

The Fall of Troy by Peter Ackroyd  
Chatto and Windus 2006

Peter Ackroyd is an extraordinarily prolific author, and the quality of his output is very high. The Fall of Troy, his latest novel, is not at all what one might be expecting; it is not about the siege of an ancient city, with clashing swords, beautiful women and a large wooden horse. Nor is it about the famous archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered Troy and its greatest treasures.

Ackroyd's The Fall of Troy is about another obsessive amateur archaeologist, Heinrich Obermann, struggling to uncover the ancient city of Troy with the aide of a new, young, Greek wife, Sophia, aided and abetted by his staff, visiting scholars and Turkish overseers. All of Ackroyd's characters are dramatic and full of life, none more so than Obermann himself: hovering on the edge of madness, Obermann has no self-doubt whatever and treats any disagreement with disdain. His new wife, Sophia, fails to love him, but is, at first, enthused by his drive and then the dig itself.

The other major character, Alexander Thornton, a young scholar from the British Museum, comes for one purpose but ends up being the catalyst to Obermann's downfall.

This is a tale of great power with some memorable characters, and is a wonderful portrayal of the dangers inherent in an obsession that goes too far.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh