CHAPTER FOUR

The Story of Troy Through the Centuries

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When we meet Achilles for the first time in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*, a little boy asks him: "Are the stories about you true? They say your mother is an immortal goddess. They say you can't be killed." His words remind us of the story we know:[1] Achilles' mother Thetis is a goddess living beneath the sea, and Achilles is invulnerable except in his famous heel.[2] But in the film Achilles replies to the boy: "I wouldn't be bothering with the shield then, would I?" So we learn that Achilles is not invulnerable. Later on, when he meets his mother, she is not diving up from the depths of the sea but walking in the flat water of the shore and collecting shells. When she tells her son about his future (as she does in the *Iliad*), she ends with the words: "If you go to Troy . . . I shall never see you again." So we understand that she is not a goddess who can visit her son wherever he is (as in the *Iliad*) but resembles a mortal woman endowed with an unusually high amount of prophetic power.

To modern audiences, all this sounds like a playful rationalization of a Greek myth, especially when we compare the text of the *Iliad*, in which the intimate relationship between Achilles and his divine mother is crucial for our understanding of his more-than-mortal ambitions.[3] In the film, the gods are simply left out of the plot. So, what has our cinematic storyteller done with the ancient myth? To understand the relationship between this modern and the ancient versions, we should take into account several different levels: the allusion to the original version (Achilles' heel), the realistic correction of the original version (the hero as vulnerable mortal), and, maybe, a parody of this correction (the tone in which Achilles mentions his shield). Stories about invulnerable heroes fighting in full armor are illogical and verge on the ridiculous.

But there is even more, for in the penultimate sequence of the film we receive an explanation of the meaning of the old myth: Paris hits Achilles with an arrow in his ankle. Achilles does not die from this wound, and Paris continues to shoot arrows at him, striking him in the chest. Now the great hero finally sinks to his knees. Even then he pulls all the arrows out of his chest, and when the Greeks find him lying dead on the ground, they see only one arrow sticking in Achilles' heel. So, we could say, the film tries to explain rationally how the myth came into being: Achilles was not killed by the arrow in his heel, for how on earth can anyone be killed by such an arrow? Nevertheless, this was the arrow that doomed him.

Very modern? Well, not quite as modern as it may seem. As early as 1855 Thomas Bulfinch wrote in *The Age of Fable*, his handbook of Greek mythology:

> While in the temple of Apollo, . . . Paris discharged at him [Achilles] a poisoned arrow, which . . . wounded Achilles in the heel, the only vulnerable part about him. For Thetis his mother had dipped him when an infant in the river Styx, which made every part of him invulnerable except the heel by which she held him.

In a footnote Bulfinch comments:

> The story of the invulnerability of Achilles is not found in Homer, and is inconsistent with his account. For how could Achilles require the aid of celestial armour if he were invulnerable?[4]

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1   On Achilles through the centuries see Katherine Callen King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
2   Servius on Virgil's *Aeneid* 6.57: "Achilles, dipped by his mother in the water of the Styx, was invulnerable on his whole body, except the part by which she held him." Apollodorus, *Epitome* 5.3: "at the Scaean gate he was shot with an arrow in the ankle by Alexander [Paris] and Apollo." Translations are my own.

3   Cf. Laura M. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the* Iliad (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
4   Thomas Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable* (now accessible on numerous websites), ch. 28. David Benioff mentions Bulfinch as one of his sources for his script of *Troy*; see "David Benioff's Epic Adaptation, TROY: Interview by Daniel R. Epstein," at www.ScreenwritersUtopia.com.

Bulfinch, too, explains ("poisoned arrow") and corrects ("inconsistent") the myth. But he did not invent this approach to ancient myth that is found in most modern handbooks of Greek mythology. In what follows I will show how the Greeks themselves, from Homer until the end of antiquity, worked on the myth of Troy by using the same methods we have already noticed in the film: citation, allusion, explanation, correction, and parody. And as does *Troy*, they worked with and against their one great model: Homer's *Iliad*. An excursion through the history of the myth of Troy in antiquity will give us a better background for asking what *Troy* is doing with the *Iliad*.

If we search for the roots of the method of arguing for and against the traditional myth, we may start with the *Iliad* itself, our first written text. We can still use the motif of Achilles' heel as our example. In the *Iliad*, Achilles is *not* invulnerable. But during his heroic fight he has become as good as invulnerable, because he wears invulnerable armor made by the god Hephaestus.[5] When, for once, Achilles' survival is at stake, it is because he fights against the river god Scamander, who threatens to drown him (*Iliad* 21.1–384).

It may even be that we find in the *Iliad* a hidden polemic against the traditional version of Achilles' death as caused by Paris' arrow to the heel. In Book 11, the hero Diomedes is fighting against the Trojans. Diomedes has by now been established as the most important surrogate for Achilles, who is not fighting. Paris, hiding behind the pillar of a tomb in the plain, shoots an arrow at Diomedes and hits him in the right foot. Diomedes reacts coolly: he curses Paris as a coward, pulls the arrow out of his foot, and retreats on his chariot to the Greek camp to have his wound treated.[6]

These scenes are a clear statement by the poet of the *Iliad* about his approach to traditional myth. He prefers a rationalist manner, he does not believe in all of the old myth's supernatural features, and he prefers to tell his story on a human – and humane – level, cleansed from monsters and daemons. With this humanistic approach he sets himself apart from the oral pre-Homeric tradition.[7]

So, as early as with the *Iliad*, myth fights against myth, poet against poet, just as Hesiod will describe it a little later.[8] In epic, rationalizing explanations or corrections of competing versions of myth concern only small aspects, mostly the plausibility of minor details. On a larger scale, epic narrative usually sticks to the heroic view of the world, depicting its heroes as human beings who lived a long time ago. They were separated from our world and acted on a higher level and in close contact with the gods. Many of them were themselves sons or grandsons of gods, able to carry out heroic deeds that men of our own generations could never match.

Problems about mythological thinking arose only in the sixth century B.C. with the first philosophical critics of Homer's theology and world view. Two kinds of responses developed in defense of Homer. First there was an allegorical reinterpretation of myth that tried to discover philosophical meanings lying beneath the surface of the Homeric texts. This method was much used by philosophers. In its popularized Stoic form, it intruded back into mythological poems.[9] Second, and more to the present point here, were the earliest historians, who traced the past back over several generations. They were confronted with the fact that no written records existed but only oral stories, transmitted from generation to generation and often as family records.[10] Within this oral memory there was no difference between mythical and historical tales, for most noble families traced their origins back to the one or the other hero of mythology. So there was a continuum from the Age of Heroes to the Age of Men. For the first historians, the only possible way of referring to the generations of heroes consisted in reinventing and rewriting mythical stories in the style of men's history. With this, the rationalizing interpretation of myth was born.[11] The heroes became human beings

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5   *Iliad* 20.259–272. Cf. the description of armor and shield at 18.477–613.

6   *Iliad* 11.369–400. For a full discussion see Wolfgang Kullmann, "Oral Poetry Theory and Neoanalysis in Homeric Research," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 25 (1984), 307–323, at 313–315.

7   Cf. Jasper Griffin, "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 97 (1977), 39–53.

8   Hesiod, *Works and Days* 24–26. I have dealt at length with similar narrative techniques in the *Odyssey* in *Epos und Zitat: Studien zu den Quellen der Odyssee* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998).

9   For a comprehensive survey see Ilaria Ramelli and Giulio Lucchetta, *Allegoria*, vol. 1: *L'età classica* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2004); for poetical reuse cf. Philip R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

10   Cf. Rosalind Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

11   Cf. Wilhelm Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos: Die Selbstentfaltung des griechischen Denkens von Homer bis auf die Sophistik und Sokrates*, 2nd edn (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1941; rpt. 1975), 126–152. For recent approaches see *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*, ed. Richard Buxton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially the editor's "Introduction" at 1–21.

like everyone else and so had to follow the same rules of behavior. Most importantly, the gods had to be eliminated from these heroes' stories. The historians' chief criteria were credibility and plausibility, principles first expressed about 500 B.C. by Hecataeus, who opened his historical work with the following words:

> Hecataeus of Miletus speaks like this: I write this the way it seems to be true to me, because the accounts of the Greeks are manifold and laughable as they present themselves to me.[12]

Hecataeus belongs to the first generation of mythographers. He began a long tradition that would eventually lead to mythographical handbooks like that attributed to Apollodorus in the first or second century A.D. Apollodorus took a good deal of his material from Pherecydes of Athens (fifth century B.C.). The first genuine ancient historian, Herodotus, who wrote about 430 B.C., started his *Histories* by stating that you cannot get any reliable information about the "beginnings," which lie in the dark realm of conflicting mythological stories. Even so, Herodotus makes ample use of old stories, but controlled by his rationalist approach. After telling the story, told by Egyptian priests, of how Helen came to Egypt and stayed there during the whole Trojan War, Herodotus comments:

> This is what the priests of the Egyptians said. As for me, I agree with the account given about Helen, adding this: if Helen had been in Ilium, they would have given her back to the Greeks whether Alexander [Paris] agreed or not. For Priam was not really so foolhardy, nor his other relatives, that they wanted to endanger their own bodies, children, and city so that Alexander could sleep with Helen. If even in the early times [of the war] they had decided on that [keeping Helen], when many of the other Trojans, joining battle with the Greeks, were killed and for Priam himself it came out that two or three or even more of his sons died in battle – if we must make some use of the epic poets in our argument – when all that had come out like this, I suppose that, even if Priam himself was sleeping with Helen, he would have given her back to the Achaeans in order to be set free from the evils at hand . . . But in fact they could not give back Helen nor . . . did the Greeks trust them . . . And the preceding has been stated as it appears to me.[13]

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12 Hecataeus, *Histories*, fragment 1.

13 Herodotus, *Histories* 2.120. Cf. Robert L. Fowler, "Herodotos and His Contemporaries," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 116 (1996), 62–87.

Herodotus argues against Homer – by taking his proofs from the text of the *Iliad*. The same is true for Thucydides, who polemicizes against historical accounts that are too near to what he calls *to muthôdes* ("myth-like manner"). Nevertheless, Thucydides takes his proofs for a rationalizing explanation of the mythical past from the *Iliad* by correcting and retelling it, as when he argues about the conditions of war in the heroic past:

> I think Agamemnon was able to raise the army because he was superior in strength and not because Helen's suitors were bound by the oaths to [her father] Tyndareus . . . [and] because he also had a navy far stronger than all the others. I think he assembled the army not so much because he was well liked but because he was feared. For it appears that he arrived with the largest contingent of ships and furnished that of the Arcadians as well; this at least is what Homer says, if his testimony may be sufficient for anybody.[14]

Like Herodotus, Thucydides explains and corrects the *Iliad* by allusively citing passages and constructing from them a new, coherent meaning that corroborates his view of the heroic past.[15] The picture remains the same through the following centuries. The Trojan War is used as a historical argument in the same way as the Persian Wars were used by Athenian politicians, mostly in burial speeches,[16] or by philosophers.[17] They purge the story of Troy from any divine involvement in human actions and assimilate the events to everyday war-time reports.

Euhemerus of Messene (about 300 B.C.) is the first to construct a theoretical background for this rationalizing method by writing a story of a (fictional) journey that carried him to an island in the Indian Ocean. There he detected an inscription from which he learned that the gods of Olympus had once been mighty kings among humans and had come to be worshipped as benefactors and gods after their deaths. Later authors use this perspective to retell all kinds of myth and include fantastic elements. In the first century B.C. Diodorus of Sicily starts his *World History* with a detailed account of Greek and other mythologies, refashioning the traditional stories in the historians' rationalizing style. It is a pity that his sixth book, which contained the Trojan myth, has been lost.

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14 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.9.

15 For both historians' approach to the mythical past see Virginia Hunter, *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 93–115.

16 Isocrates, *Panathenaicus* (12), 71; Demosthenes, *Epitaphius*, 10.

17 Plato, *Hippias Minor*, passim; *Symposium* 221c2–d1.

People still believed in the Trojan myth as historical fact down to the second century A.D., when Artemidorus of Daldis gives the following advice to professional interpreters of dreams:

> Remember that you should take into account only those stories [or: histories] which are thoroughly trusted to be true from many important proofs, as for example the Persian War and, in earlier times, the Trojan War, and things like that. Because it is from these wars that people show localities, battlefields, sites of army camps, foundations of cities, constructions of altars, and whatever else comes with these things.[18]

Artemidorus represents the mainstream of popular belief in the value of myth. But by his time there also existed a more sophisticated approach to myth. The second to third centuries A.D. are the heyday of the Second Sophistic, a time of prospering schools of rhetoric with a newly heightened interest in older themes. Interest in the myth of Troy abounds once again, but now a more distanced, critical, and ironic approach prevails. In a rhetorical exercise called *Trojan Speech*, subtitled "Ilion was not conquered," Dio Chrysostom (about 100 A.D.) argued with and against the *Iliad* that Paris had not abducted Helen but had legally married her and that the Greeks besieged Troy for ten years without success. Dio, like Herodotus, quotes (11.37–43) an Egyptian priest as telling him "the true story" that originated in an eye-witness account of Menelaus and was transmitted in Egyptian writings through the centuries.

In the third century A.D. the sophist Philostratus has the ghost of the hero Protesilaus talk about the course of the Trojan War in his dialogue *Heroicus*, sometimes agreeing with, sometimes correcting, Homer.[19] By that time, the eye-witness motif has become a literary game that indicates fictionality. The best proof of this development is the satirist Lucian of Samosata, who lived in the second century A.D. In paragraph 17 of his dialogue *The Dream, or The Cock*, Lucian has a cock claim to be the reincarnated Trojan hero Euphorbus. This eye-witness, of course, knows much more than Homer, who had lived many centuries later and at the time of the Trojan War had been "a camel in Bactria." But when the cock comes to his report, he confines himself to correcting Homeric minutiae, like this:

> I tell you only so much, that nothing was extraordinary then, and Ajax was not as tall, and Helen herself not as beautiful, as people think.

18   Artemidorus of Daldis, *The Interpretations of Dreams*, 4.47.
19   Cf. Peter Grossardt, "Ein Echo in allen Tonlagen: Der *Heroikos* von Flavius Philostrat als Bilanz der antiken Troia-Dichtung," *Studia Troica*, 14 (2004), 231–238.

Because I saw her with a rather white skin and a long neck, as if to think that she was the daughter of a swan; on the other hand, she was rather old, about the same age as Hecuba, because Theseus raped her for the first time and kept her at Aphidnae in the time of Heracles, and Heracles took Troy earlier, about the time of our fathers.

Lucian, too, laughs at the myth – Zeus begot Helen, as we know, disguised as a swan – but his parody of mythical thinking includes a parody of the rationalizing method of correcting myths. So we may conclude that, by the time of the Second Sophistic, an intertextual method of retelling the story of Troy has been established which uses, reuses, misuses, changes, and corrects the traditional story, concentrating mostly on the plot of the *Iliad*. At the same time and from the same literary background the first and only presentations of the whole story of the Trojan War in narrative form that survive from antiquity were produced, except for mythographic handbooks. They are in two historical narratives, the *Diary of the Trojan War* by Dictys the Cretan and the *Report of the Trojan War* by Dares the Phrygian.[20] Both versions survive only in Latin translations of the fourth to fifth centuries. A few pages of the Greek original of Dictys have come to light on papyrus. We have no firm proof for the existence of a Greek Dares, but the Latin text shows that the original must have been directed at sophisticated readers who enjoyed the contrast between the dense web of refined allusions to minor details in the *Iliad* and the rude, laconic, diary-like presentation of "pure facts."

Both authors claim to be eye-witnesses. Dictys tells us that he wrote the annals of the war on the order of his king Idomeneus; he had the book buried with him in a tin box until an earthquake during the rule of Emperor Nero uncovered the tomb. Dares claims to be a Trojan who fought from the beginning to the end of the war. (A minor character by this name appears once in the *Iliad*.) His Latin translator only tells us that he found the Greek account during his studies in Athens. The same kind of fictional discovery of an eye-witness account occurs in *The Wonders Beyond Thule*, a fantastic travel novel by Antonius Diogenes written in the second century A.D. Petersen's *Troy* uses this motif in its frame when a narrator, Odysseus, talks about his heroic experience and personal involvement in voice-over.

20   English translations: *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, tr. Richard M. Frazer, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966). Stefan Merkle, "The Truth and Nothing But the Truth: Dictys and Dares," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 563–580, provides a good survey.

In the Middle Ages, Dictys and Dares were widely read (in Latin), imitated, and reworked, mainly because they give the impression that they are telling the real story about Troy, an impression corroborated by their dry prose style and matter-of-course narrative. Keeping to the rationalizing manner, they eliminate the gods from the war on earth. They change Homer's course of events, add new elements, and follow a strictly chronological order. On the one hand, Dictys and Dares turn Homer's epic into history oriented on the historians' sub-genre of the *commentaries*; on the other, they turn it into romance. In this way they "correct" the *Iliad*.

Dictys and Dares developed precise methods to deal with the *Iliad*, their subtext. I will concentrate on a sample of their narrative devices that show how these "fringe novels," as we may call them, construct an alternative account of the Trojan War. Some of these techniques appear in *Troy* as well.

1. Verbal Citations of the *Iliad*

The early historians argued against Homer by quoting him. They were followed by authors like Lucian, Dio Chrysostom, and Philostratus. Dictys and Dares, on the other hand, do not argue with the *Iliad* but tell the whole story of Troy anew. With them, every citation signals to the audience that the new version sticks closely to the subtext and that the new account as a whole is trustworthy. But, since they translate the content of the *Iliad* into prose, they do not use verbatim quotations, and close correspondences can be checked only from the content. There are differences as well: Dictys every now and then stays close to the text of the *Iliad*, while Dares does his best always to turn events into the exact opposite of Homer.

Troy, on the other hand, operates with a dense web of verbal citations of the *Iliad* that are taken from Robert Fagles's translation, although with minor variations.[21] As a result, the film's dialogue is frequently elevated to a highly poetic level. In this way audiences can recognize citations as such even if they are not familiar with the *Iliad*. Connoisseurs may enjoy the differences from the *Iliad*. I give a few examples of this technique:

Agamemnon says about Achilles before the Trojan War has even started: "Of all the warlords loved by the gods, I hate him the most." In

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the *Iliad* it sounds like this: "You – I hate you most of all the warlords / loved by the gods" (Fagles, 1.208–209 = *Iliad* 1.176).

A priest recalls his conversation with some farmers: "They saw an eagle flying with a serpent clutched in its talons." This derives from "That eagle flying high on the left across our front, / clutching this bloody serpent in both its talons." Both times, Hector replies by exclaiming: "Bird-signs" (Fagles 12.253–254 [= *Iliad* 12.219–220] and 280 [no exact equivalent in the Greek]). But the roles have changed: in the *Iliad* the priest warns against an attack, and Hector wants to fight; in the film, it is the other way round.

Priam on the walls of Troy: "Helen! . . . Sit with me!" This recalls "Sit in front of me" (Fagles 3.196 = *Iliad* 3.162). Contrary to the *Iliad*, in which Helen tells Priam about individual Greek heroes down on the plain, Priam and Helen do not talk about the Greek army in *Troy*.

Achilles before his duel with Hector: "There are no pacts between lions and men." This keeps close to "There are no binding oaths between men and lions" (Fagles 22.310 = *Iliad* 22.262).

When Priam arrives in Achilles' tent, he kisses Achilles' hands. His first words are: "I have endured what no one on earth has endured before. I kissed the hands of the man who killed my son." This is a variation of "I have endured what no one on earth has ever done before / I put to my lips the hands of the man who killed my son" (Fagles 24.590–591 = *Iliad* 24.506–507). Priam answers Achilles' question "Who are you?" with a quotation from the *Iliad*.

The same high poetic diction sounds through in places where the script does not stick to the wording of the *Iliad*, as with Thetis' prophecy about Achilles' future: "If you go to Troy, glory will be yours . . . But if you go to Troy, you'll never come home. For your glory walks hand in hand with your doom." In this we find only some catchwords from the *Iliad*. Thetis says: "All I bore was doom" (Fagles 1.493 = *Iliad* 1.414), and Achilles says: "If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy, / my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies" (Fagles 9.500–501 = *Iliad* 9.412–413). Here the film sounds even more poetic than Fagles's translation. The heightened language functions as a signal for the audience that the original is being referred to.

2. Hidden Allusions

These are attested since the very beginnings of Greek literature. Authors allude to the *Iliad* in such a way that readers without an intimate

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knowledge of Homer cannot catch the whole meaning of a text. These intertextual signals give the works of Dictys and Dares an extra meaning while the narrative itself remains understandable even without knowledge of Homer. In *Troy*, there are two problematic cases.

Advancing toward the Trojan leaders for negotiations before the first full battle, Agamemnon raises his sword while turning back to the Greek army. Not all spectators know what this gesture means. Only when we turn to Book 3 of the *Iliad* do we catch its full significance. When Hector starts to arrange a duel between Paris and Menelaus, he steps forward and keeps the Trojans back from advancing by holding his spear in the middle. The Trojans understand his sign and sit down on the ground; the Greeks do not understand and shoot at him with arrows and stones. Agamemnon intervenes and explains Hector's purpose to the Greek army (*Iliad* 3.76–85). The scene in the film is an abbreviated and condensed variation on this, incomprehensible to anyone who does not remember the *Iliad* in detail. Is this negligence on the filmmakers' part?

Aeneas appears in one of the last scenes of *Troy* only to disappear immediately. He is introduced to the external audience, the viewers, by a silly question from Paris ("What's your name?") that is pointless in regard to the internal audience, the Trojans in this scene, and to the action. But there is no necessity to reveal Aeneas' name concerning the function he has to fulfill – to save and keep the Sword of Troy – to all those spectators who know that he will found a New Troy that is to become Rome. Those viewers who already knew Aeneas are likely to find the allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid* flat; whoever did not know Aeneas is unlikely to remember him afterwards.

3. Variations of a Scene: The Duel between Paris and Menelaus

Variation, combination, and reversal are the underlying principles of most of the plot changes in Dictys and Dares and in *Troy* as well. A list of people in Dictys, Dares, and *Troy* who kill, die, or survive contrary to the *Iliad* or to traditional myth, or who appear in the "wrong" place, would be long indeed. Some of the most surprising effects in the film are due to such violent changes from tradition, as when Menelaus is killed by Hector and Agamemnon by Briseis. I here describe in detail three variations of a single Homeric scene, the duel between Paris and Menelaus.

In the *Iliad* there is a formal duel, spun out in a long series of individual scenes and delayed by several interruptions. Menelaus hits Paris

first with his spear, then with his sword, then drags him behind himself by the helmet. Aphrodite causes Paris' helmet to come off. Menelaus is left holding the helmet, while Aphrodite carries Paris into his bedroom in Troy and unites him with Helen. Menelaus is still searching for Paris on the battlefield when Athena entices the Trojan warrior Pandarus to shoot an arrow at him. Pandarus shoots and wounds Menelaus (*Iliad* 3.15–4.219).

Dictys (2.39–40) has Paris challenge Menelaus to a duel. They fight, Menelaus stabs Paris with his spear in the thigh, and Paris falls to the ground. Menelaus pulls his sword and rushes at Paris to kill him. At this moment Pandarus' arrow hits him, and, while the Greeks are shocked, the Trojans save Paris behind the lines. This change of action is caused primarily by the elimination of the gods, which reduces the action to the human level, and by a process of rationalization, for how could Paris escape if he was not saved by a god? Dictys' condensation of the sequence of events leads to a logically more consistent plot.

As for Dares, I give the full text of paragraph 21 to show his extremely terse style:

> Menelaus starts chasing Alexander. Alexander looks back at him and hits Menelaus' thigh with an arrow. This man is struck by the pain, but together with Ajax the Locrian proceeds to chase him. When Hector realizes that they do not stop chasing his brother, he comes to his aid together with Aeneas. Aeneas protects him with his shield and leads him out of the battle to the city.

Dares here aims at a reversal of Dictys, because in the *Iliad* nobody is hit in the thigh. The course of action becomes progressively more banal, the formal duel of heroes is reduced to a trivial battlefield incident, and Paris is saved in quite a normal way by his comrades.

Troy preserves the formal duel of the *Iliad*. Menelaus gives Paris a thrashing and hits him with his sword in the thigh. Paris falls to the ground, and Menelaus throws his sword to kill him. Paris crawls back to Hector, whose knees he clasps. Menelaus comes after Paris, has a short discussion with Hector, who is protecting Paris, and raises himself up to kill Paris with his sword. Hector stabs him in the belly. The result is a total surprise as it goes against all traditional versions. Menelaus' death makes the war senseless since now the Greeks will no longer fight for the return of Helen. But the audience is satisfied because Menelaus has been a "bad guy" who did not deserve to get Helen back. So we are left with greedy Agamemnon, for whom Helen was only a pretext for war on Troy.

4. Achilles as Lover and Hero

One of the most fascinating developments of the Achilles myth through the centuries is that of the love motif. There is none yet in the *Iliad*: Achilles' wrath caused by the abduction of Briseis does not mean that he is in love with her, and his pain caused by the loss of Patroclus concerns friendship, not a sexual relationship. It is only in the post-Homeric tradition that we can observe an additional love element, one that involves Achilles with Priam's daughter Polyxena. We do not know who was the first to tell the story of Achilles' desperate love for Polyxena, but traces of this motif occur in the earliest post-Homeric epics, which may go back to the pre-Homeric oral tradition, and in a large number of vase paintings from the seventh century on. Achilles tries to ambush and capture Polyxena together with her brother Troilus near the temple of Apollo outside the city.[22] In all our sources Polyxena is killed or buried next to Achilles' tomb.[23] Not surprisingly, Dictys and Dares took over this story and turned it into an elaborate bourgeois tragedy of love.

Dares (27–34) leaves out Briseis, and Patroclus' death has no consequences for Achilles' behavior. Achilles falls in love with Polyxena when she visits Hector's tomb together with her family. He starts wedding negotiations, keeps away from the battlefield, and is trapped into an ambush and killed by Paris in the temple of Apollo. Dictys keeps Briseis separate by moving her forward to the beginning of the war. Polyxena's story occupies a large portion of the whole plot and is worked into a complicated web of actions involving Achilles, Patroclus, Priam, Hecuba, Hector, and Troilus. Dictys, too, has Achilles fall in love while meeting Polyxena in the temple of Apollo and start wedding negotiations. She offers herself as a slave to him when she comes with Priam to obtain Hector's body, but Achilles, despite his burning desire for her, sets her free. His marriage negotiations almost lead to his betraying the Greeks, but then he is caught in an ambush laid by Paris in Apollo's sacred district.

In *Troy*, this love motif is transferred to the person of Briseis, who is taken over from the *Iliad*. But this Briseis incorporates five other women

of the *Iliad* and the myth. Briseis' first appearance reminds us of Cassandra: both are virgin priestesses of Apollo and close relatives of Priam's. When, at the end, Agamemnon tries to drag Briseis away from the statue of Apollo, we are reminded of Ajax the Locrian, who dragged Cassandra out of Athena's temple. Agamemnon threatens to sleep with Briseis as he does with Chryseis in the *Iliad*.[24] When Briseis stops Achilles from killing Agamemnon, she behaves like the goddess Athena in the *Iliad* (*Iliad* 1.188–218). When she kills Agamemnon, she takes over Clytemnestra's part. And, most importantly, Briseis is more and more assimilated to Polyxena. This development starts when Achilles saves Briseis from the Greek army mob. Achilles falls in love with her and sets her free when Priam comes to get Hector's body back. Achilles is shot by Paris in the area of Apollo's temple in Priam's palace while trying to save her from being killed during the conquest of Troy.

All of this fuses several traits of the traditional myth that make Briseis a much more complex character than any single model of her had ever been. Achilles has become the kind of love hero he was in the post-Homeric tradition. But contrary to the tradition represented by Dictys and Dares, he also remains a war hero, fighting for Briseis until the end. And he remains the Achilles of the *Iliad* when he reflects on the value of heroic fighting, decides not to fight for Agamemnon, reflects on going home, but then does fight for Briseis even at the cost of his life.

5. The Duration of the War

In the *Iliad* the Trojan War lasts ten years, but the story occupies only fifty-one days of action, with no more than seven or eight days of fully narrated action and four days of battle. Even so the *Iliad* represents the whole war. Its first third refers us to the beginning of the war, its last third to the end, and its middle third to the long time of fighting. When we ask what happened in the first nine years of war, we learn that it was almost not worthwhile: the Trojans avoided fighting Achilles in open battle, and there were not too many victims. Only the fighting told in the *Iliad* led to the decisive events of the war. The plan of Zeus mentioned at the beginning of the *Iliad* consists not only of his decision to

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22   There exists no comprehensive work on the archaic myth of Polyxena. For the pictorial documents see the articles in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, s.vv. "Achilles" (vol. 1.1 [1981], 37–200, here 72–95) and "Polyxene" (vol. 7.1 [1994], 431–435).

23   For various aspects of the Polyxena tradition see King, *Achilles*, 184–201.

24   Agamemnon's words ("Tonight I'll have her give me a bath. And then – who knows?") allude to *Iliad* 1.29–31: "slaving back and forth / at the loom, forced to share my bed!" (Fagles 1.34–35).

favor Achilles by helping the Trojans in battle but also in his strategy of bringing the war to its long-desired end in just this way.[25]

Dictys and Dares explain the long duration of the war in a rationalizing manner. Dictys long delays the beginning of the war because its preparations and its unsuccessful first campaigns take eight and a half years. The war itself lasts for only a year and a half. In Dares (19–20 and 22), the war is full of long truces and negotiations. The two armies fight for two days, during which Hector kills Patroclus, and then arrange a truce. During the funeral games for Patroclus the Greeks start quarreling about leadership, and the fighting starts up again only after an interval of two years. Soon afterwards, a new truce lasts three years.

Troy condenses the war to a sort of Blitzkrieg. There are only three days of regular fighting, then a truce of twelve days for Hector's funeral, and then we witness Odysseus' ruse of the Wooden Horse. The film blends the method of the *Iliad* of condensing the narrated action to just a few days and focusing on the stories of Achilles and Hector while still representing the "war that will never be forgotten" with the rationalizing explanation that the ten years of war did not mean ten years of continuous battle action.

I close with two observations. Pausanias briefly states his opinion about the true meaning of the Wooden Horse:

> Every one who does not suppose that the Phrygians [Trojans] were the veriest ninnies, is aware that what Epeus [the horse's builder] made was an engine for breaking down the wall.[26]

Dictys and Dares avoid the danger of having the climax of their tale turn on an improbability. In their versions, the Greeks do not take Troy with the Wooden Horse but by treason. The film gives us a lot of rationalizing explanations of mythical thought but still serves up the Wooden Horse, without any meaningful explanation for the Trojans' stupid behavior except for a vague hint at superstition. So we must conclude that these Trojans *are* "the veriest ninnies."

Secondly, in the course of their conversations in Achilles' tent, Briseis says to him: "I thought you were a dumb brute . . . I could have

25   On this see my "Achilles and the *Iliad*," in *Eranos: Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium on the Odyssey*, ed. Machi Païsi-Apostolopoulou (Ithaca: Centre for Odyssean Studies, 2001), 165–179.

26   Pausanias 1.23.8, quoted from J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, 2nd. edn (London: Macmillan, 1913), vol. 1: *Translation*, 34.

forgiven a dumb brute."[27] But why do we get the feeling that Achilles *is* a dumb brute despite all attempts to cleanse his character? In the *Iliad*, we need the gods to understand Achilles. As soon as the filmmakers drop the divine apparatus to explain otherwise inexplicable human behavior, their audiences can no longer fully grasp what forces drive Achilles to behave like a madman – unless he really is nothing but a dumb brute. So there is a choice. Either find a new motivation for Achilles' behavior, the way Dictys and Dares painted him as being sick of the political corruption in the Greek army and sick in his love for Polyxena, or simply state that the Achilles of the *Iliad* is a dumb brute because you do not believe in Homer's gods. *Troy* tells us that Achilles is not a dumb brute only because he feels intense emotions even in the face of death. Most people today will not excuse his behavior on these grounds. So there remains, in the film, a gap between the rationalizing tradition and the epic and tragic mood that we find in the *Iliad*.

The original Greek "true stories" of Dictys and Dares were intended for well-informed readers who enjoyed the intellectual game of detecting similarities with and differences from the *Iliad*. The best terms to describe this literary genre are "parody" or "travesty." This holds true even if most readers of the Latin versions, from late antiquity until the eighteenth century, did not catch this hidden meaning and believed in the "historical truth" of these eye-witness accounts. In the Greek originals and in the Latin translations, part of the parody consisted in their trivializing style, which is in stark contrast to the sublime poetic language of the *Iliad*. Another, and more important, aspect of this parody is the authors' method of sticking closely to the sacred tradition on the whole but every now and then employing a surprising or paradoxical twist that turns the story upside down and gives it a wholly different color.

Screenwriter David Benioff was as ambitious about improving on the plot of the *Iliad* as his colleagues Dictys and Dares had been almost 2000 years ago. He succeeded in constructing a coherent plot with dramatic unity by condensing the myth to a few storylines and concentrating on the characters of Achilles and Hector and, to a lesser degree, Paris and Helen. Benioff's approach closely resembles the intertextual methods of Dictys and Dares, even if Benioff may have taken over some of their

27   German writer Christa Wolf also has him referred to as "Achilles the brute," but this is probably not what the filmmakers were thinking of. See Christa Wolf, *Cassandra*, tr. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1984), 57. The German has "Achilles, das Vieh" (i.e., "Achilles, the beast").

scenes from modern mythological handbooks like Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths*.[28] Contrary to the times of the Second Sophistic, nowadays only few people know the *Iliad* well enough to enjoy most of Benioff's allusions. The allusive method may work best with people who have both the DVD of *Troy* and Fagles's translation of the *Iliad* at hand and so can trace the film back to its sources. But most people will confine themselves to doing what readers of Dictys and Dares have done through the centuries: enjoy the old story in its "true version" that tells us "what really happened" with a seasoning of "modern" rationalism.

28   Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (1955; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1993). Benioff mentions Graves as one of his sources ("David Benioff's Epic Adaptation, TROY").

CHAPTER FIVE

Viewing *Troy*: Authenticity, Criticism, Interpretation

Jon Solomon

When classicists view a film set in antiquity for the first time, their reaction to the film is never the same as that of the non-classically trained audience. The viewing process bypasses the usual modes of passive reception and sensual spectatorship that apply to the viewing of most contemporary Hollywood films and becomes by default an intellectual endeavor.[1] Because of the critical and pedagogical nature of their discipline, classicists approach the cinema with essentially the same mindset they apply to evaluating a colleague's article or even a student's term paper. Classicists are on the lookout for a variety of irregularities, scanning a broad spectrum of signals that do not belong to the vision of the classical world they have honed during decades of study, research, and teaching. Did the Greeks reside in huts or tents outside Troy? Could Achilles have been blond? Is that an accurate portrayal of a sexual encounter between Achilles and Briseis? And wasn't Agamemnon killed in his bath at home by his wife Clytemnestra and not in Troy by Briseis?

Academic concerns tend to dominate scholars' viewing experiences. For two or three hours we are responsible for knowing more about the

1   Contemporary theorists recognize that artistic illusion is not unique to film viewing. See Richard Allen, "Representation, Illusion, and the Cinema," *Cinema Journal*, 32 (1993), 21–48. and Murray Smith, "Film Spectatorship and the Institution of Fiction," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 53 (1995), 113–127.

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

Edited by

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