through the stories of individuals. But in going beyond the laws of the physical world and appealing to supernatural entities like gods and superhuman heroes, history became myth and men became legends. *Troy* explains how this might have happened because the film adapts ancient Greek tales to a modern Hollywood story and so historicizes myth. As poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau observed: "History consists of truths which in the end turn into lies, while myth consists of lies which finally turn into truths."[8]

8 Quoted from the documentary *Jean Cocteau: Autobiography of an Unknown* (1985), directed by Edgardo Cozarinsky. – I should like to thank colleagues at the Universities of Reading and London for their comments, with special thanks to Alastair Blanshard.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Fate of Troy

Stephen Scully

Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* is no *Iliad*, but why should it be? Virgil's *Aeneid* is no *Iliad*, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* no *Odyssey*. Nor should they be. Petersen's primary task is not fidelity to an ancient text but to tell, as Homer does, a rousing good story. The credits say that *Troy* is "inspired by" the *Iliad*, but the title suggests that the film also intends to deviate from Homer's poem. Some of Petersen's innovations are splendid, none less so than Briseis herself killing Agamemnon. Such an idea might have sparked the envy of the ancient poets had they learned of it, even if Agamemnon's premature death at Troy would have made havoc of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and deprived Clytemnestra of the pleasure of dispatching her disagreeable husband. Another innovation in the film, although less bold, is the attention Petersen devotes to Troy itself, the doomed city. To a far greater extent than possible in Homer's telling, Petersen's reshaping of the story makes his audience experience the pathos of a city destroyed.

To discuss that pathos, we must say something about the film's overall design, on which my view is mixed. If we judge by its opening and close, *Troy* is rather dreadful. Comparison with Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) makes the point. *Gladiator* has a terrific opening scene. It is not hampered by historical accuracy, but that hardly takes away from the thrill of the action. *Gladiator* begins with the highly mechanized Roman army poised for battle against a German horde of barbarians in

a dense forest. There is little historical likelihood or even logic in all this, but the sequence made for great spectacle and set the pace for the remainder of the film. The cool efficiency of the film's hero in the hand-to-hand slaughter which follows only enhanced our sense of Rome's bloody might. It did not take much imagination to see how such a culture could turn this art of war to the pleasures of the gladiatorial games. No other civilization has made the spectacle of man-killing a commonplace sport.

The opening scenes of *Troy* pale by comparison. The film begins with an episode introducing Achilles and Agamemnon but not with the scene from the *Iliad*. In northern Greece, Agamemnon's army stands poised to do battle against the forces of a local king when the two leaders agree to spare their troops and let a duel of their champions decide the day. After the Thessalian king calls out a name, a hulk of a man comes forward amid great cheers. But when poor Agamemnon calls out Achilles' name, no one appears. His hero is back at the nearby village, sleeping after a night with two local girls. When he finally makes it to the front, he dispatches his gargantuan opponent by coming up on him on the run, soaring high in the air, and in his descent piercing his neck and shoulder blade with the point of his sword. The scene is needlessly contrived, although Achilles' balletic leap foreshadows his climactic duel with Hector. The film then cuts to Sparta, where Menelaus and Helen are hosting a Trojan peace embassy. Prospects of a successful mission quickly vanish when at a banquet steeped in medieval-looking revelry and Persian excess the pretty-faced Paris slips away to Helen who is waiting upstairs. Menelaus fails to notice his wife's indiscretions as his hands and eyes are on the dancing girls in the banquet hall, but Hector, Paris' older and socially minded brother, is more observant. When he wrinkles his brow with concern, we suspect that Paris' actions do not bode well for Troy. Both scenes smack of 1950s Hollywood sword-and-sandal stories of love and war.

Troy, to its peril, has done away with Homer's gods, although Achilles' immortal mother Thetis does make an odd cameo appearance as an aging goddess. The absence of divine machinery and its mundane dialogue keep *Troy* from achieving epic greatness. We first sense trouble when Helen greets Paris with the ponderously earnest line: "Last night was a mistake." Apparently the lovers have met like this before. For what reason? In the ancient tradition, they have been brought together by the power of the gods. Petersen is forced to concoct reasonable motivations of his own. It is not Aphrodite's bitter-sweet Eros that draws Helen to Paris but rather her desire to live a comfortable life with a man

she can relate to: "I don't want a hero. I want a man I can grow old with." Nor does Paris elevate the dialogue with his comment: "Men will hurt us . . . but I will love you until the day they burn my body. I will love you." As readers of Homer since antiquity have recognized, much of the greatness of the *Iliad* lies in its speeches. But nowhere have Petersen's changes let Homer down more than in the script and the motivation of the plot. Both the dialogue and the humdrum reasons for war reduce an epic scale to the commonplace. Something other than dialogue and nuanced portrayal of character are necessary to hold our interest and attention. For me, it was anxiety for the welfare of Troy, a concern which Petersen managed to keep fresh throughout.

Nor does its closing scene enhance the film. In keeping with his excision of the gods and using another medieval symbol, Petersen first substitutes an old if elegant-looking sword for the Palladium, the ancient statue of Pallas Athena, which the Greek and Roman traditions identify with the safety of Troy. Ancient lore has it that this small wooden image of the armed goddess fell from the heavens in response to a prayer from Ilus, the founder of Troy, and secured the city as long as it was in Trojan hands. According to post-Homeric Greek sources, Odysseus and Diomedes whisked it away from Troy and so made the sack of the city possible. Romans claimed that Aeneas rescued the Palladium from the burning city and brought it to Italy, where he became the ancestor of the Romans.

Modifying an early scene from the *Iliad*, Petersen introduces the magic sword at a moment of high pathos when Priam, fearful for his son's life and for the welfare of Troy, hands it to Paris in a garden before he faces Menelaus in a duel in front of the city walls. As he hands the sword to his son, Priam tells him about its antiquity and the legend that the Trojan line will never die as long as it remains in Trojan hands. In the duel Menelaus wounds Paris in the thigh and knocks his sword to the ground. With a cowardliness almost unbearable to watch, Paris hobbles back to his brother standing nearby and falls down at his feet, but he leaves the charmed emblem of Troy's future behind. Hector saves the day by stepping in for his younger brother and killing Menelaus. Getting rid of Helen's Greek husband simplifies the story, and with this bold revision the filmmakers avoid the melodramatic encounter between Menelaus and Helen at war's end when, according to non-Homeric sources, he is ready to pierce her with his sword. Nor need they allude to the couple's resumption of their marriage and their eternal life in the Elysian Fields as forecast in the *Odyssey*. With Menelaus dead, Paris to our relief now regains a bit of his manhood and retrieves the Sword of Troy before the two armies resume combat.

Troy's talismanic sword then returns in the final scene. As the city is burning and survivors of the royal family, including Helen and Paris, sword in hand, are about to escape through a secret passageway, Paris turns to a bystander and asks him his name. "Aeneas," says the young man. In the ancient accounts, Aeneas is Paris' cousin and the legendary figure identified with continuing the Trojan line of descent as ancestor of the Romans. Here he is a new acquaintance to whom Paris hands the Sword of Troy on the spur of the moment. Heroic after all, Paris returns to the burning city, leaving Helen and her new protector to make their way to safety on their own. For those who do not know the Aeneas legend, *Troy* ends with a puzzle about the fates of Aeneas, Helen, and Paris; for those who do, *Troy* ends with a laugh.

Neither the opening nor closing scenes of *Troy* are in the *Iliad*. The film begins and ends with Paris and, in tandem with its love story about Achilles and Briseis, tells the story of a boy-lover who in a few weeks, the film's length of the Trojan War, grows up to be a man and even something of a hero. His role in *Troy* contrasts with the relative neglect of Paris in the *Iliad*. Apart from his two prominent scenes in Books 3 and 6, Paris rarely appears. From Book 7 to Book 15 there are occasional accounts of his exploits in battle, but mainly in single-line references.[1] After that, Paris, unlike Helen, disappears from the action as a major character and comes close to vanishing altogether. In the last nine books he is mentioned only five times.[2] Helen's role stands in stark contrast. She is the last woman to speak in the *Iliad* when, in a ritual lament, she mourns for Hector and her own ill fate, "for no one else in wide Troy / was gentle and dear to me, but they all bristle at the sight of me" (24.774–775).

The *Cypria*, a post-Homeric epic, indicates that Aphrodite instructed Paris to take Aeneas, not Hector, with him to Sparta, the intent being from the start to seize Helen. But unlike the *Cypria* and *Troy*, Homer says nothing about Paris' time in Sparta and only twice offers information about his return journey home.[3] Homer is equally quiet about the Judgment of Paris, alluding to it only once, when the Olympians are debating whether Hermes should steal Hector's corpse from Achilles' tent. The allusion to Paris' choice of Hera's, Athena's, and Aphrodite's gift is so oblique that Aristarchus, the leading Hellenistic critic of Homer, rejected the lines outright (*Iliad* 24.25–30).

1 *Iliad* 7.2, 355, 374, 388, 389, 400; 8.82; 11.124, 369, 505, 581; 13.766, 774; 15.341. All translations from the *Iliad* below are my own.
2 *Iliad* 22.115, 359; 24.28, 249, 763.
3 *Iliad* 3.443–445 and 6.289–292.

It hardly seems accidental that Homer's references to Paris appear near the beginning of the *Iliad*. His most prominent occurrence is in Book 3. Scarcely has the fighting between Greeks and Trojans begun when the two armies halt their combat, "hopeful to be rid of the sorrow of warfare" (3.112), and negotiate a truce for Paris and Menelaus to fight in single combat. The winner will take "the woman and the possessions" (3.254–255). If mortals had been able to have their way, friendship would have replaced war, and the legend of Troy would have ended almost before it began. But Aphrodite intervenes and, rescuing Paris from certain death, whisks him away to his bedchamber, where he and Helen make love. Homer elegantly dramatizes how the collective desire for peace is usurped by the eroticism which had sparked the war.[4] This scene appears here in order to cast aside the purported cause of the Trojan War for what will emerge as the true concerns of the *Iliad* and its major characters. The Olympian gods are at the center of these concerns.

Zeus especially takes great interest in the truce of Book 3. When nameless warriors on both sides pray to Zeus that he honor and oversee the peace treaty, the narrator comments that "none of this would the son of Cronus accomplish" (3.302). Even more than Hera, Athena, or Poseidon, Zeus is eager for the war to press on to its bitter end. After Menelaus defeats Paris in the duel and the Trojan War appears to be over, Zeus taunts Hera with the following words (4.14–19):

> Let us consider how these things will be,
> whether we should again stir up grim warfare and the terrible
> fighting, or make the armies friends with each other.
> If somehow this way were sweet and pleasing to us,
> the city of Priam might still be a place men dwell in,
> and Menelaus could lead Argive Helen home.

The *Iliad* never explains what Zeus finds sweet and pleasing in the destruction of Troy. His eagerness to see the city destroyed is especially curious as Zeus acknowledges that there is no city under the heavens which he more honors than Troy (4.44–47):

4 Cf. my "Eros and Warfare in Virgil's 'Aeneid' and Homer's 'Iliad'," in *Being There Together: Essays in Honor of Michael C. J. Putnam on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Philip Thibodeau and Harry Haskell (Afton: Afton Historical Society Press, 2003), 181–197, especially 183–184. See also Robert J. Rabel, *Plot and Point of View in the Iliad* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 75–79.

> Of all the cities of men who live upon the earth,
> cities which dwell under the sun and starry heaven,
> none has ever been more honored in my heart than sacred Ilios
> and Priam and the people of Priam of the good ash spear.

Whatever his reasons, they certainly go beyond Paris' abduction of Helen. It seems that Zeus finds sweet something which is darker and closer to the tragedy of human existence. Our understanding of Zeus' motives may lie in how he frames his love for sacred Ilios (Troy) even as he acknowledges its doom. The city, a sacred space of civic order and stability that the Greeks considered to be mankind's highest social achievement, is set within an Olympian, even cosmic, frame (sun and stars) but recognized as mortal. Like the leaves on a tree in one of the most famous similes in the *Iliad* (6.147–149), the city is only of a season. Zeus' will that his beloved Ilios fall stems less from punishment than affirmation, the perspective that the immortals alone are free from a world of change, mutability, and death.[5]

Cutting the gods out of his film, Petersen significantly domesticates plot and motivation. His recourse is to make a story of true love on the one hand and of naked imperialism on the other. How pale compared with what Homer gave him! It is crucial to the broad canvas of epic that some force larger than human contain man. In ancient epic the gods fulfill this role, but it need not always be so. In Tolstoy's *War and Peace* history functions in much the same way. Without such framing, the hero looms too large.

Petersen has been criticized for telling two stories in one: the story of Troy from beginning to end and the story of Achilles' wrath. Alcaeus, the seventh-century lyric poet from Lesbos, managed to link the two narratives with great economy:

> As the story goes, grief came to Priam and his sons
> on account of evil deeds, a bitter grief, o Helen, from you,
> and with fire Zeus destroyed
> sacred Ilios.

5 Cf. Sheila Murnaghan, "Equal Honor and Future Glory: The Plan of Zeus in the *Iliad*," in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. Deborah H. Roberts, Francis M. Dunn, and Don Fowler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 23–42, at 24, and Jenny Strauss Clay, "The Whip and the Will of Zeus," *Literary Imagination*, 1 (1999), 40–60. See further my *Homer and the Sacred City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990; rpt. 1994), 16–40 and 124–127, and "Reading the Shield of Achilles: Terror, Anger, Delight," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 101 (2003), 29–47, especially 41–44.

> Not like you was the bride whom Peleus, the noble
> son of Aeacus, married, inviting all the blessed gods
> to the wedding, taking Thetis the delicate maiden from her
> father's halls
>
> to the home of the Centaur Chiron where Peleus loosened
> the pure maiden's girdle, and his love
> and the greatest of Nereus' daughters flourished;
> within a year
>
> she bore a son, the finest of the semi-gods, Achilles,
> blessed driver of chestnut horses.
> And for Helen's sake they perished, the Phrygians
> and their city.[6]

Alcaeus' poem is often understood as a cautionary tale juxtaposing two women in order to teach adolescent girls to be good.[7] But it seems less concerned with finding a happy marriage to contrast with Helen's wretched one than with the story of two marriages converging at Troy with its deadly effect on the sacred city and its people. By postponing the phrase "sacred Ilios" to the end of the first stanza, Alcaeus stresses the heavy price of Helen's infidelity, a theme to which he returns at the end of the fourth stanza. The two marriages make a complementary pair in a divine scheme that brings on the fall of Troy. Alcaeus managed to join the marriages of Helen and Thetis in the story of Troy. Petersen did not.

Classical scholar Daniel Mendelsohn is the harshest of Petersen's critics. He quotes Aristotle's *Poetics* in his rebuke of the director:

> Homer may be said to appear "divinely inspired above the [other ancient Greek poets who wrote about the Trojan War], since he did not attempt to treat the war as a whole, although it had a beginning and an end; for the plot was bound to be too extensive and impossible to grasp all at once – or, if kept to a reasonable size, far too knotty in its complexity. Instead taking up just one section, he used many others as . . . episodes with which he gives his composition diversity. But the others construct one composite action about a single man or period, as for instance the poet of the

6 My translation of Alcaeus 42 is adapted from *Greek Lyric*, vol. 1: *Sappho and Alcaeus*, ed. and tr. David A. Campbell (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 256–259.

7 So Denys Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus: An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955; rpt. 1975), 280. For a view closer to mine cf. Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 190–198.

> *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*." . . . Petersen's *Troy* falters hopelessly for precisely the same reasons that those lost, bad poems did. *Troy* claims, in a closing credit sequence, to have been "inspired" by the *Iliad*, but however much it thinks it's doing Homer, the text it best illuminates is Aristotle's.[8]

But Petersen deserves his day in court. For Mendelsohn, the *Iliad* "is precisely about what is proposed, in its famous opening line, as its subject matter: the wrath of Achilles, its origins, its enactment, its consequences." But is the *Iliad* only about this? Its title, *Ilias*, attested at least since Herodotus, suggests otherwise.[9] It derives from Ilios, one of the two names for Troy commonly found in Homer's poem, especially in the formulaic phrase "sacred Ilios." Since antiquity, the *Iliad* has been thought to be about Achilles and Hector, and it closes with Hector (his funeral), not with Achilles (his meeting with Priam). The third-century A.D. philosopher and Homer critic Porphyry addressed the question of Homer's title this way: "Homer wished to show not only Achilles but also, in a way, all heroes . . . so unwilling to call it after one man, he used the name of the city, which merely suggested the name of Achilles."[10] There is none of this expansiveness in Mendelsohn's view of the *Iliad*.

Petersen seems to have sensed what Alcaeus had already seen, or at least part of it since he omits the gods. Homer's concentration on Achilles' wrath at the opening of the *Iliad*, a wrath directed against his fellow Greeks, initiates a process that culminates in Achilles symbolically laying waste to sacred Ilios by killing Hector, its protector. (The name "Hector" means "holder, preserver.") The structure of the *Iliad* precludes a direct narration of the fall of Troy, but the city's fate hovers perpetually over the poem and at crucial moments comes to the fore in poignant prognostications. Perhaps none is more affecting than the dirge at the end when Troy's three most prominent women, Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen, deliver speeches of lamentation. Hector's wife Andromache, speaking first, addresses her dead husband and then their son, visualizing with chilling clairvoyance the day, soon to arrive, when "some Achaian, / in a rage because Hector killed his brother, father, or

8 Daniel Mendelsohn, "A *Little Iliad*," *The New York Review of Books* (June 24, 2004), 46–49, at 46.

9 Herodotus, *The Histories* 2.116.

10 Porphyry, *Homeric Questions* 1. I quote from Seth Benardete's translation of Porphyry to draw attention to his essay, "The *Aristeia* of Diomedes and the Plot of the *Iliad*," *Agon*, 1.2 (1968), 10–38; quotation at 10.

son, / will take you by the hand and hurl you from the tower, / a horrible death" (24.734–737).

The *Iliad* may be described as one prolonged note reaching a crescendo of heroism and warfare in Book 22, when Achilles and Hector face each other in single combat. Just at the moment when the war music is at its loudest in the climactic clash between the city-defender and the city-destroyer "full of savage strength" (22.312–313), the narrative becomes strangely serene. It pauses first to describe Achilles' divine armor, which has remained largely unmentioned since Book 19 when Achilles received it (22.313–316):

> Protecting him, the shield, beautiful and elaborately wrought,
> enfolded [Achilles'] chest; he tossed his glittering four-horned
> helmet, and about it waved beautiful, golden horsehair
> plumes, which Hephaestus had set thick about the crest.

After this juxtaposition of the savage and the divine, the narrator turns to a simile (22.317–321):

> As a star goes among the stars in the night's darkening,
> the evening star, the most beautiful of the stars set in heaven,
> such was the gleam from the keen point of Achilles' spear
> as he poised it in his right hand, devising evil against godlike Hector,
> eyeing the beautiful flesh where it might especially yield.

This sudden expansiveness, likening the death-stroke to the evening star, has struck many readers. The image of a star bringing on night fits Hector's movement toward death, but the simile ultimately tells us more about Achilles and his affinities with stars mentioned in Books 18–22. Like the joyful scenes of human life among those on his shield, the evening star is remarkably distant from the violent human drama toward which the poem has been moving. The shield and the evening star become symbols of death in an impersonal world that only Achilles among mortals can gaze upon with pleasure.[11]

Clearly, this decisive moment is not only Achilles' but also Hector's, the culmination of his civic heroism in his death at Achilles' hand. As the narrator makes clear with his simile, the moment also comes as close as the *Iliad* can to a dramatization of Troy's fall (22.405–411):

11 I adapt this discussion of Book 22 from "Reading the Shield of Achilles," 46–47.

> So [Hector's] head was befouled in the dust; and now his mother
> tore out her hair, and ripped the shining veil from her,
> and let out a great wail as she looked upon her son.
> His dear father groaned piteously, and the townspeople around him
> were seized by wailing and lamentation throughout the city.
> It was most like what would happen, if all lowering
> Ilios had been burning top to bottom in fire.

As this last simile attests, by now the *Iliad* has journeyed far from its exclusive attention to Achilles and his wrath against the Achaeans in Book 1.

Petersen's film, even more than the *Iliad*, is about Troy, even if there are some significant omissions in his telling of the city's story. The women, who add great depth to Homer's epic, are reduced in grandeur, power, and number. Hecuba, Priam's wife and Hector's mother, makes no appearance. The speeches of Andromache and Helen are drastically cut as the two women are reduced to being little more than beauties who give in to male authority. Petersen once again domesticates Homer, this time shifting the famous scene of Hector, Andromache, and their infant son in Book 6 from the city gate to the bedroom. He has Andromache, sitting on the marriage bed behind a crib, beseech Hector not to fight the next day but to stay at home. While he replies ("You'd make a fine general, my love"), the camera pans to Astyanax gazing sweetly up at his parents. Petersen effectively makes us aware of all that will be lost when the city falls, but he loses Homer's mastery in setting a familial scene in a public place. Instead of the sentimentality of a baby smiling, Homer's Astyanax, on the city wall with his mother, shrieks in terror when his father, in full armor, reaches out to kiss him. It is the parents who laugh, moved by their son's understandable fear even as they are aware of the doom that awaits them all.

In Book 22, husband and wife once again meet in a public space. The scene begins with Andromache at home and preparing a bath for Hector when she hears the Trojan women shrieking from the city wall. Running like a madwoman from the house, she arrives at the wall in time to see Hector's corpse being dragged behind Achilles' chariot. As she falls into a faint, she hurls from her head the veil which Aphrodite had given her on her wedding day. In both scenes Homer recasts the intimate and familial as public and communal by setting the climax of a scene at or on the city wall. The walls of Troy symbolize the divide between civilization and war, a strong but precarious border which shelters women, children, and old men from rape or slaughter.

Plate 1 The ruins of Troy today (view from south). Lower city with excavation (foreground) and citadel (background). Courtesy of Troia Project, University of Tübingen.

Plate 2 Troy (view from south). From upper right to lower left: Schliemann's trench (Troy I), ramp and citadel walls (Troy II), citadel wall (Troy VI), Greek and Roman sanctuary (Troy VIII–IX), and houses of lower city (Troy VI–VII). Courtesy of Troia Project, University of Tübingen.

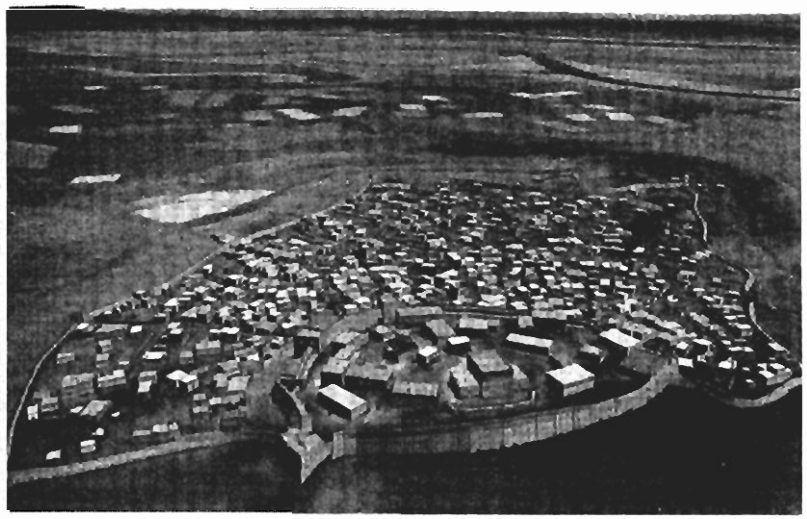

Plate 3 Computer reconstruction of Troy at the end of Troy VI (view from north). Courtesy of Troia Project, University of Tübingen.

Plate 4–5 Achilles and Briseis. Red-figure Panathenaic amphora by the Cleophrades Painter (ca. 490–480 B.C.). Antikenmuseum, Basel, and Collection Ludwig (inv. no. 424). Photo: Claire Niggli.

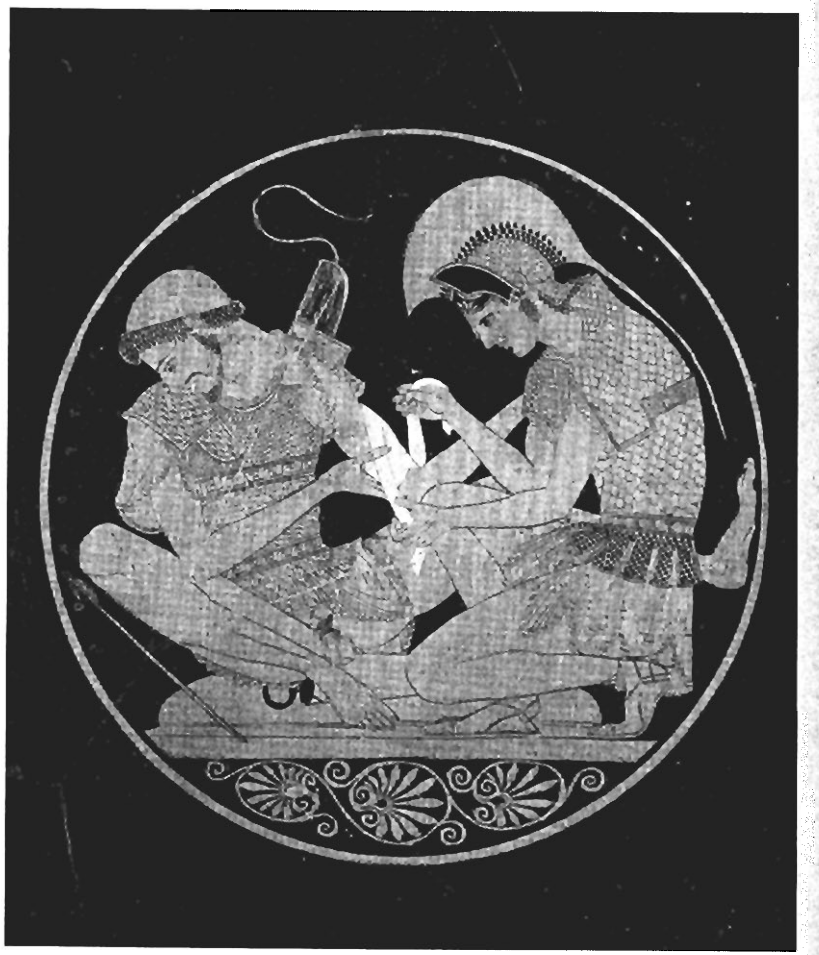

Plate 6 Achilles tending the wound of Patroclus, a scene not in the *Iliad*. Interior of Attic red-figure kylix by the Sosias Painter (ca. 500 B.C.). Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany, Archives Charmet / Bridgeman Art Library.

Plate 7 The shield of Achilles. Illustration from *Le costume ancien ou moderne* by Jules Ferrario (Milan, ca. 1820), after Angelo Monticello (1778–1837). Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France, Archives Charmet / Bridgeman Art Library.

Plate 8 The duel of Achilles and Hector. Attic red-figure volute krater attributed to the Berlin Painter (ca. 500–480 B.C.). © The Trustees of The British Museum.

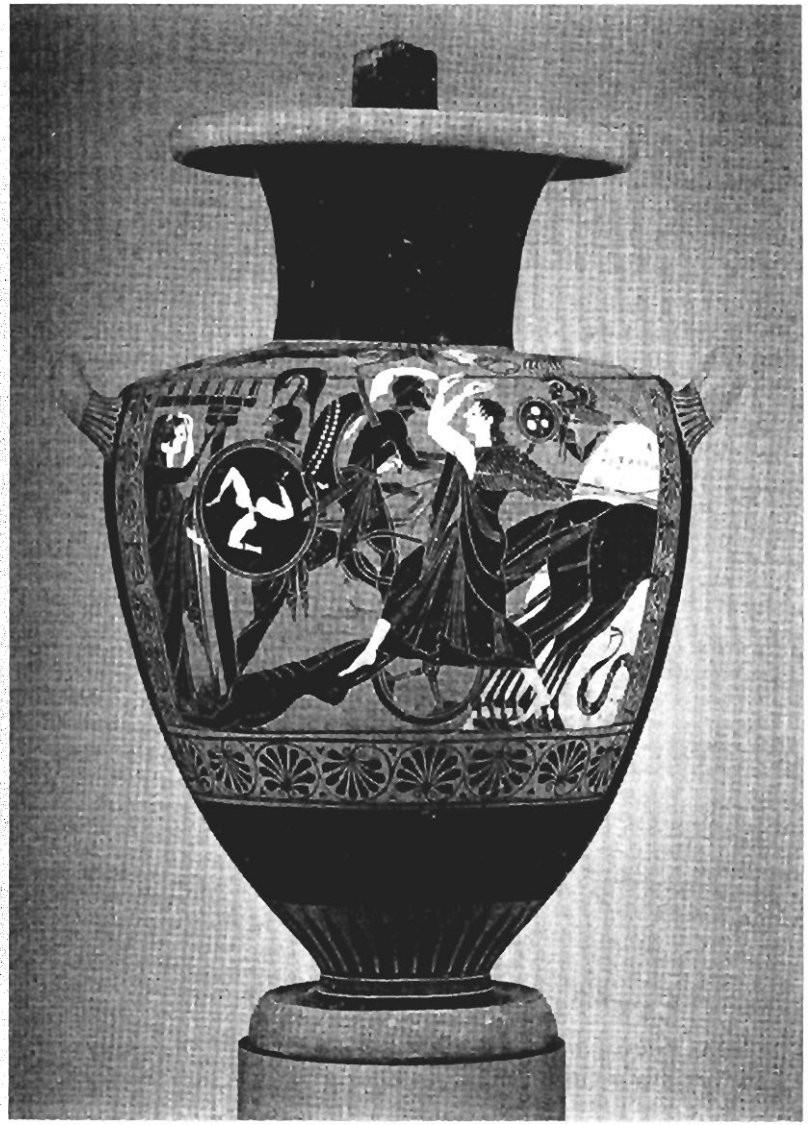

Plate 9 Achilles dragging Hector's body, with Priam and Hecuba (l.) and the goddess Iris. Attic black-figure hydria attributed to the Antiope Group (ca. 520–510 B.C.). © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, William Francis Warden Fund / Bridgeman Art Library.

Plate 10 Priam begging Achilles for the return of Hector's body. Red-figure Attic skyphos by the Brygos Painter (ca. 490 B.C.). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Plate 11 Maria Corda as Helen in the *art déco* splendor of Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. The William Knight Zewadski Collection.

Plate 12 The Bronze-Age palace of Knossos comes to life as King Priam's palace in the Minoan Troy of Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy*. Paris, Helen, Cassandra, Hecuba, and Priam (center l. to r.) hear the Greeks' demand for the return of Helen. The William Knight Zewadski Collection.

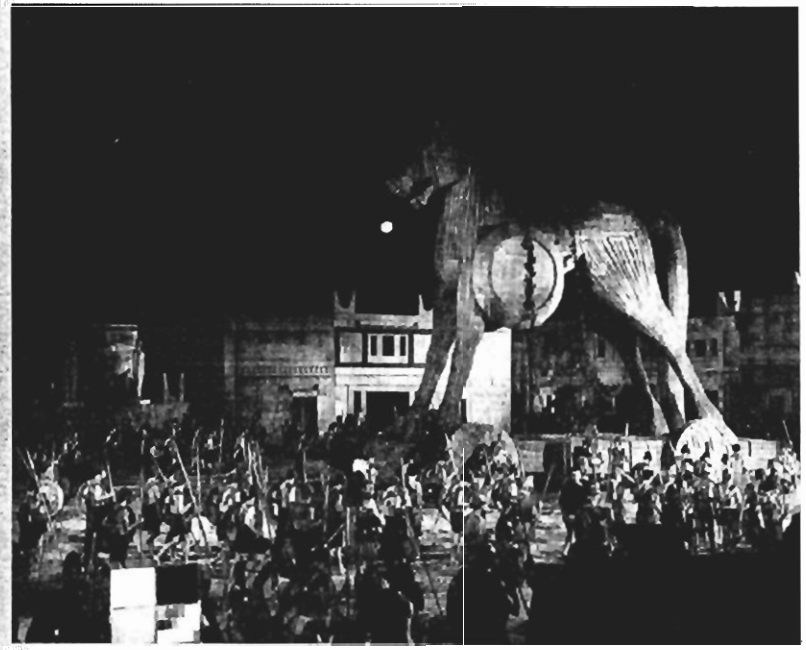

Plate 13 On the set of Wise's *Helen of Troy*. The wooden horse inside Troy. The William Knight Zewadski Collection.

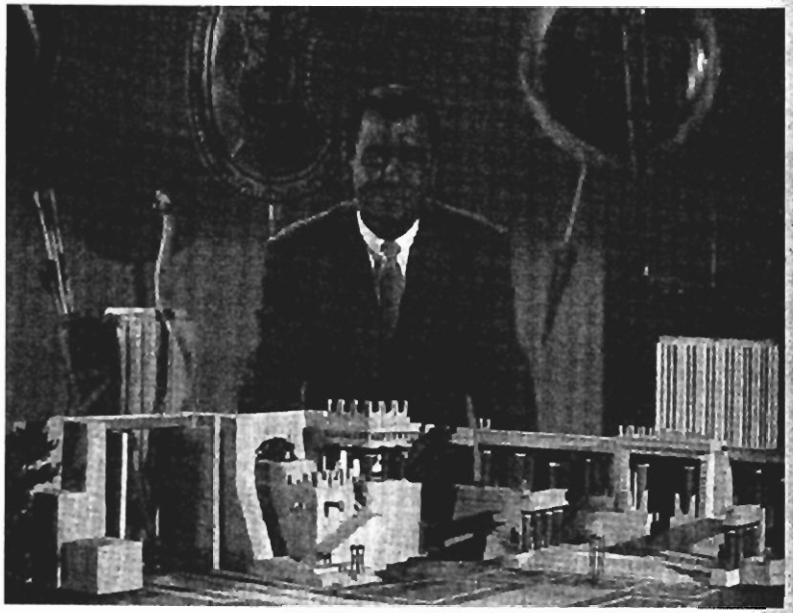

Plate 14 The model set of Troy, "the city of Paris and Helen, the city that Homer wrote about," for Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy* as seen in *Behind the Cameras*: "The Look of Troy," a promotional television program hosted by Gig Young. Warner Bros.

Plate 15 "Homer's *Iliad*, one of the greatest love stories ever written." Gig Young promoting Homer ("This book was our challenge") and Hollywood in *Behind the Cameras*: "Sounds of Homeric Troy." Warner Bros.

Plate 16 The wooden horse approaches a Troy protected by rugged-looking walls in Giorgio Ferroni's *La guerra di Troia*. The William Knight Zewadski Collection.

Plate 17 A strange horse enters an exotic Troy in John Kent Harrison's *Helen of Troy*. Minoan columns are by now standard for the city's look. Universal Studios.

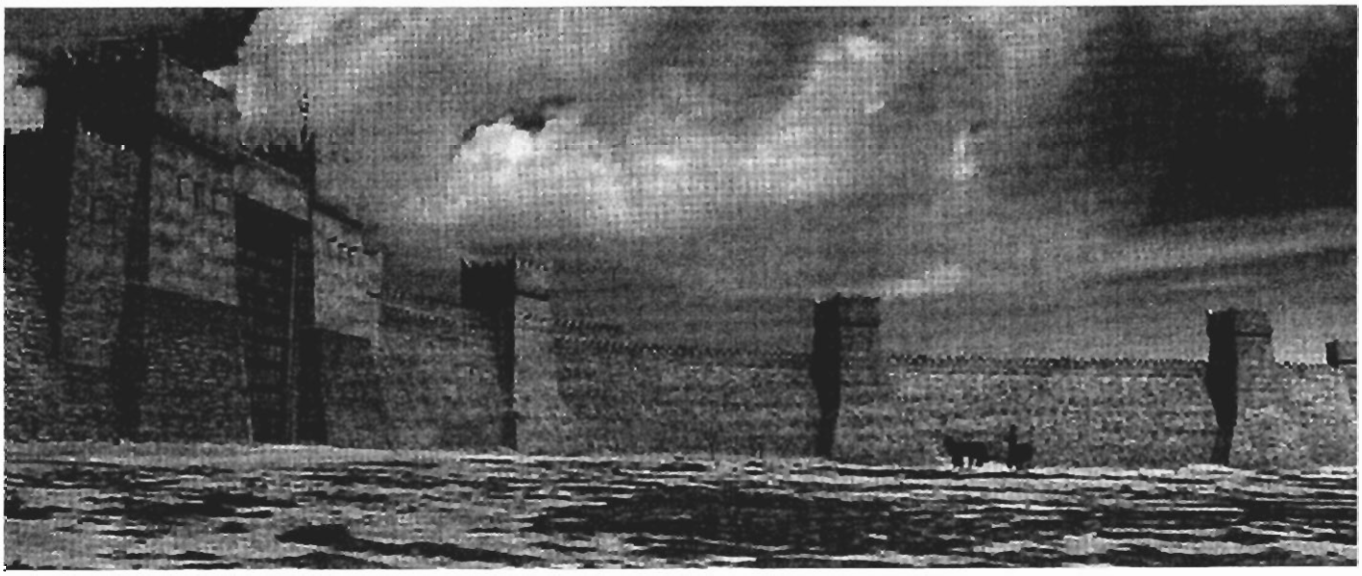

Plate 18 A tiny Achilles before the massive walls of Troy in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*. Warner Bros.

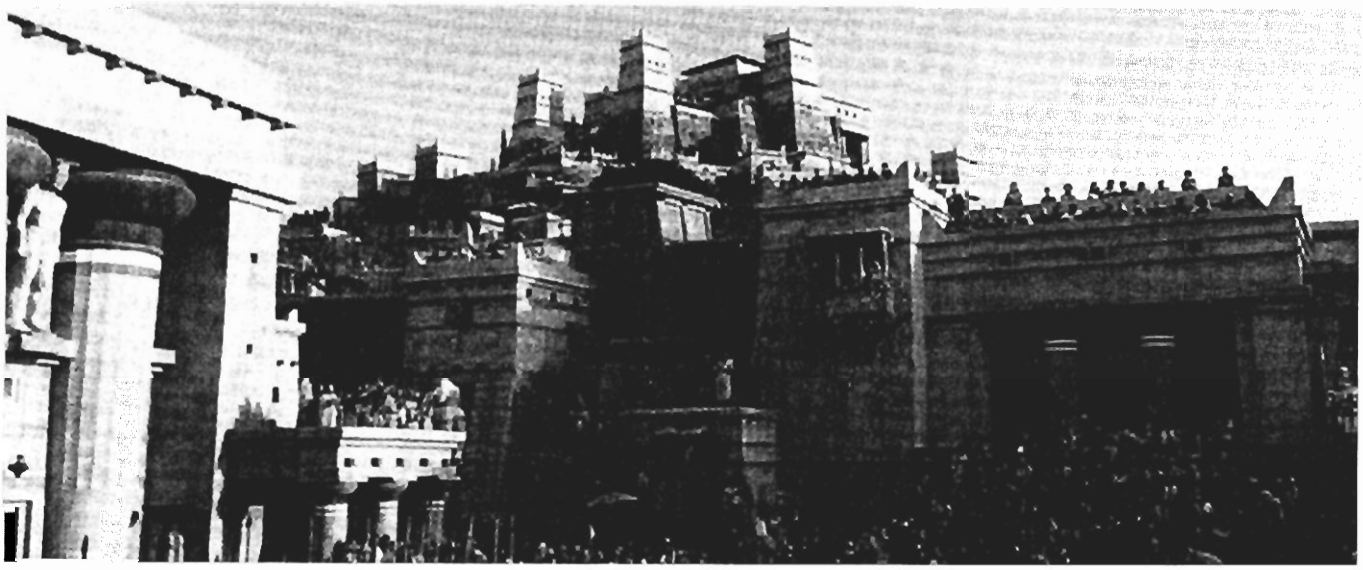

Plate 19 *Troy*. The city's architecture is an eclectic mixture of Minoan, Egyptian, Near Eastern, and other styles.

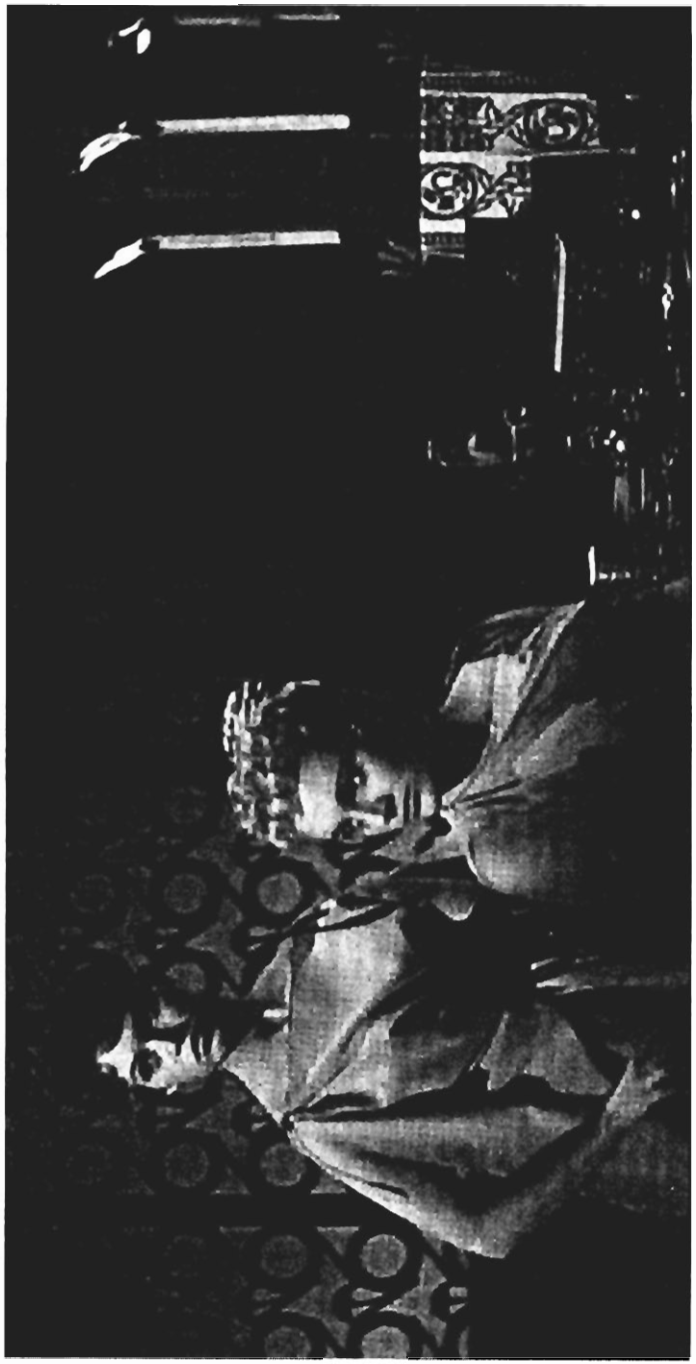

Plate 20 Which is the face that *should* have launched a thousand ships? Rossana Podestà (r.) as Helen and a pre-stardom (but already pouting) Brigitte Bardot (l.) as her handmaid Adraste in Wise's *Helen of Troy*.

Petersen does not render this theme but dramatizes that of a city in danger in his own way. Introducing us to noble Hector at Sparta makes us fear for Troy long before we actually see the city. The Trojans' slow sea journey home helps sustain our curiosity about and concern for their city, especially when we hear Hector, surprised by the sight of Helen, severely chastising Paris for his reckless love and his indifference to Troy. By the time we first see Troy, we marvel at its high and seemingly impregnable walls, but we also think of the fate that awaits it. The early scene at Sparta may be weak in some respects, but it works well in arousing our curiosity and anxiety for Troy in peril. Petersen may have learned a trick here from the *Iliad* itself, which does not turn to Troy until Book 3.

The duel between Achilles and Hector in *Troy* is staged as if it were chorcographed. Hector is a perfectly good swordsman. The problem is that his virtuosity – and his virtue – are all too human. Achilles' swordplay is of a different order. While Hector fights, Achilles dances. In the moments before the kill, with balletic leaps – perhaps Petersen's substitute for Homer's simile of the beautiful evening star – Achilles soars above Hector, then whirls upon him and pierces Hector's armor. If the film generally avoids the divine, in this scene Achilles is terrifying and demonic, more than human in his warrior's might and less than human in his animal grace.

The *Iliad* itself recognizes the ebb and flow of battle as a dance, the Greek word *stikhes* describing both a chorus and a battle line. In one of his war speeches, Hector at first contrasts the works of war and the gentler art of dance but reveals that the twists and turns of the shield are their own form of dance (7.235–241):

> Do not test me like some feeble boy
> or woman who does not know the works of war.
> I myself know well both battles and man-slayings;
> I know how to wield to the right and to the left the dry ox-hide
> shield, which for me is the shield way of fighting.
> I know how to rush into the press of fleet chariots;
> I know how in close combat to dance for the fierce war god.

In a speech before his troops, Ajax also at first distinguishes manly war from dance ("Hector did not invite you to come to dance but to fight"; 15.508) but then in a metaphor points out their underlying symmetry. What, he asks, is better than "at close quarters to mingle our hands and our strength"? (15.510) The word choice goes beyond the image of the

dance and joins the intimacy of warriors to that of lovers. "Mingle" is a standard term in Greek poetry for love-making. For example, Paris reminds Helen that, returning from Sparta, he "mingled [with her] in love and the bed" on an island (3.445). Nowhere is the association of love and war stronger than when Hector reminds himself of "the gentle cooing, / the kind between . . . a maiden and a young man who dally in love-talk with each other" (22.127–128), an image of budding eroticism which comes into Hector's mind just before he faces Achilles. Not long before, Hector spoke of the "love-talk of war" (17.228) to encourage his allies to join in battle and test whether they shall live or die. The language of Homeric heroes may suggest that the true intimacies of the *Iliad* are to be found in warfare. Martial and marital imagery become inseparable. But the result is the destruction, not the creation, of civilized order.

Troy does not and cannot capture all the complexities of the Homeric poem or its imagery, but in Achilles' dance against Hector's methodical if valiant sword work we sense a warrior who has turned mortal combat and the resulting fall of the sacred city into a god-like ballet of death.

I close with a memory which Michael Herr recorded as he looked back on the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War: "And for the next six years I saw them all, the ones I'd really seen and the ones I'd imagined, theirs and ours, friends I'd loved and strangers, motionless figures in a dance, the old dance."[12]

12 Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Avon, 1968; several rpts.), 66.

CHAPTER NINE

Helen of *Troy*

Monica S. Cyrino

> "Men are haunted by the vastness of eternity. And so we ask ourselves: Will our actions echo across the centuries? Will strangers hear our names long after we're gone and wonder who we were? How bravely we fought? How fiercely we loved?"

The opening voice-over of Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* expresses the film's self-conscious remembrance and re-creation of the glorious deeds of ancient heroes. Under the words of a smooth-voiced Odysseus the audience hears the ominous rumble of military drums punctuated by a woman's yearning song. Here is the double focus of the film's narrative: love and war, a war fought for love. The most famous war of antiquity was fought for the love of the most beautiful woman on earth, Helen of Sparta or, as she is more famously known, Helen of Troy. The distance she travels between her two names tells her story.

Early in the film, the camera pans along a steep wall of rock rising from dark blue waves, with ships anchored in the choppy waters. The viewers' eyes are drawn upward to a rough stone palace carved out of the sheer cliff face and set precariously high above the water. A title flashes on the bottom of the screen: "Port of Sparta – Greece." A cut to the interior of the palace reveals a long banquet table crowded with revelers enjoying a celebratory meal. At the center of the table, a tall, imposing man rises and addresses his guests: Menelaus, King of Sparta.

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

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