

Trojan Temporality in Imperial Greek Epic

This chapter tells the story of three Greek epics composed between the third and sixth centuries CE: Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, Triphiodorus' *Sack of Troy* and Colluthus' *Abduction of Helen*.¹ Though in many ways very different, these poems are united by two key notions. First, their intense and explicit interest in time, as both a theme and a narrative agent. Second, their choice to set their plots in Troy, before or during the mythological war.² Here I examine the combined impact of these two interests and explore how Troy operates in these texts not only as a marker of space, but also as a vehicle of time. This temporal power of Troy becomes a way for these poets, all of whom are ostensibly silent about their contemporary contexts, covertly to express their literary and political positions. Harnessing Troy's ability to symbolise the tensions within imperial subjectivity – between past and present, beginning and end, progress and reversal – they ask what it means for a Greek-speaking poet to write of Troy now, in the Roman Empire.

Troy and Time

It is first necessary to step back and consider the broader connection between Troy and time, which becomes sharpened and stretched in the imperial Greek

* Thanks to Charles Baker and the 2022 sixth form Classics pupils at Westminster School for being an engaged audience for the early ideas for this chapter, and to Simon Goldhill and Oliver Parkes for helpful discussions on the first and final drafts respectively. Special gratitude to Tom Phillips for his perceptive comments on the piece, and for the many inspiring conversations about temporality.

¹ The edition of Quintus is that of Vian; of Triphiodorus and Colluthus that of Mair; of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* those of Murray. Translations of Quintus are adapted from Hopkinson, and those of Homer from Murray and Dimcock. All other translations are my own unless indicated.

² For the relationship between these works and the Epic cycle poems, which also cover this narrative material, see Bär and Baumbach 2015. Discussions of the Epic Cycle in this volume can be found in the chapters by Verhelst and Hosty.

epics treated in this chapter. The status and significance of Troy as a cultural locus has been long and deeply perceived: it is a space – a site and a city, real and imagined, lost, claimed and (re)found; and it is also a symbol – an abstract cultural icon, a lens through which to reflect on conflicts past and present, and an image of both tragedy and hope.³ In its long and chequered *Nachleben* in ancient Greek and Latin literature, Troy also has a striking *temporal* dimension. The city becomes a way for authors to narrate and thematise time; that is, to express the opposing forces of acceleration and delay, expansion and contraction, cyclicity and closure at work in their texts.⁴ To take some illustrative examples, the *Iliad* infamously makes Troy the singular setting of its tightly compressed plot, but Troy also functions more expansively and symbolically as a character *within* the story. As Christos Tsagalis emphasises in Chapter 4 of this volume, the Trojan battlefield itself is not described in the poem, but, within this geographical void, the city is thematised expansively, through for example the walls and battlements (*kredemna*) which crown the city and the headbands (*kredemna*) which crown Andromache's hair, and which she casts to the floor in agony when she sees Hector's defiled corpse (*Il.* 22.469–70). This moment is brutally symbolic of the connections between the death of Hector and the impending downfall of the city.⁵ In this way, Troy also conveys the conflicting forces of echoing and foreshadowing which loom over the *Iliad*'s primary narrative. Earlier in the poem too, when Hector returns inside the city walls, he reveals to Andromache an agonising vision of the city's fate – an event which has not yet unfolded, but which, from the point of view of myth, has always already come to pass (6.448–9):⁶

ἔσσειται ἡμᾶρ ὅτ' ἄν ποτ' ὀλώλη Ἴλιος ἱρή
καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς ἐνυμνέλιω Πριάμοιο.

A day will come when sacred Troy will fall, and Priam, and the people of Priam of the good ashen spear.

³ See Mac Sweeney 2018 for a lively account of Troy throughout the ages, which inspired the formulation in this paragraph. On the reception of Troy in modern cinema since its gestation, see Winkler, Chapter 21, this volume.

⁴ See the three following sections of this chapter for further discussion of these narrative forces.

⁵ See also Scully 1990: 69–80 for how Troy is further represented metonymically. On the gendered spatial symbolism of the *kredemna* (women's 'house and veil'), see Llewellyn-Jones 2007.

⁶ The lines are repeated from an alternative perspective at *Il.* 4.164–5: as Menelaus lies wounded, Agamemnon looks forward to the fall optimistically to console himself and his brother.

The *Odyssey*, amidst its kaleidoscopic plays with chronology,⁷ is also deeply invested in the thematic power of Trojan time. The final phases of the Trojan War are repeatedly recapitulated through reports, stories and songs, with an array of affective impacts on the present.⁸ Penelope expresses her deep sorrow at Phemius' song about the Achaeans' return from Troy (*Od.* 1.336–44) and Odysseus flares up in womanly grief as Demodocus recounts his exploits during the sack (*Od.* 8.521–34). Through its role in such stories, Troy also has an impact upon narrative flow and characterisation: it causes delay through retrospection – Demodocus' Trojan song triggers the four-book 'digression' of the *Apologoi* – and enables constructive self-preservation: when Helen narrates the tale of the wooden horse to Menelaus and Telemachus, she cannily recasts her own role in the saga, becoming an agent, not just a victim, in her tale, and staking her claim in the art of heroic storytelling (*Od.* 4.235–64).⁹

Troy's status as the site of victory in Homer is turned on its head in Greek tragedy, whose plots frequently elect to dramatise the intervals and aftermath of the sack. Most viscerally of all, Euripides' *Troades* takes place on the Trojan shores, immediately after the capture of the city, but before the departure of the Greeks: the play unfolds as Troy burns, infused with smoke and fog, as the women wait to begin their captive lives.¹⁰ The interstitiality of this timing from the perspective of the Trojans is the driving component of the drama, brought out most forcefully in the figure and language of Cassandra. As she prepares to follow Agamemnon to her doom, Cassandra shockingly redrafts both future and past: she predicts the new turmoil that awaits Odysseus once he sets out for home, but also utters a powerful *retrospective* assessment – that the Trojans were better off than the Greeks, since they were able to die at home, and above all to bury their dead (*Eur. Tro.* 353–405). As Neil Croally has argued, the notions of liminality and transition in the *Troades* are suggestive of the play's political position. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Athenian attack on the island of Melos, Euripides scrutinises and subverts the neat spatial and temporal categories that ideologies of war and victory impose.¹¹ As Cassandra's speech makes clear, the line between victim and victor can all

⁷ See de Jong 2001 for an overview.

⁸ On affect and emotion in Greek epic, see LeVen, Chapter 14, this volume.

⁹ By describing the horse, Helen moulds our judgements of the characters contained within it. See Worman 2001.

¹⁰ This setting is of course itself a response to the opening of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, on which see discussion in the final section of this chapter.

¹¹ Croally 1994. The exact extent of the connections between the play and the Melos massacre are the subject of debate: see Kovacs 2018: 8–15 for an argument against this chronology and the anti-war sentiment.

too easily be reversed, in a shifting of values and status which comes about through the movement in between the polarities of before and after.

These exempla do not purport to offer even a ‘brief history’ of Trojan time.¹² Rather, they aim to suggest a crucial aspect to Troy’s relationship to temporality in all its forms. It is not simply that Troy operates as a narrative setting in time; it is also used to comment on time. This reflexive component can be best expressed through three related processes, which are found across these vignettes. Firstly, Troy offers a marker of *exemplarity*, as seen in the metonymy of the Iliadic towers and headbands, and the potted re-performances in the Odyssean songs. Secondly, it functions as an agent of *narrative anxiety*, raising questions of how to tell the same story again – from the internal narratives given in the *Odyssey* by the bards and Helen and the *Apologoi*, to the different timespans and perspectives provided by the two Homeric poems, and the Greek dramas on the tragic stage, each of which display and challenge the relationship between literary past and present. And finally, Troy can denote a sense of *reversibility*, via Hector’s prophecy of Troy’s ‘future’ fall, and Cassandra’s topsy-turvy assertion that the victims of the war were really the victors.

As the *Troades*’ Athenian (self)-commentary already begins to suggest, in the literature of empire these reflexive dimensions of Troy take on an even sharper resonance. When Cassandra prophesies about Troy again, in (ps-) Lycophron’s *Alexandra* (from the second or third century BCE),¹³ her foretelling is connected to a broader explanation of the conflict between the East and the West, and can also suggest a ‘celebration’ of Roman power. The prediction that Cassandra’s descendants will restore Trojan glory (which, as scholars have rightly emphasised, evokes the Iliadic prophecy of Poseidon that Priam’s people will rise again, *Il.* 20.302–8) provides a shakily optimistic vision of Rome’s own imperial glory.¹⁴ This vision is the centrepiece of Virgil’s *Aeneid*: through Aeneas’ departure from Troy and journey to Italy, the Trojan origins of the Roman Empire are persistently emphasised. When Aeneas proclaims after the opening shipwreck that Troy will rise again (*illic fas regna resurgere Troiae*, ‘there [in Latium] it is fated that Troy’s kingdom will rise again’, *Aen.* 1.206), and Jupiter soon affirms this prediction with the totalising prophecy of the ‘empire without end’ (*imperium sine fine*, *Aen.* 1. 279), the victims, it seems, indeed have been turned into victors. But the possibility of a cyclical reversal of fortunes always lurks beneath the surface. The century after Virgil, Lucan

¹² To un-echo the title of Goldhill’s Chapter 8 in this volume.

¹³ Hornblower 2015 dates the poem to around 190 BCE. See the Introduction to his commentary for detailed arguments and alternatives.

¹⁴ See McNelis and Sens 2011 for how these lines of (ps-)Lycophron may serve as a lens through which Virgil’s *Aeneid* reconsiders that Iliadic prophecy.

imagines Julius Caesar trampling over the bleak remains of Troy, a reminder that for a contemporary Roman, Troy could offer, in Jim Porter's words, 'paradoxical *lieu de mémoire*' – a haunted space of nothingness, where 'even the ruins had perished' (*etiam periere ruinae* ... Luc. 9.969).¹⁵ Rome's tight aetiological connection to Troy raised the possibility of it also sharing its demise: the collapse into dust could happen all over again.¹⁶ It was this very possibility, the threat of repetition and reversal, which allegedly moved a triumphant Roman general to tears. In a famous vignette, Diodorus Siculus describes how during the Third Punic War Scipio Africanus wept as he watched the destruction of Carthage at the hands of his Roman army. When asked why he was so dismayed, he uttered two verses from Homer: ἔσεται ἡμᾶρ ὄτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλη Ἴλιος ἱρὴ | καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς ἐνμελίῳ Πριάμοιο, 'a day will come when sacred Troy will fall, and Priam and the people of Priam of the good ashen spear' (32.24) – the same words spoken by Hector during his moment of static reflection in Troy. In the mouth of Scipio, the lines give a deeply layered sense of the transience of empires. As Denis Feeney remarks, he 'sees the fate of Rome in Carthage and Troy is the model for both.'¹⁷ Through this Homeric long perspective, Troy becomes an echo and a forewarning all at once, as it contains the ever-present precarity of new and future imperial victories.

The three reflexive processes which Troy conveys (exemplarity, anxiety and reversibility) are therefore strongly bound up in the story of Roman power. As Julia Hell has compellingly demonstrated, in its specific *longue durée*, the Roman Empire became caught in a spectacular loop of resurrection and collapse.¹⁸ The fascination and inspiration which it provided for future epochs were rooted in its own constant fear of its inevitable destruction. Even in its heyday, Rome was a destroyed city, destined to be a *Nova Troia* (New Troy) in its ruins as well as its rise.

In the light of this context, this chapter will now turn to imperial Greek epic, which offers a unique perspective (or rather, set of perspectives) on Roman power and how it was experienced. The response of educated Greeks to the onset of Roman rule has been the subject of long and intense scholarly discussion.¹⁹ The dominant understanding is that erudite Greeks used the

¹⁵ Porter 2002: 61. For a stimulating new reading of Lucan's entwined response to the literary tradition and the historical past, see Joseph 2022, who argues that Lucan adopts certain *topoi* from his predecessors (Homer and the early Roman epic poets) to end, subsume and transform their innovative 'openings' to the epic tradition.

¹⁶ The final exchange of Jupiter and Juno (*Aen.* 12.826–8) can be read as an attempt to forestall this possibility, but the necessity of such a scene underscores the sense of danger.

¹⁷ Feeney 2007: 55. ¹⁸ Hell 2019.

¹⁹ For starting points on this vast topic, see Alcock 1993; Schmitz 1997; Goldhill 2001; Whitmarsh 2001a, 2013; Schmitz and Wiater 2011.

power of their literary heritage to compensate for their political loss of hegemony: Greek language and culture became a mode of peaceful, bookish resistance to Roman rule, in a process crystallised by Horace's famous claim that 'captive Greece [*Graecia capta*] took her savage victor captive' (*Ep.* 2.1.156). The Greek epic written under the Roman Empire provides an exceptional opportunity to nuance and challenge this view. For a long time relegated to the hinterlands of the classical canon, but now celebrated and studied by many,²⁰ these poems combine the textuality, metre and narrative techniques of Troy's 'original' storyteller, Homer,²¹ with the Romanised nature of Troy as a vehicle for reflection on the workings of imperial power. I turn now to three case studies to demonstrate and juxtapose the techniques employed in such reflections.²² In their treatment of Troy as both a narrative setting and a reflexive theme, these poems each use the city to present a double temporality, which connects the mythological past with their (differently experienced) imperial presents. The themes of exemplarity, anxiety and reversibility, we shall see, are deployed to create an approach to the Roman Empire which is neither simply celebratory nor straightforwardly resistant, as the imperial loop of resurrection and collapse is halted mid-motion and drawn in for scrutiny.

Quintus

Our first epic takes us to an unknown place and date in the third century CE.²³ The *Posthomerica*, whose author is a shadowy figure known only as Quintus of Smyrna,²⁴ begins by directly picking up from the final lines of the *Iliad* (Εἶθ' ὑπὸ Πηλεΐωνι δάμη θεοείκελος Ἴκτωρ | καὶ ἐ πυρῇ κατέδαψε καὶ ὅστέα γαῖα κεκεύθει . . . 'When godlike Hector had been vanquished by the son of Peleus and the pyre had consumed him and the earth had covered his bones . . .', *PH* 1.1–2).²⁵ It goes on to narrate in fourteen books the events of the Trojan War which took place between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, including the arrivals and deaths of the Amazon Queen Penthesilea and the Ethiopian warrior

²⁰ See the Introduction to this volume for discussion and key bibliography.

²¹ For the widely demonstrated centrality of Homer to imperial Greek education and culture, see e.g. Kindstrand 1973; Morgan 1998; Kim 2010; and Hunter, Chapter 17, this volume.

²² I also discuss these three epics together from a different but related perspective in Greensmith 2021.

²³ On the third-century dating, see Greensmith 2020. On the wider dating controversies and parameters, see Baumbach and Bär 2007: 1–7 for further details.

²⁴ His Roman name, Quintus, occurs only in Byzantine discussions of the poem, and Smyrna comes from the metapoetic claim in the delayed proem.

²⁵ This opening is discussed from two different perspectives in this volume by Goldhill (Chapter 8) and LeVen (Chapter 14).

Memnon, the death of Achilles and the entry of his son Neoptolemus, the death of Paris, the return of Philoctetes and the sack of Troy itself. It ends with the storm which causes the turmoil and adventures of the *Odyssey*. The poem's lexicon is almost 80 per cent Homeric; it favours Homeric stylistic features like similes and ecphrasis; and it even reincorporates defining Homeric set pieces like the shield of Achilles. Most remarkably of all, in a delayed proem, the author makes a claim actually to *be* Homer: he describes himself tending sheep in Smyrna, one of Homer's famous mythological birth-places (12.306–13).²⁶ Overall, the epic constructs a spectacularly paradoxical poetics: Quintus on the one hand subsumes his identity into the persona of Homer, but on the other includes subtle signals which disavow this claim, such as philological quirks, contemporary references and later literary allusions.²⁷

This paradox lies at the heart of the complex temporality of the poem. As I have discussed in detail elsewhere,²⁸ the *Posthomeric* is intensely interested in time as a narrative and thematic feature. Turning points in the story are often prefaced by explicit discussions and images of time, and Quintus revels in playing with the contrasting forces of acceleration and delay, rushing past major episodes like the theft of the Palladium or the efforts taken to persuade Philoctetes to return to Troy, and pausing on seemingly empty moments or inconsequential scenes – book-long battles which go nowhere, filled with stalemate and frustration.²⁹ It is, however, Quintus' structural approach to time that holds the most powerful political implications. In the previous chapter in this volume, Tom Phillips begins with David Quint's celebrated account of how the Western epic genre responded politically to Homeric time. Drawing on the two opposing temporal models offered by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, poets like Virgil, Lucan, Ercilla and Milton constructed an ideological reading of the poems as a response to empire, whereby the *Iliad*'s linear teleology became associated with the victors, and the *Odyssey*'s 'romantic', circular wandering expressed the position of the 'losers', who were powerless to shape their own ends.³⁰ Phillips suggests that Quint's framework may help to illuminate the buried Hellenistic politics of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, which never directly mentions its Ptolemaic context, but offers a 'creative refashioning of Homeric narrative models', which can obliquely reveal Apollonius' sense of his subjective position in time.

These ideas richly resonate with the *Posthomeric*. Quintus, like Apollonius, makes no explicit references to his contemporary era, and he too

²⁶ On the proem see especially Bär 2007, Maciver 2012 and Greensmith 2018.

²⁷ See Maciver 2012 and Greensmith 2020 for two recent discussions of this poetics.

²⁸ Greensmith, 2020: Ch. 7.

²⁹ See Greensmith 2020: 291–308 for discussion and examples. On Quintus' 'poetics of frustration', see Greensmith 2022a.

³⁰ Quint 1993.

combines linear and circular temporal structures across his poem. However, Quintus makes these moves from a specifically inter-Homeric narrative chronology, and under the conceit of being Homer himself. *This* creative refashioning of Homeric time, therefore, also becomes a continuation of Homeric poetry itself, and a bold interrogation of what sort of Homeric temporality is required for Quintus' own third-century present: is it one which identifies with the Roman imperial conquerors, or one which champions the Greeks as the 'losers', the oppressed but defiant?

The *Posthomeric*'s Trojan setting is a crucial aspect of this interrogation. The whole of the *Posthomeric* takes place at Troy: except for two simultaneously occurring episodes (the voyages to Skyros to bring Neoptolemus to battle, 7.169–345, and to Lemnos to retrieve Philoctetes from exile, 9.353–445), the action is entirely rooted in the Trojan plains and unfolds in a linear manner from hero to hero, battle to battle, with each book creeping closer to the predestined fall. Quintus alludes to this outcome in his very first lines: as the Trojans remain trapped in the city, huddled together in fear of the raging Achilles,³¹ the narrator looks forward to a time after Achilles' death, where it is not the pyre of Hector, but the city itself that is ablaze (1.16–17):

ἀμφὶ δ' ἄρα σφίσι πένθος ἀνηρὸν πεπότητο
ὡς ἤδη στονόεντι καταιθομένης πυρὶ Τροίης.

Bitter grief fluttered all around them, as if Troy were already being burned with grievous fire.

In this unmissable gesture towards Troy's downfall, signed and sealed with the knowing word 'already' (ἤδη), the poem seems to establish for itself categorically an Iliadic temporal structure: as well continuing the *Iliad*'s story, and echoing its own strong connections between Hector's death and the fall of Troy, Quintus' narrative also seems set to emulate its tight, teleological temporality. As this narrative unfolds, however, there are also several moments which undermine this strictly end-directed programme. What Quintus in fact produces is a profound combination of the teleological and wandering plot types, with Troy always-already fallen and also still roaringly alive: a poem which truly connects the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, by merging their two 'opposing' temporalities as well as bridging their narratives.

The account of the sack of Troy (*PH* 13) best demonstrates this combination and its dramatic interpretative effects.³² The book contains many

³¹ Such claustrophobia could also be a nod to the infamously tight, constricted plot of the *Iliad*'s primary narrative.

³² For a rich and detailed analysis of Book 13 from a cultural-historical perspective, see Avlamiis 2019.

teleological markers. Linguistic echoes create a strong ring composition with the opening ‘prediction’ of Troy’s fall; for example, flames are described as flying around the city, to echo and actualise the fear and grief which earlier winged its way around Troy (φλόξ δ’ ἄρ’ ἐς ἡέρα διαν ἀνέγρετο, πέπτατο δ’ αἶγλη | ἄσπετος, 13.464–5; cf. ἀμφὶ δ’ ἄρα σφίσι πένθος ἀνιηρὸν πεπότητο, 1.16). And through a shift of perspective to an anonymous sailor, who watches from a distance as the blaze takes hold, the finality of the situation is emphasised: after so many stalemate battles, the war really is now at an end, and Troy is immediately turned into a paradigm – the subject of proverbial wisdom, a relic of the past tense (13.468–77):

καὶ τις ἀλὸς κατὰ βένθος ἔσω νεὸς ἔκφατο μῦθον·
 ἦνυσαν Ἀργεῖοι κρατερόφρονες ἄσπετον ἔργον
 πολλὰ μάλ’ ἀμφ’ Ἑλένης ἐλικοβλεφάροιο καμώντες,
 πᾶσα δ’ ἄρ’ ἢ τὸ πάροιθε πανόλβιος ἐν πυρὶ Τροίῃ
 καίεται· οὐδὲ θεῶν τις ἐέλδομένοισιν ἄμυνε.
 πάντα γὰρ ἄσχετος Αἴσα βροτῶν ἐπιδέρκεται ἔργα·
 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀκλέα πολλὰ καὶ οὐκ ἀρίδηλα γεγῶτα
 κυδῆεντα τίθησι, τὰ δ’ ὑπόθι μείονα θῆκε·
 πολλακί δ’ ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ πέλει κακόν, ἐκ δὲ κακοῦ
 ἐσθλὸν ἀμειβομένοιο πολυτλήτου βίότιο.’

And out on the deep sea one of sailors on board ship said: ‘The formidable Argives have brought their huge enterprise to an end after their long struggle over the seductive Helen; and the once prosperous city of Troy is in flames. They hoped for help from the gods, but none came: irresistible Destiny surveys all the deeds of men, making famous things originally without fame and obscure, and making low the mighty. As life goes by with all its changes and sufferings, good many a time gives way to evil, evil to good.’

We have seen, however, from Diodorus’ vignette of Scipio that such a detached view of a fallen city does not just signal the end of a narrative – either one of prosperity or one of suffering – but, by triggering reflections on exemplarity and repetition, it can also open such narratives back up. In Quintus’ picture, the sailor’s remarks are gnomic and generalising, but spoken from the mouthpiece of a seaman, they are also eerily reminiscent of the Greek army’s disastrous sea voyages, as the victors’ prosperity turns sour in the very next maritime phase of this mythic story. This change becomes manifest in the final book of Quintus’ poem. After the sailor’s ‘conclusion’, the poem hurries on: first to a new episode (the meeting of Aithra with her grandsons, 13.496–563), and then to a whole further book. The material reality of the *Posthomeric* – the crude but fundamental fact that there are another 658 verses after the account of the city’s destruction – is a stark reminder that the

climax of the sack, despite the heavy sense of ring-composition and closure which was imposed upon it, was false. Enacting in his own poem the infamous verdict of the Alexandrian Homeric scholars Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus of Samothrace, about the ending of the *Odyssey* (they considered the penultimate book, *Od.* 23.296 to be the real end [τέλος] or ‘limit’ [πέρας] of the poem),³³ Quintus offers a neat ending in *his* penultimate book, only to continue elliptically beyond it.

If *PH* 13 provides a closural, Iliadic story of Troy, and then derails it, *PH* 14 (the actual end of the poem) repeats this process in reverse. This book seems much more Odyssean than Iliadic. Linguistically, it contains a marked increase in allusions to the *Odyssey*, such as *poly-* compounds, terms for cunning and contrivance and even the loaded word ἀτασθαλία, at 14.435, which evokes the comrades in the Odyssean proem, who perished ‘by their own recklessness’ (*Od.* 1.7). The book also evokes the *Odyssey* in its subject matter (storms, shipwrecks and thwarted homecomings) and in its ‘wandering’ temporal structuring: tempests in epic are usually vectors of disorientation, used to turn the story, or mark a point of changed direction: Odysseus, Aeneas, Jason and even Paris are all blown onto new heroic courses by them.³⁴ Quintus, however, takes all these markers of open-ended narratives, and turns them into end-stops. Here, the storm does not take us anywhere: amidst all the chaos, we the readers, like the Greeks, still have not really left Troy by the final verses of the poem. The *Odyssey*’s timeframe has not yet taken hold, and the homecomings signalled as already complete in the *Odyssey*’s own opening lines (οἴκοι ἔσαν, πόλεμόν τε πεφευγότες ἠδὲ θάλασσαν, ‘[the rest] were at home, safe from both war and sea’, *Od.* 1.12) are yet to come about. The final descriptions of divine activity emphasise this point. Athena veers between her joy at the current upheaval, which satisfies her desire to punish the Greeks for the rape of Cassandra in her temple during the sack, and her concern for Odysseus in the future, who ‘was destined to suffer many troubles’ (*PH* 14.628–31). Poseidon and Apollo, however, bring us back to the here and now. The nod to the *Odyssey*’s predetermined plot comes into conflict with the reassertion of the mythic present still *in Troy*: they rage against destruction with further destruction, tearing down the city which has already been torn down, but now such havoc is not caused by the Greeks, as it was in the previous book, but is aimed against them:

ὅς ῥα τότε ἀκαμάτοισι περὶ φρεσὶ πάγχυ μεγάριων
 τείχεσι καὶ πύργοισιν ἐυσθενέων Ἀργείων,
 οὐς ἔκαμον Τρώων στυγερῆς ἔρυμ’ ἔμμεν ἀυτῆς.

³³ See Heubeck et al. 1992: 342–5 and Bakker 2020 with full references.

³⁴ For the latter, see Colluthus 206–10.

ἔσσυμένως μάλα πᾶσαν ἀνεπλήμυρε θάλασσαν
 ὄσση ἅπ' Εὐξείνιοι κατέρχεται Ἐλλήσποντον,
 καί μιν ἐπ' ἠϊόνας Τροίης βάλεν... (14.632–6)

Just now, however, Poseidon was feeling great resentment in his tireless heart at the walls and ramparts carefully constructed by the stalwart Argives as a defence against the Trojans' hateful onset. He hastened to raise into a tidal wave all the waters which come down the Hellespont from the Euxine Sea, and he hurled it upon the beaches of Troy.

οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ' Ἐκάεργος ἄτερ καμάτοιο τέτυκτο·
 ἀλλ' ἄρ' ἅπ' Ἰδαίων ὄρεων μάλα πάντα ῥέεθρα
 εἰς ἓνα χῶρον ἄγεσκε, κατέκλυσε δ' ἔργον Ἀχαιῶν. (14.639–41)

The Archer god too, was by no means idle: he channelled every single stream from the mountains of Ida to one spot and flooded the building-works of the Achaeans.

Quintus' reader thus leaves the poem in a state of disorientation. We have neither returned to the beginning of the *Odyssey* nor yet reached the end of the shipwreck; Troy has fallen, but there is more destruction ongoing in the aftermath. Quintus does not offer the satisfaction of the 'proper', concentrated teleology promised by the Iliadic opening of his epic; but nor does he give way to the total openness, transition and uncertainty often heralded by Odyssean symbols like shipwrecks and storms. In this ambivalence, we may be invited to sense Quintus' views on the imperial symbolism of Troy. By refusing to subscribe either to a fully Iliadic or entirely Odyssean temporal framework, Quintus resists identifying with either a victorious or a defeatist perspective. Eschewing this binary enables him to embrace the full range of interpretative possibilities of Troy – the post-Iliadic and the pre-Odyssean, the analeptic and the proleptic, and (crucially) the celebratory and the foreboding. This is not a Greek-speaking writer using the mythology of Troy to condemn his Roman oppressor; nor is it an acquiescent imperial subject simply joining in the imperial triumph. In its intricate, oscillating portrayal of Troy between Homer's epics, the *Posthomeric* instead showcases the many available responses to the experience of empire, and it challenges, but never compels, the reader to take a side.

Triphiodorus

About a half a century after Quintus' epic,³⁵ a poet called Triphiodorus (who, according to the *Suda*, also wrote a now-lost lipogrammatic *Odyssey*

³⁵ The direction of influence between the two poets is contested. See Miguélez Caveró 2013: 4–6 for a summary of debates. The dominant view, which I accept, is that Quintus is earlier. See Gerlaud 1982: 8, *pace* e.g. Gärtner 2005: 25.

and a *Paraphrase of Homer's Similes*) composed a hexameter poem also richly steeped in Homeric language,³⁶ but whose content deals solely with the sack of Troy. Unlike Quintus' elliptical fourteen books, this poem tells its tale in just 691 lines. In fewer verses than some books of Homer, it is over and done with. It provides a characteristic example of what in modern literary criticism is known as *epyllion*: little epic. Now, 'little epic' is in some senses a big oxymoron: epic is grand, large-scale and anything but diminutive. Berenice Verhelst (Chapter 7, this volume) considers in detail such formal perspectives on *epyllion* as a genre. What is crucial for my purpose is Triphiodorus' choice of Troy as the setting of his miniature tale.³⁷ The self-conscious manipulation of the narrative *and scale* of Troy contains this poet's covert expression of his own third-century perspective.

Triphiodorus is also acutely interested in time as a theme: for him, the most important narrative force is speed. The pressure on narrative pace and rapid shifts of perspective found in the *Posthomerica* are pushed to the extreme in Triphiodorus' poem: the narrative forces of expansion and contraction, acceleration and delay are elevated into *the* programmatic elements of this poetics. This thematisation of speed is most brazen in the proem (1–5):

τέρμα πολυκμήτοιο μεταχρόνιον πολέμοιο
καὶ λόχον, Ἀργεῖης ἱππήλατον ἔργον Ἀθήνης,
αὐτίκα μοι σπεύδοντι πολὺν διὰ μῦθον ἀνεῖσα
ἔννεπε, Καλλιόπεια, καὶ ἀρχαίην ἔριν ἀνδρῶν
κεκριμένον πολέμοιο ταχείη λῦσον αἰοιδῆ.

The end long-delayed of the toilsome war and of the ambush, the equine work of Argive Athena, straightway tell me in my haste, Calliope, doing away with sizable speech; and the ancient strife of men, in that war now decided, release with speedy song.

Hearing up words for speed (αὐτίκα, σπεύδοντι, ταχείη), Triphiodorus literally starts with the end (τέρμα). *τέρμα* also means a turning-post in a chariot race, so the word doubles as a foreshadowing image of the (wooden) horse on which the poem's story will focus. The bossy request to Calliope to do away with πολὺν μῦθον can be taken to acknowledge the many μῦθοι,³⁸ or the single long one, which have been previously expounded on the topic of the Trojan War (including perhaps Quintus' lengthy poem). And in asking the Muse to 'release' (λῦσον) her theme in swift song, Triphiodorus points more technically

³⁶ Just over 80 per cent of Triphiodorus' words are Homeric.

³⁷ For the wider trend of miniaturisation of Trojan mythology in the late Hellenistic and imperial periods, see the groundbreaking studies of Squire 2011 and Petrain 2014.

³⁸ On the term μῦθος and its relationship to epic, see discussion in the Introduction to this volume.

to the swift resolution of a plot: *lusis* since Aristotle had denoted a term for literary closure.³⁹ Through these almost aggressively symbolic word choices, the proem seems to announce an overwhelmingly linear, teleological plot structure. We have seen how the sack of Troy can be used to express literary as well as political anxieties, as authors like (ps-)Lycophron, Euripides and Virgil work out how to return to such a well-known and unsurprising story, inextricably rooted in the literary heritage of Homer. Triphiodorus expresses such concerns in a uniquely brazen way, and through this confrontational approach, he seeks to ‘release’ himself from their burden: Troy’s fall is an old, long, ‘decided’ (κεκριμένος) story, Triphiodorus is writing long after Homer,⁴⁰ and his innovation is going to come in accepting and exploiting these facts, and unapologetically racing to the end. If, to return to Quintus’ model which we explored in depth with Quintus, linear narratives are associated with the victors, then in a literary and political sense, Triphiodorus seems resolute in his status as a poetic latecomer, or an imperial subject: his victory, it seems, will come with *refusing* to stop and reflect.

The rest of the poem, then, seems to follow this programme of speedy resolution. The first word of the narrative proper, which begins in the tenth year of the war, is ‘already’ (ἤδη, 6).⁴¹ Quintus began by gesturing towards the sack with the image of the Trojans cowering, as though Troy was ‘already’ on fire. Triphiodorus expands this premise into a *précis* covering all that has taken place in the war in the *Iliad* and its aftermath up until this point (6–39). After the horses mourn their charioteers (14–16), the deaths of all the major heroes are recounted in quick, list-like fashion (17–39): first the Greeks – Achilles and his ‘comrade’ (i.e. Patroclus), Ajax ‘with a self-dealt wound’ and Nestor’s son Antilochus – and then the Trojans and their ‘many tongued’ allies (24), including Sarpedon, Memnon and Penthesilea. The chronological length and demographical breadth of the Trojan conflict is confined into this abridged report, which is really, as Laura Miguélez Caveró neatly puts it, ‘a reminder more than a summary.’⁴² The sack itself is narrated with the same alarming rapidity. Triphiodorus follows Quintus in offering a ‘view from afar’ as Troy falls – an inherited marker of hindsight disguised as prediction.⁴³ Triphiodorus’ version, however, is much briefer: there is no contextual scenario, no sailor looking out at sea. Rather, it is the narrator, not a character, who voices the

³⁹ Arist. *Poet.* 1455b24–30. The word choice also adds a further resonance to the metaphor for the horse and chariot, since the verb is also used for loosening a horse’s bridle.

⁴⁰ In stark contrast to Quintus’ poetic impersonation as discussed in the previous section, Triphiodorus makes no attempt to conceal the chronological gap between Homeric epic and his own poetry.

⁴¹ ἤδη μὲν δεκάτοιο κυλινδομένου λυκάβαντος, ‘already when the tenth year was rolling on . . .’.

⁴² Miguélez Caveró 2013: 138.

⁴³ For further discussion of this marker see Greensmith 2021: 282–3.

sentiments. Troy has become a paradigm for Triphiodorus and his readers; the σῆμα doubles as a marker of literary monumentality (682–3):

αὐτοῦ καὶ μέγα σῆμα φίλοις ἀστοῖσιν ἐτύχθη
Ἴλιος αἰθαλόεσσα· . . .

And even there was smoking Ilium made a great monument to her dear citizens.⁴⁴

The aftermath of the destruction, which spanned the whole final book of the *Posthomerica*, is similarly curt. The sacrifice of Polyxena is covered in just two verses (686–7). The captivity of the Trojan women and children is summarily dispensed: the plots of whole tragedies like the *Troades*, and Hector’s biggest Iliadic fear for his wife (*Il.* 6.450–65), are over in a flash.

Throughout this quick-fire narrative, vocabulary for ending, inevitability and swiftness continues to resound. Thus, Ajax had ‘released’ his body when he ended his life (λύσας, 19); the Greeks ‘immediately’ storm into the Trojan city once Sinon gives the sign (αὐτίκα, 510); and, in the final scene, Triphiodorus repeats the teleological terms from his opening (664–7):

πᾶσαν δ’ οὐκ ἄν ἔγωγε μόθου χύσιν ἀείσαιμι
κρινάμενος τὰ ἕκαστα καὶ ἄλγεα νυκτὸς ἐκείνης·
Μουσάων ὄδε μόχθος, ἐγὼ δ’ ἄπερ ἵππον ἐλάσσω
τέρματος ἀμφιέλισσαν ἐπιπαύουσαν αἰοιδῆν.

All the multitude of strife and the sorrows of that night I could not sing, distinguishing each event. This is the Muses’ task; and I shall drive, as it were a horse, a song which, wheeling about, grazes the turning-post.

Triphiodorus’ Muse therefore appears to answer his demand for a speedy end to this tiresome tale: the poem, as Vincent Tomasso puts it, is ‘fast and furious’.⁴⁵ However there is another dimension to all of this. In the space *between* the proem and the narrative of the sack of Troy, Triphiodorus actually slows down. Immediately after the roll-call of deaths, he signals this change of tack (40–1):

εἰστήκει δ’ ἔτι πᾶσα θεοδμήτων ὑπὸ πύργων
Ἴλιος ἀκλινέεσσιν ἐπεμβεβαυῖα θεμέθλιος . . .

⁴⁴ The σῆμα in the *Iliad* already simmers with metapoetic connotations: cf. *Il.* 24.801: the Trojans pile up the mound (σῆμα) of Hector, at precisely the moment where, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, the proleptic force of his death as a cipher for the imminent fall of Troy is at its strongest. I suggest that Triphiodorus is building on such connotations of that Homeric σῆμα here.

⁴⁵ Tomasso 2012. For another lucid reading of Triphiodorus’ poetics in light of Alexandrian literary innovations, see Maciver 2020.

And still the whole of Ilium stood, because of her god-built towers, mounted upon unshaken foundations . . .

On the one hand, this comment serves a clear ironic purpose: the allusion to the divine construction of the Trojan walls by Apollo and Poseidon,⁴⁶ and their supposedly steadfast strength as a result, emphasises (like Quintus did at *PH* 14.632–41) the bitter mythological fact that these walls were obliterated. On the other hand, it also draws attention to the reality of the specific moment in the Trojan timeline which Triphiodorus has chosen to narrate. In this present, Troy *is* still standing, for all the protestations of the proem. The paradoxical image of the long-fallen city still towering high offers a fitting metaphor for the whole agenda of Triphiodorus' epic, which is much more complicated than it first seems. It rushes us through the narrative of Troy's downfall, but also stretches out the moment of Troy's final day.

This process of stretching out the moment is most dramatically executed through two scenes centred on the wooden horse. Epius' construction of the horse is described in a vast and elaborate ecphrasis (56–105), complete with dazzling gems, vibrant colours and swirling, hypnotic movements:

αὐχένα δὲ γλαφυροῖσιν ἐπὶ στήθεσσιν ἔπηξε
 ξανθῷ πορφυρόπεζαν ἐπιρρήνας τρίχα χρυσῶ·
 ἢ δ' ἐπικυμαίνουσα μετήορος αὐχένι κυρτῷ
 ἐκ κορυφῆς λοφόντι κατεσφρηγίζετο δεσμῷ.
 ὀφθαλμοὺς δ' ἐνέθηκε λιθώπεας ἐν δυσι κύκλοις
 γλαυκῆς βηρύλλοιο καὶ αἰμαλέης ἀμεθύσσου·
 τῶν δ' ἐπιμισγομένων διδύμης ἀμαρύγματι χροίης
 γλαυκῶν φοινίσσοντο λίθων ἐλίκεσσιν ὀπωπαί. (65–72)

He fixed the neck to the hollow breast and sprinkled the purple-fringed mane with yellow gold; and the mane, floating high on the arched neck, was sealed on the head with a crested band. He fixed in two circles the eyes gleaming with jewels of blue-green beryl and blood-red amethyst: and through the flash of a double colour produced from their mixture, the eyes shone red with rings of green gems.

κληιστήν δ' ἐνέθηκε θύρην καὶ κλίμακα τυκτῆν,
 ἢ μὲν ὅπως αἰδηλὸς ἐπὶ πλευρῆς ἀραρυῖα
 ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα φέρησι λόχον κλυτόπωλον Ἀχαιῶν,
 ἢ δ' ἵνα λυομένη τε καὶ ἔμπεδον εἰς ἐν ἰοῦσα
 εἴη σφιν καθύπερθεν ὁδοῦ καὶ νέρθεν ὀροῦσαι.
 ἀμφὶ δέ μιν λευκοῖο κατ' αὐχένος ἠδὲ γενείων
 ἄνθεσι πορφυρέοισι πέριξ ἔζωσεν ἱμάντων

⁴⁶ The Trojan walls were built by either Apollo and Poseidon (*Il.* 7.452–3), or Poseidon alone (*Il.* 21.446–9) at the time of Priam's father, Laomedon.

καὶ σκολιῆς ἐλίκεσσιν ἀναγκαίοιο χαλινοῦ
 κολλήσας ἐλέφαντι καὶ ἀργυροδίει χαλκῷ. (90–8)

He placed in it a closed door and a wrought ladder; so that the door, unseen and fitted to the sides, could carry the famous equine ambush of the Achaeans this way and that; and so that the ladder, released and set firmly into one place, might be a path for them to rush up from above or down from below. And he encircled the horse on its white neck and cheeks with purple flowers all around the straps, and with curved spirals of harsh bridle and he fastened them with ivory and silver-eddy bronze.

This descriptive *tour de force* also takes us all the way back to the first cause of the Trojan War: the horse is made of wood from Mount Ida, where Phereclus built Paris' ships, the 'beginning of the woe' (πῆματος ἀρχήν, 61).⁴⁷ It also reminds us of the imminent future, when this amazing creature is driven to its purpose (the paths in the mouth for the hiding men to breathe, the ladder from which they can rush in and out). Ecphrasis is of course one of the most famous techniques of expansion in literature: the opposition between narrative (*diegesis*) and description (*ecphrasis*) is a hallmark of structuralist criticism, and can be found in all epic from Homer onwards.⁴⁸ For Triphiodorus, however, this literary truism is troublesome. Ecphrasis is also the opposite of speediness. Viewing always takes time, and time is what Triphiodorus has openly stated that he, like Troy, does not have. And yet here he creates not just any ecphrasis, but one which puts staggering emphasis on the intricacies and effects of visualising an object as it is artistically formed into being. It is not so much the animalistic realism of the horse which is stressed (despite the nimble movement of its limbs, 84–6), but rather its technicolour, sparkling virtuosity. It takes on the properties of a lifelike, gleaming statue, animated into being to fill its beholder with wonder. The reader must simply *stop* and stare.⁴⁹ Many late antique written works display a similarly marked interest in the visual, paying special attention to glittering details and fragmentation to convey a sense of polychrome patterning in both colours and words, an aesthetic which Michael Roberts famously termed 'the jeweled style'.⁵⁰ But these trendy features of the time mean something different when set against the principles of this small, rapid

⁴⁷ Further discussion of this image comes in the next section of this chapter.

⁴⁸ For some excellent starting points on ancient ecphrasis, see Webb 1999 and 2009; Bartsch and Elsner 2007; Goldhill 2007; Zeitlin 2013. See Laird 1993 on Homeric ecphrasis and, for imperial Greek epic perspectives, Baumbach 2007 and Maciver 2012: 39–86.

⁴⁹ Our reaction as readers is starkly different to the pragmatic efficiency of the Greeks, who, urged on by Athena, immediately call a council to discuss the plan (108–10).

⁵⁰ Roberts 1989. See also Elsner 1995 (who neatly describes 'the rhetoricisation of the visual'); Agosti 2006; Cadau 2015.

poem. We have to look hard at this horse, the ultimate icon of the Troy story, which could (and, according to the proem, should) have been taken for granted as the vessel for the long-completed fall. This bedazzled description reveals a proleptic narrative knowingly at odds with itself.

Two hundred lines later, the Trojans haul the sparkling monster into their city (306–57). Every heaving pull, every creaking rope, every shout is described in detail, a frenzy of energy on both an earthly and cosmic scale:

γαῖα δὲ χαλκείοισιν ἐρεικομένη περὶ κύκλοις
 δεινὸν ὑπεβρυχᾶτο, σιδήρειοι δὲ δι' αὐτῶν
 τριβόμενοι τρηχεῖαν ἀνέστενον ἄζονες ἠχῆν·
 τετρίγει δὲ κάλων ξυνοχή, καὶ πᾶσα ταθεῖσα
 λιγνὴν αἰθαλόεσσαν ἔλιξ ἀνεκῆκτι σειρή.
 πολλή δ' ἑλκόντων ἐνοπή καὶ κόμπος ὀρώρει·
 ἔβρεμε νυμφαίησιν ἅμα δρυσι δάσκιος Ἴδη,
 ἴαχε καὶ Ξάνθου ποταμοῦ κυκλοῦμενον ὕδωρ,
 καὶ στόμα κεκλήγει Σιμοεῖσιον· οὐρανίη δὲ
 ἐκ Διὸς ἐλκόμενον πόλεμον μαντεύετο σάλπιγξ. (318–27)

The earth, shattered around the bronze wheels, groaned in terrible agony, and the iron axles grinding within them screeched a harsh shout. The join of the ropes creaked and the whole coiling cord, stretched tight, sent out a thick burning smoke. A huge din and clash rose up from their heaving. Bushy Ida murmured together with her oaks sacred to nymphs, the circling water of the river Xanthus cried out, and the mouth of Simois screamed aloud: and the ethereal trumpet of Zeus prophesied of the battle that they were drawing in.

Τρωιάδες δὲ γυναῖκες ἀνὰ πτόλιν ἄλλοθεν ἄλλαι,
 νύμφαι τε πρόγαμοί τε καὶ ἴδμονες Εἰλειθυῖας,
 μολπῆ τ' ὀρχηθμῶ τε περὶ βρέτας εἰλίσσοντο·
 . . .
 ἀνδρομέη δὲ βοῆ συνεβάλλετο θῆλυς ἰωή,
 καὶ παίδων ἀλαλητὸς ἐμίσγετο γήραος ἠχῆ. (340–2, 350–1)

And the Trojan women throughout the city, some here, some there, brides and those before marriage and those with the knowledge of Eileithyia⁵¹ circled about the wooden image with song and dance . . . the female cry collided with the roaring of men, and the shouts of boys were mingled with aged voices.

This cacophony threatens to overload the senses: the sheer density of noise and movement, the collision of sounds, the intense pathetic fallacy and frantic Bacchic overtones all fight for the reader's attention. But this overwhelming set

⁵¹ Eileithyia is the goddess of childbirth (cf. e.g. *Il.* II.270, I9.119; *Theog.* 922) and so the phrase refers to mothers.

of sonic descriptions is concentrated around a tiny transitional point in the narrative. As soon as the horse crosses the threshold into Troy, the reader well knows, everything changes: this moment is miniature in timespan, but vast in consequence. By zooming in on this moment and stretching it out in words, Triphiodorus both emphasises its momentous significance in the inevitable sack (an inevitability which itself is heavily marked, via Zeus' trumpeting prophecy),⁵² but also *delays* that very onslaught from being narrated, as we, like the Trojans, linger because we cannot look away.

This noisy description, like the ecphrasis, gives Troy more time. During the ominous revelry, the city remains still standing. Triphiodorus draws attention to this connection between the narrative elongation of the horse's movement and the extension of Troy's physical existence. As the contraption finally reaches the gates, it almost gets stuck, because 'the [gate's] folding doors were constricted' (θυρέων πύγες ἐστείνοντο, 336). This disruption is swiftly corrected by Hera (337), and events continue along their divinely ordained course. But an uncannily similar scenario recurs during the account of the sack, where it is not the gates which are narrowed, but Troy herself, described with the same epithet as Hector used in his Iliadic prophecy (*Il.* 6.448):

... ἐστείνετο δ' Ἴλιος ἱρή
πιπτόντων νεκύων ... (543–4)

And sacred Troy was compressed with falling corpses.

Through this macabre nexus of language, Triphiodorus displays the interconnected dynamics of blockage, compression and release at work in his poem: the gates which were almost too confined to let the 'long decided' disaster in, the city which becomes chocked once this disaster inevitably occurs and the descriptive elongations which knowingly hinder the poem's proclaimed race to resolution.

These dynamics are central to the symbolic power of Troy as Triphiodorus reads and employs it. *The Sack of Troy*, like the *Posthomerica*, merges the linear properties of the city's downfall with the more meandering, expansive elements of the moments which build up to it. Quintus returned to Troy under the pretence of still being Homer and explored the space in between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Triphiodorus makes his return as an aggressively belated poet, who is not Homer at all, and who treats Homeric epic and mythological

⁵² This inevitability is perhaps furthered by the mention of Eileithyia, the goddess of birth (see note 49 above), which subtly taps into the long-standing association of the wooden horse as 'pregnant' with soldiers (Triphiodorus 412, δέμας πολυχανδούς ἵππου and 536, compare also *PH* 12.307. See Bär 2007: 55–9 and Greensmith 2018: 265).

Troy as ancient and completed. And yet, he betrays the impulse to slow down even within this end-driven programme. By finding unexpected time and space for expansion, Triphiodorus offers his own covert reflection on living and composing in the third century. As a statement of literary anxiety, he shows that there is more to epyllion than aggressive miniaturisation: in this ‘completed’ story, there *is* in fact more to be said and done. And, in the context of third-century imperial politics, this accelerated-yet-expanded fall also speaks volumes. Amidst rapid political transitions (no fewer than twenty-five different emperors ruled between 235 and 284 CE), Triphiodorus invites his readers to pause in the moments before the next iteration of change and succession takes hold. By stretching out the *telos*, even in a poem ostensibly all about it, he shows what it is like to exist *within* an empire that is so aware of its own ‘loop of resurrection and destruction’. Even when the ultimate outcome may be inevitable, the imperial ‘moment’ can seem to last forever. It can be dark and ugly, agonisingly stretched and strained, but it can also be beautiful, something to be wondered at, revelled in, appreciated and even enjoyed . . .

Colluthus

To end this story of imperial Greek Troy, I turn to another epyllion, later in chronological time, but earlier in mythical time. In the sixth century CE, a poet named Colluthus from Lycopolis, in the Egyptian Thebaid, wrote an account of the rape – or abduction, or seduction (*ἀρπαγή*) – of Helen.⁵³ If Triphiodorus obsessively thematises his belatedness, then from the perspective of literary history, Colluthus’ poem is even more intensely defined by coming after. It was composed three centuries later than both the *Posthomeric* and the *Sack of Troy*, and after some of the most momentous changes in the history of the empire had occurred: the state ‘conversion’ to Christianity (Colluthus lived under the reign of Anastasius I, the first emperor to be born a Christian and who was deeply involved in ecclesiastical politics); the shift of the centre of power eastwards, from Rome to Constantinople, and the sack of Rome and the ‘fall’ of the Western empire. But unlike Triphiodorus, Colluthus thematically focuses on the *before*. His chosen part of the Trojan saga returns to the start and cause of the entire war: the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the anger of Strife, the apple contest and its verdict, Paris’ voyage to Sparta and first encounter of Helen and, in the poem’s final scene, Helen’s entry into Troy, as she is led in as Paris’ new bride. Where Triphiodorus and Quintus nod to the wider Trojan topography through descriptions of Mount Ida and the wood which built Paris’ vessel, Colluthus turns this mountain, those ships, into his

⁵³ On the definitions of *ἀρπαγή* in this context see Morales 2016: 61 with further references.

opening setting and theme. The proem is addressed to the Nymphs of Troy, and describes in evocative detail their joyful activities across the Trojan landscape before the onset of disaster:

νύμφαι Τρωιάδες, ποταμοῦ Ξάνθοιο γενέθλη,
αἱ πλοκάμων κρήδεμνα καὶ ἱερὰ παίγνια χειρῶν
πολλάκι πατρώησιν ἐπὶ ψαμάθοισι λιποῦσαι
ἐς χορὸν Ἰδαίησιν ἐπεντύνασθε χορείαις . . .

(I-4)

Nymphs of Troy, the offspring of the river Xanthus, you who often leave the headbands for your locks and the sacred toys for your hands discarded on your father's sands and get yourselves ready to twirl on the dance floors of Mount Ida . . .

Troy, the doomed city, appears here as idyllic, a country disco and playground. The poem, as we shall see, then resounds with further images of primordality and inception. Colluthus joins Quintus and Triphiodorus before him in displaying a marked interest in time as a narrative agent, but he focuses his attention on aetiological and analeptic dynamics. He vividly stresses the origins of the Trojan saga, drawing back into focus the connected plot points of Troy's mythographical story which predate its brutal collapse.⁵⁴

We have seen how notions of cyclicity are a key part of Troy's function in the imperial imagination: from Aeneas' victory cries in the midst of stormy upheaval, to Scipio's gloomy despair in the midst of victory, Troy's perennial paradox is that every end can signal a new beginning, but every beginning can also signal the end. Colluthus' inceptive poetics reveals its own understated commentary on this process. The joyful rusticity in the proem is pointedly precarious, since the reader simply knows that it will not last. The poem's narrative proceeds to maximally exploit this knowledge: through a sustained use of ironic temporal markers, it not only predates, but relentlessly anticipates Troy's darker future-past.

The proem's picture of Troy as a happy countryside is tarnished whilst it is being created, first subtly and then inescapably. The four opening verses quoted above contain multiple 'innocent' words which, when refracted through their epic intertextual history, become incendiary and proleptic. The very mention of the river Xanthus cannot help but cue the darker side of the river's 'future past': its role in the *Iliad* (furthered by Triphiodorus) as a river screaming and choked with corpses, not a nurturing father of the nymphs but Achilles' blazing antagonist.⁵⁵ The κρήδεμνα (line 2) echo the

⁵⁴ The *Cypria* in the Epic Cycle also narrated this early part of the story, and Colluthus may well be drawing on sections or summaries of this poem for his new reworking.

⁵⁵ Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* also makes use of this Iliadic characterisation of the Xanthus, as Achilles' grandfather engages in his own watery battle there (*Dion.* 22.354–89).

symbolic doublet of doom from the *Iliad*, the city battlements and Andromache's headbands. And the epithet *ιερά* (also line 2), here describing the jocular playthings of the nymphs, evokes that recurring fatalistic premonition of Hector's and Scipio's: ἔσσεται ἡμαρ ὅτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλη Ἴλιος ἱρή . . .

This linguistic foreboding continues beyond the opening vignette. The Nymphs are asked to declare 'the thoughts of the shepherd who gave the ruling' (θεμιστοπόλοιο νοήματα μηλοβοτήρος, 5). The leading position of θεμιστοπόλος ensures that Paris' rustic identity is compromised even before it is asserted: he is never just a shepherd. μηλοβοτήρ itself also has a macabre undertone. A Homeric *hapax*, it is used in the *Iliad* on the shield of Achilles to describe the generic group of shepherds who are slaughtered in the city at war (*Il.* 18.529). The Homeric origins of the term therefore already connote conflict. Colluthus then requests that the Nymphs tell of the reason for the ships that were 'the beginning of woe' (νηῶν ἀρχεκάκων, 8–9), in a phrase which both calls back to Triphiodorus' allusion in the horse ecphrasis to Paris' ships as πῆματος ἀρχήν, and also, via the specific word choice ἀρχεκάκος (another Homeric *hapax*), echoes the only direct mention in the *Iliad* of this part of the Trojan tale (*Il.* 5.61–2, Phereclus described as ὃς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρω τεκτῆνατο νῆας εἴσαζ' ἀρχεκάκουσ, 'the one who built the ships for Alexander, the beginning of woe').

Colluthus then asks the most pressing question of all: 'what was the primeval beginning of the conflict?' (ὡγγυίη δὲ τίς ἔπλετο νεΐκεος ἀρχή, 10). νεΐκεος here has double resonance: it can mean both a military battle or flying contest *and* a personal conflict or feud. The personal, even petty roots of the huge-scale Trojan War (squabbling goddesses, jealous husbands, ambitious kings) are succinctly and suggestively conveyed.

As the narrative progresses, this collision between the primordial past of Troy and its certain mythic future intensifies. When Strife (*Eris*) hurls her golden apple to disrupt the wedding of Peleus, Colluthus uses the language of memory and like Quintus and Triphiodorus deploys that loaded term 'already' to signal just how foreclosed this beginning really is (59–61):

ἦδη δ' Ἑσπερίδων χρυσέων ἐμνήσατο μῆλων·
 ἔνθεν Ἔρις, πολέμοιο προάγγελον ἔρνος ἔλοῦσα
 μῆλον, ἀριζήλων ἐφράσσατο δῆνεα μόθων.

And already now she recalled the golden apples of the Hesperides. Then Strife grabbed the fruit, the announcer of war, the apple, and devised her plans for those notorious miseries.

Then, when Zeus orders Hermes to appoint Paris as judge, we are hurled into a vast digression of music-making (102–23). Paris plays his pipe, relaxes with

his animals and so deeply immerses himself in his leisurely pursuits that he almost forgets his flock. In a sonic reversal of Triphiodorus' ominous cacophony, here Paris plays to a docile audience (the bulls do not bellow and the dogs stop barking, 117) in a scene filled with bucolic tranquillity.⁵⁶ Such an environment points to a non-epic world, which emphatically lacks the martial themes associated with this genre. However, once again, this hazy vista is punctured with repetitive hints at the rupture which is already coming. The description of Paris counting his flock (νόσφι μὲν ἀγρομένων ἀγέλην πεμπάζετο ταύρων, | νόσφι δὲ βοσκομένων διεμέτρεε πάεα μήλων, 106–7) rehearses his next task of 'ranking' the goddesses. And the word μῆλα, repeated three times in this episode, now drips with irony: refracted via the μηλοβοτήρος of the proem, and the *other* μῆλον thrown by Strife, Paris' sheep are associated with and contaminated by the apple which starts the conflict. Triphiodorus used *din* and ecphrastic description to enable Troy to remain standing just before her fall. In his own delay to the account of the judgement, Colluthus invites his reader to spend time in the pastoral world of Troy before it became 'Troy', the city of Homeric trauma, but also to unlock the verbal and visual cues for its undoing.

The final verses of *The Abduction of Helen* offer the most haunting portrait of this beginning-of-the-end.⁵⁷ Helen's entry into Troy is focalised neither through the perspective of the omniscient poet, nor that of the Trojan collective.⁵⁸ Instead, we see it through the eyes of Cassandra (391–4):

πυκνά δὲ τίλλε κόμην, χρυσέην δ' ἔρριψε καλύπτρην
 Κασσάνδρην νεόφοιτον ἀπ' ἀκροπόλεως ἰδοῦσα.
 Τροίη δ' ὑψιδόμων πολέων κληϊδας ἀνεῖσα
 δέξατο νοστήσαντα τὸν ἀρχέκακον πολίτην.

And Cassandra on the acropolis, when she saw the newcomer, frantically tore her hair and flung away her golden veil. But Troy undid the bolts of her high-built gates and received on his return her citizen that was the source of her woe.

We have considered through the *Troades* Cassandra's long history of embodying and voicing the double temporality of Troy. In ending his poem, unexpectedly, with her (she does not feature anywhere else in the narrative), Colluthus continues this tradition, and gives some powerful prompts for reflection.⁵⁹ The language of this scene drives to the foreground the multiple interconnections

⁵⁶ See Cadau 2015: chap. 2 for a detailed account of the intertexts with pastoral poetry, especially Theocritus' *Idylls*.

⁵⁷ See also Greensmith 2021: 390–4.

⁵⁸ Colluthus rejects the obvious parallel of the Iliadic *Teichoscopia* here (a scene of which elsewhere he makes great use, cf. e.g. 268–77).

⁵⁹ For Triphiodorus' contrasting depiction of Cassandra, who is very vocal and acts as a speaker during the poem, rather than a spectator at its end, see the recent article by Tsakiris 2020.

between different figures, fates and stories. The description of Helen as νεόφοιτος employs an extremely rare word, whose only other attested use in poetry is in an anonymous sepulchral epigram of unknown date describing the air through which Icarus fell (*AP* 7.699.1–2) – another doomed mythological journey. And yet the word’s proximity to Cassandra ensures that it also evokes the conditions of her own downfall: Cassandra will later be the newcomer in Argos, when Agamemnon leads her into his home. ἀρχέκακος from the proem (8–9) recurs again here, but now describes not Paris’ ships, or the shipwright who built them (*Il.* 5.61–2, cf. Colluthus 196–7) but Paris himself, further unsettling the locus of agency and blame.⁶⁰ And νοστήσαντα evokes further paradigmatic homecomings: as well as gesturing towards Odysseus’ own narrative of return, it directly echoes *Od.* 1.36, where Zeus bluntly describes how Agamemnon was slain by Aegisthus ‘when he returned home’ (τὸν δ’ ἔκτανε νοστήσαντα), underscoring how even once completed (note the aorist), a *nostos* can still be derailed and undone.⁶¹ The lines thus merge the fates of Helen, Cassandra, Paris, Agamemnon and Odysseus into one matrix. The politicised language (ἀκροπόλιος, πολίτην) adds another more contemporary set of referents. Whilst both words are perfectly Homeric, their potential also to hold a more Hellenocentric significance (*the* Acropolis, political citizenship) enables them simultaneously to point forward to Greece’s ‘future’; an Athenian heyday which is already, from Colluthus’ sixth-century perspective, part of the inherited past.

Cassandra’s silent reaction thus poignantly enacts the experience of watching a scenario unfold as an actor as well as a spectator, knowing what is going to happen, but being powerless to prevent it.⁶² The cyclicity of Troy’s fate from an imperial perspective is deeply resonant here. (ps-)Lycophron’s Cassandra gave voice to a shakily optimistic prophecy about the Roman restoration of Troy’s glory. Colluthus positions her before the fall *and* before the restored glory to remind us of the destabilising mix of certainty and peril involved in this circle of destruction and rebirth.

Coda: Troy and (Christian) Time?

In our explorations of Trojan time in Quintus and Triphiodorus, we considered whether their differently nuanced approaches to Troy may be informed by the political and cultural realities of the Graeco-Roman third

⁶⁰ On this shift as an intervention into the well-worn debates about Helen’s responsibility for the Trojan war, see Greensmith 2021: 392–3.

⁶¹ Thanks to Oliver Parkes for drawing my attention to the force of the aorist in the intertext here.

⁶² Her lack of speech also offers an Aeschylean nod: the Cassandra of the *Agamemnon* famously spends an agonisingly long time on stage before she talks.

century. Colluthus' own distinctive treatment of Troy – the persistent mixture of themes from pre- and post-destruction, and the intense overlapping of language, figures and imagery – also encourages us to ask contextualising questions. The Christian cultural politics at large in Colluthus' period add a further compelling dimension to later imperial Greek epic's relationship to Trojan time. In late antique Christianity, time began to be conceptualised in different ways, with new or changing discussions of eternity, life after death and the end of days. Individuals also began to experience time differently: 'church time' established new markers of day-to-day timekeeping like the seven-day week and festal calendars marking, for instance, Christmas and Easter. This is not the place to discuss these changes at any length;⁶³ but it is crucial to note that such forms of time did not exist in a vacuum, nor did they replace and destroy older modes of chronology and timekeeping. Rather, they formed part of a long-standing Christian project of synchronising time; of linking, as Francois Hartog puts it in his *Regimes of Historicity*, 'the already fulfilled' and 'the not yet completed'.⁶⁴ This manifested itself, for instance, through the adoption of modes of reading which could link the Christian Bible as a new sacred history with the old profane history of the pagans and the older sacred history of the Jews, to create a new truly universal human view of time. This Christian time was therefore emphatically un-monolithic: as a number of Christian chronicles from the fourth century onwards make clear, it operated within and alongside the older systems through a process of comparing, correlating and calibrating. *The Abduction of Helen* is certainly not a 'Christian chronicle'. Instead, it offers, but never asserts, suggestive links between the pre-classical past of myth and the narrative of Christianity: primordial origins and judgement days, shepherds leaving their flocks, relationships between mothers and children.⁶⁵ Troy stands as a mediator between these different worldviews: its ambivalent status as a marker of both origins and endings of empire is now accompanied by a different cosmic perspective. Precisely because Troy is always symbolic of the 'already fulfilled' and the 'not yet completed', because of its close relationship to both destruction and resurrection, it can offer a complex but rewarding setting for a Christian-classical mythology.

⁶³ See Adler 1989 and Feeney 2007: chap. 1 for lucid overviews. Goldhill 2022 is a recent important contribution. Hartog 2021 offers an ambitious exploration of Christian → Western time, beginning with the ancient Greeks and ending in the twenty-first century.

⁶⁴ Hartog 2015: 62.

⁶⁵ On the pronounced relationship between Helen and her daughter Hermione in a Christian context, see the excellent analysis by Morales 2016. Verhelst discusses Herimone from yet another illuminating perspective (as a 'small' character in 'small' epic) in Chapter 7 of this volume.

As Tim Whitmarsh (Chapter 18, this volume) shows, many scholars have dedicated significant time to exploring and explaining the continued relevance of Homeric epic to Christian writing and thinking in late antiquity. The imaginative setting of Troy can and should be brought into these discussions. An inherited space from Homeric time, it tells a story of reversibility, cyclicity, memory and empire, a story which was taken up and refashioned time and again in later poetics, from the *Odyssey* to tragedy, from (ps-)Lycophron to Virgil, into Quintus and Triphiodorus (and many in between). It then offered to the Christian successors of ancient poetry a way of expressing their position in time, a trajectory which could be appropriated, adapted or rejected anew. Through this continued relevance, Troy the always-already fallen city acquires a new route of continual life. In the evolving imagination and creativity of imperial poetry, *regna resurgunt Troiae*.

Further Reading

Three recent books offer stimulating explorations of the politics of temporality in a broad sense: Hell 2019, Hartog 2015 (originally published in French in 2003) and Hartog 2021 (originally published in French in 2020). The first chapter of Feeney 2007 considers the role of Troy in ancient Greek and Roman configurations of time. On techniques of temporality in imperial Greek epic (discussed through analyses of individual poets), see especially Goldhill 2020, 2022 and Greensmith 2020: chap. 7.