

Authentic Inauthenticity: Homeric Resonance in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy* (2004)

It is now ten years since the release of Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*, a cinematic depiction of the events and figures of Homer's *Iliad* and the Epic Cycle, and like the Achaean army itself many classicists have been locked in a decade-long conflict with the film's numerous deviations from the Homeric tradition. Many readers of Homer scoff at elements such as Achilles' whitewashed, desexualized love for his "cousin" Patroclus or his aggressively profane attitude toward the gods; more still cringe to witness Hector's slaughter of Menelaus after his victorious duel with Paris or the Trojans' underhanded night raid of the Greek camp. There has been a temptation for scholars and teachers to dismiss the film as yet another of Hollywood's typically blundered and audience-driven attempts to wring commercial success from Classical history and mythology. However, scholars such as Jon Solomon, Martin Winkler, and Joachim Latacz have admirably reminded us that, as with all instances of classical reception, Petersen's *Troy* is just as concerned with and informed by the contemporary world of its audience as it is with epic poetry that inspired it. Any incongruities with the Homeric text, they point out, serve as excellent starting points for a variety of conversations of ancient and modern interest, from the transmission of malleable narratives within an oral culture to questions surrounding civic, heroic, or sexual values and beyond.

In this paper I suggest that in addition to the valuable insights these scholars propose, Petersen's *Troy* offers viewers with a high level of Homeric literacy a number of rewarding and surprisingly authentic points of contact with the *Iliad* and the Epic Cycle. Some of these are linguistic, such as Achilles' insistence, upon learning that he is to lose Briseus, that Agamemnon is a "sack of wine" (*oinobares*, *Il.* 1.225). Others are visual, such as Hector's unique and shining horsehair helm (e.g. 6.467) or Ajax's enormous stature (3.226-7) and shield (7.219-23).

However, most interesting of all are two unexpected Greek deaths that at first appear to be glaring mistreatments of the Epic Cycle, but that upon closer inspection pay perceptive and knowledgeable tribute to the epic narrative, though under the constraints imposed by modern Hollywood. While the on-screen deaths first of Ajax and later Agamemnon serve as important components for enhancing *Troy*'s grim suspense and ethical gratification, the details of each hero's demise share key, unmistakable elements with the extra-Homeric tradition, creating a kind of cinematic shorthand for attested narrative strands that find no room in the film. Beyond offering satisfaction to Classicists and students of ancient mythology and epic poetry, the Homeric resonances contained within each of these instances offers the opportunity to those who remain unsettled by how much Peterson and his film get "wrong" to view this narrative as yet another rendition in an ancient, evolving lineage of *aidai* that remains extremely compelling to audiences removed by millennia from its murky origins.

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