archaeologists now working at Troy do not agree with a few traditional scholars who insist that nothing in the archaeological evidence about Troy is connected with Homer at all. These scholars maintain, for instance, that Troy was an insignificant settlement of a size that would not fit a city as large and powerful as Homer describes it. But they fail to take into account recent archaeological discoveries and the new conclusions to which these discoveries lead us.

So where does all this take us regarding the question about the Trojan War? The answer is best expressed in two counter-questions: "Why should or could there not have been a Trojan War?" And: "Why do those who see a measure of historicity in the *Iliad* have to justify their views against any doubters?" Given today's level of knowledge, the burden of proof that there was no such war must rest on the doubters' shoulders. How, for instance, do they propose to reconcile their view of Troy as a third-rate settlement with the modern archaeological evidence concerning the thirteenth and especially the early twelfth centuries? Whether the wars or war-like conflicts of that time, in whole or in part, gave rise to the later legend of the Trojan War, or whether there had been among those wars or campaigns an especially remarkable one that was thought to be worthy of preservation first in memory and legend and then in heroic poetry – all this is yet unknown. But at the moment everything indicates that we ought to take Homer seriously about the background information of a war between Trojans and Greeks that his epic provides. Future research and the evaluation of current and yet-to-be-discovered evidence must take such information into consideration. According to the current state of our knowledge, the story told in the *Iliad* most likely contains a kernel of historical truth or, to put it differently, a historical substrate. Any future discussions about the historicity of the Trojan War only make sense if they ask what exactly we understand this kernel or substrate to be.

Translated by Martin M. Winkler

CHAPTER TWO

From Homer's Troy to Petersen's *Troy*

Joachim Latacz

Not all critics and reviewers of Wolfgang Petersen's film have paid sufficient attention to its title. *Troy* does not mean the same thing as *The Iliad*. Petersen was well aware that his film differs from Homer, as the end credits tell us: it was "inspired" by Homer's *Iliad*, but it is not a retelling of it. Only those who understand what this difference means can appreciate the film. So I will here address two questions to make the difference clear: What does Homer tell about Troy in the *Iliad*, and how does he tell it? And how does Petersen's *Troy* relate to Homer? My answers are intended to provide a fair appraisal of the film in regard to its subject matter.

1. *Homer's Troy*

Troy is not the subject of the *Iliad* but the site of its action. The first line of the poem states the theme: "The wrath do sing, goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles!" This announces not the history of Troy or of the Trojan War but the story of an individual. What the name signified and to what larger context it belonged was known exactly to Homer's first audiences in the late eighth century B.C. as soon as they heard it. Achilles was the greatest hero of the Greeks who once had fought at Troy. To

these audiences the name "Troy" immediately conjured up a whole long story: that of a victorious ten-year struggle their ancestors had fought long ago against the Trojans, a struggle with an extensive prehistory and aftermath. As was generally known, that story comprised a very long time. Modern scholarship has calculated a duration of at least forty years: twenty years before and ten years after the war, and a decade for the war itself, as the following outline shows. Italics indicate events occurring or mentioned in the Homeric epics:

THE COMPLETE TALE OF TROY IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

I. Prologue on Mt. Olympus

1. Zeus and Themis confer over the advisability of the Trojan War.
2. Zeus fathers Helen on Nemesis/Leda.
3. *Zeus and Hera force the sea goddess Thetis into marriage to King Peleus.*

II. The Twenty-Year Period Before the Trojan War

4. *Zeus' grandson Peleus marries Nereus' daughter Thetis on Mt. Pelion in Thessaly. All gods except Eris (Strife) attend. Peleus' and Thetis' child will be Achilles.*
5. Eris sows discord among Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite over which of them is the most beautiful.
6. *The three goddesses approach Paris (Alexander), son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy and shepherd on Mt. Ida, as judge. Paris had been exposed there as an infant.*
7. *Judgment of Paris: Aphrodite is the most beautiful. Paris' reward will be Helen, wife of King Menelaus of Sparta.*
8. *Paris sails to Greece and abducts Helen from Sparta.*
9. *The Greeks muster to take revenge. They elect Agamemnon, King of Mycenae and brother of Menelaus, as their leader.*
10. *The Greek fleet departs from Aulis but lands in Mysia, too far south of Troy.*
11. Achilles wounds Telephus, king of Mysia.
12. *The Greek fleet leaves Mysia for Troy but is scattered by a storm.*
13. *The Greek fleet again assembles at Aulis. Agamemnon kills a hart sacred to Artemis and is forced to sacrifice Iphigenia, his daughter by Helen's sister Clytemnestra (Klytaimestra).*
14. Telephus arrives at Aulis and is healed.
15. *Calchas the seer receives an augury that appears to predict the fall of Troy in the tenth year of the war.*

16. *The Greek fleet departs from Aulis again and lands on the islands of Tenedos and Lemnos. Philoctetes is abandoned on Lemnos.*

III. The Ten Years of the Trojan War

A. The First Nine Years

17. *The Greek fleet lands in the Troad. Death of Protesilaus.*
18. *An embassy to the Trojans led by Odysseus and Menelaus to demand Helen and Paris is unsuccessful.*
19. Achilles kills Cycnus.
20. *Achilles conquers 23 mainland and island towns to isolate Troy. Among his captives are Chryseis and Briseis. The former functions as the starting point for the* Iliad.

B. The Last Year

21. *The plot of the* Iliad *(51 days), a small episode in the entire war, now occurs, with the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles and its consequences, especially the deaths of Patroclus, Achilles' closest friend, and Hector, son of Priam and Troy's greatest hero.*
22. The Amazon queen Penthesilea arrives and is defeated by Achilles. Thersites abuses Achilles, who kills him. The Ethiopian king Memnon arrives and kills Nestor's son Antilochos, among others.
23. *Paris and Apollo bring about Achilles' death.*
24. Ajax and Odysseus dispute about Achilles' divine armor. Odysseus wins; Ajax is driven to madness and suicide.
25. *Odysseus causes Philoctetes and Achilles' son Neoptolemus to join the army.*
26. *Odysseus' trick with the wooden horse brings about the fall of Troy and the deaths of most of the Trojans, among them Priam.*

IV. The Ten Years of the Greeks' Returns

27. *The Greek survivors return home. Agamemnon is killed in Mycenae by Clytemnestra in revenge for Iphigenia's death.*
28. *The plot of the* Odyssey *(40 days): Odysseus returns to his island kingdom of Ithaca after ten years of wanderings. He is reunited with his wife Penelope and his son Telemachus and restored to power after an absence of 20 years.*
29. Further travels of Odysseus; he is killed by Telegonus, his son with Circe.

V. The Survival of Troy

30. The plot of Virgil's *Aeneid*: Aeneas, son of Anchises and Aphrodite (Venus), journeys to Italy in search of a new home for the surviving Trojans, including his son Ascanius. Their descendants found the city of Rome. Fusion of Greek myth and Roman history.

The reason why Homer's audiences were closely familiar with this complex tale is that *aoidoi* ("singers") had already told it in countless performances to numerous generations. Besides many other such stories such as those about Jason and the Argonauts or the Seven against Thebes, the story of Troy was part of the standard repertory of these *aoidoi*, who formed a kind of professional guild. While the singers told the familiar stories each in different ways – otherwise they would probably have lost their audiences – certain things remained fixed. They could not change because the main plot had to remain recognizable.

One of these unchanging parts was the motif of a quarrel in the Greeks' own camp. As the old story had it, again and again during the ten-year siege disagreements had arisen among the leaders allied against Troy. We may surmise that since long before Homer one of these disagreements in the story was between the most important leaders of the Greek forces, Agamemnon, king of Argos-Mycenae on the Peloponnesus in southern Greece and commander-in-chief of the entire military alliance, and Achilles, prince of Phthia in Achaia Phthiotis (Thessaly), an area in northern Greece, and commander of the most powerful individual contingent in the Greek army. We no longer know how large a part this controversy had played in earlier or contemporary recitals of the *aoidoi*, but our evidence suggests that it had been rather marginal to the story of Troy as a whole. Most likely, the *aoidoi* had emphasized the city itself and the grim nature of the war in their versions – i.e., the outer, action-driven plot – rather than the inner lives of individual figures, their emotions and motivations.

Homer, however, radically turned around audiences' familiar perspective on the story.[1] He did not start with the gigantic panorama of the mighty Trojan city and country near the Hellespont or with the armies of attackers and defenders arranged in battle lines, but he began with something much smaller: an individual hero. Homer did not even take something obvious such as this man's heroic exploits in battle as his point of departure but rather something much more personal, even private: his wrath. For audiences who knew the standard versions of the tale, this beginning must have been utterly new and surprising, conjuring up a feeling of suspense. What was this singer Homer, standing right there before them, getting at? Surely not something soulful or sentimental? Homer's second line at once dispelled any such concerns: "that baneful wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans . . ." So the wrath of an individual hero would only be the starting point of a tale that was going to deal with Troy after all, if from an utterly unusual point of view. The tale was not going to focus on the Trojan War as a real event of the past, nor even on war as such, its struggles, sacrifices, and bloodshed, but on the aftermath that warfare brings to those who fight and suffer in any war. Chief emphasis would be on the Greeks and their alliance: their tensions, dissensions, and, finally, the grievous suffering caused by one man's anger. Homer structured his story as follows; numbers in brackets identify books and lines in the text:

1 I provide an introduction to Homeric epic in *Homer: His Art and His World*, tr. James P. Holoka (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996; rpt. 1998). On Homer and his connections to the history of Troy see now my *Troy and Homer: Towards a Solution of an Old Mystery*, tr. Kevin Windle and Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The essay collection *Troia: Traum und Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2001; rpt. 2002) deals with all aspects of the topic and contains numerous illustrations.

THE TEMPORAL STRUCTURE OF THE *ILIAD*

Prologue (1.1–12a): the poet invokes his Muse and announces his theme

I. Exposition (21 days)

1. *Day 1* (1.12b–52): Chryses
2. *Days 2–9* (1.53): plague in Greek camp
3. *Day 10* (1.54–476): quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, embassy to Chryse
4. *Day 11* (1.477–492): return of embassy, wrath of Achilles
5. *Days 12–20* (1.493): gods visit the Ethiopians
6. *Day 21 and following night* (1.493–2.47): Thetis' plea to Zeus, Agamemnon's dream

II. Main Narrative (6 days)

7. *Day 22 (2.48–7.380): First Day of Fighting*
   - Agamemnon tempts the army
   - catalogues (review of troops)
   - first truce: duel of Menelaus and Paris is to decide outcome of war
   - Helen and Priam look down on Greek army from walls of Troy
   - Pandarus breaks truce

- great deeds of Diomedes
- Hector in Troy
- duel between Hector and Ajax

8. *Day 23* (7.381–432): second truce, burials of the dead
9. *Day 24* (7.433–482): Greeks build walls around their camp
10. *Day 25 and following night (8.1–10.579): Second Day of Fighting*
    - Greeks forced to retreat
    - Trojans camp on the plain before Troy
    - Greek embassy to Achilles
    - Dolon episode
11. *Day 26 and following night (11.1–18.617): Third Day of Fighting*
    - great deeds of Agamemnon
    - great deeds of Hector
    - Greek leaders wounded
    - Achilles sends Patroclus to Nestor
    - fighting at the walls of the Greek camp
    - Trojans invade Greek camp
    - fighting by the Greek ships
    - Hera seduces Zeus
    - great deeds of Patroclus, his death in a duel with Hector
    - Achilles' new armor, description of his shield
12. *Day 27 and following night (19.1–23.110a): Fourth Day of Fighting*
    - settlement of quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles
    - great deeds of Achilles
    - duel of Achilles and Hector, Hector's death

III. CONCLUSION (24 DAYS)

13. *Day 28* (23.110b–257a): funeral of Patroclus
14. *Day 29 and following night* (23.257b–24.21): games in honor of Patroclus
15. *Days 30–40* (24.22–30): Achilles abuses Hector's body
16. *Day 41 and following night* (24.31–694): Priam visits Achilles and obtains release of Hector's body
17. *Day 42* (24.695–781): Hector brought back to Troy
18. *Days 43–50* (24.782–784): third truce
19. *Day 51* (24.785–804): funeral of Hector

Homer's ultimate subject was how horribly the wrath of a leader, a great personality, could affect a large common undertaking. This was something new and far more gripping than any of the traditional versions of

the well-known Trojan War story, for to Homer's audiences this was an urgent problem at that very time.

So Homer's version of the story reflects current concerns about fundamental issues, among them the applicability of traditional values such as honor, rank, devotion to a common cause, and, above all, qualities of leadership. The *Iliad* shows us how discussions or quarrels of such a basic nature may arise between two high-ranking and sharply intelligent leaders through an escalation of emotions that leads to the humiliation and dishonor of one of the antagonists. As a result of his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles boycotts the common undertaking. He regards his own dishonor to be a suspension of social and ethical norms. The only way he sees for them to become binding on everybody again is to bring about a situation of extreme danger to his own side. Only this, he believes, will force Agamemnon, now faced with the utter ruin of the alliance he leads, to realize his error, make amends, and beg Achilles to return to the Greek army. In this way Achilles and the social norms that all Greeks had previously adhered to will be rehabilitated.

Indeed, Achilles' calculation leads to the desired effect – but only after insulter and insulted alike and, more importantly, the entire alliance have suffered heavy losses in manpower and prestige and have had to abandon their former innocence regarding human existence. All concerned have to realize that later excuses or remorse among their fellow men or acts of revenge against their enemy cannot undo or even alleviate the losses endured. The military alliance survives; it continues to fight and will eventually be victorious. But it has utterly lost any illusions about the excellence or special quality of its leadership. It has learned a sobering, perhaps useful, lesson, but its old fighting spirit is gone forever. This is the deeper contemporary meaning of Homer's perspective as expressed in the *Iliad*, as his original listeners and the audiences throughout the eighth century B.C. clearly understood.

Evidence of this understanding comes from later epic poems about the matter of Troy that were composed around 600 B.C. At this time Greek culture had made significant advances, brought about mainly by the introduction of writing some 200 years before. Literacy was now almost a matter of course. As a result, people no longer experienced the old stories told orally by *aoidoi* as often as before and so lost their familiarity with the larger framework of their tales. But these tales presupposed audiences' knowledge of their contexts, to which the *aoidoi* constantly alluded; now they ran the risk of being no longer understood. To counteract this growing risk of unfamiliarity, poets began to write down in separate compositions all that the original audiences had

spontaneously thought of when listening to the *aoidoi*. These new and written epics told stories "around" the *Iliad*, which by now had also been written down. That is to say, they encircled the *Iliad* with tales of its entire prehistory and aftermath. These cyclical epics, also called the Epic Cycle – after Greek *kyklos*, "cycle, circle" – have been lost, but we possess later prose versions that retell or summarize their content.[2] As a result, we are in a position to reconstruct the entire plot of the Troy story from its earliest beginnings to its ultimate ramifications, as shown in my outline above. From these sources we learn that after the funeral of Hector, with which the *Iliad* closes, the allied Greek armies were indeed unable to take Troy by military force alone. Their vast assembly of originally 1,186 ships and over 100,000 men as calculated in Book 2 of the *Iliad* could win victory only by means of military trickery – a wooden horse! Even worse: after an angry and savage destruction of the city the Greek alliance collapsed. No proud armada returned to the harbors of Greece; no victory parades, celebrations, or speeches for the conquerors upon their arrival. Instead, each king's flotilla sailed home by its own route. The heroes who had survived were driven by storms far off course throughout the Mediterranean and made their way home only years later, quietly and barely noticeably, as was the case with Odysseus. Agamemnon reached home only to be slaughtered that very day by his own wife in the bath. What an end for the glorious conqueror of Troy!

So it is clear that the story which Homer tells is not at all the story of the Trojan War, of its causes and effects. But what kind of story is it, and what does it have to do with Troy?

As mentioned before, Homeric scholarship has made it evident over the past fifteen years or so that the main theme of the *Iliad* can be understood only through the time of its origins. Let us pursue this line of research a bit further. In its present form and under a misleading title added later, the *Iliad* is a product of the second half of the eighth century B.C. For the people of that time the Trojan War, the context of the poem's plot, was a kind of early or pre-history. Today we know that such a war, if it had indeed taken place, must have occurred about 400 years earlier, in the thirteenth century. This is something that Homer's audiences did not know. Since they did not yet possess an exact chronology and so lacked any orderly sense of history, they considered this war to have been an actual event in an era long gone. So the war was only of limited – we might say: historical – interest to them. They had other concerns. To understand the relationship between the epic's narrator and audience in the eighth century, we must turn to the historical conditions then prevalent.

2 On these epics see now Jonathan S. Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), a recent study with an updated bibliography. For textual editions and translations see *Greek Epic Fragments from the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries* B.C., ed. and tr. M. L. West (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). Cf. also Quintus of Smyrna, *The Trojan Epic: Posthomerica*, ed. and tr. Alan James (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

In Greece, the eighth century was a time of departure after a long period of stagnation. Greek tribes had immigrated into the southern Balkan peninsula around 2000 B.C. and had developed a flourishing culture in the area still known as Greece. They had built a sophisticated infrastructure that was administered from palatial centers distributed throughout the region. An early form of syllabic writing, which modern scholars have called Linear B, was used extensively for accounting and governing purposes. It survives on thousands of clay tablets which, together with documents written in other scripts and languages of the time and alongside the vast archaeological finds throughout the Mediterranean, reveal how wide-ranging the Greeks' international diplomatic and economic relations in the second half of the second millennium B.C. had been: with Egyptians in the south; with Hittites, Babylonians, and Assyrians in the east; and with many smaller countries around the Mediterranean. About 1200 B.C., however, an invasion of warlike tribes from the north caused the complete destruction of this culture. The palaces went up in flames, central administration collapsed, and leadership elites, when not killed in defensive battles, fled, mainly to Cyprus. The common people fell back into anarchy, many reverting to the status of nomads.

Still, a few centers survived the catastrophe and provided the impulses for an eventual return to civilization about 450 years later. Among these were Athens, some parts of central Greece, and the island of Euboea. From about 800 B.C. the Greeks sought new contacts with foreign powers. They took over and improved on their neighbors' technical inventions and cultural achievements. Among the latter were the Phoenicians' alphabet, used today in its Latinized form, and long-distance commerce from the Levant via Greece to Italy and from there even to the Baltic Sea. Next came the largest phase of colonization in pre-modern history when Greeks founded cities along all the coasts of the Mediterranean world. Extensive maritime exchanges of goods and information also began. All this amounted to a rapid broadening of the Greeks' geographic and intellectual horizons.

But it did not happen out of the blue. A new leadership class was needed to organize, administer, and direct all commercial, social, and political activities. This new ruling class in part consisted of descendants

of those who had been in power before the general collapse. Eighth-century aristocrats provided the impulses for further developments, but at the same time they saw themselves threatened by an all too rapid progress. While the previous aristocracy had enjoyed unchallenged control of leadership, new classes were now rising as a result of increasing colonization, navigation, trade, and productivity and demanded their share of power and influence. So aristocrats became unsure of themselves: How to deal with these developments? What about their traditional cultural norms and ethical values, which before had been followed unquestioningly? Were these to be given up or at least modified? Were honor, dignity, truthfulness, reliability, and responsibility to be adapted to modern times and changing beliefs? Or should they stubbornly adhere to the tried and true? In the latter case, all the aristocrats had to stick together; no one was allowed to deviate from their community; common interests had to trump an individual's wishes or desires. So there could be no quarrel among the elite under any circumstances. From this point of view, the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon was a bad and terrifying example, a warning how not to act or react. And yet: if the cause of this quarrel were those very norms fundamental to society, was it not unavoidable? Should such a quarrel then not be permissible or even be encouraged in certain situations because, after all, social cohesion can only be based on clearly understood and commonly held norms? And was not such a quarrel necessary to provide leaders with ways to deal with newly arising circumstances? If so, could Achilles not demonstrate how much better a strong protest against Agamemnon's absolute authority would turn out to be than the conformity and appeasement, as we might call it, of an Odysseus?

These are the fundamental questions the *Iliad* raises, of topical concern to eighth-century Greeks and not at all unfamiliar to us today since we live in an age of a technological revolution that is comparable in its global reach to the impact which the first phonetic script ever introduced in human history had on the Mediterranean world. Should or can we continue today on the well-trodden paths of our political institutions? Or should we instead begin to think about the feasibility of entirely new forms of government? Homer makes such questions his main subject since no other medium of communication existed at the time to function as the aristocrats' mouthpiece. For centuries epic poetry alone had been the aristocracy's means to state and rethink its social position and the demands made on it by changing times. Homer's epic about Achilles represents an attempt at dealing with the urgent contemporary problem, as yet unsolved, of how the aristocracy should define itself

and its rights and responsibilities. So Homer presents his audience with several characters – Achilles, Agamemnon, Nestor, Odysseus, Ajax, and Diomedes among others – who discuss or exemplify various ways of reacting to new situations or problems. All this occurs in a plot which pushes its conflicts, once arisen, to such an extreme, an extreme imaginable only in great literature, that the kind of compromise that must have been a common way out in reality should here become impossible.

Once we read the *Iliad* from this perspective, that of Homer's original audiences, we begin to realize that everything in the epic that is of primary interest to us – the matter of Troy and the Trojan War – was of only secondary importance to its poet and audiences. They were far less concerned with that war than with their own problems, for which Troy and the whole Trojan War provided only the backdrop. What then does this leave us with? The story of Troy as a whole is a narrative web comprising a period of about forty years, a web far too complex in its episodes, characters, connections, and ramifications to be the invention of one poet. Homer composed the story of Achilles and his wrath in an epic which later generations came to call the *Iliad*. He embedded his own narrative, which comprises only fifty-one days but which points to important contemporary issues, within the already existing, widely familiar, and much larger narrative of Troy. In this way he freed himself from having to provide a framework for his story. He selected a specific segment from the wider narrative, a part he then examined in close-up, as it were. In this way he directed his original audiences' and our attention to a circumscribed number of characters and to a particular problem and its impact.

Such a narrative technique can be found in the history of world literature again and again. Various segments from the same meganarrative of Troy recurred, for example, in Greek tragedy of the fifth century B.C. and in Roman myth-based epic poetry like Virgil's *Aeneid*. The pattern continues in modern works like Derek Walcott's *Omeros* or Christa Wolf's *Cassandra*, to mention only two highly sophisticated representative examples. The figure of Achilles, too, has undergone significant changes in the ways authors have presented him.[3] Such literature reprises ancient myths and is indebted to Homer's example. French literary scholar Gérard Genette calls such literature a palimpsest, using the Greek term for a piece of papyrus whose original text has been erased (*palimpseston* = "scratched off") and whose surface has been covered

3 Cf. on this topic my *Achilleus: Wandlungen eines europäischen Heldenbildes* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995).

with a new text. Genette has developed a sophisticated theory that is applicable to practically all literature. Small wonder that Homer is his starting point.[4] (For comparison's sake, consider the Bible and its influence.) As a result, today we possess an enormously complex web of interrelated texts and visual narratives that deal with the matter of Troy. But all of them have certain features in common. They all fit or can be embedded into a system of narratives that has become canonical. It allows of numerous variations and deviations from one version to another, but it demands that its basic structure remain fundamentally unchanged. In turn, this system guarantees that readers and viewers can recognize the pattern. Themes and variations are familiar, useful, and pleasant each time we encounter the story or parts of it. Within the overall frame, of course, much can be newly invented or made to serve new purposes, such as contemporary concerns. All this ensures the survival even across millennia of the original frame story within which the new versions are placed.

Evidently it is this technique that the author of our *Iliad* adopted when he took over the familiar story of Troy as the frame within which to present his own narrative, voicing his own concerns. Consequently the story of Troy and the Trojan War must have been available to him when he began the *Iliad* and must have afforded him a vast array of events and characters; otherwise we could not account for the large number of references or allusions that the *Iliad* contains to parts of the whole that are far removed in time from its own plot. Nor could we explain the presence in the *Iliad* of certain motifs that it does not fully develop but seems only to play with. This means that the matter of Troy must have been quite ancient at the time the *Iliad* was composed and must have reached a level of great complexity. The very size of the Troy story as we know it makes the conclusion unavoidable that long before Homer many *aoidoi* had embedded their own versions into the old frame of the matter of Troy, also expressing their own contemporary concerns and in turn contributing to the story's expansion. They are certain to have used plot material already embedded by their predecessors, just as later generations of oral poets and eventually the literate poets from antiquity until today were to do. The tradition of epic poetry composed and transmitted orally that has survived into the twenty-first century, for example in Serbo-Croatia, provides us with a modern analogy. For professional reasons alone each of these modern *aoidoi* was and is keenly

4 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, tr. Channa Newman and Claude Dubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

interested in becoming familiar with as many versions of the stories in his colleagues' repertory as possible. The same must have been the case with Homer himself. When he took it up again in the eighth century to address current concerns, Homer could count on his listeners' knowledge of its frame. He could have found no more effective a subject than this old story with its long-familiar characters, making it, or rather a part of it, fresh and newly meaningful. In this way he did not have to start by inventing his own plot and characters; instead, he could immediately concentrate on what was of prime importance to him.

It is highly regrettable that all of the pre-Homeric uses of the frame story about Troy have been lost, since they had been performed only orally. Before the art of writing came to Greece in the eighth century, they could not have been preserved beyond a poet's death, except as part of the continuing, if anonymous, palimpsest tradition. Only after writing became common could the Greeks begin to preserve a version of the old tale that they considered to reveal exceptional value or beauty. This version was Homer's. It was later called *Iliad*, but this name is quite erroneous, as we know by now. For all of Western culture Homer's poetry came to be the prototype of literature, and the *Iliad* became the ancestor of all written narratives until today. We can already see what this means for Petersen's *Troy*, the most recent kind of palimpsest to address the matter of Troy, although one that primarily uses images rather than words.

2. *Petersen's* Troy

The title of the film, as mentioned, directs us not so much to Homer's *Iliad* as to the story that people from antiquity to today have associated with the name of that famous city. As we have seen, this is a subject far larger than what the *Iliad* deals with. It was, and still is, the story of the destruction of a mighty and rich city brought about in a war against a Mediterranean superpower, the allied kingdoms in areas that roughly correspond to modern Greece. The Greeks – Homer's Achaeans – apparently wanted to eliminate Troy for some reason. If the story is based on fact – and more and more discoveries indicate that it is – a possible reason is that the city was an obstacle to the Greeks' access to the Black Sea and to its rich coastal regions. To make such a story immediately accessible and visually impressive to modern audiences who do not know the entire wide-ranging background that is involved, Petersen and David Benioff, his screenwriter, had to do two things. First, they had to

condense the extensive ramifications of the Troy narrative of which ancient sources, and not only the *Iliad*, tell us and to concentrate on a limited number of crucial plot points. Secondly – and this is crucial for any appreciation of the film – they had to do the very thing that Homer had done in order to present audiences with something more meaningful than an empty if grandiose historical spectacle. To draw them into the narrative in such a way that viewers today, just like Homer's original listeners almost 2750 years earlier, could emotionally and intellectually respond to a tale they were experiencing before their eyes or in their imagination, the filmmakers had to introduce contemporary references or parallels readily recognizable to most viewers, and they had to focus less on the gigantic extent of the matter of Troy and the Trojan War than on the personal experiences of those embroiled in it either as combatants or as bystanders, showing their deeds and sufferings, their achievements and losses. In order to reach their goals within a limit circumscribed by cost, time, and other aspects of film production, Petersen and Benioff had to accept a number of compromises. One of these is Petersen's recourse to formulaic presentations of battle scenes that viewers have come to expect from the long tradition of sword-and-sandal films, although I believe that Petersen's direction of these scenes subtly subverts audience expectations, at least as far as he could do so without arousing suspicions on the part of studio bosses or members of his team. Clearly, historical accuracy concerning the thirteenth century B.C. – something that not even archaeologists, Bronze-Age historians, or Homeric scholars have fully achieved, given the current if constantly increasing state of our knowledge of that time – did not have to be Petersen's chief concern. Nor could it have been. Nor had it been Homer's chief concern. This is the main reason why criticism of the film on the part of scholars who miss accurate reproductions of ancient buildings, ships, weapons, tools, clothes, social institutions, etc. are beside the point, are indeed inappropriate. Modern Homeric scholarship knows only too well that Homer himself was severely limited in his factual knowledge of Troy, having never laid eyes on the city he was telling about. Scholars also know that neither Homer nor his listeners, who had never seen the Troy of the story and so could not check the extent of Homer's knowledge of it, greatly cared about what we call historical accuracy. Homer's concerns, as we saw, lay altogether elsewhere. He cared about presenting conflicts, feelings and passions, intrigues, fear and suffering, honor and treason, and many other related aspects of the human condition that a great war brings out in people and that go beyond their everyday lives. Petersen took direct recourse to this perspective. Notwithstanding some weaknesses in dialogue or plot construction, Petersen's film will be a surprising achievement for anybody who knows the *Iliad*.

Petersen and Benioff should not be criticized that, in order to achieve such effects, they sometimes changed the sequence of events, had characters die earlier than they do in Homer or in other ancient sources, omitted whole plot strands, or invented connections between and among characters and events about which our texts say nothing at all. The filmmakers are actually in excellent company. For example, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, besides many other playwrights in fifth-century Athens, had done just that. They surprised their audiences with variants of the venerable matter of Troy, which was a recurring subject of their tragedies. These variants of their own invention forced the Athenians to think anew about something they thought they already knew intimately. All this was far more than merely theatrical entertainment; it was the very goal of the annual festivals held in honor of the god Dionysus. We may conclude that Petersen, who as a student at the Johanneum, an elite *Gymnasium* (high school) in Hamburg, had read Homer in the original, seems to have understood much more about the nature and spirit of classical mythology and literature than most of his critics, even academic ones. Petersen was even aware of modern research concerning Troy. His Nestor says to Agamemnon after the death of Menelaus: "If we leave now, we lose all credibility. If the Trojans can beat us so easily, how long before the Hittites invade?" The Hittites were unknown to Homer; only modern scholarship has known of them after their language was deciphered in 1915.

The true substance of the *Iliad* and of *Troy* alike is to be found in the scenes between individuals who are faced with critical issues. Such private and intimate scenes, for example those between Hector and Andromache, convey an emotionally touching immediacy. Or consider the Trojan brothers Hector and Paris. They have achieved a peace treaty between Troy and Sparta and are now sailing back home. Paris shows Hector a stowaway: Helen, the wife of the Spartan king Menelaus. Paris and Helen have fallen in love. Hector knows that Helen's secret eloping with Paris constitutes a cause for war, annihilating years of diplomacy and setting aside the peace treaty. So Hector immediately wants to return Helen to Menelaus, but Paris threatens to go back with her. His death would be unavoidable, and so Hector relents. Brotherly love wins out over reasons of state. But tragedy ensues.

In another scene, Achilles and Briseis, here a priestess of Apollo and Achilles' captive, are discussing the gods. A bitter Briseis, who has

considered Achilles to be no more than a killing machine, "a dumb brute," comments on his apparent lack of reverence for the gods ("All the gods are to be feared and respected"). In return, Achilles observes that the gods admire humans for the mortality that gives meaning to their existence: "The gods envy *us*. They envy us because we're mortal, because any moment might be our last. Everything is more beautiful because we're doomed." Briseis now begins to understand Achilles better. The scene reveals that one of the main charges critics have leveled against Petersen – that he omitted the gods from his narrative – is wrong. The gods *are* present in *Troy*. They are *inside the humans*. As a result, Petersen's conception of Achilles is appropriate. Yes, Achilles is a ruthless killer, as he had been in the *Iliad*. But he takes no pleasure in his killings, as his facial expressions reveal. (The same, by the way, is true for Hector, Achilles' greatest antagonist.) Achilles is a solitary character, a lonely hero. Like Homer's, Petersen's protagonist shows that greatness of spirit that allows him eventually to rise above the inhumanity of war. He returns the body of Hector, whom he has killed in a duel, to Hector's father. The depth of Priam's love for his dead son conquers Achilles. When he himself is dying, he sends Briseis, whom he loves, away. Achilles is fated to die, but Briseis he wants to live. The film intends to show us that peace is far better than war. So it had been for Homer.

Petersen has understood Homer. Following the examples of Homer and other ancient poets, he did the only right thing: he emphasized several, if not all, of the themes that had already been important to Homer and his audiences. *Troy* is not an empty spectacle but an estimable attempt at presenting great literature in the popular medium of film. For this Petersen deserves our gratitude.

Translated by Martin M. Winkler

CHAPTER THREE

The *Iliad* and the Cinema

Martin M. Winkler

Probably the most famous verdict ever passed on a translation of Homer was that of Richard Bentley, the great classical scholar of eighteenth-century England. Bentley told Alexander Pope about his translation of the *Iliad*: "it is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope; but you must not call it *Homer*."[1] Comparable negative views that classicists have held about translations and adaptations of ancient literature have echoed Bentley ever since. Usually these scholars have been disappointed that the new work is insufficiently faithful to the original. Classicists tend to reserve their greatest scorn, however, for adaptations of ancient masterpieces to modern mass media. Cinema and television, they believe, only turn sacred texts into fodder for the undiscriminating millions. Vulgarity is inevitably the result, for how can a profit-driven industry like Hollywood avoid catering to the lowest common denominator? Rare exceptions apparently only prove the rule.[2]

1 Quoted from *Lives of the English Poets by Samuel Johnson, LL. D.*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, vol. 3: *Swift–Lyttleton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 213 note 2, with references; cf. also 275–276 (Appendix N) for other contemporary views of Pope's *Iliad*. See further Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New York: Norton/New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 348, 642, and 877 (note on 348). Bentley's words are sometimes quoted slightly differently.

2 A representative recent example of a scholar's contempt for a film deriving from a canonical text is the review of *Troy* by Daniel Mendelsohn, "A Little *Iliad*," *The New York*

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