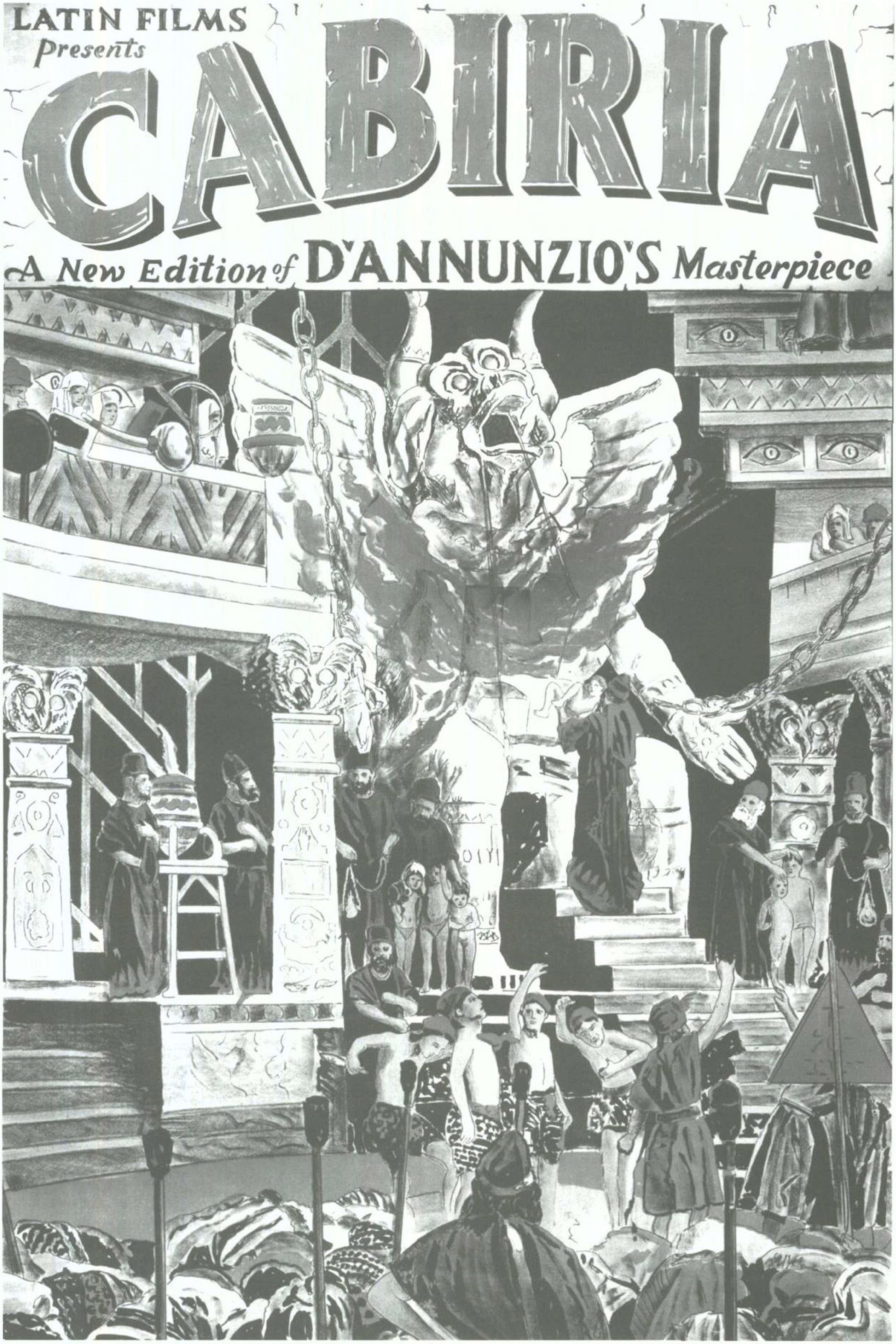
From Hephaistos to the Silver Screen

LIVING STATUES, ANTIQUITY AND CINEMA

By VITO ADRIAENSENS

Lynda Nead has pointed out that the dream of motion has haunted visual arts from the classical period to the present and the same can be said can be said of the literature that spawned many of these visual representations.[1] As the foremost image-maker of our time, it should come as no surprise that cinema itself reflects the animation of static people in its subject matter, for the tension between stasis and movement is at the heart of the medium. The fascination for breathing life into the lifeless is, of course, as old as time itself. The most prevalent creational myths implicitly or explicitly employ the image of the deity as a sculptural artist who breathes life into a clay or dust effigy; more often than not, the statue is fashioned in the deity's own image, essentially making it a self-portrait.[2] The main literary sources for these myths are the writings of ancient Greek and Roman philologists such as Hesiod, Homer, Ovid, Pseudo-Apollodorus and Apollonius of Rhodes, who not only speak of the sculptural marvel that is mankind, but of other significant statuary as well. It is these ancient Greek and Roman myths that I will focus on. In most accounts, it was Zeus, king of the Olympians, who commissioned the Titan Prometheus and the Olympian god of fire Hephaistos to create man.[3] Out of water and earth, Hephaistos sculpted man in the likeness of the gods. Prometheus then secretly instructed this new being in the arts of Athena and Hephaistos so that man might fend for himself. The Titan thus tricked the gods on several levels and topped things off by stealing fire from the heavens as a gift to humankind. Not only was Prometheus severely punished for his deeds, mankind also suffered a great blow in the form of the second divine sculpture, Pandora, the first woman. Hephaistos sculpted this creature and her beauty and cunning were meant to be the ruin of man. She was gifted to Prometheus' brother, Epimetheus, and inadvertently unleashed evils from a Greek *pithos*, or storage jar, that was a wedding present from Zeus. These evils would plague mankind forever, but would not be able to extinguish the flame of hope.[4]

The primordial Greek tale of sculptures coming to life was by no means restricted to a creationist context, however. Deborah Tarn Steiner has traced the function and form of statuary from Greek and Roman literary art histories, be they Homeric, Hesiodic, Ovidian or Virgilian, to the art of archaic and classical Greece in her astounding work *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic Greek Literature and Thought (2001)*. Her study lays bare a wide-ranging spectrum of representational strategies with regard to Greek statuary in both myth and reality. Steiner describes figurines and statues that doubled for the dead or absent and preserved the talismanic properties of its originals, an act of "presentification" that led to their symbolic use in rituals where the effigies would be honored or cursed, but one that did not dismiss the possession of other properties, for "combined in the single piece, several kinds of image 'magic' are at work."[5] The craftsmanship with which these statues were animated by late sixth-century and early fifth-century sculptors is a case in point. Steiner rightly argues that the artistry and materiality of these sculptures elevated them from mere representational objects to vivified artifacts.[6] This animation was effectuated through inscriptions and ornamentation that highlighted its status as an object of craftsmanship, and, more importantly, through posture and anatomy. The development in Greek sculpture from the Archaic (800 to 500 B.C.) to the Classical (500 to 323 B.C.) period saw the stiffness of the *kouroi* give way to a more naturalistic freedom of movement of expression, or as Richard Neer describes it: "The result was an amplified, hyperbolic version of the Archaic style. Classical *contrapposto* ratcheted up the internal inconsistencies of the kouros stance, and Classical movement bet everything on striking and awing the beholder. From the poise of the kouros to the headlong rush of the Tyrannicides is a natural evolution."[7] The dynamic postures of the Classical period were, indeed, amplified. From Kritios and Nesiotes' threateningly advancing musclemen Harmodius and Aristogeiton, known as the Tyrannicides or tyrant killers (477-476 B.C.), and Polykleitos's athletically balanced Doryphoros in contrapposto (450-400 B.C.) to Myron's unnatural but compellingly dynamic discuss throwing Diskobolus (460-450 B.C.) and Lysippos' monumental leaning Hercules, known to us as the Farnese Hercules (4th century B.C.), Classical Greek sculpture embraced movement to the extent that it sought to blur the lines between bronze and flesh. The illusion of life that exudes from these idealized frozen bodies was sometimes even complemented by an open mouth that not only fit a narrative context in which the subjects spoke or sang to one another, but could also indicate the process of breathing; this can, for instance, be seen in the Riace bronzes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(ca. 460 B.C.).[8] The magical qualities that these statues possessed by grace of their supreme craftsmanship came to fruition in the expansive mythology that put their subject in perspective and could make them come to life quite literally. It was these tales, situated in an almost timeless antique world populated with Olympian gods, demigods, monstrous creatures and mysterious living statues, that found their way to the silver screen.

Sculpting Pygmalion

As early as 1898, Georges Méliès appropriated one of the classic tropes of Greek mythology in *Pygmalion et Galathée* to demonstrate his own magical craftsmanship. As an illusionist, magician and pioneer in cinematic special effects, Méliès, more than anyone, embodied cinema's Pygmalion syndrome. The Ovidian account[9] tells of a Cypriot sculptor who, frustrated with the vices of the Propoetides (women driven to prostitution by a vengeful Venus[10]), decided to create his own perfect female out of ivory. The beauty of the virtuous statue was so breathtaking that the sculptor fell in love with his own creation and beseeched Venus to bestow it with life. The artist's wish was granted and the cold ivory turned to warm flesh at his touch:

> He kisses her white lips, renews the bliss,
> And looks, and thinks they redden at the kiss;
> He thought them warm before: nor longer stays,
> But next his hand on her hard bosom lays:
> Hard as it was, beginning to relent,
> It seem'd, the breast beneath his fingers bent;
> He felt again, his fingers made a print;
> 'Twas flesh, but flesh so firm, it rose against the dint:
> The pleasing task he fails not to renew;
> Soft, and more soft at ev'ry touch it grew;
> Like pliant wax, when chasing hands reduce
> The former mass to form, and frame for use.
> He would believe, but yet is still in pain,
> And tries his argument of sense again,
> Presses the pulse, and feels the leaping vein.
> Convinc'd, o'erjoy'd, his studied thanks, and praise,
> To her, who made the miracle, he pays:
> Then lips to lips he join'd; now freed from fear,
> He found the savour of the kiss sincere:
> At this the waken'd image op'd her eyes,
> And view'd at once the light, and lover with surprize.[11]

Actual cinematic retellings of this myth in a Classical or mythological context are rare, however, because George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play *Pygmalion* provided filmmakers with more fertile and realistic grounds upon which to build their stories. Shaw's update was inspired by the popularity of the Pygmalion myth on the nineteenth-century stage,[12] but turned the story of a statue come to life into a social commentary on the class system by having a professor educate and edify a young Cockney woman in the ways of the upper class, shaping her to his demands like a sculptor would. The most famous incarnation of Shaw's play is undoubtedly *My Fair Lady*, the 1956 Broadway musical by Loewe and Lerner that was turned into an eponymous motion picture with Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison in 1964 by George Cukor. Cukor had already explored the Shavian *Pygmalion* in *Born Yesterday* (1950) and *A Star is Born* (1954), a plot that was explored indirectly in hundreds of films, from *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, 1948) to *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990).

This is not to say, however, that Pygmalion was completely absent from film history as a sculptor breathing life into inert matter, far from it. The horror genre proved to be an exceptionally fruitful breeding ground for all sorts of inversions and perversions of the Pygmalion myth, but almost never in a Greco-Roman or ersatz Classical context. The realistic statue's relation to death is inherent in the idea of the immobilized body, implying that its well-crafted matter was perhaps once alive, or, better yet, might still one day break loose from its bronze, marble or stone constraints. The horror film's predilection for visceral effects related to the manipulation and violation of the human body lent itself perfectly for the figure of the insane sculptor and his creations, trapping living beings inside of sculptures, transforming them into sculptures, or using body parts as primary source material. It was in the nineteenth-century fascination for the wax museum that the insane sculptor first found his way onto the stage and, later, the silver screen. The wax statue's uncanny semblance of life had been unnerving and fascinating visitors of wax cabinets and museums since the late 17th and 18th century, when, for instance, the anatomical waxes of La Specola in Florence—which opened for the public in 1775[13]—enticed spectators with wax dolls in sultry poses and the opportunity to quite literally "dig into" the subject matter that was put on display. The unmistakable eroticization of the statues made it an almost necrophiliac experience, especially given the fact that the statues' faces and hands were often modeled off of actual corpses, and that visitors were allowed to touch the waxes, or even spend some private time with them, for a few dollars more.[14] With the popularization of the wax museum as a form of popular entertainment in the nineteenth century, Madame Tussauds being chief among them, and the addition of a very popular Chamber of Horrors that coupled the anatomic realism of the waxes to gruesome visceral events from past and present, came the fictional characterization of the wax museum's artist as a madman. The French Grand Guignol theatre probably first picked up on this idea through André de Lorde's 1910 stage production *Figures de Cire*, brought to the screen eponymously in 1914 by Maurice Tourneur, but it was an unpublished story by Charles Spencer Belden entitled *The Wax Works* that introduced the Pygmalion myth into the equation and launched a horror trope that is still being reproduced. Warner Brothers bought Belden's story and first turned it into the early Technicolor gem *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* (Michael Curtiz, 1933), before reworking it in 1953 as the 3-D Technicolor *House of Wax* (André De Toth), and doing the same in 2005 when they released Jaume Collet-Serra's *House of Wax*. The first two films were highly influential and depicted the wax artist as a Pygmalionesque genius who, embittered by the loss of his beloved wax dolls in a crippling fire, starts rebuilding his collection by covering murdered lookalikes of his favorite figures, as well as his enemies, in a thin layer of wax. Interestingly, the presence of the doubles instigates a reversal of the Pygmalion pattern in the artist. Instead of being overjoyed at the occasion of finding his figures come to life in a sense, the artist wants to "immortalize" them in wax, a process of mortification, or "thanatography,"[15] that keeps the artist in control of his own work. The reverse Pygmalion motif was prominent in (wax) sculptors after *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* in films such as *Mad Love* (Karl Freund, 1935), *A Bucket of Blood* (Roger Corman, 1959), *Nightmare in Wax* (Bud Townsend, 1969), *Waxwork* (Anthony Hickox, 1988) and *Maschera di Cera* (Sergio Stivaletti, 1997).

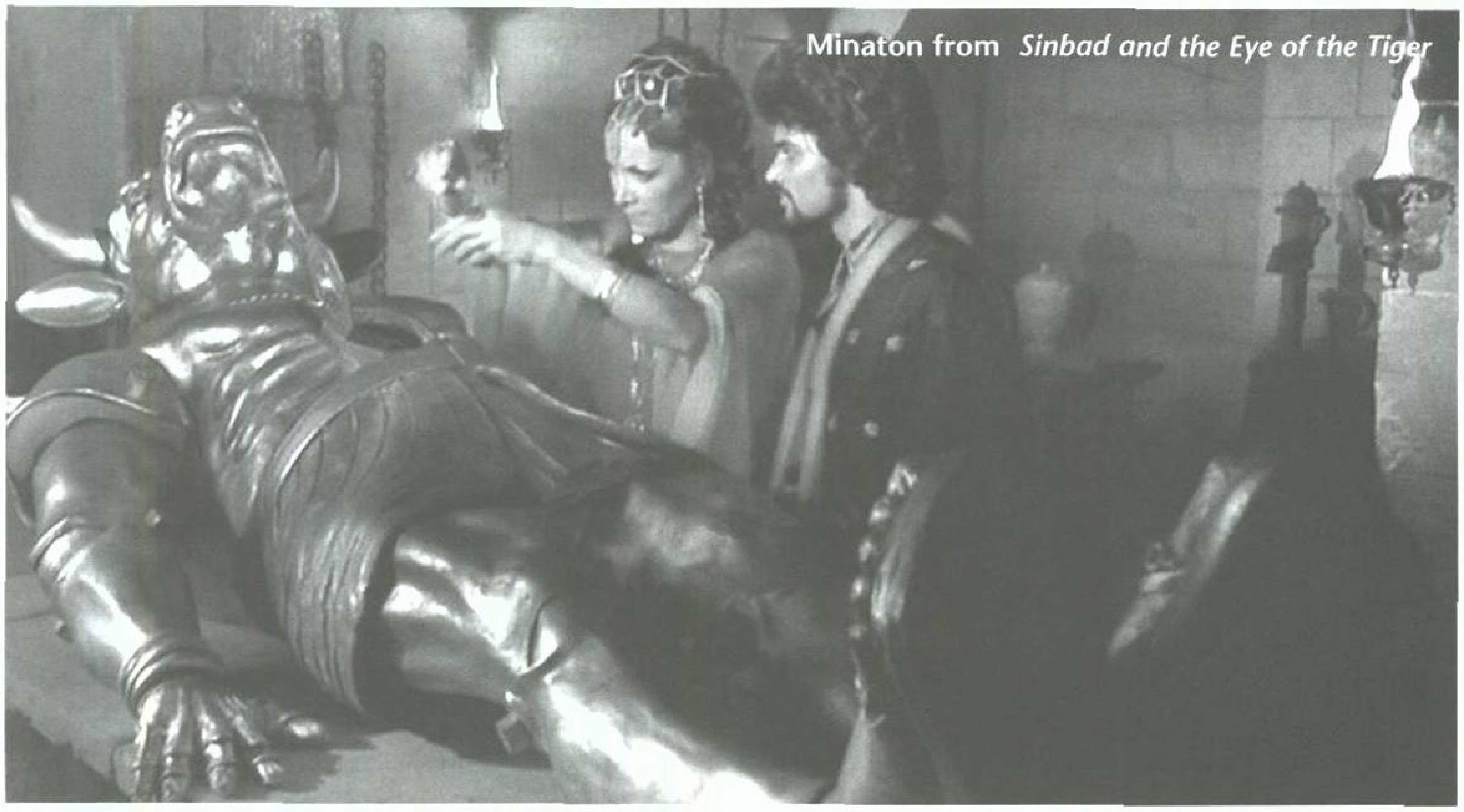
Of Swords, Sandals and Statues

Although the Pygmalion figure itself did not appear often in a classical mythological context on screen, production companies did not wait long to create the perfect setting for the rich collection of popular historical and mythological stories. From 1908 on, not coincidentally the advent of the *film d'art* movement, there was a sharp rise in the number of historically and mythologically themed films in Europe. Like their later counterparts of the 1950s, these films were billed as grand spectacles, uniting the best that the filmmaking business had to offer. The antique backdrop was an ideal way to draw in audiences through advances in film technology, screenwriting and production design, creating what is known as the "historical epic". As Blanshard and Shahabudin have shown,[16] the success of "cine-antiquity" was not only due to key technological advances, but also to the rise of nationalism and the popularity of nineteenth-century historical novels such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1880) and Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis: a Narrative of the Time of Nero* (1895). Historical and mythological subject matter were particularly well represented on the French and Italian silver screens.

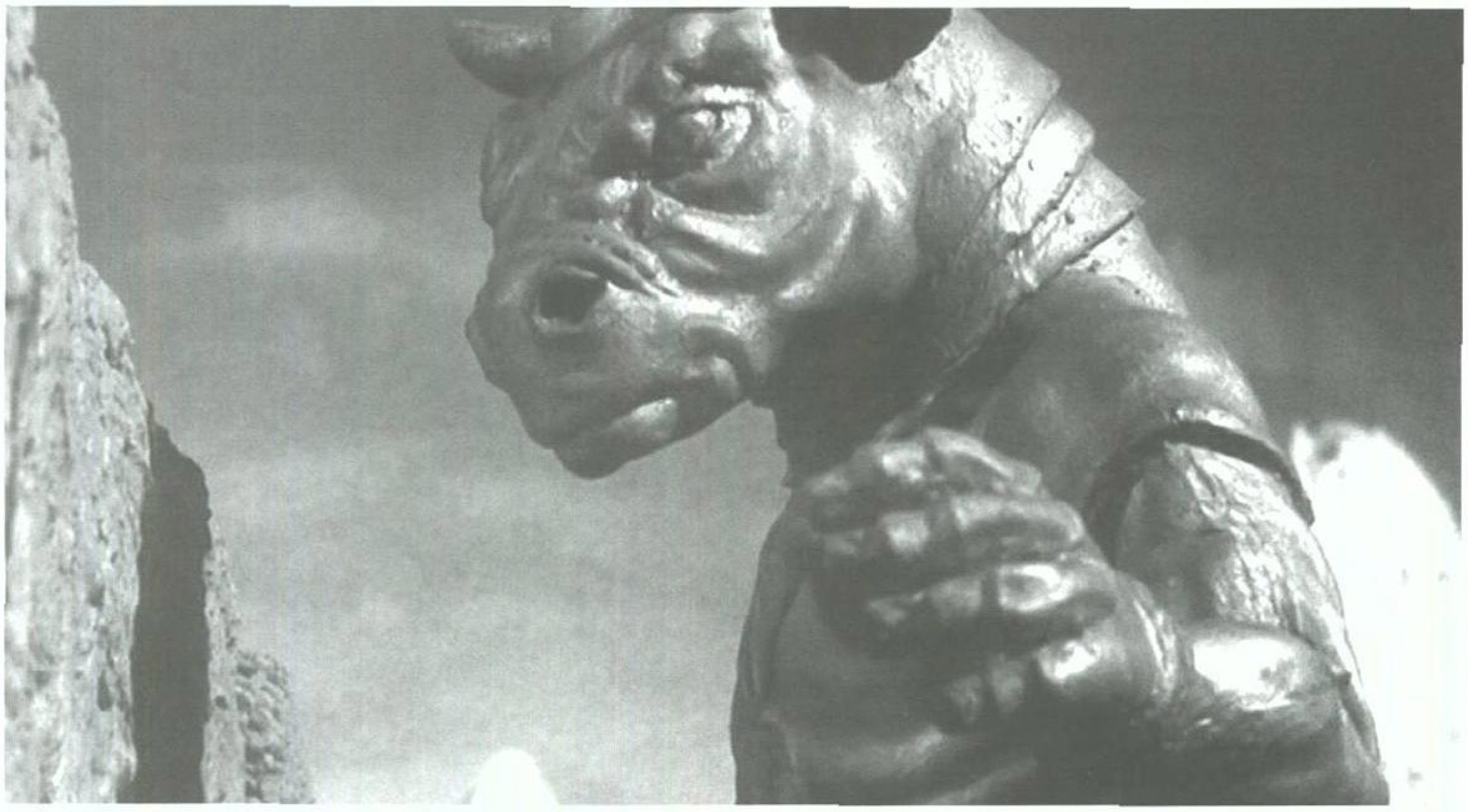
The French had more of a penchant for the mythological, for instance in major productions by Louis Feuillade at Gaumont, who churned out a number of high quality myth-inspired films, such as *La Légende de la Fileuse* (1908), which deals with the story of the weaver Arachne, *Prométhée* (1908), *l'Amour et Psyché* (1908), *La Légende de Narcisse* (1908), *La Légende de Midas* (1910), *La Légende de Daphné* (1910) and *La Fiancée d'Éole* (1911). This was much to the dismay of French theatre owners, who quickly grew tired of the "outdated" genre and publicly asked for more modern dramas.[17] The Italians, on their part, were keener on historical epics. It were the Itala Film and Società Italiana Cines film companies that truly established the genre conventions for the historical epic or, almost synonymous with it, the so-called "sword-and-sandal" or "peplum" films. At Itala, star director Giovanni Pastrone paved the way for American productions. When his 1911 effort *La Caduta di Troia* (The Fall of Troy) opened to full houses in the United States, it was named film of the week by *Moving Picture World*, who described it as a "great spectacular production" and a "masterpiece of art and human endeavor;" the magazine furthermore admitted the European supremacy in the field of historical subject matter: "For historical productions like 'The Fall of Troy,' the European manufacturer has it all over the American producer. The old country is, of course, more full of opportunity, and its history is more prolific of incident."[18] While Cines was very productive with directors such as Enrico Guazzoni and Mario Caserini, it was not until Guazzoni's 1913 *Quo Vadis?* that the company could score an international hit. In the same year, Mario Caserino and Eleuterio Rodolfi made *Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii* (*The Last Days of Pompeii*) for the Società Anonima Ambrosio, but all were blown out of the water when Giovanni Pastrone and Itala presented *Cabiria* in 1914. The famed Italian writer and poet Gabriele D'Annunzio wrote the film's titles and the film's heavy overseas promotion highlighted this fact.[19] *Moving Picture World* devoted an entire spread to the film entitled: "Italia's (sic) Big New Twelve-Part Spectacular Masterpiece, a Worthy Successor to Illustrious Predecessors."[20] The film was a great influence to filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith, whose equally epic *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916) was greatly indebted to *Cabiria* in terms of production design, camera movement and subject matter. Furthermore, the Italian epic was responsible for creating one of the first, if not *the* first, Herculean action heroes that became a staple of the peplum genre in the 1950s and 1960s. The Italian strongman's name was Maciste (Bartolomeo Pagano) and his muscular physique and rugged good looks made him a hit. So much so that the character spawned almost fifty films from the 1910s to the 1970s.

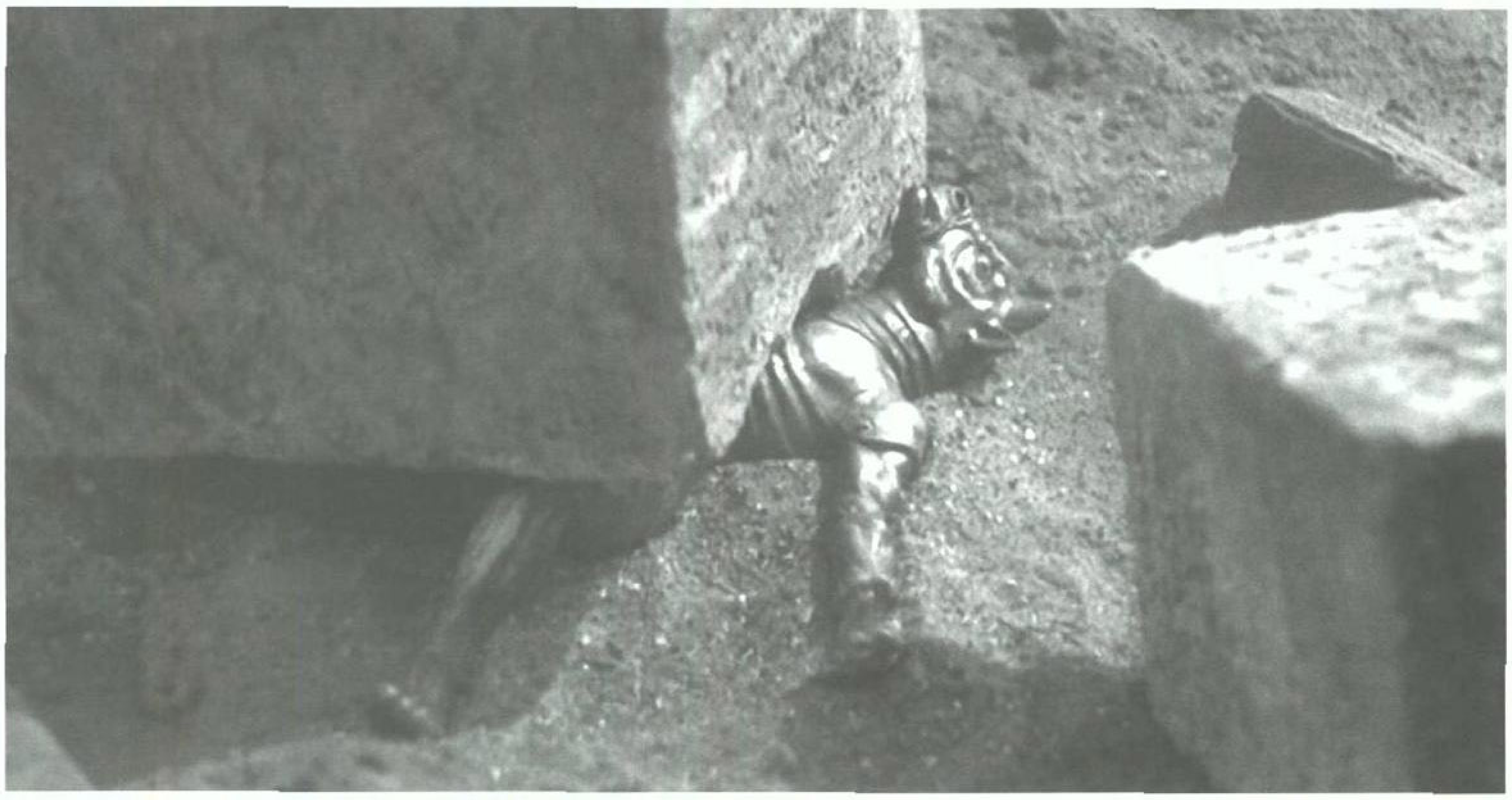
The leap from the historical epic to the peplum or sword-and-sandal film is not a great one. The two latter terms were used in a somewhat derogatory sense, and while sword-and-sandal is rather self-explanatory, "peplum" refers to the Greek word "peplos" for robe or tunic,[21] garments that were worn in Greco-Roman times but which grew ridiculously short in the second wave of American and Italian antiquity films in the 1950s and 1960s. The main distinction, it seems, lies in the nature of the productions. In the 1950s, Hollywood's technological advances but dropping attendance numbers prompted a new wave of spectacular cinema that aimed to lure television viewers away from their tiny black and white screens and into the fully equipped color and widescreen cinemas, where they could enjoy epic films that sought to stimulate their imagination and astonish their senses. It was no coincidence, then, that the first Hollywood film to be shown in widescreen was a Roman Biblical epic fittingly named *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953). The film was second in a line of epic Roman prestige pictures that was initiated by the Technicolor rendering of *Quo Vadis* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1951) and followed by *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, 1959), *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960), *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Anthony Mann, 1964). These were all expensive productions that "were also associated with the prestige and reputations of the studios, both because of their technical virtuosity and their economic scale. Their 'event' status made them ideal candidates for awards."[22] The flipside of the big-budget Hollywood epics could be found in Italy, where the subject matter was turned into the quickly made and cheap genre fare that is conventionally known as "peplum cinema," even though the generic codes often apply to American cinema as well. Blanshard and Shahabudin define this particular genre as referring to the

> **...large volume of films produced in Italy between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s that took as their subject matter a story involving a hero or adventurer from the ancient world. They have a number of distinctive elements. Muscular bodybuilders (often American) were cast as the heroic leads. Female love-interests were pretty, slim, and always in need of rescuing (...) and there was normally a sexually voracious, vampy female who tried to seduce the hero away from his task of overthrowing tyranny and rescuing his 'true' love. Opponents tended to rely upon extra-natural resources (e.g. sorcery, mythical monsters, advanced technology) to advance their schemes, only to be thwarted by the natural strength and stout heart of the hero. Other regular features included the presence of elaborate dance sequences performed by scantily-clad women, set-piece demonstrations of heroic strength (...) and the very noticeable dubbing of voices (...) as there was rarely any budget for live sound recording.[23]**



Minaton from *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*





Medusa, from *Clash of the Titans*

The most famous of these statuesque bodybuilders in peplum cinema were Steve Reeves and Reg Park. They both played Hercules several times and were succeeded by Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno in the late 1970s and 1980s, when a third wave[24] of peplum and peplum fantasy films—sometimes called sword-and-sorcery films—such as *Clash of the Titans* (Desmond Davis, 1981) *Conan the Barbarian* (John Milius, 1982), *The Beastmaster* (Don Coscarelli, 1982), *Hercules* (Luigi Cozzi, 1983) and *Conan the Destroyer* (Richard Fleischer, 1984) rolled into town. The fourth wave, finally, seems to have started with *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) and has worked its way through the 2000s with films such as *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004) and *300* (Zack Snyder, 2006) and TV shows such as *Rome* (2005-2007), possibly culminating around 2010 with TV's *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010-...), *Clash of the Titans* (Louis Leterrier, 2010), *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: the Lightning Thief* (Chris Columbus, 2010) *Immortals* (Tarsem Singh, 2011), *Wrath of the Titans* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2012) and another installment of the *Percy Jackson* series, Thor Freudenthal's *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* (2013)". These different waves of full-blown antiquity revivals are most interesting, for they encompass an incorporation of mythological and supernatural elements into a Classical context that brings us back to the main focus of our paper, namely the cinematic presence of mythological living sculptures.

Fire from the Gods

Perhaps most interesting among the many instances of statues coming to life in peplum cinema are those linked to the mythological master craftsman himself, the Olympian god of blacksmiths, artisans, sculptors, metallurgy, fire and volcanoes, Hephaistos. As opposed to Pygmalion, however, Hephaistos was never really deemed a screen-worthy character, it was mostly his legendary creations that made it onto film. This is strange, to say the least, for the god of blacksmiths' biography makes for quite the read; he was cast from Mount Olympos on several occasions, created woman, bound Prometheus, was married to Aphrodite and was responsible for creating the most renowned armor, weapons, temples and statues in the whole of Greek mythology. In Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, the divine sculptor is even accompanied by female attendants, or *amphipoloi*, crafted out of gold. One would dare say that a biopic is long overdue.

It were Hephaistos's famed automatons, or self-operating machines, that became a staple of the fantasy variant of the peplum genre. Fittingly, these cinematic creations would themselves be remembered for their unmatched craftsmanship thanks to the many talents of the recently deceased visual effects wizard Ray Harryhausen, who combined expert matte painting and photography skills with believable rear and front projection and thrilling stop-motion model creation and animation to create fantastical worlds in which people interacted with hideous monsters, giant statues and angry skeletons like never before.[25] It was the bronze giant Talos that launched Harryhausen headlong into Hephaistos's wake in *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey, 1963), which tells the tale of the quest for the Golden Fleece. The film opens on a giant painted statue of Hera, Olympian queen of the gods, seated on a throne in one of her temples. Modeled after the actress who portrays her in the film, Honor Blackman, the sculpture's dress, hair and crown are faithful to Hera's representation in vase paintings, although with two of her attributes, the scepter and libation bowl, missing (cf. the Louvre's *Juno Campana*). When King Pelias/Douglas Wilmer brutally murders one of Hera's praying devotees in her sacred temple in the name of Zeus, the goddess materializes and tells the warrior that his shameful deed will cause him to die by the hand of Jason. Twenty years later, Jason/Todd Armstrong saves King Pelias from drowning and tells him of his plan to procure the Golden Fleece. The King encourages Jason to undertake the perilous journey, but sends his son Acastus/Gary Raymond along to make sure that Jason fails. A sturdy boat known as the Argo takes Jason and his ragtag band of adventurers, the Argonauts, on their mission. A painted wooden figurehead of Hera guides Jason through the hazardous waters, opening her eyes and whispering sound advice when it is most needed.[26] The figurehead of Hera eventually leads the pack to the so-called Isle of Bronze, where the Greek god of sculpture Hephaistos was said to have resided. The Argonauts are advised to take nothing but food and water on the isle populated by gigantic bronze sculptures, but when Hercules/Nigel Green and a friend approach the statue of Talos, they find its pedestal to be filled entirely with riches. When Hercules attempts to sneak a brooch out, the statue of Talos comes to life.

In Pseudo-Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca* and Apollonius Rhonius's *Argonautica*, Talos was a bronze giant crafted by Hephaistos and gifted to Europa by Zeus, to protect his lover. Talos, depicted in ancient Greek vase paintings as a handsome clean-shaven young man, would patrol the island of Crete and chase away unwanted visitors by throwing rocks or engaging in physical combat. He is said to have had one long blood vessel from his neck down to his lower ankle containing the magical ichor, the golden blood of gods and immortals, which powered his movements. Harryhausen deviated from the myth and modeled the statue after a bearded Spartan warrior in a fighting stance, donning an Attic helmet, a very short peplos skirt and, of course, a sword and sandals. The stance and the figure were quite possibly inspired by ancient Greek frieze sculpture and statues of the great Spartan king Leonidas. The stop motion magic of Harryhausen convincingly animates the bronze giant as he comes from its pedestal, wrecks the Argo and goes after its crew. It is the figurehead of Hera that advises Jason to defeat the murderous statue by going for its ankle, corresponding with the mythological account of the single vein from neck to ankle and sealed with a stud. It is thus that Jason opens a hatch on the ankle that releases a liquid, seemingly suffocating Talos before his façade starts to crack, he keels over and falls apart.

Harryhausen's next foray into the mythological was Gordon Hessler's *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1973), a long-awaited follow-up to Nathan Juran's *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), for which Harryhausen had likewise created spectacular creature and visual effects. Much like the "ancient" or "classical" period in which the peplum genre situated itself, Sinbad the Sailor's realm equally provided filmmakers with a timeless, mythological context in which anything goes, from dinosaurs to genies and Cyclopes. It is therefore not at all surprising that the sailing action hero has to face a sword-wielding statue of Kali, brought to life by an evil wizard in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, and then an evil stepmother commanding a bronze bull and a saber-toothed cat in *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (Sam Wanamaker, 1977). The evil bronze bull that Sinbad faces in the latter is an automaton named Minaton, powered by a magical mechanical heart given to it by the wicked Zenobia/Margaret Whiting. With ancient rituals such as bull leaping in the Minoan society, the bull has held a special place in Greek society for a long time, especially on Crete, and this is evidenced by its abundant presence on pottery and in sculpture, with bulls made entirely out of silver and gold as early as the Mycenaean period (c. 1600 BC–c. 1100 BC). The Minaton creature in *Sinbad* could have been an actual Minotaur, a mythical beast spawned from the congress between a bull and a human being, but Harryhausen opted for an automaton that not only echoes his own screen wizardry in its magical animation, but also harks back to Hephaistos, as he had created two bronze fire-breathing bull automatons, or *khalkotauroi*, and given them to King Aeëtes of Colchis.[27] Furthermore, the bronze bull was reputedly also turned into a torture device as early as the 6th century B.C., when poor souls would be locked up in a hollow bronze bull, also called brazen bull or Sicilian bull, and let to roast inside as a fire was set up underneath it. The bull's sculptor was a metalworker named Perillos, who made it for the despot Phalaris, but the poor artist was allegedly the first one to test its effectiveness.[28]

Ghosts in the Shell

In the case of the automaton, the ghost in the shell was not literally a *deus ex machina*, but supposedly a combination of technical virtuosity and supernatural magic elements, such as the ichor that powered the Talos figure. Another case in point is the mechanical owl that accompanies Perseus/Harry Hamlin on his quest in *Clash of the Titans* (Desmond Davis, 1981), which is also ridiculed in a brief cameo in the 2010 *Clash of the Titans* (Louis Leterrier) and makes an even more ridiculous appearance as a mechanical pigeon in David Gordon Green's medieval quest parody *Your Highness* (2011).[29] In the film, the bird is meant to be a well-crafted replica of Athena's owl, Baubo, put together by Hephaistos to help guide the young Perseus. The Athenian owl was, in fact, a powerful symbol that was widespread in Classical Greek culture, but I have found no references to a mechanical creature devised by Hephaistos, not that one would expect Harryhausen's inspiration to be limited to literary sources, of course. In fact, true to his research methods, the cinematic shape of the little owl does mirror the artistic representation of Athena's own, which was traditionally called Glaukos, meaning "glaring eyes." It is these eyes that stand out in the images preserved on (Early) Classical Greek pottery, 5th century B.C. silver tetradrachm coins, and the owl figurines that one is bombarded with when visiting Athens. Its diminutive frame and large eyes do give the little owl a very artificial appearance, especially on the flat surface of the silver tetradrachm coins.

While the fantastical mechanical creatures obviously provided Harryhausen and his directors with an opportunity to dazzle viewers with state-of-the art special effects, the most common statuary vivification effects were achieved by simple mechanical or double exposure techniques, and represented the embodiment of a statue or icon by a deity—a *deus ex machina* of sorts. This is also in line with Greek mythology and culture, for, as was mentioned before, direct contact between humans and gods was problematic. The adoration of anthropomorphic icons, such as the hyperbolic sculptures of the Classical era, was a widespread phenomenon that saw statues painted, adorned with clothes, jewelry and spoken to. The painted figurehead in *Jason and the Argonauts* is a nice example of an iconic image that is used by a deity, in this case Hera, to remotely and covertly converse with her followers. As Steiner rightly points out, however, the sculpting of anthropomorphic icons was not unproblematic.[30] The art form posed some much-debated ethical dilemmas pertaining to the representation of the deities, who were, after all, immortal presences. While the statuary cult was obviously meant to bridge the gap between the Olympian rulers and the common people, it was also key to hold on to the gods' sublime aura. Steiner argues that an aniconic or semi-iconic approach was most respectful, and the proliferation of these representations in Greek cult practices certainly backs up the validity of this idea. Art historically, however, Greek sculptors decided on the human form rather early on, in a sense elevating and democratizing the sculptural body throughout the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic period. This was of course only true up to some point, for the evolution into hyperbolic or idealized forms of sculpture separated the divine body from the mortal one, even though the gods were represented in a human form.

It was also in this way that divine sculpture was most often depicted on screen, usually modeled after the actor playing the part. In the 1981 *Clash of the Titans,* sculpture plays an especially important role in the story. The narrative is overseen by the gods in their foggy soft-focus Olympus—led by a campy Laurence Olivier as Zeus—and the earth is represented by a wall full of small clay figurines that stand for the characters of the story. The gods handle the figurines and manipulate them in a scaled amphitheater that symbolizes the arena of life. When King Acrisius of Argos/Donald Houston disrespects Zeus, the god of gods starts off by crushing Acrisius's clay figurine, killing him instantly, and then has Poseidon flood the city, killing (almost) everyone and bringing down the giant statue of Zeus that graced the city. The clay figurines pop up frequently in the story, as they serve to influence characters such as Calibos and Perseus. A more prominent role is reserved for the statue of the vengeful goddess Thetis, which is modeled after actress Maggie Smith. The statue of Thetis is portrayed in a Classical style and in keeping with its pictorial tradition, accompanied by a seahorse and holding a small statue of the winged goddess Nike in her outstretched hand as a sign of victory. The statue is brought to life in the film through the superimposition of the goddess's face onto her image, as she secretly converses with the monstrous Calibos, but also makes her own head fall off in a fit of anger at Andromeda and Perseus's wedding and her severed head then goes off to threaten the couple.

Clash of the Titans also deals with another popular statuary trope concerning one of the most horrifyingly accidental sculptors in the whole of mythology, a monster whose petrifying gaze stood for instant mortification and whose hissing hairdo was quite successfully reproduced by Harryhausen's good modeling and beautiful stop motion photography in *Clash of the Titans.* The creature was a little less successfully reproduced in the Hammer horror film *The Gorgon* (Terence Fisher, 1964), with special thanks to its shabby make-up department; the 2010 *Clash of the Titans,* in which the digital gorgon was characterized by artificially fluid motion and poor facial detail; and *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: the Lightning Thief,* where she was even turned into a leather-clad, sunglasses-brandishing baddie with poorly animated CGI-hair, portrayed by Uma Thurman. Medusa is generally regarded to be one of three Gorgon sisters and the only mortal one. The Gorgons were described by Hesiod as monstrous sea creatures but also portrayed as winged female figures with tusks and large eyes in ancient Greek vase paintings. There are several origin stories for both the Gorgons in general and the Medusa specifically, but one of the most adhered to is that of Ovid, who describes Medusa as a fair young maiden who was violated by Poseidon in the temple of Athena. It was the jealous goddess Athena who then punished the beautiful Medusa by turning her hair into a nest of hissing snakes, making her so repulsive that anyone who looked at her would turn into stone. Medusa was later slain by Perseus, who cut off her head. As Garber and Vickers rightfully argue, the tension between the beautiful and the monstrous is inherent in the visual and literary representation of Medusa.[31] This is apparent art historically, where the Gorgon's portrayal ranges from barely human in its monstrosity to cursedly beautiful. The rich history of the Medusa is, however, fit for another paper altogether.

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Notes

1 Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 45.

2 The prototypical sculpted man is known as Adam across various religions.

3 Like all myths, this one, too, came to us in many shapes and sizes. It is most famously mentioned in Aesop's *Fables* (via Themistius and Phaedrus), Plato's *Protagoras,* Pseudo-Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca,* Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Hesiod's *Works and Days.*

4 Cf. among others Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days,* Homer's *Iliad,* Aesop's *Fables,* Pseudo-Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca.*

5 Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.21.

6 Ibid., p.19.

7 Richard Neer, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture* (London & Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p.105.

8 Guy P.R. Métraux, *Sculptors and Physicians in Fifth-Century Greece: a Preliminary Study* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), p.48.

9 Cf. Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*

10 Since Ovid, full name Publius Ovidius Naso, was a Roman poet, the goddess of love known as Aphrodite was called Venus.

11 *Ovid's Metamorphoses, in fifteen books. Translated by Mr. Dryden. Mr. Addison. ... and other eminent hands. Publish'd by Sir Samuel Garth, M.D. Adorn'd with sculptures. ... The third edition* (Ann Arbor: Gale ECCO, 2007), p.343-344.

12 Harold Bloom, *George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion* (New York, New Haven & Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), p.88.

13 Though the museum only opened its doors to the public in 1775, it collected anatomical waxes by famed wax artist Gaetano Giulio Zumbo (1656-1701) that predate its grand opening by more than 70 years

14 Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks* (London & New York: Hambledon and London, 2003), p.26.

15 Michelle E. Bloom, *Waxworks: A Cultural Obsession* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.124.

16 Alastair J.L. Blanshard & Kim Shahabudin, *Classics on Screen: Ancient Greece and Rome on Film* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), p.18.

17 "Les Films tels qu'ils sont" (Le Courrier Cinématographique n°12, 30 September 1911, p.16) in Alain Carou & Béatrice de Pastre (eds.), *Le Film d'Art & Les Films d'Art en Europe, 1908-1911* (1895 - n°56, December 2008, Paris: AFRHC), p.317.

18 "The Film of the Week," *Moving Picture World,* vol.8, (April 29, 1911), p.934

19 *Moving Picture World,* vol. 20, (April-June 1914), p.772.

20 W. Stephen Bush, "Cabiria" in *Moving Picture World,* vol. 20, (April-June 1914), p.1090-1091.

21 Claude Aziza, "Le Péplum: l'Antiquité au Cinéma" in *CinémAction* n°89 (Condé-sur-Noireau: Editions Corlet, 1998), p.7

22 Alastair J.L. Blanshard & Kim Shahabudin, *Classics on Screen: Ancient Greece and Rome on Film* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), p.36.

23 Ibid., p.58-59.

24 Michael G. Cornelius (ed.), *Of Muscles and Men* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2011) p.5.

25 Harryhausen would later patent his combination of special effects that created an exciting mix between live action and animation as "Dynamation."

26 This act of sculptural manifestation is called agalmatophany, which, along with the appearance of a god, or theophany, was not only common practice in *Jason and the Argonauts,* but also in Greek mythology. Gods were said to use statues as a go-between to communicate to mortals, for the latter would not be able to withstand the radiant presence of the actual deity. Deborah Tarn Steiner, ibid., p.135.

27 Cf. Pseudo-Apollodorus's *Bibliotheca* and Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica.*

28 George Grote, *A History of Greece: from the Earliest Period to the Close of the Generation Contemporary with Alexander the Great, vol.5* (London: John Murray, 1870), p.58-59.

29 In spite of its rather medieval settting, *Your Highness* also features a Minotaur and a Hydra.

30 Deborah Tarn Steiner, ibid., p.81-92.

31 Marjorie Garber & Nancy J. Vickers (eds.), *The Medusa Reader,* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).