Achilles and Patroclus in *Troy*

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Among the many kings and princes who follow Agamemnon from all over Greece on his campaign against Troy, Achilles and Patroclus stand out as a pair of close friends who maintain a high degree of independence in the army. In this regard the *Iliad* established a fixed tradition, so Achilles and Patroclus have been named together ever since, besides other famous pairs of mythological friends such as Orestes and Pylades or Theseus and Pirithous. Wolfgang Petersen and his screenwriter David Benioff did not altogether disregard this tradition, yet they present Achilles as rather a solitary character, someone who stands and fights for himself only. The introduction of Patroclus therefore caused them some problems since Patroclus, an outstanding warrior in Homer, plays only a minor part in *Troy*.

By eliminating the gods as active participants from his plot, Petersen reduced the siege of Troy to a realistic affair of human power politics. At the beginning we learn that Greeks and Trojans already have been rivals for years, struggling for predominance in the Aegean Sea. In this, Agamemnon is the driving force: by and by he has subdued the local rulers of Greece, aspiring to absolute power and supremacy. The kidnapping of his brother’s wife Helen gives him a most welcome pretext of gathering a pan-Hellenic army against the mighty city of Troy, his rival. All Greek leaders except Achilles feel obliged to fight in revenge of the violation of Menelaus’ honor but really for the ambition of his powerful brother. King Priam, on the other hand, who after many wars over several decades had been anxious to secure peace, has finally realized, with bitter resignation, that his efforts have been for nothing.

War and peace are depicted on an equal level of importance for human society at the beginning of *Troy*. War is then shown gaining the upper hand, whereas the peace treaty between Trojans and Spartans will not keep its validity beyond even one day after being agreed upon. The film’s opening scenes stress the cruelty of war by introducing to the audience its two chief promoters: Agamemnon, who has led his conquering army against Triopas, king of Thessaly, and young Achilles, who has joined the campaign although we are

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given no explicit reason for his participation. The opening of the director’s cut of *Troy* reveals, to stark effect, that fierce slaughter has already taken place, as we can deduce from the corpses that are lying unburied in the fields. Yet the two armies have formed up against each other for battle again. But their leaders decide to end the war in traditional aristocratic manner by single combat of their best warriors. Triopas presently summons Boagrius, a man of colossal monstrosity and frightening strength, whose name appropriately means “Wild Bull.” Just as “Triopas” is not an indigenous Thessalian name, so “Boagrius” is invented for the present situation. In turn Agamemnon calls out for Achilles but gets no reply. The young hero is not among the soldiers lined up for battle but, as we will soon find out, is lying asleep in his hut in the company of two pretty women. An infuriated Agamemnon, King of Kings, is compelled to send a messenger boy to fetch Achilles and to wait in front of both armies for the arrival of his man. The duel then ends in one quick go: Achilles rushes up against his huge opponent, with a high jump lands upon him like a flash, and plunges his sword into Boagrius’ neck. “Is there no one else?” he yells, facing the front line of the enemy with deliberate provocation.

Agamemnon will gain the allegiance of yet another people by Achilles’ act of bravery. When, as a symbol of submission, the Thessalian king is about to hand his scepter to Achilles to give to his king, Agamemnon, Triopas receives the curt answer: “He is not my king!” The antagonism between Agamemnon and Achilles, already implied in the latter’s absence from the battleline, is now confirmed. Whereas the other Greek rulers have accepted Agamemnon’s superiority more or less voluntarily—“Ithaca cannot afford an enemy like Agamemnon,” observes Odysseus the pragmatist—this is not the case with Achilles. Agamemnon knows all too well that Achilles is not his loyal subordinate and that he does not fight for anybody but himself. “Of all the warlords loved by the gods I hate him the most,” he later mutters. On his first appearance in the film, then, Achilles proves himself both a lover of women, if without any emotional involvement, and a ruthless killer, but he is stripped of his mythical nature as a demigod. For the time being we are introduced to an individual fighter with no troops of his own to command. His soldiers, the Myrmidons, and Patroclus will be introduced only later, after the film’s and our focus of attention has turned explicitly towards Troy.

Meanwhile in Sparta, peace with the Trojans was being both celebrated and broken. Menelaus at once hurries to Mycenae to let his brother know about the wrong done to him by Prince Paris. Agamemnon, more than eager to resume war against Troy, immediately gets down to gathering troops for a revenge campaign. Most conveniently, the old and wise Nestor, whose kingdom of Pylos is never mentioned in the film, happens to be present at court; he urges