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Editor's Introduction

> Harry Cohn heard there was a good story, *The Iliad*, written by somebody named Homer, and thought it might have picture possibilities. He called his writers together and said, "Now, boys, I want a one-page treatment of it by tomorrow." So a team of Columbia writers worked all night, and the next morning, blurry-eyed, they handed Harry a one-page synopsis. Cohn read it, but looked doubtful: "There are an awful lot of Greeks in it."[1]

Too many Greeks for the American public? The head of Columbia Pictures and *enfant terrible* among Hollywood moguls may have thought so, but ancient Greeks, especially Homer's heroes, have been long prominent in the cultural and popular history of the United States, if not to the extent that the Romans have been. The early history of America readily lent itself to providing analogies to classical history or myth.[2] The tradition of referring to the *Iliad* became prominent at several moments in nineteenth-century America, as at the revolution of Texas from Mexico that culminated in the 1836 siege of the Alamo and in flare-ups

1 Paul F. Boller and Ronald L. Davis, *Hollywood Anecdotes* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 68–69, from a 1936 interview with actress Dolly Haas.

2 On this see John P. McWilliams, Jr., *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially chapters 4 ("A White Achilles for the West?") and 5 ("Red Achilles, Red Satan").

of frontier violence, most famously the 1881 gunfight at the OK Corral.[3] In between, the American Civil War (1861–1865) provided ample opportunities for references to the *Iliad*.[4]

The American tendency to draw ancient and specifically Homeric parallels to modern war has seen a resurgence in recent years in connection with World War II, the Korean War, and the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Here are only a few examples, intended to indicate the broad range that such analogies may take. A recent translation of the *Iliad* has a photograph of the American D-Day landing for its cover illustration.[5] Christopher Logue makes specific allusions to World War II in his free poetic retellings of the *Iliad*.[6] A novel on the Korean War was hailed as an "epic story worthy of the ancient Greeks" by television journalist Dan Rather and characterized by novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., with the statement: "The Korean War now has its own *Iliad*."[7] Concerning Vietnam, the best-known analogy to the Trojan War is developed in psychiatrist Jonathan Shay's book *Achilles in Vietnam*; Shay compares the psychological effects of Achilles' killings on himself to post-traumatic

3 On these two episodes see Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835–1836* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), and Walter Noble Burns, *Tombstone – An Iliad of the Southwest* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1927).

4 Cf. the title of Charles Pierce Roland, *An American Iliad: The Story of the Civil War*, 2nd edn (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004). *The Civil War* (1990), an eleven-hour documentary film by Ken Burns, was frequently compared to Homer's epic. A review of Jay Winik, *April 1865: The Month That Saved America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), sees in the burning of Richmond, the Confederate capital, an analogy to that of Troy and in Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee analogies to Achilles and Hector: Max Byrd, "The Month That Was," *The New York Times Book Review* (April 22, 2001), 25. Larry McMurtry, "His True Love Is Politics" (review of Bill Clinton, *My Life* [New York: Knopf, 2004; rpt. 2005]), *The New York Times Book Review* (July 4, 2004), 1 and 8–9, refers to Grant's autobiography as "an Iliad, with the gracious Robert E. Lee as Hector and Grant himself the murderous Achilles" (8). Thematically comparable is the perspective expressed in a speech elaborately entitled "The Soldier's Faith: An Address Delivered on Memorial Day, May 30, 1895, at a Meeting Called by the Graduating Class of Harvard University" by Oliver Wendell Holmes, best accessible in *The Collected Works of Justice Holmes: Complete Public Writings and Selected Judicial Opinions of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, ed. Sheldon M. Novick; The Holmes Devise Memorial Edition, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 486–491.

5 *Homer: Iliad*, tr. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

6 See especially Christopher Logue, *All Day Permanent Red: The First Battle Scenes of Homer's Iliad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

7 James Brady, *The Marines of Autumn: A Novel of the Korean War* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000). The two quotations appeared in a full-page advertisement of the novel in *The New York Times Book Review* (July 23, 2000), 5.

stress disorder (PTSD) in Vietnam veterans.[8] Since the beginning of the second war in Iraq, waged chiefly by the United States and its ally the United Kingdom, more or less loose analogies to the Trojan War and specifically the *Iliad* have become commonplace in political commentaries and elsewhere.[9]

American popular culture, too, and especially the cinema, has long been aware of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, chiefly in retellings of the story of the Trojan War from the abduction of Helen by Paris to the fall of Troy and the return of Odysseus.[10] Large-scale adaptations have attempted to bring the Homeric and heroic past to life in glorious color and on the wide screen associated with epic subjects since the early 1950s. Some of the cinematic spectacles based on Homer are discussed in the following chapters in connection with *Troy* (2004), the most recent big-screen adaptation of the Trojan War myth and the film on which the present book focuses. *Troy* was written by a young American screenwriter, David Benioff, and produced by Warner Brothers at a cost of about 180 million dollars. (Published figures vary.) The film was directed by Wolfgang Petersen, a German filmmaker with a successful Hollywood career. So two questions immediately arise: Why *Troy* now? And why Petersen as its director?

The first question is relatively easy to answer. As Petersen himself has said, the gigantic and wholly unsuspected worldwide success of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), the first big-screen ancient epic since the demise of large-scale historical works in the early to mid-1960s, made *Troy* possible.[11] In Petersen's words: "'Gladiator' was a big surprise for

8 Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994). Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2003), provides a recent critique of PTSD and related psychological issues. Cf. also Shay, "Achilles: Paragon, Flawed Character, or Tragic Soldier Figure?" *The Classical Bulletin*, 71 (1995), 117–124. Ernst A. Schmidt, "Achill," in *Antike Mythen in der europäischen Tradition*, ed. Heinz Hofmann (Tübingen: Attempto, 1999), 91–125, surveys the influence of Homer's Achilles from antiquity to today, with special attention to Shay's book. On modern war, its artistic heritage, and the *Iliad* see also James Tatum, *The Mourner's Song: War and Remembrance from the* Iliad *to Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

9 Edward Rothstein, "To Homer, Iraq Would Be More of Same," *The New York Times* (June 5, 2004), Section B (*Arts and Ideas*), 9, is just one example of an article in the mainstream media connecting *Troy*, the *Iliad*, and the contemporary war. An internet search for "Homer," "*Iliad*," and "Iraq" is instructive.

10 A list of American and European film and television adaptations appears below in Chapter 13.

11 M. E. Russell, "Helmer of Troy," *In Focus*, 4 no. 5 (May, 2004); quoted from the complete interview at http://www.infocusmag.com/04may/petersenuncut.htm.

the industry, for the audience, for all of us – because, as you know, it sort of connected again to a kind of film we hadn't seen for decades. It became so successful that all of a sudden these projects were popping up that dealt with the times of 2,000 years ago – 3,000 years ago, in our case." *Gladiator* inaugurated a veritable renaissance of classical antiquity on American and European cinema and television screens.[12] In addition, *Gladiator* revealed more about the spirit of contemporary America at the beginning of the third millennium A.D. than about the history of the Roman Empire in the second half of the second century. *Troy* also contains current political and military analogies.[13]

The answer to the second question is more complex and, for the context of the present book, more important. On the most basic level, Petersen is an experienced commercial Hollywood director whose films have almost invariably proven successful at the box office. He is also a highly versatile craftsman in the tradition of the studio directors who had made Hollywood's Golden Age possible. Petersen is at ease directing films on different subjects in a variety of genres, especially action films, and has complete mastery of his craft. His craftsmanship almost single-handedly revived the flagging careers of Clint Eastwood and Dustin Hoffman when they starred in his films *In the Line of Fire* (1993) and *Outbreak* (1995). Today, Petersen is one of only a few filmmakers in Hollywood who have final cut on their films, a sign of respect not easily attained. It is also an achievement that justifies our consideration of *Troy* as primarily Petersen's and not Benioff's or the studio's product. While he is not one of the great directors who decisively shaped or are shaping the history of cinema as a popular and artistic medium, Petersen may always be relied on to deliver a solid product. Many of his films reward repeated viewings. If this were not the case, he could not have

12 Works include Antoine Fuqua's *King Arthur* (2004), written by the principal screenwriter of *Gladiator* and despite its title as much a Roman as a medieval film, and Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004), both made for the big screen. The small screen preceded *Troy* with John Kent Harrison's *Helen of Troy* (2003) and followed it with *Imperium: Augustus* and *Imperium: Nero* (2003–2004), the first installments of an ongoing series, and with two other multi-part series, *Rome* and *Empire* (both 2005). All films were made at considerable expense and relied on the financial successes of *Gladiator*, *Troy*, or both.

13 On the cinema as a kind of cultural seismograph in general see my brief comments in the "Introduction" to *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–22, at 8 (examples there in note 7). On this aspect of *Gladiator* in particular cf. Monica S. Cyrino, "*Gladiator* and Contemporary American Society," and Peter S. Rose, "The Politics of *Gladiator*," both in *Gladiator: Film and History*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 124–149 and 150–172. Regarding this side of *Troy* cf. Petersen's comments below.

expected to be granted the assignment to direct as expensive, technologically complex, and logistically demanding a project as *Troy*.

More important for the content and style of *Troy*, however, is Petersen's background in classical antiquity and epic filmmaking. The former goes back to his high-school education at the Johanneum, an elite *Gymnasium* in Hamburg, dedicated like all the country's traditional high schools to humanist education. Petersen attended it for the entire nine years of the regular German high-school curriculum. He studied Latin for all of those years and classical Greek for six. Reading and translating excerpts from the Homeric epics was part of the Greek curriculum. Like most teenagers, Petersen was not particularly fascinated by his Greek and Latin courses, but on his high-school diploma his grade in Greek was the second highest possible, the equivalent of an American "B." Petersen enjoyed reading Homer in the original:

> we had to learn to write and read in ancient Greek . . . I actually learned to speak it. I can still kind of write it. At school, we were reading the Iliad in Greek. I always hated these Greek and Latin lessons – but the Iliad was always fun . . . I heard that Warner Brothers was developing a film inspired by the Iliad and I flashed back right away to schooltime.[14]

Looking back on Petersen's body of work from the vantage point of *Troy*, we can trace a line of development from his earliest films to his Homeric epic despite the variety of his output.[15] After film school, Petersen started honing his craft in 1970, chiefly directing feature-length and occasionally longer films for German public television. He had developed his passion for cinema as a teenager and directed his television films as if for the big screen.[16] He specialized in crime thrillers for the popular and still

14 Quoted from Russell, "Helmer of Troy." Cf. Petersen's comment in Wolfgang Petersen with Ulrich Greiwe, *"Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten": Vom "Tatort" bis nach Hollywood* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1997), 57. The internet site of the Johanneum lists Petersen among its "famous alumni." I am grateful to Joachim Latacz for some of this information.

15 On Petersen's continuing affinity to Germany and his awareness of the country's importance for the archaeology of Troy cf. his comments in an interview in which he mentions Heinrich Schliemann and Manfred Korfmann: Peter Zander, "Deutscher Härtetest: Wolfgang Petersen hat 'Troja' verfilmt – und fand in den Sagen Parallelen zu George W. Bush," *Berliner Morgenpost* (May 12, 2004), at http://morgenpost.berlin1.de/archiv2004/040512/feuilleton/story677622.html.

16 As he emphasizes in Petersen and Greiwe, *"Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten"*, 315. Prominent among the directors whom he admires most are John Ford and François Truffaut.

continuing series *Tatort* ("Scene of the Crime") and in films of political criticism.[17] Even his thrillers tended to address topical social issues. Particularly significant in this regard is *Die Konsequenz* (*The Consequence*, 1977), a film about a homo-erotic love affair that is still remarkable for the open-mindedness with which it treated an almost taboo subject. The film was highly controversial but found wide resonance.

Such serious, sometimes large-scale, explorations of topical or controversial subject matter with tragic overtones prepared Petersen for his first true epic, *Das Boot* (1980–1981), a five-hour television film about the dangerous journey of a German submarine in World War II. "When the Hunters Become the Hunted" and "The Other Side of World War 2" were slogans used to advertise the film. Released theatrically in a version shortened to half its original length, the film established Petersen's international reputation and made his move to Hollywood possible.[18] Describing the reception at its American premiere, Petersen himself has best summarized the impact on foreign audiences of a film in which the enemy is portrayed with a human face:

> We were all full of suspense. This was the first test [of the film] before an audience outside Germany, in Los Angeles, before many viewers, also many Jewish viewers. There were about 1,500 people in the theater. At the beginning of the film the statement appears that of about 40,000 Germans on board the U-Boats 30,000 did not return. During this sentence gigantic applause erupted, sending chills down our spines. I thought: This is going to be a catastrophe! When the deaths of 30,000 people are met with applause, you know what to expect. But it was weird: in the following 150 minutes, the film turned the audience completely around. I'll never forget it: at the end, I went up on the stage to thundering applause and discussed [the film] with the audience.[19]

17 Noteworthy are *Smog* (1972), on the effects of pollution; *Stadt im Tal* ("City in the Valley," 1974), a two-part psychological and political portrait of a small town; *Stellenweise Glatteis* ("Spots of Ice," 1974–1975), a two-part film on corruption and electronic surveillance in an industrial concern; and *Planübung* ("Scheduled Drill," 1976–1977), an apocalyptic vision of World War III.

18 *Das Boot* was nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Director. It is now available on DVD as *Das Boot – The Director's Cut* (209 mins.), with an audio commentary by Petersen, and *Das Boot – The Original Uncut Version* (293 mins.). On the film's production and early critical reception see the chapter in Petersen and Greiwe, *"Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten"*, 151–183, especially 155 and 165–166 (Petersen on Fascism and its fascination).

19 Quoted from Petersen and Greiwe, *"Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten"*, 174. Here and below, quotations from this book appear in my translation.

Das Boot is the first of Petersen's films with clear analogies to the *Iliad*. Petersen's words about his approach to the subject of war, heroism and its seductive appeal, and death and destruction may remind us of some of the themes and passages of Homer's epic:

> The film shows [all] this quite strongly, especially at the beginning . . . The film contains all of that. It shows first what fogged up the minds of the young generation and then the wretched reality . . . Quite simply, the film was intended to show what war really means – especially to young people, for they are the ones whose lives are wasted in war . . . "A Journey to the Limits of Reason" was the [film's] subtitle, which was right on the mark. From below a glorifying façade there surfaces total insanity.[20]

If Petersen turned to recent history with *Das Boot*, he returned to the roots of his education with *Troy*. In between (and besides several other films) came transitional works like *In the Line of Fire*, *Outbreak*, and *Air Force One* (1997), polished commercial films that dealt with heroism, masculinity, militarism, and politics in ways easily palatable to mass audiences. Much closer to epic and tragic themes was *The Perfect Storm* (2000), a kind of disaster epic and Petersen's last film before *Troy*. Although again a commercial work, it nevertheless addressed the subject of heroism and hubris in unforgettable images. A small fishing vessel's crew faces up to implacable nature when they find themselves engulfed in a huge storm. Almost willfully dismissing its overwhelming power, the captain and his men bring about their own deaths.

Troy brought several of the themes of these films into closer focus. Telling an ancient story, it also addressed contemporary issues, as reviewers and commentators noticed. In several interviews given to German journalists on a promotion tour for *Troy*, Petersen himself explained how a story set over three thousand years ago can express current concerns. His understanding of Homer may not find every scholar's assent but is worth considering:

> Look at the present! What the *Iliad* says about humans and wars is, simply, still true. Power-hungry Agamemnons who want to create a new world order – that is absolutely current.
>
> Of course, we didn't start saying: Let's make a movie about American politics, but [we started] with Homer's epic. But while we were working on it we realized that the parallels to the things that were happening out there were obvious.

20 Quoted from Petersen and Greiwe, *"Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten"*, 166–167.

> You develop such a story [for your film], and then almost the identical thing happens when you turn on the television. You can't help thinking that this Homer was a real genius, that he exactly understood us humans who apparently need wars again and again; also that someone like Agamemnon reappears again and again. Still, Homer was never interested in black–white, good–bad. Such a concept doesn't exist in reality. Only in the mind of George W. Bush . . . But this direct connection between Bush's power politics and that of Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, this desire to rule the world, to trample everything underfoot that gets in your way, that became evident only during filming. Only gradually did we realize how important Homer still is today.
>
> Homer's story shows that projects driven by belief and fanaticism often end in disasters. You need only open the newspaper to notice that nothing has changed in this regard.[21]

Why Petersen thinks that nothing in human nature has changed since Homer becomes evident when we consider his views on war and politics in connection with his perspective on cinematic storytelling:

> With my camera I want to tell grand stories that touch everybody. I don't want to preach, I don't offer any definite solutions. I want viewers to be able to recognize their personal experiences in a film. What makes grand stories interesting is the feeling that we're part of this story, that something is treated there that forms the endless complexity of our own existence, that my longings, my dreams, or my sorrows are being addressed . . . For me, friendship is one of these grand topics . . . I love grand stories. When a viewer notices that a largely unknown world is being described with genuine curiosity, he'll find what happens on the screen especially credible.[22]

Petersen is not the only contemporary director to believe in the ever-present appeal of myths and other stories, as the very title of *Die unendliche Geschichte* (*The Never-Ending Story*, 1984), his film based on a modern German fairy-tale novel, indicates. (The success of the *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Harry Potter* films points in the same direction.) To Petersen, the *Iliad* is the source of all grand stories in the Western tradition and the best example of the timeless modernity of larger-than-life heroic plots: "I think you can say that Homer's work – for the first time in the history of mankind, in an unbelievable, breathtaking way – describes the brutality and suffering of people in war."[23] But in order to preserve their appeal and importance over millennia, such stories must change – or better: must be changed by their modern tellers, not least when they tell them in a medium different from the original's. Writer Benioff has well summarized this aspect of turning an ancient literary epic into a modern film epic:

> I can't measure up to Homer. His composition has survived for nearly three millennia and remains the world's most beautiful and mournful depiction of war. But the story of the Trojan War does not belong to Homer. The characters he employs were legendary long before he was born. Dozens of different versions of the War have been told, and my script ransacks ideas from several of them. The script is not, truly, an adaptation of *The Iliad*. It is a retelling of the entire Trojan War story. So I'm not worried about desecrating a classic – Homer will survive Hollywood.[24]

Despite the extensive criticisms leveled at *Troy* by reviewers and classical scholars alike for the changes to Greek myth and the *Iliad* that the film contains, Benioff is surely correct about Homer's survival. *Troy* well illustrates, even exemplifies, some of the major aspects of any adaptation or translation of a long textual narrative to a long narrative in images: of an epic or a novel – the latter the logical and legitimate descendant of the former in the age of prose rather than verse narratives – to the screen.[25] Rather than making things easy for ourselves by grumbling about a film's lack of faithful adherence to its literary source or declaring it hopelessly inferior, we may take what Walter Benjamin wrote in 1921 about translation – if only translation from one language to another – as a starting point for a brief consideration of translation from

21 I have translated these passages from the following sources, listed here in the order in which they are cited: Tobias Kniebe, "Homer ist, wenn man trotzdem lacht: 'Troja'-Regisseur Wolfgang Petersen über die mythischen Wurzeln des Erzählens und den Achilles in uns allen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (May 11, 2004), at http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/artikel/607/31576/print.html; Frank Arnold, "Wolfgang Petersen: Keine Welt in Schwarz und Weiss," *Kölner Stadtanzeiger* (May 14, 2004), at http://www.ksta.de/artikel.jsp?id=1084203219381; Zander, "Deutscher Härtetest"; and Tobias Wiethoff, "Interview mit dem Regisseur Wolfgang Petersen: 'Ich gehe dahin, wo der Stoff ist'," *Westdeutsche Zeitung* (May 7, 2004), at http://www.wz-newsline.de/seschat4/200/sro.php?redid=58942.

22 Quoted from Petersen and Greiwe, *"Ich liebe die grossen Geschichten"*, 95, 317, and 330. Years later, Petersen reiterated his love for grand stories (Russell, "Helmer of Troy").

23 Quoted from Russell, "Helmer of Troy."

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

25 John Kevin Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), provides a classical scholar's perspective on novel and film as successors to ancient epic.

text to image. Benjamin introduces the concept of "translatability" and comments:

> a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability. It is evident that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Nonetheless, it does stand in the closest relationship to the original by virtue of the original's translatability; in fact, this connection is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original . . . a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife . . . no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change.[26]

Benjamin then turns to two related aspects that are of immediate concern to translators of texts as well as images and to their addressees: "The traditional concepts in any discussion of translation are fidelity and license." After remarking that "traditional usage makes these terms appear as if in constant conflict with each other," he asks a crucial question, one that applies equally to textual translations and text–image translations: "What can fidelity really do for the rendering of meaning?" He answers by concluding that fidelity alone is far from being capable of rendering or preserving the original's meaning. Instead, translators must proceed from a different understanding of their task. For the present purpose, it is not necessary here to trace the entire argument of his essay, but the analogy which he uses to make the point about fidelity as a limited and limiting aspect of translation is worth our attention. Tellingly, Benjamin's analogy resorts to something visual, imparting an aura of immediacy and vividness to his words:

> Fragments of a vessel that are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of imitating the sense of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.

26 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," tr. Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1: *1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1996), 253–263; quotations at 254, 256, and 259.

The greater language of literature, of narrative texts across different linguistic and stylistic systems, is analogous to the even greater language of visual narratives that cross over from text to image and of visual narratives that have been created and translated within the wide field of cinematic genres and styles. The theoretical foundations of such a view are far older than some film critics or literary scholars may realize. Long ago, linguist Roman Jakobson distinguished among three classes of translation:

> 1) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. 2) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. 3) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.[27]

Jakobson's third category includes filmic translations of literary texts. Related to these are remakes of films, both of works based on literature and of originally filmic stories. When Benjamin observes: "Fidelity and freedom in translation have traditionally been regarded as conflicting tendencies," he expresses what even today can cause heated debates in regard to film adaptations of epics, novels, or plays.[28] The fruitlessness of such debates becomes evident when we examine what actually happens when a text becomes a film. George Bluestone's observations in his now classic study of film adaptations of famous novels apply equally to ancient epic when translated to film:

> What happens . . . when the filmist [i.e., filmmaker] undertakes the adaptation of a novel, given the inevitable mutation [from text to image], is that he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel – the novel viewed [!] as raw material. He looks not to the organic novel, whose language is inseparable from its theme, but to characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like the heroes of folk legends, have achieved

27 Quoted from Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *Selected Writings*, 2nd edn, vol. 2: *Word and Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 260–266; quotation at 261. Scholarship on the language and the semiotics of film is extensive; for an introduction and basic bibliography see James Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, 3rd edn: *The World of Movies, Media, and Multimedia: Language, History, Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150–225 (chapter entitled "The Language of Film: Signs and Syntax") and 607–608.

28 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 260.

> a mythic life of their own . . . That is why there is no necessary correspondence between the excellence of a novel and the quality of the film in which the novel is recorded . . . the filmist becomes not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right.

In this description, we should understand "epic" alongside "novel," as Bluestone's reference to legendary characters and myth reveals, if rather unintentionally. The same is true for his conclusion:

> Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point, then diverge. At the intersection, the book and shooting-script are almost indistinguishable. But where the lines diverge, they not only resist conversion; they also lose any resemblance to each other. At the farthest remove, novel and film, like all exemplary art, have, within the conventions that make them comprehensible to a given audience, made maximum use of their materials. At this remove, what is particularly filmic and what is particularly novelistic cannot be converted without destroying an integral part of each . . . the filmed novel, in spite of certain resemblances, will inevitably become a different artistic entity from the novel on which it is based.[29]

The history of cinematic translations from texts to images parallels, at least in its wide variety and fluctuations, the history of classical myth within and since antiquity. As Benioff observed, Homer was not the inventor of the characters or the plots of his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and we should keep the flexibility of myth in mind when we view or judge a film like Petersen's. The subject is too vast to be dealt with here, but one classical scholar's voice may be adduced as representative. In a chapter on the limitations of the structuralist approach to myth, G. S. Kirk comments on the variety of mythical storytelling in antiquity. His words

29 Quoted from George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (1957; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 62–64 (in a chapter entitled "The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of the Film"). The literature on adaptation has become extensive since this book was published. Representative works are André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," tr. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo, in *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, ed. Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41–51, rpt. in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 19–27; Neil Sinyard, *Filming Literature: The Art of Screen Adaptation* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986); Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, 54–76, and "Novel and Film: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," in *La decima musa: il cinema e le altre arte/The Tenth Muse: Cinema and the Other Arts*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima and Laura Vichi (Udine: Forum, 2001), 441–457.

are also applicable to the history of ancient myths as they are retold in literary and other forms until today:

> If . . . myths are traditional tales, then their telling is subject to the rules of all traditional tales: they will be varied in some degree on virtually every occasion of telling, and the variations will be determined by the whim, the ambition or the particular thematic repertoire of the individual teller, as well as by the receptivity and special requirements of the particular audience. Themes will be suppressed, added, transposed, or replaced by other apparently equivalent themes.

Kirk concludes with a call for open-mindedness that viewers of today's adaptations of classical myths in popular culture, especially on cinema and television screens, might keep in mind if they wish to do justice to the continuing presence of ancient culture in modern mass media. After summarizing the various functions of myth that structuralists point to, Kirk observes:

> The important thing for the modern student of myth, in my opinion, is to be prepared to find any or all of these properties in the myths of any culture; and not to apply generalizing theories *a priori* to a category of human expression and imagination that is likely, after all, to be a broad one.[30]

For "theories" we may also read "fixed opinions," "prejudices," or "dismissive judgments." Awareness of Kirk's exhortation does not, of course, entail our uncritical acceptance of each and any new work. Nor should it. But we ought not simply to condemn a work as inferior or unworthy of serious attention if it deviates from what we believe to be the right, true, and beautiful – qualities we tend to ascribe only to our classical originals whose unique greatness we believe no later work can reach. Rather, we should look for strengths and weaknesses of a particular work, such as a popular film that reaches an audience of millions, on its own terms: What made it the way it ended up being? Why did the creators invent characters or events rather than reproducing what they found in their sources? The chapters in this book exemplify this approach in connection with *Troy*.

If we apply a broad perspective to visual adaptations of literature in general and to Homeric epic in particular, we find ourselves in a long

30 Quotations from G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970; several rpts.), 74 and 83.

tradition of adaptation: from Greek vase paintings and Roman, especially Pompeian, wall paintings based on specific episodes from the *Iliad or Odyssey* and from Greek and Roman stage adaptations of Homeric themes to a never-ending parade of works of textual and visual art since the Middle Ages. In the late nineteenth century, technology brought another dimension to bear on this tradition: narratives in moving images, later accompanied by words, sounds, and music. As is true for the history of ancient textual adaptations of Homer in genres other than epic, the history of visual adaptations exhibits anything but faithfulness to its sources. But there is nothing bad or wrong about the lack of slavish adherence to the model provided by a revered master like Homer. We may compare what Goethe wrote in 1801 after seeing a drawing of Homeric heroes by his friend, the painter Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein. The visual arts, Goethe commented, should treat mythic-epic subjects not according to Homer but like Homer ("nicht nach dem Homer, sondern wie Homer"). Painters who merely translate a text into images fall short of what is accomplished by those who approach their subjects with the model of Homeric creativity in mind.[31]

Such an approach to visual adaptation is both sensible and necessary, but in an era whose technology has enabled visual artists to advance far beyond canvas, paint, and brush the range of possibilities for adaptations has advanced as well. This is nowhere better seen than in the cinema and its offshoot, television, in particular in fanciful retellings of Greek myth. In principle, such free adaptations are nothing new. Even in antiquity, alternate versions of myths spread far and wide throughout literature and the visual arts, as the works of playwrights, mythographers, and epic and lyrical poets on the one hand and those of sculptors and painters on the other attest. Modern visual media have only taken this tradition further. They have proven especially fertile grounds for reimagining and reinventing classical antiquity. Film director Vittorio Cottafavi, who made several films set in antiquity, aptly called this phenomenon "neo-mythologism."[32]

31 For quotation and context see *Goethes Werke* (Weimar Edition), vol. 35 (1892): *Tag- und Jahres-Hefte*, 97; easily accessible in the reprint of this edition (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), vol. 40, 97.

32 On Cottafavi and his term "neo-mythologism" see Pierre Leprohon, *The Italian Cinema*, tr. Roger Greaves and Oliver Stallybrass (New York: Praeger, 1972), 174–179. I use Cottafavi's term as the theoretical starting point for "Neo-Mythologism: Apollo and the Muses on the Screen," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 11 (2005), 383–423, with discussion of *Troy* at 418–420.

The most notorious genre of neo-mythological film is that of the muscleman epics made in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s. Most, and the most famous – or, depending on one's view, infamous – of these are loose adaptations of the myths of Heracles (Hercules). These in turn spun off slews of comparable films about assorted ancient or quasi-ancient heroes, a veritable band of Herculean brothers. Some of these films are capable of stretching viewers' patience to the breaking point. *Troy* evidently is an example of neo-mythological cinema. But to those who love both classical epics and epic films, the most severe test of their endurance of the freewheeling liberties that the cinema has taken with classical antiquity is a film that goes considerably further than *Troy* in its radically altered retelling of the Trojan War and the *Iliad*. This film is Manfred S. Noa's *La regina di Sparta* (*The Queen of Sparta*, 1931), made for a small Italian production company in Hollywood. Today it is little-known and not easily accessible. Its neo-mythological plot is instructive – and amusing or infuriating, according to a viewer's temperament. The American Film Institute provides the following summary:

> After the kidnapping of Helen, Queen of Sparta, Priam, the King of Troy, is informed that she must return to her kingdom or war between the Spartans and the Trojans will ensue. While Paris, Prince of Troy, begs his father not to return his beloved, Helen insists on averting warfare by returning to her home. When Priam hears that the Spartans have begun to revolt, he insists on fighting, but Helen begs Paris to stay with her rather than risk his life on the battlefield. Priam's consort, the queen, asks Helen to beg Hector, Paris' brother, not to fight. However, Hector insists on going to battle and takes leave of his wife Andromache and his son despite the former's pleading and her accusations against Helen that Hector is in love with her. Priam enlists Paris to lead the troops against Menelaus, Helen's husband. Meanwhile, at the Spartan camp, a messenger announces the Trojans' approach. When Achilles' request to have the honor of killing Paris and Hector is refused by Menelaus, who desires to do the job himself, Achilles refuses to fight. Paris loses the duel with Menelaus, and Helen, fearing for Paris, orders a chariot and begs Menelaus to throw down his arms, which he does. But Agamemnon, another Spartan, convinces Menelaus to continue the fight and to avenge the kidnapping of Helen. On the Trojan side, Hector gives the command to fight and many Spartans are killed. A messenger announces the Trojans' rapid progress toward the Spartan camp, and in his fury, Achilles strangles the messenger and then tries to distract himself from the urge to do battle by watching acrobats and dancers perform. Back in Troy, Spartan prisoners arrive and Helen begs Priam to spare them, reminding him that she too is

a Spartan. Priam menaces Helen, and Paris in turn menaces Priam, who then orders his son taken away. Patroclus, a Spartan, begs to take Achilles' place as high commander in order to save Sparta. Achilles agrees, calls the men to arms, and then sends Patroclus out, the latter eventually being killed when he engages in combat with Hector. When Patroclus' body is brought back to the camp, Achilles vows to avenge his fallen friend and takes up arms, although the Trojans have already declared victory. Achilles fights with Hector in front of the walls of Troy, but Andromache takes her son to the scene and begs her husband not to fight. As Hector tries to run to his family, Achilles pierces his throat with a sword. Achilles takes the body and announces that Patroclus is avenged. The Trojan women denounce Helen, and a prophet from Athens foretells the death of Paris and Hector and the fall of Troy. Priam has the prophet burned to death. Next, Priam, the queen, and Andromache go to Achilles and beg that Hector's body be returned for a proper burial. Achilles says he will only give the body up if Helen relinquishes her crown and has it placed on Patroclus' tomb. Priam agrees but secretly plans to avenge Hector's death by asking Paris to thrust a poisoned arrow into Achilles' heel. He refuses until Priam threatens to send Helen to do the job. Helen tries to stop Paris, but is too late. He kills Achilles and, ashamed at his father's treachery, tries to attack Priam with the poisoned arrow. Priam has him seized and orders that he be put to death. Agamemnon decides on a plan to destroy Troy: he will declare peace, then send a huge horse filled with Spartan soldiers as a friendship offering. Paris, in prison, is visited by Helen and his mother, the queen. He says he will kill himself if Helen leaves him. As the Trojans rejoice in their victory, the horse is brought in. Helen and Paris are sentenced to death and the queen tries to help them to escape, although the brave Helen wishes to stay and die by Paris' side. They see Menelaus emerge from the horse, and then the Spartan king kills Helen's lover. Priam tries to poison Helen, but when he sees the Spartans, he drinks the poison himself. Menelaus enters and Helen tells him to kill her. He tells her to commit suicide, but then changes his mind and invites her to return with him to Sparta.[33]

This film's ending, with its quasi-Oedipal overtones, exceeds anything that Benioff and Petersen do in *Troy*. Noa's film was released well over seven decades before *Troy*, sufficient proof that neo-mythological narratives have never deterred filmmakers. But the neo-mythologism of *La regina di Sparta* can be traced even further back. The film is a condensed remake of *Helena* (1924), a grandiose three-and-a-half-hour silent epic in two parts that Noa had directed in Germany. So there is nothing at all unusual if *Troy* follows in the long-established tradition of cinematic neo-mythologism by introducing characters and plot twists that were unknown to the ancients and by revealing its debt to cinema history.

33 I have anglicized the Italian names, corrected misspellings of others, and slightly altered some punctuation. Only intrepid readers are urged to view the original at https://afionline.org/members/catalog/AbbrView.aspx?s=1&Movie=2343.

Some of the chapters in this book address a number of analogies and similarities to earlier epic films that *Troy* contains. In both plot and visual style, for instance, *Troy* is reminiscent of the first American widescreen epic on the same subject, Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy* (1956), also produced by Warner Brothers. A particular detail in *Troy*, the custom of placing coins on the eyes of the dead, has elicited justifiable criticism for being anachronistic, for coinage did not exist in the Bronze Age or at the time of Homer. But apparently the custom is familiar at Warner Brothers. In Raoul Walsh's *The Roaring Twenties* (1939), one of the studio's classic gangster films, we hear none other than Humphrey Bogart in the role of an ice-cold racketeer warn an accomplice: "You came into this racket with your eyes open. You learned a lot, and you know a lot. If any of it gets out, you'll go out with your eyes open, only this time they'll have pennies on them."

While conservative classicists can still be shocked by all the non-classical plot elements in *Troy*, familiarity has long inured classical cinephiles. Traditionalists might therefore wish to ponder Petersen's own words on the close connections between Homer and himself as epic storytellers:

> He [Homer] wrote down his story only a few hundred years after it all happened, and you can see clearly that he did everything to make his story gripping for the audience of his time. We tried to do the exact same thing. In this sense he could understand us.[34]

The preceding observations are intended to serve readers as a framework for their encounter with the essays on *Troy* in the present book. Their authors are scholars trained in classical history, archaeology, or literature; all have strong interests in the cinema and its importance for the survival of antiquity today. They examine the film from a number of perspectives, including Bronze-Age archaeology, Homeric studies,

34 Quoted from Kniebe, "Homer ist, wenn man trotzdem lacht."

ancient and modern history, and film history and aesthetics.[35] It will be readily apparent to readers from the various points of criticism being advanced in the different chapters that there is no complete consensus between and among contributors about the artistic qualities of *Troy*. But it will be equally apparent that all of them adhere to the belief that simple dismissal of the film as yet another instance of deviation from a sacred tradition is beside the point. We hope that our readers will join us in this perspective. Such readers are all those who are interested, on the one hand, in classical antiquity, Homeric epic, and the classical tradition and its prominence today and, on the other hand, in cinema and the importance of film for our culture. We also address students and teachers of Greek literature, history, and civilization and those in related areas of the humanities such as Film Studies, Comparative Literature, and Cultural Studies. Our contributions are written in non-specialized English and without academic jargon. We explain all technical terms, and all quotations from Greek and Latin texts appear in translation. If we succeed in persuading readers to think anew about Homer, about ancient and modern culture and their interactions, and about epic cinema, our work will have accomplished its purpose.

As editor of this volume, I owe thanks to a variety of people and institutions. First among them are my contributors, whose co-operation made this book a highly pleasant working experience for their *poimên laôn klassikôn kai philokinêmatographikôn*, if they permit me the use of such a quasi-Homeric epithet. For illustrations of the archaeological site of Troy and for images of ancient vase paintings I am grateful to Peter Jablonka of the Troia Project and to the Antikenmuseum Basel, the British Museum, and the Kunsthistorische Museum Vienna. William Knight Zewadski, Esq., again graciously allowed me to use a number of images from his unique collection of film stills. I am also greatly indebted to the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University and its director, Brett de Bary, for a fellowship during the academic year 2004–2005 that provided me with a congenial working environment. At Blackwell, Al Bertrand, my commissioning editor, deserves thanks for his generous support of this project from its inception. I also thank Angela Cohen, Annette Abel, and the Blackwell staff who worked with me in efficiently seeing the book through the production process.

35 Scholarship on Homer, archaeology, and early Greek literature is vast. Besides works cited in this book's chapters, the following recent publications provide up-to-date information from first orientation to advanced introduction, with additional bibliographical references: *Homer: Critical Assessments*, ed. Irene J. F. de Jong, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1999); Jasper Griffin, *Homer*, 2nd edn (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2001); Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Gregory Nagy, *Homer's Text and Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Carol G. Thomas and Craig Conant, *The Trojan War* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005). Michael Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996; rpt. 1998), is a general introduction that accompanies his television series of the same title, now available on DVD. For basic information on translations of Homer see *Homer in English*, ed. George Steiner (London: Penguin, 1996); Philip H. Young, *The Printed Homer: A 3,000 Year Publishing and Translation History of the* Iliad *and the* Odyssey (Jefferson: McFarland, 2003).

POSTSCRIPT. Manfred Korfmann, director of the archaeological excavations at Troy-Hisarlık, unexpectedly died in August, 2005. Publisher, contributors, and editor all mourn his death. His chapter in this book is one of the very last essays written by the "Father of Troy," as he was affectionately called. We hope that it will stand as a reminder of the depth of his commitment to increasing our knowledge and understanding of all things Trojan and as a testimony to the breadth of his scholarship, which included a strong interest in the survival of the past in the present and in its importance for the future.

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

Edited by

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