

**HELEN AND THE POWER OF EROTIC LOVE:
FROM HOMERIC CONTEMPLATION TO HOLLYWOOD FANTASY**

The 2004 movie *Troy*, scripted by David Benioff and directed by Wolfgang Petersen, is the latest in a series of films that feature the world famous lovers Helen and Paris. The film acknowledges its debt to Homer's *Iliad* but, like ancient works before, freely adapts source material to its own vision and aims. In this talk, I will attempt to compare Benioff-Petersen's treatment of Helen with that of the *Iliad*.

The greatest difference in the two works' characterization of Helen is anchored in their fundamentally different conceptions of love and, with this, of the type of woman who inspires and is inspired by it. In both, the story of Helen's elopement with Paris and of the war it engendered is a story of passion. In both, erotic love is an all-powerful emotion, and Helen is drawn as simultaneously arousing it and being carried away by it. But here the similarities end. The *Iliad* offers a contemplation of the nature of this love, *Troy* a fantasy of it. The two Helens are drawn accordingly.

I will first focus on how this difference can be seen in the ways Homer and Petersen show the tremendous power of love and create audience sympathy for Helen. In the second section I will briefly discuss differences in Helen's characterization. In a similar manner, I will also consider the treatments of Helen by Robert Wise, in the movie *Helen of Troy* (1955), and by Ronni Kern and John Kent Harrison in the TV mini series *Helen of Troy* (2003). Finally, I will address the question whether Homer's conceptualization of love is transmittable to cinematic rendition.

282 words

Hanna M. Roisman
Department of Classics
4162 Mayflower Hill
Colby College
Waterville, ME 04901
USA

hroisman@colby.edu

Preferred panel: Classical antiquity and Mass Culture or Open Topics

Length of paper: 20 minutes