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David Gemmell

Shield of Thunder (Troy, 2)

United Kingdom (2006)

TAGS: Agamemnon Andromache Hector Odysseus / Ulysses Penelope Priam Troy





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Shield of Thunder (Troy, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2006
First Edition Details	David Gemmell, *Troy: Shield of Thunder*. London: Transworld Publishers, 2006, 480 pp.
ISBN	9780593052228, 0593052226
Available Onllne	An excerpt at penguinrandomhouse.com (accessed: February 19, 2019)
Genre	Fiction, Historical fiction, War fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@gmail.com
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Creators



David Gemmell (Author)

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Additional information

Summary

Troy, Shield of Thunder is the second in a trilogy of books by David Gemmel on the story of Troy. *Shield of Thunder* and *Fall of Kings* were published posthumously after Gemmel's passing in 2006.

The book spins an epic tale of love, trust, romance and bloodshed across the years before the destruction of Troy.

In Chapter 1, *A Black Wind Rising*, Penelope, wife of Odysseus and Ithakan queen is introduced. Kalliades, the young warrior, together with Banokles, rescue Piria the runaway trainee priestess. In Chapter 2, *The Sword of Argurios*, Kalliades speaks with Piria and then fights with Arelos the pirate. In Chapter 3, *The Sacker of Cities*, Sekundos the Kretan reflects on his many years of sea-faring and Odysseus takes on board Kalliades, Banokles and Piria. In Chapter 4, *Voyage of the Pigs*, Bias the Black helps Odysseus take on pigs on board and one prize pig ends up overboard. Piria reflects on her past with Andromache and Odysseus risks his life to rescue the pig. In Chapter 5, *The Royal Priestess*, Kalliades, is shown to have feelings for Piria and he talks with Odysseus. He remembers the death of Odysseus' son, Laertes. In Chapter 6, *The Three Kings*, Kalliades reflects on his childhood. Odysseus' ship undergoes an attack by pirates. In Chapter 7, *Circle of the Assassin*, Odysseus reflects on his ere protégé, Helikaon. Kalliades and Banokles banter about comradeship. In Chapter 8, *Lord of the Golden Lie*, Kalliades realises that Piria is from Thera, island of priestesses. Odysseus regales his men with a tale. Odysseus tells Piria he knows she is Kalliope and they discuss the nature of truth. In Chapter 9, *Black Horse on the Water*, Odysseus engages in a sea battle against pirates. Piria assists with Odysseus' bow. Piria reveals her identity to Kalliades. In Chapter 10, *The Hammer of Hephaistos*, songs are sung for the fallen in battle. Banokles fights Leukon and wins. Chapter 11, *Back from the Dead*, has Leukon conceding to mentor Banokles. Hektor and Odysseus discuss Hektor's upcoming marriage to Andromache.

Chapter 12 (and the start of Book 2), *Ghosts of the Past*, focusses on Andromache's emotional turmoil over Kalliope, Hektor and Helikaon. Gershom the Egyptian finds help for Helikaon's dying state from the Prophet. In Chapter 13, *The Worms of Healing*, Gershom and Andromache save Helikaon's life. Helikaon reflects on the assassination attempt on him by Attalus. In Chapter 14, *Black Galleys*

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in the Bay, Andromache practises her archery and is reminded by Antiphones how she saved Priam's life. Agamemnon arrives outside Troy. Chapter 15, *The Eagle Child*, focuses on Antiphones' past with his father Priam and Kassandra's ability for prophecy. Andromache is pregnant with Helikaon's child. Chapter 16, *The Death of a King*, has Agamemnon in Troy, Helikaon recovering and Andromache initiating contact with Hektor. Chapter 17, *Andromache's Choice*, shows a tender interaction between Hektor and Andromache and a marital arrangement which affects Priam's advances on Andromache. In Chapter 18, *The Fear of Kalliades*, Polites, Priam's son arranges games. Banokles outs Kalliades' love for Piria. In Chapter 19, *A Bow for Odysseus*, Odysseus is angered at being given a substandard bow for competition in the games. He intends to assist Piria. Chapter 20, *The Enemy of Troy*, has a chill confrontation between Agamemnon and Odysseus. Helikaon doesn't want to believe that Odysseus was responsible for his assassination attempt. Chapter 21, *A Queen of Poison*, has Hekabe, Trojan queen, ill with cancer and then killed by Andromache. Chapter 22, *The Sacker of Cities*, has mourning decreed by Priam. Agamemnon and Odysseus make a compact of collaboration against Troy. Chapter 23, *A Gathering of Wolves*, shows a maudlin, mourning and aging Priam. Chapter 24, *The Fallen Hero*, shows Achilles and Hektor competing against each other with Hektor victorious. Kalliades and Banokles accompany Piria on her mission. Andromache is attacked. Chapter 25, *Blood for Artemis*, details the rescue of Andromache by Kalliades, Banokles and Piria. Piria is killed.

In Chapter 26 (and the start of Book 3), *The Treacherous Hound*, Penelope reminisces about her life with Odysseus and defends her land. Helikaon resolves not to be so bloodthirsty. In Chapter 27, *Sons of Sorrow and Joy*, Dexios pines for his mother Halysia's attention. Andromache loves her son, Astyanax. She tries to stop Kassandra going to Thera. In Chapter 28, *The Trojan Horse*, Banokles fights heroically and wants to go back to Big Red, his now wife. In Chapter 29, *Orphans in the Forest*, Banokles rescues two orphan princes and their nurse from peril. Chapter 30, *The Temple of the Unknown*, has Helikaon strategizing warfare and Banokles leading his men. Chapter 31, *The Reluctant General*, has Banokles in the role of general. Periklos the orphan prince advises him to help Kalliades. Banokles saves the day. In Chapter 32, *The Battle of Carpea*, Peleus ponders battle and his past with Kalliope. Chapter 33, *Death upon on the Water*, Banokles and Kalliades talk and a Mykene force destroys Dardanian galleys. In Chapter 34, *Traitor's Gate*, Trojan Pausanias

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kills traitor Menon whom he loved. In Chapter 35, *The Rider in the Sky*, Dexios hides from invaders. Halysia finds him, rescues him and dies.

Analysis

Given the nature of the rich mythological cycle surrounding the destruction of Troy, there are ample opportunities for expansion on individual plot lines and this is what Gemmel has done. Barely counted as historical fiction as the historical element is just a trace, the myth Gemmel weaves is one of romance and violent warfare. In an epic sweep of the Greek, Trojan and other cultures of the time, over thirty-five chapters Gemmel details the romantic, military, nationalistic areas affected during this period. Gemmel has created from *Shield of Thunder* a work of historical fiction, with more focus on fiction than history. Alternating between chapters on betrayal, old wounds and intense battle scenes, Gemmel weaves a story of incipient war against Troy, examining in depth the background of all parties involved.

While achieving epic status through the alluded content (Troy) and the length (480 pages), there are various themes which Gemmel includes that one may arguably say align with epic themes. For example: "The house of Priam will go on for a thousand years, and I played my part in that", says the dying Hekabe (p. 274). This is a small but illustrative example of the nature of winding truth and myth circles that Gemmel has hinted towards in aiming for a timeless epic on a timeless story. Even as Hekabe, Queen of Troy, dies, nevertheless, the kingdom of Troy will live on – as the reader knows, through Trojan seed.

Gemmel replicates a version of the Trojan funeral games like those narrated in Vergil, *Aeneid*, Book 5. These were traditionally seen as a preparation for war in a safe contained setting as well as a more or less harmless containment of the violence deemed necessary to the heroic lifestyle. For example:

"These men would leave Troy and sail back to their homelands, there to gather armies and return. There would be no friendly contests then, no competition for laurel wreath…they would seek to slaughter or enslave the very people who now watched happily as their future killers raced against one another." (p. 305).

Through the funeral games for Hekabe, Gemmel tries, sometimes successfully, to bring to the fore concerns of trust, familial bonds and

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the complexity of the human condition. He primarily focusses on Priam's various sides as a cruel and malicious leader, a senile aging man and a bereaved husband. As is expected from the leitmotif of funeral games, the contrast between the young and fit and the old and past their prime is coldly apparent and it characterises the epic shift from the past to the promised future.

Gemmel touches on the nature of heroism – in the fight between Hektor and Achilles (pp. 312–313). With a seemingly unnecessary focus on bloodshed (a theme prevalent in Gemmel's work), Hektor is transformed to the hero which the situation demands – "with all his strength, hit his opponent with an explosive right" so that a "huge cheer went up from the crowd". Hektor's obvious rebuttal of this form of crude heroism is shown by his rejection of the laurel wreath of victory (p. 313). "Walking back to where Achilles lay he dropped the wreath onto his chest…As the cheering faded away he pointed down at the fallen hero… 'Hail to mighty Achilles,' he said." The contrasting attitudes towards being a publically acclaimed figure of attention for warfare riddle the book. Hektor the unwilling, Achilles the desirous and Agamemnon the seemingly apathetic.

Though Gemmel's characters are quite cardboard cut-out, that is, lacking emotional depth (one of the academics' comments on Virgil's Aeneas also, so in good company) there is some predictable character growth discernable in the development of the characters. Banokles, the cheery buffoon of the start of the adventure, has found himself with growing emotions for the prostitute Big Red (p. 316). "There had been no hugs, no farewell kiss…to what purpose?…With luck he could buy some slave girls to tend him. Curiously, the thought saddened him."

Gemmel, who tends towards the long-winded, manages here in the one adverb "curiously" to evince some form of character development outside of the comic relief which Banokles had thus far provided. This is continued further and once again touches on the theme of heroism (p. 398).

"The nurse had called him a hero. At any other time this would have been pleasant. It was good to be considered a hero…Banokles didn't know much, but he did know that in times of war heroes were usually idiots. More important, they also died young. Banokles had no intention of dying at any time."

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This perspective on changing identity and confidence in one's own continued existence is relatable to most audiences.

The book includes some mention of varying attitudes towards the gods – "they are more interested in disguising themselves as swans and bulls and such like and rutting with mortal men and women. Or feuding with one another like children. I have never heard of such an unruly bunch of immortals." (p. 269). This approach towards theodicy provides an outsider's perspective on the theodicy Gemmel has attributed to the cultures presented in this book.

Furthermore, Gershom, the token Jew from Egypt, says "when you have learned from childhood of horrors of Set, and what he did to his brother, your gods seem no more worrisome than squabbling puppies" (ibid.). The inclusion of a foreigner to the Trojan and Greek world provides an opportunity for the reader of the book to reflect on the attitudes presented, in particular towards the workings of the divine.

The friendship of Banokles and Kalliades is a constant theme and source of tension in the book, as the readers worry for the safety of each, hoping the remaining other will not be bereft. The trust that lies between the two is a contrast to the trust of Piria (Kalliope). On pp. 133–143, we see the burgeoning trust that Piria holds for Kalliades, as she "glanced up at him, wanting to offer him some indication of her trust. 'My true name is Kalliope,' she said at last…'I thank you for trusting me. I will not betray you.' 'I know that, Kalliades. You are the first man I ever met I could say that about.'"

Kalliades' affections for this girl show a tender side towards the thoughtful warrior. It also highlights the narrative function of Piria as she reflects on her experiences regarding coming of age and becoming a woman. Gemmel touches on elements of sexism throughout his work, including: "Do not pity him, cried the dark voice of her fears. He was a man, and the evil of his gender would have shown itself as he grew older." (p. 131). In speaking of Piria's attitude towards Kalliades here, Gemmel presents a somewhat sympathetic perspective towards her predicament. He also includes her complaints against the patriarchal elements inherent to the society described: "'What right do you have to be proud of me?' She stormed. 'I am not like a horse of yours that has won a race.'" (p. 132). Highlighting the woman's perspective is an underused method of Classical mythology and thus Gemmel has included something worthy of interest here.

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Odysseus is shown to morph into different identities throughout the novel. The loss of Laertes strikes him hard and the grief transforms him. We also see how Penelope, his wife, is changed through her trauma. The use of flashbacks throughout adds levels of time and emotion to the novel, meaning we get a deeper look, not only at the Ithakan troupe but the other characters.

Gemmel engages with the passing of time and aging (p. 128):

"'Damn, but I never used to feel this tired after a battle'…'You will not tell me we are getting older,' Odysseus warned him. Bias smiled. 'No, Odysseus. Perhaps we are just getting wiser. The thought of all the men who were alive this morning, and walking the Dark Road now, is dispiriting. And what was achieved?'"

This is an epic trope on the futility of action in the short time of our lives, with a reflection on the meaning of our achievements.

The author employs multiple vulgarisms and a coarse manner of talking in his work, e.g. "by the tits of Thetis" (p. 127). Presumably, his motivation is to authenticate the warriors' behaviour and make more "accessible" the world he describes. Although it seems gratuitous, it certainly varies the register making the demarcations of hierarchy easier for the reader to discern.

The historical basis of this novel could be described generously as slim but as a work of mythological enterprise, it is rich and developed.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Agamemnon Andromache Hector Odysseus / Ulysses Penelope Priam Troy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Childhood Coming of age Emotions Expectations Family Heroism Multiculturalism Relationships Society Storytelling Tradition

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