind the horses*

→ *I'll deal with the horses*

→ *the horses will be my responsibility*

19. ἀλλ' οὐ μοι Τρώων τόσσον μέλει ἄλγος ὀπίσσω  
...ὄσσον σεῦ. (*Il.* 6.450-54)

But the future grief of the Trojans doesn't **engage my attention**...as much as yours does.

→ *preoccupy me*

→ *worry me*

20. ἔγνωσ ἐννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι βουλήν  
ᾧ ἔνεκα ξυνάγειρα· **μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ**. (*Il.* 20.20-21)

Earthshaker, you know the plan in my heart,

the reason why I gathered you: **dying men engage my attention**.

→ *dying men preoccupy me*

→ *dying men are my responsibility*

→ *dying men are my concern*

### V. Conclusion: Zeus' Deadly Plan

21. ἔγνωσ ἐννοσίγαιε ἐμὴν ἐν στήθεσι **βουλήν**  
ὣν ἔνεκα ξυνάγειρα· μέλουσί μοι ὀλλύμενοί περ. (*Il.* 20.20-21)

Earthshaker, you know the **plan** in my heart,  
the reason why I gathered you: dying men preoccupy me.

22. Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος,  
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρί' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκεν,  
πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν  
ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν  
οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι, **Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή** [...]. (*Il.* 1.1-5)

Sing, goddess, the destructive wrath of Peleus' son Achilles,  
which inflicted countless pains on the Achaeans  
and sent to Hades many stalwart souls  
of heroes, and made them spoils for dogs  
and all birds, **and Zeus' plan was being fulfilled...**

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