

Romanticised History of the War of Troy

A NOVEL FREELY BASED ON HOMER'S ILIAD

Dionigi Cristian Lentini



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http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=57158226

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ISBN 9788835404323

Аннотация

The fascinating historical-mythological epic, with its enormous weight of pain and death, but over all the splendid timeless scenes of the Trojan War. The fascinating historical-mythological epic, with its enormous weight of pain and death, starts with a simple love triangle whose sides are: Elena, "femme fatale" ante litteram of the Homeric legend; Paris, hero in possession of a classic virile charm; Menelaus, pale ruler of Sparta, overwhelmed by the continuous confrontation with his valiant brother Agamemnon. The meeting between these characters creates a destiny that is filled with pathos: Paris, son of King Priam and who is madly in love with Helen, escapes with her; Menelaus, former husband of Helen, is blinded by jealousy and lust for revenge, will declare war on Troy, beginning a ruinous tragedy that will last ten years. Around this central nucleus, infinite events come to life that are linked by invisible Fate, now tangling now dissolving: unfathomable and mysterious, the true *deus ex machina* of Greek mythology, Fate exceeds, with its absolute determinism, even the

will of the gods. In this fictionalized version of the Trojan epic, the author seems to already know that readers will remain, in spite of themselves, ensnared by the plot and that, like children placed in front of a fairy tale, at the end of each chapter they will ask with irrepressible curiosity: "And then ?".

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Romanticised History

of the War of Troy

*To my father for having transmitted his love of
classical mythology to me*

**ROMANTICISED HISTORY
OF THE WAR OF TROY**

By Dionigi Cristian Lentini

A fictionalized history of the Trojan War

This novel was based freely on Homer's Iliad

ENGLISH VERSION TRANSLATED BY

ROSEMARY DAWN ALLISON

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PREFACE

In a book published two years ago, entitled *Triangoli diabolici indagine su un archetipo del male (Diabolic triangles Investigation of an archetype of evil)*, among others, is written:

“Jealousy is an omnipresent sentiment. Moreover, it is one of the main declinations of the human soul, which has been found since the dawn of time and is substantially detached from historical and social conditions. It is of no coincidence that classical mythology represented and typed it”¹.

And the concept is better defined further on:

“In the myth, jealousy is the midwife of tragedy and of blood”².

Here we take this feeling for granted, always susceptible to alarming deviations, it represents the other face of love: both one and the other state of the soul, preeminently they move human actions and, within the myth, even the Gods themselves.

The war of Troy, with its enormous burden of pain and death, begins right from a love triangle whose sides are: Helen, "femme fatale" *ante litteram* of the Homeric legend; Paris, hero with a classic virile charm; Menelaus, pale ruler of Sparta,

¹ Musci, A. – Minicangeli, M. 2006. *Triangoli diabolici. From Rina Fort to Circe della Versilia. Investigation of an archetype of evil*, Rome, Alternative Press.

² Ibidem

overwhelmed by the continuous confrontation with his valiant brother Agamemnon.

The meeting between these characters activates a destiny that is filled with *pathos*: Paris, son of King Priam is madly in love with Helen, and runs away with her; Menelaus, Helen's former husband, blinded by jealousy and lust for revenge, declares war on Troy, beginning a ruinous tragedy that will last ten years.

Around this central nucleus, infinite events are linked to each other by the invisible Fate who comes to life, now tangling now dissolving: unfathomable and mysterious, a true *deus ex machina* of Greek mythology, Fate exceeds, with its absolute determinism, even the will of the gods.

Like the Iliad, to which Cristian's writing refers, as with all the myths of antiquity, far from simply proposing an invented story, he has fulfilled the same function that today is assumed by psychoanalysis. Dense with symbolism, in fact, the myth dug deep into the human soul triggering them to become aware of their hidden drives and freeing them from the slavery of the unknown.

The love triangle therefore comprises the underlying dynamic – he-she-the other – on which infinite variations are implanted, according to a space-time scenario that never repeats itself in its fundamental instances. And this happens as much in real life as in artistic re-enactments, especially in theater, cinema and literature.

The story of Helen, Paris and Menelaus therefore represents

"an archetype", a primary model that recurs in the complex logic of human feelings. To the point of being considered the archetype of absolute evil.

It is not strange then if the Homeric plot, despite the passage of entire centuries, each time returns to enthrall and involve.

A few weeks ago, all of a sudden, this very fluid and captivating piece by Cristian urged me to turn my mind to the lost pleasure of "listening to stories", that ancestral childish disposition of following mythical stories, from the fantastic narration of grandparents, to the compelling plots of fairy tales and legends.

I began to read and continued until the end, without taking a breath, often pausing on the pages because, continuously, names and situations were linked to innumerable details that had been long submerged in my crowded memory. The tightened synapses regained their height leading me to readings that seemed to have been forgotten.

So I returned joyfully to my years in high school, when, among students, they joked mocking the intricate and improbable events of this noisy acolyte, made up of characters and divinities who, between malice and passions, often touched the fascination of madness.

Yet, imprisoned in spite of ourselves between books and old benches, we would never have admitted then that, after all, those events had won us over. It might happen that, at the end of the lesson, an intense curiosity remained to know the implications of

that story that we dealt with solely as a scholastic duty.

Those who claim the Homeric poem is nothing more than the harmonious and poetic result of a tradition handed down orally are right: the conflicts and situations reported in it adhere too closely to earthly existence.

With this fictionalized version of the Trojan epic, it seems that Cristian proposes winking, between the inviting and the amused. A sort of game ... almost a bet.

He seems to already know that the readers will remain, despite themselves, caught up in the plot and that, like children placed before a fairy tale, at the end of each chapter they will ask with irrepressible curiosity:

“And then?”

Consiglia Mosca

Mottola, 10 June 2009

Prologue

In the time when humans, gods and heroes were the only true masters of their time, intertwining their lives, confusing their work, assimilating and sharing their feelings, fate revived, as it had already done millions of other times, as it does every day despite our being unaware and as it will do until the final day of human existence, the historical, fantastic and mostly intimate story that has marked and conditioned the natural course of history with its extraordinary action, dynamic narrative, epic plot, psychological implications, and eternal indelible values.

Prometheus, the wedding of Thesis and Peleus and the apple of discord

It all began on a brisk spring morning...

The sun of day, long awaited by mortals and immortals, rose on the mountains of Thessaly.

Finally the divine wings of Hermes, god of luck and travel and messenger of the gods, rested exhausted on a comfortable seat of ebonite, after having delivered the happy invitation throughout creation. Meanwhile, little Eros, god of love, took advantage by playing with the caduceus, in the heartbreaking expectation of hitting the two young spouses who everyone was now awaiting. The world celebrated the wedding feast of Thetis and Peleus.

Thetis, or Tethys, was the most beautiful of the fifty nymphs who were daughters of Nereus, the old god of the marine abysses. Her youth and her bewitching ways had also caused the father of the gods, god of heaven and earth, to lose his head, Zeus, who, despite already being married to his sister Hera, goddess of abundance, used to loose himself in faithless escapades with the most beautiful maidens in the world.

It happened that, just when Zeus, in disguise, was about to mate with Thetis, Hermes arrived in time, bringing an urgent missive to his father: the Titan Prometheus, who had been chained by Zeus for years on a cliff in the Caucasus for having

stolen the divine fire and given it to humans, had to report something that if ignored would cause the supreme god to lose the throne and his primacy on Olympus.

Thus, the divine seducer swooped down like a thunderbolt on Prometheus and promised to end his captivity and the atrocious torture to which he had been condemned if the latter immediately revealed what was threatening his throne and had troubled his sleep continuously. And while he was making a solemn oath, he liberated a huge, majestic, impressive eagle in flight, which came with its claws against the vulture that had meanwhile come from the east. Throughout the day that dismal bird devoured the liver of poor Prometheus, abandoning its victim in the hours of night, during which the abdominal organ, by divine will, fatally and cruelly recomposed itself, ready to be devoured the next day. That was the infinite punishment that had been decided by the father of the gods.

Only after the raptor's beak fell to the ground and the eagle returned to its lord's feet did Prometheus raise his exhausted head and, while a light drizzle wet his dry lips, did he accept the compromise dictated by his executioner, revealing that if Zeus conceived a son with Thetis, he would do to his father what his father had done to his grandfather.

At this admonition, the father of the gods was stunned, the sky thundered, a thunderbolt ripped the earth open and the overflowing waters of the Pontus reminded Zeus of the heinous means by which, in the mists of time, he had killed his father

Cronus removing him from the throne of thrones.

Prometheus was immediately freed and Zeus renounced Thetis forever ruling that no being of a divine nature could ever join with the daughter of Nereus, who would marry a humble mortal, the strongest of princes then living, Peleus, son of Aeacus, king of Thessaly, the one who after a thousand vicissitudes had managed to seize the golden fleece during a feat while following Jason and the other 54 Argonauts, that had been brought together by the centaur Chiron, the one who, although mortal, would have fought as a god, the one who was most devoted to Zeus and would watch over his future wife day and night at the cost of his own life.

This is why, despite the heterogeneous nature of the spouses, the wedding being prepared was blessed by humans as well as by the gods, that is why the wedding witnesses were Hera and Zeus in person and that is why gods and goddesses from all around the Earth, sea and sky flocked to Mount Peleus to celebrate the sensational event.

Finally, escorted by Apollo's golden chariot, the two spouses arrived and among a thousand celebrations they took their place at the center of the table set with the most exquisite delicacies on the Earth; immediately at their side sat the divine witnesses and then Poseidon, god of the sea, Hades, god of the underworld, his wife Persephone, goddess of spring and summer luxuriance; Apollo, god of the sun and the arts; Ares, god of war; Athena, goddess of wisdom and fortitude; Aphrodite, goddess of beauty;

Artemis, goddess of hunting; Hermes; Demeter, goddess of the crops and fertility of the earth; Hephaestus, god of fire and industriousness; Themis, goddess of justice; Irene, goddess of peace; Aeolus, god of the winds; Dionysus, god of wine and games, and so on, up to all the rulers and notables of the Earth.

Everything had been taken care of down to the smallest detail, everything was perfect, indeed divine, happiness was clearly visible in the eyes of all the guests and love in that of the spouses, even before Eros had stretched his bow and let fly his fatal arrows towards them.

A scent of nectar and ambrosia inebriated and spread in the air each time the two cupbearers, Ganymede, son of King Tros, and Hebe, goddess of youth, served all the guests in turn.

Apollo, urged by his father, called upon the Muses (Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Calliope and Urania), as well as the Graces (Aglaea, Euphrosyne and the other Thalia) and began to sing the deeds of Peleus, accompanied by the zither.

The sound of that divine instrument enchanted all present and resounded all around the Earth until Iris the deaf and ugly goddess of discord heard about it, the only goddess who had not been invited to the banquet. The previous day, she had attempted to break into the divine gathering but was escorted by Eros and Dionysus who unknown to Poseidon were hidden with the Nereids and the Oceanids.

Even Ares, who after having argued animatedly with Irene had

withdrawn with Aphrodite, noticed that suspicious shadow and, grasping her by the throat, made the unwanted goddess tumble all the way down the western side of Mount Pelion, telling her not to return.

But the singing of Apollo and the festive shouting of the participants increased Iris's anger and indignation to such an extent that the latter devised a diabolical plan that would have the most unexpected and unpredictable consequences...

Discord went to the ends of the Earth, where Atlas, brother of Prometheus, had been relegated to support the heavenly vault having been guilty of having participated in the war of the Giants against Zeus. In the garden of the Hesperides, the daughters of Atlas, where the trees with golden apples grew; employing trickery Iris gathered the most beautiful apple and immediately returned to Thessaly with it.

She arrived at the banquet when the celebrations were drawing to a close and the guests, one by one, were showing off the gifts brought for the spouses: Poseidon gave Peleus two beautiful horses, Balius and Xanthus, the fastest in the world, gifted with speech and prophesy, Hera gave Thetis a magnificent peplum decorated with embroidery, Aphrodite offered a bronze cup and a golden diadem, Athena a golden flute, Hermes a bronze and ivory chariot, Chiron a heavy spear with a bronze point.

So, while everyone admired the features of those wonderful gifts, Iris managed to introduce herself into the party and hide in a dark corner where no one could see her but close enough to

be able to throw the "apple of discord" on the table, now almost cleared, that she had stolen from the daughters of Atlas.

Although he was not very lucid because of the 99 ounces of wine he had drunk in the competition with Dionysus, Zeus was the first to notice the apple; he knew those fruits well and, before all the others inevitably looked at that extraordinary fruit, he ruled: "it is from the garden of the Hesperides!"

Suddenly everyone were enthralled, including the bride and groom, by that apple that caught the eye at the center of the table and someone assumed it was another gift for that unforgettable wedding.

Again it was Zeus who noticed there was an inscription on that fruit, but the wine he had drunk prevented him from distinguishing the letters well and then he sent the apple to Athena, the most learned among the gods, asking her to read the inscription for everyone. Athena did not hesitate and read the curious message: "To the most beautiful", and returned the fruit to her father so that he could decide who it was for.

She was certain her husband would have no doubts, and made no effort to present the reasons of the bride and first goddess in order to grasp that extraordinary gift. Immediately afterwards Aphrodite intervened, reminding Zeus that it was not by chance that the title of goddess of beauty belonged to her. Finally other goddesses and nymphs came forward, all with reasonable arguments, but in the end the third candidate gathered around Athena who, in addition to possessing a statuesque physicality,

also boasted an indisputable inner and intellectual beauty.

Even Zeus expressed his embarrassment with this contest and, when the murmur grew dramatically to the point of dispute, he uttered a powerful cry like a hundred lightning strikes, silencing everyone. Irate and staggering, he took a few steps away from the banquet, leaving the burden of choice to Themis, goddess of justice.

Themis, in turn, after having convinced all those present that everyone had their own good reasons and that nobody there was able to judge objectively because, for one reason or another, they were emotionally involved, acting on the assignment received, she ruled: "The choice touches Paris of Mount Ida, who is the most beautiful among men".

Only then, Zeus, who could not wait to rest to rid himself of his accursed hangover, expressed his paternal approval of the sentence and decreed the matter definitively closed.

So, after several years, when Paris achieved his maximum youthful beauty, the three candidate goddesses, preceded by Hermes, in their turn departed for Mount Ida.

Paris' judgment and return to Troy

During the journey Aphrodite, unbeknownst to the other goddesses, managed to seduce Hermes and steal the secret of Paris from him, revealed that night to the god by his son Pan: the young shepherd was actually Alexander, prince of Troy, son of Priam and Hecuba. His parents had abandoned him at birth on Mount Ida, as an oracle had prophesied their son would cause the fall of the entire kingdom of Troy. King Priam, unable to be the cause of *his son's* death, had ordered that he be left on that mountain known to all for the harsh winters and the presence of wild beasts.

The little boy, sent to meet his certain death, was nursed and protected by a large bear and then cared for and raised until he was strong and beautiful by a family of shepherds who, following the bear, had discovered the den and fortuitously also the newborn in the basket.

When Hermes and the three goddesses joined Paris, he was in the shade of an oak tree playing his fistula of seven canes, watching over his flock with satisfaction, unaware of the incredible visitation.

Having revealed herself to the young man, Hera began by saying that, being that it was her privilege to dispense wealth and power to mortals, if she received that prize she would make Paris the richest and most powerful of men.

Athena, on the other hand, in exchange for the apple offered intelligence, wisdom and valor in life and war.

Finally Aphrodite appeared, more beautiful than ever; explained to Paris that he already possessed all that her competitors offered him because he was actually already the son of a rich and powerful father and he already had all the promised gifts and his noble origin soon would be revealed to him. Aphrodite, on the other hand, offered him the love of the most beautiful mortal woman that no man's eyes could resist.

Paris half-closed his eyes, in his mind he saw wealth and power, he was fascinated by the highest wisdom, but with the image of Helen, the woman promised by Aphrodite, he could not help but instantly fall in love and all else dissolved like clouds in the sun; he then opened his eyes and, now blinded by love, without hesitation handed the apple into Aphrodite's hands, disregarding the scorn and threats of Hera and Athena who, defeated, withdrew.

Hermes immediately ran to inform Zeus of the choice Paris had made, while Aphrodite promised the young shepherd that he would soon know his noble lineage and love; however, he would have to race to retrieve the robe that wrapped his infant body in the basket and leave for Ilion as quickly as possible, the splendid capital also called Troy; there he would be registered in the games in the kingdom, where a fat bull was the prize, that days before the king's soldiers had confiscated the livestock from the one who believed to be his father.

Paris, bewitched and dreamily obeyed without delay and, with a rough spear, a bow and its characteristic fistula, finally reached Troy, the "city with golden walls". It stood on a pleasant hill between the Hellespont and the Aegean Sea. At the foot of the hill flowed two rivers, the Scamander to the west and the Simoenta to the north.

There, with Aphrodite at his side, he beat all the participants in the tournament, one after the other, under the eyes of the rulers and Prince Hector, the strongest and most valiant Trojan hero.

At the time of the award ceremony, the winner approached the royal stage to receive Priam's investiture and blessing, but, when he was about ten paces from the king's seat, Princess Cassandra let out a shrill cry of distress; Priam and his lady froze, recognizing only in that moment the clothes the young man wore; only then did they realize that the battered shepherd from Mount Ida, armed with humble weapons but capable of beating all the strongest Trojan nobles, could only be their beloved son Alexander, abandoned tearfully twenty years earlier.

There were festivities in Troy for another 7 days and 7 nights and, despite the initial envy and the dull grudge held by his fifty brothers, twelve sisters and young Trojan nobles, Paris soon managed to be valued and loved by everyone, especially by Hector, his older brother. Only Cassandra continued to distrust and curse whenever she had the occasion to meet up with him, inciting his father and his people several times to ban him from the city before the fatal prophecy could be fulfilled: Troy

would be destroyed and his family exterminated in the flames. Cassandra, in fact, at a young age, for having refused to return the love of the god Apollo, had been condemned by divine will that no one would ever believe the prophecies her divine lover inspired in her. The unhappy princess was able to predict all the disasters that affecter her people in time but every time no one trusted her or accorded her their trust, in fact everyone avoided her and considered her not quite sane.

The abduction of Helen

Some time later, Aphrodite, appearing in a dream of the newfound Trojan prince, ordered her protégé: “Take a ship and go towards the south, you will round the island of Tenedos, you will go down along the wooded sides of Lesbos, you will pass between Pseira and Chios and there you will see two white doves meet, and fly away together; follow them and stop your ship only where they land; in that land you will find the woman I promised you and who disturbs your dreams every night”.

Paris, after telling Priam of his vision, gathered fifty young people of his age and, despite Cassandra imploring him and admonishing him innumerable times, he managed to sail with the blessing of his father and the approval of Neptune, who calmed the waters, and of Aeolus, who released favorable winds for sailing.

So the Trojan ship left the homeland and traveled for days until it met up with the doves and lapped the kingdom of Sparta on which, after the death of Tyndareus, young Menelaus reigned.

And the Trojan strangers, who had just landed, came across, precisely, the young king at the head of a garrison ready for war; Paris met him and reported the reason for his pilgrimage to the lord of Sparta.

Menelaus welcomed him as was due a foreign prince and according to what was foreseen by the law of Zeus regarding the

sacredness of guests; he had the Trojans escorted and placed at court and asked Paris to remain in Sparta at least until he and his army returned from the expedition that he was preparing to lead against Crete; on his return Menelaus would help Paris with all his power to seek what the goddess Aphrodite had promised him.

Paris and Menelaus were immediately in agreement; almost instantaneously a certain complicity was created between the two, corroborated mostly by the fact that the two regal young men were more or less peers and that Menelaus had certainly not had a happy adolescence, having always grown up in the shadow of his older brother Agamemnon, who, on the other hand, had never known friendship.

On the evening of his departure for Crete, during the banquet, the Spartan king called his bride to entrust the young guests to her during his absence. The order created amazement among the servants; the presence of Queen Helen was in fact very unusual, indeed quite exceptional, given Menelaus' justified jealousy in showing his beautiful wife in public.

As soon as Helen, escorted by her handmaids, entered the atrium of the hall, all the bystanders could no longer take their eyes off her beauty, fresh, graceful, harmony in her young face and in her every movement.

Paris, like everyone else, was enchanted, he could no longer turn his eyes away; he seemed to see Aphrodite in flesh and blood, but an instant later, when the queen was at the marble door, at the same time ecstatic and terrified, he could no longer

fail to recognize the woman who was the object of his dreams, the one whom the goddess of beauty had promised on Mount Ida. The most beautiful man and woman in the world were there, facing each other, mutely staring at each other, astonished and blushing like children.

Menelaus noticed how distraught his young friend was but there and then did not give it any importance, being now accustomed to the reaction his beautiful bride aroused in all men; on the contrary, he was attentive and recommended that her and her handmaids should attend to the young prince and his companions during the entire time he would be away from home. So, after the last orders were given, Menelaus left with his army.

In those days Helen and Paris, although they tried to avoid each other in every way so as not to betray the trust of the groom and their friend, they could not escape the divine will that day after day was fed more and more by the flame of passion in the glances of the two beautiful young people: revulsion soon became a fatal attraction the Platonic amorous glances became hot nights amid the silks of the royal bridal chamber.

Helen was now finally in love for the first time, overflowing with joy. Only two things sometimes constrained her sparkling happiness: the sight of her little daughter, Hermione, and the thought that all this would end when Menelaus returned; suddenly her face darkened and the sadness often took on a depressive form, as far as to imitate her mother in attempting suicide; but now Paris was following her everywhere and arrived in time to

shield her from that extreme gesture. That same evening Paris told her his story and Helen did the same.

She was the second daughter of King Tyndareus of Sparta and the beautiful Queen Leda, who, after having given birth to the princes Clytemnestra and Castor with her royal husband, was seduced by Zeus who had turned into a swan, when Tyndareus was on a trip to Egypt. Helen and Pollux were the fruit of their union. Leda never revealed her secret and threw herself from the walls of the city of Sparta in shame before her husband returned from the Egyptian expedition. Tyndareus, for his part, raised the princes without any distinction, as if they were all his offspring, and told them their mother had died in childbirth. Meanwhile Helen was becoming more and more beautiful, even more so than her mother, and all the rulers of the neighboring regions came to Sparta to ask her father for her hand in marriage. Tyndareus, now old, was clearly in difficulty: he no longer knew how to justify the continued waste of that indomitable daughter without risking compromising the safety of the crown.

One day the king of Athens, Theseus, killer of the Minotaur in the labyrinth of Minos in Knossos and also secret pretender to the princess, managed to kidnap Helen and take her with him to Athens. The two became lovers and the Athenian ruler decided to reveal the truth about his divine origins to Helen and the circumstances of her mother's death.

Shortly thereafter, however, an expedition led by Prince Pollux brought her back to Sparta by force. It was on this

occasion that the incomparable horse tamer, Castor, tragically fell in battle and Pollux asked the gods to follow his brother even in death.

Tyndareus, having regained his daughter but always in need of making allies, identified in the princes Agamemnon and Menelaus the possible saviors of his kingdom; he helped the two to drive the usurper Thyestes, their uncle, from Mycenae and to regain the throne of their father Atreus; so Clytemnestra went to marry Agamemnon and on the occasion of the wedding, on the advice of the wise king Ulysses of Ithaca, he invited all the kings and princes to court who were the pretenders to Helen's hand, he made them swear solemnly: divine fate would decide who would have his other daughter, Helen, and all the others would bless and protect that union in every way and by all means, even declaring war on anyone who attempted to separate what Fate would unite that day. The princes swore without hesitation, and soon Fate decided on the spouse and the successor of Tyndareus on the throne of Sparta: the incredulous young Menelaus.

As Helen told her story, her voice became more and more mixed with hiccups; tears gradually marked her white face with its divine features. Paris wiped her eyes and pushed the blond hair behind her ears, then asked her to stop her painful narrative; he gathered his men around him and ordered them to prepare to leave; he decided that the next day, when the city was still asleep, they would leave Hellas and return to Troy; Helen and her maids who, in the meantime, had met the beautiful young

Trojans, would also leave with them.

All evening they celebrated and toasted in honor of Paris. Helen embraced her lover and her head rested on his chest. It was soon time to leave; leaving little Hermione with the housekeeper who had raised her, they ran to the beach hidden under the veil of Aphrodite. There the Trojan ship was ready to take them to the kingdom of Priam.

Aphrodite had kept her promise and her son Eros had never been as prodigal in shooting arrows as with the crew of that ship. However, old Poseidon had no liking for the slight the two lovers were about to make against Menelaus: he infuriated the Aegean enough to make the return of the faithless to Troy nothing short of miraculous.

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