LOVER, FRIEND, COUSIN
THE PORTRAYAL OF ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS' RELATIONSHIP IN THE ADAPTATIONS OF THE *ILIAD* IN 1920-2020

Mirke Sipiläinen
Maisterintutkielma
Yleinen historia
Historian ja etnologian laitos
Jyväskylän yliopisto
Kevät 2023

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta	Laitos
Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen	Historian ja etnologian laitos

Tekijä
Mirke Sipiläinen

Työn nimi
Lover, Friend, Cousin: The portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship in the adaptations of the *Iliad* 1920-2020

Oppiaine	Työn laji
Yleinen historia	Pro gradu -tutkielma

Aika	Sivumäärä
31.5.2023	62

Tiivistelmä

Yksi Troijan sotaa käsittelevän kreikkalaisen mytologian keskeisimmistä elementeistä on Akhilleuksen raivonsekainen suru hänen surmatun kumppaninsa, Patrokloksen, vuoksi. *Iliaksessa*, ja muutenkin mytologiassa, Akhilleuksen ja Patrokloksen suhteen tulkinnanvaraisuus on johtanut siihen, että *Iliaasta* tehdyt adaptaatiot eroavat suurestikin siinä, kuvataanko nämä kaksi mieshahmoa aseveljinä, serkkuina, platonisina sielunkumppaneina vaiko traagisina rakastavaisina.

Tarkastelen maisteritutkielmassani näitä Akhilleuksen ja Patrokloksen suhteen erilaisia kuvauksia kymmenessä vuosien 1920 ja 2020 välillä ilmestyneessä länsimaisessa adaptaatiossa. Alkuperäislähteinäni toimii neljä elokuvaa, neljä romaania sekä yksi Web-sarja ja lyhytelokuva. Koska adaptaatiot eivät synny erillään ympäröivästä kulttuurista, voivat ne heijastella oman historiallisen kontekstinsa sosiopoliittista tilaa sekä yhteiskunnan arvoja, jotka muuttuvat ajan myötä. Tutkin, kuinka suhdetta on kuvattu eri aikoina, ja selvitän kuvauksessa tapahtuneiden muutosten mahdollisia historiallisia syitä ja merkityksiä. Lähestyn adaptaatioita kulttuurihistoriallisina lähteinä metodinani lähiluku, ja teoreettinen viitekehykseni koostuu adaptaatio- ja queer-teoriasta sivuten myös klassista vastaanottotutkimusta.

Olen jakanut tarkastelemieni adaptaatioiden kuvaukset Akhilleuksen ja Patrokloksen suhteesta kolmeen temaattiseen kategoriaan: romanttinen, platoninen ja tulkinnanvarainen. 1990-luvulta lähtien romanttiset kuvaukset ovat lisääntyneet huomattavassa määrin, mutta tämä ei ole syrjäyttänyt muita kahta tapaa kuvata suhdetta. Syyt tähän kehitykseen eivät myöskään ole yksiselitteisiä, ja esimerkiksi adaptaation muoto (elokuva, lyhytelokuva, sarja tai romaani), genre ja kohdeyleisö ovat vaikuttaneet valittuun kuvaustapaan kuten myös voimassa olleet sensuurilait.

Asiasanat
The *Iliad*, Homeric epics, Achilles, Patroclus, Greek mythology, adaptation theory, queer theory, queer coding, masculinity, cultural history, censorship laws

Säilytyspaikka
Jyväskylän yliopisto, JYX-julkaisuarkisto

Muita tietoja
-

1 INTRODUCTION

In my master's thesis I examine how the relationship between two pivotal male characters of Greek mythology, Achilles and Patroclus, have been portrayed in ten adaptations from 1920 to 2020. Achilles and Patroclus are mainly known from their central role in Homer's the *Iliad.* The nature of the relationship is ambiguous enough in the epic and in the mythology surrounding the Trojan War, so that the portrayal of their relationship varies a lot across adaptations. It has also been the cause of debate in academic circles since the Antiquity.[1]

The reason I chose the *Iliad* – and the *Odyssey* and the Epic Cycle to some extent – lays in its status as a classical epic and the way it has inspired countless adaptations, retellings, reinterpretations, and academic research over the centuries. Another reason for choosing this subject is the generally accepted notion that Ancient Greece is the birthplace of European and Western culture. Adaptations nor fiction exist in a vacuum and are at least to some extent products of the surrounding society. Therefore, they may reflect the socio-political environment they were made in, as they are not mere copies of the "original text". There might be multiple different meanings, interpretations which can also change depending on time and culture the reader/audience is part of.[2] Examining how culturally important works such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have been adapted in different times can shed light on what is deemed significant enough to keep or what has been altered to better fit into the ever-changing cultural norms and possible censorship in order to be released.

In this introductory chapter I will go over the methodology and theoretical framework I use as well as the primary sources and research questions. I will end it with an overview of the previous research and literature relevant to my research theme. In chapter two, *On Ancient Greece, Queerness and Trojan War*, I contextualise where my research is situated on the discourse of whether the Trojan war and Homer were merely myths, tales or history, as well as why the queerness of Ancient Greece matters to my thesis. In the same chapter I will also provide a short summary of the Trojan War from Achilles and Patroclus' point of view

---

[1] Fantuzzi (2012), 227.
[2] Fantuzzi (2012), 3-4.

for those who are unfamiliar with the tale. In the following three chapters, *3 Romantic narratives*, *4 Platonic narratives* and *5 Ambiguous narratives*[3], I analyse my primary sources. I have sorted them into the aforementioned three thematic categories based on the nature of the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship in the adaptations. In the final chapter, *6 Conclusion*, I present my findings and reflect upon my research.

1.1   Theory and methodology

My master's thesis is essentially a multidisciplinary work as I borrow from multiple different academic fields to examine my chosen topic. I approach the adaptations as fiction from the perspective of cultural history, linking my research to adaptation studies as well as to queer theory using close reading to analyse the sources.

I will be also linking my research loosely to the tradition of classical reception studies which concentrates on the ways the cultural products from classical antiquity have been interpreted, adapted and used in other cultures and societies. From the understanding of classical reception studies, retelling transforms the original text for a particular need and therefore adaptations and works inspired by Homeric epics tell more about the time of their release than the time in which the story they adapt is se, in this case the Greek Bronze Age.[4] But I say "loosely", as my focus is in the adaptations themselves and what they can tell about the cultural and historical context in which they were created. I'm not as concerned with the relationship between the original text and adaptations as is the way of classical reception studies.

I have chosen to approach my primary sources mainly as fiction and adaptations for multiple reasons, mainly to reduce the possibility of setting them in hierarchical order where literature is seen as a higher form of culture, or TV/WEB series inferior to cinema. By approaching them all primarily as adaptations – and only secondarily as works of literature, film, or TV series – I aim to even out the differences of these formats in order to concentrate more easily on my research topic.[5] I draw heavily on Hutcheon and O'Flynn's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013) in defining adaptations and my approach to them as historical source. Some of my primary sources are not commonly regarded as adaptations, as the term is most often used when referring to the process of text to film, but all of them do fit into the definition of an adaptation which Hutcheon and O'Flynn offer.[6]

To call something an adaptation is to declare its connection with the original source, although with literary works like novels terms such as "inspired by" or "retelling of" are

---

[3] When I speak of *narrative*, I refer to the interpretation of the relationship in the adaptations, so a narrative as a storytelling element.

[4] Stray & Hardwick. (2008), 329-330.

[5] See subchapter 1.2 *Primary sources* for more on the differences in literature, film, and TV adaptations that I need to consider in my analyses.

[6] Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 3.

more commonly used. Still, the result is similar enough, which is why I have chosen the term *adaptation* when I am referring to all of my primary sources. *To adapt* something means to retell, re-create, transform, and reinterpret the original source material, so in this case the tales of the *Iliad* (and the *Odyssey)*. Changes in the point of view in which the story is told – for example telling the tale from the perspective of a minor character in the original text – is common for adaptations, and this is also the case in several of my primary sources. Adaptation often includes the shift of medium as well, in the case of my research the shift from classical epics into historical (fantasy) novels, films or serialised TV/WEB format. This transposition of mediums means there will be inevitable changes that come from the nature of the mediums themselves, such as changing one sign system to another – for example, words to images when adapting text to film.[7]

Adaptation can be understood either as the finished *product* or the *process* of adapting something.[8] In my analysis I focus on adaptations as a product. Examining the process of adapting would shift the focus from the interpretations of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus too much towards the convoluted process of how adaptations – especially cinema and TV – are made. It would also require much more sources than I can possibly fit into a master's thesis.[9]

Adaptations are also a form of intertextuality as the audience experiences them through the memories of other works. They may be experienced differently depending on the audience's familiarity with the original source or other adaptations of the same source.[10] I believe this is especially true with my primary sources, the *Iliad* being one of the earliest and widely spread epics which is still read to this day. Despite this, adaptations are still autonomous works even if they "inherently lack uniqueness".[11] Adaptations happen in certain historical context, and therefore are affected by the surrounding socio-political culture and the values reflected in them are tied to said context.[12] I am particularly interested in this aspect of adaptations when it comes to my primary sources.

There are multiple reasons why certain works get selected to be adapted ranging from politics to marketing, cultural values to education and to the wish to pay homage. Adaptation can also be studied as a business[13], but I have left this out of my analysis to avoid it expanding too much.[14] Cultural capital is probably the most likely influencer of adaptations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as these stories still carry a weight and reputation to this day.

---

[7] Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 6-8, 16-18.
[8] Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 7, 15-16.
[9] Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 18-21.
[10] Hutcheon (2006), 8.
[11] Cartmell (2012), 122-123.
[12] Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 142-144.
[13] To approach adaptations as a business is to examine the "adaptation industry", to take into consideration a wide range of individuals who might be connected to producing and marketing adaptations from agents to cultural price judges and distributors. Who are the ones funding the adaptation and benefitting from it in an economic sense? More on this see Simone Murray's "Business of Adaptation: Reading the Market" in *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (2012).
[14] Cartmell (2012), 122; Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 20, 141-144.

This also offers easy marketability to their adaptations. [15] Studying the different modes of audience engagement is an important part of adaptation studies, but I will not concentrate on that aspect of adaptations too much.[16]

Classical reception studies is something my research will touch upon as well. In Stay and Hardwick's *Companion to classical reception* (2008) they used the term *reception* meaning those different ways Greek (and Roman) materials "have been transmitted, translated, interpreted" [17] – here adaptations are a form of reception. Reception, as it is understood in the present times, developed in the 1960's and put emphasis on the relationship between the past and the present. Classical tradition on the other hand focuses more on the influence that the classical culture had on later cultures and the ways classical materials transmit and transform. *Classical reception* then focuses on the ways people in different times have responded and adapted said materials, both in the Western and non-Western cultures. While my focus is on the adaptations themselves, the differences from the *Iliad* and the mythology of the Trojan War are present in my analysis even if not the main focus of it. For this reason, my own research is linked to classical reception studies as well.[18]

Queer theory is an important part of my theoretical framework. I will use its core elements; analysing and questioning standards, binaries of sex, gender, sexuality, and their representations when it comes to society and cultures.[19] Queer theory in its nature is hard to define which is perhaps its weakness but also its strength, as it makes it easily modified to fit into the theoretical framework I am using. As Jagose (1996) put it, *queer* is both an umbrella term as well as a theoretical model, and its indeterminacy and elasticity are its character.[20] Queer theory gives me tools to examine, question and find alternative interpretations in the ways Achilles and Patroclus' relationship has been portrayed, as well as look deeper into possible explanations behind the portrayals. As I have mentioned, the purpose of this master's thesis is not to suggest that romantic and/or sexual interpretations of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship are more valid or "truer" to the original text than other interpretations. However, the ambiguity of the original text has left a lot of room for different interpretations which then reflect in some ways the historical context they were made in. Because of this, I find queer theory a necessary part of my theoretical framework.[21]

I will use the term *queer* in the current work, as it is also a term that refers to sexualities, romantic attractions, and genders (among other things) which fall outside of the heteronormative. It "debunks" the notion of sexualities, sexes and genders being something stable, and as such can be used in an analysis that covers roughly a century of Western culture.[22] During this period of time a lot has happened concerning these topics in many of Western

---

[15] Cartmell (2012), 92, 122-123.
[16] See more on the audience engagement Hutcheon & O'Flynn (2013), 22-24.
[17] Stay & Hardwick (2018), 32.
[18] Kouneni (2013), 1-3.
[19] Saresma, Rossi & Juvonen (2010), 149.
[20] Jagose (1996), 1.
[21] Jagose (1996) 1-3.
[22] Jagose (1996), 3.

societies.[23] It is important to note, that queer as an identity was reclaimed from being a derogatory label and is widely used both in the meaning of umbrella term for different sexualities, genders and such, but also as a specific identity label. It also has a long history of activism behind it as well.[24]

Queer is also perhaps the most fitting term to use when referring to sexual and romantic identities of historical people and/or people from different cultures, as there have been – and still is – multiple different terms and understandings of sexuality, sex and gender which fall outside the Western heteronormative binary. [25] Therefore, I deem *queer* to be more fitting to use instead of modern sexuality labels such as homosexuality or bisexuality, when meaning same-sex attraction in an Ancient Greek setting. While Achilles and Patroclus are more like mythological, practically fictional, people instead of actual historical figures, their story is still set in the bronze age of Ancient Greece. This is why I find it more appropriate to use the term queer when there is need to describe their same-sex relationship, for example. There is no certain knowledge of Ancient Greek terms that might have been used for such relationship in the bronze age, and none of the adaptations use the Ancient Greek terms currently known to us.[26]

I will also make use of the term *queer coding* in my analysis. Queer coding means a creator(s) of an artwork or piece of media might have included certain signals (on purpose or not) such as particular symbolism, code phrases and such to allude to a character's queerness without outright acknowledging it.[27] Many of my primary sources have been created during a time, when explicit queerness would have been impossible to depict due to censorship, but there might still be queer elements in them. Though, a more cynical takes on queer coding have been made as well, as the pioneering queer studies scholar Alexander Doty puts it: "the concept of connotation allows straight culture to use queerness for pleasure and profit in mass culture without admitting to it"[28]. I will also keep in mind that – as Christopher Reed, an art historian, reminded in his analysis of visual art and queer coding – it is still best not to read too much into queer coding, partly due to its ambiguous nature and uncertainty of the codes.[29]

Cultural historians Kallioniemi and Kärki have stated, that *close reading* is an important method when it comes to audio-visual sources (as well as literary). [30] It should operate well within the theoretical framework I have chosen. Still, instead of a case study, I am looking for recurring themes and narratives, so I will not analyse each individual adaptation too deeply. I will be using close reading when examining the way the adaptations have portrayed the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Despite its name referring to *reading*,

---

[23] See *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: Homoseksuaalisuuden historia* (2006) edited by Robert Aldrich, chapters 8, 9 and 14.
[24] Jagose (1996), 3; Saresma, Rossi & Juvonen (2010), 144-148.
[25] Jagose (1996), 8; Saresma, Rossi & Juvonen (2010), 151-155.
[26] See subchapter 2.1. *Greek Antiquity and Queerness* for more on this.
[27] Doty (1993) xi-xiii; Whitney (2019), 121-2.
[28] Doty (1993), xi-xii.
[29] Reed (2011), 130.
[30] Kallioniemi & Kärki (2012), 180.

close reading is a method that can be used with different mediums. To put it simply, it calls for close examination of the sources while also allowing the use of different theories and terms, and to go over the source material multiple times.[31] Sources should be examined multiple times from different perspectives. Cultural studies scholar Pöysä mentions that pre-existing prejudices and, for example, fiction genres might affect the interpretation a person makes when they encounter the source. This affect should lessen the more they examine and spend time with the source material, which is why it is so important for close reading to examine the source material multiple times.[32]

I started my research by doing a first "level" of reading – reading/watching the adaptations casually, and afterwards sorted them into three different categories based on how they interpreted the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus; romantic, platonic and ambiguous. Pöysä is of the opinion, that it is not possible to close read a full novel, but as I am looking just into certain parts of the adaptations, which sometimes are only few minutes long scenes or couple of lines in a novel, I see no reason to doubt that close reading proves a fitting method for my analysis. In the current work I examine closely what is explicitly said or shown in the adaptations and then analyse the possible subtext, implications, and silences – this is where queer theory becomes especially useful. I will also link my analysis into the historical, socio-political, and cultural context each adaptation is part of. This way I will concentrate on only the relevant scenes and sections, instead of attempting to close read multiple novels, films, and TV series in their entireties.

1.2   Primary sources

I have chosen ten works of fiction which openly use the *Iliad*, the Epic Cycle (and to some extent, the *Odyssey*) as their source material.[33] They have been released/published between the years 1920 and 2020, so I will cover roughly a century's worth of Western adaptations of the *Iliad*. I base my analysis on the adaptation theory, and so I will be primarily approaching these works as adaptations, tied to the original text yet autonomous works of fiction of their own right.

I have chosen four full-length films, one short film, one Web series and four novels as my primary sources. The full-length films are *Helena: Der Untergang Trojas* (1924), *Helen of Troy* (1956), *L'ira di Achille* (1962), *Troy* (2004), and the short film is *Achilles* (1995). The four novels are *The Song of Troy* (1998) by Colleen McCullough, *Ransom* (2009) by David Malouf, *The Song of Achilles* (2011) by Madeline Miller, and *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) by Pat Barker.

---

[31] Pöysä (2010), 333-338.
[32] Pöysä (2010), 339-340.
[33] I have not been able to find out what translations of the *Iliad* and other sources the creators used as inspiration for their adaptations. Some of the changes and differences between the adaptations might be due to using different translations of the *Iliad*, and so this aspect of my analysis remains lacking.

The Web series is the Netflix and BBC One production *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018). I selected the adaptations mostly based on whether they had both Achilles and Patroclus' characters alive and interacting at least part of the story.[34] Availability also played a part on the selection process. *Helena: Untergang der Trojans* (1924) is originally in German, and *L'ira di Achille* (1962) in Italian, but with both of these adaptations I will be relying on the English subtitled/dubbed versions.[35] Also, I selected the novels based partially on their popularity, as there are far too many novels inspired by the *Iliad* published in the past two decades just in the anglophone world for me to be able to include them all, unlike with film and TV/Web series.[36]

Release	Tittle	Creator(s)	Medium	Ambiguous	Platonic	Romantic
1924	*Helena: Der Untergang Trojas*	Manfred Noa (director) Hans Kyser (screen play)	Film	x		
1956	*Helen of Troy*	Robert Wise (director) John Twist & Hugo Gray (screen play)	Film		x	
1962	*L'ira di Achille*	Marino Girolami (director) Gino De Santis (screen play)	Film		x	
1995	*Achilles*	Barry Purves (director & screen play)	Short film			x
1998	*The Song of Troy*	Colleen McCullough	Novel			x
2004	*Troy*	Wolfgang Petersen (director) David Benioff (screen play)	Film		x	
2009	*Ransom*	David Malouf	Novel	x		
2011	*The Song of Achilles*	Madeline Miller	Novel			x
2018	*Troy: Fall of a City*	David Farr (creator & screen play) Nancy Harris, Mika Watkins & Joe Barton (screen play) Owen Harris & Mark Brozel (directors)	Web series			x
2018	*The Silence of the Girls*	Pat Barker	Novel	x		

---

[34] For this reason, I had to leave out multiple notable adaptations such as *Kassandra* by Krista Wolf (1983), *The Trojan Horse* (1961), *Helen of Troy* (2003) and *Troy: The Odyssey* (2017) among others.
[35] I will come back to this in more detail in chapters 3 and 4, where I analyse these adaptations, mainly *Helena.*
[36] I will introduce each adaptation, their creators, and the version I use in more depth in the analysis chapters 3, 4, and 5.

I have sorted the adaptations into three categories – romantic, platonic, and ambiguous – depending on how they portray Achilles and Patroclus' relationship.[37] I decided on these categories after I had familiarised myself with the adaptations instead of decided beforehand. Originally there was also a fourth category for non-existing relationship, as there are several adaptations which have completely left out Patroclus. Examining how the absence of his character affects Achilles' could have undoubtedly added interesting information to this study. Unfortunately, I had to leave this category out in order to narrow down the research topic.

I have also deliberately left out some forms of adaptation such as video games, music, and performative arts like theatre and opera to narrow down the mediums I will be focusing on. Another reason was my own limited understanding (and resources) when it comes to video games and the rather poor accessibility of plays and operas. Instead, films, TV/Web series and novels are more easily circulated cultural products and accessible to people around the world as well as to me. As I mentioned earlier in the theory and methodology subchapter, using three different kinds of mediums as my primary sources does poise some problems as each medium has their own storytelling techniques that I need to take into consideration when analysing them. Here I will go into more detail of using fictional literature and then audio-visual fiction as a historical source, what challenges and possibilities they might offer as well as look into the difference between cinema and TV mediums.

As I am analysing fiction from a historical perspective, there are some things I need to consider carefully. First of all, *fiction* here refers to the adaptations I use as my primary sources, as none of them are historical documentaries nor do they try to present the story as real historical events.[38] As Oinanen and Mähkä (2012) put in their article, fiction does always reference reality in some way, but it is important to remember that the relationship between reality and fiction is quite complicated as well as hard to define. They suggest that fiction should always be seen first and foremost as fiction, and I am inclined to agree. Therefore, the adaptations I am examining here fall under the category of fiction.[39]

Cultural historian Salmi (1993) notes that art works can produce new meanings long after their first release, but as I am not focused on the audience engagement and reception of the adaptations, this is something I believe is not too relevant to my research. However, Salmi also raises the important question of how much does the copy or the version of, for example, a particular film, influence the research. There might be multiple different versions released over the course of decades or different countries might have differently cut versions of the same film. In my case this is very relevant, as I have not been able to get physical copies of some of my primary sources – and the ones I have are in format such as DVD, some of which have been released decades after the theatrical release. Therefore, this is

---

[37] I will go over the criteria for each category in their own chapters 3, 4, and 5.
[38] See chapter 2.2 *The Trojan War* on the historical background of the Trojan War.
[39] Oinonen & Mähkä (2012), 271-274.

something I will keep in mind while analysing them and will come back to later when relevant.[40]

I tentatively put all the adaptations I analyse under the category of popular fiction, though there are a few that might not fit into it as well as the rest of them. However, I argue that examining them as popular fiction as well as adaptations gives me better tools to analyse them and look for common themes and trends. They all fall under the same genre of using Greek Antiquity and mythology, mainly the *Iliad*, the Epic Cycle and the *Odyssey*, as their source material. As the classical reception scholar Maurice (2017) puts it, genres are always evolving and other forms of media influence one another, form different subgenres and so on. Genres in fiction set expectations for the works, which I will come back to in my analysis. I will use Maurice's wide definition of popular fiction as "fiction for mainstream, non-academic audiences".[41] Adding the word *popular* before the *fiction* indicates that these works do reflect to some extent widespread and perhaps unquestioned values, beliefs embedded in the society.[42]

Maurice suggests that there are three elements which should be taken into consideration when one is studying popular fiction: the relationship between the text, the world, and the reader (audience). [43] I will be using modified take on this, switching the reader to *adaptation*. With a text I mean the *original text* (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the Epic Cycle and other secondary sources from Greek Antiquity). With the *world* I mean the historical context surrounding each adaptation. I will be looking into the dynamics between these three elements – the text, the world, and the adaptation. I will pay more attention to the relationship between adaptations and the world, leaving the original text in the background.

Literary works are, just like all human creations, part of the world they were created in and so they are shaped by the economic, social, cultural, political world.[44] However, literature is not just "a mere reflection of the historical forces shaping society",[45] but literary text is a dynamic part of its historical time period, and this is how I will look into the novels among my primary sources. Maurice also notes that popular fiction often reflects beliefs and norms of a society in a way that elitist media does not.[46] These are precisely the elements of the cultural history I am interested in when analysing the different ways of how the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus has been portrayed and what are the possible reasons for the chosen ways.[47]

Films are generally not a commonly used primary source among historians, perhaps because they are very multi-layered cultural products, and as such, poise certain difficulties

---

[40] Salmi (1993), 52.
[41] Maurice (2017), 1-3, 8-10.
[42] Maurice (2017), 1-3, 8-10.
[43] Maurice (2017), 4.
[44] Humm, Stigant & Widdowson (2002), 3.
[45] Humm, Stigant & Widdowson (2002), 3.
[46] Maurice (2017), 3-8.
[47] More on literature vs. popular fiction in the introduction chapter of *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History* (2002) by Humm & Widdowson.

for historians.[48] They are made with a collective effort, which complicates matters when one needs to look into the influences that have affected the final product. Who is the creator, for example – the director, the screen writers, the sponsor, the financiers, or the studio? Very rarely a film has only one creator. Among my sources even the short film *Achilles* (1995) has multiple different people credited. Another concern is that there can be multiple different versions and cuts from the same film based on countries restrictions or other such reasons – for example, the Italian film, *L'ira di Achille* (1962), varies in its length depending on which country's version one examines. The difference can be from few minutes to nearly half on hour of footage missing, added, or otherwise altered. Also, I have only two of the five films as a physical copy (DVD), the rest I have found from various online streaming services, which raises a question whether the version I am examining now in 2022 and 2023 has been altered after the original release. But this is relevant to the physical copies such as DVD (and even physical novels), as those may also have been altered between the theatrical release and making of the DVD. [49]

Just like with novels and popular fiction in literature, films have different genres that affect and shape the adaptation process and product as well as the way audience engages with the adaptation through expectations. Most of the films I have as my primary sources belong to a genre often called Antiquity spectacles or "sword and sandals".[50] They have their own conventions such as big scale, elaborate set design, certain kind of locations and huge crowds of extras.[51] Such films in Italian cinema are also called *pepla*, popular especially during the 1950s and 1960's.[52]

Film and TV have similar issues when it comes to motives behind adapting works set in "Ancient Worlds"[53], to attract sophisticated audiences and get their share of the cultural capital. They also share similar problems with censorship and being collectively made. However, censorship might have a different impact on TV and Web series, being often less strict with sexual and violent themes than cinema.[54] The history of these two audio-visual mediums is intertwined, but not without differences. Film adaptations of Ancient Worlds have been around since the beginning of cinema history. For a long time, cinema could offer unique experiences to the audience such as a large screen, the latest technology, and vivid colours, which TV could not. This has been changing, especially after streaming series became popular as it favours quality, well produced, high budget TV.[55]

---

[48] One such difficulty being how to refer to them as primary sources. I have decided to mark down the beginning of the scene I am referring to as accurately as I can by hours, minutes, and seconds in the following format [00:00:00]. However, unless the scene continues over five minutes, I have decided not to mark down the ending time – this is purely for practical reasons, as most scenes only last from few seconds to a minute.
[49] Salmi (1993), 13-21.
[50] Magerstädt (2019), 1.
[51] Salmi (1993), 93, 220-222, 256-273.
[52] Magerstädt (2019), 4-5.
[53] Ancient World refers generally to Greek and Roman Antiquity as well as Jewish and Bible themed films.
[54] Magerstädt (2019), 3, 6.
[55] Magerstädt (2019), 1-6.

Film and TV also tend to differ slightly in the ways they adapt stories set in the Ancient Worlds. Cinema goes for epicenes when adapting Greek history and mythology, and often has a 'coy attitude' towards sex and violence.[56] TV on the other hand has tried to cultivate unique style of its own for telling stories about the Ancient Worlds. TV's episodic format, for example, allows for more dramatic and complex explorations of characters psychology, offering more intimacy and psychological approaches to the audience. According to Magerstäd (2019), the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* fit exceptionally well for TV format, as the episodic storytelling style used in TV series can be found in ancient sources as well. They also note that TV films on the other hand do not have similar kind of uniqueness compared to cinema films, and some online streaming channels have especially concentrated on quality when making series set in Ancient Worlds.[57]

One key difference between cinema and TV formats seems to be the general purpose of the adaptations. Magerstädt states that TV is especially made for educational purposes and/or entertainment (in Europe at least), which in turn affects the way these adaptations are made and what source materials used.[58] This brings in an interesting question, whether TV is more prone to be influenced by the socio-political climate and ideologies. Though to me this also sounds somewhat contradictory to the statement they made earlier, that TV is not typically as coy about sex and violence, as these themes are often discussed as improper in educational materials and foremost reasons for censorship or late airing time.[59]

All the same, censorship affects both TV and the film industry and perhaps to lesser extent published literature as well. This is one of the ways the historical context is very important – what can be said and shown, and what does subtext, coding or possible silences tell. This will affect adaptation choices made in the Western culture as well, and perhaps reflect changes over the century in a boarder sense. It is also best to keep in mind that half of the adaptations I use as my primary sources were made in the 20th century and the other half in the first two decades of the 21st century. The sample size is somewhat skewed as well, because there are several decades from which I have no adaptation at all among my sources.

1.3   Research questions and hypothesis

My research questions are as follows:

---

[56] Magerstädt (2019), 3.
[57] Magerstädt (2019), 3-10.
[58] Magerstädt (2019), 5.
[59] See Marjorie Heins' *Not in Front of the Children: 'Indecency,' Censorship, and the Innocence of Youth* (2007) for more on censorship and curating education in the USA.

1. How is the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus portrayed in Western adaptations of the *Iliad* between 1920 and 2020?

2. Does the overall nature of the interpretations change over time and if so, how?

3. What kind of historical and socio-political context, cultural values, and norms might affect the ways the relationship is portrayed in different times?

My hypothesis is that Achilles and Patroclus are portrayed explicitly as lovers when they are the main characters of the adaptation, but that the medium and release/publishing date might have more influence over the portrayal choices. My second tentative hypothesis is that while the readiness to portray them as lovers might increase from 1920 to 2020 as the Western culture becomes more open to queerness, the target audience of the adaptations might have more impact onto the portrayal. Overall big films meant for international consumption are probably more likely to portray them as platonic friends while novels, series and short films may have more variety when it comes to portraying their relationship.

1.4   Secondary literature

When it comes to Antiquity, or Ancient Greece to be more precise, it is easy to drown in the available secondary sources and academic research. As my own research topic - the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus in popular fiction - is very multi-layered and still quite specific, I need to touch upon several related topics as well as my own. For example, I take a brief look at topics such as the historical nature of the Trojan War, the questionable existence of Homer and classical reception studies and more. I will mainly concentrate on research done on Ancient Greece in literature, film and TV, and the ways Achilles and Patroclus have been interpreted in history and popular fiction.

As for Antiquity in fiction, there has been multiple books written and research done on this topic in several different academic fields. Paglia's *Homer on Film: A Voyage Through The 'Odyssey', 'Ulysses', 'Helen of Troy', and 'Contempt'* (1997) analyses several different adaptations of Homer's epics. Works such as Richards' *Hollywood's Ancient Worlds* (2008), which examines multiple films from the 1950's to the 1990's, and Michelakis and Wyke's *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema* (2013) give a wider look on the history of films inspired by Ancient cultures, including Ancient Greece.[60]

The exact nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is central to my research, and there has been much written about it in academic circles as well. For

---

[60] See also Magerstädt's *TV antiquity: Swords, sandals, blood and sand* (2019) and Maurice's *Rewriting the Ancient World: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction* (2017).

convenience's sake, I have divided the previous literature into two subcategories: the debate on their relationship in the original text and the debate on the portrayals of it in later works inspired by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which is where my own research falls. There have been different takes on their relationship since Antiquity, and I have found multiple articles which analyse how famous Greeks, such as Chariton of Aphrodisias, interpreted their relationship and what kind of trends or narratives these different interpretations showed.[61] Other research has concentrated on examining the so-called homoerotic subtext in the epics themselves.[62] Most of the literature written about their relationship seems to be centred around the assumption of the possibility of there being a non-platonic bond, but there are a few that approach the topic from other perspectives, such as friendship or camaraderie.[63]

There are also some studies to be found that examine the portrayal of their relationship in works inspired by the *Iliad* and Greek Mythology. Most relevant and useful for my own research is Sinha's *The Loves of Achilles: From Epic to Popular Fiction* (2017). Besides that, I have been able to find a few other relevant studies; in *Achill und Patroclus: Freundschaft und Tod in den Trojaromanen Benoîts de Sainte-Maure, Herborts von Fritzlar und Konrads von Würzburg* (1999) Kraß examines several medieval novel adaptations of Trojan war and what meanings in their historical context Achilles and Patroclus' relationship has in them from a model for knightly friendship to possibility of homosexual love. Perkins has analysed Shakespear's play in which Achilles and Patroclus were portrayed as lovers in time when same sex relationships were outlawed in *Taking the Kissing Path: Making the Homoerotic Modern in Fixing Troilus and Cressida* (2019).[64] And closest to the current study comes González Pérez' *Classical tradition and reception studies in contemporary literature written in English: The song of Achilles by Madeline Miller* (2014). They compare Miller's novel to the original myth as well as looking into Miller's reasons for changing some things or alternatively keeping loyal to the original text. And similarly, Sinha examines *The Song of Achilles* and Byrne R. S. Fone's *Achilles: A Love Story* which both depict Achilles and Patroclus as lovers but approach this theme somewhat differently.

Most of these are not however, historical studies, so this master's thesis will offer a different perspective on the matter. My research covers a bigger picture instead of concentrating on just one adaptation or its creators' reasons for choosing a particular way of portraying Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, as many of the aforementioned studies have done. My aim is to investigate whether there are overarching trends in the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship and bring in more historical context for the portrayals that different adaptations have chosen. However, I will not be able to focus on each individual adaptation

---

[61] Morales & Mariscal (2003); Laguna-Mariscal & Sanz-Morales (2005).

[62] See Warwick's *We Two Alone: Conjugal Bonds and Homoerotic Subtext in the Iliad* (2019), Clarke's *Achilles and Patroclus in Love* (1978) and James Davidson's chapter 10 *Achilles and Heracles* (p. 255-284) in *The Greeks and the Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (2007).

[63] See Konstan's *Friendship in the Classical World* (1997) and Verweij's "*Comrades or Friends? On Friendship in the Armed Forces* (2007).

[64] See chapter 4 *Uuden ajan alun Eurooppa, 1400-1700* by Helmut Puff in *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: Homoseksuaalisuuden historia* (2006).

as much, and instead I will be looking for broader similarities and differences in the portrayal of the relationship.

2 ON ANCIENT GREECE, QUEERNESS AND TROJAN WAR

2.1 Greek Antiquity and Queerness

Although my research does not concentrate on how Achilles and Patroclus' relationship was intended to be interpreted in the *Iliad*, queerness is still very much present in my research. Others have argued for and against Achilles and Patroclus being lovers since Antiquity, as James Davidson has shown in his extensive study *The Greeks and Greek Love* (2008). Since the source material has left enough room for different interpretations, people have done just that. For the current work, the queerness of Ancient Greece matters as people making adaptations have access to other sources besides the *Iliad*, and the Greek love, as Davidson puts it, has "always been one of knottiest problems in all of Western history".[65] As Ancient Greece was looked up to as the birthplace of Western culture, what could be done with the problem of same-sex (male) relationships being so integrated into the society and its institutions? Modern attitudes have of course affected in turn how the theories explain it.[66]

Ancient Greece was not one homogenous society or culture, but made up of different city-states (*poleis*), each with their own traditions and local cultures.[67] Therefore, it is hardly surprising that when speaking of same-sex relationships and their place in a society "it manifests itself differently in different materials, in paint or in poetry; in different places, Elis or Macedonia; in different times, fourth century Athens or archaic Lesbos c. 600 BC".[68] And the language used to describe different kinds of same-sex relationships and people's role in them varied greatly in Ancient Greece, as they do in the modern day as well.[69] Nowadays,

---

[65] Davidson (2008), 1.
[66] Davidson (2008), 1-4.
[67] Davidson (2008), 5.
[68] Davidson (2008), 467.
[69] See Davidson's *The Greeks and Greek Love* (2008) part I *The Greeks Had Words for It,* particularly chapter 1. *Eros in love,* and chapter 2. *Grace, Sex, and Favours*.

the most commonly known terms used to refer to male lovers in Ancient Greece are *erastēs* and *eromenos*, which are often translated as "the lover" and "the beloved".[70]

I will be cautious when using these terms to refer to Achilles and Patroclus and their roles in the relationship in the adaptations. The terms are very nuanced, and they most likely originated from Athens while Achilles and Patroclus are from Northern Greece – in the mythology at least. As Athenian dominates the literature remaining for our inspection, much of what we know about Ancient "Greece" is more accurately specific to Athens. Davidson does mention that in "Sparta and Thessaly, home of Achilles and Patroclus, the respective terms were *eisprelas* and *ëitas*".[71] However, these terms also had their own nuances, and here we run into the problem that there is mostly only uncertain historical evidence of same sex relationships before 5th century B.C.E. Athens. While there is no good reason, as Davidson points out, to doubt that same-sex relationships were part of the Greek culture before that as well, it is still 300 years after the time that the *Iliad* was written down and other 500 years or so from 12th century B.C.E. when the Trojan War is believed to have taken place.[72]

Another reason to use ancient terms with caution is the way they have changed in the hands of previous historians and translators, especially since the 1970's. When originally terms such as *erastēs* and *eromenos* were more about the roles in love, now they were defined by sexual act centring around anal penetration. [73] *Erastēs,* the lover, referred more to the act of pursuing and courting one's love interest, being almost like a helpless victim of the all-consuming feeling of love. Later *erastēs* was defined as an active masculine role, the one who did the penetration, while *eromenos,* the beloved, was the passive, receiving and even shameful role. It was common for *erastēs* to be somewhat older, often depicted with a beard in art, while *eromenos* was younger male, beardless, often known for his beauty and other virtues.[74]

Their roles in love, their physical appearances, and their ages are something I will come back to when I analyse the adaptations, and these aspects of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship was debated on even in ancient times. For example, in *Symposium* Plato argues against Aeschylus, a playwright born in the 6th century B.C.E., who implied in one of his tragedies that "Achilles was the *erastēs* of Patroclus, and not the other way around".[75] Plato was of the opinion that as Achilles was younger, more beautiful and did not even have his beard yet, it was obvious that Patroclus must have been the *erastēs* - the one who pursued

---

[70] Davidson (2008), 24-26; Lovatt & Vout (2013), 29.
[71] Davidson (2008), 27.
[72] Davidson (2008), 24-6, 481.
[73] The newer definition of *erastēs* and *eromenos* seem very similar to modern day terms such as "top" and "bottom" in the anglophone world or other similar terms such as 1 and 0 used in China, for example, which both centre around the roles in the sexual act of same-sex male couple. Top/1 taking the insertive position in anal intercourse while bottom/0 the receiving. (Versatile and 0.5 being for people with no clear preference for one position or another.) Despite these being only positions in sex, there are certain personality traits associated with these roles, just like with *erastēs* and *eromenos.* More on this subject in *Gay Men and Anal Eroticism: Tops, Bottoms, and Versatiles* (2003) by Steven G. Underwood, and in article *Gender beliefs and internalized homophobia shape sexual self-labeling and partner choice in gay and bisexual men in China* (2021) by Zheng Lijun and Fu Chengyao in *Sexual and relationship therapy* p.1-15.
[74] Davidson (2008), 29, 102-3, 120-1, 157; Lovatt & Vout (2013), 29.
[75] Davidson (2008), 90.

and courted the other man. Achilles and Patroclus' love did not really fit neatly into the norm of Athenian same-sex male relationship, which was likely the reason it caused sporadic debate. [76]

Here I must briefly mention the matter of *pederasty* – the notion that Greek same-sex male couples were basically practicing cultural paedophilia, as it has been long one of the defining features attributed to same-sex relationships in Ancient Greece.[77] Ancient Greece was however an age-class society and in some nation-states under 18-year-olds did not have many opportunities to mingle with older men. And in literature the author often went great lengths to show that the "boy" they were talking about was over 18-year-old or had a chaperone present. There were laws to protect the underage boys from unwanted attentions as well.[78] This is not to say that relationships between young boys and older men did not happen, but it was not necessarily such distinctive feature for the Greek same-sex male relationship as is often stated, and there is certainly evidence of alternatives existing.[79]

For example, the Sacred Band of Thebes was, according to ancient sources[80], a legendary military force in 4th century B.C.E. that remained undefeated for forty years. What made it truly special, was the way it apparently consisted of 150 pairs of male lovers. While it was not uncommon for male lovers to be found in military spaces, not often were both the lover and the beloved fighting together.[81] The idea behind this way of forming the force relied upon the thought that the pairs would fight more fiercely protecting their partner and that the threshold of fleeing the battle would be higher.[82] According to the historical sources, they indeed fought till the very last man, refusing to surrender, and so were finally defeated by Philip II of Macedonia, Alexander the Great's father, in the battle of Chaeronea 338 B.C.E. According to the tale, Philip II was greatly moved by their devotion.[83]

So, as I have discussed, Ancient Greece was inherently queer, and same-sex relationships were part of their society and the institutions as well, not a separate phenomenon. Therefore, adaptations depicting a story set in the Antiquity had the chance to use these sources for inspiration. And as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, some did so more than others.

---

[76] Davidson (2008), 90.
[77] Davidson (2008), 68-9.
[78] Davidson (2008), 68-69, 79, 84-5, 102.
[79] Davidson (2008), 68-71; Hupperts 2006, 39-40.
[80] See Leitao's article *The Legend of the Sacred Band* (2002) in *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (2002) for more on the trustworthiness and the nature of these sources.
[81] Leitao (2002), 143-5.
[82] Leitao (2002), 151-2.
[83] Buckler & Beck (2008), 154-5; Leitoa (2002), 148-9.

2.2 The Trojan War

The *Iliad* is a poem divided into 24 books and consists of c. 15 600 hexameter lines.[84] It is one of the earliest existing literature works. The *Iliad* centres around a war that lasted for ten years according to the tale, but one of the pressing questions among scholars has been whether it truly was one long, continuous war or series of wars.[85] The ruins of the city of Troy[86] have been located in the modern-day north-western Turkey, at a strategic point where the Black Sea connects to the Aegean Sea in a narrow strait called the Dardanelles. It was an important location of trading and cultural exchange. However, it is still uncertain whether this archaeologically remarkable site truly is the location of the legendary war.[87]

While the *Iliad,* the *Odyssey*, and a few other poems have been attributed to Homer, herein lies the so-called Homeric Question: there is a very little evidence of Homer ever existing as a historical person, although the influence of the poems have been immense throughout history. If there truly existed a poet called Homer, he likely lived in the 8th century B.C.E. The poems, however, tell about the Greek Bronze age, the Mycenaean time specifically. Some events in the poems are dated to the 13th century B.C.E. while the oldest parts of them seem to refer even earlier times, most likely the 15th century B.C.E.[88] It is nowadays more or less agreed upon by scholars that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not composed or even collected by the same person. The material of the poems is part of an old oral tradition which formed over a long period of time.[89]

As Burgess put it, the "tradition of the Trojan War had a long and complex development before the Homeric poems were composed".[90] There existed another remarkable poem collection linked to the early Greek history and mythology called the Epic Cycle. It covered topics such as the origins of the gods, the Theban War, and the Trojan War. These poems were also composed in dactylic hexameter much like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* but they are considered to have been inferior in style. A significant part of the Trojan War was actually told in these poems instead of the *Iliad*, and some of the poems in the Epic Cycle formed the so-called Trojan Cycle, which included the following poems: the *Cypria*, the *Aethiopis*, the *Little Iliad*, the *Iliou Persis*, the *Nosti* and the *Telegony*.[91]

Unfortunately, the Epic Cycle poems have not survived as well as the Homeric Epics, and now we are left with only fragments and summaries of them from ancient sources.[92] The Epic Cycle poems were recorded a century or so later than the Homeric epics, before

---

[84] Castrén & Pietilä-Castrén (2000), 229.
[85] Castrén (2011), 36.
[86] The city of Troy has many names; Homer calls the city Ilion, hence the name *Iliad,* but it is also referred as Ilios and Troia in Greek, and Ilium, Troia and Troja in Latin. I will be referring to it as Troy.
[87] Castrén & Pietilä-Castrén (2000), 599-600; Burgess (2001), 2; whc.unesco.org; britannica.com.
[88] Castrén & Pietilä-Castrén (2000), 220; Castrén (2011), 69.
[89] Castrén & Pietilä-Castrén (2000), 220; Burgess (2001), 1-5; Castrén (2011), 78-79.
[90] Burgess (2001), 1.
[91] Burgess (2001), 7; Castrén 2011, 81-3.
[92] Burgess (2001), 1, 7.

the Classical Age. For this reason it is very likely that the style and the content of the Homeric Epics influenced the recorded versions of the Epic Cycle poems.[93] The Trojan Cycle poems most importantly covered the following parts of the legend of the Trojan War: The *Cypria* told about the events leading up to the Trojan War, the *Aethiopis* about the events after Hector's death, the *Little Iliad* about the fight over Achilles' weapons and Ajax's suicide, the *Iliou Persis* about the fall of Troy, and the *Nosti* about the homecoming of the Greek warriors after the long war.[94] Many of these events are depicted in the adaptations which usually tell more or less the whole story of the Trojan War, not just the part told in the *Iliad.*

2.3   Summary of Achilles and Patroclus in the Trojan War

As a reference for the general story of the Trojan War, and Achilles and Patroclus' role in it, I use the Finnish translation *Homeros: Troijan sota ja Odysseuksen harharetket* (2016) by Paavo Castrén, as it covers the whole story from the events leading up to the war and the aftermath of the war told in the Trojan Cycle or what we know of it. The *Iliad* itself only covers circa 50-day period of the 10th year of the War, and Castrén has marked the beginning and ending of the *Iliad*. I chose to use this version of the *Iliad* as it is available to me and covers the whole war, just like most of the adaptations do. As I am using it only as a guideline reference for the story of the Trojan War, and not including it to my analysis nor am I using it as a primary source, I am of the opinion that it will serve its purpose.

The following summary is meant for those unfamiliar with the source material of the adaptations I analyse in the next chapters. I find it is more practical to give the basic outline of the Trojan War than a detailed summary of each individual adaptation, as they all cover more or less these same events of the story, and the differences are in the details and nuances.

*   *   *

It all began with an apple. The king of the Olympian gods, Zeus, had invited all the gods to celebrate the wedding of Achilles' parents, a mortal man, king Peleus of Phthia, and a nereid (sea nymph) Thetis. Everyone was invited, except for Eris, the goddess of discord, as Zeus feared she would cause chaos. Despite not having been invited, Eris came to the wedding and threw a golden apple amongst the guests. It had the words "to the fairest" inscribed into it. Three goddesses claimed the apple and started to quarrel amongst themselves. Not wanting to be the one to choose one goddess and anger the other two, Zeus appointed a Trojan prince, Paris, to be the judge of the matter. Paris chose the goddess Aphrodite, as she

---

[93] Burgess (2001), 6, 13.
[94] Castrén & Pietilä-Castrén (2000), 142¸ Castrén (2011), 81.

had promised to give him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world should he do so.

It so happened, that the most beautiful woman in the world was Helen, the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Paris travelled to Sparta, fell in love with Helen and together they escaped, sailing to Troy. After discovering this, Menelaus went to his brother Agamemnon, the kind of Mycenae, asking for help. Together they mustered a group of mighty heroes and kings, tricking Odysseus to join them as well. They had however heard that Troy would not be conquered without Achilles, son of Peleus, who was the mightiest of all the Greek heroes, so they started to look for him.

When Achilles had been a young child, Thetis had tried to get rid of his mortality by various means. For example, dipping him into the river Styx in order to make him invincible, holding him only by the heels. Achilles had been trained by the wise centaur Chiron, and since childhood had been close friends with Patroclus, the son of king Menoitios, who came as a refuge to Phthia. When Agamemnon and Menelaus started to gather their forces, Achilles' parents sent him to Scyros to hide in king Lycomedes' court dressed as a girl, as there was a prophesy which warned that if Achilles were to go to war, he would never come back. During this time Achilles had a son called Neoptolemos with princess Deidamia, Lycomedes' daughter.

Achilles' hiding came to an end, when Odysseus managed to trick him into revealing himself, and so Achilles, Patroclus and the *myrmidons*, Achilles' soldiers, joined the war. After some difficulties the Greek forces sailed to Troy, but instead of a quick and easy victory, the war became a ten-year siege with the gods each trying to aid their own favourites.

The first book of the *Iliad* starts when Achilles withdrew his *myrmidons* from the battle as the high commander of the Greek forces, king Agamemnon, had insulted him by taking his war prize, slave girl Briseis. Achilles' mother, Thetis, asked the gods to aid the Trojans so that the Greeks would realise Achilles' true worth. The Greeks indeed started to lose but Achilles would not budge even when Patroclus, his right-hand man, begged for him to join the battle again. When the Trojans were almost upon the Greek camp, Patroclus could not take it any longer. He led the *myrmidons* into the battle dressed up in Achilles' armour so that it would seem like Achilles has returned to the battlefield.

At first Patroclus seemed to be victorious until Hector, the crown prince of Troy, confronted Patroclus and killed him. *Myrmidons* were able to bring Patroclus' body back to Achilles, who nearly lost his mind from the grief. Achilles swore to kill Hector and take revenge for his slain companion. So, Achilles joined once more the Greek forces, caring no more about Agamemnon's insults. He single-mindedly hunted down Hector, despite knowing about the prophesy which said that when Hector died, Achilles' own time would be near as well.

Patroclus' ghost appeared to Achilles, requesting to be laid to rest, and for Achilles to stop his mad rage. Before leaving, the ghost asked that when Achilles' time came, they would be buried together in the same grave so that their earthly remains could be forever

together as they had been in life. Achilles agreed to this and tried to embrace Patroclus for one last time, but the ghost had already disappeared.

Achilles then did as Patroclus asked; he organised extravagant funerals, sacrificed Trojan youths for him, and held funeral games as was proper for the men of their social position. But he did not bury Hector's corpse, nor did he return it to the Trojans. Achilles found no relief from his grief even after avenging Patroclus, so he dragged Hector's body behind his chariot day after day before the Trojan walls.

In the end, the king of Troy, Priam, came alone to Achilles to plead for his son's body so that they could bury him properly. Achilles was moved by the old man's noble character and was reminded of his own father, and so he agreed. The *Iliad* ends with Hector's funeral, when there is still roughly a year left before the war itself came to its devastating end. Achilles faces several other enemies such as the amazon queen Penthesilea, and in the end is killed by Paris, whose arrow pierces his heel. Later Achilles' son, Neoptolemos, joins the war as well, and Odysseus comes up with the clever plot. The Greek pretend to leave the Trojan's shores defeated, leaving a huge wooden horse behind. Celebrating Trojans drag the horse inside their city walls as a sign of their victory, but when the night comes the Greeks hiding inside the horse open the city gates for the rest of their army. Finally, the city of Troy is defeated.

3 ROMANTIC PORTRAYAL: "HE IS HALF OF MY SOUL, AS THE POETS SAY"[95]

Release	Tittle	Creator(s)	Medium	Ambiguous	Platonic	Romantic
1995	*Achilles*	Barry Purves	Short film			x
1998	*The Song of Troy*	Colleen McCullough	Novel			x
2011	*The Song of Achilles*	Madeline Miller	Novel			x
2018	*Troy: Fall of a City*	David Farr (creator & screen play) Nancy Harris, Mika Watkins & Joe Barton (screen play) Owen Harris & Mark Brozel (directors)	Web series			x

Out of the ten adaptations I chose as my primary sources, four of them portray Achilles and Patroclus as lovers: the 1995 short film *Achilles*, the 1998 novel *The Song of Troy*, the 2011 novel *The Song of Achilles* and the 2018 Netflix and BBC One series *Troy: Fall of a City*. The criteria I had when defining this "romantic category"[96] was thus: there must be explicit confirmation of either a romantic or a sexual relationship between the two characters.[97] First, I introduce the four adaptations that fit into this category. Then I dive deeper into the proper analysis on the romantic narrative these adaptations offer and how it affects the portrayal of the characters themselves. I will also discuss what historical, cultural, and socio-political reasons there might be in this particular kind of reinterpretations as well as what values and norms these adaptations seem to maintain or suggest through the relationship.

---

[95] Patroclus about Achilles in *The Song of Achilles*, Madeline Miller (2011), 284.
[96] I call it *romantic* even if it could be called sexual just as well, but I prefer this term to avoid reducing a relationship between two men just to sex.
[97] Adaptations where the romantic/sexual relationship is only in the subtext or something that is hinted at but never explicitly confirmed I analyse later in chapter *5 Ambiguous portrayal.*

Two of these adaptations are novels, and even their titles are confusingly similar. Madeline Miller, the author of *The Song of Achilles*, published it in 2011, so over ten years after *The Song of Troy* (1998) by Colleen McCullough, so the McCullough's novel might have influenced Miller's, or at least inspired its name. Apart from the title and the fact that both portray Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, the novels are not too similar. In *The Song of Troy* Achilles and Patroclus are certainly important to the plot, but only as important as the other main characters which the novel has several.The novel has multiple narrators alternating between them, and Achilles narrates six chapters and Patroclus one, while Helen narrates four and Odysseus three. In *The Song of Achilles*, Achilles and Patroclus are the sole main characters and Patroclus narrates the whole story, continuing to do so even after his own death as a spirit.

In two of the four adaptations Achilles and Patroclus are clearly the two main characters (*Achilles* and *The Song of Achilles)*, but in all four the men are an important part of the main cast. Like in *The Song of Troy*, in the series *Troy: Fall of a City* there are multiple main characters, and the story is told through different perspectives. Both *The Song of Troy* and *Troy: Fall of a City* also show the Trojan as well as the Greek side, while *Achilles* and *The Song of Achilles* only concentrate on the Greek side of the story.

The target audience for the adaptations in this category vary. For example, the 1995 short film, *Achilles,* was shown in film festivals - winning several awards too, especially for its animation.[98] It was written, directed, and animated by Barry Purves, and it is a "a very adult retelling of the *Iliad*", as Purves puts it.[99] Later I will in fact argue that *Achilles* is influenced by queer BDSM and leathermen subcultures due to its very adult themes. Therefore, it is not meant for mainstream or young audiences. *The Song of Troy* is also a very mature novel, violence and sex ever present in the story. *The Song of Achilles* on the other hand is a young adult novel, belonging also to the LGBTQ+ novel section. In 2012 it won the Orange Prize for Fiction[100], a literature prize from UK. There is sex and violence in *The Song of Achilles*, but nothing too explicit. I would argue both *The Song of Achilles* as well as *The Troy: Fall of a City* fit into the category of historical fantasy, as gods play a big part in both, unlike in *Achilles* and *The Song of Troy.* All the other adaptations in this category are aimed at more mature audience except for *The Song of Achilles.*

---

[98] For a more comprehensive list, see barrypurves.com/achilles.
[99] barrypurves.com/film; barrypurves.com/achilles. (Seen 12.4.2023)
[100] Currently called *Women's Prize for Fiction*.

Left, figure 1. Achilles and Patroclus' funeral.[101] Right, figure 2. Odysseus placing Achilles' helmet into Patroclus' ashes.[102]

3.1 The relationship

Mingle our ashes and bury us together.[103]

The main themes in these adaptations when it comes to the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, is Patroclus' loyalty to Achilles and the tragedy that comes from hubris and Achilles' insulted pride. Achilles calls Patroclus as "my oldest friend"[104], "*philtatos*" (most beloved)[105], "my lover"[106] as well as "my husband"[107] and other such terms, openly stating his status as someone who belongs with or to Achilles. Other characters also refer to Patroclus in a similar manner, even calling him Achilles' "lover boy".[108] Patroclus is described in text and shown on screen to always follow Achilles, standing behind him or sitting nearby almost all the time either protecting Achilles with his shield during a battle or with words, taking offence when someone insults Achilles' honour.

The dynamic of the relationship in all four of these adaptations is clearly Achilles leading, and Patroclus following wherever Achilles goes. And it seems to be portrayed in a somewhat unbalanced way in all four adaptations. Patroclus gives and gives and gives, while Achilles is more emotionally detached or even takes Patroclus for granted, as Odysseus notes in *The Song of Troy*.[109] Only Patroclus' death makes Achilles truly realise his worth, driving him into a mad grief in all four adaptation, and nearly committing suicide on the

---

[101] *Achilles* (1995). [10:30]
[102] *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018). Episode 7 *Twelve Days* [52:50].
[103] Achilles to other Greeks after he has collected Patroclus' ashes to an urn. *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 334.
[104] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 352.
[105] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 335.
[106] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 265, 352.
[107] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 122.
[108] *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018). Episode 5: *Hunted* [15:00].
[109] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 211.

spot when he learns of Patroclus' death in *The Song of Achilles*.[110] Achilles' grief is viscerally portrayed in the adaptations, in *The Song of Troy*, it is as simple as:

'Patrokles!' I screamed. 'Patrokles!'[111]

In *The Song of Achilles* it is described in more detail from the perspective of Patroclus' spirit:

He [Achilles] falls on the body. The knowledge rushes up in him, choking off breath. A scream comes, tearing its way out. And then another, and another. He seizes his hair in his hands and yanks it from his head. Golden strands fall on to the bloody corpse. Patroclus, he says, Patroclus, Patroclus. Over and over until it is sound only.[112]

In life, Patroclus being beside Achilles is the natural order of things – Achilles thinks: "Patroclus by my side, as always".[113] This comes naturally from their positions, Achilles as the leader of the *myrmidons* and Patroclus as his second in command. When it comes to their personal relationship, it is the other way around. Patroclus is the one who mostly takes the initiative in romantic and sexual moments, and here too Achilles is shown to be more reserved. In *Troy: Fall of a City* Patroclus even confronts Achilles after he refers to what he feels for Patroclus as "affection" and Patroclus argues: "It's not affection, it's love. And I'm not afraid of it."[114]

Physically they are also shown to be different; Achilles the more muscular and masculine one. In *Achilles* he has a beard as well, resembling the statues of men from the classical period, while Patroclus is visibly younger and smaller, an exemplary Greek youth of the same period. They contrast each other quite similarly how *érastes* and *eromenos* are often portrayed in art of the classic period.[115] In *The Song of Troy* Patroclus is older than his half-cousin, Achilles, but still defers to him and is described as being smaller in size.[116] Patroclus is not portrayed as a feminine character per se, but his masculinity is softer than any other male characters in the adaptations. Especially in *The Song of Achilles,* Patroclus' strongest character traits (besides his devotion to Achilles) are kindness and compassion – when Achilles is meant to learn how to fight from the centaur Chiron, Patroclus instead chooses to learn healing.[117] Later, during the siege of Troy, Patroclus works as a healer,[118] teaches Greek to the captured slave girls,[119] and outright refuses to kill anyone on the rare occasion he accompanies Achilles to the battlefield.[120] Even in *The Song of Troy* and *Troy: Fall of a City*,

---

[110] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 321.
[111] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 355.
[112] *The Song of Achilles (2011), 320-21.*
[113] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 192.
[114] *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), Episode 6: *Battle of the Beach* [00:35:40].
[115] See Charles Hupperts' "Homoseksuaalisuus Kreikassa ja Roomassa" in *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: homoseksuaalisuuden historia* (2006).
[116] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 264.
[117] *The song of Achilles* (2011), 78, 85.
[118] *The song of Achilles* (2011), 235.
[119] *The song of Achilles* (2011), 219.
[120] *The song of Achilles* (2011), 226.

in which Patroclus is shown fighting in battles, most of his scenes are about caring for other people – usually Achilles, but occasionally Briseis or other soldiers.[121]

Other characters know to go to Patroclus if they need someone to talk to Achilles, knowing that Achilles will heed Patroclus' words. Patroclus' devotion to Achilles goes so deep, that his whole character revolves around Achilles, he takes no lovers of his own at all even when offered a chance. In *The Song of Achilles* Patroclus sleeps with Deidamia, who Achilles unwillingly wed and impregnated because of his mother's manipulation. While Patroclus is slightly jealous of Deidamia and he sleeps with her, he does so more out of pity than, for example, trying to get revenge on Achilles for his infidelity or having an interest in her. Patroclus is very secure of the knowledge that Achilles is his, and Deidamia cannot change that.[122] In *Troy: of a City*, both Achilles and Patroclus kiss Briseis, and it is implied they sleep with her as well, entering seemingly into a polyamorous relationship with her.[123]

Patroclus' devotion to Achilles in all four adaptations can be easily summed up with these lines from *The Song of Troy*:

> 'Patrocles, would you do anything I asked of you?'
>
> 'Anything, Achilles.'[124]

Achilles, on the other hand, does take other lovers and has a wife, or at least is shown to be interested romantically/sexually in other people – women, to be precise. This is another instance in which there is a clear difference between the characters, Achilles is shown to be a more stereotypically manly man with multiple sexual partners, while Patroclus is the opposite. Achilles and Patroclus discuss of Achilles' preference for partners in *The Song of Troy*:

> 'When a love is not returned, we weep.'
>
> He got up from the couch and held out both hands to me. 'I do return your love, Patrokles,' he said. 'I always have.'
>
> 'But you are not a man for men, and that's the love I want.'
>
> 'Perhaps that would be so, if I had chosen long and ignominious life. As it is, and for what it's worth, I'm not averse to love with you. We're in exile together, and it seems very sweet to me to share that exile in the flesh as well as in the spirit,' said Achilles.[125]

---

[121] For example, Patroclus takes care of Briseis wounds as Achilles watches them in *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), episode 4: *Spoils of war* [00:13:40].
[122] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 125-7, 138-41.
[123] Briseis, Achilles and Patroclus sharing kisses between the three of them in *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), episode 4: *Spoils of War* [00:39:50], and the three of them sleeping next to each other [00:45:00].
[124] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 162.
[125] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 241.

Patroclus is referred to as a "man for men" on another occasion as well, [126] and while Achilles is noted not to be "man for men" [127] nor really a "man for women".[128] Achilles' true purpose is war, Achilles is shown and stated in the text to have more intimacy with Briseis who he also declares to love, than with Patroclus.[129] *The Song of Achilles* is the only adaptation of these four, in which Achilles is not shown to have any interest in others than Patroclus. As mentioned before, he only wed Deidamia because of his mother's trickery. [130]

In all of these four adaptations, the role of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship plays a big part in the story. In *Achilles* and *The Song of Achilles* it is the main focus, these two adaptations focus heavily on their bond. In both adaptation the story of the Trojan War is told from the perspective of Achilles and Patroclus. In *The song of Troy* and *Troy: Fall of a City*, the relationship is important, and time is spent on portraying how Achilles and Patroclus work things out between them, but the relationship is not the defining feature of the whole story. In both, Helen and Paris, for example, are very important to the story, though Achilles and Patroclus are perhaps the second most focused on relationship along with Hector and his wife, Andromache. In these two adaptations, Briseis plays a big part as well – either as a part of a love triangle or polyamorous triad. But the focus is on the war itself. Their relationship is a sub plot while the war is the main plot. With *Achilles* and *The Song of Achilles* it is the other way around.

In three of the adaptations in this category there is at least one moment when someone finds out of the non-platonic nature of their relationship. The exception is *Achilles*, where there is no visible reaction from any of the other characters, who almost constantly surround them even in their intimate moments. Thus, the lack of reaction *is* a reaction in on itself, indicating it is not something out of ordinary. However, in the other three adaptations, there are moments when other characters react or comment on the relationship. Overall, it seems like the society in these adaptations does see two boys having a sexual relationship quite normal part of boyhood, but in both *The Song of Troy* and *The Song of Achilles* it is made clear such a thing is not the norm for grown men, as Odysseus' comment about Achilles and Patroclus' having a sexual relationship in *The Song of Achilles* demonstrates:

> 'Come now, there's no need for shame – it's a common enough thing among boys.' He scratched his jaw, contemplated. 'Though you're not really boys any longer. How old are you?'[131]

Although in *The Song of Troy* there is three same-sex male pairings – besides Achilles and Patroclus, there is Odysseus and Diomedes showing what is the right way for grown men to share a sexual relationship as opposite to Achilles and Patroclus. There are also a

---

[126] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 332.
[127] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 241.
[128] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 266.
[129] For example, *The Song of Troy* (1998), 273, 381, 385.
[130] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 125-7.
[131] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 165.

few mentions of two kings who share love, Sarpedon and Glaucus. But even here, it is made clear that two adult men together is not the norm, at least if they do not also have circumstances such as spending years of time away from their wives. [132] "Some men have wives and lovers both.[133]

Troy: Fall of a City does not much touch this subject, other than having a minor character Thersites referring Patroclus as Achilles' "lover boy".[134] This is similar to other such comments made of male-female pairs as well. In *Troy: Fall of a City* Achilles' reluctance to use the word love has more to do with his stoic, prideful nature, not what others might think of them. Achilles even calls love a weakness.[135] It seems while the society is portrayed very heteronormatively, queerness does not have a stigma even when the characters are adult. Another good example from *Troy: Fall of a City* is Penthesilea, the queen of warrior women *amazons*, who fight on the Trojans' side. Penthesileia is portrayed quite stereotypically lesbian with her short hair, wiry body and fighting skills to back up her bloodlust. When another Trojan ally, a man called Aeneas, shows interest in her after expressing his condolences for Penthesilea losing her woman to Achilles' wrath, she simply states "men and me…it doesn't happen" and Aeneas accepts this. [136]

In *The Song of Achilles*, Patroclus is more afraid of how their romantic relationship might affect Achilles reputation, going as far as trying to deny it when Odysseus questions them about it and later suggests that they could be more discreet.[137] In this novel most characters who do learn about the nature of their relationship accept it without much reaction, other than Achilles' son Neoptolemus who opposes Achilles and Patroclus being buried together: "He is a blot on my father's honour, and a blot on mine".[138]

Both *The Song of Achilles* and *The Song of Troy* have included the scene of Achilles hiding in Scyros dressed as a girl among the womenfolk of king Lycomedes. In *The Song of Achilles* Achilles even acts the part, dances with the other girls and calls Patroclus "my husband". On the other hand, in *The Song of Troy* it is very short scene, where Odysseus thinks to himself:

> A sort of a woman. Easy to see why Lykomedes had not dared to display her![139]

Achilles himself views being dressed as a woman as a loss of honour, one that no man could be able to bare willingly, which is why his mother tricked him into it.[140]

---

[132]*The Song of Troy* (1998), 209.
[133] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 253.
[134] *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), Ep 5: *Hunted* [15:00].
[135] *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), Episode 6: *Battle of the Beach* [00:36:00].
[136] *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018), Episode 7: *Twelve Days* [00:21:30].
[137] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 165-6.
[138] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 347.
[139] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 138.
[140] *The Song of Troy* (1998), 127.

The boldest of these four adaptations when it comes to being unapologetically queer, is undoubtedly the short film *Achilles.* In *Achilles,* Ancient Greece meets Tom of Finland[141] in BDSM[142] fetish wear ready to partake in pet or role play scene.[143] Gay leather subculture has been around since the World War II and is currently a stable part of queer communities and pride celebrations.[144] In leathermen subculture hypermasculinity was – and is – embraced and features such as bulging muscles and genitals are typically "embraced and eroticized via leather".[145] The community is also heavily associated with sadomasochistic (S/M) practices, which also uses leather often for outfits, harnesses, and such. These queer subcultures found new vitality in the 1990's after the AIDS tragedy[146] had lessened its hold on the community a bit, leathermen and S/M among the others.[147] Achilles and most of the other warrior characters in *Achilles*, especially the Trojans, are presented in a way that would not stand out in a gay BDSM club; their heavily muscled bodies clad in leather harnesses which leave their pierced nipples out in the open for all to see (figure 3).[148] The Trojans also wear helmets reminiscent of animal heads such as bulls – it is not too far from the practice of wearing animal mask or hoods among those who practice pet play, which is also closely related to leatherman and BDSM subcultures.[149] This short film draws inspiration aesthetically from these different sources and is decidedly not made for a bigger audience, so the fact that most characters have their genitals proudly on display would not hinder its spreading unlike a big production film. *Achilles* also includes a scene of Achilles and Patroclus roleplaying as Helen and Paris, wearing masks – Patroclus as Paris and Achilles as Helen (figure 4). Here they are playing with gender roles in sexual manner, and it is the only time it is portrayed in sexual context among my sources.[150]

---

[141] More on Touko Laaksonen a.k.a. Tom of Finland and leather, see Vänskä's *Before There Was Gucci or Gaultier, There Was Tom of Finland': On the Legacy of Tom of Finland to Fashion* (2019).

[142] BDSM is an acronym referring to bondage and discipline (B&D), dominance and submission (D&S), and sadism and masochism (S&M). It is also an umbrella term for (mostly) sexual activities that are outside of the norm, and the acronym does not reflect all its aspects. More on BDSM and its history, see "BDSM" by Robin Bauer in *The SAGE Handbook of Global Sexualities,* p. 337-57.

[143] Role play is a practice of adopting certain roles in (mostly) erotic context during a scene, such as a master and a slave. Pet play/animal role play is a form of role play, where at least one partner role plays as an animal, for example in puppy play they role play as a dog. This may involve mimicking the behavior of the animal and dressing in a specific gear, for example in pony play the partner who role plays as a pony might use hoods, bridles, tail plug and hoof shoes designed for this purpose. (Not to be confused with bestiality or zoophilia, as pet play/animal role play only ever involves humans). Brown (2015), 40, 92-7.

[144] Surace & Levitt (2015), 887-9.

[145] Mosher (2006), 97.

[146] HIV/AIDS epidemic that spread in the USA (and later worldwide) in the 1970's and 1980's was especially devastating to queer communities, and especially gay and bisexual men as tens of thousands died. Especially isolating and devastating was the fact that governments tented to react slowly to this deadly disease as at first it only seemed to affect queer men, and other marginalized groups such as drug addicts. See Gert Hekma's "Homojen maailma vuodesta 1980 nykypäivään" in *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: Homoseksuaalisuuden historia* (2006), p. 333-63.

[147] Hekma (2006), 338.

[148] For example, Patroclus fighting the Trojans [06:05] and Achilles killing Hector [09:55] in *Achilles* (1995).

[149] Lawson & Langdridge (2020), 475-88.

[150] *Achilles* (1995), [02:55]

Left, figure 3. *Achilles,* Achilles killing Hector. Right, figure 4. *Achilles,* Achilles and Patroclus role playing as Helen and Paris.

In *Achilles* and *The Song of Troy*, both made during the 1990's, Achilles is portrayed as a colder, aggressive masculine man, while Patroclus' tenderness is something remarked upon or shown to receive distaste from others. In *The Song of Achilles* and *Troy: Fall of a City Achilles* is still very masculine figure as I showed earlier, he is not as cold and brutal as before. There is no big difference but nuances instead. And in the later adaptations Patroclus is known for medicine and working as a healer which is respected or at least not laughed at. Therefore, I suggest, that there is a gradual shift at least within adaptations I am examining to more nuanced masculinity shown through Achilles and Patroclus' characters.

All the adaptations that portray Achilles and Patroclus as lovers are released or published after 1990. There have been adaptations which do not portray them as lovers since then as well, but four out of ten adaptations do so and none before the 1990's, so there seems to be at least some kind of shift in the overall interpretations of Achilles and Patroclus in these past thirty years. The explanation seems quite simple as it has been possible only for the last few decades in Western culture to openly portray queerness. For example, during the Golden Age of Hollywood in the mid-twentieth century, there were strict codes studios had to comply with if they wished their films to be aired. The Motion picture Code, or the Hays' code, prohibited all kinds of profanities from cinema, such as too passionate heterosexual kissing and showing crime in positive light as well as sexual perversion (which was code for homosexuality).[151] So even if a filmmaker would have wished to interpret Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, it would have been impossible. This would affect international film studios and filmmakers as well, if they wished to enter US market. There were also different kinds of censorship practices in place in other countries, which I will come back later when I analyse a German and American-Italian film in chapter five.

---

[151] Leff & Simmons (1990), 44, 285; Gilbert (2013), 7.

4   PLATONIC PORTRAYAL: "MY NOBLE AND FAITHFUL FRIEND"[152]

Release	Tittle	Creator(s)	Medium	Ambiguous	Platonic	Romantic
1956	*Helen of Troy*	Robert Wise (director) John Twist & Hugo Gray (screen play)	Film		x	
1962	*L'ira di Achille*	Mario Girolami (director) Gino de Santis (screen play)	Film		x	
2004	*Troy*	Wolfgang Petersen (director) David Benioff (screen play)	Film		x	

In this chapter I will take a closer look at how the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus has been portrayed in three adaptations, that show the relationship as explicitly platonic: *Helen of Troy (*1956*), L'ira di Achille* (1962*),* and *Troy (*2004*).* I will examine how this is done and how it affects their characters as well as the bond between them. I will also present a few possible reasons why the creators of these adaptations chose to portray them strictly platonically, and why in two out of three cases went out of their way to purposefully discourage the audience from making any other interpretation. The criteria I had for this category was that Achilles and Patroclus are shown as explicitly platonic in the adaptations – there is no romantic and/or sexual element between them in these adaptations and hardly any subtext either as those adaptations are in the third and final category.

   Helen of Troy is a film released worldwide in 1956 by Warner Bros. It is an Italian American film produced at the Cinecitta Studios in Rome. It concentrates on fleshing out the

---

[152] Achilles to Patroclus in *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [00:59:25].

Trojan side of the conflict, especially the love story of Paris and Helen. It is directed by Robert Wise, and the screen play is by John Twist and Hugo Gray. The runtime of *Helen of Troy* is 120 minutes, and I will be analysing the digital version from Google play. This means there might be some changes made after the film's original release at the theatres, but I have not found significant changes between the runtime of different digital versions or the DVD release. While it does focus more on the Trojans, it portrays the main elements for the Greek side of the story as well. Achilles and, to a lesser extent, Patroclus are important side characters in the film, portrayed by Stanley Bakeraud and Terrence Longdon. [153]

The second film in this category is Italian *L'ira di Achille,* from now on referred with its English tittle *The Fury of Achilles,* which was released in 1962. It was directed by Mario Girolami, written by Gino De Santis and filmed in Italy. Achilles is portrayed by American Gordon Mitchel, and Patroclus by Ennio Girolami. Achilles is the main character of this film, and Patroclus is an important side character. I am analysing the digitised version of the English dubbed release uploaded to YouTube, with a runtime of 112 minutes. It is also available on *Internet Archive* and a few other online streaming sites with a couple of minutes longer runtime, but most of those versions have noticeable audio issues as the dub is lagging and does not match the scenes properly.[154] The quality is also atrocious. It is also worth noting that the Italian release is circa 20 minutes longer than the dubbed, as it includes scenes of the Trojan horse. The English dubbed release ends after Achilles has killed Hector. For the current work the shorter release is suitable, so it is not too big of a problem that I have not been able to get the Italian release.

The last adaptation of this category is the 2004 Hollywood film *Troy.* It depicts the Trojan War from the abduction of Helen to the fall of Troy. *Troy* tells the story of both sides, and Achilles and Hector are in a way mirroring each other. *Troy* is directed by Wolfgang Petersen, and the screen writer is David Benioff. The runtime of the theatrical release is 162 minutes. Achilles is played by Brad Pitt and Patroclus by Garret Hedlund. *Troy* was mostly shot in Malta and Mexico.[155] In the 2007 director's cut of the film was released with half on hour added runtime. Most of it consist of extended battles or sex scenes with more nudity, but also some scenes to flesh out the characters more. I will concentrate on the theatrical release – partly because I own the theatrical DVD version and because the director's cut added very little to Achilles and Patroclus' relationship. The biggest difference in that regard I found is in the scene where they argue over Achilles' refusal to fight for the Greeks after Agamemnon took Briseis. In the director's cut this scene is slightly extended with a few additional lines of dialogue by Patroclus, but as it does not really change their dynamic overall, I will leave it out of my analysis.

---

[153] *New York Times* 27.1.1956.
[154] The *Internet Archive* version can be found here https://archive.org/details/FuryOfAchilles (Seen 20.5.2023)
[155] Malta Movie-Map

4.1 The relationship

> "I, and my good friend, Patroclus, since we were boys together, we could stand alone and defy an army."[156]

As all the three adaptations in this category are sword and sandals films (or *pepla*), made in large scale and for theatrical release, comparing them is slightly easier than the adaptations of different mediums in the other two categories, as different mediums have somewhat different storytelling possibilities. In two of these films Achilles is one of the main characters while in the third, *Helen of Troy*, he is more like an important side character. In *Helen of Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles* Achilles and Patroclus are exclusively referred as friends or companions – by themselves and by others – while in *Troy* they are cousins, and they refer to each other as such and so do other characters.

Left, figure 5. *Helen of Troy,* Patroclus and Achilles. Right, figure 6. *The Fury of Achilles,* Patroclus and Achilles.

In all three films Achilles is firmly shown to be higher in a hierarchy than Patroclus, and this comes across both from the dialogue as well as from the visual story telling elements. In *Helen of Troy* Patroclus calls Achilles "my prince",[157] while in *The Fury of Achilles* "my king".[158] In these two adaptations Achilles' status as either a prince or a king puts him socially as well as in a military setting in a higher position. The difference in their stations is also shown in the way that Achilles often stands and sits in a more elevated position (figure 5 and 6). Patroclus is often standing slightly behind him on his right-hand side. In *The Fury of Achilles* Achilles is also visibly taller and more muscular than Patroclus, and this is something I will come back to later.

Troy is a slightly different matter. Achilles' status in Phthia is not as clearly defined as in the other two films; here he is more like a lone wolf, warrior going his own path. In *Troy*

---

[156] Achilles in *Helen of Troy* (1956), [00:29:20].
[157] Helen of Troy (1956), [00:29:55].
[158] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [00:58:40].

Patroclus is both visibly smaller as well as younger than Achilles and is referred to as "boy" by king Agamemnon.[159] Their relationship is more akin to a bond between a mentor and a student or an uncle and nephew than that of friends. This is clear from the first moment we meet them; Achilles is training Patroclus in sword fighting.[160] This scene includes good-natured teasing between them but also establishes just how much better and more experienced Achilles is as a fighter. He is also shown to be wise, level-headed in a battle and outside of it while in contrast Patroclus is more hot-headed and inexperienced as is shown during his training scene with Achilles. Patroclus is eager for war while Achilles in comparing is more reluctant. Their dynamic in *Troy* is easy to sum up with the scene where the Greeks are getting ready to start the attack against the Trojans forces for the first time, and Achilles forbids Patroclus from joining the fight (figure 7):

> Patroclus: "But I'm ready, you taught me how to fight! [Patroclus voice is almost cracking, betraying emotions]
>
> Achilles: "You're a good student, but you are not *myrmidon* yet. – Cousin, I can't fight the Trojans if I am concerned for you."[161] [Achilles cradles Patroclus close]

Left, figure 7. *Troy*, Patroclus and Achilles. Right, figure 8. *The fury of Achilles*, Patroclus and Achilles.

Physical touch is something all three films show between Achilles and Patroclus, mostly in a form of Achilles placing his hand on Patroclus' shoulder as a sign of camaraderie (figure 8). It is also often done when they are surrounded by other characters. In fact, they rarely have scenes where there is just the two of them present in any of the films. Briseis is the one Achilles has most of his one-on-one scenes, and Briseis is the one Achilles is vulnerable with, both emotionally and physically, especially in *Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles.* In *Helen of Troy* neither man has a love interest, but they are shown to enjoy female company.[162] Still, they do not share one-on-one scenes.

Interestingly both in *Helen of Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles* the moment when Achilles finds out Patroclus is dead and grieves for him, which is arguable the most tragic,

---

[159] *Troy* (2004), [01:45:00].
[160] *Troy* (2004), [00:20:30].
[161] *Troy* (2004), [00:36:00].
[162] *Helen of Troy* (1956), [01:16:00].

emotionally charged scene in the *Iliad*, is not shown on screen. Other characters make references to Achilles' grief, but the audience does not see the initial reaction. For example, in *Helen of Troy* Helen says to Hector:

> "He [Achilles] was devoted to Patroclus. – He cried like an animal in grief,
> my lord, and then called for his armour."[163]

The audience, however, only see a brief scene of Achilles standing over Patroclus' corpse, placing a laurel-leaf wreath on his head, and then putting on his armour getting ready for his fight with Hector.[164] In *The Fury of Achilles* there is a similar scene, where Briseis and Xenia (Patroclus' female love interest) discuss Achilles' reaction to Patroclus' death. Xenia says that Achilles frightened her as he shouted, blamed himself for Patroclus' death and could not even look at the body, running away instead.[165] And yet, the audience does not see this happen, only hears about it.

In *Troy* there is a scene where Achilles learns of Patroclus' death and becomes so violent, he almost kills the messenger who brought the news and chokes Briseis for trying to interfere.[166] Achilles' grief is violent, and after he has successfully taken revenge, he broods alone in his tent. In *Troy*, Achilles is shown crying openly over Hector's corpse before returning it to king Priam, but not over Patroclus.[167] Achilles' attachment for Patroclus and his grief is either cut out completely or muted in these adaptations. Perhaps this is because it would clash with the image of strong, masculine hero. In all three films Achilles is strong-willed, prone to violence and shares his most emotionally vulnerable moments for Briseis (if anyone at all).

The common theme in Patroclus' character in all three films is that he is deferential to Achilles and inferior in battle, especially considering he could not win against Hector while Achilles' succeeds in that. This aspect does not differ from the romantic nor ambiguous adaptations. In *Helen of Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles* Patroclus is Achilles' companion, and if not an equal in the hierarchy or a battlefield, they are mostly treated in a similar manner by others and they share camaraderie. In *Troy* the difference in age and experience in battle is a more defining feature than that of a difference in rank. Patroclus' character does revolve around Achilles, he hardly has any independent scenes and when he does, it is mostly him acting as a representative of Achilles with the other Greek leaders.[168] His loyalty is his defining characteristic in *Helen of Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles*, while in *Troy* it is not so clearly on display. In *The Fury of Achilles* Achilles is passed out from drinking too much and

---

163 *Helen of Troy* (1956), [01:34:30].
164 *Helen of Troy* (1956), [01:29:00].
165 *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [1:22:20].
166 *Troy* (2004), [01:42:00].
167 *Troy* (2004), [01:42:00-01:45:10].
168 In *The Fury of Achilles* (1962) *myrmidons* obey Patroclus in Achilles' absence [00:59:00]. In *Helen of Troy* (1956) Patroclus is among the Greek kings in war council and seems to represent Achilles there [01:25:00].

Patroclus dresses in his armour says "I am Achilles' friend and so I must carry out my own as well as Achilles' obligations"[169] and then later calls himself "the strength of Achilles".[170]

Achilles on the other hand is shown to be protective of Patroclus in slightly different ways depending on the adaptation. In *Troy*, he refuses to let Patroclus fight at least partially due to his inexperience. When Odysseus first meets Achilles and Patroclus during their training session and tries to convince Achilles to join the war, Achilles is friendly enough. But the moment Odysseus turns his attention to Patroclus, Achilles points his blade at Odysseus and comes physically between them saying "play your tricks on me, not on my cousin".[171] In *Helen of Troy*, Achilles keeps himself between the ongoing fighters as they watch a fight unfold and even drags Patroclus back a bit when the fighters come closer to the onlookers.[172] In *The Fury of Achilles*, Achilles is perhaps not protective as such but shows care for his friend's happiness – for example, he tricks everyone into thinking Patroclus had won a spear throwing competition and won the dress his lady love Xenia coveted, when in truth Achilles had won using Patroclus' spear.[173]

What is interesting compared to the romantic portrayals and Achilles and Patroclus' characters in those is that Patroclus is associated with compassion and healing the wounded in most of those adaptations. When their relationship is portrayed as platonic, there is nothing even hinting at that. Patroclus has overall less personality and is especially in *The Fury of Achilles* more like a sidekick.

The genre of these three films undoubtedly played a role of how Achilles and Patroclus were portrayed in them. Similar *pepla* or "sword and sandals" films were produced in USA as well as in Italy especially during the 50's and 60's. Films set in the classical world allowed more freedom for depictions for nudity, for example, than what was allowed for contemporary films of the time. Italian *peplum* films were later on produced cheaply and typically starred American bodybuilders, *The Fury of Achilles* 1962 fitting right in the description as it stars Gordon Mitchel, a body builder, as Achilles. *Pepla* were initially (especially in the USA) about women in revealing clothes, while the Italian films offered male bodybuilders in equally revealing clothes. The male body being the main object of desire and identification "remain today the most distinctive and notable characteristic of these films".[174] This difference is clear between the Italian-American coproduction film *Helen of Troy* (1956) and the Italian *The Fury of Achilles* (1962). The former allows somewhat more clothes and armour for the male characters while dressing Helen in clothes that reveal more naked skin. On the other hand, the latter hardly hides anything from view when it comes to the main male characters, especially Achilles, while the female characters are more modestly dressed, no bare thighs on sight, unlike in *Helen of Troy*.

---

[169] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962) [01:13:40].
[170] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962) [01:18:00].
[171] *Troy* (2004) [00:23:00].
[172] *Helen of Troy* (1956), [00:32:55].
[173] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [00:46:10].
[174] Rushing 2016), 1-2.

Peplum as a film genre has been targeted predominately at straight, white male audiences, which also mirrors the main characters of most of these films.[175] This fits especially *Helen of Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles*, but also *Troy*, which was part of the "sword and sandals" renewal at the beginning of the 2000s.[176] These films either make no mention of the possibility of queerness in the Ancient Greece or use queerness as a comedic relief, as is the case with *Helen of Troy*. There is a scene where Odysseus tells the other Greek kings how he found Achilles from Scyros dressed up as a female hiding amongst women, and the kings joke about Achilles being a "blushing girl".[177] It is notable, that *Helen of Troy* only makes a reference for this cross-dressing part of the myth but the audience does not see it played out, and the other two films do not even mention it.

If we bring in mind the terms *erastēs* and *eromenos*, Achilles and Patroclus from *Troy* might fit into these classical Greek (from Athens) roles of the youthful beloved and the more experienced lover, if not for the cousin-part. While them being related does not necessarily mean they cannot also be romantically/sexually involved– as it does not hinder them in *The Song of Troy* (1998) - here them being closely related seems to purposefully discourage that interpretation. In *The Fury of Achilles* and *Helen of Troy* they might fit better physically to the idea of two male lovers fighting together much like in the secret Theban Band. However, the audience does not get to see them fighting together in the films. *Helen of Troy* is the only one of these films that leaves a sliver of ambiguity for them, as there is no female love interest for either of them nor are they closely related. Them being side characters does limit the scenes with them and there is no explicit – and I would argue there is no implicit either – queer coding that would point at them being anything other than friends at least in the subtext.

In *The Fury of Achilles*, Patroclus has a female love interest, Xenia, specifically made up for the film, and in *Troy* Patroclus is Achilles' cousin. Both films came up with a way to make sure Achilles and Patroclus' relationship could only be interpreted as platonic, so that there is no room for suspicions of homosexuality that could potentially arise due to their close relationship. In *The Fury of Achilles*, Achilles is the most vocal about his devotion for Patroclus after his death, when he goes to speak with his mother Thetis and says:

> "What satisfaction do I have, when Patroclus, my loyal companion, dearer to me than life, is dead? Mother, I cannot stay or live amongst men unless I avenge his death." [178]

In *Over His Dead Body: Male Friendship in Homer's Iliad and Wolfgang Petersen's Troy (2004)* Krass points out that a man can utter passionately his love for another man, when it is said out of grief for the fallen companion. This is the case of Achilles in *The Fury of Achilles* and a

---

[175] Rushing (2016), 5.
[176] Rushing (2016), 25-6.
[177] *Helen of Troy* (1956), [00:27:50].
[178] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [01:25:00].

lesser degree Achilles in *Troy* – while he does not speak his grief is still very visible. Krass also notes that while in *Troy* Achilles and Patroclus are referred as close relatives, their relationship is visually portrayed similar way as *eraster-eromenos* couple of the older teaching or guiding the younger. He goes as far as to suggest that scene "leaves enough room for a strong homoerotic message that is implied by the pictures in the screen".[179] I would argue it is not a *strong* homoerotic message, due to their lack of shared screen time as well as Achilles' desire for women being in the forefront, but it is there. Krass does also point out that *Troy* includes heterosexual love stories that are not even part of the *Iliad*, and this can certainly be said about *The Fury of Achilles* as well.[180]

What *is* truly queer (in multiple senses of the word) in *Troy*, is the way Achilles takes Patroclus' seashell necklace from his corpse. He is shown to fiddle with it alone in his tent after killing Hector,[181] and then later on he gives the same necklace to Briseis.[182] There is no explanation of where it came from, but in the beginning of the film Achilles mother, Thetis, talks about how she used to make seashell necklaces for Achilles when he was younger.[183] Therefore, I see three possibilities; it is implied that Thetis made such a necklace for Patroclus as well as for her son due to him being Achilles' cousin, and this is just left out of the film. Or it could be that Achilles got the necklace from his mother and then gave it to Patroclus. Or perhaps he made it himself – we will never know. After Patroclus' death he gives the necklace to Briseis.[184] This could be read as Briseis and Patroclus occupying the same place in Achilles' life.[185] Because of this, Krass suggest that *Troy* is deliberately made in a way that there are multiple ways to interpret Achilles' relationship with Briseis and Patroclus. In his opinion there is both the obvious heteronormative love story between Achilles and Briseis, but also room for queer interpretation of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship.[186] However, this seems very unlikely to me for multiple reasons. Achilles and Patroclus do not share many scenes together, and Achilles and Hector mirror each other in their relationships with younger male relative (which Krass also mentions) – Hector with his brother Paris, and Achilles with Patroclus. Briseis and Achilles relationship is also explored a lot more in *Troy* than in the *Iliad*, and it more central to the story in the film than Achilles and Patroclus' bond.

Both Italy and USA had a censorship regime in place for most of the 20th century, including the time of production and release of *Helen of Troy* (1956) and *The Fury of Achilles* (1962). The censorship did not only make it impossible for Achilles and Patroclus' relationship to *be* anything other than platonic in its nature,[187] it also affected to some degree the

---

[179] Krass (2013), 167.
[180] Krass (2013), 153, 167-8.
[181] *Troy* (2004), [2:00:00]
[182] *Troy* (2004), [02:05:30].
[183] *Troy* (2004), [00:23:30].
[184] *Troy* (2004), [02:05:30].
[185] Krass comes to the same conclusion as well and takes their analysis even further. See Krass (2013) p. 168-170.
[186] Krass (2013), 170-172.
[187] Although queer coding is still very much possible during even a tight censorship, as I will argue is the case with *Helena* (1924) in the next chapter.

way their individual characters were portrayed and the plot itself. From my sources alone it is not possible to analyse in depth of how strong the impact was. However, considering that Patroclus has more softer masculinity in the adaptations of romantic and ambiguous categories but not in the platonic, this could be an indirect effect of the censorship. There is no threat of him coming across as effeminate, or for his loyalty to be mistaken for something else.

As I have already mentioned briefly, in the USA the Motion Picture Production Code a.k.a. the Hays Code[188] affected the film industry from 1930 to the late 1960s.[189] The Hays Code had guidelines for the film industry, such as defining what and how themes such as criminality, marriage and sexual relationships should be portrayed – if at all.[190] For example, some scenes of (heterosexual) passion were permitted, but not too many as that was believed to arouse "dangerous emotions on the part of the immature, the young or criminal classes".[191] Sexual/romantic relationships between men fell under the "sex perversion or any inference to it" which the Code forbade completely.[192] This did not only affect the explicit queer content but also more "innocent" portrayals such as two men dancing together or a man being effeminate – these elements were frowned upon if not cut out completely.[193]

Italy's situation was quite similar to the USA, although as Italy did not have as concentrated film industry, the effect of the censorship was somewhat different.[194] In Italy the censorship was twofold; the State enforced preventative form of censorship from 1947 onwards.[195] The Commission for Cinematographic Revision had the power to exclude films from screening, but especially in later years it did not exercise this power much.[196] The other form of Italian censorship was a form of private censorship by Centro Cattolic Cinematigrafico, which judged and classified films based on Catholic morality, and films that included immoral content such as divorce, suicide and duels were to be excluded.[197] Censorship criteria for the State were similar to the Catholic guidelines which were made by the Pope Pius XII himself.[198]

Both the Hays Code and the Italian censorship had Christian religious values and moral panic as their driving force – the first outline for the Hays Code was drafted by a Jesuit priest, Father Daniel A. Lord.[199] In Italy, too, portrayals of homosexuality were

---

[188] Named after Will H. Hays, an American republican who oversaw the making and implementing of the Code. More on the history of film censorship and the making of the Hays Code in *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s* (1990) by Leff and Simmons.
[189] Gilbert (2013), 7.
[190] Leff & Simmons (1990), 11-14.
[191] Leff & Simmons (1990), 291.
[192] Leff & Simmons (1990), 44, 285.
[193] Leff & Simmons (1990), 44.
[194] Treveri Gennari (2008), 25.
[195] Treveri Gennari (2008), 52, 55.
[196] Treveri Gennari (2008), 52.
[197] Treveri Gennari (2008), 27, 1005-8.
[198] Treveri Gennari (2008), 26-7, 106.
[199] Smith (2005), 38.

censored under the "obscenity" claim.[200] *Helen of Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles* were produced and released under these circumstances, which dictated partially what was possible to include to the story. In *Helen of Troy* the possible queer aspects such as making reference to Achilles' crossdressing and his vanity were met with ridicule and condemnation. Achilles' death was all but heroic too – after being shot in the heel with an arrow he fell from his chariot and hit his head on a rock dying there in front of the Trojan walls and the Greek army.[201] And unlike in most of the adaptations, in *Helen of Troy* Achilles did not have Briseis to prove his masculine heterosexuality. So, although his and Patroclus' relationship was not queer coded, Achilles' character was not as pointedly hypermasculine as it is in *Troy* and *The Fury of Achilles*. In *The Fury of Achilles* both Achilles and Patroclus on the other hand are shown to be virile men, interested immediately in Xenia and Briseis, making comments alluding to their lady loves and bonding over it.[202] However, a kiss was as far as the audience was allowed to see, the screen fades away when Achilles and Briseis move towards the bed.[203] Patroclus on the other hand is making promises to Xenia to marry her after the war is over[204], perhaps to keep up with the good morality of marriage.

The three adaptations portraying Achilles and Patroclus' relationship as platonic have many similarities among themselves. Patroclus' importance to Achilles being reduced and Achilles' grief over his death being downplayed happen to some degree in all these adaptations, which are the aspects that set them most clearly apart from the romantic and ambiguous adaptations. There are still some differences, too, such as Briseis being Achilles' lover and closest confidant in *The Fury of Achilles* and *Troy*, while being absent from *Helen of Troy*. Achilles and Patroclus' relationship in *The Fury of Achilles* and *Helen of Troy* was that of a friends or a lord and his closest vassal. In *Troy* the difference in their age and battle experience set them apart, and them being cousins also gave their relationship a new aspect.

---

[200] Treveri Gennari (2008), 26-7; Signorelli (2018), 277-8.
[201] *Helen of Troy* (1956), [01:39:00].
[202] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [00:07:20].
[203] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [01:29:00]
[204] *The Fury of Achilles* (1962), [01:13:30].

5   AMBIGUOUS PORTRAYAL: "THEIRS WAS A RELATIONSHIP THAT INVITED SPECULATION" [205]

Release	Tittle	Creator(s)	Medium	Ambiguous	Platonic	Romantic
1924	*Helena: Der Untergang Trojas*	Manfred Noa (director) Hans Kyser (screen play)	Film	x		
2009	*Ransom*	David Malouf	Novel	x		
2018	*The Silence of the Girls*	Pat Barker	Novel	x		

The third thematic category is for those adaptations, that much like the *Iliad* itself, avoids clearly defining the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. From my primary sources, three adaptations fit into this category. This is also where the queer coding becomes extremely useful tool in exploring implications and the ambiguousness of these adaptations. I will briefly introduce the adaptations and then analyse them more deeply.

    Helena: Der Untergang Trojans (hereafter *Helena*) is a German silent film released in 1924 by Munich based production company Emelka, and it is the oldest of all the ten adaptations in my master's thesis. *Helena* was directed by Manfred Noa (1893-1930), whose name is mostly lost from film history due to him being of Jewish descent in Nazi-Germany. *Helena* was a box office hit in its own time – it was also exported to different countries and had multiple different cuts of it released until the early 30s. The cast is very multinational including actors from Munich and Berlin theatre as well as actors from Italy and Czechoslovakia. The screen play is by Hans Kyser, who adapted the *Iliad* into two parts: *I The Abduction of Helena (Der Raub der Helena)*, 100 minutes long, and *II The Fall of Troy (Die Zestörung Trojas)*, 119 minutes long. As happened to many Emelka films, *Helena* has not survived in its original form. The version I am using in my analyses is reconstructed version released by

---

[205] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 74.

Filmmuseum München in 2016.[206] The text in the film uses contemporary wording, as it is based on foreign prints of the film, and I will use the English subtitles when needed. [207]

I will not rely heavily on the text in my analysis, and I will be concentrating more on the shown restored footage of the film, while also acknowledging that there might be some missing footage or that it might be arranged differently than its original released form in 1924. Despite these factors, I believe *Helena* is a valuable source to my analysis. *Helena* covers the story from the Greeks holding a chariot race competition in honour of Aphrodite to Paris and Helen eloping to the fall of the city. Achilles and Patroclus appear as important side characters especially in the second part of the film, portrayed by Carlo Aldini and Carl Lamac.

Ransom is a novel by David Malouf published in 2009, and it won the John D. Criticos Prize[208], a Hellenic literary prize, and was shortlisted for the *International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.*[209] The edition I have is 2011 first vintage international edition. The novel is divided into five parts and alternates in telling the story of different characters' perspectives, alternating mainly between Achilles and king Priam. The focus of this adaptation is the shared grief of Achilles and Priam, one for a dead companion, one for a dead son. Patroclus, in fact, dies very early compared to all the other adaptations; within the first pages of this 224-page novel. The reason I decided to include this adaptation in my research is that despite Patroclus dying so early, he is still very much present in the story in Achilles' thoughts and motivates his actions. And in the short time he is alive, they interact constantly, and the reader does get a sense of his personality to some degree.

The Silence of the Girls by Pat Barker is the most recent adaptation among my primary sources. Published in 2018, the novel was a finalist for the *Women's Prize for Fiction*[210] in 2019 and the edition I am using was also released in 2019. The focus of this novel is on the women of the *Iliad*, especially Briseis and the others in the Greek camp. This novel is divided into three parts, the first and the third parts are mainly narrated by Briseis while in the second part there are multiple chapters from Achilles and Patroclus perspectives. The story itself covers the war starting from Greeks attacking Troy and ending with the fall of Troy.

---

[206] The reconstruction was done using multiple fragmentary export prints, some of which vary in their quality, by Cinémathéque Suisse, the Cineteca Nazionale, the Filmoteca Española, Cosfilmofond, Filmmuseum München, Bundesarchiv, the Deutsches Filminstitut, as well as some nitrate reels from private collection. For more, see Stefan Drössler in "Restoring a forgotten silent epic" in *Helena: Der Untergang Trojas*, DVD booklet.
[207] Drössler (2015).
[208] *Neos Kosmos* (2010), seen 27.5.2023.
[209] *The Irish Times* (2011), seen 27.5.2023.
[210] *Women's Prize for Fiction* is the same *Orange Prize for Fiction* that *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller won in 2012, but since the 2017 it has been renamed.

5.1 The Relationship

> Patroclus, his [Achilles] soulmate and companion since childhood.[211]

All three of these adaptations are much closer to romantic than platonic themes when it comes to the elements of Achilles and Patroclus relationship and how individual characters are portrayed. Their relationship is pivotal to the story. Their personalities have more depth and especially Patroclus' character is not reduced to a sidekick as happened with the platonic adaptations. Gentleness and compassion are once again his defining features like in many of the romantic interpretations.

Calling these three adaptations ambiguous in their portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship is just due to them all portraying a deeply committed relationship that defies a clear definition. There are elements in these adaptations which are usually associated with romantic/sexual relationships as I will discuss soon, but it is not confirmed that they share a romantic bond or a bed. In *The Silence of the Girls* the ambiguity is acknowledged in the text itself as well multiple times. For example, this is what Briseis thinks when she sees Achilles and Patroclus embracing on a beach:

> And perhaps they were lovers, or had been at some stage, but what I saw on the beach that night went beyond sex, and perhaps even beyond love. I didn't understand it then – and I'm not sure I do now – but I recognized its power.[212]

Briseis and Achilles have sexual relationship in *The Silence of the Girls* while it is not confirmed by any of the characters whether Achilles and Patroclus do. Patroclus does have "a girl", Iphis, but his connection to this girl is defined by her being a gift from Achilles, and it is not explored deeper.[213] Briseis notes, that Patroclus does prefer this girl to others, implying he shares his bed with her and perhaps others on occasion, but this is the only time it is brought up. And mostly Iphis is mentioned here to add weight to Patroclus' kindness, as he is described to be very gentle with her (unlike most men with their women).[214] Iphis, or Briseis for that matter, are not a threat to Achilles and Patroclus' bond in *The Silence of the Girls* – unlike in *The Song of Troy*, where Patroclus is jealous of Briseis and Achilles' relationship.

As mentioned, romantic elements are present in these three adaptations. Or at least they are elements usually portrayed in romantic relationships. Affectionate words and ways of calling each other, physical touch and intimacy, deep emotional connection as well as their shared history are portrayed in these adaptations. Jealousy and Achilles' grief over

---

[211] *Ransom* (2009), 10.
[212] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 74.
[213] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 39.
[214] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 39.

Patroclus' death are also very much present. This way, ambiguous interpretations are closer to romantic ones than the platonic in the elements they include in the portrayal. However, these are only one aspect of their relationship – another is how Patroclus is referred to as Achilles' adoptive brother in *Ransom*[215] and foster brother in *The Silence of the Girls*.[216] Their affection is called "brotherly" as well.[217] Despite having this brotherly connection, it is not stressed over in these adaptations like in *Troy*. This is told as part of the reason why they are so close, not in order to discourage alternative interpretations of the relationship – quite similar to how in *The Song of Troy* Achilles and Patroclus are cousins *and* lovers. In *Ransom,* Achilles refers to Patroclus as his soulmate,[218] and describes how Patroclus' coming to live with him changed his whole life in the following manner:

> Patroclus was to be his adoptive brother, and the world, for Achilles, reas-
> sembled itself around a new centre. – It was as if he had all along needed
> this other before he could fully become himself.[219]

Similarly in *The Silence of the Girls* Achilles and Patroclus are described as becoming one, and that this is the highest aim of love, fusing two identities into one.[220] Briseis even notes how when Patroclus puts on Achilles' armour, they look identical – a physical manifestation of their closeness.[221] In *Ransom*, too, Achilles "knew every movement of Patroclus' soul."[222] A modern term that I would use to describe this kind of relationship is *queer platonic*. It is used to refer to relationships that are something other than what is conventionally considered a friendship, but without implying a romantic or sexual bond. [223]

Jealousy is expressed by Patroclus in *Helena,* when he is shown to watch how Achilles is flirting and embracing a female dancer. [224] Patroclus looks sullen and turns bodily away from the scene – his mood is contrasted with the merriment around him. Achilles immediately notices Patroclus' reaction and pushes the dancer away, looking unhappy or perhaps conflicted. [225] As Patroclus is not shown to have any interest in the female dancer, the object of his jealousy is clearly Achilles, and Achilles being aware of this as well. In this scene nothing is said outright so there is plausible deniability, but I argue that the queer coding of this scene is very thinly veiled as it offers no ready alternative interpretation.

In *Ransom* it is Achilles who feels jealousy, albeit it seems to be more like anger towards himself than actual jealousy over Patroclus. This happens with Automedon, who was with Patroclus in his dying moments and managed to save Patroclus' body and bring it back to

---

[215] *Ransom* (2009), 13-14.
[216] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 73.
[217] *Ransom* (2009), 14.
[218] *Ransom* (2009), 10.
[219] *Ransom* (2009), 13-14.
[220] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 188.
[221] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 187.
[222] *Ransom* (2009), 16.
[223] Strait (2012), 3.
[224] *Helena* (1924) Pt 2 [00:27:40]
[225] *Helena* (1924) Pt 2 [00:28:10]

the Greeks. Achilles resents Automedon as he feels it should have been him, not anyone else, doing these things for Patroclus:[226]

> Him, Achilles tells himself bitterly, not me. In his arms, not mine.[227]

A clear distinction between platonic and romantic and ambiguous interpretations is the way Achilles' grief for loosing Patroclus is shown. Much like in romantic adaptations, in these three ambiguous portrayals Achilles' grief is one of the core moments of the story – also the revenge he seeks from Hector is tied to Patroclus' loss, not Achilles' own pride. Achilles is described as having lost his mind in both *Ransom* and *The Silence of the Girls*.[228] In Briseis words, "Patroclus was dead; nothing else mattered"[229]. In *Helena,* Achilles is visibly shaken by the news of Patroclus' death, he sinks down on the ground and pours dirt over himself in agony as he curses his own pride, questions whether life is worth living after Patroclus is gone:

> What is my life worth now that you, Patroclus, whom I loved so dearly,
> have fallen into the dust?[230]

This paints a stark a contrast between the platonic adaptations versus romantic and ambiguous ones, as only the platonic adaptations shy away from showing different sides of Achilles' grief. This is the biggest difference between the categories when it comes to Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, considering how fundamental Achilles' grief is for the story. In all the categories there are adaptations in which Achilles has a romantic/sexual relationship with Briseis; in the romantic category those are *The Song of Troy, Troy: Fall of a City* and *The Song of Achilles,* in the platonic *The Fury of Achilles* and *Troy,* and in the ambiguous *The Silence of the Girls.* The fact that only platonic adaptations downplay Patroclus' death effect on Achilles is very telling. Not only in the sense that they went out of their way to discourage any other than a platonic interpretation, but this is also a telling example of what is acceptable in a friendship between men. The only way Achilles was permitted to show his grief was through violence. The mingling of their ashes after both of them are dead from the *Iliad* is not brought up in the platonic adaptation nor does Patroclus' ghost make an appearance like in most of the romantic and ambiguous adaptations.

In platonic adaptations Achilles is allowed to feel and show grief over Patroclus' death and be emotional vulnerability with characters other than Briseis – in fact in *Helena* there is no Briseis at all and in *Ransom* she is only mentioned briefly. In *The Silence of the Girls* she is the main character, but Achilles is also vulnerable with Patroclus and after his death, Achilles and Briseis are united in their grief for him. Achilles is a multifaced character as well, he

---

[226] *Ransom* (2009), 169
[227] *Ransom* (2009), 169.
[228] *Ransom (2009),* 83; *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 200-7.
[229] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 210.
[230] *Helena* (1924) Pt.2 [00:38:10].

is shown to be interested and proficient in playing music, has a strong and special relationship with his mother in *Ransom* and *The Silence of the Girls*. He is described both as elegant and brutal killer, but that is not his only quality. In *The Silence of the Girls* Briseis remarks that "no girl ever dressed more carefully"[231], alluding to the otherness of a man caring for his appearance, which links to queerness as well. In *Helena* Achilles is distinctly differently dressed – only in a very short skirt, his muscles and bare, oiled skin on display. The other Greek kings and soldiers alike are more modestly dressed, including Patroclus. In fact, the only time Patroclus is in as revealing clothes as Achilles, is when he is alone with Achilles in their hut.[232]

In both romantic and ambiguous adaptations Patroclus gets to be a multi-layered character, not only a one-dimensional sidekick to be Achilles' companion or ward. Just like in the romantic adaptations, in the ambiguous ones Patroclus defining characteristic is his kindness and compassion as well as the calming effect he has on Achilles. He is described as "kind"[233] in *The Silence of the Girls* and "pure hearted" in *Ransom*. [234] In *Helena* he is shown to calm Achilles down and reason with him on multiple occasion.[235] However, he is also shown to be a good soldier and having great compassion for his fellow countrymen.

In all three adaptation Achilles and Patroclus are physically close, which seems to be the case of all the adaptations at least so some degree, even in the platonic ones. This is especially poignant in *Helena*, which is perhaps partially due to the nature of it being a silent film. In *Helena* the gestures and reactions are dramatic, quite like in the theatre, which was common in early cinema – many of the film actors came from stage as well.[236] Their relationship is heavily queer coded, and the closeness is shown to be more intimate than in platonic adaptations. In the very first scene we see Achilles and Patroclus together, Achilles places his hand on the side of Patroclus' face while Patroclus grabs his bare arms in a lingering touch.[237] They are shown to share an intimate embrace and Patroclus stroking Achilles' arm the first time he asks permission to dress in Achilles armour and fight in his stead.[238] They share similarly intimate touches throughout the film, but there are two scenes that are most notable. In the first one they are in their hut, both barely clothed in the short skirts and Achilles is torn apart due to his decision not to fight with the other Greeks, and Patroclus tries to calm him down. Patroclus does so by placing his hand on Achilles' bare chest, caressing his skin from one nipple to another, and the scene take several seconds (figure 9).[239]

---

[231] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 36.
[232] *Helena* (1924) Achilles getting his muscles oiled Pt. 1 [00:26:55], the contrast of Achilles and Patroclus' costumes Pt. 2 [00:07:40], Achilles and Patroclus in their hut, both now in similar costumes Pt. 2 [00:21:40].
[233] *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 39, 146.
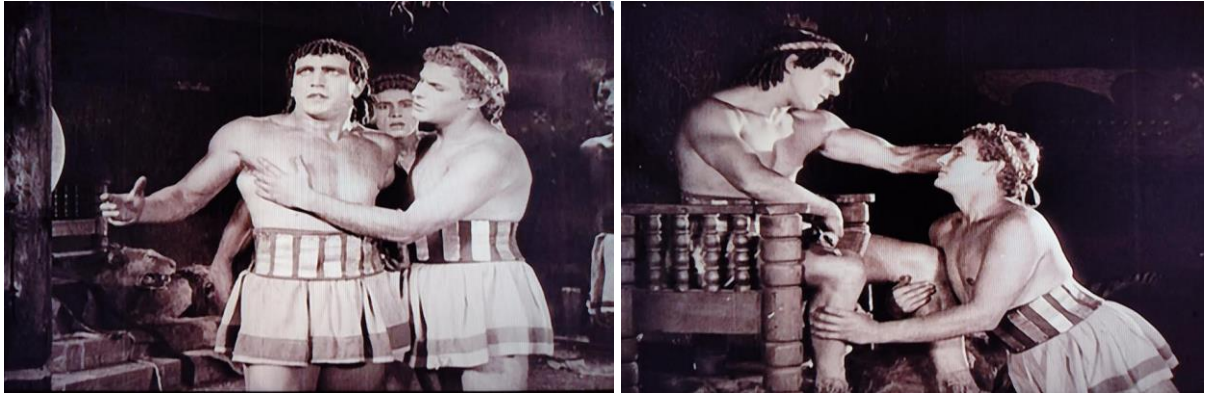[234] *Ransom (2009)*, 16; *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), 39, 80-1, 116.
[235] *Helena* Pt 2 (1924) [00:09:00-00:10:30], [00:21:40], [00:29:15].
[236] Steakly (1999), 181.
[237] *Helena* (1924) Pt. 1 [00:28:00].
[238] *Helena* (1924) Pt.2 [00:29:30].
[239] *Helena* (1924) Pt. 2 [00:22:15].

Left, figure 9. *Helena*, Achilles and Patroclus. Right, figure 10. *Helena,* Achilles and Patroclus.

The second notable scene is when Patroclus begs Achilles for permission to fight against the Trojans. They are again in their hut barely clothed and at least seemingly alone, and Patroclus kneels between Achilles thighs while grabbing his bare skin. Achilles again caresses Patroclus' hair and side of his face while remaining seated. The scene is very intimate and homoerotic due to their positions and naked skin on display (figure 10). [240] Patroclus' position is also very similar to the female dancer's earlier, and she was clearly an object of Achilles' desire, albeit briefly. [241]

What is interesting, is that in none of these three adaptations portrays Achilles hiding in king Lycomedes' court among the women dressed in female clothes nor is it discussed happening off-screen. This part of his myth seems to be rarely explored in adaptations – among my ten sources only two explicitly shows it happen (*The Song of Achilles* and *The Song of Troy)* and only one made any reference to it happening off-screen (*Helen of Troy*). There might be multiple reasons why creators of the other adaptations chose not to include this part of the mythology depending on what the focus of the adaptation was etc. But there is a long history of showing men in women's clothing – or straight up including drag queens or even transwomen – which has deep-rooted history in homo- and transphobia and is usually only included when it is done for comedic and demeaning purposes of the man expressing femininity.[242] This is also how it was portrayed in *Helen of Troy* and *The Song of Troy*. So, no matter how an adaptation portrays Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, Achilles' "femininity" or perhaps better said, gender expression, is not explored in a similar way as his sexuality.[243] Perhaps that has to do with his image as a traditionally speaking very masculine hero – and how "feminine" or gender nonconforming homosexual men are rarely portrayed in media even to this day as other than caricatures.

---

[240] *Helena* (1924) Pt. 2 [00:31:20].
[241] *Helena* (1924) Pt 2 [00:27:40].
[242] For history of queer representation on American TV (and radio), see *Alternate channels: the uncensored story of gay and lesbian images on radio and* television by Steven Capsuto, and for a brief look on men dressing in female clothes for comedic purposes, see Dan Pasternack's *Cross-Dressing at the Crossroads: A Brief History of Drag in Comedy* (2017).
[243] As mentioned in chapter *3 Romantic Portrayal,* the short film *Achilles* did have a scene where during a role play Achilles' took the role of Helen.

As I have discussed, the ambiguous adaptations are all queer coded to some degree – the audience is meant to read between the lines and see the hints or at least the possibility of a non-platonic relationship. The reasons for this, however, are likely very different. *Helena* came out in 1924 in Weimar Germany. It was during that brief period between the wars that there was a bit more freedom for queer people in Germany, especially in Berlin.[244] However, there was still film censorship, and it would not have been possible for such a big film to include an openly queer relationship even if there might have been desire to do so. It is still remarkable, how the very first big film adaptation of the *Iliad* allows this ambiguity, while none of the following ones do so – not even in the 21st century *Troy*, which went out of its way to remove any ambiguity.

I have referred earlier to the Hays Code and its affect in the USA, but Germany too had its own censorship laws in place which affected films produced from 1920 to 1945[245] - it was so tight that the Nazi regime did not feel the need to tighten it when they came to power.[246] Theatre censorship had been actually abolished briefly in 1918 in Weimar Germany, and during that two year window the very first film – that we know of - which depicted homosexuality explicitly was released, *Anders als die Andern*,[247] as well as other films which dealt with different controversial subject matters. *Helena* was released in 1924, so four years after the new Lichtspielgesetz (Film Law) was installed, and all the new films had to be submitted to a censorship board prior to release. Films could not contain any material seen as a threat to public order, demean the German image or offend religious values, for example. Depicting homosexuality was feared to "sway 'wavering' audience members to act out slumbering homosexual propensities",[248] and so in the following years if homosexuality was portrayed it was so carefully coded it was hardly noticeable at all.[249]

Considering these circumstances, under which *Helena* was produced and released, I suggest that were it made few years earlier, Achilles and Patroclus' relationship might not have been as ambiguous as it is. Unlike *Ransom* and *The Silence of the Girls*, which were published in 21st century in countries with no such censorship laws in place, the ambiguity of those adaptations is more likely due to artistic decision than anything else. This could still be the case with *Helena* as well, but the very fact that there was a censorship law in place and that the characters are queer coded enough to be noticeable makes it at least uncertain. In fact, I claim that the queer coding of Achilles and Patroclus in *Helena* is remarkable similar to the coding in modern Chinese TV series which cannot explicitly portray same-sex relationship (even if the text they are adapting is explicitly queer) and so these series use other

---

[244] Tamagne (2006), 181-2.
[245] Censorship in the East Germany, see Richard A. Zipser's *The Many Face of Censorship in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1989 and for censorship in the West Germany,* see Mario Cutajar's *West Germany: Censorship and Repression in the Model State".*
[246] Steakley (1999), 181, 191.
[247] Only around 20 minutes of this originally 90-minute film has survived to present day. See Steakley's *Cinema and censorship in the Weimar Republic* (1999).
[248] Steakley (1999), 192.
[249] Steakley (1999), 193.

methods such as symbolism and code phrases to hint at the censored relationship.[250] The ambiguity in *Helena* is tied to what was possible to depict at its time of release unlike the ambiguity in *Ransom* and *The Silence of the Girls,* which is quite possible done more as an expression of artistic choice than for any other reason. Marketability is also a possible factor but considering the popularity of *The Song of Achilles* (2011), I do believe it to be the deciding one at least in the case of *The Silence of the Girls,* which was released in 2018.

---

[250] In recent years in the Mainland China any explicit portrayal of homosexuality (among other topics) has been forbidden and censored in the media. Despite this, some of the biggest Web series released – in China and internationally – have been adaptations of explicitly queer novels using queer coding to allude to the censored relationship. Eve Ng and Xiaomeng Li discuss this in their article "A queer "socialist brotherhood": the Guardian web series, boys' love fandom, and the Chinese state" in *Feminist media studies* 2020, Vol.20 (4), p.479-495, and Shana Ye in their article "Word of Honor and brand homonationalism with "Chinese characteristics": the dangai industry, queer masculinity and the "opacity" of the state" in *Feminist media studies* 2022, Vol.ahead-of-print (ahead-of-print), p.1-17.

6 CONCLUSION

As I have illustrated in the three previous chapters, the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus has been portrayed in multiple different ways in the last hundred years. In order to better understand the similarities and differences in the portrayals as well as the socio-political and historical reasons, I decided to divide these ways in to three thematic categories: romantic, platonic, and ambiguous. With these three categories there are some generalisations to be made and overarching themes to be found.

In my early hypothesis I theorised that medium might affect the nature of the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship more than whether they are the main characters of said adaptations. This does seem to hold true to some degree. In three out of four full length films they were portrayed platonically, and these films were targeted at a wider audience, being spectacle or "sword and sandals" films. Overall, however, the release period had the biggest effect as I had theorized – since the 1990's there have been much more variety among the adaptations. Prior to that only ambiguous or platonic adaptations were released. There are clear historical and political reasons for this, as I have discussed. For most of the 20th century it was simply not possible to portray Achilles and Patroclus as romantic partners, as all the countries in which my primary sources had been produced had strict censorship laws in place – for the film industry especially. There was no novel or TV/Web series released before the 90's among my sources, so I cannot say much about that other than retellings of the *Iliad* were quite scarce in other mediums than film for the most part of the century.

My second hypothesis was that the target audience might affect the portrayal choice more than the release date, but the results for this is somewhat unclear. Since the 90's the portrayals have increasingly included romantic interpretations among the platonic and ambiguous ones, but I think it is important to note that it does not mean that creators have completely switched to only making adaptations with romantic portrayals and targeting specific audience with these adaptations. What it does mean, is that there is a "new way" of portraying the relationship that has joined the others.[251] However, completely platonic

---

[251] New for 20th century, not for the history of the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship.

portrayals have also decreased within the last two decades. This could also be due to the fact that *Troy* (2004) was the last big production film adaptation of the Trojan War, and as platonic portrayal is mainly limited to films, this might be the reason for that. These films were predominantly targeted to white male audiences, which did in turn most likely affect to their choice to portrayal, but there were multiple factors impacting that choice, especially censorship laws.

Another reason for the growing popularity of romantic portrayal might be that since the 1970's research on the queerness of Ancient Greece has gained popularity as well. One could propose this is the reason why the romantic portrayals have become more common, as we now know so much more of different same-sex relationships in Greek societies and institutions.[252] However, I argue it is more linked to the overall growing openness in most Western societies when it comes to queerness, and that the academic world is just one part of this change. The romantic adaptations do not really try to fit Achilles and Patroclus' relationship into the mold of the most known male same-sex partners in Ancient Greece, such as clearly defined older *erastēs* and younger *eromenos,* or two lovers fighting side by side in the same military unit. Which is why I argue that the change reflects more the practices of their own times and creators' artistic decisions than an attempt to depict Ancient Greek same-sex relationship in a historically "accurate" way.[253]

What I find interesting, is that the very first adaptations among my sources, *Helena* (1924) and the most recent, Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), both portray the relationship in an ambiguous manner despite the socio-political climate and cultural context in which these adaptations were created being vastly different. In 1920's Weimar Germany the strict censorship made it impossible to portray Achilles and Patroclus in an explicitly romantic sexual way as lovers, and yet the film did its utmost to queer code their relationship and convey its romantic nature in a way that would still pass the censorship. *The Silence of the Girls*, in contrast, was published in 2018, after multiple romantic adaptations had been published and gained recognition. Yet Barker decided to skirt around the subject, leaving it very pointedly without explicit clarification. This is why I argue that the ambiguity was an artistic choice. The key difference indeed is the fact that during the time of publication, all kinds of portrayal would have been possible, some even more celebrated perhaps than others among the target audience.[254]

Some kind of shift towards embracing the romantic interpretation can be detected with adaptations and, overall, in popular culture. For example, the narrative of Achilles and Patroclus being lovers is used intertextually elsewhere as a way of queer coding. In *Alexander* (2004), a film released the same year as *Troy*, the relationship between Alexander and his general, Hephaestion, is compared to Achilles and Patroclus by said characters themselves.

---

[252] See chapter 4 *Sexing up the Greeks* in Davidson's *The Greeks and the Greek Love* (2007).
[253] If this is can even be said about a story that is closer to a myth than actual history for all intents and purposes.
[254] For example, von Tunzelmann questioned why even make an adaptation of ancient Greece, if it does not include gods or gay men in *No gods or gay men but a whole lot of llamas* (2008).

Their relationship skirts the line of ambiguous and explicitly romantic in the film. In a romantically changed scene where Alexander and Hephaestion discuss their fate, Hephaestion says to Alexander: "Well, if I'm Patroclus, I die first. Then you, Achilles".[255] Similarly in NBC's tv series *Hannibal* (2013-2015), the titular character compares himself to Achilles and his love interest, Will Graham, to Patroclus as they discuss about Achilles and Patroclus' relationship using it as a metaphor for their own relationship. Hannibal is shown drawing Achilles lamenting over Patroclus' dead body as he says "Achilles wished all Greeks would die so that he and Patroclus could conquer Troy alone. Took divine intervention to bring them down."[256] In fact, the term *achillean* is used in some queer communities in a similar fashion to *sapphic* – in this case, meaning men loving men.[257]

When Achilles and Patroclus are the main character in the adaptations, they are generally allowed to have more complexity. Especially Patroclus, and his character is also most nuanced when they are portrayed as lovers – he shows more caring, gentle side of himself and is in some cases associated with healing while this is absent in platonic adaptations. Achilles is shown to dress in female clothing only in two adaptations, and this is discussed in one platonic adaptation in two romantic adaptations, and Patroclus roleplays Helen in one. Overall, Achilles and Patroclus' portray still a very traditionally masculine warriors across the adaptations and do not play with gender much. Achilles' character is stays quite unchanging no matter the adaptation; he is strong, proud, and obsessed with honor – brutal in battle as well.

The biggest difference between the three thematic categories is the way Achilles grieves for Patroclus. In platonic ones he is allowed only rage and violence, no sleepless nights keeping vigil next to Patroclus' corpse. Words of affection are to be said only after his death, if there is no preventative way – like being closely related or both having female love interests – to discourage the audience interpreting their relationship in other than a platonic way. Achilles' character and the plot he is involved in reflects overall the cultural and political changes in the last century. His character is increasingly interested in sex, no matter who his partner is – be it Patroclus or Briseis.

Physically Patroclus is mentioned to be tall, and he is also older than Achilles in both *Ransom, The Song of Troy,* and *The Silence of the Girls*. While in *Troy, Achilles,* and *The Fury of Achilles,* Achilles is the one who is taller and more muscular. There does not seem to be a clear divide between the categories in how these aspects of Achilles and Patroclus are handled, although adaptations portray Achilles as physically bigger and also older than Patroclus more than the other way around. I suggest that this is due to Achilles being in most cases the more important character between the two of them. Portraying Patroclus as a "lesser" in a masculine sense elevates Achilles in contrast.

---

[255] *Alexander* (2004), [01:09:35].
[256] *Hannibal* season 2 (2014), episode 12: *Tome-wan* [40:20].
[257] lgbtqia.wiki/wiki/Achillean (Seen 12.4.2023).

Overall, analyzing these ten adaptations did reveal some general trends in the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus' relationship, and I claim they do reflect the socio-political and cultural climate of their release time to a degree. The evolution towards more romantic portrayals is a clear testament to that. However, my research is in no way a comprehensive study on the portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus and their relationship in adaptations. There are at least two fronts that it is lacking due to the nature of this being a master's thesis with a page limit: the audience reception and the intent of the creators of the adaptations. In the future, examining these aspects of the adaptations could offer more insight into topics such as why creator(s) chose a particular way of portraying Achilles and Patroclus, and whether the reception of an adaptation is affected by the chosen way of interpreting their relationship.

And now I will bid farewell to Achilles and Patroclus, at least for a while, with this:

> But then I see the tomb, and the marks she had made on the stone.
> ACHILES, it reads. And beside it, PATROCLUS.[258]

---

[258] *The Song of Achilles* (2011), 352.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Helena: Untergang des Trojans (1924), directed by Manfred Noa, screenplay by Hans Kyser. Filmmuseum München DVD release 2015.

Helen of Troy (1956) directed by Robert Wise, screenplay by John Twist and Hugo Gray. WarnerBros. https://play.google.com/store/movies/details/Helen_of_Troy?id=lOklEyhEOrU (Seen 2022-12.4.2023)

The Fury of Achilles (1962) directed by Mario Girolami, screenplay by Gino De Santis. https://youtu.be/WgPTTmUq_oI (Seen 12.4.2023)

Achilles (1995) https://youtu.be/NPUfdxJn02U Written and directed by Barry Purves. (Seen 12.4.2023)

The Song of Troy (1998) by Calleen McCullough. Orion Paperback 1998.

Troy (2004) directed by Wolfgang Petersen, screenplay by David Benioff.

Ransom (2009) by David Malouf. First Vintage International Edition 2011.

The Song of Achilles (2011) by Madeline Miller. Bloomsbury paperback edition 2012.

The Silence of the Girls (2018) by Pat Barker. Penguin Books edition 2019.

Troy: Fall of a City (2018) directed by Owen Harris and Mark Brozel, screenplay by David Farr, Nancy Harris, Mika Watkins and Joe Barton. Netflix and BBC One. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80175435?trackId=200257859 (Seen 2022-12.4.2023)

Photo Credit

All the photos used in this master's thesis are taken be the author during the years 2022 and 2023.

LITERATURE

Baier, Christian (2017). *Homer's Cultural Children: The Myth of Troy and European Identity*. 35-62. In History and memory, 29(2). doi:10.2979/histmemo.29.2.03

Bauer, Robin (2020). "BDSM". In *The SAGE Handbook of Global Sexualities*, p. 337-57. SAGE Publications Ltd, Los Angeles; London.

Brown, J. Byrd (2015). *Newbies Guide to Kink: A BDSM Companion*. USA.

Buckler, John & Beck, Hans (2008). *Central Greece and the Politics of Power in the Fourth Century BC*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Burgess, Jonathan S. (2001). *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore; London.

Capsuto, Steven (2000). *Alternate channels: the uncensored story of gay and lesbian images on radio and television*. Ballantine Books, New York.

Carroll, James (2008). "The Greek Foundations of the West". In *Thesis Eleven* 93, no. 1 (2008): 5-21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513607088196.

Cartmell, Deborah (2012). *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*.Malden. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, West Sussex, UK.

Cartmell, Deborah, Hunter, I. Q. & Whelehan, Imelda (2001). *Retrovision: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*. Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, London.

Castrén, Paavo (2011). *Uusi antiikin historia*. Otavan kirjapaino Oy, Keuruu.

Castrén, Paavo & Pietilä-Castrén, Leena (2000). *Antiikin käsikirja*. Edition 4. (2015). Otavan kirjapaino Oy, Keuruu.

Castrén, Paavo (2016). *Homeros: Troijan sota ja Odysseuksen harharetket*. Otavan kirjapaino Oy, Keuruu.

Castrén, Paavo (2017). *Antiikin myytit*. Otavan kirjapaino Oy, Helsinki.

Clarke, W. M. (1978). *Achilles and Patroclus in Love*. Hermes (Wiesbaden), vol. 106, no. 3, pp. 381-396.

Davidson, James (2008). *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece*. Phoenix, Orion House, London.

DiGangi, Mario (2006). "Queer Theory, Historicism, and Early Modern Sexualities". In *Criticism*, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 129-142.

Doty, Alexander (1993). *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis; London.

Doty, Alexander (2000). *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon*. Routledge, New York.

Drössler, Stefan (2015). "Restoring a forgotten silent epic". In *Helena: Der Untergang Trojas,* DVD booklet, Filmmuseum München & Goethe-Institut München.

Fantuzzi, Marco (2012): *Achilles in love: Intertextual studies*. Oxford University Press cop., Oxford.

Gilbert, Nora (2013). *Better Left Unsaid: Victorian Novels, Hays Code Films, and the Benefits of Censorship*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

Goldwyn, Adam J. ed. (2015). *The Trojan Wars and the Making of the Modern World*. Uppsala University Press, Uppsala.

González Pérez, Leticia (2014). *Classical tradition and reception studies in contemporary literature written in English. The song of Achilles by Madeline Miller*. Thesis, Universidad de Almería, Almería.

Grieveson, Lee (2004). *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-twentieth-century America*. University of California Press, Berkeley & Loss Angeles & London. https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt1pq05z.

Griffin, Jasper (1997). "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer". In *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 97: 39-53. https://doi.org/10.2307/631020.

Cutajar, Mario (1979). West Germany: Censorship and Repression in the Model State". In *The Red Menace*, Volume 3, Number 1.

Heins, Marjorie (2007). *Not in Front of the Children: 'Indecency,' Censorship, and the Innocence of Youth*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick; New Jersey; London.

Hekma, Gert (2006). "Homojen maailma vuodesta 1980 nykypäivään". In *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: homoseksuaalisuuden historia* by Robert Aldrich (edit.), Finnish translation by Veli-Pekka Ketola, Multikustannus Oy, China.

Humm, Peter; Stigant, Paul & Widdowson, Peter (2002). *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London; New York.

Hupperts, Charles (2006). "Homoseksuaalisuus Kreikassa ja Roomassa". In *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: homoseksuaalisuuden historia* by Robert Aldrich (edit.), Finnish translation by Veli-Pekka Ketola, Multikustannus Oy, China.

Hutcheon, Linda (2006). *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, New York; London.

Hutcheon, Linda, & O'Flynn, Siobhan (2013). *Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, Abingdon; New York.

Jagose, Annamarie (1996). *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press, New York.

Jouhki, J. & Pennanen, H.-R. (toim.) 2016. *Länsi: käsite, kertomus ja maailmankuva*. Hansaprint, Turenki.

Kraß, Andreas (1999*). "*Achill und Patroclus: Freundschaft und Tod in den Trojaromanen Benoîts de Sainte-Maure, Herborts von Fritzlar und Konrads von Würzburg". 66-98. In *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 1999-06, Vol.114 (2).

Krass, Andreas (2013). "Over His Dead Body: Male Friendship in Homer's Iliad and Wolfgang Petersen's Troy (2004)". In *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics*. Brill, Leiden; Boston.

Kurth, James (2003-2004). Western Civilization, Our Tradition. In *The Intercollegiate Review* - Fall 2003/Spring 2004, pp. 5-13.

Konstan, David (1997). *Friendship in the Classical World*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Korpela, Jukka (2015). *Länsimaisen yhteiskunnan juurilla*. Gaudeamus, Helsinki.

Kouneni, Lenia (2013). *The Legacy of Antiquity: New Perspectives in the Reception of the Classical World*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Laguna-Mariscal, Gabriel & Sanz-Morales, Manuel (2005). "Was the Relationship Between Ahilles and Patroclus Homoerotic? The View of Apollonius Rhodius." In *Hermes* (Wiesbaden), vol. 133, no. 1, pp. 120-123.

Lawson, Jamie & Langdridge, Darren (2020). "History, Culture and Practice of Puppy Play." In *Sexualities* 23, no. 4: 574-591. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719839914.

Leff, Leonard J. & Simmons, Jerold (1990). *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s*. Grove Weidenfeld, New York.

Leitao, David (2002). "The Legend of the Sacred Band." In *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome.* University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Lovatt, Helen & Vout, Caroline (2013). *Epic Visions: Visuality in Greek and Latin Epic and Its Reception*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Magerstädt, Sylvie (2019). *TV antiquity: Swords, sandals, blood and sand*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Martin, Breanna (2021). *Adaptation and Cultural Study of Mythology: Exploration of Riordan's Literature.* Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations. 1291.

Maurice, Lisa (2017). *Rewriting the Ancient World: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction*. Brill, Leiden & Boston.

Michelakis, Pantelis & Wyke, Maria (2013). *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Morales, Manuel Sanz & Mariscal, Gabriel Laguna (2003). "The Relationship Between Achilles and Patroclus According to Chariton of Aphrodisias". *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2003, pp. 292-295.

Mosher, Chad M., Levitt, Heidi M. & Manley, Eric (2006). "Layers of Leather: The Identity Formation of Leathermen as a Process of Transforming Meanings of Masculinity." *Journal of Homosexuality* 51, no. 3: 93-123. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n03_06.

Murrey, Simone (2012). "The Business of Adaptation: Reading the Market". In *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, West Sussex, UK.

Nash, Catherine J. & Browne, K. (2010). *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Taylor & Francis, Routledge, New York.

Ng, Eve & Li, Xiaomeng (2020). "A queer "socialist brotherhood": the Guardian web series, boys' love fandom, and the Chinese state". In *Feminist media studies* 2020, Vol.20 (4), p.479-495.

Oinonen, Paavo & Mähkä, Rami (2012). "Fiktio Kulttuurihistorian Tutkimuksen Lähteenä Ja Kohteena". In *Tulkinnan Polkuja: Kulttuurihistorian Tutkimusmenetelmiä*, Turun yliopisto, Turku.

Paglia, Camille (1997). "Homer on Film: A Voyage Through The 'Odyssey', 'Ulysses', 'Helen of Troy', and 'Contempt' (Critical Observations)". In *Arion* (Boston), vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 166-197.

Perkins, Kristin (2019). "Taking the Kissing Path: Making the Homoerotic Modern in Fixing Troilus and Cressida". In *Borrowers and Lenders* XII, no. 2.

Prosperi, Valentina (2016). "The Trojan War: Between History and Myth". 93-112. In *Splendide Mendax: Rethinking Fakes and Forgeries in Classical, Late Antique, and Early Christian Literature* by Cueva, Edmund P. & Martínez, Javier (eds.) (2016). Barkhuis Publishing.

Pöysä, Jyrki; Järviluoma, Heli & Vakimo, Sinikka (2010). *Vaeltavat Metodit*. Suomen Kansantietouden Tutkijain Seura; Tiedekirja, Joensuu; Helsinki.

Reed, Christopher (2011). *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*. Oxford University Press USA – OSO, Oxford.

Richards, Jeffrey (2008). *Hollywood's Ancient Worlds*. Continuum, London; New York.

Salmi, Hannu (1993). *Elokuva ja historia*. Painatuskeskus, Helsinki.

Saresma, Tuija, Rossi, Leena-Maija & Juvonen, Tuula (edit.) (2010). *Käsikirja Sukupuoleen*. Vastapaino, Tampere.

Seif, Ray (2017). *The Media Representation of Fictional Gay and Lesbian Characters on Television: A Qualitative Analysis of U.S. TV-series regarding Heteronormativity*. Jönköping Universaty, Master thesis. http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1111368/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Signorelli, Valentina (2018). "Adaptation as defense against film censorship: Pasolini's Salò - 120 Days of Sodom in Italy and the UK". *Where Is Adaptation? Mapping Cultures, Texts, and Contexts*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam; Philadelphia.

Sinha, Anne (2017). "The Loves of Achilles: From Epic to Popular Fiction". In *Rewriting the Ancient World: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction*. Brill, Leiden & Boston.

Smith, Sarah (2005). *Children, Cinema and Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids*. Bloomsbury Academic, London; New York.

Steakley, James D. (1999). *Cinema and Censorship in the Weimar Republic*. In *Film History* (New York, N.Y.), vol. 11, no. 2, p. 181.

Strait, Ashton (2012). "Beyond BFFs: Cozying up to queerplatonic relationships". *Post-*. Vol. 14, no. 8. Brown University. p. 3.

Stray, Christopher & Hardwick, Lorna (2008). *Companion to Classical Receptions*. Blackwell Publishing, Chichester, UK.

Surace, Francisco I. & Levitt, Heidi M. (2015). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer: Bear and Leather Subcultures*. The University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.10259-4.

Tamagne, Florence (2006). "Homoseksuaalisuuden aika 1870-1940". In *Rakkaus samaan sukupuoleen: homoseksuaalisuuden historia* by Robert Aldrich (edit.), Finnish translation by Veli-Pekka Ketola, Multikustannus Oy, China.

Treveri Gennari, Daniela (2008). *Post-war Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis, New York; Abingdon.

Underwood, Steven G. (2003). *Gay Men and Anal Eroticism: Tops, Bottoms, and Versatiles*. Harrington Park Press, New York. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203057216.

Verweij, Desiree (2007) "Comrades or Friends? On Friendship in the Armed Forces." *Journal of Military Ethics*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 280-291.

Vlassopoulos, Konstantinos. (2014). *Which comparative histories for ancient historians?* Synthesis (La Plata, Argentina), 21.

Warwick, Celsiana (2019). ″We Two Alone: Conjugal Bonds and Homoerotic Subtext in the Iliad." In *Helios (Lubbock)*, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 115-139.

Whitney, May S. (2019). *"To Test the Limits and Break Through": How Femslash Rejects Straight-Coding of Queer Experiences in Disney's Frozen*. In *Representing Kink : Fringe Sexuality and Textuality in Literature, Digital Narrative, and Popular Culture,* edited by Sara K. Howe, and Susan E. Cook, Lexington Books, 2019.

Vänskä, Annamari (2019). "'Before There Was Gucci or Gaultier, There Was Tom of Finland': On the Legacy of Tom of Finland to Fashion." *Porn Studies* (Abingdon, UK) 6, no. 4: 453-458. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2019.1580449.

Ye, Shana (2022). "Word of Honor and brand homonationalism with "Chinese characteristics": the dangai industry, queer masculinity and the "opacity" of the state". In *Feminist media studies* 2022, Vol.ahead-of-print (ahead-of-print), p.1-17.

Zheng, Lijun & Fu, Chengyao (2021). "Gender Beliefs and Internalized Homophobia Shape Sexual Self-labeling and Partner Choice in Gay and Bisexual Men in China." In *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print: 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2021.1957091.

Zipser, Richard A. (1990) "The Many Faces of Censorship in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1989: Part One: A Survey." In *The Germanic Review* 65, no. 3: 111-117. https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890.1990.9934212.

Internet sources

https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/articles/a-short-history-of-lgbt-rights-in-the-uk *A short history of LGBT rights in the UK*. (Seen 28.11.2021.)

https://www.britannica.com/place/Troy-ancient-city-Turkey *Troy: Ancient city, Turkey*. (Seen 11.12.2022)

https://www.masterclass.com/articles/hays-code-explained#what-was-the-hays-code The Hays Code Explained: History of Hollywood's Hays Code. (Seen 24.4.2022.)

https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/849 UNESCO Worl Heritage Convention. *Archaeological Site of Troy*. (Seen 11.12.2022)

https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/western-countries (Seen 29.3.2022)

https://barrypurves.com/achilles/ Barry JC Purves. *Animator, Director, Writer* (Seen 14.4.2023)

https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/jan/27/troy-fall-of-city-west-against-east-lovers-siege-homer-bbc-netfllix Hughes, Sarah (2018). "Enter the wooden horse. But this time the Trojans tell their side of fall of Troy". *The Guardian.* (Seen 12.4.2023)

https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/aug/28/bradpitt.troy von Tunzelmann, Alex (2008). "No gods or gay men but a whole lot of llamas". *The Guardian*. (Seen 25.4.2023)

https://www.pastemagazine.com/comedy/drag/cross-dressing-at-the-crossroads-a-brief-history-o Pasternack, Dan (2017). "Cross-Dressing at the Crossroads: A Brief History of Drag in Comedy". In *Paste Magazine*. (Seen 25.4.2023)

https://neoskosmos.com/en/2010/11/10/news/greece/david-malouf-ransom-wins-john-d-ctiticos-prize/ "Australian writer wins major Hellenic literary prize". In *Neoskosmos* (2010). (Seen 27.5.2023)

https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/william-trevor-makes-an-impac-1.569880 Battersby, Eileen (2011). "William Trevor makes an Impac". In *The Irish Time*. (Seen 27.5.2023)

https://www.lgbtqia.wiki/wiki/Achillean *Achillean*. (Seen 12.4.2023).