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The Disney Version: *Hercules* (1997)

Introduction

Recent critical attention has not been kind to Walt Disney (1901-1966). In his review of *Hercules*, the cultural critic Stefan Kanfer summarised much contemporary feeling about Disney:

> The impresario couldn't draw with much panache, couldn't write dialogue or compose music or lyrics. He was a naïf and right-winger, biased against blacks, Jews and homosexuals. His taste could be vulgar, and his self-importance was notorious (Kanfer 1997: 17).

A recurrent feature of such criticism is the innate social conservatism implicit in the Disney Corporation's products, both those produced under Walt Disney's direction and those subsequent to his death. Some progressive family therapists have even advised against allowing children to watch Disney films or, if this proves impossible, then adults should intervene to mediate their child's viewing either by hi-jacking the stories to provide alternate endings or pointing out errors or misconceptions that the film is promoting.

Such criticism stands in contrast to the critical acclaim that attended the work of Walt Disney in the 1930s and 1940s. At this time, members of the avant-garde embraced his animations and his work received adulatory reviews in Paris and Berlin. The leading French director René Clair praised Disney's polymath abilities and described his artistry as 'sublime'. Amongst the most vocal of Disney's champions was the Russian director Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948). Eisenstein has a claim to being one of the most influential directors of the twentieth century. The impact of his films, such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible, part I* (1944) and *part II* (1958), can be seen in the work of numerous directors right up to the twenty-first century. In addition, Eisenstein was an important early theorist of cinema. Famous for his championing of montage, Eisenstein was fascinated by the origins of the appeal of cinema and its relationship to earlier art forms. In any account of cinema, Eisenstein felt that Disney must have a prominent place. Indeed, he regarded him as one of the three most important figures in the industry and his work one of the greatest contributions that America made to art:

> I'm sometimes frightened when I watch his films. Frightened because of some absolute perfection in what he does. This man seems to know not only the magic of all technical means, but also the most secret strands of human thought, images, ideas, feelings. Such was probably the effect of Saint Francis of Assisi's sermons. Fra Angelico's paintings bewitch in this way. He creates somewhere in the realm of the very purest and most primal depths ... He creates on the conceptual level of man not yet shackled by logic, reason, or experience (Eisenstein 1988: 2).

It is impossible to reconcile such views with those of Kanfer above. Kanfer's Disney is a man distinguished by the smallness of his talent and of his breadth of vision; Disney is a figure who ruined popular film. For Eisenstein, Disney is part saint, part genius. Yet, whatever opinion we decide to follow, it is clear that it is impossible to give a full account of cinema that doesn't include Disney.

The change in critical attitude towards Disney animation is the result of a number of factors. Certainly, changing attitudes and increased sensitivity towards issues of gender, race, and class have not served Disney films well. In addition, Disney films have come under increased scrutiny because of the dominance of Disney in the media market. The Walt Disney Company is the world's largest media and entertainment company enjoying a market capitalisation of approximately $70 billion, an annual turnover in the region of $38 billion, and an operating income of close to $6 billion. In addition to its animation studios, its film business includes the large studios of Touchstone Pictures and Miramax films. These film businesses are complemented by an extensive network of home distribution companies for the selling and rental of DVDs as well as commercial vehicles for the translation of films into live entertainment formats such as musicals or dramatic shows. Further opportunities for cross-promotional activities are provided by the parks and resorts division which includes five Disney theme parks (Anaheim, Florida, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong) as well as a private cruise line. The merchandising division of the corporation is the largest in the world and its publishing division (Disney Publishing Worldwide) is the world's largest publisher of children's books and magazines with a market penetration of 100 million readers each month in 75 countries. Finally, Disney is a large owner of media networks. These include one television network (ABC) as well as a number of cable channels, radio stations, and Internet businesses.

Far more than any other cinematic product, Disney films need to be seen in the context of an extensive network of complementary commercial pressures. Its films not only need to be saleable in a variety of international markets, but they also need to be translatable into small screen formats for home entertainment systems and television distribution as well as supporting a range of themed merchandise, resort entertainments, and book versions. Given such a range of diverse pressures that each film needs to satisfy, the tendency to rely on established formulae is understandable.

Hercules belongs to the so-called 'Eisner era' of Disney film productions. Traditionally, the animated cinematic output of Disney is divided into 'Silent and Early era' (1924-1937), 'Golden era' (1937-1967), 'Silver (post-Walt) era' (1967-1984), 'Eisner era' (1984-2005), and 'post-Eisner era' (2005-) films. However, these divisions are not impermeable. For example, while the beginning of the 'Golden era' is normally associated with the production of *Snow White* (1937), the first full-length, sound-synchronised, Technicolor, animated film, *Snow White* only makes sense when seen as a continuation of Disney's early experiments in colour and sound (e.g. *Silly Symphonies*) rather than a radical break from them.

The influence of the 'Golden era' productions on the style and formula of Disney films is unmistakable. Films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Bambi* (1942), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Peter Pan* (1953), established a preference for young protagonists, a mixture of comedy and drama, and a strong musical element. The Disney Corporation has continually returned to these films for inspiration and the development of new revenue streams. Merchandise associated with these films continues to sell well and they occupy a central place in the formulation of the Disney brand.

The 'Eisner era' of production is one associated with renewal in the animated division of the corporation. After the death of Walt Disney, animated film revenues experienced a decline. Although features such as *Robin Hood* (1973), *The Rescuers* (1977), and *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) were commercial successes, it was felt that the animated output of Disney looked increasingly dated and was being left behind by other studios and cinematic formats. The tremendous success of live-action films such as *Star Wars* (1977) threatened animation's monopoly on the depiction of the fantastic and unreal. The low point for the animated division was the production of *The Black Cauldron* (1985), an expensive flop universally derided for its overly complex storyline and difficult to like characters. In 1984, in order to reverse declining revenues and protect the company from hostile takeovers, the board of Disney appointed Michael Eisner as its new chairman. Eisner had been previously president of Paramount Pictures. Instrumental in getting Eisner elected to this position was Roy E. Disney (Walt Disney's nephew and son of Roy Disney, the co-founder of Disney).

In return for his corporate support, Roy E. Disney was appointed in charge of the animated division of the company. This period is characterised by a back-to-basics approach in terms of animation. According to Peter Schneider (Senior Vice President), there were three cardinal rules to observe: 'Tell a great story; tell it with great characters; and always push the technological barriers.' The first film to demonstrate this new sensibility was *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Its character-driven storyline combined with a strong soundtrack and technically impressive underwater animation proved a tremendous hit at the box-office and started a chain of successes that included *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin*

(1992), and *The Lion King* (1994). In each film, we see a similar combination of elements: a young hero is forced to confront danger accompanied by physically-comic sidekicks. All the while, a popular musical soundtrack provides commentary on the film's developments. As we shall see, it is a formula that with minimal tweaking Disney applied to the story of Hercules.

Background to case study

In 1992, the animation department at Disney turned to Greece in its quest for new subject matter for development into an animated feature. Amongst a number of proposals, two were singled out for further development, a feature based on the story of the *Odyssey* and a feature based on the hero, Hercules. Ultimately, the decision was taken to proceed with the Hercules project. The reason for the decision to green-light Hercules over the *Odyssey* illustrates both Disney's production priorities and the form that the movie took. 'Hercules appealed to us because it didn't seem as sacred a thing as something like the *Odyssey*. We had to feel that whatever we chose, we would be able to take quite a few liberties', said Ron Clements, one of the film's directors.

The other director for the film was John Musker. Clements and Musker had been a directing team in three previous films (*The Great Mouse Detective, Little Mermaid*, and *Aladdin*). As directors, they originally had come to prominence when Roy E. Disney had been put in charge of the animation department. Both figures were poster-boys for the new Eisner-era Disney. *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986), their first co-production, is normally regarded as one of the first films to express the new reinvigorated spirit of the animation department. Following the disastrous flop of *The Black Cauldron*, Disney animation moved in a different direction. Budgets were tightened. The marketing of the films was more targeted towards a children's market. The production schedule was increased. *The Black Cauldron* had occupied all of Disney's animation resources for a three-year period. Now two to three projects would be prepared simultaneously. Thus, while *Hercules* was undergoing development, *Pocahontas* (1995) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996) were being finalised. The lessons learnt from one film could now be quickly and easily imported into another.

A number of the successful features of *Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Aladdin* (1992) were replicated in *Hercules*. A popular catchy soundtrack was commissioned. Sidekick characters are used to provide much of the humour. The ratio of comedy to drama follows the traditional Disney recipe of 3:1. Just as the genie in *Aladdin* was a thinly disguised Robin Williams, so again, the look and style of prominent actors, in this case Danny DeVito and James Woods, influenced the depiction of the characters of Philoctetes and Hades.

Yet, although there is much that is similar with these previous productions by Musker and Clements, *Hercules* also represents some significant departures. The most obvious one is the graphic style employed in the animation. Rather than use in-house animators for the artistic lead in this film, Disney turned to the British cartoonist Gerald Scarfe to take on the role of production design. Musker had long been a fan of Scarfe's work and was instrumental in getting him on board for the project.

Gerald Scarfe made his reputation as a satirical cartoonist for magazines such as *Punch* and *Private Eye* in the 1960s. Later he became more famous as a political cartoonist for the *Sunday Times* for which his depictions of Margaret Thatcher were renowned for their savagery. Although primarily a cartoonist, Scarfe was not without experience in animation. Prior to his involvement in *Hercules*, Scarfe had been the animator and principal director of the celebrated animated short, *The Wall,* for the band Pink Floyd. He had also extensive experience designing for the theatrical stage.

As a cartoonist practising for the adult market, Scarfe was well positioned to be the aesthetic muse for this film which pitched itself at a slightly older, savvier, hipper market than previous Disney films. Unlike other films which aimed to please audiences from age six and upwards, *Hercules* was very much slanted towards the over-eleven market. His sharper lines and edgier graphics suited the more mature subject matter of this film. Translating Scarfe's vision to the team of animators were Andy Gaskill (Art Direction) and Sue Nichols (Production Styling). Both were experienced Disney professionals, having worked on a number of previous films. While Scarfe sketched out the broad-concept and aesthetic look, Gaskill and Nichols were charged with organising the animators to bring it to fruition. They were responsible for working out the nature of the lighting, props, costuming, and background. Most of the more quirky elements in the scenes were the product of their work.

In looking for their inspiration, members of the artistic team travelled to Greece and Turkey. Their itinerary in Greece included Mount Olympus, the Acropolis in Athens, Delphi, and Thebes. While in Turkey, in addition to major classical sites such as Ephesus, their travels also included a tour of the coast to see the rock-cut tombs of Lycia. The distinctive architecture of the tombs, which were carved into high cliffs, makes a frequent appearance in the film; such tombs providing Hades with his preferred place from which to watch the unfolding drama. In addition, a large amount of time was spent combing through standard works on Greek art. This initial research was distilled into the reference guides issued to all animators. The impact of this research is seen most effectively in the opening scene of the film, which features a run-through of the greatest works of classical art.

The other important creative input into the film was the song-writing team of Alan Menken and David Zippel. Menken was a well-established figure at Disney having won Academy Awards for his soundtracks for *The*

Little Mermaid (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *Pocahontas* (1995). However, he had not previously worked on a Disney feature with Zippel. In many ways, it was a pairing that suited the production values and the narrative structure of the story. Zippel, a former lawyer, was a talented lyricist who enjoyed complex puns and wordplay. Menken's experience meant that he could easily adapt to a musical pastiche style that fitted well with the movie's post-modern sensibilities. Moreover, the most distinctive musical motif in the film, the gospel and blues-singing chorus of Muses, replicated a musical conceit that Menken had used earlier in his career. One of Menken's earliest successes had been with the musical *Little Shop of Horrors*, a musical that parodied early B-grade horror films. One of the features of the musical was a troupe of gospel-singers who provided meta-textual commentary and fill-in narrative in much the same way as the Muses do in *Hercules.*

In promoting *Hercules*, Disney followed its standard combination of print and digital media promotion. One feature that makes Disney promotion strategies distinctive from other film companies is the opportunity to cross-promote its films through its Disney stores, theme parks, and television channels. Stores started to receive Disney merchandise in advance of the film in order to whet the audience's appetite. Another cross-promotion strategy was use of a strategic tie-in arrangement with McDonald's restaurants. In January 1997 McDonalds and the Disney corporation signed a ten-year agreement to facilitate large-scale cross-promotion and *Hercules* was the first film to benefit from this arrangement. Hercules merchandise such as figurines, soft-drink cups, and tray inserts all appeared throughout the campaign to help launch the film. In Europe, Disney entered into an arrangement with the confectioner Nestlé to promote Hercules through the incorporation of Hercules figurines in their range of chocolates.

Another distinctive aspect of Disney's marketing of its films is the use of spin-off television shows to rejuvenate the franchise. In 1998, Disney produced *Hercules: The animated series* to capitalise on the popularity of the *Hercules* movie. The series premiered on the Disney Saturday morning show on the national ABC network where it proved tremendously popular. It continued to show on the ABC network until 2001 when it moved to the cable television channel Toon Disney. Episodes were made until 2008. The series was created as a prequel to the film and followed Hercules' adventures as a teenager at the Prometheus Academy, where together with his friends, Icarus and Cassandra, he battled both the snobbery of classmates such as Prince Adonis and the plots of Hades. Like the film, the series was characterised by a comic approach to myth. Icarus, for example, is shown as constantly frazzled owing to his close encounter with the sun and the inability of anybody to take Cassandra's prophecies seriously is a running joke.

One other post-release spin-off that was designed to capitalise on and maintain interest in the film was the 'Hercules on Ice' skating spectacular.

This was the first of the 'Disney on Ice' productions. The show, which toured the US, received almost universal critical praise and was often compared to the film in much more favourable terms. In particular, critics praised the depiction of Megara as a more lovable figure than the cynical and damaged character in the movie, and the character of Philoctetes who swapped a lot of his verbal humour for physical slapstick in the ice-capades version of the story.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Disney's promotional campaign for *Hercules* was the Disney parade in New York. In 1995, Disney purchased the lease on the derelict art-nouveau playhouse, the New Amsterdam Theatre on 42nd Street in Times Square, and began renovations. Disney's intention was to create a central venue that it could use for promotional screenings of its movies and a location for its theatrical spin-offs. Indeed, the latter is perhaps the most prominent use of the space; the New Amsterdam having been the location for the opening of the stage version of the *Lion King* in 1997. This renovation was heavily supported by city officials who were keen to see the New Amsterdam rehabilitated as part of their plan to clean up Times Square. To celebrate the re-opening of the New Amsterdam, Disney was able to secure an agreement from Town Hall to allow a parade from West 42nd Street to East 66th Street. The occasion of the parade was the première of Disney's new summer blockbuster, *Hercules*.

The logistics and cost of the parade were enormous. The city repaved one block of 42nd Street and filled all the potholes for the length of the parade route. Teams of electricians turned off all the streetlights along the parade route. Disney asked over 5,000 businesses to turn off their lights for the duration of the parade. Traffic around 42nd Street was closed from midnight on Friday to noon on Sunday. Most of Midtown was closed to traffic for the duration of the parade. Over eight miles of police barricades and 2,000 police officers were deployed. The clean-up operations involved 118 sanitation workers charged with clearing 350 specially-deployed rubbish bins.

The excessive cost of the event (only a proportion of which was covered by Disney) combined with the inconvenience and the perception that Disney was in receipt of special favours attracted criticism. The *New York Post* was particularly scathing in its editorial on the event. Letters-to-the-editor of the major New York newspapers took a similar line. These critics were joined by a number of New York chapters of industrial unions who were involved in strike action at the time against ABC, a Disney affiliate, and who objected to New York city officials condoning a celebration of the Disney corporation. Yet, despite this opposition, the event was also popular in many quarters. Approximately two million people came out to watch the parade, which featured, in addition to a giant Hercules striking poses as he stood atop Pegasus, thirty imported floats from the night-time parade at the Disneyworld in Florida. The audience for the event was

further expanded through the televising of the parade on E! The Entertainment Channel, a cable channel owned by Disney.

The critical reception of the film was mixed. Some critics panned the film for being too commercial and too obviously aimed towards the merchandising market. Kanfer complained that far from being the offspring of Zeus and the wife of Amphitryon, this title character 'springs from the twin sources of Myth and Avarice'. Others found it too formulaic, a repetition of techniques previously seen in films such as *Aladdin*. Critics often compared Menken's score for *Hercules* unfavourably with his previous efforts. It is perhaps telling that although *Hercules* was nominated for an Academy Award, it failed to win, ending Menken's run of success.

The initial box-office was equally disappointing. In the first two weeks of general release, the film took only $58 million at the box-office. This compares with *Pocahontas* and the *Lion King*, which took $80 million and $119 million respectively in the same time period. The film eventually garnered $252 million in worldwide box-office, a respectable return, but not outstanding. Part of the reason for the comparative underperformance at the box-office was a misjudgement of the audience. The traditional secret for Disney success had been to produce films that appealed to the entire family. Such a formula became increasingly difficult as the audience fragmented at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, the target audience of the film, namely slightly older, but pre-teen boys, failed to be attracted in the requisite numbers, preferring to go to even more adult-oriented films such as *Men in Black* (1997) or *The Lost World* (1997), the sequel to box-office hit *Jurassic Park* (1993). At the same time, the film alienated younger viewers who found the darker vision of the film distressing. The lack of success of *Hercules* is noticeable given the lack of competition in the summer of 1997 for the child market. There were no other films, apart from *George of the Jungle* (1997), pitched at children that year. Analysts noticed the gap and predicted *Hercules* would do well. Such predictions only served to reinforce the sense of *Hercules'* failure. The final contributing factor was the run away success of *Titanic* (1997), which succeeded in smashing all previous box-office records. The film so dominated the takings that year that *Hercules* got lost. Ultimately, it was not the Titans that destroyed Hercules, but a ship named after them that sank the film.

Plot summary

The film begins with a prologue in which a singing chorus of Muses describe how Zeus (voiced by Rip Torn) created order out of chaos by imprisoning the destructive elemental Titans that formerly stalked the earth (song: 'That's the gospel truth'). The scene shifts to Mount Olympus where the pantheon of gods is assembled to celebrate the birth of Hercules, the son of Zeus and Hera (Samantha Eggar). All of the gods are enchanted

by the young infant and shower him with gifts, his parents providing him with a small winged foal, Pegasus. Hades (James Wood) alone proves immune to the child's charms, and his hatred only intensifies when he returns to the Underworld and learns from the three Fates that his plans for domination will be undone should the adult Hercules ever take the field of battle against him. Hades hatches a plan to dispose of Hercules by first stripping him of his immortality and then killing the helpless infant. He entrusts the plan to his two bumbling sidekicks, Pain (Bobcat Goldthwait) and Panic (Matt Frewer). Unfortunately for Hades, these two demons fail to administer the full dose of the potion that will render Hercules mortal and defenceless. Instead, Hercules is left mortal, but retains his godlike strength. When Pain and Panic, in the form of serpents, try to kill the child he quickly dispatches them. Defeated, the two demons decide to return to the Underworld and pretend to Hades that they were successful in their mission to kill Hercules.

Unable to return to Olympus owing to his mortal condition, the infant Hercules is raised by Alcmene and Amphitryon, a peasant couple who find the child after it has been abandoned on earth by Pain and Panic. Ignorant of his origins, Hercules (Tate Donovan) grows up into an awkward adolescent, his exceptional strength proving more of a burden than a gift (song: 'I can go the distance'). Recognising the unhappiness of their adopted child, Alcmene and Amphitryon recount to him the strange events surrounding their discovery of him on a mountainside. Hercules realises that the gods must know the story of his origins and he sets off to the temple of Zeus to find out the truth.

On his arrival at the temple, Zeus manifests himself and reveals that Hercules is his son. Moreover, he tells Hercules that he will be able to return to his biological family on Mount Olympus, if he transcends his mortality and proves himself a 'true hero' on earth. In order to help him to achieve this end, Zeus reunites Hercules with Pegasus and sends him to undergo training with the satyr and hero-trainer, Philoctetes ('Phil'; Danny DeVito). After an extended montage of training-scenes (song: 'It's up to you'), Hercules feels ready to embark on his quest to become a hero. Phil advises him to head for Thebes. As they journey to Thebes, Hercules encounters a young woman (Megara, 'Meg'; Susan Egan) being menaced by a centaur river-spirit. Hercules rescues this 'damsel in distress' and the young hero is smitten by this gorgeous auburn-haired beauty. Unfortunately for him, Megara has already sold her soul to Hades and is acting as his agent on earth.

Hercules' actions in rescuing Megara bring to Hades' attention the fact of Hercules' continued existence. Afraid that Hercules may yet upset his plans, Hades immediately undertakes to destroy Hercules by arranging for the hero to go into battle against the giant Hydra. The pair is evenly matched, but Hercules eventually triumphs over his foe, burying the many-headed serpent under a pile of boulders. The Hydra is the first of a

sequence of monstrous opponents sent by Hades to kill Hercules. Through an extended musical number (song: 'Zero to Hero'), we see Hercules triumphing over all of them, increasing his fame and fortune.

Unable to succeed by force, Hades resorts to guile and arranges for Megara to seduce the hero. Hercules falls deeply in love with Megara, refusing to heed the warnings given by Philoctetes, who accidentally uncovers Hades' plan about the danger she poses. Megara meanwhile has been bowled over by Hercules' honesty and integrity and refuses to assist Hades in his plans. When Hades sees how passionately in love these two figures are, he realises that he has the perfect leverage to enact his scheme.

Appearing before Hercules at the gymnasium, Hades offers Hercules a deal. After demonstrating that he has Megara in his clutches, Hades promises that if Hercules will give up his godlike strength for twenty-four hours then he will not do any violence to Megara. Hercules, reluctant because he knows that Hades will use this period to wreak havoc, agrees provided that no harm should come to Megara during the twenty-four hours. Hades and Hercules shake on the deal and Hercules discovers that his powers have gone.

Hades then bounds off to unleash the Titans and lead them in an attack against Olympus. The release of the Titans causes calamities on earth and Hercules stands by powerless to help. While he launches his attack on Olympus, Hades sends a giant Cyclops to kill Hercules. As Hercules and the Cyclops battle, Megara is accidentally injured by a falling column. This violates the agreement that Hercules made with Hades and Hercules finds his strength returned.

Hercules then ventures to Olympus where he manages to defeat Hades and the Titans. Unfortunately while he is away saving Olympus, Megara dies. Risking his own life, Hercules journeys to the Underworld to retrieve Megara's soul from the River of Death. It is this act of self-sacrifice which finally proves that Hercules is a 'true hero' and allows him to have his immortality restored. Finally able to return to Olympus, Hercules chooses instead to stay on earth with Megara. He has finally found a place where he belongs (song: 'A Star is Born').

Key scenes and themes

The nature of heroism

Hercules is the paradigm of the Greek hero. He's the archetype and the template for all subsequent versions of heroism. As Ron Clements, the director of *Hercules*, remarked, he's the 'first superhero'. Given his status, Hercules is the ideal vehicle for analysing the nature of western heroics. One of the constant questions running throughout *Hercules* is a question about the nature of heroism. The issue is central to the plot of the film. It

is Hercules' discovery of what makes 'a true hero' that allows him both to defeat Hades and reconcile himself to his family on Olympus. Allied to this theme are a number of other important themes in this film. For example, Hercules' quest for true heroism maps onto an ancillary concern about how one makes the transition from childhood to adulthood. Hercules' gangly, uncontrollable body at the start of the film exemplifies many of the problems that young men face as they approach puberty. Hercules' escape from his awkward adolescence represents the first step towards becoming a hero. Similarly, the concern with substance over style that underpins much of the criticism of consumer culture that one finds in this film is part of this broader quest for a definition of heroism. When Zeus advises Hercules to 'look inside your heart', he implicitly rejects all external trappings of fame in favour of an interior life predicated on a moral framework of self-sacrifice. This is the formulation that Disney offers as a notion of heroism.

The ancient mind would have had trouble grasping the notion of heroism offered in Disney's *Hercules*. The idea that there was such a man as a 'true hero' was one unknown in the ancient world. People were simply either heroes or they were not. Essentially, heroes were figures (usually from the past) who were offered some form of worship or commemoration such as ritual offerings on their graves or sacrifices performed in their honour. By defining heroism in terms of ritual function (i.e. anyone who receives cult is a hero), a large number of figures were recognised as heroes that we would not normally consider as such. We possess, for example, a few child heroes whose only claim to fame are distinguished parents. We even have one case of a dog worshipped as hero. Later in the Hellenistic period, wealthy benefactors would use their patrimony to establish cults to themselves and ensure that they were worshipped as heroes by their communities and descendants.

There was no moral requirement for being a hero. Heroes could perform the most horrendous, immoral acts. Achilles mutilated the body of his opponent Hector to such an extent that even the gods were outraged. Other Homeric heroes were no better. Agamemnon is shown to be a vain and ill-tempered ruler in the *Iliad*. Odysseus is wily and deceitful. Indeed, Hercules was no paradigm of good behaviour. He was as famous as a drunk or a glutton as he was a defender against evil. Ancient artists seem to have had as much fun depicting a fat, drunken, urinating Hercules (the so-called 'mingens-type') as they do showing him in more elevated poses.

Moreover, the implicit criticism of wealth and fame in the film contradicts much of the ancient ethos surrounding the hero. One of the defining features of the hero in the ancient world was his fame. A hero without fame was a contradiction in terms. Further, there was a direct correlation between fame and material rewards. Heroes expected to be rewarded as a natural consequence of their status. Sometimes they could be exceptionally mercenary. Hercules, for example, refused to rescue the daughter of

Zero to hero

The sequence begins with the Theban crowd staring at the pile of rocks under which the Hydra is buried. Hercules' destruction of the Hydra seems to have cost him his life. Suddenly, the clenched fist of the Hydra twitches and Hercules emerges, exhausted, but alive. Carried aloft by the adoring crowd, Hercules turns to Phil and says, 'You've got to admit – *that* was pretty heroic.' The scene cuts to the chorus of Muses and a jazzy musical number begins. Through a montage of scenes, the Muses recount the deeds of Hercules and show his increasing fame. Hercules' activities largely consist of defeating monsters sent by Hades. Only the extinguishing of an erupting volcano by placing a boulder on its mouth breaks up the otherwise endless repetition of monster-bashing. All the monsters of Greek myth are here. Even monsters outside the traditional Herculean mythic cycle are included. So while the montage begins by showing him skewering with an arrow the Erymanthian boar, traditionally the third of Hercules' labours, it soon shows him defeating the Gorgons and the Minotaur, monsters more often associated with Perseus and Theseus respectively. In a visual conceit first established in *Jason and the Argonauts*, Hades is shown controlling the monsters via chess pieces on a large game board. Interspersed among the scenes of monster fighting are scenes where Hercules is shown receiving the rewards of fame [Fig. 19]. Increasingly the hero is turned into a brand and used to market goods as diverse as action figures, soft drink, and sandals.

The visual imagery is underscored by the lyrics of the accompanying musical number, 'Zero to Hero'. These stress both the martial nature of Hercules' activities ('Who puts the glad in gladiator? Hercules! / Whose daring deeds make great theatre? Hercules!') and the monetary rewards that he received from them ('From appearance fees and royalties, our Herc had cash to burn / Now nouveau riche and famous, he can tell you what the Grecians earn'). The song and attendant sequence of images finishes with the line, 'Now he's a hero. Yes, indeed!'.

Well actually, no he isn't as it turns out. Almost immediately, the colour and volume disappear and the scene transforms to a darker and more sober scene set inside the temple of Zeus where Hercules re-enacts some of the previous adventures we have just seen for his divine father. Confident that he has now earned a place amongst the Gods, Hercules awaits his invitation to Mount Olympus. Sadly for him, his confidence turns out to be misplaced. Zeus informs him that he is yet to prove himself 'a true hero'. It takes more than fame or a capacity for violence to make a hero in the Disney universe.

the king of Troy from a sea-monster until he promised Hercules a set of fine horses. When the king reneged on the gift after Hercules' rescue of the princess, Hercules vowed to destroy the city. It is a story that is the very antithesis of chivalry.

This consideration of ancient notions of heroism brings into relief just how contrived is the version offered by Disney. The notion of heroism that Disney presents here is the product of a complex series of post-antique

19. Is there a difference between fame and heroism?
Disney *Hercules* (1997).

intellectual developments. The modern hero is a confection of a number of different ideas. It takes the Christian focus on the internal self, melds it with Romantic notions about the importance of the individual, and tops it off with a coating of twentieth-century self-help rhetoric. Looking for the origins of the version of heroism in Disney's Hercules one is better advised to read the letters of Paul or the Charles Atlas guide to physical development than any work of Greek mythology.

There is a further problem with the notion of heroism that Disney offers in this film. As a number of critics have noted, despite its rhetoric, the film seems to offer mixed messages about the relationship between fame and heroism. The film may claim that heroism is not a quest for glory, but its visuals and music revel in precisely the rewards that fame brings. This is especially shown in the 'Zero to Hero' sequence where the up-beat tempo of the music and the fast-paced editing specifically invite us to enjoy the spectacle. Further strengthening the viewer's association with this sequence are the specific images employed. This story of success is a version with which viewers are all too familiar. From the celebrity endorsements of sports shoes and soft drinks, to the autographs, to the rewarding of poor parents with glistening mansions, Hercules walks a path already trod by numerous basketball and football stars [Fig. 19]. His version of heroism is one that needs little extra validation. Rather than under-cutting traditional narratives about success, this sequence reinforces and amplifies them. Given that the sequence is designed – like so many other Disney sequences – to be replayed as a stand-alone

segment (it is its own chapter on the *Hercules* DVD), its contradictory message obliterates many of the values that are supposedly the mainstay of the storyline of this film.

Indeed, in pushing too hard the eschewing of worldly possessions as a desirable aim, Disney threatens its own interests. Annalee Ward identifies the contradiction that lies at the heart of *Hercules* thus:

> This is the problem. Disney keeps waffling on the message it sends. Disney says that it wants to teach the lesson that a true hero is defined by the strength of his heart, but it also wants to teach the audience to value materialism: more stuff is good. After all, Disney needs to sell more to keep its profit margin acceptable for stockholders. (Ward 2002: 88).

This tension plays out in the plethora of tie-in merchandise that was produced for the film. The film may specifically ridicule the notion of Hercules merchandise such as action figures, soft-drink bottles, and sneakers. Yet it was precisely these items that the corporation and its affiliates produced to sell in its Disney-branded stores or to accompany the Hercules-themed fast-food meals at McDonald's. Disney's *Hercules* proves to be an exercise in doublethink where viewers are simultaneously encouraged to reject and desire consumer products.

These rival versions of heroism can be seen in the rival narrative arcs of Hercules and his trainer, Philoctetes. If the story of Hercules is a story about the discovery of a deeper, internal form of heroism, the story of Philoctetes is one where its showier, more superficial rival is shown to be triumphant. From the beginning, Philoctetes is only interested in surface. For him the way to heroism is through the development of muscles not ethics. When Phil talks about 'heart' he means endurance not morals. Heroism is all about 'going the distance'. His only interest is fame, creating a hero whose name will endure forever; a real 'star'. For all of Zeus' moralising about the true nature of heroism, the film ends with the Muses singing that 'a star (significantly not a hero) is born'. It seems that ultimately this film is all about making Phil's wishes, not Zeus', come true.

Rejecting the epic film

As we have regularly seen, representing antiquity on film inevitably involves working with a tradition. Not only is one competing with the plethora of classical motifs that permeate western culture, but one is also heir to a substantial cinematic inheritance. It is a heavy weight to bear and each director and genre reacts differently. The ironic, meta-theatrical response to this tradition offered in *Hercules* typifies many of the cultural products of the last two decades of the twentieth century. This was a period in which the in-joke and the parody reached their heights as an art form. This was particularly noticeable within the field of popular US

animation where TV shows such as the *Simpsons* and *South Park* pioneered this approach and trained their audience to expect such metatextual humour. In this period, it increasingly became seen that one of the functions of entertainment was to run a commentary on popular culture. No trend, fad, or fashion was immune. In many ways, it was a perfect fit of form and content. Just as animation offered an overly stylised version of reality that referenced, while never completely replicating, the original, so plotlines, dialogue and motifs from other cinematic, mythological, and popular narratives were referenced in a playful, parodic fashion.

The opening prologue sets the tone visually, musically, and comedically for the rest of the film. The film is all too aware of its cinematic predecessors and works hard in the prologue to signal that *Hercules* represents a departure from what has gone before. This rejection of older genres of epic

Prologue

The scene opens in what looks like the inside of an abandoned temple or perhaps the vault of a museum. The building reflects elements of classical architecture such as the domed ceiling of the Pantheon. The camera pans around a cluttered space composed of masterpieces of classical sculpture. In the foreground is a statue of Athena of the Phidian type modelled on the bronze example found in the Piraeus. In the midground reclines a statue of Dionysus taken from the east pediment of the Parthenon. In the background, classical and archaic statuary fills a wall of niches. All are modelled on recognisable types. The camera pans round and yet more statues come into view. Some are direct copies of famous statues. For example, we see the Zeus from Cape Artemision with a restored thunderbolt, the statue of Heracles from the east pediment of the temple of Aphaia at Aegina, and the bronze Terme boxer. Others, while not direct copies, take their inspiration from classical and neo-classical sculpture such as the work of the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. As the camera travels through this assemblage, we see in the distance a black-figure vessel highlighted by a shaft of light coming through the oculus of the dome. A gravelly voice-over (Charlton Heston) accompanies the scene, telling us about an age of gods and heroes. At the moment that a close-up of the vase fills the screen, the voice is suddenly interrupted by one of the figures on the vase coming to life. She berates the narrator for making the story sound like 'some Greek tragedy'. Suddenly, all the figures on the vase come to life and we are introduced to the Muses who tell the narrator to 'lighten up' and promise that they will take over the storytelling from this point onwards. In a musical number ('That's the Gospel Truth'), the Muses give the back-story to the film and recount how Zeus imprisoned the Titans and made life 'neat and smooth and sweet'. To illustrate their lecture and support their claim that they are speaking the 'gospel truth', the Muses refer to images on Greek vases. Having finished their story, the Muses step aside as the camera zooms in on a drawing of Mount Olympus on a plate. As the camera gets closer and closer, the drawing gradually morphs into the real mountain and the credits begin to roll.

film is dramatised by the replacement of Charlton Heston in the role of narrator by the Muses. As the star of *Ben-Hur*, Heston is a figure especially associated with epic cinema. His replacement by a troupe of sassy lounge singers tells us everything that we need to know about the shift in attitude embodied in this film.

This shift is further signalled by perhaps the most distinctive stylistic device in the film; the extensive use of Greek pottery as a decorative motif. Whereas the voice of Heston is associated with a gloomy room (part-museum, part-mausoleum) full of dusty, refined statuary, the world of the Muses is a bright, colourful landscape of gutsy, primitive, and ceramic-inspired images. According to the styling reference guides issued to all animators, the guiding shape palette for all forms in the film was the Greek vase. The bulging trunks of trees, the fall of shadows on undulating hills, the curve of Meg's hips as they meet her waist, even the splashes made by drops of water all imitate Greek vase shapes. The style of drawing imitates that found on Greek vases. Tendrils of vegetation normally found in the backgrounds of vase-paintings find their way into the undergrowth of *Hercules*. The subsidiary decoration on Greek vases such as key meanders and palmettes are regularly deployed throughout this film. The appeal of pottery to Disney's animators is easy to understand. Artists interested in the movement and expressiveness of line have always been interested in Greek vases. Yet this dominance of pottery represents more than just an illustrator's fancy. The rejection of the primacy of statuary and the turn to pottery repeats again the rejection of epic cinema. Statuary has regularly been regarded as the highest form of art, and it was routinely deployed as a classical signifier in epic films. No court of a Roman emperor ever seems complete without a few plaster casts of Greek athletes. Its only rival as a piece of classical *mise-en-scène* is the fluted column. No epic film ever embraced pottery in the way that *Hercules* does. In doing so, the film signals its break from the epic tradition. Rather than having any pretensions towards high art, this film is going to be populist and accessible. Moreover, it is going to break rules.

The figures that break most of the rules are the Muses. From their first appearance, they are upstarts. They don't operate in the same plane as the rest of the action. They slide across walls, imitate friezes, and animate pottery decoration. As Mike Show, who was in charge of animating these characters, remarked:

> They exist like drawings on a flat wall or as statues. They don't exist in the world with the other characters. You can put them on a wall, make a statue out of them, a bust, or on a plate ... They live in their own realm, their own two-dimensional graphic world (quoted in Thomas 1997: 219).

This liminal nature permits them to serve a particular narrative function. Disney takes the traditional role of a Greek chorus as commentators on

passing action and combines it with an ironic sensibility. These extra-dimensional characters function meta-textually. They play-up the fictive nature of the action. They never let us forget that we are watching a story, not live action. As a stereotypical Motown act metamorphosed into a bevy of goddesses, they license the interjection of other anachronistic elements. From the moment Zeus is described as 'too type A to just relax', we know that this film intends to speak to contemporary mores. When Pain jokes that 'Hercules' may be a popular name like 'Britney', we permit the jokey reference to the popularity of Britney Spears because we've already swallowed so much of this contemporary referencing already. The Muses teach us to expect such moves.

The number of intertextual allusions in this film is too voluminous to catalogue. Gods resemble TV stars. Thebes owes more to an out-of-towner's view of New York than it does to any archaeological site. Music and lyrics often comprise a series of endless quotations from vaudeville through to pop. *Hercules* doesn't short-change you when it comes to ideas. The basic storyline of a hero saving the world and in the process discovering his humanity is one that has been used before. If nothing else, it is essentially the same premise as *Hercules* (1958). What distinguishes the Disney version is all the added embellishment. It is the postmodern bells and whistles that make this film unique. It is a rich recipe, and one not welcomed by all critics; some of whom found the tone of the film a little too flip. In her review in the *Washington Post* ('Disney's *Hercules*: Myth for the masses', 27/6/1997), Rita Kempley expressed her frustration: 'Chock-full of celeb cameos, puns, and contemporary camp, the movie is annoyingly hip. It wants to belong even more desperately than its title character.'

Sanitising myth

Time magazine film critic Richard Corliss voiced the criticism of a number of reviewers when he remarked, 'don't look for this plot in Bulfinch'. As they watched the film, viewers became all too aware of the fact that what they were watching owed more to Disney conventions than Greek myth. As we saw earlier, Disney has long enjoyed a reputation for the promotion of conservative social values. Critics have regularly derided the film corporation for its representation of race, gender, and sexual orientation, which they have seen as excessively normative and reactionary. Good women are always passive subjects waiting to be rescued. Men are heroic and find validation through action rather than emotions. Effeminacy in males is derided, but compassion in women is praised. Villains often perpetuate ethnic stereotypes. This situation seemed to be changing with the more recent Disney films (e.g. *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*) broadening the range of both gender and ethnic representations; this change reflecting a broadening of representation that occurred in US media in the 1980s and 1990s. Yet even here the corporation was not above tweaking the storyline

Rescuing a damsel in distress

As Hercules, Phil and Pegasus look on, a young woman, Megara, comes into view; she is being chased by a giant blue centaur through a river. Water flows everywhere. In the background, we can see a waterfall. The young woman and the centaur struggle in the water that pools around their feet. The centaur grabs the woman and lifts her up so that she and he are face-to-face. 'I like them fiery,' he exclaims. Unable to control himself, Hercules wanders into the river to confront the centaur and his captive. However, he finds his offer of assistance dismissed by the young woman who tells him to 'Keep moving, junior.' Hercules refuses to take the advice and begins his attempt to subdue the centaur. Released from the centaur's grip, Megara dries herself on a branch on the riverbank and watches the combat. Despite being initially unimpressed by Hercules' rather amateurish and bungling attempts at monster-fighting, Megara warms to the hero as the fight progresses. Finally, she is forced to ask Phil, 'Is wonder boy for real?' Having dispatched the centaur, Hercules returns to Megara and finds himself completely tongue-tied by her beauty. After introductions are completed, Hercules asks how Megara found herself mixed up with the centaur. 'Well you know how men are,' Megara replies, 'They think "no" means "yes" and "get lost" means "take me, I'm yours".' It is a conversation that the all-too-innocent Hercules is unable to follow. After spurning the offer of a ride to Thebes, Megara heads off into the sunset, leaving Hercules with the line, 'I'll be alright. I'm a big, tough girl. I tie my own sandals and everything.'

to fit their agenda. Thus, Disney felt at liberty to change the age, looks, and accomplishments of the historical Pocahontas as well as the ultimate outcome of her meeting with John Smith in order to make a more 'Disney' storyline. The problem faced in *Hercules* is that much of Greek myth operates in an ethical world far removed from Disney's conventional morals.

The scene in which Hercules meets Megara [see box: 'Rescuing a damsel in distress'] represents a confection of a number of Herculean myths. Its principal source is the adventures of Hercules and his love affair with Deianeira. Just as in the scene described above, the first time that Hercules and Deianeira meet, Hercules needs to wrestle with the river god Achelous for her. Although in this case, the river god took the form of a horned bull. The presence of the centaur Nessus refers to another later adventure. In that episode, Hercules and Deianeira come to the river Evenus and Hercules is tricked by Nessus into putting Deianeira on his back in order to allow him to carry her across the river. However, rather than ferrying her across to the opposite bank, Nessus attempts to abduct and violate Deianeira. Fortunately, before Nessus can succeed in his plans, Hercules cuts him down with a volley of arrows.

In the Disney version of these myths, Megara (Hercules' first wife) is

substituted for Deianeira and the incidents involving Achelous and Nessus are conflated. Nessus remains a sexual predator, but this time he was approached not for his assistance as a ferryman, but, as we learn later, as a potential ally in Hades' plan to overthrow the rule of Zeus. The directors of the film were quite open about their free attitude towards mythic traditions. As co-director John Musker remarked in an interview, 'We, Ron Clements and I, knew we would only make one Greek movie. We borrowed elements and made it a sort of stew of mythology' (Tucker 1997: 38).

It is foolish, for a number of reasons, to criticise a film for not following a particular mythic tradition. First, because the idea that there is such a thing as an authoritative mythic tradition is a myth itself. In antiquity, countless different versions of myths circulated, often with irreconcilable details. Names and deeds were frequently interchangeable. Secondly, it is foolish because it ignores the fact that writers in the Greco-Roman world regularly adapted myths to suit their own story-telling purposes. The point when dealing with treatments of myth is not to criticise the creation of a 'stew', rather the role of the critic is to comment on its flavouring. It is worth observing that the choices in adapting myth made throughout *Hercules* reflect a particular moral view. They represent a desire to repress notions of domestic violence, irrational anger, and sexual transgression in favour of a world-view that celebrates monogamous companionate relationships and the nuclear family.

Take, for example, the depiction of Hercules' relationships with women. In antiquity, these relationships are always flawed and often end in bloody circumstances. A prime illustration is provided by Hercules' relationship with Deianeira, discussed above. According to the standard mythic tradition, as Nessus lay dying from the wounds inflicted by Hercules' arrows, he whispered into Deianeira's ear that his blood was a powerful aphrodisiac and that she should capture some of his blood so that if Hercules ever strayed she could reinvigorate his love for her. Deianeira duly did so, only to discover that Nessus had tricked her. For when she applied the blood to Hercules' cloak, she discovered that it was a burning poison that caused such intense continuous pain that ultimately the hero was forced to end it by committing suicide on a burning pyre; his immortal soul then travelled up to the heavens where he was welcomed on Olympus as a god. So while both the Disney movie and traditional mythic account start the story of Hercules' ascent to godhead with the rescue of a damsel from a river guardian, one is a story of vengeance, adultery, poison and betrayal and the other is a cheery musical number.

Hercules is depicted as a bumbling sexual innocent. He doesn't understand Megara's implied rape reference. He is constantly wrong-footed by her beauty. It is Megara who calls the shots. She's a type of modern feisty woman, the 'tough gal' that Disney increasingly chose to feature in its late 1990s films. Her sisters are Esmeralda from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), Audrey from *Atlantis* (2001), and Captain Amelia from

Treasure Planet (2002). Hercules' lack of worldliness makes him an easy dupe for her subsequent deception. It is hard to imagine a stronger contrast with the traditional mythic depiction of Hercules, which made him a womaniser of the first order. This is the man who famously deflowers the fifty daughters of king Thespius in one night. Later, he seduces Auge, the virginal priestess of Athena, and causes her to lose her position and be exiled from her family. Hercules leaves sexual turmoil in his wake. The story of his encounter with Megara is one of bloodshed, not coy kisses. Megara was famous in antiquity for being the wife whom Hercules slew during a bout of madness. The twelve labours were his penance for his crime. When Hercules declares to Megara 'I will never hurt you', the viewer who knows their mythology is left to laugh at the ironic humour of the statement and the boldness of Disney's sanitisation of myth.

If the depiction of Hercules' relationship with women seeks to normalise these relationships and remove any edginess, the same can be said for his relationship with parents. Unlike traditional accounts that make Hercules the product of an adulterous union between Zeus and the mortal Alcmene, in the Disney version of the story, Hercules is the legitimate son of Zeus and Hera. Alcmene and her husband Amphitryon are relegated to the roles of foster parents. Hera is a doting loving mother, not the hateful goddess who, raging at the betrayal of her husband, plagues Hercules for most of his life. 'We felt that illegitimacy would be difficult subject matter for a Disney movie ... We moved more towards making Hades the villain instead of Hera', Ron Clements said in an interview. This divine nuclear family lives – literally – in a gated community on Mount Olympus with the other gods. By representing Zeus and Hera as a normal nuclear family, the film manages to avoid the problem of the incestuousness of divine relationships. In myth, Zeus may be Hera's brother as well as husband, but in the Disney version only the latter relationship gets any air.

This constant privileging of the normative and domestic over the strange and transgressive turns Greek myth into a comprehensive rather than confronting narrative. Hercules loses any of the cultural accretions that make him distinctive. He becomes just another costumed superhero. Indeed, that is how Ron Clements saw him, 'a kind of superhero – the first superhero'. This may have been how Hercules first appeared to Clements, but it is remarkable to observe the amount of effort that was required to achieve this depiction. Greek myth turns out to be a far from convenient source for comic-book heroes.

Suggested further viewing

Fantasia (1940)
This bold, experimental film produced by the Walt Disney Company consists of seven animated sequences set to eight pieces of classical music. It was the first feature film shown in stereophonic surround sound and

was designed to offer a new genre of entertainment; one that combined the concert experience with the animated short. In keeping with its artistic pretensions, rather than being shown as a general release, the film was shown only in a limited number of high-end theatres and only for a limited run. Although a few critical responses were received from classical music critics, the general response to the film was extremely positive and the film is now regarded as one of Disney's finest products.

The film also represents Disney's most sustained engagement with antiquity prior to *Hercules*. In an extended sequence set to the music of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, the viewer is treated to an animated romp through the landscape of Greek myth. The sequence opens onto an Arcadian idyll dotted with neoclassical temples where creatures from Greek mythology romp. Pegasus and his brood of flying horses soar through the sky. Female centaurs bathe by pools whilst flying cupids plait their manes. Onto this scene arrives the god Bacchus who inaugurates a wild revel of dancing and drinking. Suddenly the fun is interrupted by an ominous storm cloud. Rain pours down and the wind blows. The god Zeus, clearly the prototype for the depiction of Zeus in *Hercules*, has arrived. Assisted by Hephaestus, Zeus, perched on his cloud, rains down lightning bolts onto the landscape as Bacchus and his followers flee. Weary after his endeavours, Zeus retires to sleep. Gradually, the clouds disperse, the sun shines, and life in Arcadia returns to normal. Iris draws a rainbow through the sky to show that the danger has passed. The sequence finishes with Helios driving his sun-chariot to the west and darkness descends after an eventful day. The mythological creatures retire to bed and the goddess Artemis shoots a comet through the night sky.

Aladdin (dir. Clements and Musker, 1992)
Although this film does not obviously engage with classical material, it does provide a useful example of the Disney formula in action. Directed by the same directors as *Hercules*, this film is based on the Arab folktales surrounding the figure of Aladdin, in particular the story of Aladdin and the magic lamp taken from the collection of tales in *The Book of a Thousand and One Nights*. As with *Hercules*, the Aladdin myth is freely adapted to suit the purposes of the storyline. The brutality of the original tale is erased. In *The Book of a Thousand and One Nights*, Aladdin is a killer who is happy to dispose of his magician opponents. He is far removed from the sweet, happy-go-lucky adolescent of the Disney film. The film shares a number of similarities with *Hercules*. Both feature slightly awkward young male protagonists. Both have comic sidekicks (the Genie and Philoctetes) and rely upon a musical score to enliven proceedings. Indeed, the films are so compatible that Disney even exploited their shared sensibility by staging a *Hercules* and *Aladdin* crossover in one of its television cartoons. In the episode 'Hercules and the Arabian Night' from *Hercules: The animated series*, we see Hades and Aladdin's nemesis, the

evil sorcerer Jaffar, combining to destroy the two heroes. Naturally, their plans come to naught as Hercules and Aladdin team up to defeat them. The episode is striking for the ease with which it was possible to combine the two storylines. *Hercules* and *Aladdin* clearly belong in the same universe.

Achilles (dir. Purves, 1995)
It is hard to imagine a film that differs further from the Disney take on Greek myth than this one. *Hercules* is feature length; *Achilles* is very short (11 minutes). Instead of line animation, *Achilles* uses stop-motion claymation. The budget for *Hercules* dwarfs *Achilles*, which was the product of a small independent production house. *Hercules* was seen in mainstream cinemas throughout the world, *Achilles* had limited release mainly confined to the film festival circuit. Yet in terms of serious engagement with the world of classical myth, *Achilles* has equal claim to significance. Barry Purves is one of the UK's leading animators and his services have been used on a number of big cinematic projects. *Achilles* was Purves' fifth animated film and came on the back of his critically-acclaimed claymation version of Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1993). In *Achilles*, Purves tells the story of the love affair between Achilles and Patroclus and the tragic deaths of the lovers before the walls of Troy. The story is told in the manner of a Greek tragedy with the use of masks and stage props. Like Disney's *Hercules*, Purves' short film derives its aesthetic from classical art. Statuary and vase painting are referenced throughout the film. Yet its strong homoerotic subject-matter, art-house style, and serious content about the dehumanising effects of war make it a very different film.

Best of 1970 list: V. Canby, 'Critic's choice: ten best films of 1970', *New York Times* (27/12/1970): 61; cf. 'Notables name bests', *New York Times* (27/12/1970): 77; A.H. Weiler, 'Critics vote "5 Easy Pieces" best film', *New York Times* (29/12/1970): 31. For a contemporary cinematic defence, see A.O. Scott, 'Fellini's fever dream of Ancient Rome', *New York Times* (26/1/2001): E20.

Critical reception: Highet's essay was originally printed in *Horizon* (1970) 12: 42-7 and is reprinted in Highet (1983). On intertextuality in *Fellini-Satyricon*, see especially Sullivan (2001). Simon's criticism: Simon (1970). Defence of intertextuality: See Pandiri and Baxter's letter in 'Move mailbag: "Airport", "Satyricon", Women's Lib', *New York Times* (7/6/1970): 94; cf. John Simon's response in 'Movie mailbag: from "Patton" to "Satyricon" to "Chaplin"', *New York Times* (28/6/1970): 80.

Gallery scene: Hughes (1971): 119-21.

Suburra Scene: Hughes (1971): 79-87; Zanelli (1970): 11-14. Non-grammatical Latin inscriptions: Zanelli (1970): 12; Hughes (1971): 80. Head of Vitellius: Sullivan (2001): 264. Use of *Roma Amor*: Zanelli (1970): 4.

Filming of hermaphrodite scene: Hughes (1971): 44-66. Influence of Lourdes: Hughes (1971): 45; Zanelli (1970): 80. Post-Christian world: Zanelli (1970): 13.

Cledonomancy: Halliday (1903): 47-53. Sporus: Suetonius, *Nero* 27-9. Mirth ritual: Apuleius, *Golden Ass* 2.31-311. Mythological executions: Coleman (1990).

8. Satirising Cine-Antiquity: *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979)

Monty Python's Life of Brian: Cyrino (2005): 176-93; Cleese, Gilliam, Palin, Idle, Jones and the Estate of Graham Chapman (2005): 349-87; Elley (1984): 147; Solomon (2001a): 301-3; Sellers (2003): 1-24; Hewison (1981): 59-93, especially good on the blasphemy and censorship issues; Johnson (2008): a journal on the making of the film.

The ancient world in comic films: Solomon (2001a): 283-305; Cull (2001): 162-90; Malamud (2001b): 191-208.

Satire: Guilhamet (1987); Carpenter (2000).

Decline of cine-antiquity: Wyke (1997a): 183-8; Winkler (1995); Solomon (2001a): 15.

Cleopatra (1963) and *Carry on Cleo*: Wyke (1997a): 100-9; Cyrino (2005): 121-58; Elley (1984): 93-5; Cull (2001): 162-90.

Mystery Science Theatre 3000: Beaulieu et al. (1996).

Monty Python: Cleese et al. (2005); Perry (2006); McCall (1991); Hewison (1981).

Monty Python and the Holy Grail: Cleese et al. (2005): 307-48; Elley (1984): 147; Hewison (1981): 38-9.

9. The Disney Version: *Hercules* (1997)

Disney and the Disney corporation: Maltin (1987): 29-82; Byrne and McQuillan (1999); Bell et al. (1995); Watts (2002); Sammond (2005). Financial statements: Information about the size and composition of the Disney corporation is provided by Disney Investor relations. Key documents include the 2010 Disney Fact Book and the 2010 Annual Report.

Disney and family therapy: Towbin et al. (2003).

René Clair: Finch (1995): 85.

Production history of *Hercules*: Thomas (1997): 164-99.

On the age suitability for the film: J. Benzel, 'Taking the children: you're a celebrity hero now, Herc, ya big lug', *New York Times* (29/6/1997): 22.

Menken: J. Bergernorth, 'Making Disney's world go round', *New York Times* (13/7/1997): 30.

Tie-in with McDonalds: 'Disney, McDonald's plan joint campaign', *New York Times* (9/6/1997): 31.

Hercules on Ice: See Van Gelder, L. 'Mythology for the young and light-hearted', *New York Times* (15/11/1997): 13.

Hercules parade in New York: B. Weber, 'Disney unveils restored New Amsterdam theater', *New York Times* (3/4/1997): B3; M. Purdy, 'Disney parade about to turn Midtown Goofy', *New York Times* (13/6/1997): B1; D. Martin, 'Its Greeks bearing glitz, Disney parades a hero', *New York Times* (15/6/1997): 27. Letters to the Editor: Reckler, 'Disney parade madness', *New York Times* (17/6/1997); J. Duban, 'Who doesn't love a parade? Some of us', *New York Times* (3/7/1997).

Box-office: G. Fabrikant, 'Marketplace: Hercules is too weak to lift Disney stock', *New York Times* (10/7/1997).

Greek heroism: Nagy (1999); Kearns (1989); Larson (2007). Sacrifice: Ekroth (2002). Child heroes: Pache (2004). Hercules: Galinsky (1972); Blanshard (2005); Riley (2008). Hercules and the King of Troy: Apollodorus, *Library* 2.5.9; Diodorus Siculus 4.42; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.215-19.

Sanitising myth. 'Don't look for this plot in Bulfinch': R. Corliss, 'A hit from a myth', *Time* vol. 149 issue 25 (23/6/1997): 76. See also J. Maslin, 'Oh, Heavens! What a hero!', *New York Times* (13/6/1997): C1. Disney's conservative values: Towbin et al. (2003). A more nuanced and slightly more positive view is presented in Davis (2006).

Changing representation of women in US media: Davis (2006): 169.

Altering of Pocahontas: Ward (2002): 35-8.

Hercules and Deianeira: Apollodorus, *Library* 2.7.5-7. Cf. Sophocles, *Women of Trachis*.

On the 'tough gal' figure in Disney films, see Davis (2006): 206-9.

Daughters of Thespius: Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 13.4; Apollodorus, *Library* 2.4.11; Diodorus Siculus 4.29.2-3; Pausanias 9.27.6-7. Auge: Apollodorus, *Library* 2.7.4; Diodorus Siculus 4.33.7-12.

Clements on the Hercules myth: Thomas (1997): 165 (the first superhero) and 166 (the problem of illegitimacy).

10. The Return of the Epic? *Gladiator* (2000)

Gladiator: Winkler (2004); Cyrino (2005): 207-56; Burgoyne (2011): 82-98; Albu (2008): 185-204 on the political sub-texts of the film.

Decline of cine-antiquity: Wyke (1997a): 183-8; Winkler (1995): 135-54; Solomon (2001a): 15.

Cleopatra (1963): Wyke (1997a): 100-9; Cyrino (2005): 121-58; Elley (1984): 93-5.

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