

same time she asserts herself as a romantic Ovidian heroine. When she is reunited with a dying Achilles for a brief romantic moment, Achilles comforts her one last time. He cradles her face, wipes away her tears, and tells her: "It's all right." Time seems to stop during their last kiss. Their final moment in each other's arms recalls to us his words to her on their first night together: "Any moment may be our last. You will never be lovelier than you are now. We will never be here again." As Briseis flees the burning city, Achilles' words have become true.¹⁷

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Troy and Memorials of War

Frederick Ahl

"How huge a hurricane rolled out of savage Mycenae all over
 Ida's plains, what forces of destiny drove into conflict
 Europe and Asia, two distinct spheres: there's a tale that the whole world's
 Heard, even someone in some remote land where the waves of the Ocean's
 Far side crash, or who lives in a southern zone, beyond sunlight's
 Central and hottest of sky's five zones, in complete isolation."

So speaks Ilioneus, spokesman for a huge delegation that the Trojan prince Aeneas sends to the Latins when he puts ashore in Italy.¹ His claim is an outrageous exaggeration at the dramatic date of its utterance, some seven years after the fall of Troy. It was an exaggeration at the time Virgil wrote the lines, well over a millennium after the traditional date of Troy's fall in the late twelfth century B.C. And it continued to be an exaggeration for the millennium and a half following Virgil's death. Finally, however, time has leveled the arc of Ilioneus' hyperbole. Now, in the European tradition, the Trojan War is indeed the universally known (insofar as anything is universally known) archetypal clash of different cultures (or barbarisms) set within the overlapping boundaries of myth and history.²

1 Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.222–227; my translation.

2 Gilbert Achcar, *The Clash of Barbarisms: September 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*, tr. Peter Drucker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), marks a useful counterpoise to the traditional (and age-old) tendency to view conflicts in terms of civilization vs. barbarism, familiar vs. foreign, good vs. evil.

17 I would like to thank Susan Shapiro and Gregory Daugherty for their suggestions and especially Monica Cyrino for helpful comments.

Over the millennia, wars have become increasingly universalized and have been fought with armies larger than the total human population of the twelfth century B.C. Poets seeking to describe the increasing brutality of war have often used the Trojan War as a vehicle for conveying their responses to the conflicts among nations in their own day, just as they have used the now less familiar mythic war between the sons of Oedipus for the throne of Thebes as their archetype of civil war. The Roman epic poet Statius gives perhaps the clearest explanation why. He wrote his *Thebaid* shortly after the "Year of the Four Emperors" (A.D. 69), which brought a new ruling house to power in a sea of blood.³ Statius declares that he will set the House of Oedipus as the limit for his tale since he lacks the necessary skill and boldness to treat the wars of his own day. My story, he says (*Thebaid* 1.17–40), will be of a fight between two contenders for an impoverished kingdom, a fight in which all human decency failed; I haven't yet the capacity, he continues, to tell of a larger struggle whose goal is to bring the wealth and resources of the whole world under one man's control – the sort of struggle, he hints, that the Roman Empire has just undergone. He makes his parallel between the mythic civil war at Thebes and the Roman civil wars with great (and prudent) obliquity. For his current emperor, Domitian, the notorious last ruler of the Flavian dynasty, was a tyrant with well-demonstrated powers of retaliation against dissident writers. Myth, then, served as a useful allegory for current history, as it always has done.

War is often portrayed as an allegorical figure. Before the great monotheistic religions came to reframe European thinking, War was represented as the ultimate allegory, a God: Ares to the Greeks, Mars to the Romans. He was human in general appearance, one of us, in a way, all of us at certain moments, but indestructible: God in armor, angry, fierce, on occasions capable of justice but always cruel. And his name was assigned in the heavens to the planet that looks red, the color of blood. Here is how Statius imagines the palace of Mars in the *Thebaid* when Jupiter's emissary, Mercury, arrives to tell him to start the long-delayed conflict between the rival brothers and the cities they are dragging into battle behind them:

Here is where Mars likes to live; and Mercury, looking upon it, shudders on seeing the lifeless forests and savage estate high upon Haemus before

³ I discuss this work in greater detail in "Statius' *Thebaid*: A Reconsideration." *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.32.5 (1986), 2803–2912.

him. Forces of Rage in a thousand shapes encircle parapets plated with steel, a threshold, worn thin by gates of steel. Steel pillars support the roof's dead weight. It's a place light flees from in terror: sun's rays are not reflected by its surface but hurled back. Its hard glare gives starlight a foreboding quality. The castle's garrison seems right enough: Mindless Aggression leaps from the main gate; nearby stands Blind Atrocity. Anger glows red; terror stands blood-drained, Treachery hides its weapons. Civil War grips steel cutting two ways. In the great court, Threats quarrel noisily, and at the heart, grimmest of all, Manliness stands. Rage seems beatific sitting next to Death who, armed to the teeth, displays a face blushing with gore. The only blood in its shrines is blood of war, its lamps gleam fires raped from cities burned. Captured nations decorate temple pediments – here and there are fragments of panels from smashed city gates, warships and empty chariots, heads they've crushed. Every form of violence, every kind of wound is found. Only the screams of pain, perhaps, find no expression here. You see the Master everywhere; his face shows no trace of anything but brute; for that is how the metal-working God depicted him with heavenly skill. Not yet had Vulcan seen Mars' softer side exposed in sunlight – the adulterer penalized for his disgusting truce for lust in a bed of linked chain.

As Mercury, from more peaceful Maenalus, begins to hunt the king of all these shrines, Earth trembles, the Hebrus thunders as he stops his water's flow. Herds that crop the valley, herds used in war, gallop off in a lather over the grasslands – a sign *he* is returning. The gates of the holy place, sealed with eternal adamant, spring open as he nears the entrance with his team, handsome in German blood, bringing a change of color to the fields around. Forests and deep-drifting snow make way for his advance. Behind comes the plunder, the weeping prisoners. They are exhausted, but Bellona, dark soul of war, drives them, yoked like beasts, and hurries them with long-pointed spear, hands drenched in gore. Mercury, child of Arcadian Cyllene, froze at what he saw and, sorrowing, bowed his head. Even our father Jupiter himself would be awed, if he'd ever get close. He'd forget all his threats. He'd not order *this*.⁴

Jupiter, the poet suggests, orders Mars into action because he has never seen, close up, the full identity of the forces he is unleashing in the name of what he thinks is justice, and in response to the prayers of a single individual which were not even directed to him but to the demonic powers of Hell. Mars was a lord of hosts, if you will, but a lord of hosts whose power was limited by the presence of other gods, Sexual Love, for example, who, as Aphrodite or Venus, could seduce War from his rampage of killing long enough to bear him a child named Harmony.

⁴ *Thebaid* 7.32–85; my translation.

Yet War was the face of only the agent of mayhem, not of his victims. When monotheism merged the features of all gods into God, it deprived even war's divine agent of an individual face in our imagination and understanding. It became easier to depersonalize not only War but also War's victims. War became "intervention," "police action," and so forth; dead humans were "casualties," mutilated bodies were part of "collateral damage." The large number of people who, in the words of another Roman epic poet, Lucan, found war useful to their interests (*multis utile bellum; Pharsalia* 1.182.) didn't want War's brutal face staring out at us. It might deter us. They preferred to lure us with Glory and Fatherland, as American writer Dalton Trumbo showed in *Johnny Got His Gun*, a novel first published on the eve of World War II.

War as we know it in contemporary American usage, with its capitalized W, is hardly any longer an allegorical figure because it is something wholly "other." It happens "there," not "here," as in the World War I song that is the departure point for Trumbo's novel. While many thousands of native speakers of English know what war is from military service in other lands, few of us know war in quite the way the rest of the world knows it: as the destruction of one's home and homeland, the breakdown of law and civil order, the tramp of foreign soldiers across one's soil, the maiming of tens of thousands, even millions, the rape, the pillage, the bitter humiliation of defeat or the bitter-sweetness of victory won at an appalling price. What is missing from our culture on the whole is the ability to imagine the horrors that the victor can visit on the vanquished. Czeslaw Milosz gives us a graphic representation of the utter breakdown of what one thinks of as normal order in *The Captive Mind*.⁵ One of the most poignant descriptions of the sack of another people's city is in Aeschylus' tragedy *Agamemnon*, delivered by a character who never saw it, who never even left home, and who is not male: Clytemnestra, waiting for her husband's return, determined to kill him. But Aeschylus and his audience knew the story only too well. Their own city, Athens, had been sacked by the Persians less than fifty years earlier and was still being rebuilt as he wrote. And he is clearly reminding the Athenians that they ought to be able to imagine the horrors their imperial democracy is now visiting on other cities.

In the cinema, the English-speaking world dominates the representation of wars real, mythical, and fantastical: England, last invaded (officially) in 1066 and free from civil war for about three centuries; the U.S., last

invaded in 1812 (by the English) and free from civil war for about a century and a half. So English-speakers ought to profit from what others have to say about war. They know things that we are fortunate enough not to know and arrogant enough to think not worth knowing. Wolfgang Petersen has shown, over the years, that he has something to tell us about war. Now, with *Troy*, he has given us a film in which war is presented in some unusual and disturbing ways and in which echoes of other wars, both mythical and historical, resonate. While the film is not an allegory of War, it is carefully structured to suggest that what is presented in *Troy* can be understood as a comment on other wars.

A German director must approach such topics just as cautiously as Statius did, since the scars of World War II are still raw upon its victims and their descendants even after two generations. Indeed, when his producers sought to make the war film that established Petersen's international fame as a director, *Das Boot* (1981), based on Lothar-Günther Buchheim's 1973 bestseller, they had to negotiate for film rights already held by an American who was, in the words of one of the producers, preparing to convert it into "an anti-German underwater Western."⁶ For we live in a culture which inclines to extreme oversimplification. There are only "good guys" and "bad guys," "heroes" and "villains." And the appalling atrocities of World War II have made it hard for the world outside to see the Germans of the period as anything but villains: Churchill's collectivized "The Hun." Thus Petersen's achievement in this German-language film, whose protagonist is based on a real U-Boat commander, is remarkable, if unsettling.

American and British naval-action films of the 1940s and 1950s show as little sympathy for U-Boats and their commanders as other war films do for the Gestapo, and with good reason. The U-Boats took a staggering toll of Allied lives and shipping. They were the ruthless sea wolves, fearsome predators who might have turned the war in Germany's favor if the British had not broken their codes. Petersen, however, shows us that the predators were also the prey. They acquire faces; they become vulnerable; and it is the Royal Air Force that becomes the ruthlessly efficient and faceless foe of the submarine whose voyage we have accompanied. This is a very different image from that suggested in such English-language films as Guy Hamilton's *Battle of Britain* (1969), in which almost casually gallant pilots of Spitfires and Hurricanes achieve success against impossible odds, thanks to improvisation and individual

5 Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, tr. Jane Zielonko (1953; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1990), 25-53.

6 Wolfgang Petersen with Ulrich Greiwe, "Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten": Vom "Tatort" bis nach Hollywood (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1997), 153-154.

daring rather than to careful management. The English and American mind has generally regarded efficiency as a particularly German quality. Petersen puts a human face on his sea wolf, meticulously separates him from the ugly ideology which has sent him into war, and grants him a heroism comparable with that accorded American naval commanders in English-language films about the war in the Pacific. The difference is that Petersen's commander and his vessel are eventually destroyed by the faceless efficiency of the RAF, swooping down for the kill as Japanese Zeros do in American films. And *Das Boot* informs us about the huge losses sustained by German submarines in ships and personnel.

I can't say that I shed any tears for the crews who died in the U-Boats. Indeed, I could have wished that more had died sooner. But that is not the point. Germans paid a terrible price for acquiescence in that motto we also saw proclaimed on car bumpers in America during the Vietnam War, "My country, right or wrong": some twelve million dead, the destruction and partition of their homeland, and, for decades, the unspoken loss of the right to lament, and memorialize publicly, their fallen, as peoples have done in every age. The right to grieve for one's dead, regardless of what they have done, has been sacrosanct in most cultures. Most famously, it is a central issue in Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which Antigone, the sister of the dead warrior Polynices, insists on burying her brother even though she has heard a rumor that Creon, tyrant of Thebes, may have issued a decree banning such interment. I emphasize that she is acting upon a rumor since readers tend to overlook, first, that Antigone herself says so and, second, that Creon does not make his decree until after Antigone has buried her brother. Antigone's determined defiance conflates the rumor with the actual decree, which she is not on stage to hear. Although there has been no official decree banning Germany from honoring her dead in World War II, to honor them publicly is to run the risk of being seen by others as proclaiming the justice of their cause and as belittling the suffering of their victims. Similarly, Sophocles' Creon sees Antigone's lament for Polynices as her justification of Polynices' assault on his native Thebes at the head of foreign troops. In Creon's mind, honoring the dead Polynices is tantamount to dishonoring those who died righteously, defending their homeland. But this is not at all what Antigone appears to intend. In much the same way, although no official decree has been issued to that effect, the victims of Germany's aggression incline to assume that Germans have forfeited the right to memorialize their dead. The Germans, who sense this, have approached the issue more cautiously than Antigone did. For

every culture must come to terms with its own past in its own way. When the U-Boat's musician sings to the crew, his song tells us that they, too, are humans. So does Petersen's film.

The German leadership and its followers not only made the Jewish people and millions of others victims of their dangerous national myth, but they also brought hideous destruction on millions of their own citizens who embraced their policies, endured them without resistance, or opposed them in their own ways. In a sense, Germany was the victim of a kind of suicidal Armageddon, which has recently found dark expression in Oliver Hirschbiegel's film *Der Untergang* (2004), a film whose English title (*Downfall*) does not adequately convey the eerie nature of a doomed world in which the motto "Death before dishonor" crumbles into death before one is dishonored. It is perhaps worth noting that Antigone's actions and Creon's refusal to give way also lead to suicides. There are more suicides in Sophocles' *Antigone* than in all the twenty-six plays attributed to Aeschylus and Euripides combined. But these suicides seem modest in comparison with the orgy of self-destruction in Hitler's bunker.

We still don't have the necessary distance to create an epic of World War II, much less of the twentieth century, the cruelest yet in human history. In Great Britain, there remain documents sensitive enough that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reclassified them as secret. Now they won't be available until all children born during World War II are dead. Further, political ideologies stopped Western writers from giving the Soviet Union a fair portion of credit for the Allied victory. And while we in the English-speaking world have justifiably demonized Hitler and Mussolini, we have also carefully reworked the images of our own political leaders of that era to make them champions of democracy which, in some cases, they were not. To take but a single example: the worth of inefficient democracies as opposed to allegedly efficient dictatorships was a matter of great political debate in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1930, Otto Forst de Battaglia edited a book of essays entitled *Dictatorship on its Trial*.⁷ A photograph of Mussolini, who described democracy as "merely a verbal illusion for simple-minded folk," faced the title page. Winston Churchill, the writer of the Preface, declared that democracy had "invaded the Council Chamber [and] liquidated the prestige of the House of Commons." He went on to describe the United States as a "Limited Liability Dictatorship" and concluded: "The vote given to every

7 *Dictatorship on Its Trial*, ed. Otto Forst de Battaglia, tr. Huntley Paterson (London: Harrap, 1930).

one has been regarded as a trifle by many, and as a nuisance by many more." To his eternal credit, Albert Einstein wrote the shortest essay in *Dictatorship on its Trial*, which I cite in full: "Dictatorship means muzzles all around." The rest of the page is blank.

Most of all, though, the sheer scale of destruction in World War II paralyzes the mind: fifty million dead, almost global desolation of cities and communities. A young American tourist can be forgiven for not grasping the scale of what happened or even that it happened at all, since much of Europe has been, like Japan, rebuilt from rubble to riches in less than fifty years. In this sense, the fall of Rome's Western empire in the fifth century A.D. was much more devastating in the breadth and duration of its consequences despite the comparatively small number of casualties that accompanied it. But by the time we have all the materials necessary to tell the tale of World War II, popular culture will have so trivialized (and Americanized) most memories of the war in its efforts to accommodate the least discerning members of its audiences that truth will be a matter of indifference. Perhaps that is why Petersen, who has expressed his love for really big stories, went back to the classics for *Troy*, although the Greek and Latin authors had not been among his favorites when he read them as a schoolboy. Significantly, he makes this tale of war with a predominantly British cast and in English, not German. He is bringing his "take" on war to an audience that has never seen its own cities sacked and that increasingly inclines to view wars in terms of a simplistic opposition between "good" and "evil."

Probably the greatest difference between the ancient epic or tragic "hero" and the stereotypical modern "hero" is that the ancient hero is not invariably a "good guy." Nor are his opponents always "bad guys." With only one exception, there is no ancient epic of "good" versus "evil." In Greek antiquity, a hero is a man of divine descent who has much greater strength or power than most others around him. He may save his kingdom and his family from a tyrant, as Heracles does in Euripides' play *Heracles*, but then he goes mad and butchers his family. Yet he is still a "hero." Such a hero has much in common with the protagonist of the Western film, whose prowess at killing is his vice as much as his virtue.⁸

There have been far too many wars over the centuries for anyone to recall. American writer Kurt Vonnegut, who survived the Allied bomb-

ing that annihilated Dresden, graphically depicted in his novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, proposed in *The Sirens of Titan* that all events between the birth of Christ and the present day be summarized as a "universal period of adjustment." And that's why myth is the mind's substitute for history. Myth is compact memory; it removes the framework of time that separates events in a historical narrative and allows them to collapse randomly like a scattered deck of cards, creating a new but asymmetrical pattern. The myth of Troy has come to define, and to be defined by, all subsequent wars. And because the Trojan War is mythic, it can be recalled in infinitely different ways and retold through all kinds of memories of wars, recent or remote. Indeed, the varying ancient traditions of the Trojan War suggest that even the earliest versions have merged several different conflicts into one. And with each new experience of the clash of cultures, the mythic model invites modification. As Andrew Erskine points out in his study of ancient treatments of the Trojan myth: "The meaning of the Trojan War changed constantly, adapting to time and place."⁹ Most mythic narrators have personal reasons for telling their tale in a particular manner.¹⁰

The rewriting of myth isn't simply a matter of an author's preference for one predecessor's version over another's, as scholars tend to assume. Poets take, and politicians abuse, a freedom scholars don't have (or shouldn't have): the right to generate their own versions of myth. That's why we won't get any real sense of *Troy* if we play the classics teacher and "correct" Petersen's "errors," as if he were a wayward schoolboy, against the canonical version of Homer's *Iliad* or some handbook of mythology. Nor should we be deluded by a publisher who now markets a translation of the *Iliad* with the inscription "as seen in *Troy*" on the cover into believing that Petersen is simply translating Homeric epic into epic film. For *Troy* has a distinct touch of those ideas about war that we can see in *Das Boot*. It also has a great deal of Roman color. It is indebted to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Heroides* for some of its perspectives and characters, and there are also remarkable, if probably unintentional, refractions of Lucan.

Like Lucan, Petersen removes the entire divine apparatus of Greco-Roman heroic epic from *Troy*. Cuts, of course, have to be made when poetic epic is translated into an epic film. Unless one resorts to a miniseries,

8 On this cf. Martin M. Winkler, "Classical Mythology and the Western Film," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 22 (1985), 516–540, and "Homer's *Iliad* and John Ford's *The Searchers*," in *The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western*, ed. Arthur M. Eckstein and Peter Lehman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 145–170.

9 Andrew Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 258.

10 I discuss some of these issues in "Homer, Vergil, and Complex Narrative Structures in Latin Epic: An Essay," *Illinois Classical Studies*, 14 (1989), 1–31.

as television directors have done, an epic film is closer in running time to a couple of the shorter Greek tragedies than to the recital time of the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*. A one-minute shot may be worth a thousand words of a novel since most novels present us with a largely self-contained world and provide the information the reader needs to understand all but the subtlest references. Ancient epic and tragic poets did nothing of the kind. They assumed (safely, on the whole) that their contemporary audiences and readers were familiar with the characters, cultures, and scenarios of Trojan or other myths. What individualized their own poetic treatments was the way they restructured their audiences' imagined prior "knowledge." Homer's Helen tells Telemachus, for instance, that she disclosed Odysseus' identity to no one after she recognized him as a spy in Troy. Hecuba, in Euripides' *Hecuba*, says that Helen told her and no one else about it. In the *Odyssey* there is no mention that Odysseus has children by the goddesses Calypso and Circe, whereas elsewhere in Greek literature we find numerous traces of other children, most notably of his son by Circe, Telegonus, who accidentally kills Odysseus and goes on to marry his father's widow, Penelope, while Telemachus marries his father's mistress, Circe. Thus Telemachus and Telegonus end up simultaneously as one another's stepfathers and stepsons. That, we know, is the plot of Sophocles' lost play *Odysseus Acanthoplex*.¹¹ In comparison with Sophocles, Petersen is downright modest in his modifications.

Petersen obviously faced a dilemma about what to exclude. Although he probably assumed that the largest segment of his audience would know little, if anything, about Troy, he had to be aware that he was addressing many who were familiar with the tale and that some of his reviewers would be classical scholars. Such critics tend to confuse deliberate change with ignorance, and dissatisfied reviews could and did discourage both some of the less and some of the more learned audiences from seeing the film. This was especially the case in the United States, where any film based on Greek myth is likely to be regarded either as too highbrow for ordinary tastes or as a witless travesty of the text it's based on. And it was the reviewers, not Hollywood, that failed the American public on *Troy*. While the preponderance of French, English, and German reviewers knew that Petersen had studied Latin and ancient Greek at school, the American press was generally negative and often downright dismissive, chiefly because, it was supposed, of Petersen's mishandled mythic detail.

11 For the fragments of this play see Dana Ferrin Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 90–94, and my discussion in *Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 229.

Petersen's trimming away of classical gods is not the result of ignorance but of choice, and of a choice governed at least as much by considerations of tone and focus as of time management. English-language films, after all, have a venerable tradition of representing Greek gods on screen. Several of Don Chaffey's Olympians in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1962) and those in Desmond Davis' *Clash of the Titans* (1981) were themselves the "gods" of British stage and screen.¹² But these deities, and the superb monsters Ray Harryhausen created for both productions, propel the films into the world of fantasy and science fiction. Petersen did not want echoes of these works in his film. Yet the Homeric gods do not vanish altogether. In numerous places Petersen, like Lucan, gives us a glimpse of what I would call the shadows of a divine presence. Achilles' mother Thetis is shown as woman in late middle age, wading in the sea and gathering shells that have an unreal, gem-like sparkle. She is not the eternally youthful sea-goddess of Homer who consults with Zeus and arranges for her son to be provided with divine armor. Petersen is reminding the more learned in his audience of Thetis' traditional godhood and also hinting that he is aware of what he has not included. And Achilles is not, as Greek myth sometimes suggests, immortal unless wounded in the only mortal part of his body, his heel. Petersen cleverly alludes to that tradition by having Achilles shot in the heel by Paris but actually killed by the arrows that strike him once he is down.

Aside from such allusions, there are no warring gods at all in the world of *Troy*, only unresponsive if abundant statuary in the city of Troy. Petersen does not have Apollo send plagues on the Greeks for their desecration of his shrine. He keeps the plague but suppresses the divine agent. When the Greeks feign their departure and leave the Wooden Horse behind, Priam is told not to get close to the Greek corpses lying there because they show signs of plague. The only "Judgment of Paris" is Paris' decision to smuggle Helen away on his vessel as he and Hector return home.¹³ The Greek leaders, throughout, have little but contempt for the whole notion of religion. Only the occasional soldier, Briseis, and King Priam place any trust in the divine. Indeed, Priam's religiosity is ruinous for Troy. He makes a number of disastrous decisions based on what his seer tells him, among them that of bringing the

12 Cf. my "Classical Gods and the Demonic in Film," in *Classics and Cinema*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (London: Associated University Presses, 1991), 40–59.

13 Curiously, they leave from what the film identifies as the Port of Sparta. Either Petersen thought that a city in Laconia actually on the sea, such as Gytheion, would be too obscure to mention by name, or that no one would mind a Sparta moved a few dozen kilometers south. His Mycenae is also a coastal city. In Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), this kind of cavalier geography sets Macedonian Pella on the coast and places Babylon in Persia.

Wooden Horse into Troy. Hector or Paris urge him not to take these steps in each instance, but neither challenges him when he persists. Priam routinely ignores the advice of his warrior generals.

Removal of the gods not only saves Petersen from the diminished illusion of reality which comes with representing gods as personages in film, but it also allows him to let the ultimately ruinous denouement of the film emerge from the complex interactions of his entire cast. Lucan did much the same in his Roman epic without gods. In what is perhaps his most famous line, he declares: "the conquering cause pleased the gods, but the conquered cause pleased Cato" (*Pharsalia* 1.128). Approval by Cato, the just human, carries more moral value than the approval of gods. Indeed, once gods are introduced as guiding and controlling forces, the winning side appears to have been granted divine approval and thus to be justified unless, like an Old Testament prophet, you suggest that the enemy's victory is God's way of punishing his special people for some transgression. Lucan's Cato is the only fully moral hero of ancient epic. Forst de Battaglia understood Lucan and his Cato to be major intellectual stumbling blocks in the case he was making for the desirability of dictatorship. The glamor of success and power, he argued, "makes the triumphant ideology accepted as their own by the vast majority. A victorious cause is pleasing not only to the gods, but also to the masses, and a difficulty overcome is approved by the Catos."¹⁴ Lucan's Caesar restates his poet's editorial comment about the gods in a somewhat different way when he addresses his troops before their most critical battle in a civil war fought all over the Mediterranean: "The outcome will decide whether we are guilty or innocent. If we win we are innocent. If we lose we are guilty" (*Pharsalia* 7.259–260). He understands that no effective judicial mechanism exists for holding the victor to account. Two millennia later, there still is none.

But here Lucan and Petersen part company. For while Petersen has no gods, neither does he have an *immediate military victor*. And there's no whiff of a Cato. There isn't a right side or a wrong side in *Troy*. One side makes more tactical mistakes than the other because its leader won't take advice from his best general. And the most efficient killing machine on either side, Achilles, loses his life because he has started to exhibit compassion instead of cynical indifference. He succumbs to an impulse to save Briseis during the sack of Troy and dies at the hands of the only warrior in the film who shows cowardice, Paris.

14 *Dictatorship on its Trial*, 374.

Petersen demands the right to surprise us, to compel us to follow his *Troy*, not someone else's, not even Homer's. Part of the film's power lies in Petersen's refusal to confirm the more learned segment of his audience in its prior "knowledge" of the myth. In this he is exercising his artistic right to shape inherited myth, as writers of mythic texts from Homer to Beverley Cross, the well-read classicist who scripted both *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Clash of the Titans*, had done: to make us look at the world through his eyes and with his focus. He writes the myth as much as the myth writes him. Thus our "knowledge" that Helen will be taken home by Menelaus and that her sister Clytemnestra will kill or abet in the killing of Agamemnon on his return to Mycenae proves illusory. It is stripped away by Hector's killing of Menelaus and by Briseis' killing of Agamemnon. The single major Greek warrior Petersen allows to survive is Odysseus, whose voice provides the final narrative overlay. On the Trojan side, Hector is, apart from Priam, the only major casualty. Thus the killing of Menelaus makes the huge mobilization of troops by a negligent husband to retrieve his wife come to nothing, especially since Paris does not die. Agamemnon's death reduces the Greek triumph over Troy to a pointless imperial victory won for an already deceased monarch.

Troy seems to be telling us, as it refashions and trims the myth, that Agamemnon and Menelaus don't matter once the war is over. Even in ancient accounts, the Trojan War is the high point of their attainments. Return to Greece brings only death to Agamemnon and a prosperous but non-heroic life to Menelaus. Besides, Petersen needs to have some casualties of note in his film besides Patroclus, Hector, Achilles, and Ajax since he does not include most of Homer's extensive cast of warriors on either side. For Petersen does not leave Troy's destruction and Achilles' death out of his narrative, as the *Iliad* does. He seems more concerned with emphasizing something that is only the faintest of allusions in Homer: that in the world of mainstream epic the future lies with the conquered Trojans, not with the conquering Greeks. Hector's widow, Andromache, appears to escape with her son and to save herself from her usual slavery and him from his traditional death of being hurled from the walls of Troy. And there will be a Trojan, Aeneas, to ensure the generation of a New Troy in Italy – Rome.

The significance of Petersen's last-minute introduction of Aeneas must elude those unfamiliar with the myth and leave those familiar with it baffled. A youth is supporting at his side, rather than on his shoulders, an elderly, apparently unconscious man. Paris asks the youth who he is. The young man surprises us by telling Paris that he is Aeneas, thereby

conveying the strange impression that these two cousins have never met previously, something rather anomalous in a script that places almost as much emphasis on relationships among cousins as on those among brothers. Petersen's Paris obviously knows who Aeneas is, even if he has not met him before. He even corrects Aeneas' pronunciation of his own name and gives him the symbolic Sword of Troy, which in his own hands had been a rather dysfunctional Excalibur. So, if Priam's observations about its power are correct (which does not necessarily go without saying), Troy will live on, provided that a Trojan wields it. This Arthurian touch suggests that Troy is an idea rather than a specific city in a precise location. Its current site has been devastated, and thousands of its faceless citizens have been killed. In short, this Trojan War is a far cry from Statius' image of War and its suffering victims. It is, rather, a testament to the validity of Caesar's cynical observation to his mutinous troops in Lucan's *Pharsalia* that "the human race lives for the benefit of a few" (*Pharsalia* 5.343) – a point which one could only wish were not just as true in the realm of *Realpolitik* today.

At this point we may want to reflect upon what drives the various princes to take part in the war. Agamemnon has an insatiable lust for power, which he advances by deploying others' desires and ambitions to his advantage. Petersen has given us a villain with no redeeming qualities at all and, sadly, with little depth. He is more like Aeschylus' Agamemnon than Homer's, although in Aeschylus' play the elders of Agamemnon's city are equally awed and shocked by his deeds and power. They respect him as much as they despise Aegisthus, the pompous idiot Clytemnestra replaces him with. Petersen's Achilles yearns for eternal fame and declines a fight only if he thinks the moment isn't quite right. He refrains from killing Hector when he has the chance, in his first action at the temple of Apollo, because he doesn't have the audience he needs to earn the greatest possible glory. This is a witty coincidence of interests for protagonist and director. It's far too early in the film to have the decisive duel! Petersen's foppish, selfish, and unthinking Paris has no desire for war at all but is, with occasional moments of conscience, prepared to have and keep Helen regardless of the larger consequences. Helen is the forlorn wife of a brutish husband prepared to run the risk of death just to escape him. Odysseus is an opportunist, last onto the beaches, deferential to authority to secure his advancement, yet curiously candid about his willingness. Menelaus is the brutish unlovely husband prepared to recapture his wife at whatever cost. Patroclus wants to be able to share Achilles' glory. Briseis is the only prisoner of war, male or female, shown in the whole film. She is brutally treated by

everyone except Achilles, but she is ready to strike back with a dagger when opportunity arises. Ajax just enjoys a fight. Priam engages in war because under the circumstances he can think of no alternative and because he loves his sons. And Hector, the family man, fights because his sense of honor and his respect for and obedience to his wrong-headed superstitious father compel him to go forth into what he knows will be a fatal duel with Achilles.

Notably absent from the Greeks' motives for war is any ideology or religion or the lust for gold or plunder. In a sense, as I have suggested, Troy itself is the idea. So to add any other ideology would be superfluous. Yet it is very hard to think of a war in which neither religious or political ideology on the one hand nor greed on the other have played a part. These absences alone make *Troy* a curiously unimpassioned oddity in the world's tales of war. We get only a rare glimpse of what makes Agamemnon's army of 50,000 interested in going to war – Eudorus' unquestioning but abstract loyalty to Achilles, for example.

The common soldier finds only one brief voice in Homer's *Iliad*, that of Thersites in Book 2. But it is at least an independent voice of dissent, however quickly it is pummeled into silence by Odysseus, the master of words, lies, and long narratives. While Homer and his successors include some anonymous deaths in their epics, they usually take time to name, and often to provide short biographies of, the lesser warriors who get cut down. They are not at all a faceless multitude, no collateral damage in the egotistical battles of princes and military officers. They are from different cities and cultures, sometimes, like Homer's Ethiopian Menmon, of different races. They have individualized armor and weapons which identify their origins or their claims to distinction, and they have parents who will lament their deaths. All this is gone in *Troy*. With few exceptions, Petersen's uniformed and helmeted combatants move into battle like the masked storm troopers of the *Star Wars* films. They have no individualized devices on their shields and no plumes on their helmets. Only Hector and Paris wear elaborate armor. We are thus lured into accepting their destruction as casually as if they were computer-generated, virtual beings in a video game – which is precisely what most of them are. And this is why *Troy* fails to convey a convincing "feel" of ancient epic in its battle scenes. In Statius' *Thebaid*, for instance, Jocasta, the mother of the two fighting brothers, goes to the camp of one, the exiled Polynices, but finds herself surrounded by helmeted soldiers and cannot tell which of them is her son. Tears spill through his visor as he comes up to her. And as he embraces her, he crushes her against the metal of his armor (*Thebaid* 7.470–559). In the *Iliad*, Hec-

tor's infant son is terrified by the plumes on his father's helmet (6.491-510). Petersen leaves his always plumeless Hector without even a helmet to terrify his son. The strong sense of the confusing and terrifying masks of war in Homer or Statius Petersen restricts to one incident. He shows us the masking nature of armor when what appears to be Achilles comes out to fight Hector. Petersen cleverly adapts his original so that no one unfamiliar with myth will realize that it isn't Achilles until Hector mortally wounds his adversary and pulls up his helmet to disclose Patroclus. In general, however, Petersen knows, and we know, that there aren't real people beneath most of the masks of his warring armies.

For this I fault him and the film very strongly. I find the indifference to the deaths of ordinary folk in *Troy* unsettling, especially since Petersen resolutely emphasizes the large armies arrayed on either side. Homer, in contrast, though he tells of a thousand ships, doesn't impress upon us the number of combatants. Since the *Iliad* identifies who is fighting whom and since the Greek and Trojan princes, unlike modern generals or heads of state, bear the brunt of the hand-to-hand combat themselves, war in Homer is not the kind in which ordinary people are losing their lives to advance the interests of the wealthy or powerful who stay far away from the front. Whatever the inequities of the ancient aristocracy, the mythic princes, like medieval knights, were expected to be in the front lines of battle themselves. Aristocratic privilege had its price. Petersen has placed Homer's warring noblemen in a context suggestive of modern soldiers, even if they are wearing ultimately retro combat fatigues and carry antiquish weapons. The chaotic melees of battle in Homer turn into some complex military tactics and maneuvers, though it's never made clear who has planned them. In short, Petersen takes what he did in *Das Boot* one step further. There he reversed the paradigm of the Anglo-American war film by depriving the Allied foe of its individual faces as he offered us his perspective on a German military unit. In *Troy*, he is more even-handed. He deprives the soldiers and civilians on both sides of their individual faces. The huge backdrop of computerized armies emphasizes that his focus is on the elite. The human race is living (and dying) for the benefit of the few who do not even live to reap those benefits. But there are only the sparsest hints of any brutal behavior toward ordinary troops or non-combatants. We see the butchered bodies of Apollo's priests, the violence against Briseis, and Achilles' brutal treatment of Hector's corpse. But we don't see Odysseus beating up Thersites or promising the spy Dolon his life and then having him killed. Nor do we see Achilles bringing human sacrifices to the funeral pyre of Patroclus. The Trojans commit no atrocities at all.

Troy stands in sharp contrast to one of the most puzzling of all war films, Robert Aldrich's *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), in which the Allies send twelve condemned criminals on a commando raid into occupied France. One of the Americans, a psychotic killer of "loose women," murders a German woman looking for her lover. Later, the commandos lock German officers and the women who have fled with them into a basement, pour gasoline through the vents, drop hand-grenades, and cremate them. I have never been sure what the producers thought we would make of this unconscionable atrocity. Are we to feel reassured because the surviving commandos will be let loose again on their own society? Similarly, in *Troy*, I am left bewildered by the curious isolation in which the warrior princes function. This is a sanitized epic that gives us a sanitized view of war. It is neither ancient-epic war nor modern war. Perhaps the idea of *Troy* is what really matters, though what that is remains unclear. Given the presence of Aeneas, it appears to be the survival of whatever *Troy* represents as an imperial reality in some other time and possibly some other place.

In casting Brad Pitt in the role of Achilles, Petersen gave us a mature man, not the often childlike youth of the *Iliad*. Achilles now is a warrior at the peak of his abilities, ready to make his play for eternal glory before age starts slowing him down, not as a rather pretty young man who had been dressed as a girl at a girls' school until lured into shedding his disguise by Odysseus. Petersen's Achilles is an experienced and cynical killer who forbids his cousin Patroclus, who looks about the right age for a Homeric Achilles, from prematurely engaging in combat. And, as almost every critic has pointed out, there is not the slightest trace of any sexual relationship between the two cousins. In Achilles' first action, a duel with a gigantic opponent, the myth evoked is that of David and Goliath rather than anything Greek. Achilles, running, closes with his opponent. He soars into the air like a bird and strikes him, samurai-style, with his sword. The encounter is over in seconds. We know beyond doubt that this man is invincible in combat. Indeed, the helmeted Achilles, in numerous close-ups, has a distinctly birdlike appearance, suggesting not so much an eagle as the more ominous owl, a symbol of death and not a flocking bird but a solitary, cold-eyed bird of prey. (I'm thinking of the *aegolius funereus*, the Boreal or Tengmalm's owl.) Achilles even hunches himself up to look like a perched bird, runs in birdlike fashion, and strikes in battle with his characteristically bird-like swoop, just as his Myrmidons, scurrying forth, move and look like the ants that their name implies.

Achilles stands in vocal contrast to most of the other male characters, whose enunciation is distinctly British, with Irish and Common-

wealth overtones and in Odysseus' case with those of the down-to-earth Yorkshireman. This detail is not usually significant in Hollywood movies since consistency of accent has never been much of a priority to filmmakers. But I suspect that it does matter here. After all, we know that in most American-produced movies the British can't win anything without American help and that they can be replaced by Americans for operations in Burma, breaking the Enigma code, or escaping from Colditz. When Achilles is first called by Agamemnon to fight on his behalf, it is clear that Agamemnon can't win without him unless he puts his entire force at risk. In his thirst for glory, Achilles allows himself to be used by the king he despises, who is more the expansionist politician than the warrior. Yet in most respects he is a kind of ancient Westerner, a loner apart from the crowd, a supreme but until the death of Patroclus dispassionate killer – a very American reluctant individualist with his own ethical code and appropriately played by an American actor.

Otherwise, Petersen studiously avoids suggesting any major distinction between Greeks and Trojans, though Hector and Paris have darker hair and are not nearly as stout as the ruddier Agamemnon and Menelaus. The latter have the look, attire, and manners of over-aged, overweight piratical Vikings or degenerate Highland clansmen, even if they use copies of genuine Mycenaean cups at their banquets. And the only blond male is Achilles. The Greeks, not the Trojans, are the barbarians in *Troy*. The Trojans live in an elegant world that suggests an advanced civilization. Their city is full of visual echoes of Knossos, Sardis, Bogazköy, Karnak, and, at times, imperial Rome and Constantinople. In short, the "Greek vs. barbarian" theme prominent in Euripidean tragedy is reversed. A modern American director would surely not have resisted including Homer's valiant Ethiopian Memnon. But aside from the faintly Asiatic dancers in Menelaus' palace, the faces are all European, but in costumes and settings that defy precise definitions of era and location.

Our sense that these people have somehow, to use Vonnegut's phrase, "come unstuck in time" is enhanced by reference to the Greek naval expedition of a thousand vessels as "the largest ever." And for almost three thousand years it was. The scale of the assault has sometimes suggested parallels between the Trojan War in *Troy* and the recent Anglo-American assaults on Iraq. I am not at all persuaded by anything in the film that such was the director's design. For all the scale of the operations, Iraq was hardly a formidable military opponent that could be defeated only by cunning ruses and its own incompetent leadership. The common ethnicity of both sides also argues against any conscious

parallelism. True, mythic Troy was attacked twice, first by Heracles when Priam was only a child. Heracles did not destroy the city but established Priam on his throne. Similarly, the first invasion of Iraq stopped short of sacking what remained of Baghdad after the bombing and left its modern brutal Priam in power. The second attack on Iraq in response to alleged threats posed by evidence of non-existent weapons of mass destruction does not even have a justification on the level of Helen's rape by Paris. That would require a scenario more like that in Euripides' tragedy *Helen*, in which Helen did not elope with Paris but was whisked away by the gods to Egypt and replaced by a fake. The second invasion of Iraq came in response to terrorist attacks on the United States, planned and executed mostly by Saudis but including no Iraqis. It was as if Margaret Thatcher had ordered an attack on Venezuela in response to the Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands in 1982. That such a parallel can even cross one's mind bears witness to the degree to which Petersen's film shows sympathy for the defenders rather than the aggressors. The closest ancient approximation is the attack on Greece by Persian king Xerxes in 480 B.C.¹⁵ The Greeks, however, deployed a fleet of their own against Xerxes, and the most famous battle of the war was a naval engagement between the two sides off the coast of Salamis. The odd feature about Troy, given its location near the coast, is its lack of any navy whatsoever, both in the ancient tradition and in this film.

More persuasive than these historical speculations is one suggested by the film's visual echoes of Darryl Zanuck's production *The Longest Day* (1962) and Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) about the Allied naval assault on Normandy on June 6, 1944, the largest single-day naval invasion ever. It dwarfed, by about five to one, the thousand ships launched against Troy. Like Troy, the German-held coast had no naval protection against invasion. Without (the American) Achilles, (the British) Agamemnon would have no hope of victory. Achilles with his Myrmidons storms ashore first and occupies the temple of Apollo, destroying its statuary, butchering its priests, and making Briseis his prisoner.

15 Cf. also the aborted expedition by Knud den Hellig (Canute the Holy) of Denmark against recently established William the Conqueror in England a millennium and a half later. Knud's invasion fleet, reported as some 1,660 ships, dispersed when the peoples south of the Danish border seized the opportunity to revolt and forced Knud to leave and put down the insurrection. See Palle Lauring, *A History of Denmark* (Copenhagen: Høst and Søn 1986), 64–66. Does recollection of this incident perhaps contribute a touch to the Viking-like manner of Petersen's Greeks, or is the tale known only to frustrated Danish imperialists?

Even if the parallel between the Greek attack on Troy and the D-Day invasion of Europe is only a cinematic allusion thematically unconnected to the rest of Petersen's film, its resonances are disturbing. For in this scenario, the inversion of the Anglo-American view of World War II is taken a large step further. Now the invaders, particularly the English, are the barbarians; and the world controlled by the confused ruler of the beleaguered continental Europeans, who brings defeat on his realm by taking bad advice and overriding his generals, represents civilization. This is despite Hitler's documented claim that it is the Germans who are the barbarians and have a moral obligation to be barbarians.¹⁶ In Petersen's scenario, the absence of any divine force which makes Troy's fall appear as destiny makes the city's survival possible, as it is not in Homer or Virgil. But what undermines such a possibility is not the savagery of Achilles but the unquestioning loyalty of Hector to his brother and to his leader, which he sets above his own judgment. His courage and his determination to fight for his military honor, even though he knows he will be defeated by Achilles, make him act against his own and his city's best interests. Like the captain in *Das Boot*, he is a noble man in the service of a noble military tradition under an incompetent commander-in-chief. This is the mindset celebrated in Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*: "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die." They try to do what they think is their duty, and they try to survive. They are not the officers, troops, and kapos of Auschwitz remorselessly and brilliantly depicted by Tadeusz Borowski though, depending on their breaking point, they could be.¹⁷

Such loyalty indeed has a sinister side. Without it there would be no tyrants. It recalls what Lucan describes as "loyalty to one's military duty" (*militiae pietas*; *Pharsalia* 4.499) above and beyond one's larger sensibilities as a citizen and as a human being. Lucan sees it as one of the roots of the problems in the last days of the Roman republic.¹⁸ It is not far apart from the way the word "patriotism" is currently misunderstood. Laelius, one of Julius Caesar's centurions and winner of the highest military award available to someone not a commanding general, the "civil oak" (*quercus civilis*, the Roman equivalent of the Victoria Cross,

16 Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (1940; rpt. Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1973 [first complete edn]), 78 ("Ja! Wir sind Barbaren. Wir wollen es sein") and 79, reports Hitler's statement and its context.

17 Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen; and Other Stories*, selected and tr. by Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin, 1967; several rpts).

18 I discuss this idea in my *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 119–121 and 200–201.

Congressional Medal of Honor, or Iron Cross), shows the extremes to which that kind of loyalty may go: "if you were to order me to bury my sword in my brother's heart, my father's throat, or the womb of my pregnant wife, I would do all this even if my right hand proved unwilling" (*Pharsalia* 1.376–378). A man who will do such atrocities in the name of loyalty will do anything. It takes greater courage to break the pattern of obedience to one's ruler. Although facing almost certain death in either case, the soldier does not want to die dishonored by his own community. No one would have given the U-Boat captain a medal for rebelling against Hitler. Both sides would have regarded him as a traitor.

Here, I think, is the heart of Petersen's dilemma with *Troy*. It is the eternal dilemma of heroic soldiers, especially those fighting for a losing – and therefore, in Caesar's terms, guilty – cause. Like Lucan, Petersen suggests that military victory is somehow morally worse than defeat, as Lucan did: "it was worse to be the winner" (*vincere peius erat*; *Pharsalia* 1.126–7). Now I am not trying to suggest that *Troy* in its entirety is an allegory for World War II. But there are overtones. The same script, updated, could work for a film set in Europe between June 1944 and May 1945.

As a meditation on war mythically framed, however, *Troy* does not reach the level of Michael Cacoyannis's masterpiece *Iphigenia* (1977) because there is no strong sense in *Troy* of the presence of people outside the elite. Cacoyannis uses the army, superbly manipulated by Odysseus, as a potent visual analogy to Euripides' original. Once the soldiers surround Agamemnon's headquarters, it no longer lies in his power to save his daughter. Petersen's armies are only a backdrop. His film would have been better if they were not there at all, for concentration on spectacle takes away time from the details that provide all the little touches that make a film come alive – like the toddler Orestes in *Iphigenia*, who is worth thousands of computerized soldiers. Petersen has chosen not to probe the inner drives and conflicts that propel a man to such a pitch of ambition that he is ready to kill his own child to win glory. He trims away Iphigenia, Clytemnestra, and Orestes from his presentation of Agamemnon and thus bypasses an opportunity to underscore the price Agamemnon is prepared to pay for what he seeks. Perhaps Petersen could not trust that enough of his audience would know that Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to secure favorable winds for his expedition.

As it is, Petersen's Briseis has to stand in for Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, and Cassandra, the prophetic daughter of Priam whom Agamemnon brought home as a slave. Petersen does not develop the female characters adequately to counterbalance the loss of femininity occasioned by

his removal of the gods. I found myself lamenting the absence of Hecuba, who is as much the symbol of doomed Troy as is Priam. Further, there is no sense of any strained relationships between Helen and the women of Troy, and Petersen's Helen does not convey a sense of being the ultimate *femme fatale*. I admit to some prejudice here since in my mind no one is ever likely to surpass Irene Papas' Helen in Cacoyannis's *The Trojan Women* (1971) any more than her Clytemnestra in *Iphigenia*. For my mental pictures of them indelibly bear her features and voice. This is what a good film can do. It can superimpose itself on one's prior mental images and thus become a part of the myth's evolution. Petersen has done this for me with his Hector and Achilles and in much else.

Petersen knows that controlling a myth brings with it some possibility of changing peoples' perspectives on that myth and on the historical events it assimilates and reflects. His Agamemnon is right to tell Achilles that history will remember victorious kings rather than the warrior princes who fought for them. But the strength of Homeric myth is that it can elevate Achilles over his commander, as history would not do. The *Iliad* centers on the wrath of Achilles, not on Agamemnon. The *Odyssey* focuses on Odysseus and gives the island of Ithaca its only claim to glory. The great cities of Athens and Corinth, on the other hand, get short shrift from Homer. That's Homer's triumph, in a way, over history. He could make the vanquished no less important than the victors. This is what makes conquerors eager to appropriate myth.

Petersen, it seems to me, focuses attention on what we find as a persistent theme in ancient myth: that the Trojan War is the last hurrah for the victors rather than for the vanquished. So, granted that the city is destroyed, who, if anyone, has won? In *Troy*, the answer, I have suggested, is that Troy has not died but lives on as an idea through Aeneas. This is a particularly Roman version of the tale of Troy, most notably that of Virgil's *Aeneid*. If Petersen's education followed the typical European pattern, his first encounter with an ancient version of the Trojan War would have been in Virgil, not Homer. In his film, the sequence of events from the construction of the Wooden Horse to the scenes of the sack of Troy recalls the *Aeneid* rather than the *Iliad*. Julius Caesar and his dynasty claimed descent from Aeneas, and it was rumored that Caesar and his successor Octavian (Augustus), out of family piety, contemplated rebuilding Troy and perhaps even putting the capital of their empire there.¹⁹ The idea is not as preposterous as some scholars have argued. After all, Alexander had maddened the Macedonians by

19 Suetonius, *Julius* 79; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 9.950–960.

moving his capital to Babylon. And Rome did, some three centuries later, re-found the ancient city of Byzantium, just up the Bosphorus from Troy, as its new capital, Constantinople. Over mythical expanses of time, ideas can regenerate almost infinitely. For the new Latin Troy was dominantly Greek-speaking. Ironically, the inhabitants called themselves Romans (*Romaioi*) and the Italians Latins.

The wealth of Constantinopolitan Troy lured Italian crusaders from Venice to sack it some nine hundred years after its foundation. A couple of centuries later they were followed by Mehmet II, who separated the new Troy from its Greco-Roman past and subjected Greece to Ottoman rule for almost four centuries. His model was Alexander the Great. He had his personal copy of Arrian's biography of Alexander read to him daily and ordered his own biography to be written in Greek, in the same format, and even on the same kind of paper.²⁰ Finally, in the aftermath of World War I, the liberated Greeks pursued their *megali idea*, their "great idea" of a new empire centered in Troy-Constantinople. But they met catastrophic defeat as the city of their dreams became unalterably Istanbul.

Not only Mediterranean peoples sought to capture for themselves the idea of Troy. So, too, did the Celtic Britons. Geoffrey of Monmouth argues in his *History of the Kings of Britain* that Pryd (in Latin, Brutus), the mythic ancestor of the Britons, came to Britain (Prydain) after the fall of Troy. Similarly, Petersen may have included overtones of the world's most terrible war to date in his retelling of Troy as a proclamation of European culture's revival from the ashes and rubble of war, of the re-establishment of civilization after utter pillage and destruction. That is, perhaps, the price the Allies have paid for playing Creon and suppressing, however tacitly, for half a century the need of the vanquished to lament their dead, regardless of what cause they were serving as they died. For the vanquished have emerged, like the Phoenix, from the ashes of its destruction. If that means the revival of *militiae pietas*, even of the kinder, gentler sort we find in Hector, it is still a dreadful prospect, one likely to take us down the same path with more terrible consequences. It reminds us that *militiae pietas* and dreams of empire die hard. They are a sure recipe for the Armageddon of the religious fanatic's dreams. I prefer, therefore, to understand Petersen's *Troy* as a warning to us not to make the same mistakes again, as Sophocles' *Antigone* was to his fellow Athenians.

20 Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453–1924* (1995; rpt. New York: St. Martin's, 1996), 6.

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to
Hollywood Epic

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