the film as a whole, they reflected mixed influences. The question of accuracy was easy to ask but hard to answer, and any reply had to try to summarize the complexity of the issues outlined above. Our intention was not to use the costumes as any sort of archaeological resource. Instead, we attempted to put them and the film itself into the context of a long series of retellings of the Troy story from antiquity to the present day. We wanted to explore not the archaeology of Greece or Troy, which can be pursued in our permanent galleries, but the phenomenon of the story itself, its reception throughout later ages, and its continuing power.

4. Conclusion

We return, then, to the original question whether *Troy* should have had a historical advisor and whether the film would have been improved by full incorporation of historical and archaeological advice from the outset. In spite of the difficulties outlined above, it would no doubt have been possible to create a more consistent Late-Bronze-Age environment of considerable grandeur, given the extensive resources available. Many of the elements were already there, particularly in the large sets. And the film's Wooden Horse could scarcely have been improved.

Yet my personal view is that the story is not history, that Homer was not a historian, and that something of Homer would certainly have been lost in a purist archaeological approach. Ultimately, dramatic success matters more than the archaeological accuracy of Helen's hairpins. It matters more for modern audiences to feel for Achilles in his progress from war machine to man, to sympathize with Hector in his efforts to defend all that was dear to him, and in the end to mourn for Priam and for Troy. In this regard the film takes an honorable place as the latest, if not the last, instance in the long series of retellings of the tale of Troy.[7] Perhaps what matters most of all is that audiences still gather to see and hear this story as they have done for three thousand years. We share a common humanity with the heroes and with the early audiences – in spite of the differences between a Mycenaean megaron and a cinema multiplex.

7 The meticulously researched *Age of Bronze* comics by Eric Shanower deserve honorable mention here. They show that it is possible, at least in graphic form, to retell the story of Troy in an exclusively Mycenaean setting. At the same time they illustrate the difficulties inherent in showing worship of small-scale gods. The first nineteen issues of this ongoing series have been collected in two books: *A Thousand Ships* (2001) and *Sacrifice* (2004). For details about the production of these comics see *Age of Bronze: Behind the Scenes* (2002). All books mentioned are published by Image Comics of Orange, California.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From Greek Myth to Hollywood Story: Explanatory Narrative in *Troy*

Kim Shahabudin

Before the release of *Troy* scriptwriter David Benioff was asked how he felt about adapting the *Iliad*, the foundation of Western literature. He replied that this was not his intention and that his script had borrowed ideas from several different sources. He called it "an adaptation of the Trojan War myth in its entirety, not The Iliad alone."[1] Despite Benioff's declaration and subsequent similar statements from others involved in the film, the close association with Homer's epic refused to go away. When *Troy* was released critics were quick to seize on the rather vague statement in the credits that the film had been inspired by Homer's *Iliad*. Consequently, much of its critical reception has been concerned with how well or badly the film adapts the poem.

In view of Benioff's statement, this seems rather unfair. But if *Troy* is not a literary adaptation, it is also not simply a film version of the Trojan War myth. Any scriptwriter working from existing sources must select and discard from the material he or she collects. Although many of the major names and places connected with the myth are present in *Troy*, a whole layer is missing. The decision to exclude the gods as a motivating force makes man (and woman) the measure of all things and transforms the mythological story of the Trojan War from a web of interactions

1 "David Benioff . . . Web Access" at www.bbc.co.uk/print/films/webaccess/david_benioff_1.shtml.

between mortals and immortals to a chronicle of strictly human cause and effect. Structure, content, and style of the film provide rational explanations for events explained in antiquity by the irrational.

However, the reception of a film depends not only on its narrative content but also on how its audience understands it as a story. Long ago F. R. Leavis objected to popular cinema because he believed that it encouraged passivity in the audience: viewers simply absorb the visual and aural features presented on the screen.[2] Today it is generally recognized that audiences play a much more dynamic role, not simply accepting but actively interpreting what they view and hear. Along with this concept of the active viewer comes the awareness that such interpretations may differ according to the preconceptions that individual viewers bring to a film. The teenage boys who are the primary target audience of action adventure films will view *Troy* differently from classical scholars who may look primarily for its sources, from film scholars who are most interested in, for instance, its cinematography, or from fans of a particular actor. This is the theory; in reality these and other possible ways of viewing overlap. To claim under these circumstances that any one mode is the right one seems rather arrogant.

Yet if it is wrong to assume that there is a single correct way, it is also wrong to assume that all are equal or equally valid. A variety of offscreen factors are important, such as the persona of a star, previous films which may bear a resemblance, genre conventions that prompt us to expect certain elements from certain kinds of films, and the promotional rhetoric that accompanies a film's release. So to understand how *Troy* uses its version of antiquity to present myth we must think about both text and context: how cinematic narrative lets features of myth appear natural and how extra-cinematic factors encourage viewers to accept such a construction.

1. Myth and History

Viewers rarely watch a film without some prior knowledge of what it will be about. In the past such knowledge may have come from posters and trailers and from reviews in newspapers and magazines. The Internet now provides new ways to find out about films before their release. Official websites operate as electronic pressbooks with stills and on-location photographs, actors' biographies, and production information. Online

2 F. R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930).

message boards host fan discussions and spread rumors. If they give viewers greater access to information about a film, such sources also give filmmakers instant feedback on how their product is being received by its audience. Commercial pressures often mean that the paying customer's opinion is more important than that of the filmmakers. As a result, commercial cinema has become largely audience-driven and perhaps more conservative.

Online promotion of *Troy* revealed the producers' perspectives early on. First versions of the official website included a "Production Journal" by the film's publicist with information on the film's background: Benioff's original pitch to Warner Bros., director Wolfgang Petersen joining the project, problems with the choice of location. However, the journal's opening paragraph concerned Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Hisarlık in 1871. His discovery of what he reported to be the historical location of Homeric Troy transformed the view of the *Iliad* as a recounting of myth to one that might have been based on historical fact. This opening gambit in the film's publicity directed viewers to the idea of Troy as historical reality. In addition, a large part of the journal was devoted to "An Historical Primer" that set the *Iliad* in the context of the fall of Mycenaean civilization and observed that in antiquity Homer's "historical accuracy" did not seem to have been disputed. Added to this ancient validation was a modern one from archaeologist J. Lesley Fitton, who had been employed as a kind of historical consultant for the film and whose credentials were given as "the British Museum's expert on the Bronze Age." By involving a scholar whose primary objects of study are the physical remains of the past, *Troy* declares that its story will be founded on empirical evidence. The message is clear: Schliemann's excavations explained Troy as historical reality; Homer wrote about events that took place there in the *Iliad*; and *Troy* will adapt Homer's history.

Another clue to the producers' preference of how the public was to perceive the film could be seen when the title was briefly changed to *The Trojan War*. This title gives a much clearer impression of the film's content, covering the causes and effects of the war. It also suggests a more action-based storyline than *Troy*, a title that seems to refer to some kind of universal concept rather than to a specific set of people. But the new title lasted for only a few days before being changed back. In that time it was the focus of a flood of negative discussion on online message boards, with some of the contributors citing as the reason for their disapproval the fact that it made the film sound like a history lesson. Perhaps such an antipathy to history sounded an alarm with the film's publicity department. While stories in the press continued to refer to

Homer's poem and Schliemann's excavations, the main focus of publicity prior to release was on the film's exposure of Brad Pitt's body.

Another clue to the producers' views concerning *Troy* is in their identification with epics of the classical Hollywood period that were made after World War II rather than with more recent films. Those associated with making *Troy* were keener to point out the differences rather than the similarities between it and Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000). Comparisons were bound to be made despite the Roman setting of the earlier film. Perhaps partly in an attempt to deflect such comparison, Petersen was eager to distance his own vision of the ancient world from the famous computer-generated one of *Gladiator*: "I very much wanted to go with reality . . . We haven't just built a little bit and done the rest with CG" (computer-generated imagery). Actor Eric Bana, who plays Hector, supported this strategy in referring to the film's spectacle: "You can't say we haven't seen it before – but we haven't seen it for 50 years or so."[3]

A number of reviewers have noted the Old Hollywood look and outlook of *Troy*. In what is usually called classical Hollywood, studios exerted total control over their films. Film theorists have identified a particular style of filmmaking then dominant.[4] A prominent feature is its desire to make the filmmaking process as invisible as possible and to give viewers the impression that the cinema observes the world rather than creates it. Film narrative is a key element of this practice, with both content and structure producing an onscreen world that operates by the same perceptions we bring to our own world. Prominent in this are regular laws of cause and effect, characters whose actions may be accounted for by their psychology, and stories that begin at the beginning and end at the end. All these features can be discovered in the plot of *Troy*, which uses them to create an impression of the Trojan War as historical reality and to explain mythological features like gods and heroes in human terms.

2. Linear Structure

Troy is not an adaptation of the *Iliad*, which begins in the tenth year of the siege of Troy and ends with Hector's funeral long before the end of

3 Both quotations are from David Eimer, "Blood, Sweat and Spears," [London] *Sunday Times* (April 25, 2004), *Culture* supplement, 5–6.

4 An extensive analysis can be found in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

the war. The film shows us the events that happened before the beginning of the Trojan War (Paris and Helen in Sparta) and its end (the sack of Troy). One of the questions that faces the makers of any historical film is how much of the background they should explain to the audience. This is especially so when the subject is the ancient world, mainly because of today's decline of popular knowledge about antiquity. So events recounted in the *Iliad* that are not well known to the majority of the audience are at least put in a recognizable context. A narrative structure that commences with the cause of the war and ends with its effect makes the war the main goal of the film.

At its beginning, three texts superimposed on a map of Greece set out the main issues and participants. The first notes Agamemnon's political dominance over most of the Greek kingdoms that is about to be completed on the plains of Thessaly. The second introduces his brother Menelaus who, in contrast to the aggressive expansionism of Agamemnon, is at that moment negotiating peace with Troy, Greece's main rival. The third presents Achilles as Greece's greatest warrior and his antipathy to Agamemnon. The somewhat unwieldy quantity of written information recalls the rolling prologues found in historical epics of the post-war years which made watching the opening of a film like the opening of a history book.

These texts serve as the psychological definitions for the figures they introduce. The following scenes develop and expand the words to fit modern character types. Achilles' first appearance presents him as a modern celebrity, deep in hedonistic sleep with two naked women and surrounded by empty wine cups. Of the Trojan princes, Hector is a diplomat and Paris a romantic idealist, the knight errant who will rescue fair Helen from boorish Menelaus. Agamemnon is an arrogant and greedy tyrant, whose reaction to his brother's cuckolding is to observe that "if Troy falls, I control the Aegean." The elopement of Helen and Paris is presented as the original grievance in the story. The fact that it leads to war is explained by political expediency.

Some of the incidents described in the *Iliad* as having happened before its narrative begins are put even earlier in the film. Such reordering produces a chronologically linear narrative which is driven by regular laws of cause and effect. For instance, before Achilles joins the expedition to Troy, his mother Thetis tells him that he must choose between a long life and obscurity or a short life and glory. In Book 9 of the *Iliad* Achilles relates that Thetis has told him this, although he does not specify when she did so. The film, placing it before he even leaves home, defines his choice as the goal that will drive him. Another example is Helen's elopement, which the *Iliad* describes as a kind of flashback in Book 3

The elopement is the ostensible cause of the war in *Troy*, to which each event may be traced back. The drive to war builds with this linear succession of causes and effects until Hector kills Menelaus to save Paris' life almost exactly halfway through the film. From now on the war is unstoppable, and the momentum built up so far propels the events to the final catastrophe. The story of Troy and of *Troy* ends in flames; of the characters introduced in the opening titles, only Paris survives.

The story ends, but its momentum still drives the history further along its linear path. Among those escaping from Troy is a youth supporting an older man. Asked for his name, he replies: "Aeneas." For those familiar with Virgil's *Aeneid*, this insertion creates the impression of another background narrative which lies outside the onscreen story and has its own dynamic. (The entire story of the fall of Troy is borrowed from the *Aeneid*, too, in adapted form.) Rather than presenting a self-contained story world which begins and ends when the film begins and ends, some of the events in *Troy* seem to have been plucked from an independently existing chronicle, part of a continuing extra-cinematic narrative. If the opening recalled the prologues of post-war epics, this strategy recalls their epilogues, which typically predicted great future events or developments. Modern audiences can thus regard themselves as the descendants of the historical figures onscreen. Our concerns are similar to or identical with theirs. In this way *Troy*, too, assures its viewers that, while it may portray ancient people, "we, not the projected past, are their real concern."[5]

3. Omissions, Additions, Alterations

Benioff's claim that *Troy* adapts the Trojan War myth "in its entirety" should not be taken literally. Rather, it selects its content from the entire myth. Some aspects are completely left out, among them the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the prophecies of Cassandra, and the grief and defiance of Hecuba. Others are altered for the sake of narrative economy. (The siege of Troy lasts weeks rather than years.) Occasionally, radical changes occur in order to fit the myth to the narrative and themes of the film. For example, in the myth Agamemnon and Menelaus survive and reappear in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Homer's *Odyssey*; in *Troy* both are killed. Menelaus dies at the hands of Hector almost before the war has started.

5 Maria Wyke, "Are You Not Entertained? Classicists and Cinema," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 9 (2003), 430–445; quotation at 435.

This alteration illustrates the film's theme of fraternalism, showing how the fate of the stronger brother (Hector and Paris, Agamemnon and Menelaus) or brother-like figure (Achilles and Patroclus) is bound up with that of the weaker. Menelaus' death also marks the pivotal moment in the war. The first half of the film, with the possibility of peace, is dominated by dialogue; the second half is dominated by action and spectacle. A mass charge of the Greek armies immediately follows Menelaus' demise.

Differences between ancient Greek and modern morality provide another reason to alter the myth. An omission which reviewers frequently noted is the sexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Although there is nothing in Homer concerning this, it appears in later versions of the myth. Its repeated mention in reviews is evidence for popular knowledge of it. This is one aspect where the film became an adaptation of the *Iliad* alone, for the filmmakers denied that Achilles is anything but heterosexual in the poem. Asked by reporters, Pitt said: "I found nothing in the text."[6] It has been generally assumed that this is an example of the pressures exerted by the studios to protect the image of their star actors. In fact it may be an instance where the film's departure from the ancient myth does not go far enough. With Patroclus now Achilles' young cousin and protégé, their relationship never seems close enough to present an adequate motivation for the grief-driven rage that seizes Achilles after Patroclus' death. Perhaps if Patroclus and Achilles had been actual brothers Achilles' reaction would have been more credible.

One of the most spectacular visual features in the film has its roots not in any ancient narrative but in a modern one. The Trojan night attack on the Greek ships opens with huge balls of flaming straw rolled onto the stakes that the Trojans have planted on the beach as their first line of defense. Such a scene does not appear in the *Iliad*, although attack by fire is a frequent threat. But the images of exploding balls of flame remind viewers of the burning missiles catapulted into the German army in the opening battle in *Gladiator*. This visual reiteration borrows a popularly established image of ancient warfare to give credibility to its own. Historical films are just as likely to refer to film history as to historical events.

The poetic justice demanded in the finale of the classical Hollywood film motivates some of the most radical changes from the myth in *Troy*. If it were to be true to the *Iliad* or to Greek myth and literature, those

6 Charlotte Higgins, "*Troy* Stars Speak Out at 'Futility of War'," *The Guardian* (May 14, 2004), 8.

characters functioning as villains would survive while more sympathetic characters would be dead or enslaved. But Menelaus and Agamemnon are killed off. Helen returns to her life in Sparta with Menelaus in the myth, apparently unpunished for her adultery; in the film she escapes from Troy together with Paris, Briseis, and Andromache and her infant son. This child is hurled to his death from the walls of Troy in Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, but this is a scene unlikely to appear in a Hollywood film. Despite these changes, audiences have complained that the film's moral scheme is unclear and have objected that, unlike with other action-adventure narratives, they do not know which side to be on. As Petersen has commented in an interview: "It's a very unusual – but I think very real – approach to portraying life. In reality, I think there aren't really such things as 'bad guys' and 'good guys.'"[7]

4. Free Will, Determinism, and the Gods

The most fundamental alteration in *Troy* is the absence of the gods. Myth is by nature concerned with humanity's relationship with forces that they cannot rationally explain; by contrast, *Troy* offers rational explanations for everything. It is not necessarily the demands of the epic genre that motivate this rationalism; epics like the *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogies have no problem with fantastic creatures, and even *Gladiator* has moments of other-worldliness. But epic films of the classical Hollywood period were overwhelmingly dominated by realist historical narratives, except for Bible films. The filmmakers' ambition to place *Troy* in the tradition of classical Hollywood epics may have imposed a rationalizing strategy on their treatment of gods. Supernatural entities like gods and monsters are out of place in a realistically presented ancient world that functions according to the physical laws of our world. Petersen has stated that "people would laugh today if you had God entering the scene and fighting and helping out." Nevertheless ancient gods previously appeared in films, especially those based on Greek mythology.

Troy adopts a strategy that interpreters of myth have applied since antiquity, rationalizing divine motivation as human emotions and psychology. For instance, it is not Aphrodite, goddess of erotic love, who motivates Helen's elopement but Helen's own attraction to Paris

7 This and the following quotation are from M. E. Russell, "Helmer of Troy," *In Focus*, 4 no. 5 (May, 2004); at www.infocusmag.com/04may/petersen.htm.

in the face of her unhappy marriage to Menelaus. And actions of men may replace actions of gods. Aphrodite rescues Paris from Menelaus in the *Iliad*, but the brotherly love of Hector saves him in the film. Briseis rather than the goddess Athena stops the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon; she does so with the prosaic and realistic-sounding declaration: "Too many men have died today." Briseis is more important in the film than in the myth. In the *Iliad* she is the ostensible cause of Achilles' fury at Agamemnon who has seized her from Achilles as a prize; in the film, probably for the sake of narrative economy, she is transformed into a Trojan princess, Priam's niece, and a priestess of Apollo. Her religious role is significant. Briseis functions as the spiritual center of the film. She voices its anti-war morality and humanizes Achilles, the godlike hero. As a prisoner held in the enemy camp she represents the possibility of overcoming an apparently irreconcilable opposition between Trojans and Greeks. This is finally achieved when Priam persuades Achilles to return Hector's body. Here Achilles proves that he understands the common humanity of Greeks and Trojans. But other Greeks, in particular Agamemnon, are not so conciliatory. Ironically, his sneer that "peace is for women" is proved wrong at the film's climax, when none other than Briseis kills him. A further example of this rationalizing strategy shows cinema's poetic capabilities. In Book 22 of the *Iliad*, the fatal combat between Achilles and Hector ends when Athena hands Achilles back his spear, with which he deals Hector a deadly blow. In the film the climax of their combat is staged in such a way that Hector lunges at Achilles with a broken-off spear which Achilles manages to seize and with which he then fatally stabs Hector.

The removal of the gods leaves humans with full responsibility for their actions. *Troy* must follow a tricky path between free will and determinism. Classical Hollywood films relied on cause and effect to produce the impression of realism, but at the same time their characters must be free to make the right or wrong choices, depending on what kind of character they represent; otherwise there can be no praise or blame and no poetic justice. So Helen is responsible for her adultery, although we are to see it from our modern views about a woman's right to escape an unhappy marriage and are meant to forgive her. While it becomes increasingly fatalistic as the war progresses, the storyline rarely demonstrates an absolute determinism of the kind that is found in myth and that would go against the film's humanist perspective. Throughout its first half there are moments when a choice has to be made that may lead to or away from war, but those choices are always freely made. There are no gods to intervene, and when Priam's priest does invoke

religion, it is to support the wrong decision, the one that brings the Wooden Horse into the city.

5. Achilles' Heel

Troy comes closest to Homer's treatment of the Trojan War myth in its focus on Achilles and the causes and consequences of his rage. The myth poses problems for film adaptations because it includes a greater number of significant characters than could be accommodated even by an epic film. Such complexity threatens the unity of the film and might confuse an audience that does not already know the story. Both the *Iliad* and *Troy* turn a potentially unwieldy narrative into the story of Achilles. The main theme of *Troy*, however, is not Achilles' rage as in the *Iliad* but his glory. Its focus is on how a man becomes something more than a man: the transformation from man to myth.

Two scenes at the beginning and end of *Troy* make this intention explicit. In his first appearance, Achilles is roused from sleep to go into single combat with the Thessalian champion Boagrius. The awestruck young boy sent as messenger expresses the mythology of the hero: "Are the stories about you true? They say your mother is an immortal goddess. They say you can't be killed." Achilles replies: "I wouldn't be bothering with the shield then, would I?" This verbal appeal to logic echoes the rationalizing strategies of the film while the boy's references to stories and hearsay explain the process of mythmaking. The scene makes it clear that myths are our own creations, stories we want to believe because they inspire us but also because they offer explanations for our own failure to achieve heroic greatness. The boy goes on to say that he would not want to fight the giant Boagrius, to which Achilles responds: "That's why no one will remember your name." The message is that legends are written because of what men do and not because of what or who they are. Achilles has earned his heroic reputation by actions as a warrior, unlike Agamemnon who simply takes the glory earned by others. "Perhaps the kings were too far behind to see," Achilles tells him after the capture of the beach at Troy. "Soldiers won the battle." Odysseus makes the same point when he tells Achilles that "war is old men talking and young men dying."

In his final scene (except for his funeral) Achilles searches for Briseis during the sack of Troy. He finds her being threatened by Agamemnon and races to her rescue. But the hero said to have been "made for killing" is now denied his natural function when Briseis beats him to the death blow. Worse still, while trying to persuade her to leave Troy with him, Achilles is struck by Paris' arrows, first in the heel and then several times in the torso. In a last heroic gesture Achilles wrenches out all the arrows except the first before he collapses. When the apparently unkillable hero is discovered dead, the only remaining arrow is in his heel. The camera then looks down on Achilles from high above and so invites us to identify with the Greek soldiers: all are staring down at Achilles' body with its apparent single wound. Our own explanation would not have been different from theirs: the remembrance that Thetis held new-born Achilles by the heel to make the rest of his body invulnerable in sacred fire.

Achilles' heel has not been previously mentioned in the film, so its unusual nature seems to derive entirely from this one incident. In this way the story of the almost invulnerable hero has its explanation in his own last actions; by leaving Paris' arrow in his heel, Achilles achieves mythic immortality. The scene shows viewers how myths can be made, giving us the evidence to explain not the inexplicable but the stories that arise from the unexpected. *Troy* frames the story of Achilles by the two scenes discussed, each of which deals simultaneously with his mortality and perceived invulnerability and reveals that the film's focus is on the mythmaking process rather than on the myth itself. More specifically, *Troy* is concerned with the retelling of myth. Odysseus opens the film: "Will our actions echo across the centuries?" He also concludes it: "If they ever tell my story . . . let them say I lived in the time of Achilles." References to the transmission of myth appear throughout, as when Odysseus attempts to persuade Achilles to join the expedition: "This war will never be forgotten – nor will the heroes who fight in it." The king of Thessaly says: "Achilles? I'll remember the name." Most specific is Thetis' prediction to Achilles: "They will write stories about your victories for thousands of years. The world will remember your name." *Troy* repeatedly reminds viewers of their own role in the telling of stories about Achilles, and we find ourselves in a continuing tradition that began with Homer's ancient audiences. The fact that the Trojan War myth in *Troy* and in the *Iliad* centers on the same character reinforces the importance of Homer's poem for creating the myth of Achilles.

Epic films usually tell their historical stories from the perspectives of often fictional individuals. Large-scale events are explained in terms of their psychology. This method gives filmmakers a great deal of latitude but also fictionalizes history. In *Troy* we can witness the reverse process. The ancient mythology surrounding the Trojan War sought to explain what was regarded at the time of its composition as historical events

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

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

Edited by

Martin M. Winkler