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

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

Translated by Martin M. Winkler

CHAPTER THREE

The *Iliad* and the Cinema

Martin M. Winkler

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

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

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

Creative or artistic engagement with a text, however, is not scholarship, and adaptations of classical literature do not have to conform to the strictures of philology. Nor are scholars meant to be the primary audience of such works. Rather, there is room for both scholarly exposition and creative adaptation of classical and all other literature. So the dismissive attitude toward modern visual adaptations of ancient texts is short-sighted. On the one hand, it ignores the strong presence of the past in modern popular culture, usually much wider than can be found in the high culture of theater, painting, or opera. Traditionalists would have a much better reason to complain about contemporary popular culture if antiquity were *not* such a conspicuous force in it. On the other hand, even if modern adaptations are well below the artistic level of their originals, scholars' dismissals ignore the long tradition of adaptation that goes back to antiquity. This is most evident in regard to myth, the chief subject matter of ancient narratives. Greek and Roman authors and visual artists were fully aware that myth is by nature variable.[3] As a result, there was no unequivocally correct and no unequivocally false retelling of a myth in antiquity, even if some poets and philosophers claimed to know the truth behind certain tales and proceeded to correct them accordingly.[4] Nor can there be any today. To state this is not to

Review of Books (June 24, 2004), 46–49. Examples of exceptions to this attitude on the part of classicists, calling for their involvement in philological approaches to film, are my "Introduction" to *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–18, at 5–6; my "Introduction" to *Classics and Cinema*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991), 9–13; the latter book's review article by Maria Wyke, "Classics and Contempt: Redeeming Cinema for the Classical Tradition," *Arion*, 3rd ser., 6.1 (1998), 124–136, and my "Altertumswissenschaftler im Kino; oder: *Quo vadis, philologia?*" *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 11 (2004), 95–110, at 95–102.

3 Two books by Susan Woodford deal with ancient retellings of myth in the visual arts: *The Trojan War in Ancient Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) and *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; rpt. 2003). Cf. further Jocelyn Penny Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Classical Art and Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Margaret R. Scherer, *The Legends of Troy in Art and Literature*, 2nd edn (New York: Phaidon, 1964), is a survey from antiquity to the twentieth century.

4 The *Palinodes* ("Recantations") of Stesichorus, turned against Homer and Hesiod, are among the best-known ancient literary examples. On corrections of myth see now the instances examined in *Mythenkorrekturen: Zu einer paradoxalen Form der Mythenrezeption*, ed. Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). In their introduction ("Zum Begriff der Mythenkorrektur," 1–18, especially 2–8), the editors distinguish among variation, correction, and criticism of myth and briefly discuss several instances from Greek literature.

ignore that many specific versions of certain myths came to overshadow others and became canonical. But being canonical is not the same as being correct. The early Greek poet Hesiod addresses the flexibility of myth when he has none other than the Muses, the divine inspirers of poets, state outright:

> We know to tell many lies resembling the truth,
> but we also know, when we want, to pronounce truths.[5]

We may compare what two modern voices have observed on this subject in connection with Homer. First, that of a famous scholar and representative of high culture. In his introduction to *Homer in English*, an anthology of translations and adaptations, George Steiner speaks of a "perennial ubiquity of translations from Homer, of Homeric variants, recreations, pastiches and travesties." Steiner further observes: "I believe our *Iliad* to be the product of an editorial recension of genius, of a wonderfully formative act of combination, selection and editing of the voluminous oral material."[6] Second, the voice of a representative of mass culture. What film director Wolfgang Petersen has said about *Troy* is a close echo of Steiner's perspective: "If there is something like a tree of storytelling, on which each book, each film, is a tiny leaf, then Homer is its trunk."[7] Steiner's and Petersen's views are apt to do greater justice to the endless web of storytelling, in whatever language or medium, than do haughty dismissals of adaptations of a revered author's works. Petersen's understanding of storytelling exemplifies the concept of the narrative palimpsest that French literary scholar Gérard Genette has developed in connection with Homer's *Odyssey*.[8] Petersen's mention of a tree and its leaves, an immediately comprehensible image to emphasize his point, may even remind readers of Homer of a famous simile in the *Iliad*.[9]

5 Hesiod, *Works and Days* 27–28; my translation.

6 *Homer in English*, ed. George Steiner (London: Penguin, 1996), xvii and xxviii.

7 Quoted from an interview with Petersen by 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; my translation.

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

9 *Iliad* 6.146–149: the generations of man as compared to the regeneration of the leaves on a tree.

1. Can the *Iliad* Be Filmed?

The end of Petersen's *Troy* carries a written acknowledgment that the film was inspired by the *Iliad*. As such, it is a conspicuous leaf on the tall and wide tree of Homeric storytelling. Still, neither *Troy* nor any other film ever made about the themes or the plot of the *Iliad* is a close adaptation – a visual translation – of Homer's text. Instead, all these films deal in different ways with the Trojan War, usually beginning with the abduction of Helen and ending with the fall of Troy. Strictly speaking, the *Iliad*, unlike the *Odyssey*, has never been filmed. The likeliest reason for this is the epic scale of the original. A film of the *Iliad* would be far too long for most viewers' taste, running to at least six or seven hours. It would also be enormously expensive. In addition, the scenes of extreme violence in battle, in which the *Iliad* abounds so much that Simone Weil could characterize it in a famous essay as "the poem of force," would have to be handled very carefully, even today when viewers have been inundated with graphic acts of on-screen bloodshed.[10] A film of the *Iliad* would throw its viewers into the midst of carnage, death, and all the horrors of war for most of its running time. The effect might be numbing or sickening more than anything else, and the depth of Homer's characterization of the Greek and Trojan heroes, their families, their societies, and their gods would suffer accordingly. As a result, the *Iliad* has attracted filmmakers mainly as the basis for free retellings.

Nevertheless, one filmmaker stands out from all others. For many years, Italian writer-director Franco Rossi hoped to make an epic film faithful to the *Iliad*. Rossi had earlier directed and co-written *L'Odissea* (1969), the most accomplished *Odyssey* ever put on the screen. His was and still is the only version to communicate to viewers the beauty and profundity of its model. The film, a good six hours long, was an international production financed by Italian, German, and French public television. Almost every scene reveals that the film had been a labor of love, probably not only for Rossi. Three years later Rossi followed his *Odissea* with a distinguished companion piece, also for international television. His six-hour *Eneide* is the only film version of the *Aeneid* worthy of Virgil. It is likely that Rossi would have filmed the *Iliad* in a comparable manner. But he could never get the necessary financing, although a screenplay, co-written by him, had been completed. Had Rossi succeeded with this project, he would have achieved the unique distinction of making

10 Simone Weil, *The Iliad or The Poem of Force: A Critical Edition*, ed. James P. Holoka (New York: Lang, 2003), is the most scholarly reissue of this 1939 essay.

memorable screen adaptations of all three of antiquity's greatest and most influential heroic epics. After his death in 2000, a film of the *Iliad* on the high level of his style and sensibility is unlikely ever to be made.[11] So there still is no film of the *Iliad*. The question then arises: can the *Iliad* be filmed at all?[12]

The difficulties inherent in the subject matter, length, and overall complexity of the *Iliad* mentioned above, all formidable obstacles to any serious adaptation, may incline us to answer this question with "No." Moreover, to modern sensibilities the *Iliad* is wordy and repetitive, especially in its epithets and formulaic language, integral to its style as these are. An even greater problem for today's audiences is a lack of realism on both the divine and the human levels. Gods and goddesses play important parts in the *Iliad*; they take sides in the Trojan War, and some of them fight in it. Warriors deliver lengthy speeches right on the battlefield. The *Iliad* may be too alien in its historical, cultural, religious, and social aspects to be put on screen in a manner that is appropriate to its greatness and at the same time capable of reaching a large audience. That modern viewers are far less familiar with its plot and cast of characters than ancient audiences had been is an additional, and by no means negligible, factor. As a film today, the *Iliad* would need extensive verbal and visual annotation to prevent audiences from being puzzled by what they see or hear. Explanation would be necessary for major aspects and small details alike. As a result, a film would have to be expanded significantly and would inevitably distort the original. Annotation of the kind mentioned is the filmic equivalent of a scholarly commentary accompanying modern editions of ancient texts, so classical scholars might welcome the application of its principles to a film. But

11 Brief comments by Rossi on his films set in antiquity appear in the interview in Francesco Bolzoni and Mario Foglietti, *Le stagioni del cinema: Trenta registi si raccontano* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2000), 253–258. Bolzoni and Foglietti appropriately give this section of their book the heading "Franco Rossi: *L'ultimo Ulisse*."

12 *Singe den Zorn* (2004), a German film whose title renders the opening of the *Iliad*, was made with the avowed goal of remaining faithful to the poetic nature of Homer's epic. It is not a film of the *Iliad* but of a staged declamation. Matthias Merkle and Antje Borchardt developed their project for the Dramatisches Theater in Berlin in 2003 and put on a revised version at and around the archaeological site of Troy in 2004. This performance is the basis of their film, which runs to 96 minutes and comprises about 2,500 lines. The *Iliad* has more than 15,000 lines. – At the beginning of their careers, Stanley Kubrick and his friend Alexander Singer contemplated a film of the *Iliad* based on Singer's screenplay; it never materialized; cf. Joseph Gelmis, *The Film Director as Superstar* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 312. Kubrick later directed the science-fiction and historical epics *Spartacus* (1960), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *Barry Lyndon* (1975).

there is a decisive difference. A philological or historical commentary can be kept separate from the text while explanations in a film, either verbal or visual, cannot; they are an integral part of the film itself. And where should a screenwriter or director draw the line concerning expository or explanatory additions? Besides many other aspects of life and death in Bronze-Age antiquity, there would have to be explanations of the major ancient customs, for example during funerals; of concepts like duty, honor, and ethical behavior; of religious practices and the importance and functions of numerous gods. All this would be cumbersome and bring any narrative drive to a standstill, doubtless alienating large segments of the audience. Screenwriters and directors would equally defeat their purpose if they provided too much or too little information.

Nor is the *Iliad* a narrative complete in itself. Its storyline is part of a much larger plot with which ancient audiences were familiar. Homer could refer to it briefly but could otherwise keep it out of his narrative. Such familiarity is no longer the case today. So an expansion of the "backstory" of the *Iliad* would become necessary for a coherent film plot. Homer himself on several occasions refers to his story's background and its aftermath. The full story, of which he tells only a segment, begins with the Judgment of Paris and his elopement with Helen, if not even earlier; it continues well beyond the funeral of Hector during the Greeks' siege of Troy, the last scene in the *Iliad*. The death of Achilles, the fall of Troy, and the return home of the surviving Greeks are all part of the matter of Troy. And this does not even include the continuation of the Trojan myth in the historical mythology of the Romans, whose ancestor was the Trojan prince Aeneas, one of the few survivors of the destruction of the city.

Petersen's *Troy* and its cinematic predecessors since Giovanni Pastrone's *La caduta di Troia* (*The Fall of Troy*, 1910) all adhere to the pattern of plot expansion here summarized. If not even someone as experienced and uniquely qualified as Rossi could make a film of the *Iliad*, we might indeed have to conclude that Homer's epic is unfilmable. This conclusion, however, will strike any lover of both Homer and the cinema as highly regrettable, as we will see next.

2. The Cinematic Nature of the *Iliad*

The additions outlined above that a film of the *Iliad* would need are themselves highly cinematic. The beginnings of the illicit affair between the most beautiful woman on earth and her handsome prince, the big

spectacle of the Trojan War, Odysseus' trick with the wooden horse (itself a suspenseful and irresistible part of the story, as the histories of painting and film both attest), the tragic deaths of Hector, his father, and his son, the destruction of his people, city, and culture, and the remarkable deaths of Achilles and Agamemnon and the no less remarkable survival of Odysseus – all this is the stuff of cinema. Again and again the Trojan War has attracted filmmakers for its timeless plot – heroism, war, forbidden love, the most famous *femme fatale* ever – and for its visual appeal. More importantly, the *Iliad* itself is inherently visual, even cinematic, on the levels of plot and style. So we can adduce a number of substantial points to argue against the conclusion reached above.

The plot of the *Iliad* is full of action, the lifeblood of cinema: a great war hero's anger at the mistreatment he receives from his commander-in-chief and the effects of his withdrawal from fighting on himself and others on both sides in the war. The *Iliad* also has enough beautiful women (Aphrodite, Helen, Briseis) and happy marital love (Hector and Andromache) to satisfy any viewer's expectations. It also takes its readers to an exotic past. Its setting, or an imaginative version of it, can be re-created on film, most attractively in a widescreen format and with color cinematography. Computer-generated images can show us the impossible or barely imaginable and seamlessly integrate its amazing sights into live-action footage. *Troy* is an example: "Even I don't know where the CG starts and our extras end," Petersen has said.[13] So what more could a filmmaker want? Even considered by itself, the plot of the *Iliad* is a natural for large-scale visual retellings. American writer-director Samuel Fuller, playing himself in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), famously defined the cinema in terms directly applicable to the *Iliad* because everything he points to is central to Homer's epic: "The film is like a battleground: love, hate, action, violence, death. In one word: emotions."[14] Humans show emotions primarily through action. Action implies motion, and the cinema, whose very name means "motion," may well be the best artistic medium for the representation of emotions and all they entail. Petersen has echoed Fuller by summarizing his view of the *Iliad* as follows, if in rather colloquial terms: "The *Iliad* is an anticipation of eternal human drama. Men bash each other's

13 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.

14 Fuller's words, spoken in English in the film, are often quoted in slightly different wording or punctuation; cf., e.g., *Pierrot le Fou: A Film by Jean-Luc Godard*, tr. Peter Whitehead (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 28 and 33 ("Emotion").

heads in, love each other, torture each other. Homer understood this overwhelmingly: the Beautiful, but also violence and the desire to exterminate each other."[15] So a filmic treatment of the *Iliad* independent of its surrounding mythical narratives is long overdue. Presumably, Rossi would have made such a film.

The second level on which the *Iliad* works cinematically, that of style, could greatly have aided a director like Rossi in his undertaking. To an astonishing degree, the *Iliad*, the very first work of Western literature, reveals features of the art of cinematic storytelling long before modern technology made this art a reality. That is to say, the *Iliad* provides a director with numerous clues for translating its story to the screen. The text, as it were, contains its own screenplay, with staging directions, hints at camera angles, and points about editing. In a 1977 interview, film director George Cukor made the case for literary adaptations in general: "The text tells you where the camera should be. I don't think that's a question of your judgment . . . If the story is good, the director is halfway there."[16] Evidently, these words apply to the *Iliad*.

Great narrative literature is highly visual and prompts readers or listeners to see in their mind's eye the story in which they are engaged. This is especially true for a large number of Greek and Roman works.[17]

15 Wolfgang Röhl, "'Menschen hauen sich die Köpfe ein'," *Stern* (April 19, 2004); quoted from http://www.stern.de/unterhaltung/film/index.html?id=522904&q=petersen%20menschen.

16 Quoted from Paul F. Boller and Ronald L. Davis, *Hollywood Anecdotes* (New York: Morrow, 1987), 93. Cukor directed several films adapted from works of literature and had extensive experience as a stage director.

17 On this see especially Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," in Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and tr. Jay Leyda (1949; rpt. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 195–255, and "Word and Image," in Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, ed. and tr. Leyda (1942; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 1–65. Cf. William C. Wees, "Dickens, Griffith and Eisenstein," *The Humanities Association Review/La Révue de l'Association des Humanités*, 24 (1973), 266–276, and Ana L. Zambrano, "Charles Dickens and Sergei Eisenstein: The Emergence of Cinema," *Style*, 9 (1975), 469–487. J. K. Newman, "Ancient Poetics and Eisenstein's Films," and Fred Mench, "Film Sense in the *Aeneid*," both in my *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, 193–218 and 219–232, apply Eisenstein's principles to classical literature. Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio had expressed his awareness of the connections between ancient Roman literature and the cinema in February, 1914, in an interview published in *Il Corriere della Sera*; the text is reprinted in *Interviste a D'Annunzio (1895–1938)*, ed. Gianni Oliva (Lanciano: Rocco Carabba, 2002), 278–285. D'Annunzio was greatly taken with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in this regard – "There you have a true cinematic subject" (*Ecco un vero soggetto cinematografico*) – and particularly with the story of Daphne (282). The cinematic equivalent of Ovidian metamorphosis is the dissolve, one of the earliest and most common "special effects" since the days of film pioneer Georges Méliès.

Ancient poets' and audiences' creative imagination supplied what lack of technology denied them. In an essay first published in 1946, André Bazin, the influential French critic and theoretician of film, made this point explicit: "The cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. The concept men had of it existed, so to speak, fully armed in their minds, as if in some Platonic heaven, and what strikes us most of all is the obstinate resistance of matter to ideas rather than of any help offered by techniques to the imagination of the researchers." Bazin adduces an apposite analogy from Greek myth: "the myth of [Daedalus and] Icarus had to wait for the internal combustion engine before descending from the Platonic heavens. But it had dwelt in the soul of every man since he first thought about birds."[18]

The *Iliad* demonstrates the accuracy of Bazin's observation. In Book 8, Zeus comes down from Olympus to the highest peak of Mt. Ida, on which he has a grove and an altar. Here he sits down and, "looking out over the city of Troy and the ships of the Achaians," watches the battle between Trojans and Greeks.[19] Zeus resembles the viewer of an epic film.[20] He delights in watching the heroic exploits on the battlefield purely for the sake of spectacle. His elevated position affords him a panoramic overview of the Trojan War, one that corresponds to today's filmgoer looking at an extreme long shot as composed for the kind of wide screen onto which historical epics have been projected for over fifty years. A number of high-angle battle shots in Petersen's *Troy* come close to showing us what Zeus may have seen from his vantage point.

18 André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, tr. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967; rpt. 1974), 17–22; quotations at 17 and 22 (slightly altered and corrected). I discuss Bazin in related context in my "Introduction" to *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, 3–22, at 14. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 5, has repeated Bazin's point (if without reference to him): "was some cinematographic dimension of human reality always there somewhere in prehistoric life, waiting to find its actualization in a certain high-technical civilization?" The answer is evident.

19 *Iliad* 8.41–52; the last line of this passage is quoted in the translation by Richmond Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951; several rpts.), 183.

20 A recent film epic specifically makes this point. In *Alexander* (2004), writer-director Oliver Stone includes bird's-eye views of the battle of Gaugamela that are intended to represent Zeus, Alexander the Great's putative father (an ancient legend that the film takes care to include), witnessing his son's victory: "The eagle that dominates the film's imagery represents by tradition Zeus . . . I use the eagle in that scene to represent Zeus's point of view." Quoted from Gary Crowdus, "Dramatizing Issues That Historians Don't Address: An Interview With Oliver Stone," *Cinéaste*, 30 no. 2 (2005), 12–23, at 20.

Throughout the *Iliad*, Zeus and the other gods watch from on high the epic scenes that take place on earth. The poem reminds us time and again that its story is a spectacle in the word's literal sense. But there is much more. The chief cinematic clues contained in the *Iliad* may be found in its similes and ecphrases. Both are famous aspects of Homeric style.[21]

2.1. Similes

Epic similes are an integral part of Homeric narrative. A revealing instance of their function occurs in a complementary pair of similes in Book 22, when Hector is about to face Achilles for their decisive duel. As the very first lines of the *Iliad* have made evident, the hero whose anger is most devastating in the entire Trojan War is Achilles. But now his greatest foe, Hector, is full of heroic fury, too. He refuses to heed his parents' pleas not to fight Achilles but to save himself. Homer expresses Hector's state of mind in a long soliloquy, the ancient equivalent of an interior monologue. (Films usually render this as voice-overs.) In the passage that describes Hector waiting and Achilles approaching, Homer sets the scene by cutting, as it were, from Priam and Hecuba to Hector. (The cut is implied in the second "but" in the lines quoted below.) I quote the passage without Hector's soliloquy:

> So these two in tears and with much supplication called out
> to their dear son, but could not move the spirit in Hector,
> but he awaited Achilles as he came on, gigantic.
> But as a snake waits for a man by his hole, in the mountains,
> glutted with evil poisons, and the fell venom has got inside him,
> and coiled about the hole he stares malignant, so Hector
> would not give ground but kept unquenched the fury within him
> and sloped his shining shield against the jut of the bastion.
> Deeply troubled he spoke to his own great-hearted spirit . . .
> So he pondered, waiting, but Achilles was closing upon him
> in the likeness of the lord of battles, the helm-shining warrior,
> and shaking from above his shoulder the dangerous Pelian
> ash spear, while the bronze that closed about him was shining
> like the flare of blazing fire or the sun in its rising.

21 On Homer's descriptive techniques and on his similes see especially Mark W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 5: *Books 17–20* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 24–41, and *Homer: Poet of the* Iliad (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987; rpt. 1990), 82–87 and 102–110, with additional references.

> And the shivers took hold of Hector when he saw him, and he
> could no longer
> stand his ground there, but left the gates behind, and fled, frightened,
> and Peleus' son went after him in the confidence of his quick feet.
> As when a hawk in the mountains who moves lightest of things flying
> makes his effortless swoop for a trembling dove, but she slips away
> from beneath and flies and he shrill screaming close after her
> plunges for her again and again, heart furious to take her;
> so Achilles went straight for him in fury, but Hector
> fled away under the Trojan wall and moved his knees rapidly.[22]

The paired similes of the snake coiled on the ground and of the hawk pursuing a dove high in the air contain clear hints at the way we are to visualize Hector and Achilles. Homer takes care to guide us, for the first adjective describing Achilles anticipates both the similes and the result of the duel. Achilles arrives "gigantic," that is to say, towering above Hector. The filmic equivalent of this adjective is a low-angle shot, from Hector's point of view, of Achilles rushing straight toward the camera. Then a cut to the next shot, which is expressed in the snake simile: a high-angle long or medium shot of Hector ready for battle. By contrast to the preceding shot of Achilles, Hector appears dwarfed. The fact that the animal to which Hector is likened is found on the ground reveals how a viewer should imagine the moment: by looking down. The detailed description of the coiled snake's venomous fury expresses how an actor is to portray Hector at this moment: tense and crouching down but ready to spring up into action. Homer reinforces the high viewing angle and Hector's low position by a double reference to the serpent's hole and by the observation that Hector's shield is "sloped." The snake simile describes Hector's posture as it appears simultaneously to observers outside the immediate action, such as his parents (who see him) and the poem's listeners or readers (who imagine seeing him), and to a participant in the action, an Achilles swooping down on him. When Homer likens Achilles, now closer, to the god of war himself, he again does so in visual terms, emphasizing the flashing metal of Achilles' divine armor, a sight both beautiful and terrifying. No alert reader can fail to visualize Achilles and Hector at this moment.

The second simile, which uses different animals to make the scene it describes more vivid, expresses Achilles' superiority to Hector by pitting

22 *Iliad* 22.90–98 and 131–144; quoted from Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, 437 and 438–439. For the sake of consistency I substitute "Achilles" and "Hector" for Lattimore's "Achilleus" and "Hektor."

a bird of prey against a helpless victim. This simile is more accomplished and even more cinematic than the preceding one in that it contains high- and low-angle shots on the movements of both birds. Words denoting height, as when Achilles moves upon Hector as if from above ("swoop," "plunges"), find their counterpart in the dove slipping away "from beneath" the hawk. The phrase "again and again" expresses continuous back-and-forth movements that in a film call for rapid back-and-forth cutting from high-angle and low-angle shots of the two enemies in close-ups and medium shots. Such intercutting is one of the oldest filmic techniques to create in viewers a sense of suspense, even of mounting doom, concerning the fate of the people they are watching. Heightening readers' suspense is Homer's purpose in the simile, too. The fast cutting in a film corresponds to his numerous words for swift movement on the part of both birds ("quick feet," "moves lightest," "effortless swoop," "plunges").

Two scenes in Petersen's film visually express Homer's similes. In the opening sequence of *Troy*, Achilles comes down on his victim by rising in the air and stabbing him from above. This moment prepares us for two others in the scene of the duel between Achilles and Hector. In less than a second, Achilles whirls up and around Hector and, while still in the air, lunges downward at him with his sword. Shortly after, he brings Hector to his knees when he stabs him, again from above, in the shoulder. Then he kills him by thrusting his sword downward through Hector's chest.

If these two Homeric similes describe individual heroes, others give us panoramic overviews of the Greek and Trojan armies in battle. One of them finds a direct equivalent in *Troy*. This passage occurs in Book 4. It contains two similes as frames; their purpose is to make the action narrative in between immediate and easy to envision. The Greek army is advancing on the Trojans, who are holding their ground; then both sides clash in furious battle. The first simile is of waves breaking on the shore. The description implies an observer stationed on an elevation, such as a mountain top, and looking down along the beach. In the second simile two rushing rivers commingle. The poet also provides the "soundtrack" that accompanies the action: the Greeks' menacing silence and, in yet another simile, the Trojans' cries. These lines I omit. Here is the decisive part of the passage:

> As when along the thundering beach the surf of the sea strikes
> beat upon beat as the west wind drives it onward; far out
> cresting first on the open water, it drives thereafter
> to smash roaring along the dry land, and against the rock jut bending
> breaks itself into crests spewing back the salt wash;
> so thronged beat upon beat the Danaans' close battalions
> steadily into battle, with each of the lords commanding
> his own men . . .
> Now as these advancing came to one place and encountered,
> they dashed their shields together and their spears, and the strength
> of armoured men in bronze, and the shields massive in the middle
> clashed against each other, and the sound grew huge of the fighting.
> There the screaming and the shouts of triumph rose up together
> of men killing and men killed, and the ground ran blood.
> As when rivers in winter spate running down from the mountains
> throw together at the meeting of streams the weight of their water
> out of the great springs behind in the hollow stream-bed,
> and far away in the mountains the shepherd hears their thunder;
> such, from the coming together of men, was the shock and the
> shouting.[23]

Description of the repeated waves of the Greek attack on a stationary Trojan line yields to that of close combat between the two armies by means of the second simile involving water; it is prompted by the observation within the action narrative that the ground already "ran blood." A filmic retelling of these lines has to be realistic. No actual waves could appear on screen. They would only divert viewers' attention from the battle instead of involving them in it more closely, as the similes do. If staged effectively, an on-screen battle needs no extraneous enhancement anyway. Still, Petersen shows us how a real-looking attack can express Homer's imagery. Modern computer technology makes it possible. In my description I include the time at which the important shots in this scene occur according to the film's DVD edition.[24]

After the non-Homeric death of Menelaus at Hector's hands, Agamemnon orders an attack on the Trojans by the entire Greek army, Achilles and his men excepted. (Achilles is watching the attack from an elevated position.) The Trojans are arrayed in battle line, with the walls of Troy at their back. The camera shows us the attack of the Greeks first from an eye-level position on the side of their battle line, as if from a combatant's point of view. Then, in a fluid motion and without a cut,

23 *Iliad* 4.422–429 and 446–456; quoted from Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, 124 and 125.

24 Readers who wish to view the scene I am about to describe can find it at 1:17:19–1:23:31 in chapters 22–23 of the DVD edition of *Troy*. I identify individual shots according to this edition's timer.

the camera soars up and above the men (1:17:23–30). An extreme long shot beginning at 1:17:31 is also from a high angle, but this time the camera watches from behind the advancing Greeks. At 1:18:12 Petersen gives us a corresponding shot from the opposite position: above and behind the Trojans we see, as they do, the Greeks storming near. Shortly after this comes the shot that is closest to Homer's simile of the crashing waves (1:18:15–26). The camera is now positioned high above the battlefield, looking down over both armies from the side so that the Trojans appear screen left, still standing firm, while the Greeks are attacking them from screen right. The camera begins to move along and above the entire battle line, in the process swooping down closer but still remaining above all the soldiers. The shot continues while the Greeks break into the Trojan line. The Homeric nature of the moment in which both armies make contact is made evident when the shields of the Greek warriors rise wavelike above the Trojans and tumble down over their heads. Only then does Petersen cut to close-up images of hand-to-hand combat. The wavelike nature of this fight continues in three very brief shots in which we see a few Greek soldiers who have jumped up into the air descending on the Trojans (1:18:26–30). In this battle sequence the attack of the Greeks is indeed cresting, smashing, driving, and breaking on the Trojans while shields massive in the middle clash against each other. Still images can capture neither the fluidity of these shots, graceful even in the context of the carnage that is about to ensue, nor the movements contained within them. As viewers realize soon after, the ground runs blood, too, because numerous Greeks die under the missiles of the Trojan archers (whom Homer does not mention here). The individual fights and deaths which Homer describes after the passage quoted find their equivalent in *Troy* in several brief duels; they culminate in the ferocious combat between Hector and Ajax, which is followed by another wavelike Greek attack (1:21:03–09) filmed from different angles but not as long or visually expressive as the preceding one. Even the Trojans' counterattack has a wavelike quality, although it is seen only momentarily.

Like Homer's shepherd who overhears the roar of the rushing streams, we watch and hear the shock and the shouting of Greek and Trojan warriors in the film's battle sequence. Homer closes Book 4 with the comment: "on that day many men of the Achaians and Trojans / lay sprawled in the dust face downward beside one another."[25] Petersen includes shots that exactly correspond to these lines. When they see a chariot being driven over dead bodies lying on the ground (1:22:17–22), viewers familiar with the *Iliad* may even think of a specific moment later in the epic. Achilles, too, drives his chariot over dead bodies. His horses "trampled alike dead men and shields, and the axle under / the chariot was all splashed with blood."[26]

The Homeric similes of storms, fires, streams rushing down mountains, or waves breaking bring home to us the irresistible power of the elements, with which man must deal in his daily life. But they also express the devastating force of man-made conflicts like war and battle. So it is very much to the point that Petersen gives us a visual equivalent of the simile of the waves to intensify our sense of the Greek army's furious onslaught on the Trojans. (We still use the phrase "wave of attack" today.) The equivalent of Homer's simile in *Troy* has a precursor in *The Perfect Storm* (2000), the film Petersen directed immediately before. This drama deals with the impossible odds faced by the intrepid crew of a small fishing boat against a gigantic gale on the Atlantic Ocean. Images of their boat dwarfed by waves of overwhelming proportion express the insignificance of man before nature's implacability. The most monstrous wave imaginable eventually destroys the boat and kills its crew. The immediacy of this unusual storm derives from Petersen's use of state-of-the-art computer technology, for filming in an actual storm would have been impossible. *The Perfect Storm* was perhaps Petersen's perfect preparation for the epic battle scenes in *Troy*. *Das Boot* (1981), Petersen's submarine epic about heroism and death in a World War II setting, a film that made him internationally famous and paved his way to a successful career in Hollywood, is also likely to have influenced his approach to the material of *Troy*.

2.2. *Ecphrases*

Similes heighten listeners' or readers' sense of immediacy and help them imagine themselves present at the scenes described. Homeric ecphrases equally appeal to their visual imagination. An ecphrasis gives a detailed description of an object, frequently a work of art. The most famous ecphrasis in the *Iliad* occurs in Book 18, when the god Hephaestus forges a shield for Achilles that is decorated with numerous scenes.[27] This

25 *Iliad* 4. 543–544; quoted from Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, 127.

26 *Iliad* 20. 499–500; quoted from Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, 417.

27 On the shield see Klaus Fittschen, *Der Schild des Achilleus* (Archaeologia Homerica II.N.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1973), and Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 200–232, especially 206–208 on scene arrangement, the difficulties of actually

detailed ecphrasis symbolizes the process of the poem's composition.[28] The most remarkable quality of the scenes that Hephaestus puts on the shield is that they tell stories. The images represent complete narratives rather than individual – that is, static – moments in a story. As such, they show a cinematic (rather than a photographic) imagination. The two representative scenes I examine below can deepen modern readers' appreciation of the nature of Homeric epic. My first scene is comparatively simple and may serve as a suitable starting point. The second is more important for the themes of the *Iliad* and considerably more complex.

One of the scenes Hephaestus fashions concerns two lions attacking a herd of cattle. In my quotation of the text I italicize those words that indicate motion or movement. In themselves such terms are not conclusive evidence for the cinematic nature of these lines, for most of them describe a particular moment in a manner comparable to a modern photograph or a freeze-frame in a film. Nevertheless, they show us that the image is to be understood as the narrative of an action in constant progression:

> He made upon it a herd of horn-straight oxen. The cattle
> were wrought of gold and tin, and *thronged in speed* and with lowing
> *out of* the dung of the farmyard *to* a pasturing place by a sounding
> river, and beside the *moving* field of a reed bed.
> The herdsmen were of gold who *went along* with the cattle,
> four of them, and nine dogs *shifting their feet followed* them.
> But among the foremost of the cattle two formidable lions
> had caught hold of a bellowing bull, and he with loud lowings
> *was dragged away*, as the dogs and the young men *went in pursuit* of him.
> But the two lions, breaking open the hide of the great ox,
> gulped the black blood and the inward guts, as *meanwhile* the herdsmen
> *were in the act* of setting and urging the *quick* dogs on them.
> But they, *before* they could get their teeth in, turned back from the lions,
> but *would come* and take their stand very close, and bayed, and kept
> clear.[29]

The first six lines move herdsmen, cattle, and dogs from the farm to a pasture and are simple in their expressions of motion. But this simplicity

fashioning a shield from the information given in the text, and "the normal Homeric technique for physical objects to be described by means of action and movement" (207). See also Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the* Iliad, 278–286.

28 Cf. Keith Stanley, *The Shield of Homer: Narrative Structure in the* Iliad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

29 *Iliad* 18. 573–586; quoted from Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, 390–391.

ends as soon as we find out about the lions. Now we observe a short action story that is broken down into different stages. Most noteworthy for the linear progression in which the story unfolds is its first element, the past-perfect tense of the verb that expresses the beginning of the lions' attack. They "had caught" their prey already – the tense indicates that the actual moment of their capturing the ox does not appear on the shield. But since it is the logical beginning of their hunt, the narrator provides us with this information, just as a film would have started at that point. Next comes the action in progress: the bull was being "dragged away" while herdsmen and dogs "went in pursuit." Again the verb tenses are important for us to visualize the scene in that they denote a continuing action. (Cf. "in the act" a few lines later.) Then comes stage two of the lions' story on the shield: they are now feasting on their prey. This tells us that a necessary but unmentioned prior stage has occurred, in which the lions stopped dragging the ox away and killed it. By now we have followed the ox on its journey all the way from farmyard to pasture and to its death. The last scene is stationary on the part of the lions feeding but at the same time highly agitated on the part of the actions of the dogs. They run up, then turn tail, then come close again. The verb form "would come" indicates their repeated and ongoing movements.

If we take the narrative in these lines strictly literally, we must assume that Hephaestus presented a series of at least three unmoving images in sequence: 1) animals and people leaving the farm, with the pasture perhaps visible in the distance or on one side; 2) the lions dragging the bull and being pursued by herdsmen and dogs; 3) the lions gorging themselves while being harried by the dogs. The individual moments could be broken down even further; the first, for example, could be shown in two separate images (departure from farm, arrival at pasture). The third in particular almost demands to be shown in more than one still image to reveal the dogs' frantic back-and-forth motions. In principle, the sequential arrangement of still images on the shield resembles the sequence of individual exposures on a film strip: an action in progress is broken down into its constituent static elements. With film, the rapid change of twenty-four frame exposures per second deceives the eye into perceiving not static images but motion, an illusion of movement that really does not exist. This impression is caused by the retina's "persistence of vision," which blurs individual images into a continuous flow. With ecphrasis, our imagination supplies the connections that are not actually present in the images on the shield but that the words prompt us to "see." Our imagination makes us visualize – "imagination" derives from "image" – a progressing story that can only be shown and is shown in still pictures.

These images, like all others on the shield, are in color ("gold and tin," "black blood") and have, as it were, a soundtrack ("lowing," "sounding," "bellowing," "loud lowings," "bayed").[30]

Such cinematic analysis can be applied to all the individual scenes on Achilles' shield. For the episode that takes the greatest amount of verbal description, Hephaestus fashions a contrasting pair of complex images.[31] The first depicts a peaceful city with its marriages and festivals. Expressions of motion – people "were leading the brides," "young men followed" the dance – and accompanying sounds of bridal songs and musical instruments (492–496) express the fluid nature of the scene and prepare us for the much more dramatic one that follows, a court trial (497–508). As again the verb tenses make evident, Hephaestus tells a complete and self-contained story. Below, I italicize words and phrases that reveal its temporal aspects. Hephaestus provides first a prehistory ("a quarrel / *had* arisen," 497–498) and its impact ("two men *were* disputing over the blood price / for a man who *had been* killed," 498–499; note the different past tenses and their non-chronological sequence). The background information continues in such a way as to signify the progress of time: "One man promised full restitution" but "the other refused" (499–500). We can easily visualize this two-part phase. The next stage follows: "Both *then* made for an arbitrator" (501). Now comes the climax, the actual trial. Its agitated nature, expressed on a screen in rapidly intercut shots of the different participants from various angles, is conveyed in the text through verbs and conjunctions (502–505): "people *were* speaking up on either side . . . *But* [a word corresponding to a cut in a film] the heralds *kept* the people in hand, as *meanwhile* [a transitional panning shot in a film to a different view of the court] the elders *were* in session . . . The two men *rushed* before these, and *took turns* speaking . . ." The scene of the trial, whose resolution Hephaestus does not render since it can be deduced from the preceding description of the peaceful city with its well-functioning laws, ends with another cinematic equivalent. The mention of gold lying on the ground between the antagonists, a reward for the most just among the elders (507–508), indicates a more distant view of the court than before. On film, it would appear in a long shot of the entire court, perhaps with the camera further receding from the scene.[32] Such a long shot or traveling

30 Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 208: "Even sound effects are included" in individual scenes on the shield. Note his use of a term familiar from film.

31 *Iliad* 18.490–540; Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*, 388–389.

32 The opposite camera movement, a zoom, is mentioned by Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the* Iliad, 86, in connection with Homeric descriptions.

shot might in turn be followed by a fade-out or by a dissolve to the next description.[33]

The second city is at war, besieged by two armies (509–540). This part of the story is even more intricate in its details and thus more cinematic than the one just described. Again, verbs of both motion and inaction, adverbs like "quickly," "meanwhile," or "presently," and conjunctions like an adversative "but" and a temporal "as" impart both scope and complexity to a kind of small-scale epic of war, a miniature *Iliad*. Attentive readers cannot fail to visualize this passage, to translate it into a sequence of mental images. Their imagination, prompted by the clues in the text, turns them into their own directors, cinematographers, and editors.

The scenes on the shield of Achilles are short films expressed in words. All represent action narratives that progress through different stages. Our understanding of them as a kind of proto-cinematic approach to narrative does justice to their intricate and highly visual nature, but it also leads us to an important question. Could Hephaestus really have put images of all the individual parts of the several different stories mentioned in the text onto the surface of a single shield? Such a feat would be impossible even for a divine craftsman. A shield of a size that accommodates all the scenes described in such loving detail would be so large as to be useless for any practical purposes. Evidently, we are not meant to understand the ecphrases on the shield in purely realistic terms.

What then is the purpose of such detailed descriptions? If they are not intended to be factual, they must be intended to appeal to our imagination. That is to say, they have a double function. On the one hand, the ecphrases refer to actual scenes which most likely consist of only one image each. In the case of the cattle and lions, it may well have

33 Joachim Latacz, *Kampfparänese, Kampfdarstellung und Kampfwirklichkeit in der Ilias, bei Kallinos und Tyrtaios* (Munich: Beck, 1977), 78, adduces the analogy of a still camera with a lens of a focal length (cf. modern zoom lenses) suitable to describe the epic poet's view of the battlefield. His book contains several diagrams to illustrate the synchronic and diachronic battle actions in the *Iliad*. On Zeus' and other gods' bird's-eye view of human actions and on this perspective's analogy to the omniscient narrator's position cf. Latacz, 97. His work has influenced, among others, the study by Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the* Iliad, 2nd edn (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2004). Cf. further Irene J. F. de Jong and René Nünlist, "From Bird's Eye View to Close-Up: The Standpoint of the Narrator in the Homeric Epics," in *Antike Literatur in neuer Deutung*, ed. Anton Bierl, Arbogast Schmitt, and Andreas Willi (Munich: Saur, 2004), 63–83. (This book is a *Festschrift* for Latacz.) Such work indicates that classical scholarship has become aware of the cinematic aspects of ancient texts. A systematic study, however, does not yet exist.

been the moment numbered third in my summary above. On the other hand, the ecphrases also surround the actual images with a context; they provide narrations of the actions that precede and follow each image. These are the moments in the narrative that a real image can only imply but that the text prompts our innate sense of the visual to supply subconsciously. Such a technique of description works well because we are dealing not with static images – as in a still life, for instance – but with images of actions in progress. As classical art historian Susan Woodford has recently put it:

> A photographic snapshot records a single moment in time. The Greeks and Romans did not have cameras and probably did not have a very rigid concept of what could be seen at any one moment. It is unlikely, therefore, that they found it particularly odd if a single image suggested a number of different things, all of which could not be happening at the same time.

She also observes: "Words can sometimes conjure up images that defy visual representation."[34] So the individual ecphrases on the shield of Achilles take on a life of their own. They become independent of their material setting, as the very language of the text reveals. Verb tenses expressing a developing action are crucial for this independence, for they let the ecphrases soar above the level of mere realism and engage us mentally and emotionally as recipients of a gripping story. This is to say that Homer expresses verbally what he has already imagined visually and what he expects his readers or listeners to translate back into sequential images. With his ecphrases Homer has made a complex, even an epic, kind of film, mirroring the epic of the *Iliad* as a whole. It is fitting that the very impulse for the recent film *Singe den Zorn* should have come to one of its directors when he realized that the description of Achilles' shield is inherently dramatic.[35]

So the very first work of Western literature already demonstrates an understanding of cinematic storytelling *avant la lettre* and *avant la technologie*. Bazin's statement about film as an idealistic phenomenon turns out to be correct, for it is fully applicable to ancient epic. Greek and

34 Woodford, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity*, 39 (at beginning of a chapter section entitled "A Synoptic View") and 165 (opening sentence of a chapter entitled "Showing What Cannot Be Seen").

35 See Antje Borchardt, "Singe den Zorn: Homers Ilias in Troia," *Pegasus-Onlinezeitschrift*, 4, no. 3 (2004), 65; at http://www.pegasus-onlinezeitschrift.de/agora_3_2004_borchardt.html.

Roman poets after Homer continued the tradition of complex ecphrases by means of what we may legitimately call "motion pictures" in the literal sense of the phrase and also in its cinematic sense. The ecphrasis of the shield that Vulcan, the same god as Hephaestus, forges for Aeneas in Book 8 of Virgil's *Aeneid* is the most famous instance.

3. Iliadic Themes in the Cinema

We should therefore modify our initial conclusion that the *Iliad* cannot be filmed. A film that does justice to Homer's complex epic is difficult but not impossible to make after all. It requires a committed producer or studio with very deep pockets, a first-rate writer and director, a sensitive cast, and a creative technical crew. All involved should have a measure of knowledge of the *Iliad* and the plot, characters, time, and society it portrays. Ideally, in return they deserve sophisticated audiences, at home in classical literature and in the history and aesthetics of narrative cinema. This is, of course, a task on a gigantic scale. But we can imagine what a film of the *Iliad* could be like if we keep Homeric epic and its cinematic qualities firmly in mind when we ask how a true film of Homer might look. Rossi's *Odissea* and *Eneide* already exist to provide us with useful models.

In addition, the history of epic cinema can reinforce our mental construction of a film of the *Iliad*. Even films that are not set in antiquity provide us with clues. The cinema has produced numerous historical epics or other films that present archetypal themes and timeless issues comparable to those raised in the *Iliad*. Many of such films belong to well-established action genres (e.g., the war film) and may be related to the underlying themes and the poetic qualities of the *Iliad* even if Homer was not in their makers' minds. The best of them show at least a measure of Homer's humanity and depth, portraying human nature in all its greatness and debasement. Their number is too large, the level of their artistry too varied, and their range across genres too wide for me to list them here.[36] But two great films exemplify best what epic cinema can

36 I direct interested readers to some of my previous work, which contains further references: "Homeric *kleos* and the Western Film," *Syllecta Classica*, 7 (1996), 43–54; "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori?* Classical Literature in the War Film," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 7 (2000), 177–214; and "Homer's *Iliad* and John Ford's *The Searchers*," in *The Searchers: Essays and Reflections on John Ford's Classic Western*, ed. Arthur M. Eckstein and Peter Lehman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 145–170.

tell us about a film of the *Iliad*. Both describe war, heroism, suffering, and the toll these take in ways comparable to the *Iliad*, although they are radically different from each other in content and style. Since their stories are long and complex, they consist of several installments produced over a number of years. They are the Japanese *Ningen no joken* (*The Human Condition*, 1959–1961), written and directed by Masaki Kobayashi, and the Russian *Voyna i Mir* (*War and Peace*, 1965–1968), an adaptation of Lev Tolstoy's novel by writer-director Sergei Bondarchuk. The first of these films is in six parts that together last for more than nine and a half hours. The second is in four parts and lasts for over seven hours. Kobayashi's work, filmed in black and white, is one of the most harrowing depictions of World War II. It shows the bleakness and doom of all wars, as did the *Iliad*. The film's title is exactly appropriate for its content. By contrast, Bondarchuk's film is in color, ranging from the brightness of aristocratic elegance – as in the sequence of Natasha's dance, as ravishing a set piece in the film as it was in the novel – to the dark inferno of Moscow burning. Bondarchuk uses his color palette for thematic purposes. Both he and Kobayashi filmed in widescreen formats to show the epic scale of their subjects. Their films are intense labors of love on an immense scale, deeply moral in their portrayal of the past and of its importance for the present and the future. Their titles, taken together, aptly express the fundamental sides of human life and society, reminding us of the two cities on Achilles' shield. (War and peace *are*, we might say, the human condition.) Kobayashi's and Bondarchuk's films show us the stylistic and thematic reaches that epic cinema is capable of achieving; taken together, they could serve as models from which to shape a film of the *Iliad*.

A related aspect is an awareness of Homer on the part of epic filmmakers who are telling a modern story. Explicit recourse to the *Iliad* reveals the thematic affinity of epic cinema with Homer. An example is a film whose subject is the most notorious aspect of World War II. *Holocaust* (1978), a seven-hour American television film directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, cites one of the most famous scenes of the *Iliad*. The film tells the story of a fictional Jewish-German family. Their destruction exemplifies the fate of German and European Jews. *Holocaust* was a popular success in the United States; when shown on West German public television, it generated a nationwide renewal of the debate over German war crimes, anti-Semitism, and the Final Solution. In the film, a meek and baby-faced young German bourgeois will become the main architect of the Holocaust. He is originally an apolitical and non-violent law-school graduate, a husband and the father of two little children. He is also unemployed and unable to provide for his family. On the urging of his stronger-willed wife, he enters the SS and swiftly rises to positions of power. On the day he is wearing his black uniform for the first time, his wife and children are watching him put on its cap in front of a mirror. The mother has been holding her son in her arms. When she puts him down, the boy runs off in fear and hides behind a door. The dialogue now refers to the *Iliad*, but the entire scene puts a sinister twist on its Homeric model:

> *Husband*: Peter, how do you like your father? . . . Uniform's too much for him.
> *Wife*: Erik, you look heroic. [*The boy is peering out from behind the door*.] . . . Peter, it's only Daddy's uniform.
> *Husband* [*diffidently*]: I'm afraid my first day as a policeman is a dead loss. Like a scene from the *Iliad* – Hector goes to put on his shining helmet with the plume, and his little son moves away in terror, screaming, frightened at the aspect of his own father. Can't recall the rest; something about Hector asking Zeus to make the boy braver than he was.
> *Wife*: I'll make you both brave.

In the *Iliad*, Hector's farewell from his wife Andromache and from his terrified child shows the anguish of all warriors going off to battle, their uncertainty of survival and return, and their hope for a good outcome – often against all hope, as will be the case for Hector.[37] The farewell scene in the *Iliad* is one of the most humane moments in literature. Every sensitive reader or listener feels for Hector and Andromache. Our knowledge that despite Hector's heroism Troy is doomed to utter destruction in a kind of ancient holocaust even increases our involvement. The brief scene in *Holocaust* turns the humanity in Homer's scene into its opposite. Erik (better: Erich) is not going out to defend his country, which will soon willfully and without provocation precipitate a worldwide war, and neither he nor his wife and children will be remembered the way Hector, Andromache, and their child will be. The man whom we see leaving his family is anything but heroic; rather, he is about to turn himself into a soulless bureaucrat who rationally and without any pangs of conscience administers mass murder on an unprecedented scale. Erik organizes the country-wide violence against

37 *Iliad* 6.390–502. The specific lines to which *Holocaust* refers are 399–400 (Hector's son in the arms of his nurse), 466–470 (the boy's terror at seeing Hector in his helmet with its moving horse-hair crest), and 476–481 (Hector's prayer on behalf of his son).

Jews which signals the onset of the Holocaust and leads to the death camps. His descent into barbarism begins during the infamous *Kristallnacht*, the "night of smashed glass," of November 9–10, 1938, and ends after the war when he kills himself with a poison capsule to avoid trial for crimes against humanity. There is only one brief moment in the entire film in which Erik exhibits something resembling an awareness of his crimes and his guilt. The fact that he has studied law and should know something about justice and morality is a revealing irony, echoing the situation in Sophocles' *Antigone* that political or ideological "right" may temporarily supersede genuine right and law. The scene in *Holocaust* described above is a chilling comment on the dehumanizing side of modern war, which is the more devastating because of its virtually unlimited killing potential. Most of the film's viewers will probably not have recognized the Homeric scene to which Erik refers, but some may have recognized Homer's name and deduced that Erik is well educated. Presumably, he read parts of the *Iliad* as a student in high school. This inference is important because it tells viewers that not even a classical education can prevent a man's descent into the abyss. The scene is the more effective through its understated quality. The ominous comment by Erik's wife which closes it reveals to us that she is as different from a loving wife like Andromache as can be imagined.

4. Vestiges of Ancient Epic

The tradition of extensively reworking Homeric epic and related stories for large-scale visual adaptations began on the Athenian stage in the fifth century B.C.[38] This tradition has never ended. Since the early twentieth century it has expanded to include the furthest-reaching medium for artistic and not-so-artistic expression that modern technology has made possible. Today, films are the most influential way in which we tell stories, our most powerful means to preserve the memory of ancient legends and myths. Sometimes films themselves hint at the truth of this observation.

Giorgio Ferroni's *La guerra di Troia* (1962) is a loose adaptation of parts of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*.[39] During the night of Troy's fall, the

38 Horst-Dieter Blume, "Homer auf der tragischen Bühne," in *Homer, Hellas und Europa*, ed. Pantaleon Giakoumis (Aachen: Verlag Mainz, 2004), 57–69, provides a recent introduction and references to ancient drama based on Homer.

39 The film's English titles are *The Wooden Horse of Troy*, *The Trojan Horse*, and *The Trojan War*.

Trojan princess Cassandra tells Aeneas, the film's hero, that despite its destruction the city will survive forever in the imagination of future generations. I quote her words from the English-language version:

> Troy is living her last night. For millenniums to come, men will search in her ashes to find the vestiges of her noble walls . . . The horrors we have seen in these years [of war] will always live in legend.

Cassandra is correct in her prophecy, and the film in which she makes it is itself an example of the legend she has in mind. But there is another level. *La leggenda di Enea*, directed by Giorgio Rivalta, was released the same year as a sequel to Ferroni's film.[40] Rivalta includes a number of shots from the earlier film when his Aeneas remembers the fall of Troy. Here a cinematic retelling of the Trojan War, that of *La guerra di Troia*, becomes elevated to a quasi-mythical level when it is reprised in *La leggenda di Enea*. Not only do ancient myths and epics survive in a new popular medium, but this medium is also highly suited to mythmaking itself. Ferroni's and Rivalta's films are leaves on one and the same branch of the tree of Homeric storytelling.

It is not difficult to imagine what Richard Bentley or any of today's traditionalists might think of all this. So we are better advised to remember the words of another British classicist. Not too long ago, J. B. Hainsworth, co-author of major scholarly commentaries on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, observed in a book entitled *The Idea of Epic*: "At the beginning of literature, when heroic poetry reached society as a whole . . . society *listened*; in the twentieth century society *views*." Hainsworth concluded: "the modern heroic medium is film, and not necessarily the productions that are held in highest critical regard."[41] A number of films on Homeric themes made throughout the twentieth century bear out Hainsworth's view. Petersen's *Troy* shows that his words continue to apply in the twenty-first century.

40 The film's English titles are *The Avenger*, *The Last Glory of Troy*, and *War of the Trojans*. Aeneas is played by the same actor as in Ferroni's film.

41 J. B. Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 148. Hainsworth wrote the commentary on Books 5–8 of the *Odyssey* in Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West, and J. B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Books I–VIII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; rpt. 1990). He is the author of *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 3: *Books 9–12* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), among other publications on Homer.

Troy
From Homer's *Iliad* to Hollywood Epic

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