

Historical Truth in Laura Riding's *A Trojan Ending*

The recent translation of Christa Wolf's memorable novel *Cassandra* has claimed quite a bit of academic attention. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the reprinting of *A Trojan Ending*, Laura Riding's equally provocative novel of the Trojan War. This instance is just one example of the general neglect Riding has received as a writer of fiction. Although Riding's work both as a poet and as an essayist has been noted, she also deserves to be recognized for a large body of interesting fiction written during this period: *14A* (with George Ellidge; 1934), *Progress of Stories* (1935), *Convalescent Conversations* (1936), *A Trojan Ending* (1937), and *Lives of Wives* (1939). The revised edition of *Progress of Stories* (1982) includes some stories taken from other earlier volumes (which contained mostly essays). A delightful, complete novel *Description of Life* from the Majorcan period was issued in 1980, and *A Trojan Ending* was republished with a new afterward in 1984.

Those readers who have first come to Laura Riding's fiction through *Progress of Stories* will note a great stylistic difference in *A Trojan Ending*. This historical novel looks deceptively simple compared to such obviously difficult stories as "A Last Lesson in Geography" in the earlier volume, but an elaborate system of digressions, flashbacks, and flashforwards makes parts of the novel a challenge. Perhaps for this reason, there are no essay-length studies of *A Trojan Ending*. Barbara Adams understandably does not discuss the novel at all in her book on Riding, and Joyce Piell Wexler is unsympathetic in her brief comments on it. For Wexler, the characters "lack historical or dramatic validity and merely express varying degrees of moral virtue" (107-08).

I would like to offer a study which opens up to further discussion the issue of the historical and dramatic validity of the characters—one which gives more credit to Riding's accomplishments. *A Trojan Ending* is a provocative reflection on the historicity of the Trojan War, as we shall see by examining its plot in relation to Homer and the epic tradition, its use of the characters Dictys of Crete and Dares of Phrygia, and the philosophical commentary found in the novel and its accompanying Preface and Afterword. We will also look at the novel with respect to the boundary between the modernist and postmodernist historical novel.

A Trojan Ending is divided into six chapters of approximately seventy pages each; the novel is best read at six sittings, one for each chapter. The first three chapters take place during a day in autumn after nine years of the Trojan War have transpired. These chapters, "From the Scaean Tower," "In Helen's Chamber," and "The Truce," parallel some of the events in *The Iliad* on the day of fighting described in Books 3-7. Riding gives her own account of the "View from the Walls," or "Teichoskopia" (2-52), and the single combat between Paris and Menelaus (45-52) from Book 3. Paris's encounter with Helen (61-107) and Agamemnon's "Review of the Army," or

"Epipoleis," and the ensuing battle (107-32) are derived from Book 4. Riding includes a poignant meeting of Troilus and Cressida in the first chapter (52-58), and she does not allow Diomedes to kill Pandarus in the second. In *A Trojan Ending*, after a night council in Troy in Chapter 3 (135-56), Cressida goes with other members of the truce delegation to the Greek camp, where she meets Diomedes and has two private conversations with him.

The second half of the novel allows for more time to go by between a few days of concentrated action. In Chapter 4, "Winter," time passes to winter, and during this period Philoctetes and Neoptolemus come to assist the Greeks. The Trojan allies Medon and Othryoneus, Cassandra's suitor, are among the many killed (205-19). Andromache and Hecuba both die. In a long scene in Helen's chamber, Cressida decides to leave Troy, provoking outbursts of anger from Troilus (214-75). During another seasonal change at the beginning of Chapter 5, "Spring," Patroclus has died in battle. Before Achilles kills Hector (334-54) and before we witness the funeral rites for Patroclus and the subsequent games (344-50), we hear of the suicide of Laodice and the murder of Paolmedes by Odysseus in the Greek camp (287-334). The chapter closes with two sets of slayings—first, Achilles, Thersites, Penthesilea, and Antilochus, (350-55) and then Greater (Telemonian) Ajax, Clymene, and Tecmessa (355-57). Thus, Books 22 (death of Hector) and 23 (funeral rites and games) become, along with Books 3 - 7, those most used intertextually. The murder of Achilles by the Amazon Queen while Priam has come to the Greek camp for his son Hector comes as a great surprise and is the climax of the novel. [1]

The sixth, and final chapter, "Peace" is by far the hardest to summarize, for here the digressions, flashbacks, and flashforwards blend in more complex ways than before. [2] The first half of the chapter describes the fall of Troy with particular attention to the official oath of peace, Lesser (Locrian) Ajax's rape of Cassandra, and an attempt by the Greek leaders to butcher Paris, Troilus, and Pandarus at home (361-88). The later part of the chapter tells what happens when Odysseus comes back to Troy at night to steal the statue of Athena from Palladium. We learn the fates of many characters, including the deaths of Troilus and Paris and the escape of Pandarus. This section features a summary of the Returns of the Greek Heroes as well as of the Trojan Wanderings of the Diaspora. The foundings of London and Rome (389-432) are described. Although Cressida escapes with Diomedes and Helen, we do not discover her ultimate fate. Indeed, the stories of Troilus and Cressida and of Paris and Helen are only fleetingly presented in the second half of the novel.

In Riding's story of the Fall of Troy, the reader will be struck by far too many diversions from Homer of plot and characterization to summarize here. A few examples will suffice. The gods are worshipped, but we do not see them take part in the affairs of humans. Several gods and goddesses, particularly Apollo and Cybele, have ideological dimensions. Some of the characters reflect in an apparently anachronistic way on the nature of religion and myth (228-42). Troy is presented more sympathetically than Greece for the most part, and Odysseus is made particularly

repulsive. Priam, Paris and Helen are all basically sympathetic characters. Certain causalities are added: for example, Hector's ensuing blindness is one reason for his weakness when he fights Achilles. In short, in many ways, *A Trojan Ending* can be placed alongside of perhaps more famous works, such as Jean Giraudoux's play *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* (1935), as a revisioning of the story of the Trojan War. However, in addition to seeking the relevance of the Trojan War to the Twentieth Century, Riding also asks us to seriously consider the issue of historical truth with respect to the War.

Two characters, Dictys and Dares, only the latter of whom is mentioned briefly by Homer, introduce us to the theme of the reception of the *Iliad* as a source of historical knowledge. A good summary of post-Homeric versions of the story of the Trojan War from later antiquity to the Middle Ages can be found in the chapter "Homer Romanticized" from Howard Clarke's *Homer's Readers*. Here he describes the enormous popularity of the accounts of "Dictys Cretensis" and "Dares Phrygius" during the Middle Ages, when the *Iliad* was lost to Western readers. It was not until 1354 that Petrarch acquired a manuscript of the two Homeric epics from Nicholas Sigeros, and not until 1611, with George Chapman's *Homer*, that the two epics "appeared from a single hand in a modern European language" (56-57). Thus for many centuries the inartistic, relatively short Latin chronicles of Dictys and Dares were taken as true reports on the War. Later, Benoit de Sainte-Maure's long *Roman de Troie* in French verse (over 30,000 rhymed octosyllabic couplets) from circa 1160 and Guido dell Colonne's Latin prose paraphrase of 1277 (one-third the length of the *Roman*) were also considered the truth about Troy.

Clarke writes that it was not the accounts or even the information provided by such popular Latin authors as Virgil, Ovid, Statius, and Hyginus that determined the received story of Troy, but the prose narratives of "Dictys the Cretan," who claims to have accompanied the Cretan leader Idomeneus to Troy to fight for the Greeks, and to "Dares the Phrygian," who came from Troy's allies to the east of the city. Dictys supposedly wrote his account in Phoenician. According to Clarke:

He asked on his deathbed that his work be buried with him in a tin box, and so it was, coming to light only after an earthquake laid open his tomb in A.D. 66. The Roman emperor acquired the book and had it translated into Latin by one Lucius Septimus, who added a letter to some of the manuscripts explaining his role in producing Dictys' work. A similar letter prefaces Dares' work in which his Latin translator, a minor writer named Cornelius Nepos (a contemporary of Caesar and Cicero), explains that he found the book while studying in Athens and made a literal

translation which he entitled *De Excidio Troiae Historia, A History of the Destruction of Troy* (240).

“Dictys” and “Dares” were translated into almost all the European languages. As chroniclers of the Trojan War, they were not definitely proven to be fakes until the Eighteenth Century (14). Clarke, working from R.M. Frazer’s comments in his English translation of Dictys and Dares, speculates that the works of both authors are free Latin translations of first-century-A.D. Greek originals, the former of which was translated into Latin in the Fourth Century, and the latter in the Sixth Century.

The account of Dictys (Frazer 11-130) is about three times as long as that of Dares (Frazer 133-68). Both attempt to tell the events of the Trojan War from beginning to end, and extend their histories to before and after the brief period (about 46 days, according to Cedric Whitman) described in the *Iliad*. In this sense, they intersect the lost epics of the Homeric period such as the *Cypria*, *Aithiopsis*, *Little Iliad*, *Sack of Ilium*, *Returns*, and *Telegony*, although they sometimes contradict this material. There is also some overlap with the sixth-century Common Era Greek poem by Quintus of Smyrna, *The War of Troy*, which continues the *Iliad* after the death of Hector. However, unlike Dictys and Dares, Quintus retains in his account the divinities who interfere in human affairs.

Despite the fact that Riding includes Dictys and Dares as characters, she does not make her narration of the Trojan War follow their accounts very closely. For example, Dictys’ pro-Greek narrative introduces the story of Polyxena, Priam’s daughter, with whom Achilles falls in love when he goes to Troy during a truce. In contrast, Riding follows Dictys only to a point where Polyxena can become a significant minor character. Riding’s Achilles meets Polyxena when she comes to the Greek camp after Andromache is accidentally run over by Achilles’ horses. Sometimes Dictys contradicts Homer, such as when he has Achilles go back to the Greek camp by visiting Troy rather than immediately return to fighting. In Dictys’ work, Paris stabs Achilles, Philoctetes kills Paris, and Greater Ajax commits suicide only when he does not succeed in gaining the Palladium statue.

Riding creates different fates for these characters, but she does echo Dictys in her very low opinion of Odysseus. Riding does pick up on the pro-Trojan slant of the shorter work by Dares. She, like Dares, mentions how Hercules had abducted Hesione, Priam’s sister, from Troy and given her to Telamon. Thus we are introduced to an event which parallels the abduction of Helen by Paris while Menelaus is away in Crete. Of course, no exchange of women ever takes place. Unlike Dictys, who devotes many lines to the returns of the Greeks, Dares end his account rather suddenly. Since he claims to have stayed on in Troy, perhaps he did not have access to the other materials. Dares, like Dictys, de-dramatizes and demystifies the episode of the Trojan Horse. Riding follows suit; all include unheroic negotiations and conspiracies in their accounts of Troy’s final days.

The love of Achilles for Polyxena in the works of Dictys and Dares had a great subsequent importance, according to Clarke:

The crowning irony of their works is that in claiming to write the story of the Trojan War, free of poetic adornments, they also provided all the material for the romance of Troy. In reducing Achilles' heroic stature they made him a romantic hero who chose, if only temporarily, love over honor. This provides a new and influential orientation for the Troy story. Homer offered the initial impulse with the romance of Paris and Helen. Dictys creates the romance of Achilles and Polyxena; Dares follows him and also adds the makings of the romance of Jason and Medea by connecting the voyage of the Argonauts with the beginnings of the Trojan War. (31-32)

The next step in the romanticization of epic-history comes when Benoit de Sainte-Maure and his successors begin to develop the Troilus and Cressida story. Riding, like Sainte-Maure, keeps Troilus and Cressida as only a part of the story of the Fall of Troy. She does not follow in the footsteps of Boccaccio and Chaucer in making their romantic relationship the focal point of the plot. The general trend of these works is to stress Cressida's infidelity. *A Trojan Ending* rehabilitates Cressida in her dealings with Calchas, Troilus, and Diomedes.

The several appearances of Dictys (199, 215, 228, 364, 407) and Dares (26, 215, 363, 389, 406, 414) help to make the strong presence of Cressida more credible. Whereas by profession the Cretan is a scribe, the Phrygian is a priest of Hephaestus. The reader is shocked at the end of the novel when he learns that Odysseus has set fire to Dictys' manuscripts in order to enhance his own reputation:

Odysseus knew: what if, when the Greeks plundered Troy, they should fall into the hands of someone like Diomedes and be used at Argos for the basis of a cycle of song? Diomedes was hostile to him and would certainly not go out of his way to explain to the minstrels that the scant mention of Ithacan Odysseus was due to his being a man of subtleties not easily apparent in the crude courses of battle. And the meticulous records of Cretan Dictys would have told too much: this was why he had been obliged to contrive their destruction. (364)

By including the characters Dictys and Dares, Riding indicates that our knowledge of the Trojan War as an historical reality come to us through biases and distortions. There is a politics of power and censorship behind the received accounts. Agamemnon

quarreled with Idomeneus in trying to gain control of the only Greek records. Presumably, writing had not yet traveled up from Phoenicia, through Crete, and on to the Greek mainland at that time. In *A Trojan Ending* Idomeneus begs Dictys to start his account over again, but he declares, "In Crete, perhaps, when I am an old man, to write it down in faulty memory—and let them bury it with me, in the same grave, and so I shall tell it to the dead, to whom dim recollection of life is truth enough" (364).

Ulysses murders Dares while Diomedes, Brutus, and Helen walk ahead and do not notice the murder until it is over. The narrator remarks:

Dares was left lying on the Plain, to witness the close that his hand would never add to the Trojan records of the War. And better so; for had he lived and accompanied Odysseus on his voyage home, finally reaching Ithaca, the falsities that Odysseus told would have had a Trojan signature. (415)

The Latin account of Dictys already indicates that he used Ulysses as a source (Frazer 24), and so this version is biased in a direction that is at odds with Riding. In trying to understand what Riding is doing with the characters of the two chroniclers, it is essential to look at the 1937 Preface in which she foregrounds issues of historical accountability:

What is the mysterious difference between ourselves and those long dead—a difference that makes us feel as if we were defying a solemn law of propriety when we try to discern what people they were, how they once lived? Matter-of-fact historical research is innocent enough. The arrangement of past events in a logical sequence gives us no sense of trafficking with ghostly strangers; we are merely strengthening our own already vivid conviction of the difference between now and then, or then, or then. We know about the past, but it is the present which we believe. We are prepared to read stories of the past, but not to meet with people of the past. The difference is too great, too horrible: they are dead, we are alive. What is the difference? Did they not walk the same earth, speak languages which are contained in ours? Why does our consciousness not contain their lives along with our own? When an age passes, is nothing left besides its story and its tombs? (xiii-xiv)

Riding is seeking to discover a common humanity in the people caught up in the Trojan War, and fiction is able to achieve this empathy more successfully than straight historical research, which for her is "innocent" of concentrated emotional projection

and re-creation.

Riding champions poetry (imaginative literature) over history not because it seeks out the universals of human experience rather than the particular, but because history's specific "memory-pattern of fact" can conceal the "pattern of truth":

An irresistible instinct of sympathy has moved me to write this story, a sense of long-distance understanding that may perhaps seem premature when compared with the state of our archaeological understanding, but that, by other measures, may seem well-timed. It is, by these other measures, already a late enough date for the resurrection of the experience of Troy in a living form. Scholars are characteristically cautious of conclusions, and rightly so, since their responsibility is to indicate the memory-pattern of fact. A poet's responsibility—not liberty—is to indicate a pattern of truth. This requires boldness rather than caution; I am aware that I have risked not merely grave errors of fact, but the grave errors of truth as well. (xii-xiii)

The boldness required for her effort leads Riding to present the Trojan War as "the world of its age" (xiii). There is a "world-quality" to the Trojan story, and this has influenced the striking characteristics of Riding's novel—the inclusion of "so many characters, and the especial tale of each, even to the ancestral degree; and so many places and tales of places" (xiii). Although she knows that the story of Troy has been told again and again, she believes that these previous efforts have not had the "persistent intention of wholeness or geographical explicitness" which she brings to *A Trojan Ending* (xiii). Some readers may find that the novel lies buried under a pile of personal and place names, but it is hard to imagine how Riding could have approached her material other than the way she did, given her commendable desire to use Troy to evoke a geographical nexus.

The poet has a responsibility to be truthful about the Trojan War so that people of the Twentieth Century can avoid making past mistakes:

The mysterious difference between us and them is only that we cannot, must not suffer what they suffered. We may repeat the pleasures of the past, but to relive its miseries would make our lives wasteful and ghastly. We are not without miseries, and perhaps they are in many respects crueller than those which the dead have in their times suffered; but the miseries which we suffer must be our own—or we could not endure them. (xiv)

Riding points out that some of the miseries of the Great European War were unthinkable to the people in the Trojan War. Conversely, some of the horrors the Trojans faced are unimaginable for us. Although she does not mention the Spanish Civil War here, I think we are meant to compare it with the Trojan War as well.

An interesting but highly debatable argument is added to the previous, less controversial statements. Here Riding goes out on a limb:

Behind them (the people of the Trojan War) in time I see only obscurities and stubbornness—those who would not live. They, I think, of that time, were the first to dare to live—to live in the long sense of the word. But after them came dimness again.... To me it is almost as if, after the so-called legendary period of history within which the Trojan War falls, people lived theories of life, rather than life: the whole historical past was an experimental series in which one theoretical present succeeded another theoretical present. (xvi)

Thus there is a certain innate attraction between our time and that of the Trojan War because our age is “a final age of time” (xvii). Obviously, there is no way of proving or disproving this intuition. With this conviction, Riding is able to bypass some hesitations she may have otherwise had about tackling *A Trojan Ending*. She writes:

I consider the historical novel, as a literary form, a ghoulish, at least a somewhat parasitic performance: it is only by telling what we are that we can show grace and wisdom and sincerity. Yet I was apparently, and with no sense of shame or horror, writing a historical novel. (xvii)

This historical novel has the peculiar title of *A Trojan Ending* because it completes the story of Cressida and Troy.

Without stating it explicitly, Riding anticipates charges of historical anachronism. If the characters talk in a way that may seem unlikely to us, such as in the conversation among Cassandra, Pandarus, and Paris about religion, we should not simply dismiss Riding as projecting herself onto the past. She maintains that the Trojans are reaching out across time to us with their courage to live in spite of miseries and uncertainties.

Riding writes as though there actually was a Cressida, and she claims that Shakespeare gives us not the real Cressida but the “universal flirt of the Elizabethan stage” (xviii-ix) [3]. In other words, Shakespeare projects the characteristics of women of his own time onto Cressida and does not listen to the voices from the past. This is what Riding is willing to do personally and is capable of doing historically.

Riding was prompted to write the novel by her musing over the figure of Cressida, who, of course, is presented to us in the *Iliad* as an absent character:

But is Cressida so important? She is. There is no story so unfinished as hers, and what is unfinished must be finished. It is this that makes legends: when stories are left unfinished because the life in them was not finished. Something in the world-life that the Trojan War represented escaped mortal death; it went into suspension into legends. Looking back, in search of a familiar past, I came to Cressida, and to Troy. And at first I found myself among legends of people, legends of places; then, by my pleasure in being in a past, that was not dead, but an early courage of this life of now, the legends stood alive as people, as places. The story, the stories, began to move toward the ending that had been impossible then because the time was too early. (xix) [4]

Only in our own day can we complete Troy's story because we are back once more to an age in which "so much courage survives so much fear", after the "long spelling out of fear which marks historical time between the Trojan War and ourselves" (xix). [5]

Riding insists that we must avoid the mistake that Lord Raglan makes in his book *The Hero* (1936). He wants us to replace the legends of the Trojan War with scientific ignorance. She responds in what is probably the key passage of her essay:

Shall we say that the now astronomical heavens were mythical before they came to be understood astronomically—that, in those respects in which we do not precisely understand the nature of our heavenly envelope, our ignorance of it is equivalent to a denial of its reality? The reality of things does not depend on our accurate knowledge of them. The truth of the Trojan legends is to be measured by the insistence of their claim to our attention, regardless of our lack of compatible historical details. Where the insistence is strong enough, the compatible details inevitably appear.... (xx)

One of the dangers of trying to understand the Trojan War through Raglan's approach comes from confusions about the nature of causality in history. Riding points out that the Trojan War cannot be dismissed as a legend because we may not find it credible that the abduction of Helen caused a major war. [6] Nevertheless, if we look at newspapers from 1914, we will see that the assassination of Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo "caused" World War I. Here the *Iliad* parallels a newspaper

report in its presentation of a causality (xxii). To disallow the existence of the Trojan War means ultimately to refuse to believe in the Trojans of that time at all (xxviii).

Most historians today probably would not agree with Riding's conclusion that they must bracket out the present in examining the past:

The problem of determining the true story of Troy is not one for the scholar at all. It is a poet's problem, requiring a delicate balance between a sense of the past and a sense of the present—since a story of past events must include the present from which they are viewed. A scholar cannot allow himself this elasticity: he must avail himself only of his sense of the past (xxvi).

No doubt many historians see their written works as “including the present” more than Riding does, but even so, we may still conclude that poets have more imaginative “elasticity” than academic historians.

Unfortunately, instead of trying to substantiate this argument, Riding retracts some of her claims:

Can it be that we have all been wasting our time on things that never happened? Yet, if nothing happened in that transitional period between pre-history and history, then something like what has been calculated and imagined ought to have happened. History governs history: but this is a rule that works backwards as well as forwards. We cannot do without our Trojan chronicle because we cannot do without an intelligent beginning of things. (xxvii)

In short, Riding believes that in the Twentieth Century we require “conviction of our lateness in time” (411). We must not have the arrogance to believe that we are the first ones really to live.

The idea of the importance of the Homeric legends for our own concerns is elaborated again in direct authorial commentary at the end of the novel (406-14). Six centuries after the Trojan War, men such as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes offered people only “gloomy cheer” through their philosophical systems, and people became “infants to their own history” (409). According to Riding:

The story of Troy, now dispersed in mocking legend, was the first tight knot that history made in time. After Troy the rope of time tangled, but during all the long coils of ages, when men grew old without reaching last maturity, never was a true knot made again.

Yet perhaps, in this last of ages, the second knot will be tied, and the last. By which we too shall have a Trojan ending — leaving off once more in the middle, having attained possession of life as they attained recognition of it. (409-10)

A “faith of heartlessness, later to be called Science” (413) separates the first knot from the second. Nevertheless, at times a person escaped from this prison, as did Sappho, who declared the “dirges over Troy ended” and “raised a poetry of joy, leaving the reasons of joy to be found in other times but silencing the reasons of grief” (413).

The domination of a male culture plays a large part in this centuries-long failure to cope with the vast range of human experience. Troy’s acceptance of the feminine in human existence is symbolized by Cybele and the women characters:

Of the gods who moved in the War of Troy, which has not long been nameless, momentary air, mere chance of improvising breath? Except perhaps, Cybele, who was, rather than a god, all women infinitely; and Artemis, the high crescent sign of desolation, token that life was yet scarcely visible, knowable, in that women were yet scarcely seen, known. But the seeing and knowing of women had somewhat begun, as we have learned. Cressida was almost in her time what a woman may be in ours. Helen was as strange as women have indeed always seemed to men, whose nature it is to doubt what they most familiarly affirm. (410)

Riding feels that “we are accustomed to think of ancient women as yet more oddly of the past than ancient men” (411). Andromache represents the “credible women of her time.” She was “one who simplified its joys and distresses in a wife’s taut consciousness of her husband” (411-12).

Riding’s Andromache dies by failing to avoid Achilles’s horses, who run her down. She had come to Achilles to beg him to engage the partially blinded Hector in battle. She does not live on, as is typical of the legends. In Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, for example, she witnesses the death of Astyanax. In *A Trojan Ending* Astyanax (Scamandrius) survives instead of his mother. Thus the legacy of Troy continued, and it can still be felt today. It is symbolized by the fact that it was “Brutus the great-grandson of Scamandrius, Hector’s son, who sailed from Epirus, not Brutus the great-grandson of Aeneas” (419). Riding is clearly on the side of this “Trojan Brutus” rather than the “Latin Brutus,” who is part of the story of Aeneas and Latium. Riding does not connect Troy to London (New Troy) for the sake of nationalistic propaganda. She uses legend to provide a symbol of the link between our age and the Trojan War age,

as two times in which life was really lived.

What did Troy represent? What was preserved by Trojan Brutus? A partial answer is given early in the novel when Riding characterizes the various Trojans who have met on the Scaean tower (5-12). Cybele, Athena, and Apollo all come to incarnate ideological positions. Riding is clearly on the side of the Cybelean faction of Hicetaon rather than the Apollonian faction of Thymoetes. She writes, the "Cybelean idea had come to represent the women, the peasants, the working classes and the old aristocracy—a curious combination. The Sun people, who liked to be considered progressive, were the dull, vulgarly alert ones" (11). The cult of Cybele "was a thoroughly Trojan institution, while the Sun Cult was distinctly Greek in tone" (6). Athena is made into a goddess closer to Cybele: although Trojans worshipped Athena, she was "cultivated there as a spirit of domestic prudence and good sense, and in such a way that her other aspects—as a warrior goddess and a Greek civic idol were lost sight of" (7). Apollo appears to represent the spirit of overconceptualization and the deadening of life denounced in the closing pages of the novel.

In the 1984 Afterword, Laura (Riding) Jackson reaffirms the message of *A Trojan Ending*, using the vocabulary of her later years. She writes:

This science of life-mistrustful enlightenment kills off the available specimens of past human life for anatomical study: they are known as the dead they are, not the living they were. They are condescended to from the complex complacency of twentieth-century humanism: every man his own individual definer of what he is—and every woman in extension of the principal to a spurious womanly sense of injured vanity. (438)

Riding highlights here our need to discover the common humanity of the people lost in the passages of history.

Riding's attempt to bring the world of the Trojan War to our contemporaries without the type of historical evidence that Lord Ragland desired reflects the dividing line between modernism and post-modernism in fiction. Brian McHale, in his excellent book *Postmodernist Fiction*, suggests that a passing over from an epistemological dominant to an ontological one is characteristic of the change from modernist to postmodernist fiction. He uses as an example of a boundary work Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, published a year before *A Trojan Ending*.

So Faulkner in *Absalom, Absalom!* practices a poetics of the epistemological dominant—modernist poetics, in other words. Except perhaps in one chapter where modernist poetics threatens to break down, or more than threatens, actually does break down. In Ch. 8, Quentin and Shreve reach the limit of their knowledge of the Sutpen

murder-mystery; nevertheless they go on, beyond reconstruction into pure speculation. The signs of the narrative fall away, and with them all questions of authority and reliability.... The murder-mystery is "solved," however, not through epistemological processes of weighing evidence and making deductions, but through the imaginative process of what could and, the text insists, must have happened (10).

As McHale notes, one of the strengths of his system is that it describes the "dynamics of the change by which one system emerges from and supplants the other" (11). He claims that in postmodernist texts, "epistemology is *backgrounded*, as the price for foregrounding ontology" (11). Here he uses successfully the Russian formalist idea of the transformation of genres developed by Yuri Tynianov (6).

Is Riding telling us what must have happened in the same way that Faulkner attempts to do with his characters, Quentin and Shreve? I think so, especially if we consider the Preface as part of the text of the novel. Riding's recreation of the Trojan War feels right to her and to the sympathetic reader, but as she indicates, she cannot prove that she has not made errors of fact and of truth. However, like Quentin and Shreve, she has accepted the risk of seeking truth through imaginative recreation.

McHale talks specifically of the difference between the modernist and postmodernist historical novel. He describes three criteria for the modernist historical novel, all of which are interesting with respect to *A Trojan Ending*. First of all, historical figures in the modernist historical novel may not behave in ways that "contradict the 'official' record" (87-88). In other words, the author's freedom to improvise actions and properties of historical figures is limited to the 'dark areas' of history" (86). For example, although history does not record that Queen Caroline ever interviewed a Scottish girl named Jeanie Deans, it doesn't rule out such an encounter (87). Second, the modernist historical novel has constraints against anachronism, in spite of the fact that these are often difficult to uphold. Although it is relatively easy to describe the material culture of the past, to reimagine the "thought-styles" of the time is much more difficult (88). Third, modernist historical fiction avoids the supernatural and sticks to realism.

Defending postmodernist historical fiction, which is willing to forget all of these time-honored conventions, McHale admits that many critics are not at all as comfortable as he is with such fiction.

From [these critics'] point of view, history is the record of real human action and suffering, and is not to be tampered with lightly; inventing apocryphal or fantastic or deliberately anachronistic versions of history is a betrayal of that record. This would be unassailably true, if only we could be sure that the historical record reliably captured the experi-

ence of the human beings who really suffered and enacted history. But that is the last thing we can be sure of, and one of the thrusts of postmodernist revisionist history is to call into question the reliability of official history. The postmodernists fictionalize history, but by doing so they imply that history itself may be a form of fiction. (96)

When we look at *A Trojan Ending* with the postmodernist evasion of the modernist constraints on historical fiction in mind, we are immediately struck with one problem. Should we consider the *Iliad* as the official record of what happened in the Trojan War or as a distortion of a truth that we do not really have? If the *Iliad* tells us what happened, then *A Trojan Ending* is postmodernist; if the *Iliad* distorts what happened, *A Trojan Ending* is modernist.

If we look at *A Trojan Ending* from a postmodernist viewpoint, we can see it as foregrounding a revisionist's view of history. The funeral games provide perhaps the best example here. Homer has his own account of the scene in which Menelaus accuses Nestor's son Antilochus of cheating, and Riding has her version. Both can't be correct. Homer is shown to be wrong.

Second, in terms of cultural anachronism, we find the characters discussing the nature of myth in a self-reflexive way characteristic not of Homer but of later time periods. This practice enables the readers to accept as credible the ideological implications given by Riding to the various cults, even though they have little to do with Homer. [7]

Third, since the original historical source involved the supernatural to begin with, Riding's version, in which there are no events unaccountable by realism, again appears to be strikingly revisionist. To continue to have Zeus quarrel with Hera or go off to a banquet with the Ethiopians would allow us to passively slip into mystifying ways of thinking about the War.

On the other hand, if we do not accept the *Iliad* as an historical record but consider the Trojan War as an event about which we know little, then *A Trojan Ending* seems to be more modernist than postmodernist. From this point of view, Homer is no authority for what a prototype of Menelaus might possibly have said to a prototype of Antilochus. The Trojan War is part of the dark area of history that Scott, for example, filled up with the story of Jeanie Deans and her interview with Queen Caroline, and the modernist ethos is preserved. Second, the attempt of Riding to find a common humanity with the people of the Trojan War may not be anachronistic. Maybe it was really Homer, not Riding, who missed out on the reality of the religious discussions of the time. Third, sticking to realism is not revisionary but traditional. The fact that Riding's Paris is not spirited off by Aphrodite before Menelaus can kill him in combat can be seen as an example of an intelligent decision on Riding's part to avoid the supernatural and try to figure out the reality of people's sufferings and joys in the past.

I do not think that labelling works of twentieth-century literature as premodernist, modernist, or postmodernist is the most important aspect of literary analysis. For me, this type of categorization has been overdone. However, it does repay readers to think about literature in terms of the questions raised in this debate, especially when we are dealing with a novel as successful and provocative as *Riding's*. Unlike many twentieth-century reworkings of classical themes, *A Trojan Ending* is a serious investigation of the Trojan War, not just a fantasia on a theme by Homer.

Notes

1. By changing some of the main events after Patroclus's death, *Riding* has moved away from some of the more popular views of the moral sense of the *Iliad*. For example, C.M. Bowra in his influential *Tradition and Design in the "Iliad"* claims a moral superiority for the Greeks because of Paris's abduction of Helen. Kenneth John Atchity feels that Achilles, in accepting Priam's request, is the character who reaches out to all humanity, and his shield is one indication of this quality.

2. For a good essay on Homer's digressions, see Austin (1978).

3. For a survey of the many versions of the Troilus and Cressida story in English see Rollins (1972).

4. For various other responses of women to the *Iliad*, see the noteworthy essays of Simone Weil and Rachel Baspaloff from the early 1940's, and also Mary Lefkowitz's recent reevaluation of women in Greek myths (1986).

5. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1983) remarks that several scholars have noted a far greater feeling of "the helplessness of mortals in the face of the difficulties of life" occurring after the epic period of Greek literature.

6. *Riding* praises the historical researches of Walter Leaf and quotes from his *Homer and History* (1915). Leaf had previously worked in collaboration on a translation of the *Iliad* into English, published an edition of the epic, and written a handbook for its readers.

7. See Bruno Snell for his famous evaluation of the contrast between Homer and Heraclitus on the idea of the soul.

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