

HOMER AND ACHILLES' AMBUSH OF TROILUS: CONFRONTING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM*

A commonly attested episode in ancient art and literature is the brutal death of Troilus at the hands of Achilles. Priam's son is mostly depicted as a defenceless *pais* ('young man' or 'boy'), slain in a cruel ambush outside Troy while on horseback on some non-military business.¹ The *Iliad* makes no reference to the slaying of Troilus. The only mention of him is in Book 24, where Priam, after a visit from Iris, the divine messenger, becomes determined to go and visit Achilles in order to ransom the body of Hector. It is at this moment that in an emotional outburst the Trojan king berates his surviving sons for the mere fact that they still live, while Mestor, Troilus, and Hector, his three 'most excellent sons', have lost their lives as a result of the war (*Il.* 24.255–60):

ὦ μοι ἐγὼ πανάποτμος, ἐπεὶ τέκον υἱᾶς ἀρίστου
Τροίῃ ἐν εὐρείῃ, τῶν δ' οὐ τινὰ φημι λελείφθαι,
Μήστορά τ' ἀντίθεον καὶ **Τροῖλον ἱπποχάρμην**
Ἐκτορά θ', ὃς θεὸς ἔσκε μετ' ἀνδράσιν, οὐδὲ ἐφάκει
ἀνδρὸς γε θνητοῦ πάις ἔμμεναι, ἀλλὰ θεοῖο·
τοὺς μὲν ἀπώλεσ' Ἄρης, τὰ δ' ἐλέγχεα πάντα λέλειπται. 255
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*Woe is me, who am completely ill-fated, since I begot sons the best
in the broad land of Troy, yet of them I say that not one is left,
not god-like Mestor, not **Troilus the warrior charioteer**,
not Hector who was a god among men, nor did he seem
the son of a mortal man, but of a god:
all them has Ares slain, yet these things of shame are all that remain.*²

* I would like to thank *G&R*'s anonymous reviewer for the useful feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ For a comprehensive discussion of all the available evidence, both literary and pictorial, see T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth. A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 1993), 597–603.

² In this article, both the Greek text and the English translation of the *Iliad* are based on A. T. Murray (ed. and trans.), *Homer. The Iliad*, second edition, rev. W. F. Wyatt, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1999).

The killing of Troilus receives no specific mention in this passage, yet the contextual components invite us to imagine that the Trojan prince fought and died as a warrior on the battlefield. Both the use of the expression 'Ares has slain them all' (260) and the fact that Troilus is designated as *áristos* (255), which is very often used of those who prove themselves to be excellent in martial virtue, are highly suggestive. Even though it is not explicitly stated, the *Iliad* leaves us with a strong impression that at the time of his death Troilus was a grown man and was killed as a distinguished warrior.³ This, however, raises the question whether the story of Troilus' ambush off the battlefield pre-dates the monumental composition of the *Iliad* and whether its absence from Homer reflects a meaningful omission rather than ignorance.

Our evidence, as is so often the case, does not allow us to answer with certainty. There is, however, some indication that the ambush of Troilus formed part of the epic tradition that crystallized in one of the Cyclic poems, the *Cypria* (now only fragmentarily preserved), which narrated the origins of the Trojan War and its first events.⁴ Proclus' *Chrestomatheia*⁵ gives us an outline of the relevant section of the poem:

καὶ διαπρεσβεύονται πρὸς τοὺς Τρῶας, τὴν Ἑλένην καὶ τὰ κτήματα ἀπαιτοῦντες· ὡς δὲ οὐχ ὑπήκουσαν ἐκεῖνοι, ἐνταῦθα δὴ τειχομαχοῦσιν. ἔπειτα τὴν χώραν ἐπεξεληθόντες πορθοῦσι καὶ τὰς περιοίκους πόλεις...εἶτα ἀπονοστεῖν ὠρμημένους τοὺς Ἀχαιοὺς Ἀχιλλεὺς κατέχει. κᾶπειτα ἀπελαύνει τὰς Αἰνείου βοῦς. καὶ Λυρνησσὸν καὶ Πήδασον πορθεῖ καὶ συχνάς τῶν περιοικίδων πόλεων, καὶ Τρωῖλον φονεύει. Λυκάονά τε Πάτροκλος εἰς Λῆμνον ἀγαγὼν ἀπεμπολεῖ.

³ Cf. Σ (T) *Il.* 24.257b; A. H. Sommerstein, D. Fitzpatrick, and T. Talbot (eds. and trans.), *Sophocles. Selected Fragmentary Plays, Vol. 1. Hermione, Polyxene, The Diners, Tereus, Troilus, Phaedra* (Oxford, 2006), 197.

⁴ The thematic convergence among early Greek epics that dealt with the Trojan War (e.g. the *Cypria*, the *Little Iliad*, and the *Sack of Troy*) induced ancient readers to think of them collectively as a single entity, the so-called 'Epic Cycle'. This was either a late classical/Hellenistic reading list forming the basis of a prose summary of the Trojan War poems (see M. L. West, *The Epic Cycle. A Commentary on the Lost Troy Epics* [Oxford, 2013], 16–26) or a Hellenistic compilation created by combining the individual poems in whole or in part (see J. S. Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle* [Baltimore, MD, 2001], 7–33). For a recent and comprehensive overview of the studies on the formation of the Epic Cycle and a re-appreciation of the different stages in its evolution, see M. Fantuzzi and C. Tsagalis (eds.), *The Greek Epic Cycle and Its Ancient Reception. A Companion* (Cambridge, 2015), 7–40. For a useful discussion of the *Cypria*, see B. Currie, 'Cypria', in *ibid.*, 281–305.

⁵ Our evidence for the identity and date of Proclus remains largely inconclusive. He was either a second-century AD grammarian or the famous fifth-century AD Neoplatonist: see discussion in I. Holmberg, 'The Creation of the Ancient Greek Epic Cycle', *Oral Tradition* 13.2 (1998), 458; G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis* (London, 1969), 123–4; E. Severyns, *Le cycle épique dans l'école d'Aristarque* (Liège, 1928), 245; and more recently West (n. 4), 1 and 7–11, who argues for an early-date Proclus.

And [the Greeks] send negotiators to the Trojans to demand the return of Helen and the property. When they did not agree to the demands, then they began a siege. Next they go out over the country and destroy the surrounding settlements... Then when the Achaeans are eager to return home, Achilles holds them back. And then he drives off Aeneas' cattle. And he sacks Lyrnessus and Pedasos and many of the surrounding settlements, *and he slays Troilus*. And Patroclus takes Lycaon to Lemnos and sells him into slavery.⁶

In the *Cypria* the ambush of Troilus takes place relatively shortly after the arrival of the Greek forces at Troy. The Trojans are given the chance to negotiate, but they reject the demand of the Greeks to return Helen and the property. As a result, Troy becomes a city under siege, and the Greek army destroys the surrounding settlements. Achilles seizes the cattle of Aeneas, sacks Pedasos and Lyrnessos (among other Trojan cities), 'slays' (*phoneúei*) Troilus, and captures Lycaon, whom he sells as a slave through Patroclus. According to *Il.* 20.90–3 and 188–94, Achilles attacked Aeneas while he was tending his cattle on Mount Ida; and according to *Il.* 21.34–44 (cf. *Il.* 21.77–9), he captured Lycaon while he was cutting branches in Priam's orchard. The inclusion of the murder of Troilus in a sequence of narrative incidents which take place off the battlefield and in a context of siege suggests that Achilles ambushes the Trojan prince while the latter is carrying out some non-military business, just as he ambushes both Aeneas and Lycaon.⁷

Proclus' scanty reference to the murder of Troilus becomes a little clearer when we consider it in the light of the A scholia on *Il.* 24.257b:

ἡ διπλὴ ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ εἰρησθαι ἱπποχάρμην τὸν Τρωΐλον οἱ νεώτεροι ἐφ' ἵππου διωκόμενον αὐτὸν ἐποίησαν. καὶ οἱ μὲν παῖδα αὐτὸν ὑποτίθενται, Ὅμηρος δὲ διὰ τοῦ ἐπιθέτου τέλειον ἄνδρα ἐμφαίνει· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλος ἱππόμαχος λέγεται.

⁶ *Cypria* Arg. lines 61–4 Bernabé=§§10–11 West (=Procl. *Chrest.*). Henceforth, all citations, quotations, and translations of testimonies and fragments of the *Cypria* are from M. L. West (ed. and trans.), *Greek Epic Fragments. From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2003). Citations are also based on the edition of A. Bernabé (ed.), *Poetarum Epicorum Graecorum Testimonia et Fragmenta*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1987).

⁷ A similar sequence of events, yielding the same conclusion, is found in the mythological handbook of Ps.-Apollodorus, which also provides us with a detailed account of the Trojan War: see *Epit.* 3.32–3. The theft of the cattle of Aeneas, the sack of Pedasos and Lyrnessos, the ambush of Troilus, and the capture of Lycaon might go back to an archaic epic tradition centred on Achilles' city-sacks and expeditions around Troy, the so-called 'Tale of Foray', for which see W. Leaf, *Troy. A Study in Homeric Geography* (London, 1912), 242–8; see also G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 1979), 140–1, 272–3; C. Dué, *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford, 2002), 61–5. For the idea that such operations were initiation tests for young heroes, see M. Fantuzzi, *Achilles in Love* (Oxford, 2012), 24, n. 10.

[The critical sign is] because, from Troilus' being called 'hippiokharmēn', the post-Homeric writers have represented him as being pursued on horseback. And they take him to be a boy, whereas Homer indicates by the epithet that he was a grown man, for no one else is called a cavalry warrior.⁸

Here the scholiast rather tellingly notes that, in contrast to Homer's depiction of Troilus as a grown man, the post-Homeric writers (*hoi neōteroi*), building upon the *Iliad*'s use of the epithet *hippiokharmēs*,⁹ represented Priam's son as a *pais* pursued on horseback. Is this the version that the *Cypria* poet followed? Possibly yes. The earliest extant literary evidence for this version comes from a fragmentary lemma that is contained in an also fragmentarily preserved commentary on the sixth-century BC lyric poet Ibycus,¹⁰ but our earliest pictorial testimony comes from two Protocorinthian aryballoi. The first vase, dated around 700 BC, depicts an unarmed male figure on horseback followed by another walking male figure in armour (no names),¹¹ and the scene on another vase of about the mid-seventh-century BC shows Troilus hastily riding away on a horse while being pursued by a running (armed?) Achilles (the figures are identified as 'Troilus' and, though fragmentarily, 'Achilles').¹²

There is, therefore, some suggestive evidence in pictorial representations around the first half of the seventh century BC for the popularity of the version which has the unarmed Troilus being pursued on horseback. This is enough to say with some confidence that this version dates to as early as the late eighth or early seventh century BC and belongs to the early epic tradition that is now represented in the *Cypria*.¹³ The corollary of this is that Homer, too, may have been

⁸ *Cypria* fr. (dub.) 41 Bernabé = fr. 25* West.

⁹ The meaning of *hippiokharmēs* is ambiguous: see discussion below, pp. 83–4.

¹⁰ Ibyc. fr. S224.7–8 *SLG* and *PMGF*: παίδα] θεοῖς ἵκ[ελον τῶ]ν περιγὰμων / ἔκτοσθεν Ἰλίο[υ κτάνε:]. Although παίδα] and [υ κτάνε:] are not in the lemma, they can be made out of the scholia with some confidence: see Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talbot (n. 3), 199, n. 12. For a thorough discussion of this fragment, see E. A. B. Jenner, 'Troilus and Polyxena in Archaic Greek Lyric: Ibyc. fr. S224 Dav.', *Prudentia* 30.2 (1998), 1–15; and E. Cavallini, 'Note a Ibyco', *Eikasmos* 5 (1994), 39–52.

¹¹ Protocorinthian aryballos: *LIMC*, 'Achilleus', n. 332a; cf. a relief vase-fragment: *LIMC*, 'Achilleus', n. 280, c.680–670.

¹² Protocorinthian aryballos: *LIMC*, 'Achilleus', n. 331. There is something in Troilus' hand – spear or sword – but he is certainly not fully armed. In the surviving images of the late archaic period, Troilus sometimes holds a spear but, as Gantz (n. 1), 599, points out, he is depicted with defensive armour (shield, helmet, and sword) only once, on a cup by Oltos: *LIMC*, 'Achilleus', n. 369, c.520–510.

¹³ In the editions of Bernabé and West, the A scholia on *Il.* 24.257b are tentatively assigned to the *Cypria* as fr. (dub.) 41 and 25*, respectively. The exact date of the *Cypria* remains uncertain.

aware of this grimmer version of Troilus' death. If so, then its absence from the *Iliad* has to be dealt with as a case of deliberate omission by the poet rather than ignorance. The scholiast assigns this version to 'the post-Homeric writers' (*hoi neōteroi*), but this may be misleading. The designation of the poets of the Epic Cycle as *neōteroi*, which is typical of the scholia tradition (presumably because the scholiasts only had the means to refer to known texts),¹⁴ is usually problematic, for there is very often good reason to believe that stories which ultimately crystallized in a post-Homeric written form were derived from earlier and perhaps pre-Homeric oral mythopoetic traditions. For the most part, the Cyclic authors are *neōteroi* only in the sense that the textualization of the tradition in the form in which our sources have it postdates the monumental composition of the Homeric poems.¹⁵

At some point in its mythopoetic recreation, the ambush of Troilus, from being a random incident of guerrilla warfare, came to acquire some dramatic function in the progression of the story of the Trojan War. According to Plautus' *Bacchides* 954, Troilus had to be killed before Troy could be taken,¹⁶ as the stealing of the Palladium was one of the incidents necessary to the fall of Troy.¹⁷ Likewise, the first Vatican Mythographer (1.210) mentions that Troy would not be taken if Troilus reached the age of twenty. On the basis of suggestive evidence, the motif can perhaps be traced as far back as the archaic period but certainly goes no further than the sixth century BC.¹⁸

Some scholars date it to the seventh century BC and others to the sixth (see Currie [n. 4], 281). However, it would be more accurate to say that the Cyclic epics, including the *Cypria*, developed in performances during the archaic age, drawing their material from a long-standing mythopoetic tradition, and acquired their written form by the end of this period: see Burgess (n. 4), 8–12.

¹⁴ On the generalizing references made by ancient commentators to 'the more recent authors (*hoi neōteroi*)', see Fantuzzi and Tsagalis (n. 4), 27–8.

¹⁵ See Holmberg (n. 5), 459.

¹⁶ It has been supposed that the legend was already referred to in *Bacchides*' model, Menander's *Dis Exapaton*: see A. C. Pearson (ed.), *The Fragments of Sophocles* (Cambridge, 1917), ii.255; but contrast Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talboy (n. 3), 201–2, n. 24.

¹⁷ See *Little Iliad* Arg. lines 15–18 Bernabé=§4 West (=Procl. *Chrest.*), together with [Apollod.] *Epit.* 5.10 and Pap. Rylands 22 (in Bernabé [n. 6], 75).

¹⁸ Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talboy (n. 3), 202, n. 28, argue that 'the presence of Athena as a supporter of Achilles in several archaic presentations of episodes of the Troilus story... may indicate that already at that time there was a tradition according to which Troilus' death was a *sine qua non* of Greek victory in the war: in the *Iliad* and the epic tradition generally, Athena's concern is to secure such a victory, rather than to promote the interests or glory of Achilles or any other individual hero (except Odysseus)'. See e.g. the François Krater: *LIMC*, 'Achilles', n. 292, c.570–560.

Furthermore, there are sources that assign the *eros* of Achilles for Troilus as the motive behind the murder. In Lycophron's *Alexandra* 307–13 (with Tzetzes ad loc.), the handsome young Troilus is killed on the altar of Apollo, where he takes refuge, rejecting Achilles' advances.¹⁹ Lycophron possibly draws on Attic tragedy.²⁰ Phrynichus, an early tragic poet who won his first victory in 511 BC, seems to have depicted Troilus as *eromenos* (the younger partner in a homosexual relationship) (Phryn. Trag. fr. 13 Snell = Ath. *Deipn.* 13.564f): Φρύνιχος τε ἐπὶ τοῦ Τρωΐλου ἔφη 'λάμπειν ἐπὶ πορφυραῖς παρηῆσι φῶς ἔρωτος'. ('And Phrynichus said about Troilus: "The light of love shines on his rosy cheeks."'²¹) According to Athenaeus (*Deipn.* 13.603e–604a), this verse was quoted by Sophocles at a symposium in admiration of a boy's beauty. If not a fanciful anecdote, Athenaeus suggestively makes Sophocles familiar with the legend of Troilus as a handsome youth with erotic appeal. Some fragments of Sophocles' now-lost tragedy *Troilus*, in which the murder of Troilus appears to have taken place outside battle,²² are indeed indicative of an erotic context,²³ and it may well be the case that such was the context in Strattis' homonymous comedy, which is supposed to have parodied Sophocles' play.²⁴

A hint of homosexual desire on the part of Achilles can also be traced on an early sixth-century BC bronze shield-band relief, which depicts an armed warrior menacing with a sword a naked boy at an altar with a cock standing on it.²⁵ The presence of the cock, the favourite love gift

¹⁹ Contrast Servius on Verg. *Aen.* 1.474, whose version is that Achilles lured Troilus with a gift of doves but accidentally killed him while embracing him.

²⁰ The tragedians of the fifth century show great interest in exploring Achilles' erotic side: see Fantuzzi (n. 7), 16. In general, the dramatists of classical Athens turn their attention to mythological episodes and character traits of Achilles that Homer does not include: see P. Michelakis, *Achilles in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 2002), 13–16.

²¹ Translation from S. D. Olson (ed. and trans.), *Athenaeus. The Learned Banqueters, Vol. 2. Books 3.106e–5* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2006), 275. The phrase παῖδα] θεοῖς ἴκ[ελον in Ibyc. fr. S224 *SLG* and *PMGF* may be taken to refer to Troilus as a 'divinely beautiful youth' and parallels the strong emphasis placed upon his beauty in Ibycus' Polycrates poem: see 282a.40–5 *PMG* (see also Quint. Smyrn. 4.415 and 430; Strato, *Anth. Pal.* 12.191). Both suggest that by the sixth century BC Troilus had already become an archetype of male adolescent beauty.

²² See Σ (T) *Il.* 24.257. For a thorough discussion of the version followed by Sophocles, see Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talbot (n. 3), 203–16.

²³ See Pearson (n. 16), 254; and M. Robertson, 'Troilus and Polyxena: Notes on a Changing Legend', in J.-P. Descœudres (ed.), *Eumousia. Ceramic and Iconographic Studies in Honour of Alexander Cambitoglou* (Sydney, 1990), 67.

²⁴ See Pearson (n. 16), 255; I. C. Storey (ed. and trans.), *Fragments of Old Comedy* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2011), iii.224, 256.

²⁵ Bronze shield-band: *LIMC*, 'Achilleus', n. 377, c.590–580 (see also K. Schefold, *Myth and Legend in Early Greek Art* [London, 1966], 86, fig. 34). On the identification of the two figures as Achilles and Troilus, respectively, see Gantz (n. 1), 598.

given by men to their *eromenos* in archaic art, may be taken as an indication that the artisan was familiar with the love theme.²⁶ Nevertheless, although Achilles' unrequited *eros* for Troilus might well account for the straightforward violence depicted in iconographic representations from the first half of the sixth century onwards,²⁷ there is no evidence, either literary or pictorial, that the love motive dates from the period before the sixth century.

Such as it is, our evidence from both Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* (with Σ (A) *Il.* 24.257b) and the pictorial representations on the two seventh-century Protocorinthian aryballoi indicates that the ambush of Troilus in the early stages of its emergence and development in the mythopoetic tradition was nothing more than a random and extremely savage incident of guerrilla warfare. Troilus, who had ventured forth unarmed, was only a *pais* at the time of the ambush, apparently on some non-military business. That he was not yet a grown man is noted by the scholiast and is also implied by the relatively small size of his figure compared to that of Achilles in the two representations. Seen in this light, the incident exudes extreme cruelty and shows traits of indiscriminate primitive savagery.

Even though the ambush theme is commonly attested in the Homeric epics,²⁸ as well as in the wider epic tradition,²⁹ Homer's primary focus in the *Iliad* is on *pólemos* – face-to-face fighting on the battlefield. For the most part, both the Greeks and the Trojans try to weaken and ultimately destroy their respective opponent's military force by using battlefield tactics in open confrontation. As is so articulately described by Glaucus in *Il.* 6.206–9, the Iliadic hero fights for *aristeia*, namely, for visible pre-eminence, which can perhaps explain why ambush tactics are much less readily acknowledged. The underlying, if unspoken, principle seems to be that the killing of mass numbers in open battle, where the odds are less obviously favourable in the absence of the advantage of surprise and where both exposure and

²⁶ See Robertson (n. 23), 67; Jenner (n. 10), 8; and Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talbot (n. 3), 201, n. 23.

²⁷ Troilus is often depicted as a child put to the sword or decapitated by Achilles on the altar of Apollo. Moreover, in some sixth-century representations of the incident, the body or the head of Troilus is shown as being brandished or thrown towards the Trojans. Gantz (n. 1), 560, provides a helpful overview.

²⁸ See A. T. Edwards, *Achilles in the Odyssey* (Königstein, 1985), 15–41.

²⁹ For a comprehensive discussion of the poetics of ambush in the early epic tradition, see C. Dué and M. Ebbott, *Iliad 10 and the Poetics of Ambush. A Multitext Edition with Essays and Commentary* (Washington, DC, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2010), 31–87.

risk for the individual hero are greater, engenders commensurately greater glory.

Within the governing framework of the *Iliad*, Achilles is undeniably a stellar spearfighter who excels in *pólemos*. The widest possible scope of his substance and power as a hero is exposed by Homer in *Il.* 22.26–32 in a simile that tellingly compares a warring Achilles to a bright star:

The old man Priam was first to see [Achilles] with his eyes, as he sped all-gleaming over the plain like the star that comes up at harvest time, and brightly do its rays shine among the many stars in the dead of night, the star that men call by name the Dog of Orion. Brightest of all is he...³⁰

As has been rightly noted, however, ‘Achilles should not be pigeon-holed as solely the hero of *bíē*, for he, too, is an ambusher.’³¹ The *Iliad* knows that in the recent past Achilles ambushed Lycaon and sold him as a slave through Patroclus (*Il.* 21.34–44, 77–9; 23.746–7),³² and he also attacked Aeneas on Mount Ida and seized his cattle (*Il.* 20.90–3, 188–94).³³ In *Il.* 9.325–7, moreover, Achilles probably alludes to night-time ambush activity, as he claims that he spent many sleepless nights fighting with men over their wives.³⁴ Therefore, when in *Il.* 1.226–8 he attacks Agamemnon for his nonparticipation in ambushes, he presumably obliquely reminds the Achaean general that he himself has had the endurance to go on such missions.³⁵

Of course Achilles does not perform any ambush operations within the *Iliad*, which invariably refers to his ambush exploits as past events; but there is suggestive evidence, as we have seen, that a version of both the seizure of Aeneas’ cattle and the capture of Lycaon was part of the epic tradition represented in the *Cypria*, which, in turn, allows us to assume that in non-Homeric tradition ‘Achilles’ was in fact less narrowly conceived. This assumption coheres well with the A scholia on *Il.* 22.188: *μόνος Ὅμηρός φησι μονομαχῆσαι τὸν Ἑκτορα, οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ πάντες ἐνεδρευθῆναι ὑπὸ Ἀχιλλέως* (‘Only Homer says that [Achilles] fought Hector in man-to-man combat. All the rest say that he was

³⁰ Cf. *Il.* 20.97–100, where Aeneas says that ‘It is not possible that any warrior can face Achilles in fight... His spear flies straight, and ceases not till it has pierced through the flesh of man.’

³¹ Dué and Ebbott (n. 29), 43.

³² See *ibid.*, 36, 44, 68–9.

³³ See *ibid.*, 76–7, n. 72, and 83–4 with n. 81.

³⁴ Cf. Σ (T) *Il.* 21.37.

³⁵ Cf. Σ (AbT) *Il.* 1.227.

ambushed by Achilles').³⁶ What this suggests is that outside the *Iliad* there were (perhaps epic) versions in which the confrontation between Achilles and Hector was conceived of as ambush, as in Dictys 3.15, which is in fact the only surviving attestation of the variant. Such as it is, therefore, our evidence offers good grounds to believe that the ambush activity of Achilles, though not given narrative space in the *Iliad*, was part of the traditional characterization of the hero outside Homer; and we see that the poem does establish a degree of continuity with the wider epic tradition that knows of Achilles as ambusher, even though it focuses narrowly on him as a foremost battlefield fighter. Nevertheless, Homer still makes no reference to the commonly attested ambush of Troilus.

The Troilus ambush goes unmentioned, presumably because unlike the Lycaon or the Aeneas ambush episodes, which the Homeric tradition acknowledges, the incident remarkably exceeds not only the limits to which the *Iliad* confines ambush in the conceptualization of its key hero but also the normal run of heroic brutality. It points to an Achilles who would butcher anyone brutally and indiscriminately, whereas, as has been rightly observed, '[Homer's] Achilles can certainly be brutal, but there are limits to his brutality, and it emerges only under the influence of a grievance, or a grief, that is of properly heroic proportions.'³⁷ Besides, indiscriminate and unreflecting brutality is generally not part of heroic conduct, with the notably unique exception of Agamemnon, who advises Menelaus not to spare a single one of the Trojans, 'not even the boy whom his mother carries in her womb' (*Il.* 6.57–60). Nevertheless, the *Iliad* does make reference to Troilus, and so it is interesting to see how his story gets filtered through Homer's lens.

Referring to Troilus at *Il.* 24.257, Priam uses the epithet *hippiokharmēs*, a *hapax legomenon* in the *Iliad* which is open to double interpretation. If the second word in the compound is *kharmē*, which in Homer means either 'battle'³⁸ or 'ardour for the fight',³⁹ then the epithet may well mean 'fighting from chariot', or, as has been suggested,

³⁶ Trans. from Dué and Ebbott (n. 29), 45.

³⁷ Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick, and Talbot (n. 3), 197.

³⁸ See *Il.* 4.509, 5.608, 7.218, 7.285, 12.389, 14.101, 16.823, 17.161, and 17.602.

³⁹ See *Il.* 4.222, 8.252, 12.203, 12.393, 13.82, 13.104, 13.721, 14.441, 15.380, 15.477, 17.103, 17.759, 19.148; *Od.* 22.73.

'finding the joy of battle in the clash of chariots',⁴⁰ inviting the audience to think of Troilus as a 'chariot-fighter'. However, if the second word in the compound is the noun *khárma*, which is related to the verb *khairō* and in Homer means either 'joy/delight'⁴¹ or 'source of joy/delight',⁴² then it is also entirely possible that *hippiokharmēs* means 'horse lover' and that its use here evokes in the audience's minds the brutal slaying of the young Trojan prince off the battlefield – an incident that, as we have seen, indicates an Achilles who would use tactics of indiscriminate violence. In and of itself, therefore, the epithet is equivocal.⁴³

The polysemic significance of *hippiokharmēs* is possibly coincidental and unintended. Yet, rather than simply supposing this, we can instead make the opposite assumption, that the epithet was in fact devised by Homer to be understood in both ways. Viewed from one perspective, *hippiokharmēs* hints at the barbarous ambush of the young Troilus, pointing suggestively to the version that has Troilus being pursued on horseback as a *pais*. From another perspective, the compound also holds suggestive connotations of military prowess. These connotations, framed in a context that pointedly designates the Trojan prince as an *áristos* killed on the battlefield, become prominent and in the process overshadow any less favourable overtones. On this reading, the epithet *hippiokharmēs* is seen as a *double entendre*, through which the *Iliad* subtextually acknowledges but simultaneously refutes the traditional Troilus incident, thereby setting its own filter restrictions on a strand in the tradition in which we meet the characterization of Achilles as a brutal guerrilla attacker.

It is, however, also true that, in the broader context of the *Iliad*'s tacit refutation of the desultory cruelty in the Troilus incident, there is a constant play with the inherent tendencies in the traditional characterization of Achilles and, by implication, with the audience's expectations about the hero. In *Iliad* 24, Achilles is, for all his pity, still close to uncontrollable anger. When he asks Priam to sit down but Priam refuses the offer of a seat, Achilles' anger begins to flare again. In a scene which prefigures the killing of the defenceless and unarmed

⁴⁰ See A. Heubeck in A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra (eds.), *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Books 9–16* (Oxford, 1989), 93, on *Od.* 11.259.

⁴¹ See *Od.* 19.471.

⁴² See *Il.* 3.51, 6.82, 10.193, 14.325, 17.636, 23.342, 24.706; *Od.* 6.185.

⁴³ Cf. Σ (D) *Il.* 24.257; *Etym. Magn.* and Pseudo-Zonaras, *Lexicon*, s.v. ἵππιόχαρμος. Similarly ambiguous is the meaning of *hippiokharmēs* in *Od.* 11.259 and Hes. fr. 7.2 Most and M.-W.

Priam in the *Sack of Troy* by Neoptolemus, Achilles' progeny,⁴⁴ he bluntly warns the Trojan king not to provoke him (*Il.* 24.560–70): 'Do not provoke me further, old sir, . . . stir my heart no more among my sorrows, lest, old sir, I spare not even you inside the huts, my suppliant though you are.'⁴⁵ Homer therefore acknowledges the tradition, while largely refining away Achilles' unselective violence, in very much the same way as he does with other aspects of Achilles, such as his capacity for *eros*.⁴⁶

What the *Iliad* offers is a refined conception of the heroic ideal, in which the indiscriminate violence that Achilles shows in the Troilus incident has no part. Homer carefully refines his Achilles against the background of an Achilles who, among other things, is a raider of the sort we encounter in Nestor's reminiscences (see *Il.* 11.671–83), but, while acknowledging this tradition, his focus is on an Achilles who fights in full battle. He presents an Achilles who is certainly capable of extreme violence but whose violence is always directed against people who meet him as equals on the battlefield in the context of a competitive quest for honour, so eloquently described by Sarpedon (see *Il.* 12.310–28), and not against the weak or inferior. Even Lycaon, for all the pity which the narrative invites for his fate, is after all a warrior on the battlefield.⁴⁷ The lexical ambiguity of the epithet *hippiokharmēs* may well be seen as a tool in the purgation of the Achillean heroism into a more heroic and honorific brutality. In the person of Achilles the *Iliad* repudiates indiscriminate violence and enacts the limpidity of heroism. The result is a narrower conception of what heroism means.

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⁴⁴ See *Sack of Troy* Arg. lines 13–14 Bernabé=§2 West (=Procl. *Chrest.*).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Il.* 24.582–6.

⁴⁶ See I. Lambrou, 'Homer and the Epic Cycle: Dialogue and Challenge', PhD thesis, University College London (2015), 68–119.

⁴⁷ Lycaon is so tragically unfortunate as to face Achilles for a second time, after he was captured and ransomed once: see *Il.* 21.34–135.