EDITED BY MONICA S. CYRINO & MEREDITH E. SAFRAN

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Contents

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List of Illustrations

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Introduction

Cinemyths: Classical Myth on Screen

Meredith E. Safran and Monica S. Cyrino

The myths of classical antiquity—the vast period during which first the Greeks and then the Romans set the political and cultural course for the Mediterranean region and beyond—have fueled the cinematic imagination almost since the inception of film as an art form, as early as 1911 with Giovanni Pastrone's silent film *La Caduta di Troia*.[1] Yet to authorize his cinematic version of the Trojan War in *Troy* (2004), screenwriter David Benioff (now well known as the co-creator of HBO's *Game of Thrones*) turned specifically to Homer's *Iliad*, as the title card before the film's action proclaims.[2] Even in this televisual age, when screens are fertile ground for myths and myth-making, narrative authority still resides in canonized literary and visual texts that have been fixed in a transmittable form: from Homer's *Iliad* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Sandro Botticelli's painting *The Birth of Venus* (1486) and Antonio Canova's marble sculpture *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (ca. 1800). Such canons constitute the cultural patrimony of the Western tradition, having long since become the measure by which cultural literacy is defined—at least by institutional gatekeepers who continue to exercise enormous influence over the preservation of cultural artifacts and the validation of individuals' social status.

Yet as *Troy*'s rather loose treatment of its advertised source attests, beyond canon roils popular tradition, in which "they say" or "it goes" constitutes adequate provenance for a stirring tale. In this arena, the narratives, characters, and symbols found in canonical texts take on new dimensions as they are repeatedly absorbed and filtered through subsequent historical-cultural sensibilities, in media ranging from comic books to television shows to video games. While viewers invested in the authority of a cultural

canon may object to *Troy*'s creators taking liberties with Homer's account, the vast majority of the audience members for whom popular art is made either did not notice or were not too upset if they did—and in interviews with popular media, scholars themselves drew some distinctions between the importance of fidelity to the *Iliad* and the aims of film.[3] In texts created for popular audiences, whether the story feels true to the viewer's experiences and fantasies is more important than ensuring faithful replication of source material on screen. *Troy*'s viewers would rather consume Brad Pitt's star-crossed romance with a vastly reinvented Briseis than see him crying to his mommy over the insult of having his slave-property taken from him (*Iliad* 1.357–427).[4]

Within academia, a blockbuster movie still carries less prestige than canonical literary texts like the *Iliad*, but the view of film as a medium has changed profoundly among scholars, including Classicists, in recent years. Both professional and amateur critics of screen texts—film, television, video games, and "new media" online—have increasingly recognized their technical-aesthetic sophistication and anthropological value. Indeed, screen texts now have their own canons, and they join traditional media—not all of which is canonical—on a millennia-long continuum that charts the ongoing interpretation of classical myth. The distinction between a fixed text that commands veneration and the mythical paradigms underlying all the narrative texts from classical antiquity has been crucial in changing attitudes toward adaptation in general. Recognizing the epistemological primacy of myth, above the texts that variously embody this protean cultural form over time, facilitates this reassessment of the hierarchy of cultural value among media.

A myth must retain some core of character and causation for its narrative to be recognizable: if the antagonist does not kill the bosom buddy of the withdrawn protagonist, it is not the myth of Achilles, Hector, and Patroclus, as the makers of *Troy* well understood.[5] Yet apart from the strictest structural analysis, grasping the work of myth entails recognizing its dialectical relationship with a particular historical-cultural matrix, resulting in a given textual instantiation. Before the term "myth" became pervasively associated with "fiction" and "lies," in ancient Greek culture *mythos* referred to a persuasive story that drew its power from the effective arrangement of its culturally significant parts, chosen by the speaker to appeal to a particular audience and tailored to a specific occasion.[6] In fact, the *Iliad* is the oldest text to convey this functional, rather than ontological, meaning of "myth." Each textual incarnation of a myth inevitably reflects contemporary values and tastes, more than those that shaped a previous textual instantiation. Indeed, if a myth is to remain more than a conceptual building block of a dead society, it must be amenable to such revisions—today, as in antiquity.

While the tradition of venerating origins may lead to reflexively elevating the *Iliad* as the "authentic" version of the myth of Achilles' withdrawal from and return to the Trojan War, both the *Iliad* and *Troy* offer versions of a vast body of myths associated with the Trojan War, none of which was ever fixed into what Westerners might recognize as "scripture."[7] Rather, they were the common possession of a self-identifying culture group that subsequent historical groups, up to today, continue to claim as ancestral.[8] The text of the *Iliad*—whose cultural authority most resembled the Biblical ideal—was not stabilized in written form until centuries after its weaving from oral traditions; modern editors and translators still disagree over its "proper" contents.[9] Prior to that stabilization, and thereafter, other versions that do not happen to survive certainly existed. Perhaps the Homeric version of Achilles' withdrawal and return simply won the ancient equivalent of *American Idol*.

Benioff's opening gesture toward the *Iliad*, then, is complex. With it, Benioff seeks to anchor a mass-market film with the cultural authority still imputed to the ancient text, while taking significant liberties with the Homeric account. Yet not only does the protean nature of myth accommodate his reinvention (which does have its narrative limits: for example, both Patroclus and Hector must die); these changes are also motivated by the particular values and cultural scripts of Benioff's intended audience, and presumably the writer himself. Specifically, *Troy* marries the narrative framework of Achilles' withdrawal and return with modern cinematic myths—such as the transcendent value of heterosexual romance and the redemption of the sinner through self-sacrifice—that would have been alien to the ancient audiences of the *Iliad*.

But so too the canonical tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, whose works the Western cultural tradition venerates on par with Homeric epic, reinvented traditional tales to appeal to the particular and somewhat idiosyncratic theater-going community of fifth-century BC Athens.[10] Aeschylus certainly grew up knowing the Homeric epics, and certainly took liberties with that cultural patrimony; in fact, Aeschylus' account of Agamemnon's vengeful wife axing him in the bath (*Agamemnon* 1343–98) arguably has superseded Homer's version of the homecoming banquet at which his vengeful cousin slaughters him in battle (*Odyssey* 4.519–37).[11] Both versions are accorded respect by scholars, and each one throws aspects of the other into sharper relief. *Troy* follows neither: Briseis stabs him in Apollo's temple during the sack of Troy. That version, too, now joins the ranks of variations on the myth of Agamemnon's death: still a vengeance-killing, but at a different place on the timeline.

As vehicles for myth, modern screen texts can accomplish what traditional media cannot: they can reassert something of the power of

performance and spectacle now lost in merely reading, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Even the Homeric epics, which were not performed in the theatrical sense, were nevertheless communicated through oral performances for centuries before they became texts available for private reading—and for centuries "private" simply meant a domestic performance, not the silent reading of book culture familiar to moderns.[12] Myth, which provides framework without "thickness," draws power from enactment and embodiment; by endowing the former with the latter, screen texts animate ancient narratives for new times and audiences.[13] The relationship between film and myth is as complex as that involving any other kind of text, and like all textual incarnations, screen texts perpetuate the relevance of narratives that would otherwise exist merely as artifacts. If the *Iliad* were lost but *Troy* survived, the myth of Achilles' vengeance on Hector for the loss of Patroclus would endure—albeit in an incarnation that has shed many of the cultural implications that animated it in antiquity. It would be different, but it would be a recognizable representation of the underlying myth.

Given this continual need for renovation, why do modern artists return to the myths of Achilles and Oedipus? Why do such ancient stories continue to command such a wide audience? For classical myth is hardly relegated to the art house but rather permeates all manner of contemporary media. Certainly the Romantics, especially the Germans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, elevated the Greeks to new heights as the noble progenitors of Western civilization: a warrior culture that stood on the border of civilization and chaos, and generated an artistic corpus that formed a bulwark against barbarism stronger than iron.[14] The claim of Greek myth's universality, too, was born at that time, on a far broader scale than the ancient Greeks themselves had imagined—a common possession that could capture the elite and popular imaginations across shifting national borders and supersede the primacy of Roman history as the classical narrative that determined the parameters of contemporary experience.

The Romans had in fact been the first such adapters of Greek myth, which largely obscures their native Italic traditions in extant Roman art and literature.[15] So, while Scandinavian and Celtic myth also remain vital in the media landscape, the myths of Greek culture are the ones we continue to call "classical," a term derived from the Latin denoting "top rank."[16] And although critical voices have productively questioned and reordered long-standing orthodoxies concerning heroism, gender, and cosmology that emerged from the formation of the classical tradition, such criticism has transformed rather than lessened the widespread interest in that "foreign country" of classical antiquity. So, too, since *La Caduta di Troia*, classical myth's presence on screen has waxed and waned, but it has never faded

away. Indeed, myth remains very much in evidence as a primary narrative mechanism through which audiences today encounter not only antiquity but also their own world and its cultural scripts.

About This Volume

Classical Myth on Screen presents an original and wide-ranging set of responses to the question of how screen texts in our contemporary media landscape embrace, refute, and reinvent the cultural heritage of classical antiquity: through specific story-patterns and archetypes that are woven into the fabric of Western narrative traditions. Since the publication of Jon Solomon's *The Ancient World in the Cinema* (1978, revised and expanded 2001), several books have greatly augmented scholarly engagement with onscreen treatments of various aspects of classical antiquity. While most scholarly works focus on the representation of ancient history on screen, a number of studies also investigate how the mythological is represented in screen texts.[17] *Classical Myth on Screen* specifically illuminates how mythic narratives are widely adapted and appropriated, both in projects that advertise their debt to classical antiquity, such as *Black Orpheus* (1959), *Clash of the Titans* (1981; 2010), and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), and those whose engagement is subterranean or selective, yet still potent, such as *Rocky IV* (1985), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Hunger Games* (2012). While focusing on myth as discrete from the canonical texts of classical antiquity, the chapters in this volume point out where contact with an ancient text that canonizes a myth is meaningful, with the understanding that modern cinematic artists are under no obligation to remain faithful to an ancient text—indeed, some of the most provocative interpretations of myth stem from divergent re-imaginings of those ancient inheritances. *Classical Myth on Screen* is thus both accessible and uniquely valuable to the variety of audiences who now study these screen texts in the context of film history, media studies, and the Western cultural tradition more broadly.

The contributors to this volume offer a variety of historical perspectives, highlighting key cultural relay points at which a myth is received and reformulated for a particular audience. This variety is demonstrated through the broad range of screen texts that serve as case studies, representing the past hundred years: from the 1927 science-fiction epic *Metropolis* to the 1973 prison drama *Papillon* to the 2012 summer blockbuster *The Hunger Games*; from the "high" culture of Palme d'Or winner *Black Orpheus* (1959) to the "low" culture of schlock-horror classic *Bride of Re-Animator* (1989); from Pixar's family film *Brave* (2012) to the transgressive gender-bending of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001); from the side-splitting satire of *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) to the patriotic sports melodrama of *Rocky IV*

(1985). Several pieces treat overtly classical projects, including *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999), and *Clash of the Titans* (1981; 2010). Yet seemingly straightforward uses of classical myth can be the most deceptive, as the shape and meaning of myths have inevitably been transmuted to accommodate the norms and values of contemporary audiences, despite the appearance of fidelity to classical antiquity.

Whether that debt is explicit or recognition of the work of myth relies on some combination of authorial hints and audience members' cultural literacy, scholarly explication of the web of interpretive connections illuminates a given screen text's engagement with the heritage of classical myth. Films frequently draw from myths that have become integrated into our wider cultural discourse after percolating through the ages into story-patterns and archetypes, even recombining with other strands of cultural heritage such as Biblical tradition or comic-book superheroes. In such cases where the myth in question may be fragmented or transmuted, the contributor illuminates how, in the absence of overt signaling, a myth operates at a cellular level to shape aspects of the screen text and becomes thrillingly recognizable upon explication of its subterranean presence.

Due to their own inextricable entanglement in the narrative strategies of the Western cultural tradition, myths of classical antiquity can perform even more momentous work: formulating the modern myths that shape contemporary society. As such, knowledge of classical myths can also be used to critique the contingent nature of narratives that promote, for example, blind patriotism, the valorization of work over family, and the reification of biological sex into gendered identity—all of which are designed to impose a certain corporate uniformity that subordinates the individual to the group, one of the cultural tasks to which myths have long been put. Such observations make a powerful case for how the authority of classical antiquity is still mobilized as a medium for working out contemporary preoccupations, and how myth remains the preferred discourse of the artistic forum in which societies engage in those discussions.

Classical Myth on Screen is organized along four major themes. Part One, "The Hero's Struggle," features myths in which a male protagonist struggles to assert himself against the constraints of cosmos and society. In the first chapter, "'Italian Stallion' Meets 'Breaker of Horses': Achilles and Hector in *Rocky IV* (1985)," Lisl Walsh brings together exemplars of "high" and "low" culture by reading the Homeric myth of Achilles' withdrawal and return through Rocky Balboa's return from retirement to avenge Apollo Creed's death at the fists of Russian boxer Ivan Drago. Through the lens of the Trojan War text, Walsh elucidates how this Cold War–era film yields previously unrecognized critiques of American values while remaining

optimistic about the possibility of peace. The effects of involuntary withdrawal from society inform Scott A. Barnard's chapter, "The Isolated Hero: *Papillon* (1973), *Cast Away* (2000), and the Myth of Philoctetes." Barnard employs Lacanian theory to explore the phenomenon, first attested in the myth of the Trojan War-figure Philoctetes, of the psychological toll exacted by the protagonist's lack of human contact, specifically the inability to engage in conversation as a means of constituting the self.

The hero's attempt to use his special abilities in seemingly insurmountable clashes with divine forces underlies Osman Umurhan's chapter, "The Limits of Human Knowledge: Oedipal Problems in *A Serious Man* (2009)," and Seán Easton's "Orpheus in a Gray Flannel Suit: George Nolfi's *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011)." Umurhan illuminates the Oedipal resonances of physics professor Larry Gopnik's attempts to understand the sudden insecurity that threatens his family and professional life, as he turns to both scientific theory and rabbinical authorities comparable to the oracular sanctuaries of Greek antiquity. As Umurhan reveals, the incomprehensible yet divine origin of Oedipus' all-too-human suffering is mirrored in this film. Easton demonstrates how the myth of the enchanting singer Orpheus and his ill-fated attempt to recover his wife Eurydice from the gods of the Underworld becomes the template for the modern conflict between success and happiness in the story of David Norris, whose divinely orchestrated political ascent is nearly derailed by an encounter with rising dance star Elise. Norris' defiance of the godlike Chairman of the Adjustment Bureau, through his perilous descent into a modern-day underworld, resonates with cinematic forerunners *Orphée* (1950) and *Black Orpheus*, and thematically with the U.S. myth of the post–World War II "company man," as in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956).

Part Two, "Fashioning the Feminine," spotlights two formative myths of gender from antiquity that loom large in the contemporary media landscape. In "Dystopian Amazons: Fantasies of Patriarchy in *Le Gladiatrici* (1963)," Antony Augoustakis explores the role of Amazons in Antonio Leonviola's post–World War II European "sword and sandal" film. Amazons, the mythical warrior women who signified the inversion of gender norms, are hybridized with the historical phenomenon of the Roman female gladiator to epitomize the type of cultural rebellion that exists only to be destroyed by a Herculean champion embodying conservative forces. Augoustakis contextualizes the patriarchal message of this variety of "sword and sandal" film via the delayed emergence of a feminist movement in Italy and throughout southern Europe. The converse use of the Amazon myth in more recent screen texts is demonstrated in Beverly J. Graf's chapter, "Arya, Katniss, and Merida: Empowering Girls through the Amazonian Archetype." Female archers in *Brave* (2012), *The Hunger*

Games (2012), and *Game of Thrones* (2011–) exhibit a constellation of key Amazonian features that suggest not only a perceptible shift in how the Amazonian archetype is depicted by filmmakers and studios and how it is intended to be received by the audience, but also a sea change in the representation of female action heroes more generally.

The genre-specific adaptation of the myth of Pygmalion, best known through George Bernard Shaw's eponymous play (1912) and George Cukor's cinematic version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *My Fair Lady* (1964), is the focus of the latter two chapters of Part Two. In "The Suspense-Thriller's Pygmalion Complex: Masculine Desire in *Vertigo* (1958), *Les Biches* (1968), and *Body Double* (1984)," Kaelie Thompson explores how the genre, exemplified by the films of Hitchcock, Chabrol, and De Palma, thwarts the patriarchal/capitalist idealization of "woman." Rather than serving as maternal figure and bearer of morality in the context of man's desire for success, wealth, and happiness in the "classical" film narrative, through doubling—fashioned by reflections and duplications—these films produce an image of the feminine ideal that instead destroys those fantasies. The fantasy of "perfecting" the female form through surgery unifies the discussion in Hunter H. Gardner's "Plastic Surgery: Failed Pygmalions and Decomposing Women in *Les Yeux sans Visage* (1960) and *Bride of Re-Animator* (1989)." Both Franju's pioneering "shock horror" film and Yuzna's "schlock horror" offer a Pygmalion figure who turns to the miracles of modern science, rather than divine power, to animate his creation—an act predicated upon a view of woman's essentially flawed condition and the power that man believes he has to correct it.

Part Three, "Negotiating the Cosmic Divide," focuses on the problematic gap between mortals and immortals and the modern conceptualization of ancient divinities from mortal perspectives. Alex McAuley's "Savior of the Working Man: Promethean Allusions in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)" and Monica S. Cyrino's "Magic, Music, Race: Screening 'Black Enchantment' after *Black Orpheus* (1959)" examine the potential of the divine and supernatural from optimistic perspectives. Whereas the cosmology of Lang's landmark science-fiction epic juxtaposes Olympian plutocrats and the suffering masses of subterranean factories, McAuley reveals how the Romantic reinvention of Prometheus as a liberationist figure, entwined with the Marxist association of the rebel technologist with the industrialized proletariat, casts the film's protagonist as a Promethean intercessor in the controversial resolution to its class conflict. In her chapter, Cyrino demonstrates how another relationship between the supernatural and the subaltern, signaled by the ubiquitous cinematic figure known as the "Magic Negro," plays out in films adapted from Greek mythology: this character, originating in *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*) (1959), is gifted with

supernatural talents and musical skills and is more autonomous than in non-mythological contexts.

Part Three concludes with two pessimistic views of the pagan gods in contemporary viewing contexts, with Meredith E. Safran's case study "Re-conceiving Hercules: Divine Paternity and Christian Anxiety in *Hercules* (2005)" and Vincent Tomasso's survey "The Twilight of Olympus: Deicide and the End of the Greek Gods." Safran elucidates the long-standing Christian anxiety over the close resemblance of the mythologies of Hercules and Jesus as the context for the NBC movie's claim that a human psychopath, rather than the Greeks' "Heavenly Father" Zeus, begot the hero. Consequently, the meaning of the greatest pagan hero is transformed to accommodate a Christian narrative of rebirth and redemption. Tomasso examines the modern tendency of screen texts to subject Greek gods to physical death, in contravention of their traditional immortality. From *Star Trek* (1966–1969) to *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), such depictions exemplify how inflections of the "twilight of the Greek gods" motif may be used as a means of making sense of how the West views and uses the legacy of classical antiquity in constituting itself.

Part Four, "Cinemyth-Making," shifts focus from the interpretation of myth to the examination of the process of myth-making itself, as mobilized to address contemporary social and cultural concerns through the medium of classical mythology on screen. In "Of Marketing and Men: Making the Cinematic Greek Hero, 2010–2014," Stacie Raucci explicates how media strategies enable the modeling of the onscreen ancient Greek hero, in recent blockbusters such as *Clash of the Titans* (2010) and *Immortals* (2011), after two distinct avatars of masculinity: Maximus, the Roman general-slave-gladiator of Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), and the "everyman" hero of films like *Die Hard* (1988). In "John Cameron Mitchell's Aristophanic Cinema: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001)," Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr. looks beyond the movie musical's debt to the speech of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, to the ancient comic dramatist's own *Women at Congress*. Like Aristophanes' play, *Hedwig* examines gender identity as a social myth that can be subverted through disguise, drag, and the performance of gender under fraught political circumstances. In "Dionysus Comes to Gotham: Forces of Disorder in *The Dark Knight* (2008)," David Bullen articulates the difference between Euripides' *Bacchae* as an adaptation of the myth of the god's disruptive advent and director Christopher Nolan's appropriation of the Greek myth in his interpretation of the Batman mythology.

Two final chapters in the volume discuss the theological implications of cinematic myth-making. In "Hypatia and Brian: Early Christianity as Greek Mythological Drama," Anise K. Strong examines how *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) and *Agora* (2009) apply the concept of myth to narratives of

the Christian tradition that take place in ancient Greco-Roman historical societies. Although disparate with respect to cinematic genre, both films challenge traditional divisions between mythology and scripture; both also invoke the cultural authority of fifth-century BC Athenian drama through form and motifs. The fine line between artistic creator and deity underlies Dan Curley's "Divine Animation: *Clash of the Titans* (1981)," which explores the poetics of Ray Harryhausen's handmade aesthetic for *Clash of the Titans* (1981), whose Olympians use their power to implement narrative innovations in a manner that emulates Harryhausen's own trademark "Dynamation." This chapter evaluates such divine self-consciousness, both mythic and cinematic, and the resultant theology's implications for Harryhausen and his legacy, in light of the technological innovations of the 2010 remake of *Clash of the Titans*.

Many connections can also be drawn between chapters across these thematic groupings. For example, Walsh's examination of identity and alterity in the mortal enemies Achilles/Rocky and Hector/Drago could profitably be paired with Bullen's discussion of how Batman and Harvey Dent function as two halves of the Pentheus figure who confronts the Dionysian Joker. Similarly, Raucci's analysis of the reinvention of the Greek hero as a generic American "everyman" figure who rises up against impossible odds calls back to *Rocky IV*'s revision of Achilles' defeat of Hector, which Walsh concludes struck an optimistic tone for Cold War America. Easton's treatment of Orpheus as a middle-class, upwardly mobile Caucasian could profitably be contrasted with Cyrino's investigation of the supernatural properties of the Orpheus figure when cast as a man of African descent. So, too, Easton's invocation of philosopher Herbert Marcuse's juxtaposition of Orpheus and Prometheus as psychological archetypes makes McAuley's treatment of Prometheus as a labor hero another apposite comparandum. Strong's chapter on the problematics of treating foundational Christian narratives as mythic throws into relief Safran's and Tomasso's chapters on the pessimistic treatment of pagan gods and heroes when they impinge upon cosmic territory claimed for Christianity. And Garcia's observations on the constructedness of gender identity in *Hedwig* and its Aristophanic wellspring look back to Graf's chapter on the redefinition of the Amazon myth, and to Gardner's chapter on the reconstruction of the female body under the male medical gaze—and scalpel.

These four themes marking the separate parts of this volume, although utilized here as conceptual organizing principles, are not the only ways to categorize these myths, nor do they prescribe the limits of what these individual chapters have to offer. *Classical Myth on Screen* aims to spur further investigation into the prismatic quality of myth on screen, whether the illuminating light is cast through the film projector or the backlit LCD monitor.

Notes

1. On *La Caduta di Troia* (1911), see Solomon (2001) 103. For the ancient world in silent film, see now Michelakis and Wyke (2013).
2. On Petersen's film, see Winkler (2007).
3. For the popular media's range of responses, see the *Troy* review pages on RottenTomatoes.com and Metacritic.com; see also "Troy 101: Academics Weigh In on Wolfgang Petersen's Epic," AMC Blog (2008).
4. For the text of Homer's *Iliad*, see Monro and Allen (1920).
5. While some continue to advance the historicity of the Trojan War and would therefore consider it legendary, this volume focuses on culturally significant narratives as myths and thus does not take a position on the potential historical origins of any of the narratives discussed herein.
6. For the Greek term *mythos*, see Martin (1989), esp. 12–42.
7. On the relationship between myth and ancient epic, see Edmunds (2008); on the mythic traditions of the Trojan War beyond the *Iliad*, see Gantz (1993) 557–661.
8. For the legacy of Homeric epic in antiquity, see Lamberton (1997); for Homer beyond antiquity, see the "Homeric Receptions" section of Fowler (2004).
9. On dating the textualization of the Homeric epics, see Nagy (1997), Heiden (1998), and Jensen (1999). For the debate over the text of the *Iliad*, see Mendelsohn (2011).
10. On the relationship between tragedy and epic, see Scodel (2008).
11. For the text of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, see Page (1972); for the text of Homer's *Odyssey*, see Stanford (1959).
12. There is a vast literature on orality, oral performance, literacy, and reading in classical antiquity; see Thomas (1992) on literacy and orality, Johnson (2000) on reading, and Scodel (2002) on Homer's listening audience.
13. For the concept of "thick description" of cultural phenomena, see Geertz (1973).
14. On especially the German romance with ancient Greece, see Butler (1935) and Marchand (1996).
15. On Italian myths, see Bremmer and Horsfall (1987), Wiseman (1995), and Wiseman (2004).
16. For the etymological history of this term's development, with the key shift in meaning located in the sixteenth century, see the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for "classic."
17. Works that offer analyses of the representation of both ancient history and myth on screen include Solomon (2001); Winkler (2001); Nisbet (2006); Lowe and Shahabudin (2009); Winkler (2009); Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011); Cyrino (2013); Paul (2013a); Michelakis (2013); and Nikoloutsos (2013).

Part I

The Hero's Struggle

1

"Italian Stallion" Meets "Breaker of Horses": Achilles and Hector in *Rocky IV* (1985)

Lisl Walsh

Homer's *Iliad* and its narration of the conflict between the Greeks and Trojans, and Hector and Achilles, stands as the ur-text against which all subsequent tales of war, friendship, and revenge can be compared.[1] Scholars of classical antiquity have long recognized later works as inheritance, imitation, and adaptation of Homer's timeless epic. Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky IV* (1985), on the other hand, has not been regarded as timeless.[2] Critics have typically discussed it alongside other action films in the context of Reagan-era culture, politics, and ideology: a relatively uncomplicated pro-America microcosm of the Cold War.[3] Certainly the film is meant to comment on America's conflict with the Soviet Union and American ideology of the time, yet the film is hardly unproblematically pro-American or simplistic in its treatment of the political conflict. Reading *Rocky IV* as an inheritance of the myth of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector sheds new light on how the film engages with issues of social and political identity, responsibility to community, friendship, and war.

The observable structural parallels begin with context:[4] in the midst of war—the Trojan War and the Cold War, respectively—Achilles and Rocky Balboa are uninterested in engaging an enemy challenger (Hector; Ivan Drago) in a fight that could bring them fame and protect the welfare and status of their respective societies. The protagonist's best friend (Patroclus; Apollo Creed) feels compelled to fight in his stead; this friend is then killed by the enemy challenger. The bereaved protagonist withdraws from his community before deciding to face off against the enemy challenger,

whom he defeats. In both narratives, the protagonists' actions are structured around a central core of initial alienation from conflict, followed by loss, withdrawal, and revenge.

Who Should Fight and Why

Patroclus and Creed both fight to uphold values that Achilles and Rocky have ceased to share: investment in personal glory and the reputation and well-being of their society. Such values are as fundamental for a patriotic American athlete as they are for a Homeric warrior. In the *Iliad*, Achilles' initial withdrawal from battle stems from a personal conflict with his general, Agamemnon, who refuses to acknowledge that Achilles is the "best of the Greeks" (*Iliad* 1.244, 1.412). He also renounces both personal stake in the conflict and identification with the rest of the group: "I didn't come here to fight on account of some Trojan spearmen, it's nothing to do with *me*. They never took *my* cattle or horses" (*Iliad* 1.153–54).[5] Although Achilles' anger cools, he remains disinterested in re-entering the war, expressing his preference for a long yet anonymous life over the prestige of battle glory, which comes at the cost of an early death (*Iliad* 9.308–429). The promise of glory and helping the community, when his life is the cost, no longer makes the fighting worthwhile, even when he is promised the chance to prove his claim of supremacy by fighting the best of the Trojans, Hector.

In *Rocky IV*, though Drago has asked specifically to fight the world-famous champion, Rocky similarly prefers a safer and quieter life at home over the glory of the fight. When Creed expresses his wish to fight Drago, Rocky tries to dissuade him: "Maybe the show is over . . . we're like turnin' into regular people." Unlike Creed, who misses being in the spotlight and associates fame with having people care about him, Rocky seems to embrace the anonymity of being a "regular person," and its corresponding lack of public responsibility. More significantly, and also unlike Creed, Rocky doesn't feel any patriotic imperative to defend the reputation of the country against the Soviet claims of supremacy.

War Game

For both Patroclus and Creed, the desire to fight seems to stem from a sense of responsibility for the well-being and reputation of their society, but they also display more self-centered motives. Patroclus, who has been driven to tears by the suffering of the wounded Greek soldiers, states that he fights to stop their slaughter by the Trojans (*Iliad* 16.3–4, 22–45). But once in command, Patroclus fights not only to protect Greeks. He also defends Achilles'

honor (16.269–74) and seeks to satisfy his own rage and desire for glory by storming the walls of Troy, even if that means confronting Hector: Patroclus "rages around with his spear" (16.699), and "his own valor destroying him, he springs forward like a lion, pressing on hotly" (16.752–54). So Patroclus is driven both to help others and to increase his own renown.

In *Rocky IV*, Creed also has two motives driving him to fight Drago. Ostensibly, he wishes to represent his country and prove something to the Soviets: as he explains to Rocky and Adrian, "It's something I believe in . . . I don't want this chump to come over here with all that hype, you know, trying to make us look bad. With Rock's help and great media coverage, we can make them look bad for a change." At the press meeting for the bout, Creed reiterates his patriotism: "Let's call it a sense of responsibility . . . I have to teach this fellow to box—American style"; "I just wanna show the whole world that Russia doesn't have all the best athletes." Creed champions the idea of protecting America's sense of superiority over the Soviets. But the context of the pre-fight press exhibit constitutes a form of play, in which athletes routinely hype their antagonism, joke with the audience, and belittle their opponent. Creed, after exiting the stage, immediately drops his performed anger and asks Rocky, "How did I do?" Likewise, earlier in the film, Creed had referred to the exhibition bout as "kid stuff." The Soviets, mistakenly, take this seriously.

But Creed also confesses to Rocky, in private, that he is concerned about the loss of his individual fame now that he's retired: "It's crazy—people care about you when you're in that ring, and they care about you when you're bleedin', but once you step outta that ring, Stallion, it's like ancient history." As "warriors," he and Rocky lose their usefulness without a "war" to fight. Creed's fight, like that of Patroclus, is just as much about his individual motives—being famous and feeling useful—as it is about defending the honor of the country.

This conflict between individual and community plays out in Creed's and Patroclus' fight scenes, as do the consequences of the protagonists' absences. Unfortunately for Patroclus, Achilles' army of Myrmidons proves unable to protect Patroclus from his own folly.[6] Patroclus, wearing Achilles' armor, indeed manages to drive the Trojans away from the ships and prevent the Greeks' defeat, but his personal fury and desire for killing push him beyond his capabilities, and outside the protection of the group. The fact that the Greeks as a whole are threatened when Patroclus joins the fight emphasizes the community identity of the participants, but Patroclus' own desire for glory spurs him to try to breach the walls of Troy himself, only to find death at the hands of Hector.

The fight between Creed and Drago echoes Patroclus' death scene. The choreographed entrance of the fighters is clearly meant to sell their fight as

a conflict between two nations. While Drago stands in the ring, Creed, in his "Uncle Sam" costume from *Rocky II* (1979), is lowered in on a platform backed by a giant golden bull's head.[7] Creed hops and dances energetically to James Brown's "Living in America," singing alongside James Brown himself before entering the ring and vaunting around Drago, much as Patroclus taunts Hector's charioteer (16.744–50). This spectacle of excess is enhanced by a swarm of sparkly, scantily clad dancers, as model airplanes—one representing the USSR, the other the USA—are flown by wires over the cheering crowd; the lights are blinding, the sound is loud. Into this frenetic show are inserted short cuts of the main cast—Adrian, Rocky, Creed's other trainer Duke, Paulie, Creed's wife Mary Anne, Drago's wife Ludmilla, and Drago's trainer—all of whom seem surprised by the pageantry as they shrug and raise eyebrows at each other across the stadium. The bout begins with a clear message: this fight is about national supremacy, and wealth, entertainment, and technology are America's ammunition.

Once the fight begins, however, the silence in the room and prolonged camera shots provide a striking contrast; here are two individuals fighting, and "America"—the technology, the bustle, the crowd—can do nothing to help its ostensible representative. The cultural construct of the "exhibition bout" provides Creed no safety; the fight is quick and deadly. Drago treats the fight like a soldier in battle, eradicating the opponent without concern for life or death.

Withdrawal and Revenge

Only when their respective wars "get personal" do the aloof heroes feel the need to act. Their new carelessness about their own survival further hints at the underlying similarity between these protagonists and their enemies.[8] For Achilles, the ideation of revenge necessarily takes on a sacrificial tone: Achilles knows that if he fights, his fate is to die before he leaves Troy (*Iliad* 9.410–16). But with his friend's death, he stops caring about the value of his own life, stating, "My heart urges me not to live nor to remain among men, unless Hector loses his own heart first, struck by my spear, and pays the due penalty for Patroclus . . . But now I go to overtake Hector, the destroyer of my dear friend, and then I shall receive my death" (*Iliad* 18.90–93; 18.114–15). Whether he or Hector dies seems less important than the opportunity to face each other: "I'll test Hector face to face; either he breaks me or I him" (*Iliad* 21.225–26).[9] Achilles constructs his confrontation with Hector as one between equals. Who wins is beside the point, but one of them must die.

Similarly, Rocky is willing to destroy himself for the opportunity to confront Creed's killer. Drago has shown that he has no desire to draw a line

between sport and combat, so Rocky's life is very much at risk in choosing to fight. But the way Rocky conceptualizes his battle necessitates that Drago be willing to risk his own life in turn. When Adrian tells him there's no way he can win, Rocky responds,

> Maybe I can't win. Maybe the only thing I can do is just take everything he's got. But to beat me, he'll have to kill me. And to kill me, he'll have to have the heart to stand in front of me. And to do that, he has to be willing to die himself. I don't know if he's ready to do that. I don't know.

For both Achilles and Rocky, the grief they experience at the loss of their loved ones and the inchoate idea of revenge that blossoms from this grief motivate them to withdraw from their communities, albeit in different ways. When Patroclus dies, Achilles' grief leads him metaphorically to remove himself from human society. He refuses to bathe, to eat, to sleep, or to have sex. He is fed nectar and ambrosia like a god. When he finally returns to battle, in his rage he kills Trojans without regard for their social status or divine protection, and he even fights a river.[10]

Like Achilles, Rocky withdraws from society in response to Creed's death. But he leaves his home to train, far away from all things American: technology, entertainment, and the nuclear family. The contrast between Rocky's training environment and his American lifestyle is underlined through the film's hyperbolic treatment of American wealth and technological progress: in the staging of Creed's fight against Drago, and in the weird "pet" robot at Rocky's house.

The robot, like his sports car and large house, shows how far Rocky has moved up in the world, but it also serves as a focal point for the film's critique of American extravagance.[11] Early in the film, Adrian asks Creed why he wants to fight Drago: "What [is] worth getting hurt for?" Before Creed can respond, he gets distracted by the robot gliding into sight, playing a romantic 1980s song and "dancing." The camera lingers on the robot for an uncomfortable length of time. To everyone's incredulity, the robot serves Paulie a beer and fawns over him. After the robot leaves, Creed attempts to return to Adrian's question, but the scene suggests to the viewers that Creed is really risking himself to preserve a faulty value system: to enable the freeloading Paulie to get beer and affection from a robot is why Creed is going to get hurt.[12]

Rocky, like Achilles, loses touch with his community's values due to grief over his loss. In order to get the revenge he craves, Rocky must fight Drago in an unsanctioned match, even though this means giving up his precious heavyweight title. He chooses to train in rural Soviet territory, living in a cabin, apart from his wife and son, with limited electricity and,

as Paulie complains, no television. Rocky's training environment is the exact opposite of the creature comforts that occupy his normal world. As with Achilles, this withdrawal allows Rocky to access the primal side of his nature, one unconstrained by social rules.

Identity and Alterity, Individual and Community

When Achilles fights Hector in the *Iliad*, Homer's poem emphasizes in several ways how the two enemies are similar, both as individuals and as representatives of their cultures, and even in their values and actions. In addition to Achilles' comments suggesting that either one could defeat the other, Hector looks like Achilles because he wears Achilles' armor, stripped from Patroclus' corpse (*Iliad* 18.130–32). Despite his Trojan identity, Hector has espoused the same glory/shame paradigm that the Greek warriors value, prioritizing a display of personal honor over the safety of the larger community.[13] Also like Achilles, Hector begins to question this value system when faced with the immediate prospect of death. As Achilles approaches him for their final encounter on the battlefield, Hector forgets about glory and wonders instead if he could end the fight peacefully: "But if I should set down my bossed shield . . . I could vow Helen back to them" (*Iliad* 22.111, 114). Hector becomes another Achilles, rethinking his priorities as Achilles did upon learning about his choice of fates.

As with Achilles and Hector, Rocky and Drago increasingly resemble each other through the second half of the film. The second training montage presents most clearly the film's play with the identity and alterity of the opponents. The camera shifting between them shows that Rocky and Drago are training the same muscles as the other does: they both work to achieve the same body structure, and thus they look alike, as Achilles and Hector must in their final confrontation. The similarities between the two fighters culminate during the match, where the length of the fight reveals that they are equally matched in strength. Finally, a sequence of shots of Rocky and Drago taking punches to the chin, transparently overlaid on top of each other, emphasizes the interchangeability of the two men.

The alterity in the training montage occurs in the liberty involved in their training: Rocky's training environment, which is outdoors, cold, white, and expansive, contrasts with Drago's, which is hot, indoors, dark red, and oppressive. Drago seems consistently uncomfortable, grimacing in pain and suffering, and he is surrounded by machines and men in lab coats who take notes. Where Drago uses machines to train, Rocky uses nature and human weight as resistance: pulling a sack of rocks over a ceiling beam to work his triceps, or lifting a wagon in which Duke, Paulie,

and Adrian are seated. The camera shows both men running, but Drago's body, hooked up to monitors, seems to suffer as his trainers decide when to increase the incline on his treadmill. Rocky, on the other hand, eludes the observation of his Soviet guards and grapples his way free-form up a mountainside.

The film's play with sameness and opposition occurs on a cultural level as well. The first half of the film emphasizes America's technological advances—its wealth, excess, and focus on spectacle—but in the rest of the film, technology and spectacle belong much more securely in the Soviet realm. We see Rocky escape technology and observation in his training environment, whereas the Russians mimic American values in Drago's highly publicized electronically, and chemically, enhanced routines.

Finally, the political ideologies of *Rocky IV* create a striking nexus of identity and alterity with the issue of individual versus community.[14] Americans should emphasize the individual, given their commitment to liberty and capitalism, and the opposite should be true of the Communists, who prize sameness and a blurring of singular and collective identity. But the film repeatedly refuses to sustain these stereotypes and ultimately forces the opposite ideological values onto each culture. Creed first disrupts the paradigm with his desire to represent himself as "the American" in a fight for his country's reputation, and the flag-waving crowd seems

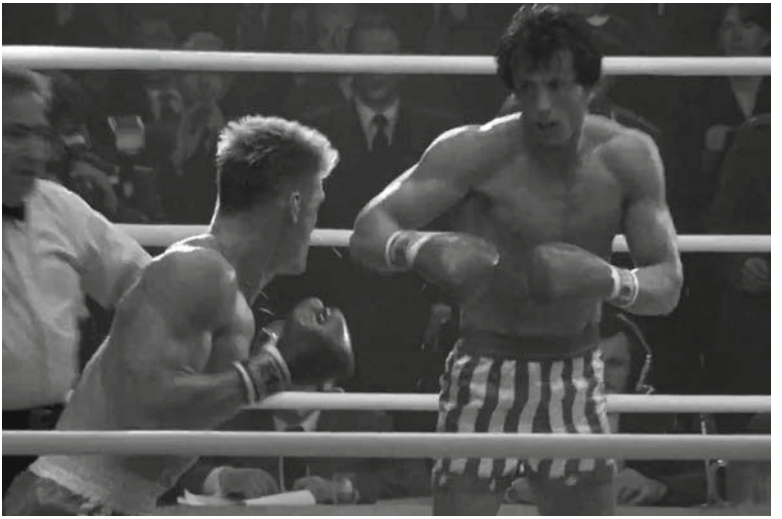

Figure 1.1 Drago (Dolph Lundgren) and Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) square off in the climactic battle in *Rocky IV* (1985). United Artists/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

perfectly happy to have him play that role. When Rocky fights Drago, the English-speaking commentators elide individual identity, referring repeatedly to Drago as "the Russian." They state that Rocky is fighting not just his Russian opponent, "a man with an entire country in his corner," but also the hostile crowd and the watchful eyes of the Russian premier and most of the politburo. The supposedly anti-Communist media focus not on the individuals but on national identity.

Ostensibly, Drago should buy into the idea of representing his country, but he changes when he gets cut in the ring. It is the first time viewers see him suffer injury, and it sparks another inversion of the combatants. After the round, Duke says to Rocky, "You cut him! You hurt him! You see? He's not a machine! He's a man!" In the other corner, Drago states to his trainer (subtitled), "He's not human . . . He is like a piece of iron."[15] Each begins to see the other as similar to himself.

Drago, like Hector in the face of Achilles, re-evaluates his individual worth and the personal cost of his working (and suffering) as an instrument of the Russian people and as an adherent of Communist ideology. Later in the match, when a Soviet official comes down from the viewing box to rebuke and strike him, Drago lifts the official by the throat and throws him into the crowd.[16] Drago expresses self-interest rather than duty for the first time here, and this itself marks a change in his values. He shouts (subtitled), "I fight to win! For me!" He turns to face the other Soviet officials and repeats, "For me!" It is clear that this particular ordeal has brought to Drago a sense of himself apart from what his community wants from him.[17]

Rocky has not come through the fight unchanged either. His heightened sense of separateness from his community, so prominent throughout, crumbles when he sees his own similarity to Drago and he grasps that his individual actions change his opponent's values, as well as those of the entire audience. At the end of the match, Rocky addresses the crowd:

> I've seen a lot of people hatin' me, and I didn't know what to feel about that, so I guess I didn't like you much none either. During this fight, I seen a lot of changin': the way youse felt about me, and the way I felt about you. In here there were two guys killin' each other. But I guess that's better than 20 million. What I'm trying to say is: if I can change, and you can change, everybody can change!

Rocky seems now to believe that he as an individual can represent his country, that he and Drago can play out a microcosm of the Cold War with each other, and that public spectacle can serve as a useful vehicle for social change.

Thoughts on Mythical Divergence

The ways in which *Rocky IV* draws from and differs from the myth of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector are equally instructive for interpreting the film and raise questions one might not ask of the film otherwise. In the ancient myth, Achilles' behavior is arguably quite blameworthy. Refusing to respect authority (e.g., *Iliad* 1.149–71, 225–44), praying for the Greeks to die in his absence (1.407–12), and deciding to prioritize his own life over those of his comrades (e.g., 9.318–27, 16.97–100) all show a fundamental disregard for the lives of others, especially when Achilles is the only individual capable of preventing death and disrepute. The fact that he allows Patroclus to fight in his place itself condemns Achilles as a poor protector even of those close to him.[18]

Similarly, Rocky's disinterest in boxing against the Soviet challenger—ostensibly a sane self-preservationist and non-aggressive response—might display a lack of appropriate concern for aggression against the lives and reputations of people for whom Rocky ought to feel responsible: the nation as a whole, as well as his best friend. But unlike Achilles in the *Iliad*, Rocky has a son to protect; for his sake, should he be more active in preventing the Cold War from escalating? Perhaps Rocky, like Creed, ought to feel an investment in his own reputation and that of his nation; perhaps he ought to recognize that only he can take on Drago's challenge and succeed. Rocky fails his fellow citizens in renouncing the role he should be playing in the conflict.

Rocky's refusal to protect Creed from Drago in the ring seems to be another indictable offense that comparison to the Greek myth reveals. Unlike Achilles, who is back at his ships while Patroclus is fighting and who has no direct ability to save Patroclus from the cascade of events that cause his death, Rocky is present for Creed's death and has the power to stop the fight by throwing in the towel, but he chooses not to intervene. Why not, if he cares about Creed so deeply? And why does no one question Rocky's decision, or hold him responsible after the fact? The difference between Creed's death and that of Patroclus highlights the American commitment to individual freedom; this value, espoused by Rocky later in the film, is also central to Rocky's petition to be allowed to fight in *Rocky Balboa* (2006). Rocky feels he must respect Creed's desire to risk—and even lose—his life,[19] even though Creed takes up the challenge as much for his own fame as for the honor of his country. In this light, Creed indeed becomes a martyr for American values, and, by drawing our attention to Rocky's role in Creed's death, the film invites the viewer to find fault with Rocky's behavior and the values that influence his decision.

The Rocky myth differs drastically from that of Achilles because, when Rocky avenges Creed's death, Drago lives through the conflict. For Achilles, Hector's death is required as a "due penalty for Patroclus" (*Iliad* 18.93), and Achilles' persistent grief for Patroclus and his abuse of Hector's body after death mark his lack of acceptance and lack of empathy with his opponent.[20] Rocky, however, leaves Drago alive; his win in the ring and the behavior of the crowd are enough to restore balance. He thus shows greater maturity in the face of loss, including empathy with the enemy. In allowing Drago to live, Rocky also returns the boxing ring from its use as a space for deadly national combat on a micro-level, as Drago treated it with Creed, to its proper role as a sports arena. Finally, by identifying with and matching his opponent, he teaches Drago and the Soviets the joy of sport for sport's sake, and the difference between sport and combat.

But the elision of Creed—the cause of the fight—from the narrative and from Rocky's speech at the end of the film is problematic.[21] As part of Rocky's transformation over the course of the match, his focus moves away from the individual and more strongly toward the potential social and ideological ramifications of his conflict with Drago. The submission of the individual to the community in Rocky's changed perspective at the end of the fight is perhaps the reason why Creed is completely absent from his thoughts: the individual loss becomes less important when nations and ideologies are at stake.

Conclusion

This comparison between ancient and modern hero-myths shows the usefulness of reception studies as a means of defamiliarizing the here and now. Reading *Rocky IV* through the lens of the Achilles myth reveals the nuanced critique within a film whose nature as a piece of pro-America propaganda in the Cold War is rarely questioned. The temporal moment of *Rocky IV*'s production, well into the Cold War, allows the film to be forward-thinking and thus hopeful, even as it cautions against the pitfalls of American individualism, competitiveness, showmanship, and technology. Like Achilles, Rocky must reject his sociocultural location and see the connection between individual and community in order to succeed. Even Achilles learned to build an empathetic bond with the enemy: he agreed to return Hector's corpse to the fallen warrior's father King Priam upon recognizing that one day his own premature death in battle will be mourned by his father Peleus.

The myth of the Trojan War always already ended in destruction—of Hector, of Achilles, and of an entire city. The *Iliad* is perpetually stuck in

the past, and its ending is not ours to write. But Rocky was able, in his final speech, to forget about the past, to express paternal love for his son and hope for the future of the country, and to imagine an end to a war that for years walked the line between real mass destruction and mere posturing.

Notes

1. Many voices went into many drafts of this paper. Thanks go to the Film and History presentation attendees, the Beloit College faculty, my Mythology students at Beloit, Kosta Hadavas, the Oberlin College Classics faculty and students, and Matthew Taylor, all of whom provided comments on various drafts. Special thanks to Monica Cyrino for her encouragement and Meredith Safran for her incisive and insightful suggestions.
2. For *Rocky IV* as "trash" and the validity of including such low culture in scholarly critique, see Holmlund (1989) 136–38.
3. See Holmlund (1990), Prince (1992) 52, LeSueur and Rehberger (1988), Palmer (1995), and Taubman (1986). This list includes Stallone himself in Jerome (1985).
4. Salyer's MA thesis (2009) 89–98 explores *Rocky IV* through the heroic structures of Joseph Campbell (1949), whose distillation of the hero story, including archetypal characters, is itself influenced by Homer's epics.
5. All translations of Homer's *Iliad* are my own. Line citations follow the Greek text of Monro and Allen (1920).
6. See Hofmeister (1995) for similes describing the violence and recklessness of the Myrmidons in *Iliad* 16.
7. The golden bull might symbolize American capitalism or suggest the Biblical imagery of the worship of false idols.
8. For the identification of Achilles and Hector as they approach their final conflict, see Redfield (1994) 221–22, Arieti (1985) 202, and Van Nortwick (1992) 64–66, 81–87.
9. This statement is echoed by Hector at *Iliad* 22.252–53. Compare Hector at *Iliad* 18.307–8: "But I shall stand opposite him—either he carries off great victory, or I do."
10. For Achilles' transformation into the bestial and/or godlike after the death of Patroclus, see Redfield (1979), Whitman (1958) 218, and Van Nortwick (1992) 70–74.
11. See Holmlund (1990) for an alternate reading: "yuppies"—an "effete, emasculated, pseudo-class"—in conflict with "punks."
12. See Rushing and Frentz (1989) 65–67 for a discussion of technology in *Rocky IV* as oppositional to human agency.
13. See his conversation with Andromache at *Iliad* 6.441–46 and the Trojan council at *Iliad* 18.243–314, especially his rejoinder to Polydamas' plea for caution upon Achilles' return to battle: "But now the son of Kronos has given it to me to take glory at the ships . . . [S]o do as I say, everyone obey me!" (18.293–97).

14. Contra Holmlund (1990): "Throughout the film, the cultural and political differences between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. are emphasized and exaggerated." Prince (1992) 74 sees the technological flip of Rocky and Drago but not the similarities between the characters. Palmer (1995) 219–22 sees the similarities of the characters but still asserts that the film carries an anti-Soviet message.
15. Compare Achilles, who is called "pitiless" twice, a word usually used to express the hardness of metal: Arieti (1986) 19–20.
16. The representation of Drago's identity as other than human—as beast or robot—merits further exploration.
17. Holmlund (1990): "Even Drago finally adopts U.S. values and asserts himself as an antiauthoritarian, individualist punk." See also Stallone's comments in Jerome (1985).
18. Gaca (2008) 163–64 explores the issue of Achilles as an irresponsible or inadequately maternal protector of Patroclus through the mother-girl simile (*Iliad* 16.7–11).
19. While Holmlund (1990) asserts that the film sends a clear message that "Apollo deserved to die because he was unprepared and weak," Rocky is not, as Achilles was, the more seasoned fighter of the pair.
20. See Redfield (1994) 217–23.
21. The issue that Creed's race enables the film to overlook his death may be at work here, in the context of how other characters of color are compromised in American cinema or the expendability of non-white soldiers in American military history.

2

The Isolated Hero: *Papillon* (1973), *Cast Away* (2000), and the Myth of Philoctetes

Scott A. Barnard

Franklin J. Schaffner's 1973 film *Papillon* depicts the grueling conditions endured by Henri "Papillon" Charrière in a French Guianese penal colony and his famous escape from the notorious Devil's Island after being falsely convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. En route, Papillon (Steve McQueen) befriends his fellow inmate Louis Dega (Dustin Hoffman), and each man quickly becomes indispensable to the survival of the other. Following two failed escape attempts, Papillon is punished in solitary confinement. Even more devastating than his extremely cramped cell and meager rations is the psychological toll inflicted on him by a lack of human companionship, a trauma that stems from Papillon's inability to engage a partner in speech. Upon his release, Papillon's mind craves and is reconstituted by conversation, no less than his body longs for food and medicine.

Among narratives that feature isolated protagonists, *Papillon* belongs to a particular strand whose origins lie in the mythological traditions surrounding the ancient Greek hero Philoctetes. The distinguishing characteristic of this strand is the psychological toll resulting from the hero's lack of a companion whom he can engage in speech. A review of the key elements of the Philoctetes myth illuminates a structural model for understanding how the lack of a speaking partner causes the hero such psychological damage. Key elements of Philoctetes' predicament are employed and reimagined in Robert Zemeckis' *Cast Away* (2000), a film whose treatment of the isolated hero sets a standard for more recent depictions of solitude, including

Francis Lawrence's *I Am Legend* (2007).[1] So, too, Steve McQueen in *Papillon* portrays a figure who, physically and psychologically, is strongly reminiscent of Philoctetes.

The Mythological Philoctetes and Sophocles' Tragedy

The name Philoctetes does not top any modern reader's list of Homeric heroes, as he is granted only two extremely brief mentions in the *Iliad* (2.718) and the *Odyssey* (8.219) and is absent from the action of each.[2] However, he and his legendary bow play a crucial role in the Trojan saga. As Sophocles dramatized in his eponymous tragedy, Philoctetes embodies an irony: although his presence and the insurmountable power of the bow he wields are critical to the success of the Greek war effort, before the Greek host arrives at Troy they abandon him on a deserted island. For en route, Philoctetes had unwittingly trespassed on a sacred shrine and was bitten on the ankle by a poisonous snake as punishment. The wound emits a wildly offensive odor, and Philoctetes' cries of agony are so shrill that they prevent the Greeks from performing the necessary sacrificial rites to the gods. So the Greek chiefs, Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus, decide to maroon Philoctetes. Only afterward does Agamemnon learn from a prophecy that the Greeks cannot take Troy without Philoctetes' mighty weapon, which had been a gift from the dying hero Herakles.

At the outset of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, nearly a decade has passed since the Greek leaders discarded Philoctetes, with no end in sight to the war—not without the aid of Philoctetes and his divine bow. And so the delicate task of retrieving the man and the bow falls to Odysseus and Neoptolemus, son of the recently slain Achilles. Their task is by no means simple; it would be impossible to force a man armed with so powerful a weapon to return, and it would be unlikely that they would be able to persuade Philoctetes to come willingly after stewing in his isolated rage for ten years. Instead, Odysseus insists that the only way to complete their task is through deception.[3] Yet Odysseus' strategy of using rhetoric rather than force in order to trick Philoctetes into returning with him and Neoptolemus to Troy takes for granted an important question: How does one reengage with someone who has been without human contact for so long? To what point does speech itself decay, when it cannot be used for huge expanses of time? What becomes of a person's mind—even that of a hero like Philoctetes—when it is deprived of human contact and stranded in isolation? From Sophocles' characterization of the hero in *Philoctetes* stems the broader literary and cinematic tradition that *Cast Away* and *Papillon* inhabit.

The Isolated Hero

The narrative of the marooned sailor or figure locked in isolation, which descends from the Philoctetes myth, differs from two other broadly similar categories of isolation narrative. One is the so-called Robinsonade,[4] in which a person has been removed from the social world but still has fairly easy access to the supplies necessary to sustain life. This scenario is frequently depicted as an opportunity for persons trapped in desolate environments to re-create a more perfect version of the world from which they have become stranded. Famous examples include the often re-imagined Robinson Crusoe, with his rustic but comforting accoutrements; or, in a somewhat lesser degree of isolation, the Swiss Family Robinson in their lavish tree house; or even the castaways on the CBS television series *Gilligan's Island* (1964–1967). A second category consists of dystopian narratives in which competition for resources or authority and the lack of any civic structure allow mankind's more savage impulses to bubble to the surface and boil over into violence—for example, ABC's Emmy-winning science fiction series *Lost* (2004–2010); Peter Brook's 1963 film *Lord of the Flies*, based on William Golding's novel; and Danny Boyle's 2000 film adaptation of Alex Garland's novel *The Beach*.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, *Cast Away*, and *Papillon* differ in being less concerned with the breakdown of civic proprieties and more immediately focused upon the decaying internal landscapes of their subjects. In these three dramas, the primary locus of suffering is not environmental but psychological, and each figure is afflicted with a trauma that entails the relentless struggle of the abandoned hero to maintain a sane sense of himself in the absence of a partner to engage in speech. At a glance, the loss of the hero's sense of self when isolated from other humans appears counterintuitive, if not an outright contradiction. After all, in the absence of any companionship or any other sentient being with whom legitimate interaction can take place, is not the hero's "self" his only truly inseparable possession?

Unfortunately for these protagonists, their narratives dramatize how a person's sense of self, when removed from a social environment, decays with alarming swiftness. The term "sense of self" derives from the idea of the "structure" of the self, which was proposed by French psychoanalyst and literary critic Jacques Lacan; his model asserts that every person's subconscious and self-conception are dependent upon and structured exactly like a language.[5] The organizing principle of Lacan's definition of the self is this: every person's self-conception is not a singular entity but instead is necessarily divided into two elements, neither of which can exist without the other.

This model of the self is best elucidated by the way each person renders him or herself and others in speech. The first element in what Lacan calls the "divided self" is what finds expression in speech as "I": the first-person perspective that says, "I see," "I act," or "I am the permanent subject of all my actions." On the other side of the division is what is articulated as the object of a sentence, the "me": "someone sees me," or "something is acting upon me." Just as grammatically "I" and "me" refer to the same person, Lacan says that to form a complete whole, a person's self-conception must contain an element that is the subject of its own speech and action, but also an element that serves as the object in the speech of others. If this circuit of self-conception—a model that Lacan calls the "signifying chain"—breaks down and a person can only posit him or herself as a subject or an object, the result is an almost immediate descent into psychosis. A person trapped in isolation rapidly loses touch with the aspect of the self that requires objectification, a process of unraveling that is unsurprisingly most clearly manifested in the subject's language. This phenomenon is immediately familiar to viewers of *Cast Away* and *Papillon*, whose protagonists' states of mind simultaneously illustrate and are informed by the myth of Philoctetes.

The Reconstituted Hero: Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is by far the most vivid dramatization of the Philoctetes myth surviving from antiquity. Many scholars have commented on the state in which Odysseus and Neoptolemus discover Philoctetes: a wild, savage, and raving version of the hero abandoned ten years before. But particularly striking is the specific language—or lack thereof—that is available to Philoctetes in this state.[6] Before Neoptolemus reveals himself to Philoctetes, he and the chorus describe the shrieks and grunts that appear to be Philoctetes' only modes of expression in his isolated state. His groans are "wild" (*agrias*, 9), "terrible" (*deinos*, 216), and "roaring" (*diasema*, 208)[7] and are clearly not speech, though perhaps it can be argued that they constitute a language of a peculiar type. Nancy Worman writes,

> Philoctetes' wild disease gave rise to his wild voice, which led humans to leave him to the beasts; his wound and his voice here become associated by their distance from the familiar significations that make for meaningful human converse. The chorus associates the isolating effect that the disease has on the hero's speech with his lack of a verbal antidote; conversation, it seems, might somehow purge the bestial infection from Philoctetes' body.[8]

Given the prominence of language as a human characteristic in the Greek mind and the extent to which being and speaking are synonymous,[9]

Lacan's conception of the divided self explains the extent to which Philoctetes has deteriorated. This deterioration is more complex than is immediately apparent. Most critical attention has focused on his physical deterioration from the wound, which is constantly described as steadily increasing in pain and even as "consuming" or "devouring" (*adephagon*, 313) him.[10] But even more devastating to Philoctetes is the loss of his link with the signifying chain that constitutes him in language as both a subject and an object.

Philoctetes' sense of this loss is manifested in two ways. To begin with, the very first thing that Philoctetes begs from Neoptolemus after ten years of scavenging what little sustenance is available on the island[11] is not food or water but simply to engage him in speech and thereby restore him to the signifying chain (*Philoctetes* 222–31):

> Oh strangers,
> who are you and from what homeland
> have you arrived to this ill-harbored
> and uninhabited land? For the appearance
> of your clothing seems Greek to me, a most welcome sight!
> I long to hear your voice. Do not shrink in fear
> at my savage appearance, but take pity on
> a wretched man, all alone, deserted, and friendless.
> Speak to me as I listen, if truly you have come as friends.
> Oh, answer me!

Moreover, the extent to which Philoctetes feels he has been removed from the field of subjects and objects is revealed when Neoptolemus falsely claims that he has never heard of a hero named Philoctetes or his terrible ordeal, causing him to lament (*Philoctetes* 245–59):

> Oh, how wretched am I! Oh how bitter to the gods,
> I of whom no report has gone to my home
> nor to any other of the Greek lands.
> But instead those men who cast me out unjustly
> laugh as they keep [my story] silent,
> while my sickness increases and spreads.

Not only has Philoctetes' isolation from human contact deprived him of the opportunity to engage in speech and locate himself in the signifying chain as a speaking subject, but also the lack of any rumor or report about him indicates that he is not even present as an object in the speech of the other Greeks at Troy or of anyone else in the world. The removal from language as both a subject and an object is perhaps the most devastating

misery that can befall a Homeric hero. In death, a hero's fame (*kleos*) remains among the living, and it is in fact this fame that lies at the center of the Greek conflict in the *Iliad*.[12] For Philoctetes, the exit from language may as well be the exit from existence.[13]

The Castaways: Chuck Noland and Wilson the Volleyball

Zemeckis' *Cast Away* features Tom Hanks as Chuck Noland, a FedEx employee who survives a plane crash only to find himself stranded on an uninhabited island in the South Pacific for four years. In the course of his exile, the viewers witness Chuck Noland transform from a pale, plump paper-pusher into a scrawny, scraggly, fully adapted hunter-gatherer whose appearance bears a striking similarity to the one depicted in Jean Germain Drouais' 1788 painting *Philoctetes on Lemnos*. Even if Zemeckis did not have this painting in mind when imagining Chuck Noland's appearance, the similarity suggests that Philoctetes provides a classic visual exemplar for figures long detached from human civilization. Of course, Noland's most immediate challenge is simply to gather the supplies necessary for prolonging his survival, which he, like Philoctetes, collects and stores in a double-mouthed cave.[14] Unsurprisingly, in addition to Noland's critical need for food, water, and shelter, he feels an increasingly pressing need for companionship; it is no coincidence that Noland satisfies this need at the same moment and with the same urgency as his need for fire.

One of the most memorable elements of this film is the intimate friendship that blossoms between Hanks and his co-star: Wilson the volleyball, whose humanoid "facial" features are born from Noland's own bloody handprint. Wilson serves, if not exactly as an interlocutor for Noland, at least as an object around which he can construct an imaginary circuit of dialogue. The vital role that Noland's one-sided conversations with Wilson play in maintaining his sense of self is never more apparent than at the point where the conversation breaks down. Frustrated in his attempts to escape the island and by Wilson's pessimistic disposition, Noland, in a flash of anger, acknowledges the inherent silliness of speaking to an inanimate object:

> It was what, a year ago? So let's just forget it. What is your point? Well, we might just make it, did that thought ever cross your brain? Well, regardless, I would rather take my chances out there on the ocean than stay here and die on this shithole island spending the rest of my life TALKING TO A GODDAMN VOLLEYBALL!

With an indignant kick, Noland punts his companion out of his cave and, for a brief moment, is relieved to have satisfied his frustration. However, it takes but a few seconds for Noland to realize that without Wilson he is devastatingly detached from even imaginary companionship, and he begins the panicked search for his partner.

Noland's humanization of Wilson is not the result of any kind of mental collapse or schizophrenic episode, but it is in fact a fairly rational response to his crumbling sense of self. As witnessed in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the alternative—the complete lack of anyone with whom to engage, except an echoed voice—would swiftly and decisively destroy not only Noland's sense of self but likely the rest of his mental faculties as well. However, for this humanization to be effective, it must be complete. Noland must in effect convince himself that Wilson is a very real companion, or the illusion will be broken and any benefit lost. Indeed, actor Hanks masterfully translates Noland's complete faith in Wilson's humanity to the audience, thereby making the emotional climax of the film possible. Adrift at sea on a collapsing raft, Wilson quietly slips off the raft and floats away before Noland can catch him. Noland is instantly crushed at the loss of his friend, and as the one object holding intact his mental stability floats away, so too does his will to survive. Even though Noland is not any more alone now than he was with Wilson at his side, he no longer has the ability to imagine himself rendered as an object in the language of another, and thus he lies speechless and apathetic until he is rescued by a passing cargo ship.

Papillon: The Torments of Silence

As a figure several times intentionally cast into isolation in spite of his relative innocence, Papillon represents a particularly strong reception of the Philoctetes myth. Indeed, his stints in solitary confinement, and on an especially secluded section of Devil's Island, become progressively longer and more permanent. As a result, Papillon becomes increasingly and frustratingly isolated in language, even at moments when he is not, strictly speaking, alone.

Papillon is first locked in solitary confinement after a failed attempt to escape from a work camp. Wordless and hobbling with fettered feet—a recurring image throughout the film, one particularly reminiscent of Philoctetes' wounded foot[15]—he is marched into the Reclusion Ward of St-Laurent-du-Maroni Prison. Here he stands in a large prison yard, alone but for a few guards; on every wall is written the word "SILENCE" in

ominous block lettering: this is precisely the scenario into which Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Menelaus callously abandoned Philoctetes on the island. So too in the Reclusion Ward, silence is an instrument of torture, as the warden's unvarnished instructions to Papillon make clear:

> The rule here is total silence. We make no pretense at rehabilitation here. We're not priests—we're processors. Strange things happen to the mind here. Put all hope out of your mind, and masturbate as little as possible. It drains your strength.

These are among the final words addressed to Papillon for the duration of the first year and a half of his time in solitary confinement, aside from two brief exchanges of furtive whispers with the disembodied head of the inmate in the neighboring cell during a lice inspection. This silence is only broken when the guards discover that Dega has been smuggling extra food to Papillon; the only response he can muster is a mumbled refusal to give up Dega, and as a result, the warden orders that he complete his sentence in total darkness. When his sentence is complete, the Papillon that emerges is nearly dead and half insane. On his way to the prison infirmary he is reunited briefly with Dega, and in that moment Papillon's relief at being re-engaged in speech is palpable. Just as during Philoctetes' first encounter

Figure 2.1 Dega (Dustin Hoffman) comforts Papillon (Steve McQueen) after his prolonged isolation in *Papillon* (1973). Allied Artists/Columbia Pictures.

with Neoptolemus in Sophocles' drama, we are left with a sense that, for the isolated hero, language is imbued with curative properties.

Later in the film, Papillon and Dega once again manage to escape from the prison yard. But unfortunately for both men, this freedom is relatively short lived. Dega suffers a broken ankle during the escape and is soon recaptured. After seeking shelter in a local convent and revealing his identity to the Mother Superior, Papillon is turned over to the local militia. In the course of his arrest, a militiaman crushes the bones in Papillon's right foot with the butt of his rifle; for the remainder of the film he will struggle to walk with a hobbling limp, again striking a physical pose reminiscent of the staggering Philoctetes. Papillon's punishment for escaping is designed to break his spirit as thoroughly and permanently as his foot was broken: a return to the Reclusion Ward and its agonizing silence, for a sentence more than twice as long as his previous one.

Five years later, a gray-haired, mumbling Papillon stumbles back into the sunlight and is transferred to a remote section of Devil's Island populated only with prisoners like him: those too mentally or physically broken to pose any real threat of escaping, discarded to die in one another's company. When pressed to give his name by one of the island's inhabitants, the only reply that Papillon can offer is a mumbled "Nobody," as if five years in silent isolation has obliterated his sense of self completely. Soon, however, his gloomy reticence turns to joy as he finds his old friend Louis Dega also living on the island. But having completed the same five-year sentence in solitude, Dega is permanently traumatized; Papillon finds that the man before him is little more than a shadow of his former friend, one whose mind is so far lost that sustained conversation is extremely difficult. Both men suffered the devastation that long-term removal from Lacan's signifying chain inflicts. Although impaired by his years in solitude, the same resolve that allowed Papillon to endure such isolation eventually drives him to attempt his famous escape from Devil's Island.

Conclusion

Papillon and *Cast Away* each recall the mythological Philoctetes, the archetypal isolated hero. Through Chuck Noland's mental deterioration and manufactured companion in *Cast Away*, modern viewers are offered important insight into the isolated hero's anguish and the crucial role that the exchange of language plays in psychological stability. The loss of this stability makes viewers feel the torments of silence endured by Papillon in his seven years of solitary confinement all the more keenly, and the limping, ramshackle figure that re-emerges has all the demeanor of a cinematic

Philoctetes. Through Tom Hanks' and Steve McQueen's portrayals of these forsaken figures, modern viewers may reimagine the similar toll taken on the mythological Philoctetes over the course of his ten-year exile and also grasp more firmly the deteriorated figure that appears on the stage in Sophocles' tragedy.

Notes

1. See Fishelov (2008) 347ff. on the ways in which *Cast Away* not only recalls and is in dialogue with Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe* but also opens new avenues of creative imagination for subsequent films.
2. For the text of the *Iliad*, see Allen (1931); for the *Odyssey*, see von der Mühll (1962).
3. See Nussbaum (1976) on the play as an exposition of competing rhetorical *ethoi*. On Odysseus as an underhanded and duplicitous figure on the tragic stage, see Stanford (1954).
4. Following the swift success of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*, the name for this subgenre of survivalist fiction was popularized by the German author Johann Gottfried Schnabel just a few years later in the preface to his 1731 work *Die Insel Felsenburg* (*Rock Castle Island*).
5. For the English text of Lacan, see Fink's translation (2006) 40.
6. For a critical summary, see Pucci (2003) 184–87 and Schein (2013) 157–59.
7. All textual citations of *Philoctetes* are from Dain and Mazon (1960). All translations are my own.
8. Worman (2000) 21. Throughout the play images of disease alongside uses of the word "disease" itself (*nosos*) are prominent in the language of all the characters, and speech itself is granted certain curative properties. See also Lacan in Fink (2006) 40.
9. Gera (2003) 182.
10. Worman (2000) 7.
11. See *Philoctetes* 14–25 on the island's lack of resources and the destitute cave that shelters Philoctetes; both the cave of Philoctetes and that of Chuck Noland in *Cast Away* are described as having two openings (see note 14).
12. On Achilles' reputation and its role in his conflict with Agamemnon, see *Iliad* 9.374–416. For a critical discussion on *kleos* and its role in the *Iliad*, see Nagy (2004) 47ff.
13. Montiglio (2000) 46–54.
14. On Philoctetes' double-mouthed cave, see *Philoctetes* 16–19.
15. For descriptions of Philoctetes' foot and his devastating wound, see *Iliad* 2.716–25 and *Philoctetes* 5–7, 264–67, 732–826.

3

The Limits of Human Knowledge: Oedipal Problems in *A Serious Man* (2009)

Osman Umurhan

> "The Uncertainty Principle. It proves we can't ever really know what's going on. But, even though you can't figure anything out, you will be responsible for it on the midterm."
>
> —*Larry Gopnik, to his physics class*

In a dream, Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), a Jewish assistant professor of physics in 1967 Middle America, furiously scribbles the derivation of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (HUP) on every inch of a towering classroom blackboard.[1] The derivation represents the mathematical proof that proves, ironically, that there will always be some uncertainty in the measurement of physical quantities. The mathematical principle has wider philosophical implications, since it also captures the irony of misunderstanding, the subjectivity of perception, or both. This dream sequence captures the signature uncertainty of Larry Gopnik's tragicomic narrative arc. At home his wife has asked for a *get*, a ritual divorce within the Jewish faith. At work a student has attempted to bribe Larry for a passing grade on his physics midterm, and Larry's department chair has alerted him to a series of anonymous letters accusing Larry of moral turpitude, which, along with his lack of publications, threaten his upcoming bid for tenure. The scientist ultimately turns to his rabbi for advice about the enigmatic turns of events that afflict his life.

In the face of uncertainty, a man seeks knowledge from inquiry, and through revelation: thus the life and circumstances of Larry Gopnik in

A Serious Man (2009) resemble the Greek myth of Oedipus. Both Oedipus and Larry Gopnik are remarkable for their intelligence and problem-solving abilities. Like Oedipus' expertise in solving riddles, Larry Gopnik's in physics functions as the very crux for recognizing his troubling circumstances. As a branch of science that seeks to explain the nature and physical mechanisms of the universe, physics resembles the ancient Greek literary genres of cosmology (e.g. Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*), historiography (e.g. Herodotus' *Histories* and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*), and the Athenian tragedies that offer explanations or philosophical theorems about the nature of man and his universe. The myth of Oedipus in Greek culture and subsequent traditions also participates in this discourse and, therefore, offers salient parallels with Larry Gopnik's story.

Neither man's story, however, revolves around Sigmund Freud's popular notion of sexuality and the "Oedipal complex."[2] Instead, the cinematic narrative offers the viewer a retelling of a venerable Western account of the inexplicable twists and turns that affect and define the human condition, and the notion of human suffering that makes this myth continually relevant. Upon finding his status threatened—Oedipus' kingship, Larry's tenure—each man embarks on a personal quest to understand the source of his hardship. This metaphysical journey involves mysterious events and cryptic conversations that defy human logic and reasoning, further plunging them into disillusion. Despite their obvious historical and cultural differences, both Oedipus' and Larry's pursuit of knowledge tap into a major mode of discourse that illuminates and aligns the other's situation, a discourse derived from the Greek literary convention that knowledge comes through suffering (*pathei mathos*[3]). Similar metaphysical questions inform scientific discussions related to physics: namely, those involved in the study of quantum mechanics.

Narratives of Suffering

Although *A Serious Man* makes no explicit reference to Greek tragedy or Oedipus,[4] the narrative of human suffering is a popular one that reverberates throughout both Jewish and classical traditions. Larry Gopnik's story resonates with many elements of the Hebrew Bible's Book of Job.[5] God tests the righteous man by allowing him to lose his possessions and endure great physical pain. Job desires to understand the cause of his suffering; following a confrontation with God, he is ultimately restored to health.

Larry Gopnik's similarly inexplicable travails also resonate with the events that beset the protagonists of Greek tragedy, such as Oedipus in Sophocles' Theban plays. Aristotle in his *Poetics* (1449b.20–1459a.16)

suggests that the operations of tragedy revolve around the human condition, including the human intellectual capacity to recognize a series of events, to contemplate their significance, and to act according to what one's circumstances dictate.[6] However, no tragic story line follows this neat, prescribed order; rather, the protagonist's inability to recognize the consequences of his actions, because of poor decisions or lack of foresight, propels the narrative and its tragic outcomes. Ultimately, what colors the human condition in such plays is the existence of powers working in the world that are hidden from, alien to, and beyond human understanding. Yet characters like Oedipus insist on pursuing knowledge, a pursuit that brings further mental turmoil and physical suffering, both for themselves and for others.

No myth from Greek antiquity speaks more poignantly to the relationship between alien powers and the parameters of human knowledge than Oedipus, as portrayed in Sophocles' plays and subsequent popular receptions of the myth. As a mortal hero, Oedipus is compelled to reassess his status when circumstances impede his own personal and political advancement. Following his rise to the kingship of Thebes, Apollo's oracle at Delphi mandates that Oedipus inquire about the circumstances of the murder of the former king, Laius, to end the plague devastating his city. Oedipus' investigation reveals a series of troubling facts about his own birth, the murder of Laius, and the identity of his father, triggering the suicide of his wife-mother Jocasta and his own blinding. Larry Gopnik presents a fitting modern analogue for Oedipus' condition, as he attempts to negotiate and comprehend the series of events that jeopardize his family relationships and his professional position.

Riddles and Their Perplexity

One of the distinctive features of the Oedipus character in myth is his innate intelligence. So great is his cleverness that he single-handedly solves the riddle of the Sphinx, who has tormented every Theban with an enigma; solving the riddle guarantees the hand of Jocasta and the rule of the Greek city-state, Thebes:

> There walks on land a creature of two feet and four feet, which has a single Voice,
> And it also has three feet; alone of the animals on earth it changes its nature,
> Of animals on the earth, in the sky, and in the sea.
> When it walks propped on the most feet,
> Then is the speed of its limbs least. (Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters* 10.456b)[7]

Not coincidentally, the solution to the riddle, or "man," entails an individual whose inability to reflect on his own circumstances guarantees his harsh suffering.

Oedipus' solution to the riddle serves as the backstory to the events informing the myth of Oedipus in general. Despite his acumen, Oedipus suffers successive misfortunes at Thebes, rendering his claim to intelligence rather ironic. He is unable to understand the immediate consequence of his actions, including his murder of a man at the crossroads on his journey to Thebes in his very attempt to avoid fulfilling the Delphic oracle's prophecy that he would one day murder his father and marry his mother. The combination of knowledge from the Delphic oracle and his ability to solve the Sphinx's riddle does not protect Oedipus from the series of misfortunes that lead not only to marriage with his mother but also to his self-mutilation and voluntary exile from Thebes. "Oedipus" may be a byword for intelligence, but more specifically for how human intelligence is limited by human nature, even in a clever man.

Likewise, Larry engages with the mathematical conundrums that are, in fact, his professional expertise: the fundamentals of physics and quantum mechanics. On the one hand, he seemingly solves the "riddle" of the HUP with the demonstration of a mathematical proof to his class (as in the dream sequence). On the other, he is unable to apply this principle, which dictates that there is no certainty due to the "observer effect" (discussed below in detail), to his own set of unfortunate circumstances. At the suggestion of a few friends and his divorce lawyer, Larry embarks on a quest to decipher the meaning of his misfortunes.

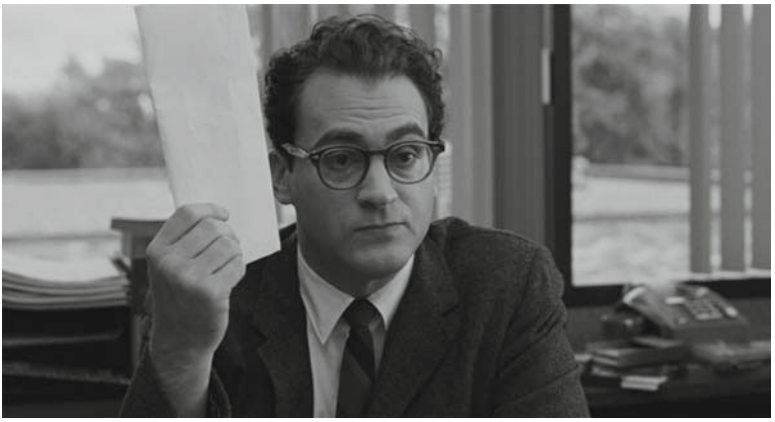

Figure 3.1 Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg) as a troubled physics professor in *A Serious Man* (2009). Working Title Films/Focus Features.

Like the oracles consulted in Greek antiquity, Larry visits multiple rabbis from his congregation for advice on his personal distress. Finally, Larry meets Rabbi Nachtner, who relates the parable of the "goy's teeth." A dentist named Lee Sussman, upon making a plaster mold in the mouth of a gentile patient, finds tiny incised Hebrew letters on the backside of his lower teeth. In translation, they read, "Help me. Save me." The mystery spurs Sussman onto a personal quest to understand the meaning of this sign or calling. He loses sleep, checks the plaster molds of all his patients, including those of his own and his wife's teeth, consults other Hebrew texts—even translates the letters into a local phone number that leads him fruitlessly to a Red Owl supermarket. The cumulative scientific effort yields zero results. Nevertheless, the rabbi reveals that Sussman resumed his life with added *joie de vivre*. Larry, however, is severely frustrated by the rabbi's tale, asking, "What does it all mean?" To which the rabbi replies nonchalantly, "We can't know everything."

The tale of the goy's teeth highlights the dissonance between perception and understanding that informs Larry's travails. The rabbi's parable implies that the mystery of the Hebrew letters offers no single explicit meaning or certainty, just as the HUP suggests. The irony of Larry's lack of understanding is fully articulated when he seeks to clarify and discover the meaning of his life; the viewer recalls the earlier dream sequence, in which he has demonstrated that the HUP "proves we can't ever know what's going on. So, it shouldn't bother you." The worlds of mathematics and Larry's current reality do not correspond, and Larry does not have the ability to decipher the incongruity.

Oedipus also exhibits a lack of foresight when attempting to reconcile the information from the oracle about his parents and the riddle of the Sphinx. As independent units of information, Oedipus understands their immediate meaning: the Delphic oracle predicts that he will kill his father and sleep with his mother, so he abandons his home. Similarly, the solution of "man" to the Sphinx's riddle appears quite straightforward. In both cases, the more substantial meanings are lost to Oedipus. Because of his misinterpretation, those around him, including the citizens of Thebes and his family, suffer deeply. His moment of clarity concerning the situation leads him to blind himself violently, to mark his own personal suffering.

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and the tragic hero's lack of good judgment similarly illuminate the narrative of human suffering and experience.[8] As a result of his travails, Oedipus becomes aware of his shortcomings and accepts his nature. By contrast, and despite his genuine pleas and investigations, Larry's continued lack of acuity renders him more pathetic to the viewer.

Schrödinger's Cat: The Subjectivity of Perception and the "Quantum Enigma"

Like the HUP and the episode of the goy's teeth, another anecdote that Larry relates to his class constitutes a paradox: the case of Schrödinger's cat. Erwin Schrödinger postulated that a certain interpretation of quantum mechanics, when applied to everyday objects, resulted in a paradox of common sense. To illuminate this incongruity, Schrödinger used the parable of the cat to suggest that something could be both dead and alive simultaneously; its state becomes apparent only when we open the box that contains it.[9] Quantum theory also postulates that the theory of the physical world depends somehow on our observation of it. In other words, our experience of the world is purely subjective. Scientists call this the "quantum enigma," or the inability to define and categorize, mathematically and definitively, all phenomena perceived by human experience; so too the ancient Greeks acknowledged the limitations of comprehensive human knowledge.[10] The paradox of Schrödinger's cat informs a series of bewildering conversations that Larry has with a Korean student, Clive Park, whose strong foreign accent also impedes Larry's path to clear understanding. These conversations, which amount to riddles in and of themselves, offer a more intricate depiction of the relationship between knowledge and the ability to observe and reflect upon one's self and environment: issues at the very core of physics.

The exchanges between Larry and his Korean student offer a glimpse of mathematics as applied to a real-life situation. Ironically, as Larry and Clive enact the quantum enigma in their brief conversations, the mystery of the cat and its larger philosophical implications seem to elude Larry. Whereas Oedipus, on his path to self-realization, comes to understand the limits of his intellect and knowledge (marked by his self-mutilation), Larry does not. Following a sequence in which Larry offers his class a brief demonstration of the Schrödinger's cat conundrum, the scene immediately cuts to Larry's office, where Clive wishes to discuss the "unjust results" of his failing grade on the midterm. Clive makes the case to Larry that he understands "the physics and the dead cat" but was unaware of being responsible for the mathematics, to which Larry responds, "You can't understand the physics [of the cat parable] without understanding the math. The math tells how it works . . . I mean, even I don't understand the dead cat."

After the dejected Clive's departure, Larry discovers an unmarked white envelope on his desk containing several hundred-dollar bills. A few scenes later, Larry confronts Clive about the envelope. Their dialogue enacts the paradox of Schrödinger's cat: namely, what each observer independently and differently perceives to be the details of events surrounding the appearance of the white envelope.

Larry: We had, I think, a good talk, the other day, but you left something—
Clive: I didn't leave it.
Larry: Well, you don't even know what I was going to say.
Clive: I didn't leave anything. I'm not missing anything. I know where everything is.
Larry: Well, then, Clive, where did this come from? This is here, isn't it?
Clive: Yes, sir. That is there.
Larry: This is not nothing. This is something.
Clive: Yes. That is something. What is it?
Larry: You know what it is, I believe! And you know I can't keep it, Clive.
Clive: Yes.
Larry: I'll have to pass it on to Professor Finkle, along with my suspicions about where it came from. Actions have consequences.
Clive: Yes, often.
Larry: No, always! Actions always have consequences! In this office, actions have consequences!
Clive: Yes, sir.
Larry: Not just physics. Morally.
Clive: Yes.
Larry: And we both know about your actions.
Clive: No, sir. I know about my actions.
Larry: I can interpret, Clive. I know what you meant me to understand.
Clive: Mere sir, my sir.
Larry: Mere sir, my sir?
Clive: Mere surmise, sir . . . Very uncertain.

Oedipal themes and imagery resonate throughout this exchange, including the power of perception and observation, as well as general uncertainty about and incomplete knowledge of the situation at hand, which all amount to a quantum enigma of its own. Schrödinger's cat, like the HUP, is sometimes referred to as the "observer effect," which suggests that the outcome of any measurement—regardless of the accuracy of the mathematics or mathematical proof—is dependent upon the observer of the outcome. The mathematics is just the language that expresses the physical reality implied by experiment. The physical reality, however, is not necessarily entirely expressed by this language, hence the observer's lack of complete understanding.

In Clive's attempt to bribe Larry for a passing grade, he cleverly engages in a role reversal and causes Larry to act the part of the student. Like Clive's failure to understand the mathematics for the midterm, so too Larry in this exchange fails to comprehend Clive's astute application of the conundrum with the example of the envelope. To this extent Clive functions as an oracular stand-in through his role as the mediator of information, rather than divulging the source of the envelope's appearance. He determines the

source of the money to be dependent on the observer when he confirms, "I know about my actions . . . mere surmise, sir . . . Very uncertain." Clive's independent observation confirms the envelope's appearance to be a mystery. In fact, in a later scene Clive's father confronts Larry at his home and threatens Larry with defamation if he does not accept the envelope. In this exchange too, Larry's inability to quantify the situation mathematically obscures its meaning from him. Clive's father ends the conversation with the curt response, "Please, accept the mystery." It is the mystery that equates to a quantum enigma.

Furthermore, this game of ambiguity has moral implications that apply to the "real" world. If this example of the cat, or white envelope, conveys a paradox centering on the observer, the following question arises: Who indeed ultimately has the authority to determine what constitutes "right" and "proper" action or behavior, let alone existence beyond observation? This is the very quandary that Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* confronts when Tiresias, the wise blind seer, challenges Oedipus' interpretation of the plague that ravages the town. Having proved his keen intelligence by defeating the Sphinx, Oedipus is determined to rid the town of a *miasma* or "pollution" by pursuing the murderer of King Laius—whom, unbeknownst to Oedipus, he had murdered on his way to Thebes. Tiresias advises that he call off the search and, upon Oedipus' insistence, reveals that Oedipus is the source of this pollution. Nevertheless, Oedipus is unable to accept the connection between himself and the plague, and this lack of awareness brings additional misfortune upon himself and his household. His inability to consider an alternate perspective on the oracle results in actions that will have serious consequences later in the play. In much the same way, Larry warns Clive about his suspicions regarding the appearance of the white envelope: "In this office, actions have consequences. Not just physics. Morally."

The Role of the Divine

As with other Oedipal resonances in Larry's life, the divine plays a role in the narratives of both men's tumultuous lives. Throughout his journey, Larry's attempts to secure an appointment with the senior rabbi—the wisest dispenser of information and wisdom to believers of the Jewish faith—prove futile, as he is rescheduled to meet with other, more junior rabbis. Similarly, in the context of Oedipus' myth, the gods Apollo and Zeus are often invoked either by the chorus or by other characters as transmitters of information to man. As the patron of the Delphic oracle, Apollo's pronouncements communicated information to men in the form of riddles throughout classical antiquity.[11] Zeus is also at a distance from man in Greek tragedy. In Aeschylus' and Sophocles' tragedies, he represents the

source of wisdom and truth for which man can strive on his path to the acquisition of knowledge. Since Zeus does not communicate directly with men, the burden of acquiring knowledge and dispensing authority lies within the judgment of men. It is this very lack of judgment on Oedipus' part that leads to his misfortune, despite the signs offered by Apollo's oracle and Tiresias' advice. Nonetheless, it is this very suffering and the eventual recognition of his poor judgment that will transform him into a wise(r) man.

Although he seeks their counsel, Oedipus chooses willfully to ignore the signs of the gods, in the form of oracles and soothsaying. Larry, too, relies heavily on religious figures in his Jewish congregation to illuminate the meaning of his misfortunes, but he has trouble accepting their counsel. Larry's ultimate goal is to consult the most senior and most wise of all the religious authorities, Marshak. However, he never gets an interview with Marshak because, according to his secretary, "The Rabbi is busy. He's thinking." After consulting the more junior Rabbi Scott, Larry meets with Rabbi Nachtner for advice. Slumped pathetically in his chair facing the rabbi's desk, relating one personal misfortune after another, Larry begs for some clarification of these perplexing, riddling events: "What was my life before? Not what I thought it was. What does it all mean? What is HaShem [the Jewish title for God in conversation] trying to tell me?" The rabbi responds by relating how the dentist Sussman resolved to forget about the matter of the goy's teeth and happily resumed his life. Larry, dissatisfied with the rabbi's parable, insists that he needs an answer. Yet Larry will never receive one—at least, not directly.

Ultimately, the role of divinity in the cases of Oedipus and Larry involves a series of misunderstandings. Oedipus ignores the signs of the gods. Larry desires clarification and assistance from HaShem and earthly religious authorities. Yet these divinities communicate their will or offer guidance by indirect means. Furthermore, the meaning of the divine communiqué is determined by the observer's perception of it. HaShem, Zeus, and Apollo never offer transparency, especially to those who seek it. As Rabbi Nachtner reinforces for Larry, "The answer! Sure! We all want the answer! But HaShem does not owe us the answer, Larry. HaShem doesn't owe us anything. The obligation runs the other way."

Conclusion

The narratives of Oedipus and Larry Gopnik articulate a common desire to understand the mechanisms of nature and knowledge, from Oedipus' own journey in search of clarity to Larry's pursuit of it through science. Furthermore, both men's circumstances are incongruent with their perceptions of

them. They experience a disconnect from reality despite their innate intelligence. Both men suffer as they come to grips with their limited capacity to understand every action and consequence.

What, then, is the answer to this enigma, this "disconnect," if any? Zeus, Apollo, and HaShem refrain from offering explicit ones. Perhaps the dentist Lee Sussman knows the answer—or Clive's father, when he suggests that Larry "accept the mystery" and receive with ease whatever comes his way, whether simple or incomprehensible. Even the film's creators, the Coen brothers, open the film with a phrase by Rashi, a medieval French rabbi and commentator on the Talmud, cast in white letters on a black screen: "Receive with simplicity everything that happens to you."

At the conclusion of the film, the viewer is left to consider two seemingly bleak scenarios that both reinforce the mysterious nature of man and also recall a Sophoclean sentiment about man's fortunes, uttered by a chorus of Theban elders, in *Oedipus the King* (lines 1524–30):

> You that live in my ancestral Thebes, behold this Oedipus,—
> him who knew the famous riddles and was a man most masterful;
> not a citizen who did not look with envy on his lot—
> see him now and see the breakers of misfortune swallow him!
> Look upon that last day always. Count no mortal happy till
> he has passed the final limit of his life secure from pain.[12]

Despite Larry's misfortunes, near the end of the film, it appears his luck has turned. His son Danny has successfully celebrated his Bar Mitzvah and Larry has heard informally that he has been granted tenure. Nevertheless, soon afterward Larry experiences a reversal of this good fortune: his physician calls to advise an immediate consultation in light of recent X-ray results suggesting cancer. The final scene finds Danny and his classmates outside their Hebrew school awaiting tornado-watch instructions, as the funnel of the tornado rapidly approaches. The definitive diagnosis of Larry's condition and Danny's imminent fate enter the undefined darkness of mystery, as the screen fades to black.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Monica Cyrino, Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr., and Meredith Safran for suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper, as well as Alexander Casti and Orkan Umurhan for their clarification of scientific concepts and terms.
2. For Freud's work on the "Oedipal complex," see Strachey (1966) 397–420.
3. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 177. For the text of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, see Page (1972).

4. Joel and Ethan Coen, the film's creators, are notoriously elusive about their inspiration for their plots and characters: see Seesslen (2001) and Allen (2006).
5. See Tollerton (2011) for general parallels in this film with the story of Job.
6. For the text of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Janko (1987).
7. For the text of Athenaeus' *The Learned Banqueters*, see Olson (2009). This translation is my own.
8. On the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, see Heisenberg (1927).
9. See Schrödinger (1935).
10. On information about the history of physics and quantum mechanics for a non-scientific audience, see Rosenblum and Kuttner (2011).
11. For a history of the Delphic oracle, see Lloyd-Jones (1976) and Fontenrose (1978).
12. For the text of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, see Lloyd-Jones and Wilson (1990). This translation is my own.

4

Orpheus in a Gray Flannel Suit: George Nolfi's *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011)

Seán Easton

The Adjustment Bureau (2011), written and directed by George Nolfi, draws on ancient and modern versions of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice to dramatize a conflict between devotion to career and personal fulfillment.[1] In this film, David Norris (Matt Damon), a rising political figure in New York, finds that the mysterious Adjustment Bureau is working to sabotage his relationship with Elise (Emily Blunt) in order to direct him toward a political future of great national consequence. Nolfi dramatizes this conflict by combining the Orpheus myth's themes of love, loss, and the limits of individual agency with the U.S. myth of the post–World War II company man, whose successful career imperils his domestic happiness.

The core elements of the Orpheus myth derive from the canonical versions that emerge from Greco-Roman antiquity.[2] According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the best-known version, on the day of their wedding, Orpheus' wife Eurydice falls prey to a lethal snakebite. Orpheus, a supremely talented singer and lyre player, enters the Underworld and, through the persuasive power of his music, gains permission to return with Eurydice to the upper world—on the condition that he not look back at her until they reach their destination. Just before completing this journey, Orpheus panics and looks back; Eurydice is then reclaimed by the Underworld. In its classical versions, a defeated Orpheus retreats into song and is torn apart by female worshippers of Bacchus. In post-classical iterations of the myth, especially in opera, husband and wife sometimes triumph over death.[3]

Nolfi engages the myth's themes by making Norris an unrealized Orpheus figure, who begins to fulfill his identity only upon meeting his Eurydice. The supernatural Bureau wishes to prevent this fulfillment in order to safeguard their Chairman's plan for Norris' political career. Resonance with two major adaptations of the Orpheus myth, Marcel Camus' *Black Orpheus* (1959) and Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), underlines the place of *The Adjustment Bureau* within the Orphic cinematic tradition. To dramatize this conflict between devotion to career and personal fulfillment, Nolfi also draws on Nunnally Johnson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), which chimes with philosopher Herbert Marcuse's reading of Orpheus in the context of modern-day man.

No Orpheus without Eurydice: David Norris' Incomplete Identities

A basic element of the Orpheus myth invoked by *The Adjustment Bureau* is Orpheus' power to win over an audience: not only animals, trees, and seas, but even Hades and Persephone, the impenetrable king and queen of the Underworld, who grant him the exceptional favor of letting the dead Eurydice return to the land of the living. As a politician, Norris has the vocal gift of persuasive rhetoric. Orpheus' music in myth primarily evokes longing and suffering, but Norris' rousing political speeches have a basis for comparison in classical authors' use of Orpheus as an analogy for persuasive, even seductive, speech. Plato (*Protagoras* 315b), for example, compares the philosopher Protagoras to Orpheus for the way his voice casts a spell over his followers.[4]

Yet in spite of his public confidence, Norris suffers from an identity crisis. In the DVD commentary, Nolfi notes that an early shot of Norris standing alone and looking lost, immediately prior to delivering an enthusiastic public address, registers the character's uncertainty over why he is in politics at all. Norris' sense of his unresolved identity is in fact the basis for his role as an Orpheus figure. Elise becomes the key to this self-realization, but in a way that jeopardizes the Chairman's plan.

Key to the mythology of *The Adjustment Bureau* is a mysterious and supremely powerful figure called the Chairman, who has written out destinies for all people's lives; in other words, their fates. The eponymous Bureau deploys operatives, endowed with supernatural powers, to ensure that these plans are carried out. For Norris and Elise, this means extracting the full measure of their professional talents—in politics and modern dance, respectively. The Bureau works to prevent their relationship because its all-consuming nature would mean the collapse of the destinies set out for them and thus would deny the world their important contributions. While the

Bureau is open to Judeo-Christian interpretation—an agent acknowledges that the term "angel" is among the "many names" by which they have been called—it is also identifiable with the Underworld of the Orpheus myth, insofar as the infernal divinities are Orpheus' major blocking figures.

Despite the existence of this larger plan, until Norris meets Elise, he feels uninspired. In the beginning of the film, Norris is practicing his concession speech on the eve of a humbling electoral defeat, precipitated by the publication of college photographs of him mooning friends at a party. Thinking himself alone in the men's room of the Waldorf Astoria hotel, Norris finds Elise hiding from hotel security after crashing a wedding. In this brief encounter, she emerges as a perceptive observer of his character, discerning his need for the adoration of crowds and how poorly suited he is to a carefully groomed political style. Elise recognizes that Norris' motivation in running for office stems from emotional wants rather than a particular political vision. By seeing his true nature, she inspires him and establishes their innate complementarity.

In a mythic sense, too, these modern characters are complementary. Ancient Greek lyre players such as Orpheus sang as they played and were commonly accompanied by dancers. Norris represents the power of vocal performance, albeit political, while the professional modern dancer Elise more clearly represents the arts. Together, they constitute a complete Orpheus. Apart, they represent the fragments of that identity.

Inspired by Elise, Norris discards his dull concession speech and delivers instead a wildly popular denunciation of the politics of image control

Figure 4.1 Elise (Emily Blunt) and David (Matt Damon) meet for the first time in *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011). Media Rights Capital/Universal Pictures.

in which his campaign had become mired. He completely restores his positive image, which positions him well to run for an open Senate seat in four years. The very public nature of Norris' return to authentic selfhood, however, creates another image with which he will next be sold to voters—as the Bureau no doubt intends. Thus, his attempt to banish the inauthenticity of his public life only prolongs it. Norris' identity remains a problem to be solved; although a successful performer, he remains unfulfilled. Norris' recognition of Elise as a possible solution to his emotional need, a way to complete his Orphic role, imperils the Chairman's plan that Norris should prioritize his career over all else.

Despite the risk, the Bureau had contrived this meeting so that Elise would inspire Norris to deliver a speech equal to his potential; this tactic seems their only option to salvage Norris' political career. But agents thereafter strive to keep them apart. The Bureau wanted to quickly assemble the whole Orpheus by connecting Norris to the one person who can accomplish that transformation—by making him feel understood—and then quickly disassemble him. For the Bureau, Elise is a means to an end; for Norris, she becomes the end that he seeks.

Despite the Bureau's efforts to keep the two apart, Norris unexpectedly catches a bus that allows him to meet Elise once again, and they seem poised to begin a romantic relationship. But his unexpectedly timely arrival at work also allows him to witness Bureau agents altering the thoughts of a colleague.[5] Startled, the agents reveal their identities and swear Norris to silence on pain of lobotomy. Without explaining why, they deprive him of any way to contact Elise and forbid him to try. Norris searches for her nonetheless, riding the same bus every day for three years, until finally he glimpses her in rehearsal for an upcoming performance and is captivated. Their romance is rekindled, and Elise takes him dancing at a club before the Bureau returns to pressure him into abandoning this relationship. In these sequences, Norris enacts the loss of the beloved that characterizes an Orpheus figure.

Becoming Orpheus

An Orpheus figure's most wondrous deed is the recovery of his lost Eurydice, in spite of supernatural obstacles. Norris cycles through the loss of Elise several times, each more serious. Now that they are a couple, Norris is endangering the Chairman's plan for him to undertake the arduous trials that will lead to the presidency and not to pursue love instead of the leadership of the country and the world. Therefore, the Bureau dispatches Thompson (Terrence Stamp), a formidable senior Bureau agent, to separate Norris from Elise more definitively.

Thompson is a figure of enormous menace who sees himself as an enforcer of the fates prescribed by the Chairman's plan. He threatens the new relationship, but also Elise specifically. He tries to reason with Norris, telling him that Elise's impulsiveness will exacerbate his already imperfect self-discipline and ruin an important political destiny, while life with him will effectively end her career. When Norris ignores him, Thompson contrives to have Elise fall and injure her ankle during a dance performance, and he reiterates his threat to Norris while he waits at the hospital. Fearful of his impact on Elise's dreams for her future, Norris abandons her there, unable to explain his actions.

Thompson proves initially successful, but in a limited sense. Free from the distraction of his emotional focus and without the increased self-knowledge that a relationship with Elise would bring, Thompson's non-Orphic Norris would gain an ever more powerful voice, as he ascends the ladder of government. Yet, it would never be his authentic voice—not only because of the Bureau's scrutiny but also because he himself is incomplete. When threatened with proof of his loss of her affections, Norris enters fully into his role as Orpheus: 11 months later, Norris learns that Elise plans to marry someone from her dance troupe. Confronted with the consequence of abandoning Elise—namely, that she will "abandon" him in return—he embraces the energizing conviction that his life only makes sense with her. In this phase of the Orpheus myth, Norris undertakes his *katabasis*, or descent to the Underworld, desperate to reach his Eurydice before she is lost to him, emotionally, forever.[6] To do so, he will ultimately have to risk both of their lives by revealing to her the truth about the Adjustment Bureau.

Katabasis and Return

The underworld journey so crucial to the myth of Orpheus is made possible by Harry (Anthony Mackie), a sympathetic Adjuster assigned to Norris, who tells him how to escape the notice of Bureau agents and move through supernatural portals throughout the city. The first space through which Harry leads Norris is the Museum of Modern Art, which offers a liminal zone where the living and the dead intermix. The pair move through a brightly lit area where Gabriel Orozco's exhibit *Mobile Matrix* (2006), a life-size skeleton of a gray whale, hangs from the ceiling. Modeled to the smallest detail on a real whale's skeleton, but constructed from artificial materials, this gargantuan symbol of death and art watches over them as they pass, marking their descent.

This skeletal sea creature also signals the role of water in the mythology of the film and its connection to the aquatic geography of the ancient Greek Underworld.[7] Nolfi notes in the commentary that the fact that the

human body consists primarily of water inspired him to make it the element that protects humans from Bureau scrutiny. In the film, Harry notes that water inhibits the Adjusters' ability to detect goings-on, so their secret meetings happen in the rain, on a ferry, and so forth. Passing under this simulacrum of a creature native to the element that blinds the Bureau's gaze suggests that Norris' journey takes him to a sphere where he will no longer be defenseless against the Adjusters. As a tour through the symbolic geography of the Orpheus myth, Norris' *katabasis* empowers him against those who wish to separate him from his Orphic identity. Using water to enter a forbidden realm recalls how Orpheus crossed the River Styx, the boundary between the worlds of the living and of the dead, in defiance of the rules separating the worlds.[8]

Once in the literal underworld of the dark tunnels of the underground water-pumping station for downtown Manhattan, Harry instructs Norris on how to elude the Adjusters and find Elise. Their conversation is intercut with foreboding scenes of Elise dancing with great intensity alone on a darkened floor, a scene evoking not only Eurydice's isolation in the gloom of the Underworld but also Elise's isolation in her life without Norris—an isolation heightened, rather than alleviated, by her impending marriage to another man. The museum and Elise's dance in the dark also mark a journey into the symbolism of the arts, connecting Norris with the traditional aspects of the Orphic persona that he lacks.

Norris' journey leads him to City Hall, where Elise prepares to enter her joyless union. He sequesters a shocked Elise in the men's restroom and then persuades her to come with him. At the beginning of the film, Elise crashes a wedding at the Waldorf and inspires Norris to transform his concession speech into a reassertion of identity. At the film's conclusion, Norris crashes Elise's wedding and persuades her to commit to him—affirming Elise as a Eurydice figure, but with a modern twist.

The Adjustment Bureau is conventionally male-centered in that Norris has critical knowledge of the plot that Elise does not and makes decisions of vast consequence for her without consultation, while she remains continuously amenable to a relationship with him under ever more questionable circumstances. The film attempts to offset this aspect somewhat by endowing Elise with essential Orphic qualities of her own and providing her with agency and desire that go unremarked in the myth's account of Eurydice. Moreover, the film suggests that Norris' actions are the result of his finally acquiring the boldness and symbolic attributes that define her and now make him a worthy match for her.

Together the couple embarks on a headlong flight from the Adjusters in a sequence that corresponds to Orpheus' attempt to bring Eurydice back to the upper world, beginning with the imagery evocative of death and the

Underworld. Dashing through a portal, they find themselves at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. Like Orozco's *Mobile Matrix*, it is a gargantuan art object that is—by virtue of its location—associated with water. In the context of the film, the statue emblematizes freedom of choice. Under its auspices, Elise stops, demanding an explanation from Norris. He declares his commitment to her, and she, in an updating of the silent, passive Eurydice of myth, chooses to go with him. In the ultimate act of gate-crashing as free will, the two head into the headquarters of the Bureau itself.

In a twist on the myth's clear reversal of Orpheus' *katabasis* with his and Eurydice's *anabasis*, or ascent, to the upper earth upon receiving Hades' conditional pardon, Norris and Elise's continued use of the Bureau's portals even as they move into open-air spaces keeps them within the Bureau's realm. This twist derives from the source of Norris' conditional pardon—not at first from the highest authority in the realm, but from his rebellious functionary: in the underwater pumping station, Harry decides to tutor Norris in how to evade his fellow agents in order to find Elise and enact their ascent. Even as Norris and Elise move through the terrestrial landscapes of the upper world, they must use the Adjustment Bureau's occult portals to progress. Norris and Elise's ascent up flight after flight of stairs through the Bureau most clearly re-enacts the *anabasis* of Orpheus and Eurydice from the Underworld. Their sudden emergence together onto the roof suggests a safe arrival from the Underworld to the clear light of day in the upper world.

However, the danger of their separation is renewed when Thompson captures them and threatens the dreaded lobotomies—until Harry hands him a memo and, having read it, Thompson departs. Harry explains that the couple's display of autonomy inspired the Chairman to write a new plan that accommodates their choice to be together. As a united couple they inspire the Chairman, as Elise did Norris. The Chairman's ultimate decision to allow Norris and Elise to remain together evokes a triumphant version of the Underworld's amnesty, which allows the conditional return of Eurydice to become a victory. At the same time, the Chairman emerges as much more than a Hades figure, transcending the supernal and infernal, possessing the power to alter prescribed outcomes, while fallible enough to allow Norris and Elise's challenge to his plan.

Invoking Other Orpheuses: *Black Orpheus* and *Orphée*

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice turns on the tension between their eternal bond and the necessity of their separation. So too *The Adjustment Bureau* reveals that Norris and Elise were always already meant to be together, according to earlier versions of the Chairman's plan, and that

their separation is the result of a recent rewriting. Their attraction to each other is therefore a product of the combined pressure of so many earlier iterations of the plans in which they become a couple. This in turn serves as a metadrama for the victory of the classical myth of Orpheus and Eurydice over the modern challenge of lovers contending with divergent, all-consuming career paths.

The use of mythic tradition to create a plot that turns strangers into fated lovers connects *The Adjustment Bureau* to one of its most famous predecessors: Marcel Camus' *Black Orpheus*. That film turned on the confrontation between its characters' sense of their own identities and the destinies that the mythic tradition imposes upon them through their names. Naive Eurydice (Marpessa Dawn) arrives in late-1950s Rio de Janeiro knowing nothing of the singer-guitarist Orpheus (Breno Mello), who is preparing to marry his fiancée Mira (Lourdes de Oliveira).[9] When the clerk at the marriage license office hears Orpheus' name, he says to Mira that she must be Eurydice, and he defends himself from her angry reaction by saying that Orpheus and Eurydice belong together in an old story. When Orpheus presently meets Eurydice and is immediately attracted to her, he playfully repeats to her the clerk's explanation. Fredricksmeyer notes how unusual it is in modern film for characters to have knowledge of the myth that they embody, while observing that Eurydice's death nonetheless shocks Orpheus.[10] But his unfamiliarity with the myth's details deepens the irony, as the film frames the shift in Orpheus' desire from Mira to Eurydice as realignment with mythic tradition.

So too in both films, dance is a crucial component in the complete Orphic identity, and thus allusion to *Black Orpheus* is an important element of *The Adjustment Bureau*. Camus' film takes place in the days leading up to the Carnival, and the climax features all major characters involved in the spectacular dances of the parade. Orpheus is not only a musician and singer; he is a dancer and leader of the United Babylon dance troupe. His rehearsals and performances, in which the other major characters are involved as performers or spectators, punctuate the plot. Eurydice, played by professional dancer Marpessa Dawn, takes on her cousin's role as a star dancer in her troupe to bring her closer to Orpheus.[11]

In *The Adjustment Bureau*, Elise's identity as a professional dancer plays a major role in her character development, and in bringing Norris into the artistic sphere. After Norris watches Elise rehearse with her troupe, she takes him out dancing, where he is recognized and celebrated by the club's adoring patrons. More than a nod to *Black Orpheus*, it points to Norris' incompleteness as an Orpheus figure without Elise. She possesses a specifically artistic dimension, evocative of Camus' film, which he possesses only through analogy between his rhetoric and music. When Elise later

sprains her ankle as Norris watches her perform, her injury evokes the fatal snakebite to the ankle that kills Eurydice in Ovid's account. Complementing the allusion to Eurydice in ancient myth, the pose in which Norris carries the injured Elise into the hospital where he leaves her mirrors that of Camus' Orpheus carrying the dead Eurydice out of the morgue at the film's conclusion.

In characterizing Norris as the Orphic figure and Thompson as the representative of supernatural necessity, Nolfi taps into another landmark adaptation of the Orpheus myth: Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950). Cocteau's Orpheus is a troubled celebrity poet of mid-twentieth-century France, whose popularity has recently suffered due to the literary set's current esteem for a new rival. Similarly, Norris is introduced as a wildly popular politician whose troubled past leads him to suffer a humiliating electoral defeat. Both are thwarted public figures who crave success and are given a path to it by a supernatural power that wishes to separate them permanently from the Eurydice figure. Underscoring such resemblances, Norris' name even bears a phonetic resemblance to Orpheus, while Elise recalls the name Eurydice in its French pronunciation (Eury-DEESE).

In Cocteau's movie, the figure wishing to separate Orpheus from his wife Eurydice is the Princess, a ruthless emissary of death romantically obsessed with the poet. She desires Eurydice's removal for her own ends and is introduced spying on the sleeping Orpheus. Nolfi likewise introduces Thompson standing ominously at the foot of the bed in which Norris and Elise are sleeping. Unlike the Princess, Thompson has no kind emotions for Norris' Orpheus and remains the couple's unswerving antagonist. The part of the Princess that is sympathetic to the Orpheus figure is embodied by the Adjuster Harry. Just as the Princess sacrifices herself to reunite Orpheus with Eurydice, Harry risks the gravest penalties to help Norris defy the Bureau.

Nolfi also borrows from *Orphée* the conceit by which characters gain passage between realms. The uniforms of the Bureau's enforcers resemble those of the Princess' guards, and their hats recall the mysterious rubber gloves worn by death's functionaries in *Orphée*, as items of clothing that enable them to pass through supernatural portals.[12] In *Orphée*, these portals are mirrors; in *The Adjustment Bureau*, any door may become a portal to any other door in the world, or may grant access to the Bureau's central headquarters.

Orpheus in a Gray Flannel Suit

In *Eros and Civilization*, first published in 1955, the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse reads Orpheus as the mythic champion of

individual life lived for itself, rather than as an instrument in the service of collective progress. For Marcuse, Orpheus represents the will to oppose the repression of pleasure in the name of progress.[13] Orpheus devotes himself to the cultivation of aesthetic pleasure, and when he does undertake hardship, it is to restore his emotional life.[14] The culture hero of the opposite side, according to Marcuse's reading, is Prometheus, who willingly endures suffering in the name of humanity's collective progress. In terms of *The Adjustment Bureau*, Thompson tries to steer Norris toward Prometheus' camp, whereas Elise draws him toward Orpheus by exposing him to the arts and provoking him to consider personal fulfillment.

Marcuse was by no means the only voice broaching such issues in the 1950s. Nolfi borrows significant plot elements concerning work-life conflict through allusive engagement with Nunnally Johnson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), an adaptation of Sloan Wilson's 1955 novel of the same name. Protagonist Tom Rath (Gregory Peck) is asked by his company president to take charge of a major project. The cause is just and the president is a good man, but the project would detract substantially from Rath's time with his family. Ultimately, he turns down the opportunity, valuing family over professional success.

Likewise, Norris is offered the presidency in return for a single-minded devotion to its pursuit; the Chairman, until the very end, recalls the company president. But Norris' feelings for Elise draw him away, parallel to Rath's wish to preserve time for his family. Nolfi finds in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*'s exploration of the white-collar careerist's travails a strain of U.S. myth that fits with his modern interpretation of Orpheus. Thus, the Bureau's suit and fedora style, together with the presence of actor John Slattery of AMC's critically acclaimed television series *Mad Men* (2007–2015), here cast as an Adjuster, establishes a visual bridge not only to Johnson's film but also to themes that resonate with Nolfi's version of the Orpheus myth.[15]

Nolfi's integration of the Orpheus myth with the post–World War II U.S. myth of the company man's choice between work and family opens a window onto contemporary debates about love, identity, and work-life balance in the early twenty-first century. At the end of the film, Norris and Elise triumph over the supernatural forces aligned against them. Unlike the classical Orpheus and Eurydice, who are reunited only in Elysium, the land of the meritorious dead, Norris and Elise are reunited among the living. Not only are they allowed to stay together—their great destinies may yet be open to each of them, despite having made each other their first priorities. The film thus provides twenty-first-century audiences with a new myth of finding one's true self within a relationship in the context of successful, demanding careers.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the editors, Monica Cyrino and Meredith Safran, as well as Yurie Hong, Sean Cobb, Robert Kendrick, Martin Lang, and Laura Maki for their valuable help.
2. See Gantz (1993) 721–25 for an overview of the myth in its ancient form, including the famous versions in Vergil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
3. For a summary of this post-classical tradition, see Segal (1989) 155–98. Even in Ovid's classical version, the couple is joined together in Elysium after Orpheus' death.
4. For the text of Plato's *Protagoras*, see Lombardo and Bell (1997).
5. Philip K. Dick's short story "The Adjustment Team" (1973), which the film liberally adapts, focuses entirely on the accidental sighting of the Adjusters, its cause and fallout.
6. See Holtsmark (2001) for a succinct yet comprehensive discussion of the *katabasis* in cinema. For a discussion of the underworld journey in Cocteau's *Orphée*, see Smith (1996) 245–49.
7. The Greek Underworld is traversed by numerous rivers: I thank the editors for this point.
8. I thank Yurie Hong for this point.
9. For a thorough examination of classical themes in *Black Orpheus*, especially the film's relationship to the myth and the role of sacrificial ritual, see Fredricksmeyer (2007).
10. Fredricksmeyer (2007) 151 n.5.
11. For a discussion of *Black Orpheus* in both its Brazilian socio-historical context and its classical context, see Murillo (2010).
12. Dargis (2011) notices the uniforms and substitution of doors for Cocteau's mirrors. On Cocteau's *Orphée* from a classics perspective, see Winkler (2009) 281–94.
13. Marcuse (1974) 164–66.
14. See Strauss (1997) for a reading of Cocteau's *Orphée* in the context of Marcuse's interpretation of the Orpheus myth.
15. Wittkower (2011) 105 establishes the thematic and aesthetic connections to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*.

Part II

Fashioning the Feminine

5

Dystopian Amazons: Fantasies of Patriarchy in *Le Gladiatrici* (1963)

Antony Augoustakis

Amazons have fueled the literary imagination of ancient Greek and Roman authors from the epic cycle and Herodotus to Quintus of Smyrna and beyond.[1] As a group, these marginal and transgressive women are portrayed as skillful in battle against men, a stereotype reinforced by the popular etymology of their name from the Greek *a-mazon* ("without breast"), which is connected to the tale of their cauterizing the right breast to facilitate spear-throwing—among other tales of their strange customs created by male authors.[2] In ancient Italy, female gladiators were fashioned after the Amazons. While productions such as the film *Gladiator* (2000) and the STARZ series *Spartacus* (2010–2013) have acquainted modern audiences with the gladiator as male hero who enacts subversion while promoting the prevailing cultural image of masculinity, Roman authors occasionally speak of the gladiatrix as a monstrosity who transgresses the norms of her gender and nature itself—an opinion that survived into modernity.[3]

A hybrid of Amazons and female gladiators is employed in pseudo-historical contexts in the mid-twentieth-century "sword and sandal" genre to epitomize a type of cultural rebellion. This chapter examines an early Amazon/gladiatrix-themed film: Antonio Leonviola's 1963 *Le Gladiatrici*, an Italian/Yugoslavian production known in the United States as *Thor and the Amazon Women*.[4] Rather than recuperate the reputation or quality of this film, this chapter situates the film in the cultural context of the 1960s and 1970s, when "sword and sandal" movies were watched in frequent

television reruns. In particular, the film's patriarchal message was in line with the delayed emergence of a feminist movement in Italy and southern Europe at the time. Thus the rule by these marginal women, the Amazonian gladiators, can only exist as a fantasy of the screen, one that must eventually be suppressed: that is, the Amazonian gladiators are antagonists who must be gloriously defeated and crushed.

Onscreen Amazons and the "Sword and Sandal" Genre

The influence of Amazons on the portrayal of warrior women on screen has been recently studied in two books. In *The Modern Amazons: Warrior Women on Screen*, Dominique Mainon and James Ursini examine the characteristic traits of warrior women in popular culture, especially in the rapid development of female-driven action movies during the "second-wave" feminist movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, into the present-day emergence of female action characters.[5] In *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*, Jennifer Stuller underscores the pivotal role of the "high-heeled crime-fighters," such as those depicted in *Wonder Woman* (1975–1979) and *Charlie's Angels* (1976–1981), arguing that they are not just love interests or sidekicks but central to the denouement of plots.[6] Stuller asserts that female heroes have broken into the traditional "boys' club" to become fully fleshed-out action characters in their own right. Some of these elements can be found in the "sword and sandal" movies of the 1960s, but with a twist.

Le Gladiatrici was a follow-up to the 1963 film *Taur, il Re della Forza Bruta* (*Taur the Mighty*). Taur, or Thor, is an amalgam of Greek heroes like Hercules and Achilles, and of Norse gods like Thor, with a dose of Tarzan. Many "sword and sandal" films of the period focus on a major mythical figure of the Greco-Roman past, such as Hercules or Theseus (for example, *Hercules and the Captive Women* [1961] or *Minotaur, the Wild Beast of Crete* [1960]), who is endowed with Teutonic characteristics to underscore exceptional strength and manhood.[7] Thus the genre promotes the status quo of male superiority based on bodily strength through a wide array of patriarchal themes, such as the salvation of the female in distress resulting in a "happily ever after" ending.[8] In Arthur Pomeroy's recent discussion of gender in *Hercules* (*Le Fatiche di Ercole*) (1958) and other films relating the Labors of Hercules, he concludes that "[Princess] Iole's promises of freedom, status acquisition, and wealth resolve into traditional family patterns" of domesticity and quotidian duties.[9] A similar message reinforcing societal structures by confirming the union between man and woman as the basis of family, as well as the subjugation of women to their husbands, is also found in *Le Gladiatrici*.

In the 1960s, a plethora of "sword and sandal" movies focused on marginalized "Amazonian" women, such as *Colossus and the Amazon Queen* (*La Regina delle Amazzoni*) (1960), in which two superheroes defeat a tribe of Amazon women, and *Amazons of Rome* (*Le Vergini di Roma*) (1961), the protagonist of which is the leader of a peculiar tribe of Amazons in Italy; the trend continues with *Prehistoric Women* (*Slave Girls*) (1967). After the success of Stanley Kubrick's film *Spartacus* (1960),[10] the male type of rebellious gladiator who seeks freedom and promotes a modern liberationist agenda is transferred to women as well: the 1974 film *Arena* (*Naked Warriors*) features Margaret Markov and Pam Grier as Spartacus-like gladiatrices. And yet the message of the story in *Le Gladiatrici* is ultimately an old-fashioned one. The myth of matriarchy has to be relegated to the realms of the impossible, because its realization leads to the destruction of civilization—from a male-centric point of view.[11]

Amazonian Matriarchy: Fantasy as Nightmare

Le Gladiatrici proposes that a tribe of Amazon warriors has subjugated their men and created a matriarchal society. At the opening of the film, the narrator explains, "Where now all is sea and desert, there once existed, countless ages ago, a [fictional] region called Naylia," in which there "grew a matriarchal civilization so frightful, the dim echoes of its cruelty and violence have come down to us across the abyss of eighteen thousand years!" The Amazons are ruled by an unnamed authoritarian black queen (Janine Hendy), while their men are cruelly imprisoned in the quarries, where they live like animals in squalid conditions. To represent the Amazon queen as black signals an engagement with social issues, such as racial equality and civil rights. But the queen is framed as the evil leader of an unusual group of women who defy law and nature, by enslaving their men and living under new and perverse rules. These Amazons train as female gladiators, hybrids who are then pitted against one another in the arena.[12] According to the narrator, for the first time in history humans are forced to kill one another; in this cinematic version of the Iron Age, war and gladiatorial combat are first invented.

Among these fearsome women resides the Sibyl, who prophesies that a strong man will eventually destroy their community. The fantasy of matriarchy does not and should not last—just as in Greek mythology, where the male superhero eventually conquers or kills individual Amazons, as when Achilles kills Penthesilea and Theseus subdues Hippolyte.[13] This prophecy will be fulfilled by the superhero Thor (Joe Robinson). Famed for his capacity to tame animals and subdue strong warriors, and with a name that derives from the Greek and Latin word for "bull" (*taurus*),

Figure 5.1 The imperious queen of the gladiatrices (Janine Hendy) in *Le Gladiatrici* (*Thor and the Amazon Women*) (1963). Galatea SPA.

Thor's strength is measureless. Villagers unfriendly to the new regime ask Thor and his friend Ubaratutu (Harry Baird) to rescue the blonde heroine Tamar (Susy Andersen) and her younger brother Homolke, who has been deprived of his birthright of kingship following the rebels' murder of their father. Despite their initial escape, now Tamar and Homolke are captives of the new regime. In freeing them, Thor will also subjugate these rebellious women to his male authority. As Ubaratutu is to Thor, Tamar may seem like the "sidekick," to use Stuller's terminology, but she is actually the key to enacting the film's ideological message: a woman should want to be subdued and obey male rule.

Viewers come to understand the matriarchal society through Tamar's experience. Tamar is led to the school of gladiatrices as a prisoner, where she is forced into the labor-camp lifestyle with the rest of the women. As expected, discipline is of the utmost importance and obedience is not negotiable: Tamar is commanded to exercise her body and intelligence for combat. In the boot camp, the women's representation combines elements of both Amazons and Roman gladiators: the armor is gladiatorial, but the women carry a *pelta* (moon-shaped shield) and ax, traditional symbols representing the Amazons in the Greco-Roman world.[14] Dress is

uniform: a brown tunic with one shoulder exposed and a circular headband on the temples. The simple brown uniforms would remind viewers of the fascist Sturmabteilung (commonly abbreviated to SA), who were known as "Brownshirts." Under the quasi-historical surface of the ancient Amazon gladiators, vivid memories of fascist atrocities would resonate with the Italian audience, less than 20 years after the Second World War.

The goal of the gladiatrices' training is to fight for the glory of the queen and the entertainment of the women of Naylia. As a sign of her induction into the gladiatrix life, 21 rings are inserted into Tamar's arm, one of which will be removed each time she wins in single combat: the road to liberation lies open! But in this combat the gladiatrices must kill their companions, and the punishment for rebellion—if the gladiatrix should refuse to kill her opponent in the arena—is death. The twisted concept of liberation has to do with the rite of passage involving transformation from gladiatrix into a prominent, mature woman. Because of the homosocial bonds that develop between the female warriors, emancipation thus comes at a very high cost. This is a lesson in hardship: every gladiatrix should be exposed to such harsh realities of daily life at the camp. So the women surrounding the queen follow the psychology of mass collectivism under authoritarian command, and matriarchy becomes synonymous with barbarism. Those who display this false consciousness, however, will soon awake under the stimulus of Tamar's defiance.

Despite the emphasis on ritualized killing, the film's director also insists that the female gaze be somehow protected from the pollution of murder and blood. Although they witness the women's combat, the Amazons pull their tunics over their eyes so as not to witness the death blow itself; their queen even covers the eyes of her snow-white Ankara cat to shield it from the gladiatorial spectacle.[15] Although the women imitate the behavior of male gladiators, their gaze, as one of their most feminine traits, remains intact from pollution. Yet Tamar's gaze, and those of her fellow warriors, must not be shielded from the murderous act. In fact, Tamar is slowly hardened, becoming accustomed to the very harsh reality, as she fixes her gaze on the unholy spectacle.[16] By not averting her gaze, Tamar rejects the rule of matriarchy, subversively witnessing the barbarism of her fellow Amazons.

The plot resolves through the organization of two conspiracies. The first happens in the men's dungeons, where Thor promises that he will restore justice. The second mutiny takes place in the women's quarters when Yamad (Maria Fiore), the chieftain of the Amazons and the queen's right hand, realizes Tamar's royal lineage and allies herself to the girl in order to bring about the downfall of "the horrible and most cruel rule" of women. Yamad sees Tamar as the symbol of restoration—which, however, is only

possible through the efforts of the manly superhero Thor (especially given the royal successor Homolke's very young age). In a secret meeting, Tamar and Yamad confide in each other, and the hardened Yamad displays a more humane side. Contrary to what one expects from a soldier faithful to her queen, Yamad concludes that she wants to obey a man, to be "[by] the side of a man stronger than I am!" She denounces the rule of women as the most horrible form of government, declaring, "Nature never meant to assign women superiority!" Therefore, women should yield to their sentiments. Her dream is to be reunited with her children, once they are rid of the terrible rule of the queen. But Yamad's dream is annulled by unraveling events; a fellow gladiatrix betrays both women to the queen.[17] As Yamad is tortured on the rack, she predicts that the kingdom of women will swiftly come to a justified end.

Thor's act of rescue, however, complicates the black-and-white ideology of the film thus far. Though considerably conservative and backward from a modern feminist perspective, there are voices of dissent that speak to the patriarchal message that is being conveyed: in a pivotal scene, the queen delivers a proclamation regarding the superiority of women. The queen bases her arguments on the violence of governments supported by men: force is the driving mechanism behind patriarchy, she proclaims. Thor retorts that this is absolutely justifiable, because "this is the characteristic of men, the use of force!" Yet the queen supports her rationale by asserting that after a long period of slavery to men, women realized how superior they were, because of procreation: "[Women] are internally stronger than men, they know how to resist physical and moral pain, therefore they must command." The queen's arguments are in line with feminist theories of the mid-1950s against biological determinism, such as the ones promoted by Ashley Montagu in his 1953 book *The Natural Superiority of Women*. Ironically, motherhood becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the childless queen to prove her point, and she quickly rejects as nonsense Thor's patriarchal and trite counter-arguments regarding the natural powerful violence displayed by men.

Ultimately Thor restores patriarchal rule by subjugating the tribe of Amazons in Herculean fashion: he meets the queen's challenge to defeat 101 women, and the men escape from prison to join forces with him. The queen is fatally wounded—but by Tamar, who throws a javelin into her stomach, wounding the site of her procreative power and signifying the end of matriarchal rule. Yamad's separation from her children and the queen's apparent lack of offspring (a virgin warrior-queen of sorts) represent the matriarchy perpetrated in this military camp of Amazons as unnatural, and therefore as something that must be stopped. This penultimate scene clarifies and consolidates gender boundaries and hierarchy: the

inferiority of women to men and the dangers posed by women's rule. Although wounded, Tamar exclaims that the "reign of terror is over."

Tamar asks that Homolke be given the throne to restore the rule of men: allegedly because as a male he deserves it, while she is "just a woman." She also requests that the symbols of the gladiatrices and their dictatorial rule be destroyed and that the authority of men be restored. Then the camera turns to the whole family gathered around Tamar: she is dressed in white and destroys the remaining symbols of the Amazons. While she once performed as the instrument of Amazonian rule, Tamar now affirms the right of the patriarchy as she accepts her structural secondarity to her brother. At the same time, she has claimed her freedom: not through the steps required by the queen, but through the strength and power of Thor. Tamar is not a Spartacus figure herself, but she is one of the aides, as she chooses naturalized secondarity to the male protagonists.

Le Gladiatrici in Historical Context

To be sure, *Le Gladiatrici* does not promote a revolutionary message: the rule of women must remain a fantasy, and only if it is eventually destroyed. This conservative message is in line with the delayed emergence of a feminist movement in Italy and southern Europe, and with the socio-political climate in which this and other such films were created. In Italy, only in 1974 did the so-called Divorce Referendum give a push to the feminist movement, together with the first big national demonstration over the issue of abortion, held in Rome in December 1975, for women only. As Andreina De Clementi observes,

> The Italian feminist movement had established itself during the second half of the nineteenth century, but during the Fascist regime, from the early 1920s to the early 1940s, it was reduced to silence like all other independent political organizations. Because of this long hibernation, along with the peculiar national and international conditions under which the Italian Republic was born in 1945, the feminist historical tradition was recovered only in the 1970s.[18]

By comparison, at the time of *Le Gladiatrici*'s production, attitudes in the United States had already shifted. In 1960, the Food and Drug Administration approved "The Pill"; in 1961, President Kennedy issued an executive order establishing the President's Commission on the Status of Women. In 1963, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan was published, initiating the "second-wave" period of feminism and invalidating the notion of marriage and housewifery as the principal source of accomplishment for American

women; this was also the year that President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act into law. A year later, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, including the Title VII prohibition of discrimination based on sex.[19]

Thus the patriarchal message of *Le Gladiatrici* establishes this "sword and sandal" film as typical of the period. The Greco-Roman fiction of marginalized women whose existence threatens men's well-defined and orderly societies is re-enacted on the big screen only to be demolished as a dystopian illusion. Certainly filmmakers strive to deliver messages through their art, and the affirmation and proclamation of patriarchy as the only way to prosperity is certainly the message here. Times change, and so do audiences; although a film like *Le Gladiatrici* may now appear to be irrelevant, or even cheap and tasteless, for its own time the film engages with the fantasy of the alternative offered by matriarchy—only to negate any optimism as an illusion.

Notes

1. The Amazon queen Penthesilea appeared in the *Aethiopis*, part of the Trojan Cycle epic, and is the protagonist of Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica* 1; for the text, see Allen (2007). Herodotus (*The Histories* 4.110–17) supplies ethnographic information on the Amazons of Scythia; see Mensch (2014) for the text. A classic study of the Amazons is found in duBois (1982); see also the recent collection of essays in Schubert and Weiss (2013).
2. For the representation of Amazons in poetry and visual iconography of the archaic, classical, and post-classical periods in Greece and Rome, see Dowden (1996).
3. Tacitus (*Annales* 15.32.3) relates Nero's show of gladiatrices at the games for King Tiridates I of Armenia; see Damon (2012) for translation. Petronius (*Satyricon* 45.7) mentions a female warrior (*essedarius*) who fought from a Celtic-style chariot; for translation, see Sullivan (2011). For a study of gladiatrices, including a first- or second-century AD marble relief from Halicarnassus that depicts two women in armor named Amazon and Achillia, see Murray (2003). Juvenal (*Satire* 6.246–66) lambasts female gladiators from upper-class families as thrill-seekers; for translation, see Green (1998).
4. For an evaluation of the film, including criticism of its anachronisms and shortcomings, see Melle (2010).
5. See Mainon and Ursini (2006), esp. 11–17 for the indispensable checklist with nine critical features a warrior-woman possesses in film and television.
6. Stuller (2010) 13–28.
7. For discussion and various titles of "sword and sandal" movies of the period with themes from Greco-Roman myth, see Solomon (2001) 101–31. On nomenclature of the *peplum* or "sword and sandal" film, see Paul (2013a) 22 n.70. On the Italian films of the period, see extensively Bondanella (2009) 159–78 and Burke (2011).

8. On the assertion of "hegemonic masculinity" through male bodybuilding in film, see Richardson (2010) 37. Fascist ideology also promoted the image of the bellicose, virile man with the perfectly sculpted body, as a means of suppressing homosexuality: see Gori (2000), Benadusi (2012) 11–30, and Champagne (2013).
9. Pomeroy (2013) 204–5. Compare also D'Amelio (2011) 25: "The Hercules series helped to negotiate the difficult transition from the fascist dictatorship to democracy in Italy after the war, and the relations with the American lifestyle and the upcoming economic and cultural changes of the Sixties."
10. In Italy, Kubrick's film is preceded by Riccardo Freda's *Spartaco* (1952), which was promoted enthusiastically but met silence after its release. As Maria Wyke (1997) 56 observes, viewers were invited to "associate the slave rebellion with both the heroism of the wartime Italian resistance and the political failure of the post-war PCI [Italian Communist Party]." See also Hardwick (2003) 32–50 for a discussion of the appropriation of Roman history by the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy.
11. The word "matriarchy" dates back to the German *Mutterrecht* of J. J. Bachofen's famous study (1861) of the rule of women in antiquity and its eventual substitution by patriarchy, the rule by men. See Davies (2010) on the context of nineteenth-century thought during which Bachofen writes, as well as the reception of the theory in the twentieth century.
12. Meredith Safran points out to me that the idea of female competition had already appeared in the Amazon society of the *Wonder Woman* comics in America in the 1940s: the women compete against each other to take the wounded pilot back to the United States—thereby deciding which one of them will become "Wonder Woman." See Daniels (2000) 25.
13. DuBois (1982) 33.
14. Whether the filmmakers did any research on the accoutrements of Amazons in classical mythology, or elements are simply borrowed from other cinematic representations, merits further investigation.
15. Warrior women have been associated with feline characteristics; see Mainon and Ursini (2006) 129–32.
16. On female gaze and pollution in classical literature, see Lovatt (2013) 28–77.
17. The film's choice of names raises provocative questions: Agarit, Tamar, and Yamad are all Semitic names, while Thor and Homolke are of Nordic provenance, and Thor's black companion Ubaratutu has an African name. Would Semitic names be received by a general audience as references to the Aryan aesthetic of Germano-Italian fascism?
18. De Clementi (2002) 332.
19. For a concise history of the movement, see O'Neill (2009).

6

Arya, Katniss, and Merida: Empowering Girls through the Amazonian Archetype

Beverly J. Graf

Myths illustrate timeless human truths, yet their various iterations reflect the needs and fears of the specific age in which they occur. Recently, young female archers invoking the myth of the Amazon have come into vogue on large and small screens alike.[1] In contemporary incarnations, there are now so many female archers in media that screenwriters are able to parody this phenomenon with the imaginary blockbuster quadrilogy *The Amazon Games*, featured in Lake Bell's comedy *In a World* (2013).[2] As protagonists, three recent young female archers serve to exemplify the trend: Princess Merida of *Brave* (2012), Lady Arya Stark of *Game of Thrones* (2011–), and Katniss Everdeen of *The Hunger Game*s (2012). They embody a new twist on the ancient Greek Amazonian archetype, providing insight into what the Amazon myth means today. A quick review of the salient characteristics of the Amazon myth in antiquity will set up a discussion of how that prototype is both perpetuated and altered in these contemporary depictions of onscreen Amazons. These three figures indicate a perceptible shift both in how the Amazonian archetype is depicted by filmmakers and studios and in how it is intended to be received by the audience. This shift may represent a new variation on the action hero, reflecting changes in contemporary society at large.

The Amazon in Classical Antiquity

While their historical existence is uncertain, from the seventh century BC through the Roman period Amazons figure abundantly in the world of art

and myth throughout classical antiquity.[3] They appear in Greek sculpture, vase painting, and large-scale painting such as Mikon's famous murals in Athens, as described by Pausanias (1.17.2–4).[4] While the written and visual sources reveal developments in the Amazonian topos over time, key characteristics persist.[5] According to Herodotus' *Histories* (4.110–16), Amazons are warrior women who live apart from men on the edges of the known world, either around the Black Sea near Scythia or near Ethiopia.[6] In the *Iliad*, Homer describes the Amazons as "man-like" (*antianerai*, 3.189), implying that they have both the appearance and martial strength of men.[7] These androgynous women have adopted the heroic male warrior ethos: they are skilled in the arts of war like their divine patron Ares and are admired as worthy adversaries for male heroes.[8] This sentiment is echoed by Pindar when he describes Bellerophon's defeat of the Amazons: "He assailed from the lonely bosom of the chill air that army of womankind, the archer host of Amazons" (*Olympian* 13.87–90).[9] Later, that depiction in visual and written sources shifts yet again, from a massive female army to individual female warriors, such as Hippolyte, who are tamed by great heroes.[10]

The Amazons' otherness is increasingly emphasized through their costume. In early visual sources, Amazons wear the armor of Greek male warriors.[11] By the time of the Persian Wars, however, Amazons are depicted as hordes of alien invaders in Scythian and other foreign garb, presenting a fundamental threat to Greece's very survival.[12]

Rather than representing a feminine role model, Amazons embody everything a typical and proper Athenian woman should not be. In addition to their martial exploits, Amazons hunt with a bow in emulation of their other divine patron: Artemis, huntress and goddess of the wild, also known as *potnia therôn* ("mistress of wild beasts"; Diodorus Siculus, 2.46). They are not confined to the home (*oikos*) or bound by the norms constraining ordinary Greek women. They have sex without marriage and value their female offspring much more highly than their male children.[13] Because they present a challenge both to the society at large and to the male hero, Amazons are both dangerous and desirable, and so they must be tamed, or killed. Accordingly, their defeat in battle and subsequent sexual taming is attributed to numerous heroes, including Herakles, Theseus, Achilles, and Bellerophon.

Although perhaps not linguistically accurate, the ancient popular etymology of the word "Amazon" as *a-mazon*, "without breast," also indicates how these women defied norms.[14] The breast is a focal point for defining identity for the typical female and her role in Greek society, and for the Amazon as her antithesis. Literary sources including Strabo (11.5.1–4) claimed that Amazons had their right breasts seared off at a young age so as to improve their mobility with weapons including the bow.[15] Although the archaeological record does not show such mutilation in the visual depictions of Amazons,

metaphorical breastlessness may refer to the warrior women's androgynous nature and appearance, or literally to the flat chests of young girls who are not yet women. This breasted or non-breasted signifier will also figure into the following discussion of contemporary young onscreen female archers.

Reflections of the Ancient Amazonian Archetype

Multiple aspects of the Amazonian archetype shape three young archers in contemporary cinema and television: Princess Merida (Kelly Macdonald), Arya Stark (Maisie Williams), and Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence). Although as characters their social classes and situations are different, all three girls actively contravene their society's norms by pursuing the masculine heroic ethos and independence over romance, marriage, needlework, appearance, and other traditional feminine pursuits. Furthermore, rather than identifying with their mothers as part of normative gender development, these three girls share the sort of bond with their fathers that is usually reserved for sons, triggering associated social transgressions.

All three characters learn the normative male skills of the hunter and warrior from their supportive fathers or paternal mentors. Before his early death, Katniss' father teaches her how to use the bow and arrow to take down prey with one shot through the eye, from a considerable distance. This skill, together with the fierce detached mind-set of the hunter and warrior, enables her to feed her family and to defend herself when she subsequently volunteers for the Hunger Games. As the first-born child of King Fergus (Billy Connolly) and Queen Elinor (Emma Thompson) in the tenth-century Scotland of *Brave*, Merida has no need to hunt for survival. However, as a small child she, too, is drawn to the bow and arrow, and to the independence of the masculine warrior's ethos. Despite his wife's disapproval, Merida's father gives her the weapon for her birthday and teaches her how to use it. Merida grows up to be a fiercely skilled mounted archer who shoots from her galloping horse, like the ancient Amazons. Such is also the case with Lady Arya Stark, the youngest daughter of Eddard Stark, Lord of Winterfell in George R. R. Martin's medieval fantasy novel *Game of Thrones* (1996). In the premiere of the HBO television series (Episode 1.1, "Winter Is Coming"), Arya is introduced as so skillful an archer that she easily bests her brother Bran while their father looks on. The literary source material privileges swordplay, and Arya does not learn archery until the third volume of the book series. In the HBO series, Arya receives a small foil as a gift from her brother Jon, and her father agrees to hire an expert trainer for her: "If you're going to own a sword, you better learn to use it" (Episode 1.3, "Lord Snow"). Despite the growing importance of her swordsmanship, the producers' choice to introduce her as an archer from the outset aligns her with the Amazonian archetype.

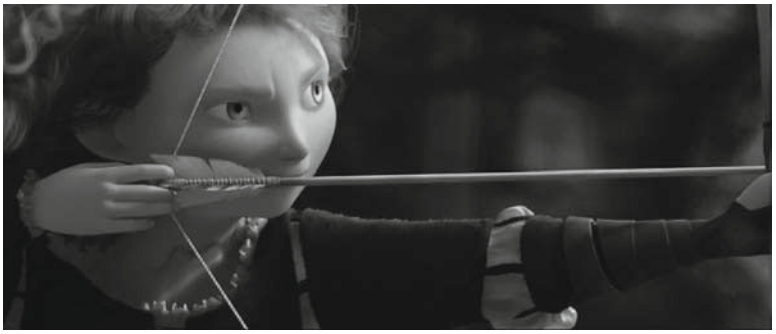

Figure 6.1 Merida (voiced by Kelly Macdonald) takes aim in *Brave* (2012). Walt Disney/Pixar.

All three young women also exhibit an Amazonian bond with the wild, manifested via their association with wild animals, the wilderness, and a corresponding fierceness in their own nature. Like all the Stark children, Arya acquires an orphaned direwolf early in Episode 1.1. While all direwolves are fiercely protective of their masters, Arya's direwolf, Nymeria, is particularly fierce, like Arya herself. In Episode 1.2 ("The Kingsroad"), Nymeria defends her mistress by attacking Prince Joffrey, and Arya is forced to send her into the woods to escape the royal family's death sentence. While it is uncertain how the HBO series will handle the remaining source material, by Martin's third volume, *A Storm of Swords* (2011), Nymeria becomes the queen of the wild wolves, and Arya a kind of *potnia therôn*.[16]

Katniss, with her ease in the wild and skill at hunting, also manifests the *potnia therôn* aspect of the Amazons' patron deity, Artemis. The first scene of the movie introduces her as a young woman completely at ease in the wild. When she arrives in the Capitol, one of her first choices is to filter out the urban environment by activating the virtual reality screen in her room that depicts scenes of the forest, where she is most at home. Katniss manifests an unusual bond with wild animals as well, communing with the deer she almost shoots and with mockingjays later in the film. It is not the forest or wild beasts that threaten Katniss but her fellow humans, especially the "civilized" residents of the Capitol.

As a princess in a family film and the first Disney-Pixar heroine, Merida does not shoot Bambi through the eye, but she is nonetheless wild. She battles her mother Elinor's daily indoctrination on the proper role of a princess, rejecting feminine norms of dress and deportment, including her mother's famous admonition: "Princesses do not chortle." Merida

does chortle, and she escapes the confines of the castle at every opportunity to ride alone in the woods, shooting arrows from horseback. She is an excellent rider who has an intuitive bond with her horse. In the internal psychological wilderness that Merida cannot yet control, the dark side of the Amazons' patron deity manifests. Merida uses magic to escape her mother's control by turning Queen Elinor into Artemis' totem animal: the bear.[17] In fact, *Brave* was originally titled *The Bear and the Bow*.[18]

While these Amazonian heroines do not live apart from civilization, each lives on the wilder edges of her world. In the post-apocalyptic world of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss resides in District 12, far from the Capitol. Further, she habitually slips beneath the barbed-wire barriers of the district into the wild. Likewise, Arya is a child of the fierce north, where old gods reign, close to the Wall and the wildlings. And Princess Merida lives in a fantastic medieval version of the uncouth Scottish north, where witches, curses, and enchanted wild bears hold sway.

All three girls concern themselves with men's pursuits, rather than the pursuit of men. Merida issues this feisty declaration at the tournament for her hand in marriage: "I'll be shooting for my own hand." Teen Katniss does express some romantic inclinations, but romance is merely a subplot. Even when her mentors make it clear that romance is a survival strategy in the Hunger Games, Katniss rebels. In a striking gender reversal, it is Katniss' teammate Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) who bats his eyes for the camera and plays the romance angle for the crowd. While Arya may be too young for romantic interests of her own, she certainly rejects the romantic fantasies of her older sister Sansa (Sophie Turner) and her girlish flirtations with Prince Joffrey (Jack Gleeson).

While their reasons and socio-economic circumstances vary, all of these heroines reject societal preoccupations with traditional feminine appearance and arts. When Lord Stark (Sean Bean) tells her that "a little lady shouldn't play with swords," Arya retorts, "I wasn't playing. And I don't want to be a lady" (Episode 1.3, "Lord Snow"). She names her sword Needle in a pointed reference to her lack of talent in the needlework in which Sansa excels, and she spends most of her time in the series disguised as a scruffy boy. Merida too rejects feminine norms, complaining to her mother, "I'd rather die than be like you!" when Queen Elinor tries to corral her headstrong daughter into dressing and behaving like a princess. Merida's body and her unruly mane constantly pop out of their constraints. Her flame-red hair was consciously designed to have a life of its own.[19] As writer/director Brenda Chapman said, "I wanted an athletic girl. I wanted a wildness about her, so that's where the hair came in, to underscore that free spirit."[20] Similarly, Katniss is uninterested in her looks or the red carpet. When the Capitol stylists try to squeeze Katniss into feminine norms

during the makeover session, the assistant stylists complain that they will need to scrub her again to remove the coal dust of District 12.

Adapting an Ancient Archetype to Contemporary Norms

These three contemporary onscreen archers reflect key characteristics of the Amazonian topos, but specific changes reflect how these Amazons are intended to be understood by the audience now, as opposed to in antiquity. Arya, Merida, and Katniss are depicted as admirable heroes, for both sexes and all social classes. This marks a change even from recent female warriors such as Xena, whom females can identify with, but males can ogle.[21] This shift stems in part from the bow—a seemingly archaic tool—as weapon of choice.

Like the gun, the bow is a technological equalizer. Although it takes strength and skill to wield, the bow's lightness enables girls like Arya, Merida, and Katniss to compete with larger, stronger males. Whereas swords are heavy and expensive to forge, and require a considerable time to master, the bow is the weapon of the commoner. In a contemporary context of democratic uprisings, archery has reappeared prominently in popular cinematic and television culture as the symbolic equalizer of the one and the 99 percent. Consider Hawkeye in *The Avengers* (2012), the glowing arrows of the Epirus Bow in *Immortals* (2011), and the perennial popularity of Robin Hood. Archers on the small screen include the hero in the ongoing CW series *Arrow* (2012–) and Daryl Dixon of AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010–). Despite marked differences of social class, Princess Merida, Lady Arya, and impoverished commoner Katniss can all learn to be equally proficient with the bow.

These contemporary depictions of the Amazon highlight the massive transformation that the myth has undergone in its intended reception by the mass audience. Instead of a perversion that men find desirable to conquer, these young female warriors are designed as admirable heroines in their own worlds, and as role models for girls and boys alike. Cinematic gender lines are beginning to blur for both the protagonists and the audience, as both sexes embrace characteristics traditionally labeled "masculine" or "feminine." In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss' teammate and competitor Peeta is the sweet-tempered baker and decorator, while Katniss is the cool-headed archer-hunter. Even with its female lead, the movie is designed to appeal to both a male and a female demographic; the film's success at the box office suggests that this strategy is working. The opening-weekend box-office receipts of over $152 million more than made back the film's approximately $78 million budget, and receipts as of July 2014 totaled more than $408 million.[22] Studio executives know that Hollywood

doesn't spend or reap that much money from an exclusively female audience. That very success reflects a degree of blurring of traditional gender roles in society at large, as women continue to work outside of the home and men assume domestic responsibilities.[23]

As Jennifer Stuller discusses in her book *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*, early females in action who were not overt antagonists tended to be objects: victims, muses, or trophies.[24] Arya, Merida, and Katniss are subjects who drive their respective stories, not mere love interests of male heroes or token members of a team formed around a central male hero. They are three-dimensional characters with flaws and strengths, specifically designed to subvert the passive princess or damsel-in-distress motif. As Pixar's first female protagonist, Merida is also the antithesis of the 1937 Snow White, the original passive Disney princess. As Brenda Chapman observed, "Fairy tales have gotten kind of a bad reputation, especially amongst women. So what I was trying to do was turn everything on its head . . . [M]ainly I wanted to give girls something to look at and not feel inadequate."[25] When Merida causes problems, there is no prince coming to the rescue; she has to fight her own way to solutions. And while all three girls can and do accept help, none is helpless. Not only do these characters wield the Amazon's weapons in war and the hunt, they also battle the typical feminine destiny society planned for them—and are applauded for it.

The relative lack of hyper-sexualization of these new Amazons is noteworthy. Both Katniss and Peeta have to parade themselves on the red carpet of the Capitol in full makeup and sexualized couture, as do the other male and female contestants.[26] But when they fight, both male and female combatants have functional, gender-neutral uniforms: no high heels and leather bikini for Katniss, compared to the customary skintight swimsuit of Wonder Woman in her many media incarnations, the micro-miniskirt of Hit-Girl in *Kick-Ass* (2010), or Xena's leather corset. Such costumes turn those Amazonian figures into sexual objects for the heterosexual male audience and complicate their function as examples of empowerment for the female demographic. Similarly, Disney-cute Merida is not overtly sexualized. Although partly a function of the "family film" genre, the designers consciously aimed for a round face and muscular body type, not the extremely thin yet buxom body of earlier Disney princesses such as Aurora or Cinderella.[27] Merida's usual attire, a plain and uncorseted version of her princess' gown, emphasizes freedom of movement by allowing her to ride and shoot without hindrance—not sexualization.

While HBO's *Game of Thrones* has become famous for sexually objectifying many of its characters—men and women both—the two overtly Amazonian characters, Arya and the lady-knight Brienne of Tarth, are not

objectified in the way that, for example, Sansa, Cersei, and Rose are. Even though Ygritte, the fur-clad wildling Penthesilea of the series, is sexual, the camera doesn't ogle her more than it does her lover, Jon Snow. Arya is disguised as a boy for most of the HBO series in order to improve her chance of eluding her father's enemies. She is never sexualized via her attire, or lack thereof. While arguably her youth plays a role in avoiding the typical Hollywood emphasis on female objectification, youth is not a sufficient explanation when one compares Arya to her sister Sansa. Pre-pubescent Sansa is depicted as the normative female child in the Stark household, and as such she is dressed in a much more sexualized fashion than Amazonian Arya. This new type of Amazon de-emphasizes Hollywood's typical hyper-sexualization.[28]

New Amazons for a New World?

So, do these heroines represent the tip of the spear of real change in how girls and women are depicted on screen? Too many times, the massive success of a female-driven film would be heralded as the advent of a new trend, only to end up being dismissed as a one-off phenomenon. Hollywood would then go back to business as usual—where the boys are—as regards the characters, the desired audience demographic, and the filmmakers.[29] Females are still greatly underrepresented, on and behind the screen. And while Merida is Pixar's first female protagonist, it is notable that Brenda Chapman, her creator and the film's initial director, was replaced by a male director during the film's last 18 months of production.[30]

Moreover, these new Amazonian heroines might have been granted such freedom and viewed so positively by both sexes in part because of their youth. Arya, Merida, and Katniss are all within the culturally understood transitional stage separating the girl from the woman. This transitional period triggers the conflict not only in their own psychosocial development between what is gender-normative and what they choose, but also in what society will allow. Tomboys are permitted by many societies for a while, but eventually the social pressures to conform to the feminine norm are enforced.

However, the appearance of these new Amazons in the action genre is cause for hope. Action is designed as a power fantasy, and it is clearly the most popular genre worldwide. Much of this is due to the changes in the film business itself and an ever-increasing emphasis on the foreign, as opposed to the domestic, market for profits.[31] Studios concentrate more and more on tentpole movies year-round, not just in the summer, and these movies center on franchise properties such as superhero comics or young adult novels. According to Mark Gill, the president of Millennium Films,

"Eight years ago, there were roughly 150 wide-release movies. Last year there were 115."[32] Action is designed to inspire and adrenalize the audience as we identify with the hero. Sadly, there are still relatively few female action heroes. When they do appear, they still make news as novelties.

The question is whether these new Amazons and their stories will finally represent a breakout for female-driven projects or will be dismissed, like so many others before them, as one-offs and quarantined to the edges of the genre world like the Amazons of antiquity. The jury is still out, but there are surely reasons for optimism about this new generation of popular heroines who appeal to both sexes.

Notes

1. For these and further examples of archers on screen, see Boucher (2012) and Dodes (2012).
2. See Dodes (2013).
3. On the Amazons' historical existence, see the afterword to Pressfield (2002) 399–400.
4. For the text of Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*, see Jones (1918).
5. See Hardwick (1990) 14–36.
6. For the text of Herodotus, *The Histories*, see de Sélincourt (1972).
7. For the text of Homer's *Iliad*, see Allen (1931).
8. On Amazon queens such as Penthesilea as the daughters of Ares, see Diodorus Siculus 2.45–46; on Queen Hippolyte's war-belt of Ares, see Apollodorus K11. For the text of Diodorus Siculus and Apollodorus, see Trzaskoma (2004).
9. For the text of Pindar, *Olympians*, see Sandys (1961).
10. Hardwick (1990).
11. As in a vase painting in the British Museum depicting Achilles killing Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, during the Trojan War: see Hardwick (1990) 24. For visual representations of Amazons more generally, see von Bothmer (1957).
12. A vase painting in the Ashmolean Museum depicts a battle between two Amazons and Theseus plus a companion; see Hardwick (1990) 25.
13. See duBois (1982) 25–48, 110–28.
14. For further hypotheses, see Weinbaum (1999) 88–89.
15. For the text of Strabo, *Geography*, see Jones (1917).
16. Martin (2011) 883–84.
17. See duBois (1982) 25–48 for the link between Artemis and her cult animal, the bear.
18. Smith (2012) 11.
19. Murphy (2012) 14.
20. Quoted in Murphy (2012) 14.
21. Knight (2010), esp. 290.
22. See the movie's page at boxofficemojo.com.

23. See Chaker (2014) for American Red Cross statistics on the sizeable uptick in the number of boys taking babysitting classes.
24. Stuller (2010).
25. Quoted in Murphy (2012) 14.
26. French (2014) 34.
27. Murphy (2012) 14.
28. French (2014) 32–37.
29. Note the key research on gender disparity in family films being conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media; see Casserly (2012).
30. Murphy (2012) 14.
31. French (2014) 34–35.
32. French (2014) 34–35.

7

The Suspense-Thriller's Pygmalion Complex: Masculine Desire in *Vertigo* (1958), *Les Biches* (1968), and *Body Double* (1984)

Kaelie Thompson

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* features the story of Pygmalion, a sculptor whose disgust for the sinful nature of the women of Cyprus inspires him to carve a female figure from ivory so smooth, so pure, that life seems to pulse beneath its surface (*Metamorphoses* 10.243–97).[1] Entranced by this beautiful image, Pygmalion falls in love with the statue and beseeches Venus, Roman goddess of love, to bring him a wife as fine as his creation. So the statue comes alive beneath his loving touch, and they are united in marriage, complete with a child to ensure Pygmalion's legacy.

Through Pygmalion's creation of an ideal, with its inherent virtue and a figure "better than any living woman," Ovid effectively presents readers with a being that can only be animated by the power of a god. Pygmalion's denial that the lifeless statue is merely an object, through his infatuation with and adornment of it, has come to signify that perfection is attainable. Contextualized within twentieth-century ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy, the statue embodies the ultimate resolution of man's desire for success, wealth, and happiness, integrated into the maternal female as bearer of morality.

Variations of this myth, in which the artist's construction of his ideal comes to life, span several film genres.[2] The suspense-thriller in particular

features an idealized construction of woman so frail it cracks under the slightest touch of reality, communicating a broader motive of the genre: to subvert and undermine the classical narrative and reveal society's own disfiguring imperfections. Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), Claude Chabrol's *Les Biches* (1968), and Brian De Palma's *Body Double* (1984) exemplify narratives that engage this fallibility and the consequences of man's desire through constructions of both the sculptor and the statue. At the textual level, the film's protagonist functions as Pygmalion within the narrative. Through doubling fashioned by mirrors, reflections, and duplications, an image of the feminine ideal emerges. At the extra-textual level, the director acts as the artist, utilizing generic conventions of the interplay between subjective and objective shots through the formal techniques of camera movement and carefully constructed *mise-en-scène*. Thus the director crafts the desire that ultimately leads men to crushing madness upon the realization of reality's imperfection. Pygmalion's legacy is initially preserved by social ideologies, but it is ultimately disfigured by reality, reshaping perception of classical narratives.

The "Classical" Cinematic Narrative and Cultural Subversion in the Suspense-Thriller

Across the many permutations of Pygmalion and his statue, the myth essentially refers to man's desire for an ideal that, once made corporeal, is to be cared for and possessed by him. Although closely aligned with the outcomes of the classical Hollywood narrative, the suspense genre's subversion of this convention results in a transfiguration of the Pygmalion myth. As described by David Bordwell, the classical Hollywood narrative prevalent from 1917 to 1960 typically depicts a male protagonist who ventures forth on the hero's journey.[3] Its conclusion, involving wealth and romance, is frequently uplifting—an ideal goal for which the male character strives throughout the narrative.[4] So too a heterosexual romance with a perfect partner, leading to marriage, is a desired outcome, signaled by the inclusion of a female archetype: either the idealized version or her opposite, the dangerous, eroticized woman. As with Pygmalion's creation of his statue, in film both the virtue-less and virtuous females are constructed and destroyed through man's desire.

The positive outcome of Pygmalion's myth—his union with his ivory maiden and the birth of their child—aligns with the ideological aspects of the classical narrative. Robin Wood identifies marriage in classical Hollywood narratives as a function of both capitalism and patriarchy. Prosperity yields a home that contains a virtuous woman whose role is to procreate

and to maintain the high morals of society through her offspring. From this description Wood identifies the emergence of an "ideal man": "the virile adventurer, potent, untrammelled man of action"; and "ideal woman": "wife and mother, perfect companion, endlessly dependable, mainstay of hearth and home."[5] The pairing of these two in film represents the ultimate objective and the means to achieve happiness.

How the protagonist gains possession of the female figure through the male gaze complicates the relationship between such gender roles in these classical narratives. According to Laura Mulvey, the desire translated through his gaze allows a man to transform the female into an entity to be consumed, contained, or possessed. In her seminal 1989 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey contends that the structure of the classical narrative within patriarchal order enables the male viewer to exercise his voyeuristic tendencies through the active protagonist, and thus to experience the pleasure of looking, or scopophilia.[6] His gaze is directed at the passive female who becomes the sexualized object over which he can exert his power, and through which he can exercise his anxieties surrounding her otherness.[7] Either through sadistic voyeurism that demystifies the object or through "fetishistic scopophilia" that both amplifies and neutralizes the object's beauty, the male gaze appropriates the feminine model to his own desire in order to preserve his patriarchal position and achieve narrative resolution.[8]

The problematic nature of these ideological constructs is often examined in suspense-thrillers through disruption of classical narrative outcomes in which ideals are privileged over reality. Pygmalion's mythical statue has evolved into an archetype for the perfect woman: faultless in both beauty and virtue. According to Paula James' examination of contemporary versions of the creation and make-over myth in film and television, Ovid's rendering of the nondescript statue has allowed it to become a "cultural chameleon" capable of morphing to meet the shifting social and cultural notions of femininity and sexuality.[9] As such, modern Pygmalion texts either explore outcomes contrary to the sculptor's in the ancient narrative or reveal the imperfection of the created (or re-created) partner. Both outcomes result in either profound discontent or a rejection of the ideal fantasy.[10] Given what Pygmalion's statue represents within this framework, the dysfunction of Ovid's story lies with its positive resolution and insistence that perfection is attainable. The re-envisioning of Ovid's text in the suspense-thriller effectively inverts and perverts the myth, exposing the imperfection of Pygmalion's construct and the unlikelihood of its materialization and undermining the validity of the classical model.

The Fallible Ideal in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

In *Vertigo*, Alfred Hitchcock both performs the role of Pygmalion and presents his myth through the meticulous construction of John "Scottie" Ferguson's desire for a pure, redeeming love.[11] By employing subjective techniques, Hitchcock frames Scottie as a Pygmalion who fashions an image of the ideal woman who will restore him to a virile state of being. Yet as the film's spiral motif suggests, the pursuit of an ideal entails a downward movement into madness. Scottie (James Stewart), a former detective plagued by a debilitating case of vertigo, becomes infatuated with Madeleine (Kim Novak) in a manner similar to Pygmalion's fixation with his statue. After her death, Scottie spirals into his own neurosis, seeing Madeleine's image in the face of others until he meets Judy. A double for his lost love, Scottie makes Judy over to replicate Madeleine, only to find out she has already been made over—in a plan to deceive and exploit Scottie's weakness. Just when he is about to overcome both his fear and her betrayal, Judy topples from a tower, leaving Scottie alone at the top with a shattered dream.

Asserting himself as the film's extra-textual Pygmalion, Hitchcock frames Madeleine as "ideal woman" through a repetition of similar shots that incite both viewers' and Scottie's infatuation. His introduction to the woman occurs with a beautifully choreographed tracking shot that pinpoints one woman in a crowd of diners as the object of his attention. Established and reinforced by cuts to different angles of his attentive gaze, Scottie's interplay with the female image is established for the rest of the

Figure 7.1 Judy (Kim Novak) emerges as Scottie's reconstructed ideal, Madeleine, in *Vertigo* (1958). Paramount Pictures.

film. Captured in a shot from Scottie's point of view, as Madeleine exits she reaches the detective and pauses for a moment; the lights dim, accentuating her pale features as the camera rests in a close-up of her classically feminine profile. The rich red and green colors of the background give life to her image; as this shot holds, Scottie steals furtive glimpses of her form, indicating his initial attraction to the object. In this moment Madeleine's profile burns itself into Scottie's mind's eye and establishes her as the object of his desire.

The familiar image of Madeleine's figure is also visually enhanced with ethereal qualities to connote the perfection of Pygmalion's statue, while simultaneously undermining Madeleine's status as Scottie's ideal woman. Another sequence in a cemetery uses shot/reverse-shot editing to further manipulate Scottie's gaze and allow him to absorb Madeleine's image. As Madeleine pauses at the gravesite of one Carlotta Valdez, her appearance is directly associated with otherworldly qualities: the filmic image is shot in soft focus, giving it a dream-like or ghostly effect. During the subsequent scene in a museum, Madeleine is framed with the portrait of Carlotta, drawing a further correlation between the painted image and the woman's own figure. Madeleine's relationship with Carlotta, an insane relative, weakens her credibility by advancing an inherent character defect.[12] Later that evening, as Scottie stares at a print of the portrait, Madeleine's initial profile is superimposed over the deceased woman's, thus firmly establishing their connection and collapsing the worlds of living and dead. This subjective point-of-view shot further endows Scottie with the ability to fuse the inanimate and animate—much like Pygmalion and his statue.

Madeleine's death not only thwarts Scottie's desire for perfection and happiness, it also reinforces his own weakness in the patriarchal order. The spiral comes around once again as Scottie's longing turns to madness when he sees Judy's profile, framed to mirror Madeleine's own, triggering his impulse to pursue his ideal woman through re-creation. *Vertigo*'s suspense lies in these transitional scenes, as Scottie's subjective ownership of the narrative momentarily shifts to Judy, whose flashback reveals the plot to murder Madeleine. Through a carefully constructed subsequent scene, Scottie's desire and the dramatic irony of Judy's betrayal create tension. As Scottie propositions Judy, she sits on a chair blanketed by shadow, her figure backlit once again by green light. The striking composition shows Judy in a silhouetted profile, facing the opposite direction of Madeleine's earlier image. Scottie's recognition of the resemblance is followed by a rapid track-in to Judy, which endows the moment with taut emotional desire that is subverted by a sense that this reflected, shadowy profile represents a mere shell of Scottie's ideal: a hollowed image that will not lead to happiness, but rather to death. The film's conclusion clearly illustrates the danger of

investing in the notion of perfection, as Scottie's resolutions topple from the tower along with Judy herself.

Hitchcock's *Vertigo* undermines Pygmalion's ideal as it relates to love, patriarchy, and capitalism. Coinciding with Pygmalion's observation of the "sordid indecency" and "defects of character" inherent in the women of Cyprus, Robin Wood identifies the film's treatment of romantic love and relationships as a paradoxical conflation of desire for the idealistic bond and how the intrinsic flaws of humanity render its realization illusory.[13] Lesley Brill also recognizes Scottie's yearning for a perfect, lasting love as a means of fixing a reality within an unstable world full of ambiguity and uncertainty.[14] As a means of repressing the anxieties over the fallibility of human relationships and individual unhappiness, Wood notes that *Vertigo*'s Scottie rejects life for "an unattainable Idea" to "form an idealized image . . . and substitute it for the reality," a concept identified in earlier Hitchcock films such as *Rebecca* (1940) and *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943).[15] The reiteration of these shattered ideals—the tarnished image and impotent patriarchy—in *Vertigo* expresses Hitchcock's understanding of fallible social ideologies and the uncertainty created by society's obsession with perfection.

Conflating Statue and Sculptor in Chabrol's *Les Biches*

Ten years after *Vertigo*, Claude Chabrol released *Les Biches*, in which Frédèrique (Stéphane Audran), an elitist member of the bourgeoisie, attempts to re-make Why (Jacqueline Sassard), a young street artist. Chabrol complicates the Pygmalion myth in *Les Biches* by conflating the amorphous construction of the statue and the ambiguous identity of its creator through an alternation of classic masculine and feminine identities. Nuanced shifts between the objective and subjective views of Frédèrique, Why, and their reflections of each other transform desire for the ideal from innocent into erotic, resulting in a commentary on the haves and have-nots in French society. The thwarted love triangle between Frédèrique, Why, and Paul (Jean-Louis Trintignant) upsets the relationship between Frédèrique as sculptor and Why as statue. Frédèrique's possession of Why is complicated when she steals Paul away from her protégé, causing the girl to descend into the delusions that emerge from her own yearning. When she is abandoned by the happy couple, Why seeks retribution for her rejection: she removes the obstacle posed by Frédèrique by making herself into the image of perfection by which she might attain "ideal man."

Evoking the erotic undertones of Pygmalion's attraction to the nude ivory statue, Chabrol's construction of the visual dynamic between Frédèrique and Why establishes a version of the gendered power hierarchy

common between sculptor and statue, then inverts it. As a representative of the bourgeoisie, Frédèrique is initially masculinized via costuming in a fedora and black coat. She is posited as the aggressor and initial bearer of an eroticized female gaze that is desirous of Why's innocence. Their first sexualized encounter takes place as Why bathes. Chabrol employs mirrors to reflect Frédèrique's first flares of desire for Why's naked form and also uses high and low angles of the bourgeois and proletariat women, respectively, to establish the power dichotomy. Intercutting the shot/reverse-shot sequence of their discussion are fragmented images of Why's legs, exemplifying Mulvey's model of fetishized scopophilia and suggesting Frédèrique's building sexual attraction. Underlining the visual power play between women is their overt discussion of Why's precarious position as the receiver of bourgeois favors. In the following scene, when Frédèrique re-dresses and undresses her torso in a further fetishization of the sexual object, Why's construction as the sexual ideal is complete.

When Why begins to exhibit her own desirous gaze toward Paul, the dynamic of Frédèrique and Why's relationship shifts, suggesting a subversion of Pygmalion's ownership over his statue. The typical shot/reverse shot creates mutual interest, but an abrupt cut to a shot of a poker game signifies the shift in the gendered power dynamic: in the center, Frédèrique commands the game and the image; to her left, Paul looks at Why, who is now relegated to the background as just another item in Frédèrique's collection. The dynamic changes in a reverse shot, with Why in the foreground exchanging a look with Paul, and Frédèrique displaced to the left. As if feeling this visual shift, the sequence cuts to a close-up of Frédèrique glancing over her shoulder, which is matched by a reverse shot centering Why within the frame. As Frédèrique orders a beer in a futile attempt to exert her authority, she and the viewers realize that her creation has come to life, with desires of her own.

Further distorting Pygmalion's myth, Why takes on the role of sculptor by re-making her own appearance into her idea of "ideal woman." The disruption of the love triangle forces Why to confront the notion that she is no longer desired by either partner, suggesting a loss of identity. Rather than seek a unique identity, Why chooses to imitate the object of both her and Paul's affection by becoming Frédèrique's double. The first indication of her neurosis occurs as she sits before Frédèrique's mirror, placing a beauty mark on her cheek and imitating Frédèrique's voice. This reflexive moment alters the Pygmalion myth by confusing the roles of sculptor and statue. Paul's intrusion reveals the full impact of the transformation when Why stands, revealing the replica of the other woman's clothing, hairstyle, and make-up. To explain her actions, Why states, "Using other people's things is like changing your skin." She continues to practice this impersonation,

amplifying its eroticism by lying in Frédèrique's bed and caressing herself with expensive baubles, eliminating the sculptor's external role as creator.

Addressing issues of interiority posed in Pygmalion's myth, *Les Biches* confuses the role of the statue as subject and object, suggesting the problematic nature of assigning identities of gender, sexuality, and perfection. Why completes her transition from statue to sculptor by becoming the dark, masculine aggressor, admitting to Frédèrique both the quarreling voices in her mind and her desirous love. Literally trapped within a mirrored corner, Frédèrique skitters to and fro in a white frock, juxtaposing her current vulnerability with her initial appearance of dominance. In a final front of evaporating authority, Frédèrique tells Why that she is "frightful" and "disgusting" and that her love, too, is repulsive. She insinuates that Why's once-beautiful exterior is now disfigured and monstrous: a statue destroyed. As Why enumerates their likenesses and kills Frédèrique in front of the mirror, their double images coalesce into one, and the transformation from ideal object to sculptor is complete.

Perverting Pygmalion in De Palma's *Body Double*

If Hitchcock exemplifies Pygmalion, then Brian De Palma grafts Dr. Frankenstein onto his rendering of the mythical artist and the construction of his ideal. Tricia Welsch suggests in her study of De Palma's *Scarface* (1983) that the director's amalgamation of horror and gangster genres creates a hybrid film that assists in overcoming social and cultural differences. The genre film, as Welsch elaborates, serves to settle "hopeless contradictions" within the culture producing them, to provide resolutions reminiscent of Bordwell's study of the classical narrative.[16] Leo Braudy further suggests that De Palma mocks directorial authority in his films through direct acknowledgment of the filmmaking process itself and the devices or techniques utilized to create the image and associative meaning.[17] With distinct authorial control as the extra-textual Pygmalion, De Palma sutures together bits and ideas from other films, especially those of Hitchcock, to create postmodern pastiche with a goal emblematic of the suspense-thriller genre itself: one of cunning subversion.[18]

De Palma's *Body Double* provides an alternative commentary on the myth of Pygmalion and its function in the construction of classical Hollywood narratives. Following a premise similar to that of *Vertigo*, Jake Scully (Craig Wasson), a low-grade Hollywood actor, is chosen to witness the murder of a woman on account of his weakness: paralyzing claustrophobia. While *Vertigo* features a single woman made over in the image of another, *Body Double* presents two women, Gloria (Deborah Shelton) as the "ideal woman" and porn star Holly Body (Melanie Griffith) as her

seductive double. In the course of the narrative, Jake's attentions shift from the perceived perfection of Gloria to the alluring and potentially sinful Holly, after Gloria's murder. The narrative resolution poses a positive outcome as Jake exposes the murder plot, overcomes his claustrophobia, and saves the porn star-in-distress to reclaim his superlative role as low-grade Hollywood actor: the very picture of success.

The visual allusions to and alterations of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* seemingly revise Scottie's failures in a possible return to Pygmalion's happy ending, but they do so in a manner that perverts the artist's intentions. Along with subjective camera work that privileges Jake's male gaze, two sequences conversely depict his own impotence and voracious desire for the ideal. The first occurs in a tunnel, as Jake's claustrophobia overwhelms him. Much like Hitchcock's high-angle shot with a concurrent zoom-in/track-out, De Palma shifts the camera's access horizontally to create the illusion of the walls closing in. Here, Jake's paralysis amplifies his inability to achieve action throughout the film. The second and perhaps most evocative shot is of Jake and Gloria's first and only kiss; it mimics the revolving camera circling Scottie and Judy, when she reappears as Madeleine. Its attempt to arouse similar sentimental emotions of deep love and longing, as in *Vertigo*, is replaced by an arousal of other senses as Jake's advances on Gloria shift from the romantic to the erotic, making its reference hollow and almost immoral. This subversion of *Vertigo*'s unrequited romance is amplified by the revelation that Gloria's body double is a porn star: utilized only for her ability to arouse and effectively personifying Mulvey's fetishized scopophilia.

Perhaps privileging the genre over the myth and further elaborating its sense of pastiche, *Body Double*'s narrative is framed by scenes from a low-grade horror film to reflexively identify the construction of a Hollywood film. The film opens with Jake in costume as he attempts to shoot a scene, but his claustrophobic paralysis prevents his action, and he is subsequently excused for his inability to perform. At the film's climax, Jake overcomes his fear as he lies in a fresh grave being taunted by the antagonist, who gives him another chance at "action." This leads to a temporal shift and repetition of the opening scene, but this time Jake rebukes the director and takes control of his own direction, similar again to the climactic conclusion of *Vertigo* as Scottie overcomes his condition. But unlike Hitchcock's tragic finale, *Body Double* concludes with Jake's resurrection as the vampire character, working while Holly Body looks on, insinuating a potential relationship and resolution of conflicts. The film's concluding credits, just like the opening, are styled in a horror film aesthetic, leaving viewers with an ambiguous sense of the narrative's overall reality. This reflexive horror film is utilized specifically to call attention to the farcical nature of not only *Body Double*'s

narrative but also the postmodern suspense genre itself. Jake's interaction with the film at the beginning, climax, and conclusion signifies his participation in the deliberate construction of idealized Hollywood and generic resolutions.

Conclusion

Brian De Palma's ending in *Body Double* juxtaposes its resolution with the tragic, climactic conclusions of *Vertigo* and *Les Biches*: the film's ideal is shattered, disrupting the complacency of the classical resolution. In suturing the pieces of the broken suspense-thrillers back together, De Palma may suggest a further subversion of the already subversive goals of the genre when Jake succeeds and achieves "the dream," as imperfect as it is. Thus the three case studies in this chapter exhibit the varying degrees to which the Pygmalion myth plays a part in the suspense genre. Whereas *Vertigo* complicates the role of the sculptor and *Les Biches* that of the statue, *Body Double* questions the function of myth itself in the construction of these filmic narratives.

Further study of films within each director's oeuvre, or more broadly in the suspense genre, may reveal similar patterns in the dualistic representations of Pygmalion's myth. The cinema's correlation with the classical narrative tends to accentuate the connection between Pygmalion and the narrative's protagonist: his, or her, ultimate goal, and Pygmalion's ideal woman. The connection between the director as Pygmalion and his idealized image also remains evident. Through the works of Hitchcock, Chabrol, and De Palma, social ideologies as sculpted by a capitalist, patriarchal society are found wanting, as their repeated construction in fallible feminized forms reveals deep flaws in society's own structure. What films like *Vertigo*, *Les Biches*, and *Body Double* achieve in the suspense genre is an opportunity for viewers to re-examine their own idealized constructs for possible nicks and cracks that are, ultimately, intrinsically human. Perhaps by perverting Pygmalion's myth, directors in the suspense-thriller genre construct their own idea of ideal humanity—flaws and all.

Notes

1. For the text of Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I use the translation of Martin (2004).
2. For a comprehensive exploration of the myth on screen, see now James (2011).
3. Bordwell (1986) 17.
4. Bordwell, Steiger, and Thompson (1985) 13.
5. Wood (2002) 289–91.

6. Mulvey (1989) 16–17.
7. Mulvey (1989) 19, 21.
8. Mulvey (1989) 21.
9. James (2011) 29–30.
10. James (2011) 30–31.
11. On *Vertigo*, see James (2011) 36–57. James examines how Hitchcock himself acts as a Pygmalion through his careful structuring of female personas on screen in *Vertigo*. But where James also identifies these similarities between Madeleine/Judy's character and the statue, I emphasize how, through his "sculpting" of Judy into Madeleine, Scottie attempts to resolve his character weaknesses, and his vertigo: she embodies the ideal characteristics that would in turn make him the ideal man.
12. In Martin's rendering of Ovid's Latin, Pygmalion's dislike of the local women is due to the "numerous defects / of character Nature had given the feminine spirit" (*Metamorphoses* 10.313–14). Madeleine's insanity is insinuated to be genetic, or part of her inherent nature.
13. Wood (2002) 109.
14. Brill (1988) 218.
15. Wood (2002) 127.
16. Welsch (1997) 39–40.
17. Braudy (1986) 25.
18. Knapp (2003) xi–xii notes how De Palma is known for referencing the films of other filmmakers, e.g. Jean Luc Godard, Sergei Eisenstein, Michelangelo Antonioni, and most notably Hitchcock. Knapp himself identifies De Palma's "variations [on] . . . , not homages" to Hitchcock's work and states that "he isn't afraid to interrogate Hitchcock and the perverse impulses that motivate his films."

8

Plastic Surgery: Failed Pygmalions and Decomposing Women in *Les Yeux sans Visage* (1960) and *Bride of Re-Animator* (1989)

Hunter H. Gardner

In the myth of Pygmalion, made famous by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.243–97), the Greek sculptor carves the form of a lovely woman from snow-white ivory.[1] After he prays to the goddess Venus, she brings Pygmalion's sculpture to life; he marries her and fathers a child by her. Despite this "happy ending," the myth's long cinematic history reflects ambiguously on the relationship between human artistry and ideals of feminine beauty. The narrative variant that charts the transformation or "make-over" of a homely or ill-mannered woman under the guidance of a lover or father-figure is epitomized by Professor Henry Higgins' education of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* (1964), based on George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play *Pygmalion*. Other cinematic articulations of Pygmalion's myth shift the focus from a woman's character to her physical reconstruction; because of their disturbingly graphic focus on the female form, these are commonly located within the horror genre.[2] The Pygmalion of modern horror supplants the divine power of Venus with the miracles of modern science, animating his art through the physician's masterful knowledge of the human body.

The artist's rejection of divine intervention and his urge to play god need not entail a gendered hierarchy consisting of a masculine creator of feminine forms, as evidenced by the many film adaptations of Mary Shelley's

1818 Gothic novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, whose alternative title acknowledges another famous mythical creator. Because the films discussed in this chapter are defined by a gendered dynamic emerging from assumptions about woman's essentially flawed condition, and man's power to correct it, Pygmalion functions as the common ancestor of both Georges Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage* (*Eyes without a Face*) (1959) and Brian Yuzna's *Bride of Re-Animator* (1989). Like the make-over film, the horror film capitalizes on cinema's inherently "Pygmalionesque" ability to make a spectacle of physical transformation.[3] These films use horror conventions to unsettle, rather than sentimentalize, notions about man's perennial desire to perfect woman, setting them apart from other filmic depictions of "womanufacture" and graphically illustrating the danger and social dysfunction inherent in any attempt to slice, cut, or paste the female form.[4]

Because these re-made women resist the masculine subject who sees himself as manipulator of the malleable feminine form, the hybrid creations of *Les Yeux sans Visage* and *Bride of Re-Animator* threateningly fuse two pairs of linked concepts: that of woman and untamed nature, and that of scientific innovations associated with male-driven technology.[5] Thus they offer an alternative closure to Ovid's rendering of the myth, which leaves off at the moment when his statue is transformed from ivory into yielding and—insofar as she is now human—decomposing flesh.[6] Whether consciously responding to the myth's Ovidian origin or simply entering the vast stream of adaptations, such films about the seductions and dangers of mortal men manufacturing women participate in a discourse that springs from Pygmalion.[7]

Ovid's Pygmalion: Love of Creation, Love of Creator

Although frequently interpreted as a romantic tale, Pygmalion's artistry is initially driven by an intense disdain for the neighboring women of Cyprus, whose neglect of Venus prompts them to prostitution until the goddess transforms them into stone for their impiety, "with little change" to their character (*Metamorphoses* 10.242).[8] The firmly committed misogynist turns to art as consolation for his disgust over feminine vices: "Meanwhile with an amazing skill he sculpted snow-white ivory and gave it beauty, with which no woman is able to be born, and he conceived a love for his work of art" (*Metamorphoses* 10.243–49).[9] Pygmalion's response to his own artistry implies a hierarchical relationship that privileges this particular fabrication of woman over woman in her "natural" condition.

The narration of the lavish attention that Pygmalion devotes to his statue highlights the ideal woman as a collection of parts: her maidenly face, hands, lips, limbs "so soft he fears bruising them," neck, ears, and

breast adorned with gems (*Metamorphoses* 10.250–65). The use of feminine pronouns to describe what is properly an inanimate object conveys the depth of Pygmalion's delusion, while also forecasting the statue's metamorphosis well before Pygmalion's prayer to Venus.[10] His carefully worded prayer for a "woman like [*similis*] my ivory statue" conceals his true desire for the work of art, which Venus gratifies (*Metamorphoses* 10.274–76). Yet upon waking, the new woman sees another as her animator: "Raising up her timid sight to the light, she saw her lover equally with heaven" (*Metamorphoses* 10.293–94). Despite the necessary intervention of Venus, the recently animated maiden sees Pygmalion as a creator-figure, whose spatial superiority in the visual framing suggests a power equaling that of the divine. Thus Ovid paves the way for more sinister interventions in the myth that will substitute the transgressive genius of the human mind for divine power.

Ovid's coupling of Pygmalion's myth with another tale of creation and desire further illuminates the horrific potential of manufactured woman.[11] The couple's great-grandchild Myrrha develops an abhorrent incestuous love for her father-creator Cinyras (*Metamorphoses* 10.299–307), which retroactively problematizes both the relationship between the artist-creator and his ivory statue, and those assumptions about feminine subjectivity by which his creative act had been motivated. In trying to justify her desire, Myrrha evokes the same language of creation used in the Pygmalion episode, remarking on the freedom of the wild bird, "who conceives [*concipit*] by whose seed she herself was conceived [*concepta est*]" (*Metamorphoses* 10.328; see 10.249). Her longing to "look at face to face, touch, address, and kiss" her father (*Metamorphoses* 10.343–44) echoes the description of Pygmalion's physical probing of his ivory maiden (10.254–56). Myrrha's stealthy consummation of her desire and subsequent wish for punishment leads to her transformation into the myrrh tree—from which her child Adonis, the doomed paragon of male beauty, is born. Myrrha's degradation into a natural object contrasts with the triumph of human ingenuity embodied by Pygmalion's statue. But the two women share a common progenitor: Pygmalion's artistic genius, born from intense disdain for woman in her natural condition. Male artistry's criticism of female forms, implicit in Ovid's rendering of the myth, emerges when Pygmalion's success is tempered by the perversions of his descendant.

A Masquerade of Femininity: *Les Yeux sans Visage*

The sequential relationship that suggests causal links between promiscuous Cyprian women, misogynistic artist, and incestuous daughter offers an interpretive framework for viewing *Les Yeux sans Visage*'s own horrific

trajectory. In Franju's film, Professor Génessier (Pier Brasseur) assumes the role of Pygmalion as he attempts to perfect one female form: his daughter Christiane (Edith Scob). Responsible for a car accident that has disfigured his daughter's face beyond recognition, this renowned plastic surgeon is driven by hubris and guilt to develop a skin graft that would allow him to reconstruct Christiane's face—but by stealing the skin of living women.

Early in the film, Professor Génessier speaks of his tentative success to an admiring audience of both men and women, though the admirers who address him after the lecture are notably older women, who remark, "What a wonderful future you've shown us!"[12] His disdain for them, like Pygmalion's for the Cyprian women, is palpable. Thus the film initially targets women whose beauty has diminished with age as the primary beneficiaries of Génessier's genius. These "flawed" creatures need transformation, like their Cyprian progenitors—though the promiscuity that Ovid has advertised as a moral failing is embodied in these women as the physical processes of aging and their eagerness to recover attractiveness.

The constant supply of fresh young faces to graft onto Christiane's disfigured one is procured by another adoring, middle-aged woman: Louise (Alida Valli), referred to as Génessier's "assistant." Louise herself has benefited from Génessier's genius, and as such she functions as a successfully corrected version of the flawed older women who crowd the professor in the opening sequence. She so adores the professor that she supplies him with abducted women for his experiments. In helping him deface countless young women, she demonstrates woman's often naive complicity in the male-authored designs to "perfect" her. Louise will ultimately die by the same scalpel that perfected her, this time wielded by Christiane, and aimed at the only scar remaining from Génessier's medical artistry.

The experimental subjects whom Louise procures share a certain physical profile: young, fair, pretty. Detectives describe one victim as sharing with her forerunners the "same type of beauty." Thus the miracle of restoring Christiane's beauty, if successful, implicitly threatens her individuality by reducing her to part of an indistinguishable series. This danger is made more explicit by the anonymity with which Christiane must live, if her visage is restored. All personal attachments, except to Louise and Génessier, must be severed: Génessier has feigned Christiane's suicide and substituted one of his victim's bodies for hers. There are plenty of bodies, since each time a girl wakens with her face removed, she is predictably distraught and kills herself, reversing the miracle of animation that memorialized Pygmalion's artistry.

The fraught nature of the literally experienced "loss of face" in the film exposes an integral connection between humanity, sense of self, and

physical embodiment. And yet there is also a dialectic in *Les Yeux* between ideals of feminine beauty forged in patriarchal culture and woman's resistance to or compliance with performing the role of rough-hewn material requiring man's artistry. This dialectic emerges through the divergent reactions of Génessier and Louise to Christiane, whom viewers first glimpse from her father's perspective, face down and sobbing in an isolated bedchamber within the mansion. She has just learned of her fabricated obituary notice and funeral. Génessier attempts a brusque explanation of his ruse but stops short when he glimpses Christiane's face, as she turns toward him without wearing her mask. Viewers are not allowed to see her exposed face and so must use Génessier's horrified reaction as a prompt. Suppressing his initial shock, and with characteristic arrogance, the doctor reassures his daughter that he will succeed in restoring her former beauty.

As he prepares to depart, Louise enters; she gazes upon Christiane's face with sympathy rather than horror. Viewers are allowed a frontal view and close-up of Christiane only after Louise has replaced the white, featureless plastic mask and gently brushed Christiane's hair in a frame around it. These divergent responses to the young woman's deformed visage and the mask are instructive. Génessier sees her marred flesh as a reminder of guilt and failure at re-fashioning his daughter's beauty; his reaction is one of disgust. Louise does not flinch, but gazes affectionately at Christiane, suggesting a kinship between the two women who may opt to view themselves as either victims or beneficiaries of the professor's schemes.

Figure 8.1 Christiane (Edith Scob) dons her mask in *Les Yeux sans Visage* (1960). Champs-Elysées Productions/Lux Film.

A dinner table sequence, which novelist Patrick McGrath describes as "domestic perverse,"[13] similarly juxtaposes the responses of Louise and Génessier to Christiane. Both the professor and his assistant admire the now "perfected" young woman, whose face appears to have accepted the graft. The doctor's comments reflect largely on his achievement in restoring his daughter's "real" face. His desire to remain master artisan of his daughter's condition extends beyond appearance: he not only prompts and quickly discourages his daughter's smile ("smile—but not too much") but also begins to work out a new identity for her, only fumblingly acknowledging the elision of his daughter's former fiancé, Jacques.[14] Louise, rather than assuming a didactic role, marvels at Christiane and assigns to her an otherworldly supernatural beauty ("angelic") surpassing her former condition. Louise views this transformation as another miracle that will allow Christiane to experience the same admiring gazes that she herself receives; Louise is referred to by other characters in the film as an "attractive woman," thanks to Génessier. Yet the logic of the film will present Louise's death as a necessary sacrifice in Christiane's attempt to free the professor's last victim and as such directs viewers to condemn her, and the "success" she embodies, as equally detrimental to Christiane's humanity.

Christiane, in contrast to both Louise and Génessier, remains uncomfortably distanced from her new face and can only comment, "When I look in the mirror, I feel like I'm looking at someone who looks like me, but seems to come from the Beyond." Her psychic resistance to what is effectively another mask anticipates the physiological reaction her body soon has to the graft: once Christiane's body rejects it, viewers are allowed images of the gradual necrosis that destroys this perfection, presented in snapshots of a medical case history narrated in a voice-over by the professor. In fact, aside from the briefly successful grafted face, Franju's camera allows access to the unmasked Christiane only through these snapshots or through a life-size painting and photographs of her former condition, impressing upon audiences a notion of woman's culturally determined role as artifact.

Christiane initially plays that role, suppressing the threatening aspect of made-over woman. Her more threatening bond with animal nature, however, emerges through her constant sympathetic attention to the dogs caged in the basement of the Génessier mansion. The professor attends to these experimental animals with the same clinical detachment that defines his attitude toward human subjects. In the film's denouement, Christiane releases the dogs—along with Paulette, a recently kidnapped young woman who functions as yet another avatar of woman under the male medical gaze.

Pygmalion's chisel has been replaced here by the scalpel, but echoes of Ovid's myth prompt consideration of what it means to artificially

manipulate woman's natural condition. While the process threatens their identity, it cannot eradicate an equally dangerous drive of the feminine subject to react against restrictions on her body. In metacinematic terms, the film may be understood as a response to the "woman's film," a phenomenon straddling various genres and especially popular in the 1930s and 1940s.[15] Such films center on a woman's desire, its thwarting within the restrictions of patriarchy, and her onscreen physical and emotional transformation. The woman's film is typified by *Now, Voyager* (1942), in which Charlotte Vale (Bette Davis) is transformed from dowdy spinster into fashionable socialite under the guidance of a male psychiatrist; various critics have demonstrated how the film constructs "femaleness" as a quality that must be impersonated.[16] Such films vary in sanctioning or critiquing the need to perform femininity, but they frequently subject their heroine to the medical gaze and prompt spectators to observe her transformation, as well as her adeptness in performing the resulting "masquerade of femininity."[17]

Christiane is a literal demonstration of how the woman's film metaphorically dramatized the masquerade of feminine ideals in the decades prior to the production of *Les Yeux*. As adapted by the writing duo known as Boileau-Narcejac, the screenplay shifts the emphasis in Jean Redon's original novel away from Génessier's experience and onto that of Christiane.[18] Previously, the same writing team had produced their own novel exploring the production of feminine ideals through the artificial reproduction of Madelein Esler, with equal emphasis on her psychological and physical transformation. This novel, *D'entre les Morts* (1954), is better known through its adaptation as Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Thus by the early 1960s, the fabrication of womanhood is familiar cinematic territory; Franju succeeds in using horror to draw attention to such conventions, shocking audiences into discomfort through the graphic dissection of a woman's face as metaphor for a larger set of prescriptions for femininity.

Génessier's methodical dissection of his second victim's face under powerful surgical lamps, from the initial tracing of the scalpel's path to removal of the woman's facial skin, defined the film as an important stage in the evolution of "shock horror." Such horror functions to familiarize audiences with the real trauma that lies beneath historical change, in particular the unsettling by-products of modernity, from the battlefield bloodshed of two world wars to the horrors of the meat-packing industry.[19] Insofar as the violence remains gendered throughout most of the film, repeatedly enacted on female bodies, the nature of its horror may be situated within the larger scope of onscreen representations of femininity, especially those of the woman's film. In a final gesture of vindication that reverses man's manipulation of female bodies, Génessier ends up as the most unsettling victim of *Les Yeux*'s shock aesthetic: mauled by the dogs that Christiane has

freed, his face is exposed as horrifying, eyeballs protruding from the fleshy pulp. Another homage to Ovidian artistry is suggested by Génessier's death, which echoes that of the huntsman Actaeon: in the *Metamorphoses* he is transformed into a stag and mauled by his own dogs after transgressively viewing female beauty—of the virgin goddess Diana (3.138–255). And yet Actaeon's accidental glimpse of divine beauty provides an emphatic counterpoint to Génessier's deliberate attempts to gaze upon perfected womankind. As such, the professor is identified as the real danger to the social order, not only because of his desire to play god but also because of the exacting control and objectification with which he approaches all women in the film. Viewed through the lens of the Pygmalion myth, with its focus on physical perfection, the film illuminates cinema's dangerous tendency to make a spectacle of transforming women—even in championing a "new and improved" heroine.

Tissue Rejection: *Bride of Re-Animator*

Bride of Re-Animator also uses horrifying images of dissection and dismemberment to dramatize the hubris of attempting to fashion the perfect feminine form; in *Bride*, the artistic creation is explicitly designated as an object of desire for either the mad Dr. Herbert West (Jeffery Combs) or his reluctant sidekick Dr. Dan Cain (Bruce Abbott). The 1989 film, adapted from a short story by H. P. Lovecraft, poses as an immediate sequel to the successful camp-horror film *Re-Animator* (1985), with which it shares a nearly identical cast.[20] At the end of that film Dan Cain's love interest Meg (Barbara Crampton), the bright, blonde daughter of Miskatonic Medical School's Dean Halsey, dies despite attempts to re-animate her. Meg's death motivates Dan's involvement in its sequel's "womanufacture." Dr. West persuades him to assist in the experiment by proposing to revive a part of Meg: her heart, which West has miraculously preserved.

While Dr. West grows increasingly absorbed by the prospects of re-animating dead tissue, Dan develops a new love interest: an exotic Italian roving reporter named Francesca (Fabiana Udenio). Francesca eventually catches on to what the two men are doing in the basement, and her response is hardly sympathetic. Where *Les Yeux* examined the made-over woman through the competing lenses of Dr. Génessier's arrogant pride and Louise's misguided sympathies, Francesca, as a clearly designated outsider, can only see Dr. West's and Dan's Pygmalionesque experiment as horrifying. But she is also entangled emotionally with Dan and would like to offer him something that an assemblage of body parts cannot.

Francesca is superficially tangential to the plot; she is not the motive for re-animation and does very little to block the progress of Dan and

Dr. West. But her character allows us to view Dan as a lover seducing a woman defined by a physical profile different from that of the icy-blonde Meg—and a living one. Dan coos at Francesca after making love: "Your skin is so soft and warm." As Dan caresses Francesca's breast, the camera cuts away to the basement of the morgue where Dan and Dr. West live and work, a move that juxtaposes the voluptuous living Francesca with the fragmented body parts tinkered with by a jealous Dr. West, who derives titillation from stroking a disembodied but recently re-animated female foot.

Like *Les Yeux*, *Bride* substitutes for Pygmalion's inert ivory the flesh of real women, whose limbs become proxies for the feminine vices and virtues assigned to the women who once possessed them. The film lingers over the exposed flesh of both Francesca and its "bride" figure to question the ideals of feminine allure. Despite Dr. West's claim that "it's just dead tissue," in presenting the finished "bride" to Dan, West betrays the difficulty of extricating ideals from the tissue that housed them. As both men survey the lifeless assemblage of body parts, West points to and comments on the origin of each:

> The feet of a young ballet dancer . . . the legs of a hooker—think of all the bodies these legs wrapped around . . . The womb of a virgin, so soft, so warm, so cold in death . . . The arms of a waitress . . . and what about these hands, Dan? A sculptress? A harpist? Would you believe: a murderess? It's all equal now, nothing but cast-off remnants of meaningless existence.

By sorting through and re-assembling stereotypes that define femininity yet claiming that "it's all equal now," West proposes an ideologically unfettered version of womanhood. Whereas Pygmalion's artistry had juxtaposed the promiscuity of the Cyprian women with the purity of the blushing maiden, Dr. West's graphic shuffling of female body parts forces viewers to recognize the woman on the operating table as a literalized construction of ideals, fusing the conceptual polarity of virgin and hooker within a single composite figure. From Dan's perspective, the "bride" embodies a feminine ideal constructed through his memories of Meg, but these memories will have no force once lifeless tissue is animated as an independent subject.

As with Professor Génessier, Dr. West's greatest triumph ends in disaster. West arrogantly pronounces, "And God created woman!" before beginning the initial series of serum injections. But it is Dan's face—like the face of Pygmalion—that the "bride" first sees upon awakening. Quite literally objectified, she has nothing to offer, other than a desire to please. Before ripping her own heart from her chest, she repeatedly asks Dan, "What do you want?" as her words upend Freud's famous query into the nature of woman's desire.

If this film asks us to rethink the process of turning women into objects and then expecting them to live full lives, it admittedly replays stereotypical beauty as something that is enticing on screen. Yet *Bride* does force consideration, in its own campy, spectacular way, of the damage done to female subjectivity when it is sliced, sewn up, and eventually reconstituted by a father-lover-maker. Even the film's Pygmalion-figure is split in two: Dr. West uses womanufacture as an indication of godlike status, whereas Dan uses the same process to create an erotic substitute for a dead and thus non-compliant woman. The rivalry between the two is thrown into sharp relief when the animated "bride" fearfully rejects Dr. West and withdraws into Dan's arms. This onscreen doubling articulates how distinct motives of womanufacture—playing the lover versus playing god—have been collapsed, suggesting that the impulses of lover and artist spring from the same desire for mastery over the feminine form.

Although not a "woman's film," *Bride of Re-Animator* uses camp aesthetic, influentially defined by Susan Sontag as a "love for the unnatural; of artifice and exaggeration,"[21] to tackle the question of performing femininity. Like *Les Yeux*, it works within the conventions of horror cinema to do so. The shock horror pioneered by Franju has been diluted by the flood of gory "slasher" films that dominated the 1980s, which fetishized graphic violence and dismemberment, conventionalizing them and transforming them into an entertainment commodity rather than an unsettling cinematic experience.[22] Still, the horror of both films brutally deconstructs ideals of femininity, prompting suspicion of men who attempt to reconstruct the female form and rousing an attitude already prescribed in Ovid's ancient representation of Pygmalion's questionable artistry. While articulating this warning under disparate horror aesthetics, the kinship of these two twentieth-century horror films in graphically illustrating the social dysfunction of womanhood as "masquerade" is signaled in a remark of Dr. West. As *Bride* concludes with a shot of its titular femme fatale, who has quite spectacularly dismembered herself, he remarks, "Make a note of it, Dan, tissue rejection."

Notes

1. For the text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see Anderson (1972).
2. For an extensive survey of Ovid's Pygmalion myth in the context of *Metamorphoses* and its resonance in cinema, see James (2011). James distinguishes between the "make-over" of a real woman (31, 65–90) and films that focus on simulacra or "copies" of women manufactured from inanimate materials (115–136).
3. For cinema's Pygmalionesque status, see Bloom (2000).

4. The term "womanufacture" derives from Sharrock (1991), who understands Ovid's version of the myth as a critique of the elegiac genre's attempt to fashion women as products of the poet-lover's artistry.
5. For men attempting to perfect female bodies as a horror trope, see e.g. *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *Stolen Face* (1952), *Pieces* (1982), *Love Object* (2003), and *The Skin I Live In* (2011). For hybrid horror/science-fiction films featuring lab-synthesized women who threaten their creators or the larger social order, see *Metropolis* (1927), *The Stepford Wives* (1974), and *Blade Runner* (1982); also *Return of the Living Dead 3* (1993). *Splice* (2009) and *May* (2002) are notable insofar as women occupy the Pygmalion role.
6. See Segal (1989) 85–94 for a reassessment of critical views on the success or failure of Pygmalion's project.
7. For Hesiod's Pandora as a forerunner to many narratives illustrating the dangers of manufactured woman, see James (2011) 27–28. However, as a composite of gifts from the gods rather than a love object created or perfected by mortal hands, Pandora plays a less important role as a template for fabricating women in the films discussed here.
8. See James (2011) 13.
9. All translations from Ovid are mine, from the Latin text in Anderson (1993).
10. Anderson (1972) 498.
11. For the troubling aspects of various forms of desire in Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*, see Janan (1988), Sharrock (1991), and James (2011).
12. Quotations from *Lex Yeux sans Visage* are my own modifications of the subtitles from the Criterion Collection DVD (2004).
13. McGrath (2004) appears in the Criterion Collection DVD liner notes.
14. Franju acknowledges the "ambiguous" relationship between father and daughter and its sexual connotations in an interview for the French television show *Ciné Parade* (1982); the interview is included as a feature in the Criterion Collection DVD (2004).
15. This overview is based largely on Greven (2011) 29–43.
16. See Greven (2011) 31–33.
17. For a critique of the "woman's film" as reinforcing the patriarchal mechanisms that force women to impersonate femininity, see Doane (1987). The notion of a compulsory "masquerade" performed by women, discussed also by Greven (2011) with reference to the woman's film, is borrowed from Riviere (1986, reprint of 1929).
18. As noted by film historian David Kalat (2004) in the Criterion Collection DVD liner notes.
19. See Lowenstein (1998) 47 who speculates on Franju's work, especially *Les Yeux* and *Les Sang des Bêtes* (*Blood of Beasts*) (1949), as a "homeopathic attempt to master [a] traumatic event."
20. Also based on the 1922 short story by H. P. Lovecraft, "Herbert West—Reanimator." On the camp aspects of *Re-Animator*, see Worland (2007).
21. Cited in Worland (2007) 246.
22. Kendrick (2009) 136–37.

Part III

Negotiating the Cosmic Divide

9

Savior of the Working Man: Promethean Allusions in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)

Alex McAuley

Loved and loathed since its 1927 premiere, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* has inspired as many divergent readings as impassioned responses.[1] Critics have decried its chauvinistic gender stereotyping, communist undertones, and apocalyptic overtones; its heavy-handed borrowing of Christian and Marian salvific imagery and narrative devices; and a simplistic melodramatic plot that culminates in one of the most notorious endings in cinematic history.[2] Lang and his wife, Thea von Harbou, have even been branded as Nazi collaborators who used the film to support a nascent political ideology.[3] Yet within this mixture of fascism and socialism, medieval and gothic, Christian and occult, this chapter throws one more brand onto the critical fire by offering another reading of *Metropolis*: through the myth of Prometheus.

The film's structure is inherently mythic: a fairly simplistic plot aligns neatly with the moralistic narratives characteristic of classical mythology, as does its allegorical function. In her introduction to the novel on which *Metropolis* is based, Thea von Harbou admits that "this book is not about today or the future. It tells of no place."[4] Such a mythic reading affords insight into both the film's internal world, including the "superficial" level of direct character analogues between *Metropolis* and the Promethean cycle, and the politics of its production, including the more abstract plane of the film's social message. Considering each in turn, followed by possible sources of inspiration, locates the film within the long trajectory of literary and artistic elaborations of the Prometheus myth. The cosmology of

the film, which juxtaposes Olympian plutocrats with the ignorant suffering masses of subterranean works, is too Promethean to be purely coincidental. As Carol Dougherty notes, Prometheus "provides the perfect figure for thinking about the role of work in the human experience through the ages."[5] But if nearly a century of *Metropolis* criticism has conveyed one message, it is that this film cannot be approached as a monolith. Rather, like the myth itself, *Metropolis* remains the product of numerous—and at times competing—influences.

Prometheus' Transformations, from Antiquity to Modernity

Prometheus is a complex figure in the ancient literary tradition because of his recurrent prominence over many centuries, beginning with two of the earliest attested literary sources: Hesiod's two didactic poems, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, composed at the end of the Greek Dark Age (ca. 700 BC). Despite some variations to the myth across the two poems, in the interest of brevity a broad synthesis will suffice.[6] To explain why life is so difficult for human beings compared to the immortals, Hesiod invokes the story of Prometheus. He is a deceptive trickster who handily fools Zeus, king of the gods, to the benefit of humankind: Prometheus steals fire from Mount Olympus and gives it to humans. His wrath kindled, Zeus orders other gods to collaborate in creating the first woman, Pandora, who will serve as his instrument of vengeance on humans by bearing and opening the famous jar of ills.[7] An angry god thus introduces disease, suffering, hardship, and toil into the world as a means of curbing transgression. For his intervention, Prometheus too suffers Zeus' anger: every day Zeus sends his eagle to eat Prometheus' liver as he is chained helplessly to a rock. In this early manifestation of the myth, Prometheus does as much harm as good to humanity: while his theft of fire does improve the lot of humankind, Zeus punishes them with economic hardship and painful mortality.

Hesiod's versions of the myth supply the fundamental narrative elements from which later accounts are variously spun, elaborated, and embellished in the following centuries.[8] In the fifth century BC, the playwright Aeschylus is said to have composed a trilogy of tragedies in which Prometheus is punished for having brought the "civilized arts" to humanity. In this instance, the actions of Prometheus elevate humanity above the condition of beasts, making him responsible for human progress.[9] This sentiment is echoed in Plato's *Protagoras* (320c–322a):[10] Prometheus sees human beings as utterly unprepared for the world in which they are to live, so he absconds from Olympus with both fire and technical wisdom to give them the means of survival. As a result of Prometheus' theft, humankind becomes the closest of all creatures to the gods because they now partake of a portion of

divine knowledge and skill. But when Prometheus intervenes in human society, he does so rather ineptly: without endowing humans with justice and shame, such technology only contributes to violence, requiring Zeus' intervention to right the balance. One of Aeschylus' lost plays, *Prometheus Pyrophoros* ("The Fire-Bringer"), however, seems to have featured reconciliation between the two immortals that ends their enmity.[11] In the process, Prometheus contributes to a rapprochement between Zeus and humanity.

Prometheus has been the mediator between the gods on Olympus and mortals dwelling below in its shadow; he has been the liberator of humankind through the teaching of technology represented by the gift of fire, a contribution that leads to the flourishing of society. Yet Prometheus also can be construed as subverting divine order in his role as an ardent advocate for humankind: it is not until the later classical Greek period that Prometheus' acts of resistance are translated into unabashed concern for humanity's well-being. As the Promethean tradition passed from Greek into Roman hands over the following centuries, the scope of his influence continued to broaden. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* at the dawn of Rome's imperial period (AD 8) recognized Prometheus as the outright creator, not just the patron, of humankind (*Metamorphoses* 1.82–88, 1.363).[12] In this iteration of the myth, Prometheus assumes more of the balancing role of Zeus in earlier traditions.

The Promethean myth underwent another series of major revisions at the hands of authors and political theorists during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during which many of the basic aspects of Prometheus' character were changed. While the ancients considered Zeus and Prometheus to be cousins, Goethe recast the myth in a play written in 1773, but not published until 1830: here Prometheus has become the defiant son of Zeus who desires a realm for humankind on his own terms.[13] A more intimate relationship thus develops between the two, who play out their confrontation as champions of liberty and oppression, respectively. Prometheus reappears at regular intervals in Goethe's writings—notably in *Faust*—as embodying the conflict between gods and men and the battling forces within human nature. He later comes to represent the intermediary between the human and the divine, and Goethe's free verse "Hymn to Prometheus" (1773) hails him, in Dougherty's elegant summary, as "the immortal prototype of man as the original rebel and affirmer of his fate."[14]

Prometheus played a similar role among the English Romantics: Byron outright confesses that Prometheus had "an influence over all or any thing that I have written."[15] Against the backdrop of the French and American Revolutions, authors like Blake, Shelley, and Byron saw in Prometheus the archetypal hero of resistance to tyranny and absolutism.[16] Accordingly, Prometheus was recast from the deceptive, at times inept, figure of

antiquity into an idealized liberator, the original freedom fighter. These Romantics perceived, in the absolutist oppression of Zeus in myth, the injustices besetting their own contemporary societies. Later Marxist theorists (explored below) similarly followed this thread, as did Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou with *Metropolis*. It is more than likely that both the Romantics and the Marxists provided the source of Lang and von Harbou's particular view of Prometheus.

The Promethean World of *Metropolis*

The cosmology of *Metropolis* is in tune with that of the Promethean myth. The film's opening scene shows an army of faceless factory workers in the depths of a city during their shift change, all plodding forward wordlessly as the whistle blows. Their heads are bowed in gaunt resignation, an attitude echoed by their black uniforms, shaved heads, and sallow faces. No conversation, no expression, no indication of social interaction can be seen. As they descend in the elevator, an intertitle tells us that their realm lays "deep inside their earth."[17] The workers of the film seem to be less than fully human, given their lack of individuality and absence of socialization. So too Prometheus himself describes the lot of humanity in Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound* (447–53):[18]

> First of all, although they had the power of sight, they looked around in vain; they were able to hear, they did not listen; but, as if they were only faint spectres, they acted without purpose and confused all things for their entire lives; . . . they lived underground, just like burrowing ants, in sunless recesses.

The opposite pole of the film's society depicts a cosmological concurrence that suggests an intentional counterpart to the depths of endless toil, the domain of the obliviously unfortunate workers. "Towering so high over them," as the intertitle says, yet supported by their labor is the glamorous world of the wealthy, the fathers who "have created for their sons the miracle of the Eternal Gardens." Replete with food, drink, company, and unceasing merriment, the "Club of the Sons" represents Olympus, and thus the wealthy elite have become the gods on high—just as the gods of Olympus feast for entire days, entertained by music as they pour each other sweet nectar.[19] The similarity is reinforced by the "eternal" nature of the gardens of *Metropolis*' elite, where the sons of the almost mythically powerful "fathers" abide. Unlike the stark uniformity of the workers, each of the wealthy seems unique, like the Olympian gods. Although not truly immortal, the elite of *Metropolis* enjoy immunity from the daily toil and economic

hardships of the "workers" below, just as the Olympians are exempt from human suffering. Thus the film introduces a world in which wealthy individuality resides both above and on top of the anonymity of servility, echoing the mythological world of Prometheus.

A similar congruence between the world of the myth and the world of the film emerges at the level of individual characters. At the literal top of society in *Metropolis*, the austere and imposing father-character of Joh Fredersen, tyrannical master of the city, is analogous to Zeus in the Promethean myth. From his airy palatial office at the top of the highest tower in the city, Joh exerts sole control over society and is credited with having played an indispensable part in its development, recalling Zeus reigning from the heights of Olympus over his fellow gods and men. Joh's son, Freder, constantly refers to him as "Father" in direct address, just as Zeus is addressed throughout Greek poetry as "Father Zeus" and "Father of Gods and Men."

Like Zeus, in his paternal authority Joh has the power to punish fellow "Olympians" who would defy him by expelling them from the heights of opulence, into the darkness and suffering. As Freder puts it in one intertitle, "Do you know what it means to be dismissed by you? It means go below, Father, go below into the depths!" This power is analogous to the manner in which Zeus imprisoned rebellious gods in the Underworld after he defeated them in war (Hesiod, *Theogony* 722–35).[20] Later in the film the Thin Man, Joh's loyal henchman, tells the captured rebellious worker Georgy to "forget everything" that happened; Joh, like Zeus, seeks to control humanity's understanding. Both the Promethean Zeus and Father Joh intend to retain their power and influence by keeping human beings where and as they are.

Analogous to Prometheus is Freder, the protagonist of the film. Although Freder is frail bordering on incompetent, in a manner that the Romantics would not associate with the stalwart rebel Prometheus, in his failings Freder resembles some of Prometheus' ancient appearances. On the thematic plane they fulfill similar functions in each narrative. Freder is the young son who leaves his comfortable opulence to descend into the depths in pursuit of the beautiful Maria; there, he witnesses the depravity of the society his father has created. His revulsion becomes sympathy, until a desire to free humanity—the workers—from their servitude blooms in Freder. Just as Prometheus straddles the worlds of gods and humankind, in his quest Freder is repeatedly referred to as "The Mediator," bridging the gap between power and servitude; in so doing, he frees men from their bonds and their ignorance. Gradually Freder becomes a mediator, blending Christian and Promethean sources to become the messianic figure for whom Maria and the workers pray during the catacomb scene, as the workers rise up against the social status quo.

Figure 9.1 Freder (Gustav Frölich) leads the workers in *Metropolis* (1927). Universum Film AG.

Both Freder and Maria spur them on, highlighting in a most conspicuous fashion the Promethean mediation of Freder specifically during the film's much-maligned ending. In front of a massive crowd of workers assembled in front of the cathedral, Joh and the head of the workers stand facing each other. Freder approaches and joins the hands of the worker and the director—and thus symbolically joining humanity and the gods—in a conciliatory gesture that marks the end of the film. He physically accomplishes what the Romantic authors saw in Prometheus: he mediated between Zeus and humankind to deliver liberty from oppression.

The pivotal figure of Maria is clearly the Madonna figure in the film and inspired by the Marian tradition. Yet her relationship with Prometheus finds no direct parallel in Greek myth. In light of the later Promethean tradition, however, her role resonates within the larger mythic matrix. While Prometheus lacks a love interest in the ancient record, Romantic authors not surprisingly began to associate him with a female counterpart. Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1821 lyrical drama *Prometheus Unbound* introduces the figure of Asia, the god's female companion who becomes his paramour and wife.[21] Thus, "good" Maria may be analogous to Asia, further reinforcing the notion that Lang and von Harbou were influenced by later

manifestations of the myth. The revolutionary undertones featured in the adaptation of the myth in Shelley's drama, along with Byron's numerous references to Prometheus, correspond well with how Maria and Freder work to liberate the masses from despotic rule.

The infamous figure of the Robot or Evil Maria is analogous to a character often elided in contemporary versions of the Prometheus myth: Pandora. The evil machine-woman was created by the mad scientist Rotwang and imbued with Maria's likeness at the behest of Joh Fredersen, and then she was sent down among the workers at his command in order to "sow discord" and "destroy the work of the woman in whose image she was created," as the intertitles say. This renowned sequence from the film depicts an artificial female created by an expert craftsman and tasked by the father-figure with inflicting punishment for the rebellion—matching precisely the character of Pandora in the Prometheus myth, with Rotwang playing the role of Hephaestus, with a sinister touch of Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein. Hesiod's words about Pandora equally suit Evil Maria (*Works and Days* 69–82):[22]

> And so the father of men and gods laughed, and then he ordered renowned Hephaestus . . . to swiftly create the beautiful form of a maiden, similar to the immortal goddesses in her countenance; . . . And he ordered Hermes, the messenger and slayer of Argus, to place in her a shameless mind and a thievish character. And [Hermes] formed lies and deceptive words and an unscrupulous character within her, all at the desire of loud-thundering Zeus. The Herald of the gods then gave her speech, and named the woman Pandora, because all those who live on Olympus gave a gift, a calamity to those men who labour in the world.

In Hesiod's other account of Pandora in *Theogony*, she has no personality or interiority whatsoever; in other words, she seems a robotic creation. Just as Evil Maria was made to be irresistible to the citizens of *Metropolis* and leads them into madness, so too was Pandora made to inspire dangerous desire in men by the goddess Aphrodite, who "poured beauty upon her head, and unendurable longing, and cares that trouble the body."[23]

Pandora and Evil Maria are women created to similarly malevolent ends. To smother the disobedience of rebellious men, Pandora inflicts plagues and sows discord, and Evil Maria brings madness and revolution. That Evil Maria was created to punish a political condition hints that this particular refraction of the Pandora figure was inspired more by the Romantic vision of the myth than the ancient tradition. The two were created in the same manner, with the same purpose, and in a very real way both Pandora in the Hesiodic myth and Evil Maria in *Metropolis* succeed at their tasks.

Through these equivalencies, a Promethean narrative emerges at the heart of *Metropolis* that matches its ancient inspiration in theme as well as personae. Eventually the madness caused by Pandora/Evil Maria fades away (in the world of the film, at least); Prometheus/Freder manages to rebel against Zeus/Joh with the aid of his paramour Asia/Maria, and in so doing humankind is freed of its shackles and brought into a new happy age. A new mentality emerges, one reflected in the sudden humanity of the workers after they have rebelled: they are no longer shown to be faceless automatons cast down in the depths, but instead are now jubilant. As in Ovid's description, humans look hopefully up to the sky (*Metamorphoses* 1.84–88): "The other animals on the earth stoop, bent over, as they look around, but he [Prometheus] gave mankind a lofty expression, and ordered them to behold the sky, to lift up their faces towards the stars."[24]

When viewed on these various levels of cosmology, narrative, and character, the fundamentally Promethean quality of *Metropolis* as allegory is patent. Consider, too, the film and the myth within the historical context of Weimar-era Berlin (1925–1927), during which time the film was made. Particularly in the winter of 1925, general privation of the masses, widespread unemployment, and rampant starvation led some to call contemporary Berlin the "Babylon of Europe."[25] The sheer wealth gap in society produced a situation ripe for revolution in near-perfect conformity with the Marxist paradigm.

It is tempting to see this context reflected in the film itself. The motif of a social hierarchy in which masters of society—architects, planners, bureaucrats—are detached from the masses recurs frequently in Weimar-era science fiction.[26] Such a parallel between mid-1920s Berlin and the dystopian vision of *Metropolis* suggests an interpretation of the Promethean myth that falls into line with a traditional Marxist reading. Karl Marx himself, in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, called Prometheus "the first saint and martyr of the philosopher's calendar," and in an editorial cartoon in the same newspaper Marx was depicted as Prometheus, with the Prussian eagle gnawing away at his liver.[27]

In Marxist mythology, Prometheus represents the proletariat embodied, and thus he—as the proletariat—becomes the protagonist of a messianic drama in which, in the words of the Marxist theorist Leszek Kolakowski, "Prometheus would, in the universal revolution, sweep away the age-long contradiction between the interest of the individual and the species."[28] George Thomson would later call Prometheus "the patron saint of the proletariat."[29] In one school of Marxist interpretation, the entirety of Marx's conception of the revolution was essentially based on the paradigm of the Prometheus myth.[30] Even today his statue stands proudly in the center of the abandoned Ukrainian city of Pripyat, now a ghost town; barely seven

kilometers from Chernobyl, the image highlights the irony of the nuclear-industrial excesses of the former Soviet Union, unintentionally paralleling the narrative of *Metropolis*.

In this light, perhaps the real Prometheus to be found in *Metropolis* is not Freder, but the workers themselves. It is their collective energy and their work that sustains the society of the rich, but when their resistance and anger are harnessed, they explode into revolution. Thus the workers become the true protagonist of the story; they are Prometheus, shaking free the shackles of the despotic father—Zeus/Joh—through their collective action and growing awareness of their own state and potential. So Freder's question to his father early in the film—"What if one day the depths rise against you?"—becomes prophecy fulfilled by the film's end, reflecting the shifting dynamics of power within the film's plot.

The Promethean Influence on *Metropolis*

What inspired this reception, and whom did it inspire? Goethe's Prometheus, for his part, would have been a familiar figure to both Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou. During his early education, Lang read Goethe extensively, and he was so entranced with the author that he was still able to quote him from memory in interviews during the 1950s.[31] Von Harbou, for her part, had such a love of Goethe—and of myth in general—that she reportedly could recite from *Faust* as early as age 11. The pair continued to read Goethe's writings while making forays into Eastern mythological texts during their marriage.[32] This combination of long exposure to Goethe and the similarity of Freder to Goethe's Prometheus strongly suggests that it was this particular manifestation of the myth that inspired *Metropolis*.

Lang famously claimed that he was inspired to make the film after arriving in the bustle of New York in October 1924, but during the period before and during the film's production actor Willy Fritsch described Lang as being "more patriotic than a German nationalist Junker."[33] Perhaps such a historically and socially conscious film ought to be credited to Lang's socialistic patriotism. Then again, Lang's actions speak louder than his words: the director behaved brutally toward his roughly 35,000 extras and actors, filming in the freezing cold for long hours, in perilous conditions, with absurd expectations, at low pay. Brigitte Helm, the actress who played Maria, observed, "The extras playing the workers might well have been actual slaves for all the humanity with which Lang treated them."[34] Such would not be the directorial conduct of a Marxist making a social commentary of this sort.

As for Thea von Harbou, even though she claimed that the film was not presentist, according to Siegfried Kracauer she nevertheless "incorporated

in *Metropolis* the unspoken thoughts and feelings of an entire society in the midst of major change in the 1920s, she . . . indiscriminately passed on whatever happened to haunt her imagination."[35] It would seem that her love of literature, combined with deeply held political beliefs that would later drive her away from Lang and into deeper involvement with the Nazi cause, led her to see Weimar Germany as a perfect setting for presenting her vision of the Promethean potential of the proletariat and her remedy to the problems plaguing her society. The origins of the Promethean side of *Metropolis* thus likely stem from von Harbou's singular passion for the mythical and the political—a facet that complements, but is not mutually exclusive of, the other readings of this intricate film. Despite her claims to the contrary, it seems that in the case of *Metropolis*, in the end film can be neither fully removed from mythology nor separated from history.

Notes

1. My sincerest thanks go to Monica Cyrino and Meredith Safran for their kind invitation to contribute to this volume and for their editorial insight, and to the organizers and contributors of the 2012 Film and History Conference for their feedback.
2. See Gunning (2000) 53–57 for a recapitulation of the various critical responses to the film.
3. See Minichiello's introduction to von Harbou (1975) vi–vii.
4. Quoted in Gunning (2000) 55. For the latest English edition of the 1927 German novel, see von Harbou (1975).
5. Dougherty (2006) 20.
6. On the Hesiodic poems, including possible dates of composition, see the commentaries by West (1966) on *Theogony* and West (1978) on *Works and Days*.
7. Dougherty (2006) 19–26 discusses both of Hesiod's Pandora passages.
8. For the Near Eastern roots of the Promethean tradition in the Greek world, see Duchemin (1974) 33–46 and Penglase (1994) 166–92.
9. See Dougherty (2006) 64–88 for an examination of the one surviving play from this trilogy, Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, and more generally, the Promethean tradition on the Athenian tragic stage.
10. For the text of Plato's *Protagoras*, see Taylor (1992).
11. The idea of reconciliation is based on a fragment from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* 15.16; see Glick (1941) for the text.
12. See also Duchemin (1974) 20–23.
13. For the nineteenth-century Prometheus in general, see Corbeau-Parsons (2013). On Prometheus and Goethe, see Corbeau-Parsons (2013) 38–56 and Duchemin (1974) 119–30.
14. Goethe's "Hymn to Prometheus" (1773) is paraphrased in Dougherty (2006) 94.
15. Quoted in Lewis (1992) 3.

16. See Lewis (1992) 111–91. On Prometheus and Shelley, see Corbeau-Parsons (2013) 57–69.
17. All quotations from the film's intertitles are taken from the original German text in the 2010 *The Complete Metropolis* edition of the film. The 2010 re-release incorporates footage from the 16 mm version of the film found in 2008 in the Museo del Cine in Buenos Aires, and thus it is as close to the original 1927 release as possible. All translations from German are my own.
18. The translation of Aeschylus is my own from the ancient Greek text edited by Murray (1955).
19. Compare how the gods feast at *Iliad* 1.595–612; for the text of Homer's *Iliad*, see Murray and Wyatt (1924).
20. For the text of Hesiod's *Theogony*, see West (1966).
21. See Corbeau-Parsons (2013) 116–17 and Duchemin (1974) 137–41.
22. All translations of Hesiod are mine from the Greek text edited by Solmsen et al. (1990).
23. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 65–67.
24. The translation is mine from the Latin text edited by Tarrant (2004).
25. See McGilligan (1997) 81–85.
26. As discussed by Gunning (2000) 57–58.
27. Noted in Dougherty (2006) 132–34.
28. Kolakowski (1978) 1.412–13.
29. Dougherty (2006) 133.
30. Wessell (1984). For other discussions of Marxism and the figure of Prometheus, see also Augustine (2007).
31. McGilligan (1997) 22.
32. McGilligan (1997) 62–63.
33. See McGilligan (1997) 104–5 for the New York inspiration; Fritsch is quoted on 134.
34. McGilligan (1997) 115–20.
35. Quoted in Minichiello's introduction to von Harbou (1975) xiv.

10

Magic, Music, Race: Screening "Black Enchantment" after *Black Orpheus* (1959)

Monica S. Cyrino

In contemporary America, film and television make persistent and compelling use of black culture. Film scholars and media critics discuss what they call "mythologies of blackness," how recurring images and tropes of culturally significant reinterpretations and reinventions are represented in modern media.[1] While the scholarly argument does not proceed from the position that there is any real correspondence between what takes place on movie or television screens and actual lived realities, nevertheless film and television often reflect what a society considers important, even if the ostensible purpose is purely entertainment. As film scholar Krin Gabbard observes, "The best place to find out how things get constructed in American culture is a movie house."[2] These onscreen representations both affirm and challenge some of society's core notions about race: as these ideas are always in flux, and since movies and television present value systems from several different points of view, audiences are constantly being invited to rethink these values at the same time that we are invited to embrace them.[3]

This chapter explores one aspect of how and why race is represented, negotiated, and utilized in popular films and television series that relate in some way to the ancient world. Black music, black spirituality and suffering, and black masculinity are all crucial obsessions among modern filmmakers and audiences and frequently drive the narrative of many screen texts. The often remarkable—even uncanny—interactions between black and white characters on screen presents a kind of "black enchantment," a prominent

representational trope among the "mythologies of blackness" that populate contemporary screen texts. In order to illustrate "black enchantment" and how it is presented in popular cinema, this chapter looks to the figure of Orpheus, the long-suffering, mystical singer of ancient Greek and Roman mythology, and suggests how modern onscreen depictions of Orpheus are implicated in contemporary cinematic fantasies about the "enchantment" of black culture.[4] Orpheus on screen often functions as a metamyth; even when removed from the ancient sources, he is heavily imbued with modern sensibilities about magic, music, and race.

Black Angels

The cinematic tradition of supportive black characters can be traced across various film genres within the entire history of film, from Rick Blaine and Sam in *Casablanca* (1942), to Tom Doniphon and Pompey (Woody Strode) in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), to the interracial "buddy films" of the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Silver Streak* (1976) or *Stir Crazy* (1980) starring Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder, or the *Lethal Weapon* film franchise (four in the series: 1987, 1989, 1992, and 1998) starring Danny Glover and Mel Gibson, or even Will Munny and Ned Logan in the Iliadic epic western *Unforgiven* (1992). These famous cinematic pairings participate in the fantasy of racial bonding and reconciliation between blacks and whites, a ubiquitous theme in the last few decades of film history.

But along the way, the supportive black character acquired some specific traits and tasks. In his 2004 study *Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture*, Gabbard explores how modern American cinema has assigned black characters a narrative function of exceptional responsibility. He describes how black characters are put on screen to "radically transform the lives of white people, usually providing them with romance and gravitas."[5] What these films propose and ultimately perpetuate is a mythology of what Gabbard calls "black magic," which he explains as follows: "I use this term *literally* to describe a group of films in which African American actors play angels who improve the lives of whites; I use this term *metaphorically* to describe the enchanting effect that black music, black sexuality, and other aspects of African American culture have on movie characters, more often than not when the characters onscreen are white."[6]

Gabbard uses the term "Black Angel," a transformational figure who appears, seemingly out of nowhere, in the plot of the film to help, heal, and ultimately validate the white protagonist. The Black Angel is typically a supporting character, played by a black actor, who uses special powers or perceptions to help the white protagonist get out of trouble, achieve his goals, or even find his soul.[7] According to film scholars, helpful Black

Angel figures have appeared in American movies at least since the late 1950s, when Sidney Poitier sacrificed his own freedom to save Tony Curtis in *The Defiant Ones* (1958).[8] Film scholar Thomas Cripps argues that Poitier spent his entire career playing this type of martyr role, noting that when he played Simon of Cyrene, "Sidney actually carried the cross for Jesus in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965)."[9] Another well-known character who martyrs himself in a Civil Rights–era film is Draba (Woody Strode), the black gladiator in *Spartacus* (1960), whose death at the hands of the oppressive elite, followed by the display of his corpse hanging upside down in the gladiator barracks, inspires Spartacus and the other slaves to escape to freedom.[10]

While Black Angel characters can be enlightening or redemptive, some are explicitly magical: more than merely supportive, they exhibit supernatural traits. Filmmakers often endow this figure with mystical abilities and make him saintly, numinous, or otherworldly; in some cases, he is an actual angel. Recent commentators and critics, especially online in blogs and commentaries, have derided the films that portray this supernatural yet subservient character, mocking the role as the "Magic Negro."[11] Outspoken director Spike Lee has not surprisingly expressed strong sentiments on the topic, and he even popularized the term when he ridiculed the figure in several university lectures and interviews as the "super-duper Magical Negro."[12] This derisive term was also used to ridicule candidate Barack Obama when he first ran for President of the United States in 2008, when it appeared in the title of a song on a CD sent to Republican National Committee members.[13] Thus the Black Angel archetype plays a complex role: it is only useful as a parody if some people are willing to invest in the concept's validity.

Starting in the 1990s, a large number of films prominently featured impossibly gifted or enchanted black figures who used their magical powers to help attractive, upper-middle-class white people. The wave of Black Angel films in the last decade of the twentieth century was likely a cinematic response to the overall fin de siècle heightening of interest in mysticism and spirituality, or, more specifically, what Gabbard calls a "millennial solution" to the representation of race and race relations on screen.[14] At the start of the decade is the mother of all Black Angels: Oda Mae Brown, the faux medium played by Whoopi Goldberg in *Ghost* (1990), a hit film that grossed $500 million after costing only $22 million and won Goldberg an Oscar for her supporting role. The caustic Oda Mae, who is at first reluctant to get involved in the supernatural yuppie romance between Sam (Patrick Swayze) and Molly (Demi Moore), does not quite fit the supremely benevolent mold of Black Angels who appear in subsequent films; this may be because almost all other movie angels have been male, and so the potential threat of their

black masculinity seems to be tempered by the emphasis on their saintly kindness. But the achievement of *Ghost* clearly proved to filmmakers how "black magic" could win both critical and commercial success.[15]

Further examples of Black Angels in the 1990s quickly accumulate. In the Coen brothers' film *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1995), the omniscient clock-keeper Moses (Bill Cobbs) saves the life of Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins) by magically stopping time. In Danny Boyle's *A Life Less Ordinary* (1997), a charming, white-suited angel played by Delroy Lindo and another angel (Holly Hunter) are sent down from heaven as an intergalactic, interracial "buddy" pair to foster a love match between two white people. In *What Dreams May Come* (1998), Cuba Gooding Jr. plays a preppie angel wearing a white V-neck sweater who welcomes Chris Nielsen (Robin Williams) to heaven. The audience soon discovers that he is really the soul of Chris' son, who died in a car accident, and therefore not *really* black; since the angelic souls in heaven can choose how they wish to appear to newly-deceased loved ones, he is rather "a white man in blackface."[16] Along with its ersatz multicultural message that race and skin color do not matter in such a big mysterious world, the film earnestly endorses religious teachings about suicide and its negative consequences in the afterlife. Many of the films in which Black Angels appear include heavy doses of post-1980s culturally conservative dogma about religion and family values, with frequent and habitually heavy-handed references to Biblical notions of Good and Evil, the simple melodrama of reward and punishment, and the profound sufferings of a scapegoat or redeemer figure.

No Black Angel is more Christ-like than John Coffey—his initials echo those of Jesus Christ—the wrongly convicted miracle healer played by Michael Clarke Duncan in the prison drama *The Green Mile* (1999); the film, directed by Frank Darabont and based closely on a novel by Stephen King, is set in a southern prison in the 1930s.[17] Coffey is portrayed as a gentle giant with divine powers of healing, who sees and feels deeply the pain and evil of the world. He cures Paul, the implausibly virtuous prison guard (Tom Hanks), of his urinary tract infection, allowing him to perform his conjugal duties with his wife, Jan (Bonnie Hunt); he also heals the terminal cancer of the prison warden's wife, Melinda (Patricia Clarkson), with a long but unerotic (and therefore unthreatening) kiss, by which he literally sucks the disease out of her body into his own. After the audience is rewarded by the death of "Wild Bill" (Sam Rockwell), the inmate who actually committed the rape-murders for which Coffey was convicted, the film takes the extraordinary step of showing Coffey's execution. Although the audience is not invited to enjoy the spectacle of an innocent black man being unjustly executed, the intensely redemptive religious framing of the scene soothes the viewer: the savior Coffey says that he is tired of suffering and longs for

the release of death. The film ends with the prison guard Paul as an old man saying he regrets that he deprived the world of one of "God's great miracles."

As pre-millennial fervor grew, two Black Angel figures, one male and one female, appeared in the dystopian science fiction future of *The Matrix* (1999), written and directed by the Wachowski brothers.[18] Laurence Fishburne plays Morpheus, a renegade freedom fighter who suffers greatly on behalf of Neo, the anagrammatic One (Keanu Reeves), and Gloria Foster is the Oracle, who musters her no-nonsense precognitive powers—which combine Eastern mysticism, African-American spirituality, and cookie baking—to prepare Neo for his impending trials and to establish his One-ness.

The magical-religious imagery reached its peak in three Black Angel films that appeared in 2000 to commemorate the millennial year.[19] In *The Family Man* (2000), directed by Brett Ratner as an updated mash-up of Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Don Cheadle plays a meddlesome guardian angel named Cash who insists on helping Jack (Nicolas Cage), a prosperous white man, realize what the movie audience already knows: that family life in a middle-class New Jersey suburb is superior to his solo life of empty affluence in Manhattan. Like his cinematic predecessor Clarence, Cash saves the day, but he also validates the idealized (white) American male of the title. In Harold Ramis' *Bedazzled* (2000), an unnamed angel, played by the angelically named actor Gabriel Casseus, makes a brief appearance to counsel Eliot (Brendan Fraser) on how to reclaim his soul from Satan (Elizabeth Hurley in a gender-bending turn). As Eliot's cell-mate, Casseus emerges from the shadows and delivers conventional religious platitudes about keeping one's heart open to God's plan, but with such measured, meaningful authority that Eliot's life is instantly changed.

The third film of the millennial year in which the Black Angel helps to restore the white protagonist's true identity and saves his soul is *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), directed by Robert Redford and based on a 1995 book by the author Steven Pressfield, who has written several classically themed novels.[20] In a twist on the conventional Christian spiritualism of the Black Angel, the name of Will Smith's mysterious golf caddy character is a play on the Sanskrit term "Bhagavan," meaning supreme being or god.[21] In Depression-era Savannah, Bagger emerges from the mists on the links to help the aristocratic young golfer Rannulph Junuh (Matt Damon)—the name R. Junuh echoes Arjuna, the warrior prince in the *Bhagavad Gita*[22]—overcome his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after World War I and rediscover his "authentic swing." Although he is an ancient deity, Bagger delivers his advice in the New Age vernacular of modern sports babble: "The rhythm of the game is just like the rhythm of life."

In 2003, Hollywood took the Black Angel role to new heights when Morgan Freeman was cast as God in *Bruce Almighty* (2003), in which the Supreme Being interrupts the workings of the entire universe just to try to save Jim Carrey's career with a box-office hit.[23] A few years later, Freeman reprised his role as God in *Evan Almighty* (2007), in which he convinces Steve Carrell's titular character to build an ark to save his family from an imminent flood. This casting is surely related to the regular use in many current media of a male African-American voice for an unseen, omniscient narrator, what is conventionally called in Hollywood the VOG, or "Voice of God." The effect of this offscreen voice may be purely subconscious, but the long cinematic history of representing spiritual blackness as authoritative may also trigger the association of the actor's voice with dignity, religiosity, and depth of feeling. The current reigning Voice of God is actor James Earl Jones: not only famous for voicing Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* films and those five immortal syllables, "This [pause] is CNN," Jones' recording of the *King James Bible* has sold half a million copies. Morgan Freeman is Jones' only real competition for the Voice of God—at least until Denzel Washington gets a little older; he has twice played the role of God on screen, and his voice narrates countless television commercials, most frequently for VISA. According to columnist Michael Kinsley, "Jones is the Old Testament God, fierce and forbidding. Freeman is the New Testament version, all wise and all knowing, to be sure, but more approachable."[24] In a magical ring composition that started two decades earlier with the film *Ghost*, Whoopi Goldberg also recently played God in the romantic-disease comedy *A Little Bit of Heaven* (2011), reacting to the terminal cancer diagnosis of happy-go-lucky Marley (Kate Hudson) with blasé omnipotence.

A more traditional Black Angel character appears in the recent film *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011), directed by George Nolfi and based on a short story by Philip K. Dick, a romantic action thriller with weighty theological implications about fate and free will. An aspiring New York politician, David Norris (Matt Damon), is separated from his beloved Elise (Emily Blunt) by the workings of the mysterious Bureau, a shadowy but powerful organization that sends secretive men in suits to control people's lives under orders from an all-powerful and unseen "Chairman." But David's caseworker, Harry Mitchell, played by Anthony Mackie, takes pity on the star-crossed lovers, so he teaches David how to use doors to pass through time and space to evade the Bureau's adjustments and thus be reunited with Elise. The film reveals heavy Abrahamic religious overtones in its portrayal of the God-like Chairman and his "master plan," as well as the ancient mythological theme of *katabasis*, or descent to the underworld, which is a major narrative element in the Orpheus myth, in the supernatural

movements of the caseworker-angels. Harry, an especially powerful and open-minded Black Angel figure, once again joins the two white lovers, but in so doing he brings free will back to all humankind.

By offering a kind of divine or otherworldly intervention in the movie plot, the Black Angel figure locates the discourse of race securely in the world of fantasy: the Black Angel exists in a mystical world outside the usual hierarchies and power structures dominated by whites, in the realm of magic. Moreover, the Black Angel figure promotes the idea that blacks are more naturally spiritual and compassionate: just as the suffering of African Americans has become universally acknowledged, the suffering of the Black Angel confers dignity and empathy. As Gabbard notes, "Because they and/or their ancestors have endured greater hardships than the typical white person, blacks are represented as more effective at coping with misfortune and with dispensing soul-healing advice."[25] Thus, in the context of these films, Black Angel characters are portrayed as more mystical, more soulful, more in touch with their feelings—and because of this, they speak, and often sing, about their religious or spiritual beliefs with more authority, intensity, and devotion.

Black Music

The notion of "black enchantment" can also be found in the way cinema uses black music in scoring certain scenes in specifically coded ways. Movie music operates from a system of codes that the audience understands intuitively and grasps immediately. Gabbard describes how these cinematic musical codes send out "utterly coherent messages: this is funny, this is scary, this is the moment when you're supposed to cry."[26] Recently, film scholars have described how black music, especially American jazz music, is deployed in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century cinema to amplify the emotional power of a scene and to imbue it with a sense of depth, authenticity, and meaning.[27] This even happens when there is not a single black character or actor in the whole film, and it occurs especially when the film seeks to raise the level of romance in a scene. White characters make love on—or just off—screen while the music of black artists plays in the background: consider Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep in *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), who fall in love to the rich, sexy vocals of African-American jazz singer Johnny Hartman.[28] The powerful yet disembodied voice of the invisible black male singer helps to smooth Eastwood's transition from cowboy killer to romantic lover, from the murderous Dirty Harry to the wandering poet who surrenders utterly to a woman.

In the Black Angel films discussed above, the element of emotional enchantment is heightened by the sounds of black music. In the scene

where Neo visits the Oracle in *The Matrix*, playing in the background is the Duke Ellington Orchestra's 1944 recording of "I'm Beginning to See the Light"—so the intervention of the Oracle to bring Neo to his place of enlightenment is both supported by the musical message and associated with the power of African-American jazz culture. Likewise, in a scene in *Bagger Vance*, Junuh's girlfriend Adele (Charlize Theron) tries to seduce him while Duke Ellington's 1930 recording of "Mood Indigo" plays softly in the background. In the scene in *The Green Mile* where the newly healed Paul makes love to his wife, her radio is playing Billie Holiday's 1937 recording of "I Can't Give You Anything but Love." In the narrative world of these films, "white people become more sensitive—and thus, in some situations, more sexual—in the presence of black music."[29] What black music succeeds in doing is to offer another layer of "black enchantment" through sexual healing and love.

Magic and Music

The preceding review of the representational trope of "black enchantment" and how it is figured in popular cinema through music and magic brings the discussion to the screening of Orpheus, the ancient mythological singer and sufferer of profound romantic loss. As portrayed in films and television shows that derive their themes from classical mythology and literature, the role of Orpheus often merges the magical and musical elements inherent in the visual and sound aesthetic of "black enchantment" on the screen. And this started with the film *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*) (1959), an adaptation of the ancient myth set in the modern context of the musical-religious festival of Carnaval in late 1950s Rio de Janeiro. Although this film predates the recent surge of Black Angel films, *Black Orpheus* originated a context where both the mystical and musical elements of "black enchantment" were explicitly combined.

Black Orpheus was an international collaboration of production companies in Brazil, France, and Italy; it was filmed in Rio de Janeiro with a mostly Brazilian cast and crew and was directed by French director Marcel Camus. The film's original Brazilian title, *Orfeu do Carnaval*, "Orpheus of Carnival," makes no reference to race, while the film's French title, *Orphée Noir*, Italian title, *Orfeo Negro*, and English title, *Black Orpheus*, all do; eventually the film would be called *Orfeu Negro* in Portuguese as well.[30] While Camus' bold, effervescent film has been criticized by some reviewers for being "a French tourist's view of Brazil,"[31] primarily because of its romanticized "postcard" depiction of the poor living in the *favelas*, or shanty towns, of Rio de Janeiro, *Black Orpheus* was one of the first films to showcase Brazilian culture and the Portuguese language, and it did so

with an almost entirely black cast.[32] The film is even better known for its pioneering soundtrack, composed by Brazilian music legends Antônio Carlos "Tom" Jobim and Luis Bonfá.[33] The film's release, scored with Bonfá's famous track "Samba d'Orfeu," is credited with spreading the romantic new sound of *bossa nova* from Rio de Janeiro to the United States via cutting-edge jazz musicians such as Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd. Like the Orpheus of myth, the film *Black Orpheus* enchanted audiences with its music.

The casting of the lead role in *Black Orpheus* established a physical archetype for the magical musician figure in later screen portrayals: Orfeu is played by Afro-Brazilian actor Breno Mello, a former professional soccer player. In *Black Orpheus*, Orfeu is a handsome musician well loved by the people of his *favela* for his charisma and expert guitar playing. Orfeu makes numerous self-referential comments about his role as the mythological musician "Orpheus," that there was another before him, and that there will be one after him. Thus he sees himself as something more than himself: he is the perpetuation of an archetype.[34] In the imagery of the film, Orfeu is associated with Apollo, the classical god of music and sunlight (and the father of Orpheus, in some versions of the myth), through his role as King of the Day in the heliocentric Carnaval show, and he is represented by the large, handmade sun he carries in the parade.[35] The local children believe he makes the sun rise by playing his guitar, which further links him with divinely inspired musical powers. His shack in the *favela* is filled with animals (note that his kitten is musically named "Caruso"), just as in the ancient myth of Orpheus' enchantment of the beasts. Thus, Orfeu in *Black Orpheus* is the visual embodiment of the magical, musical, and divine, a representation of Orpheus that dovetails with the "black enchantment" phenomenon of the late 1990s and beyond.

Although this visual cinematic archetype was established by *Black Orpheus*, it was not until much later, in the millennial year 2000, that it was resurrected on screen. At the very height of the Black Angel phenomenon in popular cinema, this representational pattern was followed in the casting of Jamaican-British actor Adrian Lester as Orpheus in the made-for-television movie *Jason and the Argonauts* (2000), directed by Nick Willing. But, while Orfeu in *Black Orpheus* was the active subject of his own film and the protagonist of his own narrative, the *Jason* film once again sidelines the role of Orpheus as a magical helper of the main character, just as in the other contemporary Black Angel movies. In numerous scenes, the film *Jason and the Argonauts* shows the audience an Orpheus who only wishes to join the crew of the Argo to relieve the pain he suffers after the loss of Eurydice by assisting Jason on his quest and providing eerie-sounding music for the rapt sailors.

Figure 10.1 Orfeu (Breno Mello) plays guitar for the local children in *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro*) (1959). Dispat Films/Gemma/Tupan Filmes.

That same magical year saw the release of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), directed by the Coen brothers as a very loose adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*.[36] Here the musical Black Orpheus figure fuses with the cinematic Black Angel in the character of uncanny guitar player Tommy Johnson, played by blues musician/actor Chris Thomas King. Even in the case of a real historical figure such as Delta blues musician Johnson—the figure was no doubt chosen for having his own rumored associations with the occult—the image of Orpheus is ingeniously evoked by the role, given the film's narrative context of Greek epic legend. Although the film replays the old story that Tommy has sold his soul to the devil, and thus seems to be on the wrong side of things "spiritually speaking," his expressive musical accompaniment helps Everett (George Clooney) and the boys get their old-timey music on the radio, and soothes their souls in more reflective moments. Like a typical Black Angel, Tommy is clearly a supporting player, bringing both music and a sense of spirituality to the main characters. Later, the trio of white protagonists returns the favor by saving Tommy from the Ku Klux Klan.

As the visual precedent of the Black Orpheus figure has become more prominent since the year 2000, parody would be sure to follow. In *Scary*

Movie 3 (2003), there are two comical Black Angel roles: Aunt ShaNeequa (Queen Latifah), who plays an obvious send-up of the Oracle in *The Matrix* as she tries to help the white girl in trouble, and her husband, who is now logically named Orpheus (Eddie Griffin), who becomes irritated when his prophetic wife tells him the outcome of the game on television.

Recently, the influence of *Black Orpheus* seems to have become strong enough to shape the contours of the Black Angel figure by simply imbuing him with musical abilities, as in the case of a character on HBO's vampire drama *True Blood* (2008–2012). In the second season of the series, the character of "Eggs" Benedict Talley, played by African-American actor Mehcad Brooks, is a close companion and servant to the maniacal white maenad, Maryann Forrester (Michelle Forbes), whose surname evokes her sylvan origins; while spellbound by her divine powers, Eggs helps Maryann enlist the local townsfolk to perform her wild Dionysian revels. It must be noted that in the original novel by Charlaine Harris, the character of Eggs is white, but under the transformational influence of the cinematic archetype, he becomes a black helper figure in the series. Moreover, because he is a character associated with a Greek mythological theme on screen, Eggs is shown strumming a guitar in many of his scenes. Under the spell of what we may now call the "*Black Orpheus* effect," Eggs is rendered both mystical and musical.

In the end, acknowledging that the role of Orfeu in *Black Orpheus* established a visual archetype for the magical musician figure that influenced the Black Angel phenomenon of the millennial cinema raises more questions than it answers. Does the figure of Black Orpheus in screen texts that refer to or re-create the ancient world reinforce the larger cinematic trend of pressing black music, black spirituality and suffering, and other aspects of black culture into the selfless service of white protagonists? Or does it—can it—begin to challenge or even reverse the trend? Orpheus, the mystical musician of ancient legend, represents a key figure of the suffering hero in Greek mythology; thus it is no surprise that the Black Orpheus figure on screen plays into the persistent mythologies in modern cinema about black hardship, black musicality, and black spirituality. But while Orpheus' music may have become more readily discernible, it seems his magic is now only conjured for the benefit of others.

Notes

1. Gabbard (2004) 144; see also Bogle (2001), Guerrero (1993), Cripps (1993), and Cripps (1977).
2. Gabbard (2004) 8.
3. On racial representation as the key organizing principle of identity in contemporary Western media, see Dyer (1997).

4. The main ancient sources for the myth of Orpheus and his love for Eurydice are Vergil, *Georgics* 4.315–558, and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.1–105, 11.1–84. For the Orpheus and Eurydice theme in film, see Cyrino (2008).
5. Gabbard (2004) 6.
6. Gabbard (2004) 6.
7. For example, two films that showcase Black Angel characters and have evocative titles are *The Angel Levine* (1970) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994).
8. Okorafor-Mbachu (2004).
9. Cripps quoted in Kempley (2003).
10. For the significance of the figure of Draba in the Civil Rights–era film *Spartacus* (1960), see Cyrino (2005) 118–19.
11. Kempley (2003).
12. Okorafor-Mbachu (2004).
13. Reported on CNNPolitics.com, "RNC chairman candidate defends 'Barack the Magic Negro' song," December 26, 2008.
14. Gabbard (2004) 143.
15. Gabbard (2004) 154.
16. On the motif of racial inversion in the film, see Gabbard (2004) 158–60.
17. For the interweaving of religious and racial meaning in the film, see Williams (2001) 301–8 and Gabbard (2004) 144–51.
18. On the female Oracle as Black Angel, see Gabbard (2004) 166–68.
19. Gabbard (2004) 160–65.
20. Pressfield's most famous novel is perhaps *Gates of Fire* (1998), about the ancient Battle of Thermopylae.
21. For *Bagger Vance* as the peak of the "Magic Negro" phenomenon, see Gabbard (2004) 170–74.
22. The *Bhagavad Gita*, meaning "Song of the Bhagavan," is narrated as a dialogue between the warrior-prince Arjuna and his guide and charioteer, the god-king Krishna.
23. Gabbard (2004) 165.
24. Kinsley (2008).
25. Gabbard (2004) 166.
26. Gabbard (2004) 15.
27. On the emotional authority in the black singing voice, see Griffin (2004); Gabbard (1996).
28. Gabbard (2004) 51–53, 59–61, 65–72.
29. Gabbard (2004) 287 n.5.
30. Stam (1997) 169.
31. Review of *Black Orpheus* at moviediva.com, October 2004.
32. See Stam (1997) 166–77; Rodrigues (2001).
33. On the film's revolutionary soundtrack, see McGowan and Pessanha (1998).
34. See Brill (2013) on the film's use of Afro-Brazilian signifiers to express the universality of the Orpheus myth.
35. Cyrino (2008) 143.
36. On the tension between classical and pop culture in the film, see Toscano (2009).

11

Re-conceiving Hercules: Divine Paternity and Christian Anxiety in *Hercules* (2005)

Meredith E. Safran

In August 2004, NBC announced the filming of its made-for-television movie *Hercules*: "The definitive re-telling of the most famous myth of all: the story of a half-god half-man whose extraordinary feats of strength would elevate him to the status of legend on Earth and immortality in the heavens."[1] But the finished product rejects the origin story of the ancient Greek hero Herakles (better known by his Latin name Hercules[2]). Instead of Zeus, *Hercules* presents a blasphemous human sociopath, mistakenly believed to have been Zeus, as the hero's father. Depriving Hercules of divine paternity allows producer Robert Halmi Sr. and director Roger Young to reshape his life story. Rather than achieving apotheosis, Hercules repudiates his false identity as "son of Zeus" and concludes his Labors with conjugal domesticity and fatherhood on earth. This hero's journey is not cosmic but spiritual—and aimed at an audience for whom there is only one true Son of the King of Heaven.

Hercules' revision of the hero's myth addresses a long-standing Christian discomfort with the resemblance between Jesus and Herakles, starting with their story-patterns.[3] Both were engendered by the King of the Universe upon a chaste virgin promised to another, who agrees to raise the divine child despite not being its father. Both were mortally threatened as infants and precocious in manifesting divine descent; both traveled while performing marvelous deeds. Both suffered persecution by political authorities; betrayal by close associates led both to excruciating public deaths with sacrificial import, then to reunions with their Heavenly Fathers. Both were

recognized as gods and worshipped by humans. Like Jesus, Herakles was called "savior" and hailed as an exemplar of manly excellence (*exemplum virtutis*), both physical and spiritual, well beyond antiquity.[4] Herakles was claimed as an authorizing symbol and even an ancestor by Christian political actors throughout Europe, and the phrase "Christian Hercules" entered Western literature.[5] Even cast as a forerunner of Jesus in the Christian worldview, Herakles' own identity survived.

The popularity of classical mythology in American culture has bedeviled the fundamentalism-inclined sects of Protestantism, including many evangelicals whose faith was forged in the crucible of post-1970s "Moral Majority"–era Christianity.[6] Their entrance into the mainstream helped to propel George W. Bush to the presidency in 2000, and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) to box-office history.[7] Halmi and Young were veterans of the Christian-friendly entertainment market. Young helmed Biblical-themed projects including *Joseph in Egypt* (1995), *Moses* (1995), *Solomon* (1997), *Jesus* (1999), and *St. Paul* (2000). Halmi had produced not only the 1997 TV miniseries *The Odyssey* and *Jason and the Argonauts* (2000) but also several Christian-themed projects: a Mother Teresa biopic (1997), a Noah's Ark miniseries (1999), *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (2004), a Ten Commandments TV movie (2006), and numerous Christmas programs. In interviews, Halmi promised to emphasize Hercules' spiritual dimension.[8]

The rise of the American evangelical market explains the creative choices behind *Hercules*. This audience would applaud not only the movie's devaluation of Zeus and the meaning of his paternity but also the hero's attainment of "born again" consciousness; the hero's public denunciation of what is "ungodly" in the pagan gods suggests proto-Christian theology. From a cinematic perspective, *Hercules* draws on mid-twentieth-century Biblical epics and Jesus biopics; Christian sayings and symbols also pepper the movie. While dissociating Hercules from Jesus, the movie still presents the hero's story as a "hagiopic": not merely biographical but celebratory of Hercules' exemplary conversion to espousing Christian values.[9] *Hercules* sits squarely within the tradition of attempting to turn the greatest hero of Greco-Roman antiquity to Christian ends.

The "Divine Paternity" Drama

Denying the divine paternity of Hercules defied expectations, starting with the network that promoted him as "fathered by the supreme Greek god Zeus."[10] Even critics reviewing *Hercules* for *USA Today*, *NY Daily News*, *The Washington Post*, and *Variety* persisted in identifying Zeus as the hero's father.[11] Recent depictions in *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (TV movies, 1994; TV series, 1995–1999) and Disney's *Hercules* (1997) had dramatized

Hercules' relationship with his heavenly father (Anthony Quinn in *HTLJ*; Rip Torn in *Hercules*). Even when the hero renounces his immortality to pursue romantic love in the first major "peplum" film *Hercules* (*Le Fatiche di Ercole*) (1958)—as he does later in Disney's version—his divine paternity is implicitly affirmed.[12]

The divine paternity of Herakles was established before the earliest known Greek literature, Homer's *Iliad*, and never seriously questioned throughout the many accretions to Herakles' myth in antiquity.[13] In Greek culture, status is transmitted through reified "blood"; Zeus' paternity made Herakles both physically and ontologically superior to fellow mortals, destined to perform great deeds—like scores of characters in Greek myth with a divine parent. But the vast majority of such characters, whom moderns customarily call "heroes," died; Herakles became a god. Even when a narrative foregrounded his mortal identity to endow his suffering with pathos, as in Euripides' tragedy *Herakles*, his ascent to Olympus could be assumed. Traditionally this apotheosis is tied to his works, which stem from his paternity—as does the goddess Hera's relentless persecution of this proof of her husband's infidelity.

Nevertheless, the ancient mythic tradition provides grounds for questioning the paternity of Herakles, since a demigod's mother was usually impregnated under irregular circumstances.[14] Sexual access to a woman was normatively controlled by her father, then her husband, but gods didn't ask permission of lower beings—including of the woman, who was customarily raped.[15] A god approached his object of desire in disguise without legitimating the intercourse or its offspring, by human standards. A socially illegitimate pregnancy created dramatic tension due to human ignorance of divine actions, abetted by woman's culturally constructed lack of credibility. Both the woman and her illegitimate offspring would risk punishment, even death, from her male guardian until divine paternity could be validated.

Herakles' begetting was, unusually, apparently licit and consensual; disguised as Alcmene's new husband Amphitryon, Zeus impregnated her at home in the marriage bed.[16] Even she is surprised to learn that her sexual partner had not been Amphitryon, who returns home from war the next day and accuses her of infidelity. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides all reputedly produced tragedies on this episode; a Southern Italian vase painting depicts Alcmene seeking refuge from her enraged husband at the altar of Zeus, who sends a thunderbolt to signal his protection. Better known is Plautus' Roman comedy *Amphitryon*, in which Jupiter vouches for Alcmene's innocence and predicts his son's greatness.[17]

This pre-natal contention is especially suitable for drama. Since the action of epic is located deep in the past relative to the audience's present,

the hero's paternity is validated by his story being told in retrospect. Characters in the *Iliad*, including Zeus himself, affirm Herakles' divine paternity; the poet's divine source the Muse, authorizes it for the audience. The content of tragedy, although derived from the same distant past, plays out in real time before the audience: embodied by actors on stage, unmediated by a narrator. Thus a movie has more in common with drama than epic: its action unfolds before the audience's eyes, authoritative via immediacy rather than divine approval. *Hercules* uses this tactic to address anxiety about the hero's Jesus-like paternity, and its implications, by graphically dramatizing his conception.

The Seminal Event: Seeds of Doubt

Cinematic depictions of Jesus must decide how to depict God as human; to be Christian-friendly, *Hercules* must conversely insist on the humanness of a figure long acknowledged as a god.[18] His true father must not be divine; for good measure, his reputed father must be unappealing. *Hercules* begins with a traditional Amphitryon (Timothy Dalton) voyaging homeward after avenging Cretan pirates' murder of his new wife's family. He bellows at the storming sky, "How do I offend you, Zeus? Why do you keep me from my marriage bed?" Focalized through the pious man's outcry at his (traditional) delay, Zeus is framed as inscrutably capricious.

Amphitryon's outrage is interrupted by one of the captured pirates: Antaeus (Tyler Mane). Traditionally an earthborn giant and late-career combatant whom Herakles dispatches in a wrestling match, later one of the most popular figures in post-antique depictions of Herakles' exploits, Antaeus becomes the movie's villain.[19] He denigrates Zeus as less powerful than Hera, whom this self-proclaimed son of Mother Earth reveres above all. Antaeus unchains himself, rips the red cloak from his captor's shoulders, and throws himself overboard—after Amphitryon slashes a bloody thunderbolt into his upper arm, branding him for the god he scorned. Although frustrated, Amphitryon defends his god against blasphemy, but viewers may already doubt Zeus' righteousness.

The confrontation between Amphitryon and Antaeus innovatively sets up Alcmene's traditional confusion of Zeus and her husband. After swimming ashore, Antaeus finds Alcmene (Elizabeth Perkins) alone at Hera's altar in the woods. Alcmene mistakes this red-cloaked man in the shadows for Amphitryon; he throws her down and rapes her. An inset shot framing the red slashes on his upper arm confirms Antaeus' identity for the audience. But Alcmene thinks her husband has violated her, as she says the next morning at home while brandishing the telltale cloak. *Hercules* thus uses the tradition of disguise and mistaken identity to turn Alcmene's

unimpeachable ignorance into a flawed assumption, deflating the "revelation" of Zeus' paternity.

Although Amphitryon easily deduces Antaeus' guilt—a "fact," to viewers—*Hercules* repurposes the dramatic value of Zeus' paternity. For Alcmene is the other great villain of *Hercules*. Through scenes intercut with Amphitryon's voyage, *Hercules* replaces the virginal, dutiful Alcmene with a scenery-chewing high priestess of Hera presiding over the goddess' annual "harvest festival." These invented all-female nocturnal drug-fueled rites in the forest culminate in the sacrifice of an unwilling male victim, the "harvest king." The pack of masked women collectively stabs him to death after Alcmene pontificates on the cycle of death and life popularly associated with agricultural fertility rites.[20]

This depravity masquerading as piety is punished such that viewers might perceive a providential hand at work. As Zeus' thunder rumbles above, the "harvest king" (Kim Coates) is revealed to be a hermaphrodite. After Alcmene blinds this defective sacrifice in retribution for seeing secret rites, he sits up and exclaims, "Zeus has given me a new sight. I am Tiresias . . . Zeus will punish you this very night, and Hera will not answer your prayers!" As rain pours from the sky, the women scatter and Alcmene, who has spotted Amphitryon's ship offshore, kneels before Hera's altar to recollect an earlier prayer: that her husband should never return. The red-cloaked figure then appears, as if delivering divine retribution: instead of Amphitryon's traditional threat to punish Alcmene upon realizing her (inadvertent) adultery, this Alcmene is punished—with rape. When faced with Amphitryon's innocence, Alcmene recalls the prophecy of Tiresias in voice-over, interprets her rape as its fulfillment, and names Zeus as her rapist. What myth posed as domestic melodrama, the movie transforms into a grotesque morality play.

Gospel Un-Truth: Perverting the Annunciation

The reinvention of Herakles' conception dissociates the hero from Jesus by subverting the Annunciation. In this episode, the archangel Gabriel announces to a chaste and pious Mary that the Holy Spirit will enter her to create a son and savior (Luke 1:26–38; Matthew 1:18–21), dramatized in *Life of Christ* (1907), *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912), *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (1966), and *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977).[21] *Hercules* inverts this episode: no longer a virginal bride who is honorably impregnated by the god before her husband can consummate their marriage, Alcmene is a depraved monster who wishes to destroy both her husband and the divine patriarch; the prophet Tiresias is the divine messenger who announces Zeus' imminent punishment of Alcmene—namely, her impregnation by

rape. Cultural logic leads characters to accept Zeus as her rapist, endowing Alcmene with a twisted version of Mary's honor: she receives the epithet "violated of Zeus," and Hera's devotees slavishly execute Alcmene's plots to destroy Hercules. Will Amphitryon become Joseph, keeping this pre-impregnated wife and protecting the "divine" child as if it were his own?

Since the child born of Alcmene's rape will not be Amphitryon's, both initially agree: it must die. But while Alcmene is eager to help ("Do you think that I would bear the child of your degenerate god?"), Amphitryon shrinks from exposing the pitiable newborn and uses reverence for Zeus as a pretext by turning Alcmene's logic against her: "If he is the son of Zeus, as you claim, I'll not be responsible for his death." Prefiguring Christian ethics and contemporary culture wars over reproductive rights, the righteous man senses that even a life created by rape must be preserved. Filling Hera's traditional role, Alcmene attempts infanticide by dumping snakes into Hercules' cradle.[22] When Amphitryon finds baby Hercules happily strangling the serpents, he becomes a believer: "Zeus! He must be your son!"

Like Joseph, Amphitryon becomes a loving father because of his belief in Zeus' paternity. In Hercules' teen years, Amphitryon tenderly comforts the dejected youth (Jamie Croft), who learns that King Creon has, per tradition, decreed his exile for (apparently) accidentally killing his music teacher Linus (Sean Astin) in a fit of rage. Amphitryon arranges for Hercules to tend his herds in the hills with the centaur Chiron (Robert Taylor) and gives him two innovative gifts. First, a pair of metal wristlets decorated with snakes memorializes Amphitryon's conversion to belief in Zeus' paternity. The other gift—apparently withheld until now—is the "truth": "I'll always think of you as my son, but you were born of greater blood than mine . . . Your father is Zeus Almighty!" The music swells as the camera zooms in on Hercules' astonished face, but viewers know the real truth.

Sins of the Father: Hercules as "Son of Zeus"

Hercules' (false) identity as the son of Zeus is no blessing but a curse, for his traditional divine precocity of strength and sexuality is played as criminality. Innovatively, the first testimony to this effect comes from Linus; he had only been knocked unconscious then healed by the forest nymph Deianira (Leelee Sobieski), to whom he complains while she bathes naked in the river. Linus opines that Hercules' violent nature is "not surprising, really, considering his vile conception. I was there . . . I saw Zeus take Alcmene . . . I saw the mark of his divinity upon him: a thunderbolt! Hercules has inherited all of Zeus' brazen audacity." The hero bursts out of the bushes chasing a boar, forcing both Linus and Deianira to take cover—only

the former successfully; Hercules laughs at the cowering nymph and snatches her dress from a nearby rock.

Although light-hearted music suggests a "meet-cute," the action echoes Linus' reminder that Hercules was conceived through the "brazen audacity" of rape. Once Deianira escapes, Linus jumps up to confront him. Believing Linus a ghost come to avenge his "killing," Hercules babbles, "I didn't know my own strength. I didn't know I was the son of Zeus!" Linus only berates Hercules for "molesting . . . a virgin goddess and sacred," ordering him "never to abuse her with your foul lust again!" "Yes my foul lust!" stammers the chastened youth, who later announces himself to Deianira as "son of Zeus" before again repudiating his "foul lust." The connection of "foul lust" to his paternity speaks to Christian ethics far more than to the norms of Greek myth.[23]

Yet the "son of Zeus" cannot avoid "foul lust" and "brazen audacity." At Hera's annual harvest festival, like his biological father, Hercules encounters a lone celebrant: his childhood crush and Alcmene's niece/protégé, Princess Megara (Leeanna Walsman). Hercules perceives her altered state and her bloody hands but accepts her sexual advances. Antaeus reappears in the next scene, attempting to steal Amphitryon's cattle.[24] Warning the thief, Hercules boasts, "Amphitryon is only my adoptive father. Zeus is my real one!" Antaeus counters, "Son of Zeus, I am Antaeus, son of Mother Earth. Grovel before her!" Chiron gallops to the rescue, but Antaeus lifts and throws him before escaping on horseback. Humiliated, Hercules pouts, "If a common cattle thief can [lift you], so can the son of a god!" Just then, King Creon (John Bach) arrives to arrest Hercules as a "violator": he has impregnated Megara with triplets! Even the "son of Zeus" cannot impregnate a princess through extramarital sex with impunity in this movie—unlike in Greek myths. Just like his father, Hercules escapes on horseback.

As a sky-god whose harsh and inscrutable treatment of humans is nevertheless accepted by the pious, Zeus resembled God the Father of the "Old Testament": destined to yield to the intercession of his loving son. By repeatedly connecting him to murderous strength and sexual violations via his son, *Hercules* makes Zeus not just capricious but morally repugnant. Only Antaeus stridently blasphemes against Zeus, but the fact that Antaeus' and Hercules' actions are deemed criminal except when attributed to Zeus suggests the hypocrisy of pagan theology without articulating the critique. Since Zeus' deeds are actually those of Antaeus, viewers are left to interpret the juxtaposition of divine king and the monstrous sociopath who became the personification of lust in the allegorical tradition.[25] *Hercules*' obsession with sex both reflects Herakles' prodigious sex life and underlines the incommensurability of Hercules and Jesus, reinforcing the Christian preoccupation with sexual behavior.[26]

Repudiating Divine Paternity: Hercules' "Rebirth"

Shamed rather than glorified through association with Zeus, Hercules re-evaluates his paternity over the next two scenes: the combat that marks his coming of age and the filicide that returns him to exile. Convinced that victory will win King Creon's pardon, Hercules (now Paul Telfer) leaves Chiron's protection to hunt the Hydra (traditionally the second Labor of Herakles), even though Amphitryon, still devoted to his "divine" son, has warned him that the king is nearby. Hercules slays the beast and saves the king, who grants him both return and marriage to Megara. Yet disaster mars his triumph: the Hydra kills Amphitryon. Dying in Hercules' arms, he wheezes, "Zeus is your father; he won't forsake you . . . You'll find the strength within yourself: the god is in you." Thus Amphitryon echoes Luke 17:21: "The kingdom of God is within you." But when Creon addresses him as "son of Zeus," Hercules demurs: "Here lies the only father I ever knew. He raised me, believed in me, loved me." Herakles' conquests validated his divine paternity; Hercules values supportive love and re-assigns paternity to Amphitryon: his first step toward "truth."

Hercules' changing values do not alter his enemies' beliefs.[27] Before the wedding, Alcmene (adapting Hera's traditional intervention) innovatively convinces Megara to frame Hercules for murder by sacrificing her sons, arguing that "the blood of Zeus flows in them; they will be Hera's tools to destroy her enemy." After Megara drugs him, Hercules mistakes his costumed and sword-wielding sons for demons and kills them, invalidating his claim to paternity. Once sober, he runs into the woods and builds himself a pyre. "Zeus!" he bellows indignantly to the thundering sky—recalling Amphitryon's opening outcry and final words, which together imply Jesus' final words from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Traditionally, Herakles' career-capping immolation results in apotheosis; here, a lightning bolt only strikes him unconscious. King Creon interprets the lightning as a divine act and refuses Alcmene and Megara's call for Hercules' death. The collusion between mother and seducer at the site of the hero's intended self-sacrifice perversely echoes the cinematic depiction of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene growing closer through the ministry of Jesus and bearing witness together at his crucifixion—as portrayed, for example, in Young's *Jesus* (1999).[28] These women have grown close through worship—but of Hera. The collective inability to achieve Hercules' death further distances him from Jesus, while still conjuring a twisted reflection of the latter's myth. Having failed to be Jesus, Hercules' loss of faith enables him to become "born again."

The oracle at Delphi provides an ironic stage for Hercules' spiritual rebirth. Traditionally, Apollo's priestess instructs Herakles to enslave himself to King Eurystheus, Hera's favorite, to expunge his blood guilt; upon completion of these Labors, he would become a god. In *Hercules*, the prophet Tiresias declares, "Dead as a hero, dead as a god, you must be reborn as a man." Hercules' companion Linus (who rejoined Hercules while battling the Hydra) objects, but the hero concurs: "I believe Zeus' thunderbolt was meant to kill me. Zeus would not abase his true son before his enemies. I'm no immortal."[29]

Hercules' renunciation of divinity triggers a shift from an inverted Jesus biopic to a conversion tale reminiscent of mid-twentieth-century "Christians in Rome" epics.[30] In films like *Quo Vadis* (1951) and *The Robe* (1953), a pagan warrior exchanges his false beliefs for the Good News, often encouraged by the love of a Good Woman. This conversion directs his use of violence toward upholding the ethical values of American Christianity: freedom and defense of the oppressed. Likewise, Hercules redefines heroism during his Labors: from the pursuit of personal glory to the penitent fulfillment of duty. Thus he becomes a champion for the people of Thebes oppressed by the decadent tyrant Eurystheus, who stands in for this genre's villain, the Roman emperor. Hercules is encouraged by the "virgin goddess" Deianira; she heals him after his lightning strike, provides moral support throughout his Labors, and advocates "balance" that entails Hera (women) reconciling with Zeus (men who rule them). Hercules conceives a son, Hyllus, with this spiritual handmaiden, and their nuptials affirm the humanness of Hercules in a romantic, if anticlimactic, final scene that promotes "family values."

Onward, Proto-Christian Soldier: Defeating Unworthy Gods and Fathers

Hercules' acceptance of his humanity colors subsequent encounters during his Labors with his biological father Antaeus. Now rampaging through villages as the Cretan Bull (traditionally the seventh Labor of Herakles), Antaeus kills Hercules' other father-figure, Chiron. In combat Hercules and Antaeus recognize each other; Hercules declares, "Son of Mother Earth, I return you to her embrace," but Antaeus crows, "The Earth is Mother Hera's life-force, and source of my strength." As Antaeus rubs earth on his arms, Hercules knocks him into a nearby pond then replicates the iconic maneuver of their first encounter by lifting Antaeus into the air, vaunting, "Your goddess washes off of you . . . Where's your precious mother now?" The reborn Hercules' victory negates Antaeus' claim of divine descent and false consciousness.

Hercules' new attitude toward the divine culminates in a dramatic declaration of faith. Before the populace of Thebes, assembled before Tiresias' new cliffside shrine, Hercules thunders at the gods:

> I pray to them one and all, and all as one. And to all gods I make sacrifice; not a sacrifice of blood, but of reverence: to their nobility, their love, their honor, their courage, their kindness, their justice. But to their pettiness, their wantonness, their cruelty, their savagery, their vanity, their injustice, I make no sacrifice; I pay no reverence; I deny all that is ungodly in them . . . I will worship and try to emulate all that is great in the gods, nothing more . . . When my time comes, they can judge me worthy or not.

This grand gesture would be more effective in the gods' presence, but to depict them as real would conflict with the ideal audience's theology. The suggestion that the gods can be addressed "all as one," and the separation of the Christian-friendly qualities from "ungodly" ones, reassuringly prefigures a familiar and "correct" formulation of the divine. Although defiant, Hercules properly subordinates himself: he will "worship and try to emulate" their good qualities; implicitly upon his death, he will accept their judgment—though not a function of the Greek gods in myth or religion.

Figure 11.1 Hercules (Paul Telfer) defies the gods in *Hercules* (2005). Hallmark Entertainment/Lion's Gate.

The final Labor of Hercules, which should involve returning alive from the Underworld with Hades' guard-dog Cerberus, is supplanted by his decisive repudiation of paternity and obviates any claim to resurrection. Since Eurystheus had ordered the Bull captured alive, Antaeus survived so that Megara, Hera's new high priestess, can send him to ambush Hercules. During their combat, Hercules' companion Linus has a revelation: "[Antaeus] was the one with Alcmene! I saw the thunderbolt on his arm and I thought he was Zeus—but he may be your father!" Antaeus confirms: "Amphitryon gave me this [scar]. Maybe I paid him back by usurping his bride night." Hercules retorts: "Why shouldn't a dog be a Bull that is really just a man . . . It doesn't matter who my father is: Zeus, Amphitryon, or Cretan Bull . . . My birth doesn't matter, only my life . . . We are not gods, Antaeus, only men: only very strong men." Revealing Antaeus' paternity as Hercules defeats him highlights the hero's liberation, from a narrative and psychological perspective. Such liberation from false belief through a rationalizing approach to myth is first attested among Greek thinkers, including Euhemerus. Understandably, proposing that now-inflated memories of great men gave rise to the (false) pagan gods becomes popular with Christian writers who want to discredit established deities and repurpose "pagan" myths in an allegorical sense.[31]

Freed from the burdens of divinity and paternity, Hercules confronts the source of his false identity: Alcmene. He finds her at Tiresias' cliffside shrine, mourning Megara's choice of her favored son Iphicles as the recent "harvest king." "Mother," he declares, "I killed the man you thought my father, and he was not Zeus." Her life doubly voided of meaning, Alcmene compensates by fulfilling one last prophecy. When Tiresias warns Hercules, "You'll find no victory [against Eurystheus] until the highborn woman of Tiryns dies," Alcmene identifies herself as that woman, declaring, "I do not know how to live in your new world, Hercules, and I have wronged you for so long. Let me give you victory now . . . I gladly die!" She throws herself from the cliff, a penitent self-sacrifice in substitution for Jesus' sacrifice to initiate a new world order.[32]

Hercules "Redeemed"

Despite the protestations of Hercules, paternity matters. Its narrative and psychological centrality to *Hercules* mirrors its role in law, popular morality, and cultural narratives. Disproving the paternity of Zeus specifically, dramatizing the destructive results of that falsehood, and revealing the liberating power of the "truth" speaks to an audience that holds Jesus as unique. Indeed, the hero-worship once directed toward Herakles can be redirected toward Jesus, as his spiritual father and narrative exemplar.

Beyond repudiating his own false divinity and renouncing heroism characterized by audacious violence and sexual conquest, Hercules endures repeated persecution yet refrains from seeking revenge: he is exiled for Linus' feigned death; Megara's accusation of rape (which the movie treats as false) makes him a fugitive; and he accepts his Labors as punishment for killing his sons, which he later learns was a set-up. Reborn as a hero, Hercules defends the weak and avoids human bloodshed, even offering mercy to his foes: a cave-in kills Antaeus; his son Hyllus kills the tyrant Eurystheus; Hercules comforts and forgives the dying Megara after Eurystheus' errant arrow fells her. Reborn as a man, he sees conjugal procreative love, not immortality, as his goal. Altering the story of his conception thus enables a reconceptualization of the hero's cultural meaning, turning the greatest hero of the pre-Christian Mediterranean world into a proto-Christian culture warrior.

Notes

1. Quoted in "NBC Goes from Olympics to Olympus as Sean Astin, Leelee Sobieski, Timothy Dalton, Elizabeth Perkins and Paul Telfer (in Title Role) Star in Epic Miniseries 'Hercules,'" TheFutonCritic.com (August 23, 2004).
2. For clarity, "Herakles" denotes the character in the ancient mythic tradition, and "Hercules" in modern depictions.
3. Aune (1990); Stafford (2012) 202–6.
4. Galinsky (1972); Polleroß (1998); Stafford (2012) 213–15.
5. See Galinsky (1972) 185–293; Stafford (2012) 206–31; in Spain, see Angulo Iñiguez (1952) 121–90; in France, see Blanshard (2005) xi–xvi; on Ronsard's "Hercule Chrétien" and Milton's identification of Hercules with Christ, see Galinsky (1972) 203–6 and Allen (1961); on resistance to "Christian Hercules," see Simon (1955) 184–85.
6. On Greek mythology as a challenge for parents, see Shearer and Shearer (1993); on the rise of evangelicals in American culture and politics, see Wilcox (1989) and Wald and Calhoun-Brown (2014) 207–38.
7. Segal (2007); Trammell (2010).
8. See "Hercules (2005)," LeeleeSobieski.com (January 17, 2005); "Hercules," *Entertainment Weekly* 802 (January 21, 2005).
9. On the hagiopic, see Grace (2009).
10. Quoted in "NBC Goes from Olympics to Olympus" (see note 1).
11. Reviews by Bianco (2005), Bianculi (2005), Shales (2005), and Lowry (2005).
12. On *Hercules* (1958), see Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) 58–76 and Pomeroy (2013); on Disney's *Hercules* in the tradition of "peplum" films, see Pallant (2011).
13. On Herakles in antiquity, see Galinsky (1972), Gantz (1993), and Stafford (2012).
14. For the hero-myth pattern, see Raglan (1956, reprinted 1975) 173–85; Campbell (1949).

15. For rape in Greek myth, see Zeitlin (1986) and Scafuro (1990).
16. See Gantz (1993) 374–78.
17. On the influence of Plautus' *Amphitryon* on Herakles' conception story in modernity, see Blanshard (2005) 7–16.
18. For this and general problems attendant upon the "Jesus film," see Baugh (1997) 3–6 and Tatum (2013) 11–13.
19. On Antaeus' ancient presence, see Gantz (1993) 416–18; on his modern popularity, see Wilson (1983).
20. For cinematic precedents, see, e.g., Pasolini's *Medea* (1969) and *The Wicker Man* (1973).
21. For the Annunciation in these films, see Tatum (2013) 25, 113, 147; in film generally, O'Brien (2011).
22. See Gantz (1993) 377; in a variant, Amphitryon performs the same action as a paternity test.
23. See Loraux (1990) for the sexual excesses of Herakles; for the opposite trend with respect to Jesus in post–World War II films, see Eschrich (2011).
24. The red heifer has special significance for Christians looking to hasten the Second Coming of Jesus; see Gorenberg (2002) 7–29.
25. On Antaeus personifying lust in literature, see Swaim (1978) 143; in visual art, see Jacobsen (1981); Wilson (1983).
26. Protest erupted over Jesus' fantasy of leaving the cross to live a conjugal life with Mary Magdalene portrayed in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988); see Baugh (1997) 51–71 and Tatum (2013) 189–204.
27. *Jesus Christ, Superstar* (1973) emphasizes that others' expectations of Jesus trapped him; see Flesher and Torry (2007) 134–35.
28. See Tatum (2013) 223–36 on Young's *Jesus* (1999); Eschrich (2011) 525–26 on Young's depiction of Mary Magdalene.
29. Contrast with depictions of Jesus making "I am . . ." statements, catalogued at Tatum (2013) 312–13.
30. For this subset of ancient epic films, see Babington and Evans (1992) 177–226; Flesher and Torry (2007) 55–69.
31. For rationalizing theories of myth, see Graf (1993) 16–23, 168–98.
32. Thanks to Nicholas Rynearson for this observation.

12

The Twilight of Olympus: Deicide and the End of the Greek Gods

Vincent Tomasso

The divinities of ancient Greece have been a staple of cinema from at least as early as Aphrodite's appearance in the Italian silent short film *La Caduta di Troia* (1911), and they have continued to appear regularly in films based on ancient Greek myths.[1] Other screen texts have reinforced the importance of the Greek gods in modern popular culture, from the *God of War* video game series (2005–), to the *Percy Jackson* film franchise (*The Lightning Thief*, 2010; *Sea of Monsters*, 2013), to the television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001). But the Greek gods are also part of antiquity's "radical alterity";[2] that is, screen texts use the gods to mark out how different ancient Greece was from the modern West through their arrogance and fickleness. This vision of divinity is problematic for modern Western audiences whose cultures are heavily influenced by Christian ideas, and so some screen texts of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries foretell Olympus' demise.[3] This chapter analyzes inflections of the "twilight of the Greek gods" motif in films and television programs, to make sense of what they communicate about how the West wants to view the legacy of classical antiquity.[4]

The Paradox of the Dying God

Although the idea of a god leaving permanently or dying is paradoxical to Western audiences familiar with the narratives of the Abrahamic religions, there are abundant examples of this phenomenon in the mythologies of

cultures from around the world, from ancient Egypt to Hawai'i.[5] By contrast, the gods of ancient Greece are described in our earliest extant texts as "deathless and ageless for all their days," starting with the eighth-century BC poet Homer.[6] As Jenny Strauss Clay and others have argued, the Greek gods are defined by their difference from typical mortal categories. They are born but never grow old.[7] They eat and drink only ambrosia and nectar, items that are not normally available to mortals. The very words "ambrosia" and "nectar" are negations of mortality. The root of "ambrosia" is related to the ancient Greek word for "mortal," *brotos*, and negated by an alpha privative prefix. "Nectar" is composed of the root NEK- (as in *nekros*, "corpse") and the suffix -TAR (related to "not" in Sanskrit). On the battlefield these gods can be injured and experience pain, though they cannot die from their wounds.[8]

The closest state to death for Greek gods is immobility: Hesiod describes how perjured gods are punished with a coma in which they are unable to breathe or speak (*Theogony* 793–98); similarly, in Homer's *Iliad* the goddess Dione reports that Ares "would have died" (*Iliad* 5.388) had Hermes not freed him from his imprisonment in a bronze jar.[9] In a handful of instances, gods actually die in ancient Greek texts: a Cretan tradition held that there was a grave of Zeus, and the religious sect of Orphism taught that Dionysus, the god of wine, was dismembered, cannibalized, and then resurrected.[10] But the authors of these texts are philosophers and non-mainstream religious groups, so their depictions did not become part of the tradition that inspired modern storytellers such as Hamilton (1942), the d'Aulaires (1962), and Evslin (1966), whose popular retellings of Greek myth have greatly influenced screenwriters and producers.[11]

Thus the "twilight" motif is an emphatically modern addition to received ancient Greek myths.[12] Like countless adapters before them, modern artists add, subtract, and change various elements of the ancient Greek myths to accord with their own aims, historical contexts, and so on. This has been a defining aspect of ancient Greek myths throughout Western history; these narratives are capable of supporting a multiplicity of meanings that allow different societies to adapt them to suit their own needs. As Joanna Paul notes, "Since the stuff of ancient myth and literature is continually recast and reshaped by ancient authors too, we cannot dismiss filmmakers who display a similar attitude to the ancient material."[13] Thus Roger Ebert misses the point when he criticizes *Wrath of the Titans* (2012) for its seeming ignorance of Greek myth: "It lacks a comprehensible story, and you won't need your Cliff Notes on the Greek myths."[14] Modern screen texts use the framework of Greek myth for their own purposes; through the invented idea of Olympus' fall, audiences are encouraged to reflect on the relationship between the present world and the classical past.

In modern screen texts, the Greek gods' demise is attributed to their moral failure as characters. They are depicted as fickle and cruel through their manipulations of and behavior toward mortals and one another. But the ancient Greeks themselves usually did not understand their gods in this way. By mainstream ancient Greek standards, the gods are not cruel and have their reasons for acting as they do; mortals must respect the power of Olympus and accept their lots. Mortals are often depicted as resigned to the Olympians, as when Achilles declares that Zeus gives mortals both good and evil (*Iliad* 24.527–34) and when Odysseus says that Zeus destroyed his ship "because, I suppose, he wanted to" (*Odyssey* 17.424).[15]

Some ancient thinkers did pass negative judgments on the gods. As early as the sixth century BC, intellectuals like Xenophanes were railing against portrayals of the gods in myth, alleging that beings who lied, stole, and committed adultery were unworthy of worship.[16] In the late fifth century BC, the Athenian playwright Euripides had the hero Bellerophon proclaim that the Olympians did not exist.[17] In the next century, Plato asserted that poets lied when they depicted the gods as shape-shifters and that the true gods were perfect (*Republic* 381c–e).[18] Yet these writers do not reflect mainstream thinking, as eminent scholar of Greek religion Walter Burkert notes: "That criticism had touched only the surface, not the roots."[19] These pagan criticisms of myth were then taken up by Christian thinkers of the second century AD and from there entered the mainstream Western tradition and its modern screen texts.[20]

The screen texts discussed in this chapter fall into two major groups based on how they inflect the twilight motif. In the first group, comprising the films *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and *Clash of the Titans* (1981) as well as an episode of the television series *Star Trek* titled "Who Mourns for Adonais?" (1967), the Greek gods vanish when humanity has progressed beyond them, although their essential role in developing and supporting humanity is acknowledged. In the second group, comprising the television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) as well as the film *Clash of the Titans* (2010) and its sequel *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), the gods die violently on screen, which indicates how these texts radically reconfigure antiquity. The film *Immortals* (2011) combines elements from both groups in an entirely different way of conceptualizing the relationship between antiquity and the present moment.

The God Vanishes: Predicting Olympian Obsolescence

The gods of the 1963 film *Jason and the Argonauts* have important roles in the narrative, both as aids to Jason during his search for the Golden Fleece and as frivolous game-players. On the one hand, when Jason first despairs

of ascertaining the location of the Fleece, he is transported to Olympus by Hermes and receives help from Hera, who advises him to go to Colchis. On the other hand, Jason appears as a diminutive piece on a game board as the imperious Olympians peer curiously at him, in a scene that drives home the point that the mortal world is strategically but self-interestedly manipulated by Olympus. We later see this game being played by Zeus and Hera, who do not view it as a matter of life and death (as it surely is to the mortals being manipulated) but instead as congenial entertainment to pass the time on Olympus. According to Ray Harryhausen, the visual effects creator for the production, the game—which does not appear in ancient Greek myths—was meant to depict the Olympians as "vulnerable and fickle."[21]

The dual nature of the gods reinforces Jason's lack of faith in them, and this distrust reaches a crescendo when his ship the *Argo* comes to the Clashing Rocks, which threaten to sink the ship with tumbling boulders. His companion Argus tells Jason to pray to the gods, but Jason cries out in frustration, "The gods of Greece are cruel! In time all men shall learn to do without them!" As if to emphasize this cruelty, the scene cuts to Zeus and Hera playing the game on Olympus. Hera responds to the *Argo*'s predicament by sending a fish-tailed sea god to help the ship through the narrow channel, an action that neutralizes Jason's charge against the gods.

Yet Jason's outburst provokes a fascinating comment from Hera to Zeus: "You are the god of many men, yet when those men no longer believe in you, then you will return to nothing." Hera's prophecy is a distant memory at the end of the film; in the last shot, Zeus and Hera are still very much in power as they watch a successful Jason sailing back to Greece, and Zeus remarks, "For Jason, there are other adventures." *Jason and the Argonauts*, then, depicts the Greek gods both as morally compromised beings that humanity is about to outgrow and as instigators of mortal heroism. The gods, and the classical tradition that they represent, will soon ebb away, but for the moment they allow the protagonist, the central source of identification for the modern audience, to be successful in his adventures.

Desmond Davis' 1981 *Clash of the Titans*, another film that Harryhausen worked on, also negatively depicts the Olympians as resentful, petty, and domineering. Zeus, for instance, punishes mortals harshly, and Thetis is jealously protective of her arrogant and brutish son. The gods conspire to oppress humanity, which becomes fearful of Olympus. In a scene near the end of the film, Hera reveals the rationale behind this behavior. The goddess voices her concerns about the victory of the hero Perseus over his monstrous foes, as well as his rescue of the princess Andromeda: "What if courage and imagination were to become everyday mortal qualities? What would become of us?" Zeus replies, "We would no longer be needed," his words channeling *Jason*'s Hera. Once again the eclipse of Olympus is

predicted, but this will happen only once humans have evolved the right moral qualities.

The 1967 *Star Trek* episode "Who Mourns for Adonais?" (2.2) takes place five thousand years after classical antiquity, and it realizes *Jason*'s and *Clash*'s projections of Olympus' fall. At the start of the episode, the crew of the *Enterprise* encounters a being who claims to be the Greek god Apollo and demands worship from them. Captain Kirk surmises that "Apollo" is an alien from an advanced civilization. The crew destroys the source of his power, and the alien "returns to the cosmos," leaving for parts unknown like the other Greek gods before it. The idea that the gods of humanity are in fact aliens who visited Earth in the distant past, dubbed the "ancient astronaut theory," is not unique to *Star Trek* and was popularized as a pseudoscientific theory in 1968 by Danish scholar Erich von Däniken's book *Chariots of the Gods?* While Jason Colavito argues that the ancient astronaut theory is pseudoscience, an irrationalist doctrine in which "modern UFO cults . . . simply replace God and angels with aliens and extraterrestrials," *Star Trek* transforms the theory into a rationalist tale of human progress.[22] The narrative of "Who Mourns for Adonais?" takes the theory to its logical conclusion; if the Greek gods were only ever technologically advanced aliens, they are no longer worthy of obeisance in the eyes of their erstwhile human subjects because those subjects have become just as advanced in the meantime. This realization is not shared by the controlling "Apollo," who does not go into retirement gracefully but forces Kirk and crew to stay on his planet while he vociferously proclaims his divinity.

Despite this negative view of the Greek gods, the episode is not a secular criticism of religion. Kirk firmly rejects "Apollo," but not all deities: "Mankind has no need for gods. We find the One quite adequate." This view is never fully explained, though the 1967 audience probably would have interpreted this as a reference to monotheism.[23] "Who Mourns for Adonais?" intimates that humanity has progressed from false, cruel gods to a true, benevolent one, from paganism to Christianity. At the same time as the Greek gods are rejected as impediments to modernity, the cultural legacy of ancient Greece is praised by Kirk: "They gave us so much, the Greek civilization. Much of our culture and philosophy came from a worship of those beings." Humanity's advancement, including the progressive future of *Star Trek* itself, would not have been possible without Olympus.

The End of Olympus: Deicide and Modernity

The television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* (hereafter *XWP*) and its parent series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (hereafter *HTLJ*) are different from the previous set of texts in that they radically reframe what antiquity,

via the gods, means to the present. In the fifth season of *XWP*, the eponymous heroine kills a number of the Greek gods in a standoff over Xena's newborn daughter Eve, who the Fates have prophesied will be the end of Olympus. In the episode titled "Motherhood" (5.22), Xena kills Poseidon, Discord, Hephaestus, Hades, Deimos, Artemis, and Athena, and in "God Fearing Child" (5.12) Hercules kills his father Zeus. Deicide had also occurred earlier in both series: Xena slays a demonic Bacchus in "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" (2.4), and in *HTLJ* Callisto kills Strife ("Armageddon Now, Part 1," 4.13). This hostility toward Olympus is encoded in both series from the beginning, as the introductory sequences explicitly position their protagonists in opposition to the gods. The narrator of *HTLJ*'s introductory sequence proclaims, "The ancient gods were petty and cruel, and they plagued mankind with suffering," while one of the first images in *XWP*'s introductory sequence is Xena stabbing her sword skyward as Poseidon's giant figure looms over her menacingly.[24]

The gods are a source of conflict in the Hercules-Xena universe not just because they are morally reprehensible (for, among many other offenses, seeking to kill an innocent baby) but also because they represent patriarchy and conservative, traditional views.[25] The Olympians do not want the

Figure 12.1 Xena challenges Poseidon in the introductory sequence of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001). Renaissance Pictures/MCA Television.

status quo to change, a change that is represented by the values of the feminist protagonist Xena and of the humanist Hercules. Classical antiquity, as represented by the Greek gods, is a stifling and disabling force of the past whose constituents seek to prevent change at all costs. At the same time, the classical past becomes part of the audience's present through the figure of Xena, a warrior from the ancient world who espouses modern values and who reconfigures the divine past to suit present circumstances.

Xena is granted the power to kill gods through Eli, a representative of a mysterious divine force known as "the Light." A number of clues hint that "the Light" is to be interpreted as some form of the Judeo-Christian god: its followers are pacifists whose central teaching is love, its servant is the archangel Michael, and the name of its prophet Eli has a Hebrew origin. Thus Xena helps enact the movement from worship of the Greek gods to worship of the Judeo-Christian god, an event parallel to *Star Trek*'s symbolic re-enactment of the movement from paganism to Christianity. Yet while *XWP* acknowledges this teleology as one of historical inevitability, it also deconstructs its morality, since both Hercules and Xena are at odds with Michael at various points.[26] As such, "the Light" and its servants are not presented as the "solution" to the problem of antiquity; in the end, the only forces worthy of veneration are love and relationships between human beings. Moreover, the only gods to survive Xena's purging of Olympus are Aphrodite and Ares, who are spared because of their relationships with the warrior princess and her friends. These Olympians are also important because, as the episode "The God You Know" (6.12) reveals, Aphrodite and Ares are necessary for the universe's continued balance as they embody the eternal concepts of Love and War.

"Damn the gods," a tagline for Louis Leterrier's film *Clash of the Titans* (2010), echoes the sentiments of *XWP* and *HTLJ* in its rejection of the Olympians. Many of the gods, including Zeus, are depicted as arrogant and misguided when faced with declining worship from mortals. But the film's true antagonist is Hades, the god of the Underworld, who manipulates Zeus into releasing a sea monster to punish the city of Argos and secretly plots to depose Zeus by channeling mortal prayers to himself and away from the other gods.[27] Caught in the middle is Perseus, a demigod son of Zeus who rejects his divine heritage but still manages to banish Hades back to the Underworld. In the conclusion, Zeus thanks his son for saving Olympus and offers him a place among the gods—which Perseus refuses, as he wants to live as an ordinary human.[28]

In the sequel *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), humans by and large no longer worship the gods, which results in the release of Kronos, a Titan from the previous divine generation. Kronos kills Zeus in battle; Ares, who conspires with Hades to free Kronos, kills Poseidon and Hephaestus; Perseus

kills Ares; and the surviving deities are stripped of their powers. Despite their arrogant and at times downright bad behavior, the gods of *Clash* and *Wrath* are more sympathetic than their counterparts in the screen texts considered above. With the exception of Ares, by the end of *Wrath* the Olympians have redeemed themselves by sacrificing their lives to defeat a threat to humanity's continued existence. Yet the release of Kronos is primarily the gods' fault, and so the impact of their sacrifice is to a large degree muted. Like *XWP*'s cynical take on the relationship between gods and mortals, *Wrath* depicts the deaths of the gods as necessary for the continued existence of humanity and the universe, although it reframes antiquity even more radically than *XWP*.

The Titans rear their ugly heads again in Tarsem Singh's 2011 film *Immortals*. In the climax of the film they kill several Olympians, after the mortal Hyperion releases them from their Olympian-imposed prison in order to get revenge on the gods because he blames them (wrongly) for the death of his family.[29] In the final battle, the hero Theseus kills Hyperion but is mortally wounded himself. He is brought to Olympus to become a god, for, as Zeus explains, "All men's souls are immortal. But the souls of the righteous are immortal and divine." This quote also appears at the beginning of the film on a title card that attributes it to Socrates; indeed, a version of the first sentence appears in Plato's *Phaedrus* (245c): "Every soul is immortal."[30] The second sentence, however, is invented and encourages a crypto-Christian interpretation of Theseus as a Christ-figure who suffers for humanity and is immortalized as a result.[31] In the final scene, Zeus describes how Theseus and the other gods wage "the fight against evil [that] never ends"—a sentiment that generalizes the classical tradition and makes it easily transferable to the Judeo-Christian context of the modern audience.

Theseus' deification is a direct reply to the rejection of godhood by Perseus at the end of Leterrier's *Clash* and so is a fundamentally different way of understanding the relationship between the classical past and the present moment.[32] Perseus refuses to become part of the corrupt classical tradition, while Theseus is assimilated into it, thus legitimizing it. Furthermore, the deaths of Athena, Herakles, and Apollo in *Immortals* effect a recalibration of tradition, much as Xena's culling of the Olympians does. *Immortals* produces a radical solution to the fissure between past and present by remolding antiquity to fit the Christian interpretation of the soul, as well as integrating humanity into Olympus.

Conclusion

Greek myths are pervasive in Western cultures, particularly in screen texts, with the Olympians being one of the most prominent and recognizable

elements of many films and television programs. These screen texts often portray the gods as flighty and arrogant beings who manipulate mortals for their own ends, which contrasts with mainstream ancient Greek thought and instead parallels Christian ideas. Beginning in the ancient world, Christians criticized what they perceived as the immoral behavior of the classical gods, and this attitude filtered into Western tradition. As a result, some modern screen texts partake of the "twilight of the Greek gods" motif, in which the eventual passing of Olympus is foretold or the gods are violently killed on screen.

The motif has been inflected in two major ways. In the first, the gods' influence on antiquity and their support of humanity's progress is emphasized; in the second, the protagonists reframe the gods, sometimes thinning their ranks and in other cases eliminating them altogether. At first glance, the twilight motif might imply that these texts are advocating that the modern world be completely severed from antiquity. As the preceding analysis has demonstrated, however, the twilight motif should be interpreted not as the passing of the classical tradition but rather as a strategy for reflecting on and reconstituting classical antiquity's meaning for the present moment.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the editors for their extensive comments on an earlier draft that clarified my thinking considerably. William Duffy and Philip Horky, as well as the audiences of earlier iterations of this paper at the 2012 Film and History Conference and the 2013 Classical Association of Atlantic States Conference, also made helpful comments and criticisms.
2. Gamel and Blondell (2005) 120.
3. While myth and ritual are interrelated phenomena in the ancient Greek world (see Burkert [1985] 8–9), this chapter focuses on the tendency of screen texts to engage with myth, possibly the heritage of Christian apologists attacking pagan culture; see Graf (2011) 320. By contrast, screen texts tend to depict the ancient ritual system as more or less analogous with the Christian system, and therefore as less problematic—a topic that deserves its own study.
4. Since film and television are closely connected with modernity, the values of their texts can be analyzed together profitably. Paul (2010) 141 notes, "Television ought not to be seen as a mere component, or sub-theme, of the study of cinematic receptions, but it is a medium with an obvious relationship to cinema."
5. De Rose and Garry (2005) 17–19; see also Frazer (1935) 3–12.
6. This poetic formula occurs four times in the Homeric corpus (*Iliad* 8.539 and *Odyssey* 5.136, 7.257, 23.336). *Odyssey* 7.94 is a variation on it, and the words "deathless" and "ageless" describe the condition of godhood at *Iliad* 2.447,

12.323 and *Odyssey* 5.218. See Clay (1981/82) 112 and Garcia Jr. (2013) 162 n.8. All translations of the Greek in this chapter are my own.

7. Clay (1981/82). See also Sissa and Detienne (2000) 77–81 and Garcia Jr. (2013) 177–78.
8. For example, the Greek hero Diomedes spears Ares in the stomach, but Zeus orders his wound to be healed "because he was not at all mortal" (*Iliad* 5.901). See Purves (2006), who argues that the Homeric gods' bodies experience mortality when they fall through space; see also Garcia Jr. (2013) 159, and more generally Llewellyn-Jones (2007).
9. For the text of *Theogony*, see West (1966); for the text of the *Iliad*, see Allen (1931). Slatkin (1991) 68 notes, "Binding is the ultimate penalty in the divine realm, where by definition there is no death. It serves not to deprive an opponent of existence, but to render him impotent." See also Garcia Jr. (2013) 222, who argues that "we cannot dismiss that Homer posits the god's death as an actual possibility" and further that for a god death is the experience of mortal attributes like grief and pain.
10. See Burkert (1985) 127, 296–98.
11. Meckler (2006) 10, 176 cites Hamilton, the d'Aulaires, and Evslin as the most popular retellings of Greek myths read in pre-college education.
12. See Phillips (1990) for an analysis of a version of the twilight motif in modernist literature, which he links in part to Sir James Frazer's popularization of the "dead and rising god" in *The Golden Bough* (1935).
13. Paul (2010) 147. There are countless examples of this process in ancient Greek and Roman cultures. See also Morales (2007) 23–26 and Winkler (2009) 247.
14. Ebert (2012).
15. For text of the *Odyssey*, see von der Mühll (1962).
16. For text of Xenophanes, see West (1972).
17. A relevant fragment of Euripides' play *Bellerophontes* is translated into English in Trzaskoma et al. (2004) 107–8. For more about the complex question of Euripides' relationship with mainstream Greek religion, see Sourvinou-Inwood (2003) 294–97.
18. For the text of Plato's *Republic*, see Burnet (1931).
19. Burkert (1985) 246.
20. On Christian views of Greek mythology, see Young (1979) 48–50, Lanzillotta (2010) 448–57, and more generally Graf (2011). Lanzillotta points out that ancient Christian criticisms of pagan gods are connected to Jewish ideas, and so we should understand the roots of the twilight motif to be Judeo-Christian rather than just Christian.
21. Quoted in Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 155. Harryhausen also says that the film shows how "the gods are seen to *play* with the fates of mankind" (emphasis mine).
22. Colavito (2005) 331. The "rationalizing approach" is another strategy, like the twilight motif, that asks the audience to interpret the relationship between antiquity and the present moment; see Paul (2013a) 108.
23. Asa (1999) 45–52 dismisses the implications of Kirk's statement and links the episode (and *Star Trek* as a whole) to secularism, while Winkler (2009) 89–90

argues that Kirk's words are an "affirmation of religion" in spite of the rest of the episode's atmosphere. "The One" is probably a direct reference to, or at least would have been understood as, Christ's title in the Nicene Creed: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ."

24. This scene was made especially for the introductory sequence and does not appear in any episode of the first season, according to visual effects supervisor Kevin O'Neill (Scapperotti (1996) 47). Xena's conflict with Poseidon does eventually appear in the second season episode "Ulysses" (2.19), which demonstrates that, at least initially, producers wanted to establish the idea that Xena was opposed to the gods, independent of any narrative continuity.
25. See Futrell (2003) 13: "*XWP* reworks notions of heroism and history, destabilizing antiquity and our assumptions about its unchanging aspect." See also Kennedy (2003) 45–47.
26. Hercules fights to stop Michael from unleashing the apocalypse in "Revelations" (*HTLJ* 5.21), and Xena refuses the archangel's order to kill Aphrodite in "The God You Know" (*XWP* 6.21); on the latter, see Kennedy (2003) 46–47.
27. When Hades is the antagonist, he often has characteristics of Satan, as Solomon (2008) 38 notes of his appearance in Disney's *Hercules* (1997).
28. The rejection of immortality by human protagonists also occurs in ancient Greek texts: for example, Odysseus rejects offers of marriage and immortality from the goddesses Calypso and Circe (*Odyssey* Books 5 and 10).
29. The release of the Titans and the threat of their conquest of the world is a theme in screen texts about ancient Greece; see further description and analysis by Gellar-Goad (2013).
30. For the text of Plato's *Phaedrus*, see Burnet (1901).
31. On the characteristics of the Christ-figure in film, see Kozlovic (2004). Compare Theseus' apotheosis to "Hercules," Episode 3 of the *Clash of the Gods* television series on the History Channel (2009), in which the narrator parallels Hercules' labors, death, and apotheosis to those of Christ.
32. Kratos, the mortal protagonist of the *God of War* video game series (2005–), has some parallels to Theseus and Xena, since he kills the corrupt Olympians and eventually replaces them. Like Theseus, the player in the present world changes the classical tradition and becomes part of it.

Part IV

Cinemyth-Making

13

Of Marketing and Men: Making the Cinematic Greek Hero, 2010–2014

Stacie Raucci

The ancient Greeks had their heyday in film from the 1950s to 1981, a period that encompasses the numerous adventures of Hercules in scores of "sword and sandal" movies and the carefully crafted mythological creatures of Ray Harryhausen.[1] While they never really disappeared from the cinema,[2] in the past four years ancient Greek heroes have appeared quite frequently in a number of back-to-back films focused on mythological characters and set in classical antiquity. Most notable among them are Perseus in the remake of *Clash of the Titans* (2010) and its sequel *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), Theseus in *Immortals* (2011), and Hercules in *The Legend of Hercules* (2014) and *Hercules* (2014).

This chapter explores how these recent incarnations of the Greek hero have been constructed and marketed to audiences in two distinct ways: first, as embodying a universal human nature that supposedly extends across time and cultures, and second, as the successors not of earlier Greek heroes on screen but of Maximus from Ridley Scott's ancient Rome–inspired blockbuster *Gladiator* (2000). Moreover, studios have fashioned the ancient Greek protagonist after the type of everyday male hero that has been populating movie screens at least since *Die Hard* (1988). Multiple media platforms have enabled studios to involve audience members earlier and more interactively in the process of marketing these movies, further advancing the notion that such heroes can be models for anyone.

Heroes without Borders: The Universality of Greek Myth

While some scholars and film critics have noted the cultural nuances of myth,[3] others have placed universality at the core of Greek myth itself. For instance, Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone discuss how Greek myth inspired later peoples: "Greek myth, in fact, is universal, and it is in the nature of myth altogether to be universal"; they also describe how Greek myth has "provided a space for meaning, for ideas, for argument that was applicable far beyond the narrow limits of ancestral Greece."[4] Irene Berti and Marta García Morcillo further note, "The cinematic image of the ancient hero ties in conveniently with the universal model proposed by Greek epics and mythology."[5]

Marketing campaigns for the theatrical releases (and subsequent DVD releases) of the latest Greeks on screen contain direct references to what is perceived as the enduring and transferrable nature of Greek myth. In advertising *Wrath of the Titans*, for example, director Jonathan Liebesman and actors from the film publicly discussed not just the hero but Greek myth itself in such terms. On the day of the film's release in the United States, a post on the *Wrath of the Titans* Facebook page invited people to view a Yahoo Movies interview described as "Director Jonathan Liebesman and the cast of *Wrath of the Titans* discuss the universality of Greek mythology, their favorite fight scenes, and which character has the best beard in this Yahoo Movies exclusive."[6] In response to a question concerning what about these myths "endure[s] retelling and reinterpretation," Liam Neeson (Zeus in *Wrath*) replied,

> Because they speak for all mankind, I think, they speak to every culture in the world. It is essentially the same story when you whittle it down. A young hero is picked to go through a trial of ordeal, having learned something about himself that he brings back to educate the rest of society, and I feel that it taps into all our souls.

Neeson's remarks recall the archetype of the hero, such as that presented by Joseph Campbell, whose scholarship has been extremely influential on filmmakers.[7] In the same interview, Ralph Fiennes (Hades in *Wrath*) noted the transtemporal quality of myth: "We haven't changed in thousands of years." Liebesman added, "The characters are extremely relatable. They are just dysfunctional families who either hate each other, love each other . . . [It's] exactly like we are today, except there are creatures in these Greek stories—and I think they will endure forever."

Indeed, Greek myth can be further elided with the rest of what Western societies consider "the ancient world," without regard for time period or

society. Actor Henry Cavill, who plays Theseus in *Immortals*, said that as a boy he "loved reading those [short stories about Greek myth] and looking at the pictures. That sort of world—Ancient Greece, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Rome—the tales of warriors and battles and warlords and conquerors and empires . . . all of that."[8] Perhaps the difference between Greek, Roman, or Egyptian myths is only of great importance to a spectator who has studied the ancient world; to a general audience it can all be part of one past, a past to which they can relate due to the belief that they are tied to it by their very humanity.

Two apparently divergent examples prove the general rule about the importance of promoting universality in connection with Greek myth. The *Percy Jackson* movies (*Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* [2010] and *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* [2013]) coincide with the aforementioned films inspired by Greek myth, even though they are set in the contemporary United States. Percy (Logan Lerman), patterned after the hero Perseus, has the problems that are typical for a teenager, such as getting along with his mother, fitting in, and making friends. Percy is universal to the extent that, despite his illustrious father Poseidon and demigod status, he has to experience the trials of being a young man. The marketing for the film stresses that even demigods have very human existential struggles: for example, in the trailer for the first film, Percy discusses the difficulties of school with his mother and engages in a rivalry with his new friend Annabeth (Alexandra Daddario), typical activities for a boy his age.

The idea that universal themes or experiences connect peoples across times also facilitates the marketing of a film across borders, by allowing filmmakers to sell one popularized version of antiquity to an international audience. While supposedly Greek heroes clearly manifest some American ideals, increasingly foreign markets are providing Hollywood studios with major profits for their biggest films, perhaps even shaping what movies get made and how they get made.[9] The simpler the storyline and the more spectacular the action, the easier to sell the movie to audiences across cultures.[10] Instead of worrying about cultural specificity, the films can rely on what they present as universal truths, experiences, and emotions to speak to both domestic and international audiences.

Consuming the Hero: Maximus Revisited

As the interviews connected to the release of *Wrath of the Titans* illustrate, consumer consumption of both the cinematic stories and the characters begins not when viewers enter the movie theater but when they encounter the first interview, film poster, film trailer, Facebook page, or tweet. Thus

the marketing of the film becomes central to the construction of the film's public narrative. Multiple forms of media are used to generate and disseminate a general message about the film and its characters. Through these media, the Greek heroes are initially constructed for the audience, in small sound bites and taglines rather than an elaborate backstory. These short-form media are especially useful for hooking an audience on one idea: not the full story of the movie but rather the most important piece to get the viewer to the theater. Moreover, these marketing pieces best illuminate the connection to *Gladiator*.

Across all media, the majority of recent Greek mythological heroes have been marketed to closely resemble Maximus (Russell Crowe), the protagonist of Ridley Scott's major box-office success *Gladiator* (2000).[11] As the soldier/gladiator/savior of Rome, Maximus revived the ancients on screen for a new generation. Posters and trailers for this film stressed one basic idea, communicated in the movie's tagline: "A Hero Will Rise." Trailers for the film likewise focused on Maximus' struggle to rise from slavery to defeat an empire: the words "The General Who Became a Slave, The Slave Who Became a Gladiator, The Gladiator Who Defied an Empire" flash across a black screen with images of Maximus interspersed throughout. Upon the 2010 release of *Clash of the Titans*, film critic Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* recognized a connection between Maximus and Perseus in her astutely titled review, "Beware of Greeks Bearing Buzzcuts": she notes that Perseus is "the latest big-screen attraction to strap on a sword and sandals to vanquish the box office. (He's Russell Crowe 2.0)."[12] Greek stories are thus presented to the audience through the now-familiar image of the Roman hero on screen, with similar physical image and psychological make-up.

Comparisons start with the treatment of the actors' bodies by the press. Martin Fradley has documented the journalistic focus on the corporeal transformation of Russell Crowe's body into Maximus' fit one, after Crowe gained much weight for a previous role.[13] Likewise, the press repeatedly asked Sam Worthington and Henry Cavill about their physical experiences in training for their roles. Henry Cavill commented on how his body helped him to transform into the hero character.[14] The physical appearances of these three male leads bear striking similarities, from the haircut to the type of armor worn during battle scenes. Audiences who have seen one film can use the visual cues provided in another film to connect these ancients on screen.

Film posters also contribute to the visual language of the Maximus-style hero who rises up and dominates his foes with his heroic body, as was the case in the poster images used to promote *Gladiator*. Marketing and film scholar Finola Kerrigan writes about posters and "their ability to

communicate the key essence of a film to the target audience."[15] Since space is limited on a poster, every single word and image is crucial. Simply by looking at posters, key differences between the representation of Perseus (Harry Hamlin) in the 1981 original *Clash of the Titans* and Perseus in the 2010 remake (Worthington) are evident. Hamlin as Perseus was not represented as a dominating figure. In most posters, he is not even the central figure, but is instead represented by a small image on the right side of the poster, sharing space with his love interest Andromeda. In some versions, the monstrous head of Medusa occupies the focal point; in others, the cast of gods appears at the top.

The posters from the 2010 remake present a very different Perseus. Worthington's Perseus is often the lone figure on the visual field. If someone or something shares the space, it is a small image of a conquered character, such as Medusa's severed head. The hero seems to be shouting so powerfully that the snakes on Medusa's head are thrust away from the hero, representing his triumph. In other posters for the film, Perseus fights various mythological beasts and remains the sole human figure in focus on the poster, leading the audience to believe that the film revolves around this one man.

This depiction of the warrior-hero was perpetuated in similar images on magazine covers around the time of the film's release. For instance, on the cover of *Empire* magazine, a British film periodical, Worthington's Perseus gazes directly out at the reader, covered in dirt from the struggle, sword in hand, in full armor.[16] For *Immortals*, individual posters were devoted to different characters in the film. The "Theseus" posters focus on his beleaguered status as one man against seemingly insurmountable odds. In one example, Theseus is shown in the center as a battle rages around him. In another example, Theseus must save the whole world; above his

Figure 13.1 Perseus (Sam Worthington) looking heroic in *Clash of the Titans* (2010). Legendary Pictures/Warner Bros. Pictures.

head, a caption reads, "The Gods Need a Hero." Although the marketing campaigns do not try to hide the gods or the connections of the heroes to them, they focus on the relatable parts of the heroes—chiefly the fact that they have to fight—in *Immortals* as well as *Clash of the Titans* and *Wrath of the Titans*.

While posters are a static means of representing the film, movie trailers bring the same story to life with sounds and moving images, and the reach of trailers has spread considerably in recent years.[17] Whereas film trailers were once seen primarily in movie theaters, now anyone with a computer or smartphone and an Internet connection has access to them.[18] As film scholar Lisa Kernan discusses, movie trailers surpass the realm of economics to exist in the artistic realm: "While trailers are a form of advertising, they are also a unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined."[19] In this useful but challenging space, artists must tell the most important piece of their story and attract people to their films.

The trailers for *Clash* and its sequel *Wrath* illustrate their potential power. In the trailer for *Clash of the Titans* (2010), the scene opens in the miserable darkness of Medusa's lair, then rapidly switches to an image of Perseus bathed in light. The light signals the hero to the audience, even without knowing any mythology or having seen the film. The small number of words spoken highlights their power: "One day, somebody's gonna have to make a stand; one day, somebody's gonna have to say 'enough.'" Directly following these words, Perseus is shown reaching for a sword; that sword remains in his hand throughout the subsequent scenes. In the trailer to the sequel *Wrath of the Titans*, Zeus approaches Perseus and asks for his help. He explains to Perseus that it is his humanity that will save the world and make him more powerful than a god. At the end of this trailer, the viewer is invited into Perseus' world. As he fights, the words FEEL THE WRATH (in capital letters) flash across the screen one at a time, putting the audience in Perseus' place and inviting them to become the hero.

Likewise, in the trailer for *Immortals*, the audience is led to believe that only one man can win the fight. Theseus is presented here as not merely an underdog but the underdog who fights for freedom. As with the narratives in the trailers for *Clash* and *Wrath*, the notion of the savior is foregrounded; the words "Even the gods will need a hero" flash across the screen. In the first trailer released for this film, there is yet another shadow of *Gladiator*'s Maximus. Theseus' rallying cry to his men—"Fight for your children, fight for honor, fight for your future, fight for immortality"—recalls Maximus rallying his troops in one of the early scenes of *Gladiator*. Maximus exhorts his troops by making them think both of the possibility of going home and of their immortal fame: "Three weeks from now, I will be harvesting my

crops. Imagine where you will be and it will be so. Hold the line. Stay with me. If you find yourself alone and riding in green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled, for you are in Elysium and you are already dead. Brothers, what we do in life echoes in eternity." There is also an echo of Brad Pitt's Achilles in *Troy* (2004), addressing his men before storming the beach of Troy: "You know what's there, waiting beyond that beach. Immortality, take it, it's yours." The recent Hercules movies also make connections to *Gladiator*. In the trailer for *The Legend of Hercules*, the presentation of Hercules in a gladiatorial-style arena clearly recalls Maximus; words on the screen note that "before he was a god, he was an ordinary man."[20]

The most popular delivery system for such trailers, the Internet, has drastically changed marketing and become perhaps its most useful tool. Filmmakers can create campaigns that have the ability to "go viral" and enable the potential audience to participate well before going to the movie theater. Instead of a one-way feed of information from the film studio to the audience, as with a poster or trailer, the Internet opens up a space for the exchange of ideas or emotions using various social media platforms.

The *Clash of the Titans* Facebook page provides a good example of the marketing of the most recent Greek heroes. Facebook connects Perseus to other action figures, specifically in this case to Sam Worthington's role in the film *Terminator Salvation* (2009): "Perseus isn't the only hero that has saved the world from epic destruction. Relive Sam Worthington's role as a futuristic cyborg in *Terminator Salvation* - available now in The Terminator Anthology."[21] Elsewhere the feed delivers numerous images of Worthington and invites readers to imagine themselves as part of Greek myth, with questions and exhortations such as "If you could be any Greek god, who would you choose to be?" and "This weekend, take an epic journey to the depths of hell with some of the fiercest gods and monsters known to man." The Facebook page for *Immortals* was even more interactive, before both the movie release and the DVD release. In one example, readers were asked to dress as their favorite immortal and post a photo on the wall. Another asked them to submit photos of their abdominal muscles in order to compete for merchandise.[22] Facebook, through which users connect with friends, can connect them just as easily to characters in movies. By giving them the opportunity to participate virtually, the users hopefully become viewers invested in these characters.

Pop-Culture Heroes

These newest Greek heroes fit into popular culture beyond the example of Maximus, the paradigm of the hero for "ancient world" films from the year 2000 onward. These Greek heroes also resonate with examples of a

hero who is an ordinary guy but ready to be courageous and save the day at great risk to his own personal safety. A prominent example in American movies comes from the *Die Hard* franchise (1988–2013), in which John McClain (Bruce Willis) was introduced as a New York City police office on vacation in Los Angeles who saves his ex-wife and her colleagues when terrorists storm their Christmas party. This figure continues to appear in movies such as *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), in which a disgraced former Secret Service agent (Gerard Butler) who happens to be on a tour of the White House saves the President of the United States, the President's son, and millions of people from an army of terrorists.

These movie heroes are "regular guys." Viewers have become accustomed to seeing the average guy on screen rising up to save society, and the newest "Greek hero" characters fit in well with a broader cinematic and cultural presentation of hero figures who start out like anyone else. These mythological films were released around the same time as a spate of American superhero films, including *Iron Man* (2008; sequel in 2010), *The Amazing Spiderman* (2012), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). A brief exchange in *The Dark Knight Rises* encapsulates the current popular attitude toward onscreen heroes. When told that the people should know the name of their savior, Batman disagrees, replying, "A hero can be anyone."

Of course, none of the examples above are really just ordinary people. They are typically people with advantages, whether elite training, money, or a special skill. Yet each of them is depicted as an ordinary man fighting against the odds and overcoming them. The audience is asked to look beyond these special skills and advantages and to identify with the act of rising up against the odds. This valorization of the average person in popular culture extended even to the leader of the free world: in the 2004 election for the President of the United States, voters were polled about the presidential candidate with whom they would prefer to share a beer.[23]

Given the goals of broad marketing campaigns and the wide distribution of these films, not only the heroes but also the actors who play them benefit from being perceived as accessible and likable, in line with the prevailing cultural dictum that anyone can achieve anything. Press and marketing teams have long encouraged this notion by connecting the audience with the actors' personal lives. The "star system" by which a film's actors are used to sell the film is a typical part of the marketing of Hollywood films.[24] As Paul Watson notes, the "star's commercial capacity is inextricably bound up with his or her ability 'to be liked' by large numbers of people from a range of cultural and national contexts."[25] This mingling of actor and character identities can spill over into how people view the onscreen persona. Thus the audience may connect more deeply to the characters,

bridging the distance between the fantasy world of gods and heroes and the real lives of the spectators.

For example, interviews with Worthington (Perseus in *Clash of the Titans* and *Wrath of the Titans*) detail his working-class upbringing and the fact that he did not intend to be an actor, creating an access point for identification by a similar audience. Instead of stories about celebrity lifestyle, he tells of working as a laborer as a teenager, laying bricks.[26] The suggestion is that, like his character Perseus, he also had to struggle. Worthington also stated, "Perseus is the guy I wish I was, the brave guy that will fight anything for his family, will take on any peril."[27] Perseus therefore becomes not just someone who can pull himself up in adverse circumstances but the ideal man who places family first. He notes in another interview that the hero is just one of the ordinary guys: "A hero isn't someone who leads men; a hero is someone that's in the trench with the men."[28] Interviews with the actors provide specific vehicles by which the audience can relate to the larger-than-life heroes of myth.

The image of the ordinary man who is an extraordinary warrior has extended beyond the space of the movie proper while staying on screen. In 2007, the Army National Guard began advertising in movie theaters during the previews and other advertisements that precede the feature film, using a music video for recruitment purposes. The video is entitled "Citizen/Soldier" and stresses the role of the soldier depicted as the average man who changes the course of history.[29] As the group 3 Doors Down sings the video's eponymous song, words such as "Soldier," "I'll Be There to Help," "I Will Never Accept Defeat," and "I Will Never Quit" flash in the bottom right corner of the screen to support the lyrics. At the end of the video, the web address for the National Guard appears.

The heroes of Hollywood all seem to be similar, whether in the dress of an ancient Greek or Roman or the everyday clothes of a modern man. It should not be surprising, then, that they are marketed in the same ways, as having the same characteristics: ordinary men rising successfully to the challenge of fighting against the odds. As marketing tactics have changed to reflect new technologies and cultural shifts, reaching out to the general audience of "ordinary men" has become easier than ever. Now filmmakers can convince the audience that Greek heroes are just like them and that they, therefore, can achieve the same extraordinary things.

Notes

1. For instance, Steve Reeves in the title role as *Hercules* (1958) and again in *Hercules Unchained* (1959). Ray Harryhausen was the creator of a special effects stop-motion animation called Dynamation and was responsible for the

mythological creatures in films such as *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and *Clash of the Titans* (1981). On Harryhausen, see Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) 129–34; Solomon (2001) 113–18.

2. Post-1981 examples, both mythological and "historical," include Disney's animated *Hercules* (1997), *Troy* (2004), *Alexander* (2004), and *300* (2006). On television: *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999).
3. For instance, see Graf (1993) 55 for a summary of the question of universality: "The view of myths as bound to specific cultures raises the question whether myths really are universal as mythologists, from the early eighteenth century onward, have supposed."
4. See Dowden and Livingstone (2011) 17.
5. Berti and Morcillo (2008) 14.
6. The Facebook post (www.facebook.com/wrathofthetitans) on March 30, 2012, directed fans to Yahoo Movies (movies.yahoo.com) to view the video "Insider Access: Wrath of the Titans." All quotes from online content, including interviews, are my own transcriptions.
7. Campbell (1949). On the hero's journey and its benefits to screenwriters, see Indick (2004). In another interview, Neeson equates mythology with Westerns: "As far as influences go, I'd say it was Westerns and Greek mythology—it's all the same story, you know," as quoted in Dittman (2012).
8. Quoted in Gross (2012).
9. Savage (2013).
10. Brook (2013).
11. On this film, see especially Cyrino (2005) 207–56 and Winkler (2004).
12. Dargis (2010).
13. Fradley (2004) 243.
14. See Gross (2012). This interview asks questions about both Cavill's role as Theseus and his role as Superman in *Man of Steel* (2013). On Worthington, see Andrews (2011); also the YouTube behind-the-scenes featurette "Sam Worthington: An Action Hero for the Ages" (October 18, 2013).
15. Kerrigan (2010) 129–30. Of course there are other issues at stake as well, such as the billing of actors and directors on the poster.
16. See the images at O'Hara (2009).
17. Kerrigan (2010) 130.
18. On the "mobile trailer," see Johnston (2009) 124–52.
19. Kernan (2004) 1.
20. While not all recent ancient-world films focus on mythology, there seems to be a constant connection to *Gladiator*. On the connection between *Gladiator* and *Pompeii* (2014), see Merry (2014) and Paul (2014).
21. Facebook posts from late summer 2012 (www.facebook.com/clashofthetitans).
22. Interactive posts (www.facebook.com/immortals). See also Kessler (2011).
23. See Benedetto (2004) and Nagorski (2008).
24. On the star system in Hollywood, see McDonald (2000) and also Watson (2012).
25. Watson (2012) 169.

26. See Miles (2010).
27. Quoted in the YouTube interview with BlackTree Media, "Sam Worthington: Perseus is the guy I wish I was" (March 29, 2012).
28. O'Hara (2009).
29. The video "3 Doors Down: Citizen/Soldier" can be viewed on YouTube. Thanks to the audience at the 2012 Film and History Conference in Milwaukee for bringing this point to my attention.

14

John Cameron Mitchell's Aristophanic Cinema: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001)

Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr.

John Cameron Mitchell's film *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001) tells the story of Hansel, an East German youth; his transformation into Hedwig, a transsexed[1] performer of punk rock music; and her[2] attempts to achieve love and self-acceptance. According to Stephen Trask, the composer and songwriter of *Hedwig*, Plato's *Symposium* provided the source material:

> When John and I started working together, the first thing that we did was we walked to a bookstore and he bought me Plato's *Symposium* . . . and he gave it to me and said, "Read this—there's a story in there I want you to adapt."[3]

In its portrayal of Hansel/Hedwig, a figure literally self-divided through a botched sex change operation, the film makes extensive use of the myth of the "divided self" from Plato's *Symposium* (189c–193e),[4] delivered by Plato's characterization of the Athenian comedian Aristophanes: in this myth, the gods have punished human beings for their arrogance by splitting their bodies in two, forever separating each self from its true other half.[5] Several scholars have noted the Platonic underpinnings of the film's musical centerpiece, "The Origin of Love," in discussing the erotic subjectivity of the transgendered hero Hedwig.[6]

In fact, the spirit of Aristophanic comedy permeates *Hedwig* even more deeply, for its mythology, like Aristophanes' own comedies, is more overtly political than Plato's erotic concerns in the *Symposium* allow. Mitchell and Trask's film offers what could be called a myth of gendered political identity

and agency—that is, how societies and polities shape and determine a person's gender identity and limit a person's capacities accordingly, using the term "myth" to indicate a specific story-pattern, a broadly repeatable but recognizable assemblage that allows for different features specific to any given retelling. Aristophanes' comic play *Ecclesiazusae* (*Women at Congress*) is a closer rendition of the story-pattern in Mitchell and Trask's film and functions as a subtext informing *Hedwig*.

As a genetic and generic descendant of *Ecclesiazusae*, *Hedwig* relies upon the same fundamental myth and trope: that society determines our identity and agency, but that its influence can be subverted. Identity can be masked, agency reconstituted; individuals can deconstruct the marks of identity, although at the risk of destabilizing the entire social fabric. Both treat the reconfiguration of identity through disguise, drag, and the performance of gender within the context of fraught political circumstances; both raise questions about a polity's enforcement of gender identity and the deleterious effects such efforts have on the male body; and both deal with issues of economic agency and parity within a gendered social order.

Performing Gender: Drag, "Passing," and Aristophanic Metatheatricality

Through autobiographical narratives, flashbacks, and performances, Hedwig traces her origins to Hansel (John Cameron Mitchell), "a slip of a girly-boy in communist East Berlin," a city wounded and divided by the Berlin Wall.[7] The political schism of East and West informs the entire film as Hansel, inspired by "American" rock and roll, comes to desire the West and its perceived freedoms. But he learns that such freedoms have a price: "To be free you must give up a little part of yourself," Hansel's mother explains, "and I know just the doctor to do it." This double entendre, as Jillian Sandell (2010) has argued, refers both to classical social contract theory, with its exchange of certain personal freedoms for the stability and defense provided by centralized government, and to the botched penectomy Hansel undergoes to become the bride of Sgt. Luther Robinson (Maurice Dean Witt), an American GI stationed in West Berlin. The heteronormativity of immigration laws demands Hansel's mutilation, to prevent a same-sex marriage.[8] Through another "cut and paste" job, Hansel's mother splices her son's photo into her passport and gives him her name: "Hedwig." In a dizzying sequence, Hansel/Hedwig escapes to the West and settles in Junction City, Kansas, where Luther abandons his wife for a younger boy on the very day that the Berlin Wall is torn down. The reunited city of

Berlin offers ironic contrast with Hedwig's own "division," which cannot be undone—only masked with a wig and mascara by which Hedwig performs her gender.[9]

Like *Hedwig*, Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, staged in Athens in the late 390s BC,[10] reflected a city divided against itself: Athens faced both external threat in the Corinthian War (395–387 BC) and internal factional dissent in attempting to rebuild the empire that was destroyed in the Peloponnesian War, a decade earlier.[11] In Aristophanes' play the Athenian women, fed up with dysfunction that male legislators are unable or unwilling to change, decide to take control of the city. First they disguise themselves as men to enter the public assembly, and then they vote to approve radical legislative changes that put women in control of the city.

The comedy begins with women getting "in drag" by wearing their husbands' cloaks and shoes. They try to "pass" as men in public by donning fetish objects that suggest masculinity, such as false beards and walking sticks, and practice the "masculine" prerogatives of public speech-making and voting.[12] Praxagora, the leader of the organized women whose name means "effective public speaker," explains (*Ecclesiazusae* 24–27, 93–94, 98–101):[13]

> Don't they have the contrived beards that they were told to have? Or was it difficult for them to escape notice as they stole their husbands' cloaks? . . . You must show no part of your body to the men . . . If we're the first to take our seats, no one will notice that we're wearing our cloaks wrapped tight. And when we let down the beards we'll tie on over there, who would think we're not men when he sees us?

The women's costumes are designed to disguise the visual markers of their femininity, as one woman explains: "Whenever my husband would go to the agora, I would anoint my whole body, stand in the sun all day long, and get some color" (*Ecclesiazusae* 62–64). Another adds, "I threw my razor out of the house right away, so that I'd get hairy all over and no longer look like a woman at all" (*Ecclesiazusae* 65–66). Aristophanes' women are performing gender on the comic stage—a particularly comic *mise en abyme*, or mirroring effect, since all roles in Greek theater were played by men, even female characters. The play exploits the tension between the "real" and "staged" gender of its actors: a "male" player performs as a "female" character, who performs the "pseudo-male" role of female figure in masculine disguise.[14] Praxagora acts as an "internal director," rehearsing her players in their costuming and proper roles.

Even as the women "pass" as men, they raise some suspicion. Chremes, an Athenian man, and a few others notice something off about the women's

appearance: "A huge crowd of people—never before was it so large—came in a throng to the Pnyx. And you know, we thought they all looked like shoemakers when we saw them; really, the Assembly was awfully pale faced to look upon" (*Ecclesiazusae* 383–87). There is an emphasis on looking, seeing, and seeming: the women in drag "look like" men, but strange men: their pallor betrays the fact that they do not spend their time working outdoors.[15] Chremes explains that when Praxagora (in drag) got up to speak, "Some good-looking, pale young man leapt to his feet to address the people" (*Ecclesiazusae* 427–28). Such "passing" requires more than transvestism; the women must police their speech and thoughts so they do not accidentally reveal their true identity. They must refrain from swearing by Aphrodite (*Ecclesiazusae* 189–92), Artemis (136), or Demeter and Persephone (155–59). They must pretend they know how an assembly is conducted: no drinking (*Ecclesiazusae* 133–39), no knitting (88–93), no habit that might give anything away (192).[16]

Hedwig also tells a story about a drag character, yet the drag is not a temporary escape but a full-time act of "passing." Hansel/Hedwig's escape from communist East Germany requires not only costuming but also surgery, to pass the "full physical exam" for entrance into the United States. Indeed, Hansel's "Hedwig" persona is entirely "drag," as the name Hed-wig itself suggests. To survive economically once she is abandoned by her husband, Hedwig must continue to perform her gender; she can only take off the disguise when alone at home, as the song "Wig in a Box" relates: "I put on some make-up / Turn on the eight-track / I'm pulling the wig down from the shelf / Suddenly I'm Miss Farrah Fawcett from TV / Until I wake up and turn back to myself."

The difficulty of sustained gender performance came through in Mitchell's own performance of the Hedwig character at Squeezebox!, the punk/drag club hosted at Don Hill's nightclub in Manhattan. Initially Mitchell had difficulty "passing" as a drag performer, as club promoter Michael Schmidt recalls in an interview:

> I think some of the queens felt they were being taken advantage of in that John was utilizing this to workshop an idea of his that they didn't fully understand . . . He had to be made to see this was not a caricature you could put on and take off—this was about a rock-and-roll sensibility that permeated every aspect of their lives. John had to pay his dues.[17]

Mitchell gained acceptance from the other drag performers and denizens of Squeezebox! only through sustained practice, making the drag character real by refining his sensibilities about the meaning of drag: it is a commitment to identity, no mere costume. Particularly in the context of glam and

punk rock's transgression of gender,[18] drag disguises while acknowledging the disguise itself, flouting a polity's gender norms.

For the women of *Ecclesiazusae*, the drag is temporary: Praxagora and her chorus of women remove their costumes once they have achieved their objectives (*Ecclesiazusae* 479, 484–88, 493–99):

> Is there any one of the men who is following us? . . . Guard yourselves carefully, for . . . one could be behind us, keeping a close watch on our presentation . . . It would bring us disgrace before all our husbands if this business were exposed. So keep yourselves covered up against this and take a look all around . . . So it's opportune for us not to waste time and wait around with these beards hanging off us, so that no one may see us in the daylight and maybe denounce us. So come on then over here into the shade by the house wall, casting glances to the other side, and change yourselves back again into just what you were.

Their plan underway, the women return home to enact their radical reform of the city. Now that they are legally in charge, they no longer need their male drag. Indeed, in the changed circumstances, dressing like a man no longer provides special privileges—so long as they avoid the shame of being caught doffing their costumes.

When Hedwig removes her drag in performance, she makes a spectacle of dismantling her gender identity; the scene plays as a shaming act of self-destruction. Toward the end of the film, during the "Hedwig's Lament/Exquisite Corpse" number, Hedwig throws the wig from her head, tears open her plastic-wrap dress, pulls down her bra to reveal a male torso, and exposes her "breasts" to be tomatoes, which she holds up and smashes on her bare chest before staggering off stage. In her next performance, Hedwig appears on stage only in trunks with a silver cross painted on her forehead. She refuses to put on her wig, relinquishing the drag role and allowing her partner Yitzhak (Miriam Shor) the freedom to become a drag performer.

The fact that a female actor plays Yitzhak, a male character, resonates with the gender-bending performances of ancient Greek comedy. Moreover, "he" transforms into a hyper-feminized diva: Yitzhak dons Hedwig's abandoned wig, magically revealing "her" femininity. She throws herself into the audience and surfs upon the crowd's uplifted hands, now wearing a stunning pink and orange sparkle dress and heels; Yitzhak's characteristic beard has vanished, as the stage prop is now unnecessary. Hedwig—without her identifying wig, the façade of drag, or any clothing whatsoever—wanders off nude into the night in the final shot of the film. The drag persona of "Hedwig" has fulfilled its purpose; Hansel can now turn back into himself—minus a few inches.

Cities, Divided and Undivided: Communism and Other Shared Economies

Once in power, Praxagora sets forth radical legislation for restructuring not only the city of Athens but the very concepts of domesticity and political identity. She proposes that the city be run as a communistic collective (*Ecclesiazusae* 590–98):

> I propose that everyone ought to have a share of everything in common, and enjoy an equal living, and no more "this guy is rich, that one is wretched" . . . First I'll make the land common property for all, as well as money and however much else that belongs to each individual.

Since all citizens are to give up their property to the state, riches are meaningless, for everyone already has everything he or she can want. Likewise, public ills such as robbery, gambling, money lending, and private lawsuits will come to an end, for there is no incentive for one citizen to attack another when everyone's needs have already been met.

More radically, Praxagora explains that not only property but also sexual partners will be held in common: "I'm making these women also common property for men to sleep with and to make babies for each man who wants" (*Ecclesiazusae* 613–15). All women will be available for all men, and vice versa: the institution of marriage is to be dissolved, its claims to sexual fidelity rejected. The demise of marriage accompanies Praxagora's next proposal: to eliminate the divide between household and polity so that the entire city will become a single household: "The same for all. I mean to convert the city into one household by breaking down all partitions to make one dwelling, so that everyone can walk into everyone else's space" (*Ecclesiazusae* 673–75).[19] In this radical reconfiguration of society, Praxagora promises to "break down together" the walls of each individual *oikos* ("household") in order to form a single political entity that consists of a single domestic space. This is a social myth of bridging divisions: rather than a political unit constituted by private households and families, a single domestic and economic sphere emerges by breaking down the dividing walls between houses in the *polis*.

Hedwig uses a similar trope, for Mitchell and Trask's film treats divided and united cities as analogues for Hedwig's mutilated body. At first, the Berlin Wall divides Hansel from his potential "other half": "The search for my other half on my side of the wall had proved futile: might he be found on the other?" East Berlin offers limited opportunities, but his sexual reassignment and marriage to an American allows him, now her, to cross that border. Hedwig's destination after her marriage, Junction City, Kansas, suggests by name a *polis* where things come

together: the name evokes the state of affairs in Praxagora's city, where the walls have been "broken down together" into a single *oikos*. But Junction City fails to fulfill its promises. After her abandonment, Hedwig must create her own community beyond the *polis*: she leaves Junction City for life on the road, playing shows in cities from Kansas to New York with her Angry Inch band. They sleep together in a single, cramped hotel room, as a family.

However, *Ecclesiazusae* finds the communal fantasy problematic. Praxagora's system aims for sexual equity among all citizens, even the old and unattractive: "The plain and the flat-nosed will sit beside the stately girls, and if someone desires that one, he'll have to bang the ugly one first" (*Ecclesiazusae* 616–18). Praxagora's old and ugly husband Blepyrus favors this new legislation, but it is oppressive for the male youth. A young man named Epigenes ("Late-born") wants to be with his beloved Neanis ("Young Girl"), but first he must sexually satisfy old, ugly women so as to avoid sexual inequity in the new *polis-oikos*. When Epigenes tries to meet Neanis, a crowd of hags surrounds him. He cries, "If only I were able to sleep with the young girl and didn't have to bang a pug-nose or an old lady first!" (*Ecclesiazusae* 938–40); they reply, "Now it's the law that you enter us first" (*Ecclesiazusae* 986). Epigenes associates the old women's cosmetics with the decoration of white vases customarily placed as offerings upon the tombs of the dead (*Ecclesiazusae* 993–96), associating sex with these old women and his own death (*Ecclesiazusae* 1105–11).

Political regimes, with their divisions and junctions, affect identity. Praxagora's new order undermines identity to such a degree that it raises the specter of incest. Blepyrus foresees this kind of problem, asking, "Well, if we live this way, how will any man be able to recognize his own children?" Praxagora replies, "Why should he? They'll regard all older men of a certain age to be their fathers" (*Ecclesiazusae* 635–37). Epigenes recoils from pleasuring women his mother's age. Neanis too points out to the old hags, "He's the wrong age to be sleeping with you—you're more his mother than his wife. If you people start enforcing a law like this, you'll fill the whole country with Oedipuses" (*Ecclesiazusae* 1038–42).

Mitchell's young Hansel is also damaged, as the forces of political division inscribe upon his body a dividing mark. The scar of his gender-reassignment surgery mimics that division of Berlin itself by the Wall: erected and then torn down, a similar scar of divided identity. Hedwig declares herself to be the embodiment of difference, the new Berlin Wall:

> (Hedwig, singing) Don't you know me Kansas City? I'm the new Berlin Wall. Try and tear me down . . . I rose from off of the doctor's slab like Lazarus from the pit. Now everyone wants to take a stab and decorate me with blood, graffiti, and spit.

> (Yitzhak, reciting) On August 13th, 1961 a wall was erected down the middle of the city of Berlin. The world was divided by a cold war, and the Berlin Wall was the most hated symbol of that divide, reviled, graffitied, spit upon. We thought the wall would stand forever. And now that it's gone, we don't know who we are anymore. Ladies and gentlemen, Hedwig is like that wall—standing before you in the divide between east and west, slavery and freedom, man and woman, top and bottom. And you can try and tear her down—but before you do, you must remember one thing . . .
>
> (Hedwig, singing) Hey, there ain't much of a difference between a bridge and a wall. Without me right in the middle, babe, you would be nothing at all.

Like a deconstructed wall, Hedwig retains the trace of dividing and defining difference, one mapped out in terms of sexual identity and nationality. One of Hedwig's costumes is a cape made to look like the Berlin Wall. The cape bears the graffiti, "Yankee go home . . . with me," a statement that points to Hedwig's conflicted self: a denial of the America that has forbidden Hansel to be himself and a plea for acceptance. "Go home . . . with me" is less "come to my home" than "take me to yours," so it is also a reiteration of Hansel's escape fantasy. But instead of finding acceptance in the West, Hedwig is reviled and spit upon.

Figure 14.1 Hedwig (John Cameron Mitchell) as the Berlin Wall in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001). Killer Films/New Line Cinema.

Economic injustice too is explored in both *Ecclesiazusae* and *Hedwig*. Praxagora's platform promises "a common share of all for all" (*Ecclesiazusae* 590–94) as all citizens relinquish their private property to the state to be redistributed fairly. In practice, such a system is problematized by the character of the "greedy man" who is unwilling to turn over his property but expects to benefit from state-sponsored meals: "I definitely need some kind of scheme to hold onto the property I've got but also share in the treats being kneaded up in common for these people" (*Ecclesiazusae* 872–74). Such unfairness is also at stake throughout *Hedwig*. After her abandonment, Hedwig works around her ex-husband's military base, even providing sexual services to desperate men. She also nurtures Tommy, the son of General Speck, and turns him into rock star Tommy Gnosis (Michael Pitt). But although she gave her former lover and musical collaborator his name and look, he records her songs without acknowledging Hedwig's contributions, depriving her of recognition and royalties. While traveling from town to town, she attempts to follow his tour, but she is abandoned once again as Tommy Gnosis denies Hedwig's contributions:

> Tommy, can you hear me? From this milkless tit you sucked the very business we call "show" . . . So you want to know about Tommy Gnosis? . . . After my divorce, I scraped by with babysitting gigs and odd jobs—mostly the jobs we call "blow." I had lost my job at the PX and I had lost my gag reflex. You do the math.

Conclusion

Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* functions as a subtext informing *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Mitchell's film is a combination of the humorous and the poignant: as the stage-show's director Peter Askin noted in an interview, *Hedwig* consists of "stand up comedy with some hoary, cheap jokes," "Stephen's wonderful music," and "this unexpectedly poignant love story."[20] The mixture of the comic and the poignant suggests one more link between *Hedwig* and Aristophanes. At the end of Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates, unfazed by heavy drinking, speaks with the comic poet Aristophanes and the tragic poet Agathon: "Socrates was compelling them to agree that one and the same man knows how to compose both comedy and tragedy, and he who is a tragic poet by art is a comic poet, too" (*Symposium* 223d). Mitchell has proved Socrates correct; this wonderful musical illuminates the tragicomic elements of the Aristophanic comedy of the body and the political context for the formulation of sexual identity and agency.

Notes

1. The term "transsexed" indicates the fact of Hansel's/Hedwig's penectomy and associated gendered identity, while noting the criticism of Jones (2006) 450 that *Hedwig* is specifically not a film about a transgendered performer since Hedwig "never articulates a desire to become a woman. His transformation is certainly not his idea, nor is it freely chosen."
2. On the difficulty of assigning gendered pronouns to refer to Hansel/Hedwig, see Sypniewski (2008) 559 n.3, and more generally Hale (2009). This chapter will refer to Hansel with male gendered pronouns and Hedwig with feminine gendered pronouns.
3. As quoted in the documentary *Whether You Like It or Not: The Story of Hedwig* (2003), directed by Laura Nix, included as a bonus feature on the DVD of the film. All quotations from the documentary are my own transcriptions.
4. For the text of Plato, *Symposium*, see Nehemas and Woodruff (1997).
5. On Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, see Dover (1966) and Beers (2011).
6. Salazar (2004), Dean (2006), Groneberg (2005) 48 n.12, Sypniewski (2008), and Sellberg (2009).
7. On the Berlin Wall as a "jagged scar" or "wound" dividing the city in two, see Sandell (2010) 238 with bibliography.
8. See Sandell (2010) 237–38.
9. On performing gender, see Butler (1990).
10. Precise dating of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* is difficult: see Ussher (1973) xx–xxv and Henderson (2002) 238.
11. On the Corinthian War, see Seager (1994). On the political dimension of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, see Rothwell Jr. (1990) and Zeitlin (1999).
12. For Freud's work on the fetish object as simultaneously concealing and revealing the lack of the female phallus, see Strachey (1961) 152–57. See Rothwell Jr. (1990) on "persuasion" (*peitho*) in *Ecclesiazusae* that bridges public speech and erotic power.
13. All citations of Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* are from Ussher's 1973 edition of the Greek text; all translations are mine.
14. Saïd (1987); Taaffe (1994) 103–33; Zeitlin (1999) 167–72; Dobrov (2001) 27–28.
15. On denoting female gender in Attic black-figure vase painting by adding white to characters or painting faces in outline, see Boardman (1974) 16, 37, 55, 197–98 and the recent analysis by Eaverly (2013).
16. Zeitlin (1999) 167–72; Dobrov (2001) 27–28.
17. Quoted in *Whether You Like It or Not: The Story of Hedwig* (2003).
18. Note Hedwig's own discussion of "the crypto-homo-rockers: Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, David Bowie" in the film.
19. On Plato's use of Aristophanes' comedy *Ecclesiazusae* in his own political theory in the *Republic* and *Laws*, see Adam (1963) 345–55 and Ussher (1973) xv–xx. On making a single household of the city, compare Plato, *Republic* 462b; on communal dwellings, see Plato, *Republic* 458c (also 464b, 416d). For the text of Plato, *Republic*, see Grube and Reeve (1997).
20. Quoted in *Whether You Like It or Not: The Story of Hedwig* (2003).

15

Dionysus Comes to Gotham: Forces of Disorder in *The Dark Knight* (2008)

David Bullen

An enigmatic figure surfaces to seize control of a city that fails to acknowledge his ideology.[1] He is confronted by the guardian of the city, whose own ideology directly opposes that of the stranger. The guardian captures the stranger and interrogates him, soon finding the tables turned as the coolly charismatic captive exposes the fractures in the guardian's uptight persona. Eventually the stranger is condemned to imprisonment, but he is not thwarted: in an eruption of fire and rubble, the stranger levels his dungeon and walks free. The theatrical flair with which he executes his schemes, the madness he inspires in his followers, the protean avoidance of one fixed identity—in all these ways he establishes himself as a figure of chaos, the arch-nemesis of the city's guardian.

This narrative matches the first two-thirds of Euripides' *Bacchae*, one of his final tragedies, produced in Athens in 405 BC. Leaping forward nearly two and half thousand years, across media and the cultural spectrum, the above description also outlines the first two-thirds of Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008). That Greek tragedy and popular film should share narrative beats is not unprecedented: Edith Hall has observed similarities between Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and blockbusters like George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).[2] Whether Hollywood actively mines the canon of the ancient tragedians or receives it indirectly through popular studies such as Joseph Campbell's 1949 work of comparative mythology *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the parallels between

The Dark Knight and *Bacchae* were sufficient to influence one recent high-profile stage production.

Stage versions of Euripides' text frequently invest in finding the right analogue for the complex and contradictory force of Dionysus, which is fundamental for making sense of the narrative. Since the late 1960s, productions constructed the god so as to encompass violent variations on "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll."[3] JoAnne Akalaitis' 2009 production of *Bacchae* went beyond this standard set of signifiers and invoked a much more recent symbol of counter-culture: the Joker from *The Dark Knight*. At the Delacorte Theater in New York City's Central Park, Jonathan Groff's Dionysus wore lipstick smeared from ear to ear to suggest a red smile reminiscent of Heath Ledger's Joker in Nolan's film. Moreover, Groff invoked Ledger's characterization in the way he moved, spoke, and laughed.[4] Akalaitis herself described *Bacchae* as an "enigma," and therefore may have constructed her Dionysus as a Joker-figure in hopes of making accessible an unfathomably ancient character, using semiotic shorthand familiar to her audience.[5] While Akalaitis' direct borrowing may have been, in Nick Geller's assessment, "a little too heavy-handed," evidently she saw sufficient parallels to construct meaning by connecting them.[6] Her production also indicates that *Bacchae* and *The Dark Knight* share not only narrative similarities but also thematic resonances.

Defining the relationship between *Bacchae* and *The Dark Knight* is no simple task: is it adaptation, or appropriation? Theater historian Julie Sanders defines as adaptations those texts that actively indicate their relationship to a source in some form or another.[7] Appropriation is more complex, "frequently affect[ing] a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain."[8] Crucially, however, as Sanders notes, "The appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signaled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process."[9] Sanders' discussion of various appropriations of Ovidian and Orphic narratives acknowledges that in some cases "the intertextuality operates in a subterranean mode, occurring beneath the surface narrative."[10] As Sanders further elucidates, much mythic appropriation turns on archetypes, not specifics.[11] By refocusing on these archetypes, a more plausible hypothesis for the similarities between *Bacchae* and *The Dark Knight* emerges. Rather than viewing the process of interpretation as a case of Nolan drawing directly on Euripides, both texts interpret the same archetypal mythic narrative: *Bacchae* being a formal and conscious adaptation and *The Dark Knight* a "subterranean" appropriation.

Certainly Euripides was drawing on a mythic source when he wrote *Bacchae*, for the myth of Dionysus' disruptive advent in Thebes was popular in the fifth century BC.[12] Dionysus, son of the god-king Zeus and the

mortal princess Semele, returns to his home city of Thebes to announce his divinity to Hellas and punish his disbelieving mortal relatives. His chief opponent is his cousin, King Pentheus. After inspiring madness in the women of Thebes and causing them to ascend nearby Mount Cithaeron to practice his rites, Dionysus disguises himself as his own priest and allows himself to be captured by Pentheus, whose interrogation of his captive only underlines the god's power. The god cannot be contained, and Dionysus utilizes his divine powers to break free. At this point variants of the myth diverge, but all conclude with Dionysus triumphing over his mortal aggressor by instructing the maddened Theban women to tear Pentheus limb from limb.

As the only extant ancient theatrical version of the myth, Euripides' *Bacchae* has become synonymous with the mythic narrative at the archetypal level, even though the final third of the play may be entirely Euripides' invention—the part of the narrative that bears least relation to *The Dark Knight*.[13] Regardless of Euripides' innovations, the core mythic narrative raises two key questions: What motivates the societal disruption brought by Dionysus, or at least represented by Dionysian worship? And what does this disruption demand that society recognize about itself? These questions also permeate *The Dark Knight* and are elaborated upon by Nolan. Thus *The Dark Knight* and *Bacchae* (along with its ongoing stage reception) exist in a matrix of sources and responses generated from the myth, each informing and/or being informed by the others. This chapter discusses the ways in which *The Dark Knight* figures in this matrix and the implications of recognizing the function of myth in cinema.

Batman as Myth

Akalaitis' production identified Dionysus with Nolan's Joker in this myth of the god's advent; does that entail Batman's identification with Pentheus? Batman fits less easily than the Joker into the advent myth's narratives and themes. Yet each serves as a deliberate foil for the other, defining his counterpart through difference. Likewise, Dionysus and Pentheus each serve, in the advent myth, as the inversion of the other—even as Dionysus carries his own independent set of meanings separate from that particular episode and his relationship with Pentheus. Pentheus, however, exists in myth only in the context of his encounter with Dionysus. So while there may be ample material to illustrate the parallels between Dionysus and the Joker, there is less scope for doing the same with Pentheus and Batman based on Greek myth alone. Therefore, we must turn to a different mythology in order to find resonances between Dionysus' opponent and the Joker's: that of the comic books from which the Batman of *The Dark Knight* emerged.

The mythology of the Batman universe has been steadily growing since the character's 1939 debut as a comic book superhero, and it encompasses a vast range of stories in a number of different media.[14] Although DC Comics has always attempted to impose a sense of coherent continuity running through the ongoing story lines of their characters, only a few core elements remain unchanged from the 1930s. In particular, the transposition of the character and his world into other media has resulted in the creation of new elements that both exist independently from the comic books and also come to influence that canon.[15] Filmmakers have had relatively free rein to interpret the characters mythically beyond the comics, drawing on particular narrative, character, and thematic archetypes that suit their particular presentation of the universe. Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*, for example, features an origin story for the Joker drawn from Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's 1988 graphic novel *The Killing Joke*. Nolan's Joker, on the other hand, is more enigmatic, yet both film versions retain key aspects of the character that have existed throughout the history of the Batman comic books. Regarding any Bacchic overtones, Will Brooker describes both Nolan's Joker and the comic book versions in overtly Dionysian terms, as an "embodiment of becoming and transformation" and an "avatar of death."[16] Geller links the pair more directly: "It is certainly not difficult to see why the Joker would be an appropriate analogue for Dionysus: he cares nothing about the rules of society (and gender roles)—and even sees himself as an 'agent of chaos.'"[17]

The Joker has always functioned as Batman's chief adversary and inversion, visually and thematically. Batman dresses in dark colors and uses fear to fight crime, while the Joker wears a garish purple outfit and uses comedy to commit crime. Batman is sane and logical; the Joker is insane and unpredictable. Batman stands for order, while the Joker seeks to spread disorder. More formally, the Joker acts as a comic inversion of Batman: he is a deviant, heedless of the law, which helps to define his heroic counterpart.[18] The Joker is not alone in this function; other members of Batman's extensive rogues' gallery also serve to define their nemesis by opposition. The four installments of Tim Burton and Joel Schumacher's 1989–1997 film series, as well as Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2004) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), made the tension inherent in Batman's binary relationship to his villains a driving force in the narrative. *The Dark Knight* is no exception, as it incorporates the usual oppositions from the Batman mythology. Although Ledger's Joker is not quite as brightly dressed as other iterations of the character, his colorful appearance contrasts with Batman's all-black outfit. Likewise, whole sequences demonstrate that Batman operates under the rubric of careful scientific reasoning, whereas the Joker's methodology is the antithesis of this approach. Batman is positioned as passive and

contemplative; the Joker is active. "I just *do* things," he says, explaining that he seeks to subvert the work of "schemers" who attempt to control their world through order and organization.

Again, the parallels with Dionysus, who seeks to enact similar—but crucially not identical—kinds of subversion, and Pentheus, whose position as king renders him a symbol of civic order, are apparent. While the relationship between the Joker and Batman in the context of their comic book mythology implicates the latter as this Pentheus figure, and while the film does comply with this to an extent, *The Dark Knight* differs from previous cinematic versions of the characters by introducing a third figure into the equation, against whom Batman is defined by contrast: Harvey Dent.

In the mythology of the Batman universe, Harvey Dent is the villainous Two-Face, whose gimmick is a split personality that is reflected in both his physical appearance and his modus operandi. Ever since Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale's 1997–1998 comic book miniseries *The Long Halloween*, one of the film's cited inspirations,[19] Dent's transformation from Gotham City's earnest district attorney to deformed criminal mastermind has been linked with Bruce Wayne's early forays as Batman. Indeed, Dent's fall from grace becomes a key formative experience for the developing hero. In Nolan's interpretation, Dent's rise and fall affects not only Batman but the entire city.

Figure 15.1 The Joker (Heath Ledger) revels in his explosive chaos in *The Dark Knight* (2008). Legendary Pictures/Warner Bros. Pictures.

Early on, the film introduces Dent as a competitor with both Bruce Wayne and Batman: he is dating the woman whom Wayne loves and is as dedicated to combating organized crime in Gotham as Batman. The crucial difference between the two men is their method: the vigilante Batman apprehends criminals, whereas Dent works within the law to ensure that they are successfully prosecuted. But the pair's methods are complementary, as they work together to hamper the activities of the criminal underworld. The film presents the Joker's arrival in the city, and role in the narrative, as a consequence of destabilizing the established order of that underworld, which also results in splitting the function of the Pentheus figure in two. Dent specifically embodies the institutional "schemers" that the Joker seeks to dissolve with his Dionysian anarchy. Just as Dionysus corrupts and destroys Pentheus in the advent myth, so too the Joker leads Dent to a tragic conclusion, initiating his transformation into the murderous Two-Face and ultimately bringing about his death.

In the myth, Dionysus' victory results in misery for Pentheus' family and complete conversion to Dionysian worship in Thebes; Batman prevents such a victory for the Joker. Instead of conversion to the Joker's world view, the film stages a restoration. To preserve Dent as a figure of hope and thus maintain his earlier advances against Gotham's crime problem, the film ends by intimating that Batman will now function as a scapegoat for the crimes Dent committed during his brief stint as Two-Face. Batman's role in this reinterpretation of the advent myth fulfills only part of Pentheus' function in the narrative; his position somewhere between Dent and the Joker allows him to interrupt and alter the outcome of the original.

The deployment of Batman, the Joker, and Dent as archetypal figures from a wider mythology—as opposed to specific characters from a single source—reflects a practice similar to Euripides' own dramaturgy. Both deployments draw upon myth to tell their particular versions of a narrative. *The Dark Knight* demonstrates that the Batman mythology can be situated amid a deeper matrix of sources and responses, connecting the film not only to Euripides' tragedy but to the wider cultural tradition of which both are refractions. However, the question remains: If myth reflects aspects of a given culture and the film is operating at a mythic level, working with and against pre-existing archetypes, what exactly is being reflected? Moreover, how can viewing the film as an appropriation of the advent myth elucidate its sources?

The Dark Knight as Myth

When *The Dark Knight* was released in 2008, a number of critics identified its resonance with the anxieties of America at the start of the twenty-first

century, calling it "the first great post-September 11 film" and a "bleak post-9/11 allegory."[20] This sentiment pertains as much to the film's general narrative as to its specifics, since six years earlier *Bacchae* was tagged with similar relevance. Peter Hall's 2002 production for the National Theatre of Great Britain framed Dionysus' return to Thebes as a religious crusade against the West, with the chorus of his followers cast as indoctrinated men and women dressed in costumes designed to evoke the Middle East. As with *The Dark Knight*, the resonances with 9/11 were identified by a number of critics reviewing the production. Nolan's film may have been more allegorical, but both demonstrate the evident political immediacy of the advent myth's basic narrative at the time. The nature of this immediacy differs between Hall's and Nolan's visions, just as their relationships to the advent myth differ. Hall's production was able to address the contemporary political situation via the myth because *Bacchae* is consciously signaled as an adaptation of it; the myth's subterranean expression in *The Dark Knight* requires further scrutiny to identify how it resonates politically there.

Whenever a myth is concretized into a singular narrative instance, there are gains and losses. This is an inevitable result of having to situate a myth within a context removed from the one in which it originated. Modern productions of *Bacchae*, while potentially able to utilize the underlying myth to address a contemporary issue, necessarily fail to convey the original cultural meaning of Dionysus' advent, because audiences receive the story amid their own contextual frameworks. For example, the liberation offered by Dionysus to the women who worship him is not twenty-first-century liberation: they may be freed from the oppressive conditions of ancient Greek society, but they are shackled to Dionysus instead, deprived of their will by his madness. Similarly, positioning the Joker as Dionysus legitimizes his actions in a way that Nolan's world cannot allow: the Joker remains a criminal and a terrorist, but Dionysus' actions in the myth are justified within the cosmic order of Greek mythology. As Euripides has Dionysus say at the end of *Bacchae*, "My father Zeus long ago assented to these things" (*Bacchae* 1349).[21] So the key questions raised in the introduction to this chapter remain: What motivates the societal disruption caused by Dionysus, and what does this disruption demand that society examine about itself?

As noted, splitting the Pentheus figure in *The Dark Knight* enables the containment of Dionysus' insurrection; the consequences for society are limited to a few individuals, thanks to Batman's actions. This ending is symptomatic of the different ordering systems at work in the worlds of Greek myth and Batman. In the advent myth, Dionysus is simply redressing the destabilization caused by Pentheus' impious denial of Dionysus' divinity: Pentheus is the aberration. When his destruction removes the

obstacle to Dionysus' veneration in Thebes, the cosmic order of Zeus and the Olympian gods is affirmed, and the dysfunctional civic order of the mortal world under Pentheus' misguided rule is corrected. Thus Dionysus' revenge is both inevitable and just. The ordering system of Batman's universe is less complex: Batman must always triumph over his adversaries, Joker or otherwise. In part, this is a material demand for an ongoing comic book character at the center of this mythology: the hero needs to triumph for publication to go on. The Joker, as Dionysian as he may be, is no true double for Dionysus because he will never succeed in asserting his disorderly system: anarchy.

Rather than a loss of the advent myth's full meaning, this change might instead be seen as productive. In complicating the simple (and unrealistic) ordering system of Batman's world by situating him in a narrative with limited capacity to appease this system, the film challenges the certainty of that order. In such a world, good may triumph over an agent of evil—but not over evil itself. Significantly, *The Dark Knight* was the first Batman film not to culminate in either the death or the incarceration of its primary antagonist, withholding certainty that the order of civilized society can or will continue. Much like Dionysus, the film's Joker is not evil; rather, he is, in his own words, an "agent of chaos." Perhaps in this way the film resonates most powerfully in the aftermath of 9/11, reflecting a disillusioned world in which order is no longer assumed to be unassailable. It is no surprise that critics likened the film to Greek tragedy, wherein human order is of little comfort against the unpredictable and unknowable might of the cosmos—Sonny Bunch of *The Washington Times*, for example, described it as an "epic tragedy in the Grecian sense."[22]

The Legacy of *The Dark Knight*

Akalaitis' channeling of the Joker through her Dionysus served to highlight the relevance of the advent myth to *The Dark Knight*. Other films too may be seen as a re-enactment of Dionysus' arrival in Thebes, including Sam Mendes' contribution to the James Bond film franchise, *Skyfall* (2012). Mendes openly admitted being influenced by Nolan's film, even though similar narrative beats play out differently.[23] As was the case with *The Dark Knight*, *Skyfall* could draw upon a wide body of sources and a long tradition, but the film's Dionysus-figure, Silva, functions as a complete inversion of Bond. Again, however, the Pentheus-figure is split between Bond and his superior, M. Her treatment of Silva is the cause for his subversive insurrection, so it is M who ultimately suffers the tragic death, which is then avenged by Bond.

As such, *Skyfall* does not offer the same bleak uncertainty as the end of *The Dark Knight*, but rather it deploys the myth in a different way: Silva's advent and M's subsequent death initiate a rebirth of sorts. By re-introducing a male M and returning Miss Moneypenny to her desk job at the end of the film, Mendes' instantiation of the myth restores two iconic conventions of early Bond films, shedding the remaining elements of the 1995 and 2006 "reboots" of the franchise.[24] Just as with *The Dark Knight*, aspects of the advent myth in *Skyfall* serve to differentiate it from previous interpretations of the Bond mythology.

Prior to 9/11, the advent myth had been deployed in the comic register as well. Both Herbert Ross' *Footloose* (1984) and Lasse Hallström's *Chocolat* (2000) feature their Dionysus-figure as protagonist, whose subversive advent in a repressed community is presented as a positive act that enables progressive liberation for the townsfolk. In these narratives, a singular Pentheus-figure is converted rather than destroyed; in both cases, however, their own boundaries must be dismantled before this conversion can take place. *Chocolat* even goes so far as to feature a moment of *sparagmos*—the ritual "tearing-apart" to which Euripides' Pentheus is subjected—but the victim is not the Pentheus-figure. Rather, it is the elaborate chocolate display that the Dionysus-figure has temptingly displayed in the window of her shop, and its destruction and devouring by the film's Pentheus-figure serves to symbolize the moment when his rigid moral conservatism finally gives way to wild, pleasurable abandon. In transposing the tragic myth into a comic narrative, the films allow their Dionysus-figures to retain the authority and righteousness that is complicated by the deployment of the god as villain in *The Dark Knight*.

Opening up the parameters for identifying the Dionysian advent myth would reveal further examples.[25] In each case, viewing the text in relation to the myth illuminates the myriad ways in which ancient narratives permeate the unlikeliest of places. An awareness of the myth is not necessary to make sense of the new text's narrative, but it can enrich understanding of its relationship to the specific historical and cultural context in which it was made. Furthermore, tracing resonances with any given myth facilitates a radical recasting of the cultural landscape, so that a vast range of disparate texts—both ancient and modern, across the spectrums of genre and social value—can be identified as productively interconnected.

Notes

1. I am extremely grateful to Meredith Safran and Monica Cyrino for their invaluable comments on the first draft of this chapter. In addition, thanks must go

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2. See Hall (2013) 2, who characterizes this as a continuation of centuries of "subterranean" adaptation, whereby the particulars of the original—a Greek hero on a mission with his close friend to rescue his sister from the clutches of barbarian captors—become boiled down to, in Hall's term, "abduction and rescue" narratives.
3. Easterling (1997) 36.
4. Geller (2013). Since I was unable to see Akalaitis' production and archival material for it is sparse, I am indebted to Nick Geller and his insightful paper for its discussion of the production, Groff's performance, and its relationship to *The Dark Knight*.
5. For Akalaitis' views on *Bacchae*, see Gener (2009).
6. Geller (2013).
7. Sanders (2006) 3.
8. Sanders (2006) 26.
9. Sanders (2006) 26.
10. Sanders (2006) 81. Sanders' choice of language here is echoed in Hall's discussion of *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (noted above).
11. Sanders (2006) 71.
12. On the myth of Dionysus, see Dodds (1960) xxviii–xxix, Kirk (1970) 11, and Gantz (1993) 112–19. Notably, Aeschylus produced a trilogy of plays, now extant only in fragments, elaborating on the Dionysian myth, the final part of which corresponds to the narrative found in *Bacchae*.
13. This includes the cross-dressing episode in which Pentheus dons female bacchant garb in order to spy on the Theban women and the gruesome ending that sees Pentheus' own mother lead the murder. See Rutherford (2005) 124 and Webster (1971) 37.
14. For a detailed discussion of the development of the Batman universe, see Brooker (2012).
15. See Brooker (2012) 86. This is in part due to the far higher profile afforded by film and television in comparison to the relatively niche audience of comic book consumers. A number of characters—or versions of characters—that first appeared in these more popular media have since entered comic book continuity.
16. Brooker (2012) 177.
17. Geller (2013).
18. See Brooker (2012) 162–77.
19. Brooker (2012) 58–67.
20. See Bunch (2008) and Stevens (2008). Brooker (2012) 178–210 discusses the relationship between *The Dark Knight* and 9/11 at length in his fifth chapter, "The Never Ending War."
21. For translation of the *Bacchae*, see Morwood (1999).
22. Bunch (2008).

23. Noted in Dyce (2012).
24. Martin Campbell's *GoldenEye* (1995) was not so formal a "reboot" as his later *Casino Royale* (2006), but it did revive the series for the first time in six years, introducing a new actor to play Bond (Pierce Brosnan) and establishing a number of elements that remained until *Skyfall*—most notably Judi Dench's female M.
25. The program for Peter Hall's production of *Bacchai* (National Theatre of Great Britain, 2002), for example, claims both *The Wicker Man* (1973) and *Back to the Future* (1985) as inspirations. In the superhero and science-fiction genres, *The Avengers* (2012), directed by Joss Whedon, features similar narrative beats and a Dionysian advent, though there is no clear Pentheus-figure; *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), directed by J. J. Abrams, features a Dionysus-figure with godlike powers whose subversive return is ultimately contained.

16

Hypatia and Brian: Early Christianity as Greek Mythological Drama

Anise K. Strong

Both the British film *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979) and the Spanish film *Agora* (2009) reimagine canonical tales of the origins of Christianity, its conflicts with Judaism and Roman polytheism, and its transformation into a dominant religion. Rather than following religious orthodoxy, both films treat the narratives of Jesus and St. Cyril, as well as crucial turning points in the history of Christianity, as tales similar to ancient Greek myths: that is, they are available to be reinterpreted according to the values and beliefs of each new generation. In challenging traditional divisions between mythology and scripture, as well as between history and fiction, both films have drawn accusations of blasphemy and irreverence toward the canonical stories of Christianity. While *Life of Brian* is a popular comedic classic and *Agora* is an acclaimed art-house film, they share an interest in re-evaluating Christian "truths," implicitly questioning why audiences welcome different depictions of Jason and his Argonauts, for example, but not of Jesus and his followers.

In shaping their Christian source materials, both films invoke another "pagan" concept: fifth-century BC Athenian drama. *Life of Brian* follows closely in the footsteps of Greek Old Comedy by using traditional narratives to comment satirically on contemporary social, political, and religious debates. The Pythons' use of cross-dressing and their willingness to offend virtually everyone echo the comedies of Aristophanes. Director Alejandro Amenábar's depiction of the Alexandrian female philosopher and mathematician Hypatia in *Agora* closely resembles the portrayal of prototypical

Greek tragic heroines; Hypatia's inflexibility is especially evocative of the Greek tragedian Sophocles' Antigone, who likewise serves as a foil for the character development of the men around her.[1] Most notably, both films feature groups in a manner reminiscent of the chorus of Greek drama. By incorporating ancient Greek dramatic structures and motifs, both films link the classical and Biblical mythological canons.

Myth and Truth

Myth is a loaded and complex term, especially with regard to early Christianity. While its archaic meaning in Homer denotes an authoritative speech or story designed to persuade the listener, the conflict between *mythos* and *logos* in later philosophical and tragic contexts is more relevant for these films and the development of early Christianity.[2] Modern usage inherits the classical Greek associations of *mythos* with fiction and lies, versus the factual *logos* ("account"), a term that in the Christian narrative comes to represent Jesus Christ himself (John 1:1).[3] Yet while many modern Westerners can hardly imagine that anyone ever believed gods could transform into bulls or drive flying chariots,[4] they often expect even non-believers to politely respect Lazarus' revival or Jesus' miraculous multiplication of fish as historical and therefore real. In this sense, Greek and Roman myths might be regarded as articles of faith that have lost their congregations of believers.

Labeling ancient Greek stories of their gods as "mythology" communicates how few people today take these symbolic tales seriously, even as they reinterpret Greek and Roman narratives in media from the Renaissance paintings of Botticelli to modern films like *Clash of the Titans* (1981; 2010). This distinction allows freer analysis of Greek myths as important symbolic tools of discourse for modern culture.[5] Marcel Detienne locates "mythology" in opposition to religion, reason, and civilization—the forces driving Western history; whereas myths are the sources of scandal, immorality, and chaos.[6] In Detienne's view, the deceptive falsehoods of myths automatically problematize them as a source of authority, a view supported by late antique Christian apologists.

"Mythology" is usually strictly separated from "scripture" or "the Gospels," terms that have developed strong implicit connotations of truth. Christian stories about Jesus, his disciples, and the early Church Fathers have of course been retold and repainted for generations. However, because these tales have been sacralized, they remain largely static. Whereas in antiquity authors could add new characters or dramatically change a narrative's ending, such as Euripides adding infanticide to Medea's list of crimes in his tragic drama *Medea*,[7] Christian authorities and believers tolerate a

limited range of interpretations by scholars or artists. The exegetic restrictions on the Christian texts paradoxically suggest their vulnerability to close examination, including through parody.

Today, reinterpretations of the fictional narratives of Greek myths go largely unchallenged, while the theoretically nonfictional status of stories of Jesus and the Christian saints are more problematic. By the very nature of their plots, *Life of Brian* and *Agora* diminish the special status of major figures like Jesus and Cyril by commenting upon the history of early Christianity and offering alternative explanations and motivations for traditional narratives. Even without calling the original texts fictional, when the Pythons and Amenábar mythologize key moments in canonized Christian narratives, they inherently devalue the status of such tales as "true" by suggesting that the existing scriptures do not tell the whole, or at least not the only, story.

Myth and Comedy

In 1979, the British sketch comedy troupe Monty Python was basking in the success of their first movie, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975). This sophisticated group of primarily Cambridge- and Oxford-educated intellectuals chose as their next project the story of Brian Cohen (Graham Chapman), an ordinary Jewish man in first-century AD Jerusalem whose life parallels that of Jesus of Nazareth, from birth to crucifixion. The film lampoons religious cults, Judaism, Christianity, Roman imperialism, "sword and sandal" movies, Gnosticism, British politics, Latin grammar pedagogy, feminism, transgender people, and speech impediments, among many other topics. *Life of Brian* has become a cultural touchstone, especially in the United Kingdom, where it has even been cited during the British Parliament's Question Time; its theme song, "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," was sung by British sailors awaiting rescue during the Falklands War.[8] In 2014, scholars in Great Britain held a conference dedicated to *Life of Brian*, and numerous works have focused on its role and uses in theological scholarship and the cinematic depiction of Christianity.[9]

The Pythons were conscious of their roles as mythmakers. Eric Idle commented that the genesis of *Brian* came in part from the success of their earlier medieval-themed film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*:[10]

> People started to take the idea of looking at this period, this sort of mythic—because the great thing about the Grail is that it's a myth that you understand and you can sort of play with it, in this mock-heroic way, but here [the New Testament] was a whole area and a subject which nobody had ever done for comedy, and that was very appealing, because, well, why not?

Here Idle distinguishes between traditional myths—cultural touchstones that "you can sort of play with"—and the Gospels. Yet in his mind, King Arthur and the Virgin Mary ought to be placed in the same category. For Idle, these stories are all part of the Anglo-American cultural heritage, equally revered and equally vulnerable. At the same time, he mocks critics by jokingly suggesting that only lack of creativity had restrained earlier artists from parodying the Bible, rather than censorship or respect for the scriptural texts. Despite Idle's casual tone, the Pythons were aware of the potentially offensive nature of the film, abandoning as too provocative the working title of *Jesus Christ: Lust for Glory*.[11]

Life of Brian indeed faced significant criticism from religious groups, severe funding difficulties, and even censorship. The film was banned in 39 British towns and most of the American South, as well as various nations including Ireland and Norway.[12] Criticism of *Life of Brian* was heterodox: Protestant critiques focused on the inappropriately happy crucifixion scene; the Catholic League complained about mockery of the Virgin Mary by association with Brian's prostitute mother; and Orthodox Jewish rabbis picketed the film because of its portrayal of different Jewish sects and perceived anti-Zionism.

The Pythons, despite their willingness to question authority, tried to lessen the negative reaction. Their film was not "taking the piss out of Jesus," as phrased memorably by Terry Gilliam, but rather responding to later writers' interpretations of the Gospels.[13] In other words, the Pythons saw themselves as legitimate commenters on the Gospels, no less than Jerome or Aquinas. They invoked the mythological tradition of reinvention through retelling as a legitimate form of Biblical exegesis, implicitly asking how our reaction to the Jesus story changes if Mary is not a virgin but a prostitute impregnated by an anonymous Roman centurion.

The Pythons were very careful to respect the words and image of Jesus, leaving oblique Jesus' status as Messiah. The only clear image of Jesus is an extreme long establishing shot during the Sermon on the Mount, exactly as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 5–7. But the scene focuses on the reinterpretation of his teachings by other characters. As the camera zooms out from Jesus, the onlookers play a game of "Telephone": when Jesus says "Blessed are the peace makers," they hear "Blessed are the cheese makers"—and explain to others that he actually means "Blessed are all those who work with dairy products." This blunt parody of exegesis questions the authority of later Christian interpreters, who seek to control the account in a way that interpreters of Greek myth did not.

The religious critics of *Life of Brian* were somewhat justified in fearing the film's effect upon popular conception of Jesus' life and teachings. As historian David Nash notes on this scene in the film, "Whether wittingly or

unwittingly, individuals were being led into questioning the very foundation of the Christian religion. Christian commentators could legitimately wonder whether individuals could ever mentally encounter the 'Sermon on the Mount' without mistakes and mishearings."[14] Jesus' central message about pacifism is potentially undermined by this association of Christian nonviolence with cheese. The atmosphere of the sacred is punctured by the banal; what if those who encounter the film first never fully grasp the original text's moral? Nash's anxiety rests upon the belief that there exists a single, true version of Jesus' life and teachings capable of transmitting Jesus' message, despite the numerous discrepancies between the four canonical Gospels and complex issues of transmission and translation. Any deviation or reimagining is thus a "mistake," a mythologizing of the *logos*.[15]

Myth and the Tragedy of Science

Alejandro Amenábar's *Agora* has received less worldwide attention, despite critical acclaim.[16] Like *Brian*, it focuses on the life and accomplishments of one individual, the late fourth-/early fifth-century AD philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria (Rachel Weisz). Through a fictionalized and expanded version of historical accounts of Hypatia's life, Amenábar dramatizes the violent religious conflict between polytheists, Christians, and Jews in the Egyptian city of Alexandria just when the Roman Empire had started to embrace Christianity as the official state religion. The religious intolerance in the film serves as a metaphor for modern religious discrimination, and especially for the persecution of scientists and atheists throughout history.

The characters surrounding Hypatia express a wide spectrum of attitudes toward Christianity. Besides Hypatia, there are three principal characters: her slave Davus (Max Minghella), who later joins the fanatical Christian monks known as the *parabolani*; her suitor and student Orestes (Oscar Isaac), who becomes the Roman Prefect and a reluctant Christian convert; and her devout Christian student Synesius (Rupert Evans), who becomes the Bishop of Cyrene. Davus is a fictional character, but both Orestes and Synesius are significant historical figures who had close relationships with Hypatia.[17] Hypatia's principal antagonist is the monk Cyril of Alexandria (Sami Samir), who later was canonized by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches as St. Cyril and honored as one of the Church Fathers and Doctors of the Church. The scholarly assessment of Cyril, however, often conflicts with his religious hagiography.[18]

The line between history and fiction is blurred deliberately in *Agora*. Amenábar performs an act of exegesis on the extremely limited surviving sources about the historical Hypatia of Alexandria and thereby creates a new Midrash-like text in his cinematic version of the tale. Midrashim, in

the Jewish tradition, are not intended necessarily as "true" elaborations on the Hebrew scriptures but rather as stories that help less educated audiences to understand and interpret complex texts more easily. They are a form of popular literature intended for mass consumption, playing a role similar to the function of medieval Christian mystery plays for European city-dwellers.[19] However, here Amenábar challenges a religious, Christian tradition about Cyril with an atheistic yet moralizing historical drama in the classical tradition; his reinterpretation serves not to translate hagiography for popular audiences but to question and undermine it. Knowledge of this historical period is no longer widespread, so the Midrashic function would be appropriate even for the art-house audience of elite intellectuals whom it reached, especially in the United States.

Despite Amenábar's condemnation of all forms of religious fanaticism and celebration of the virtues of science, his film does not directly challenge the Gospels themselves.[20] Nevertheless, a major Spanish Catholic organization, the Observatorio Antidifamación Religiosa, claimed that the film was "promoting hatred of Christians and reinforcing false clichés about the Catholic Church."[21] The Vatican, which worked with Amenábar to find the least offensive translation possible for the misogynistic sections of the Bible preached in the film by St. Cyril, refused either to condemn or to endorse the film.[22] *Agora* met with less direct censorship than *Life of Brian*, perhaps because *Agora* was only released in 17 theaters in the United States. It is difficult to tell whether *Agora*'s release was so limited because distributors viewed classical history as dull or because the depiction of Christian mobs killing Rachel Weisz was sacrilegious.

Christianity and Myths of Gender and Sexuality

The mythologizing approach enabled both *Life of Brian* and *Agora* to engage with a sensitive issue for Christianity in the West: Church attitudes toward sex and sexuality that encourage the demotion, erasure, or demonization of women and female figures. For example, Karen King, a highly respected professor of the Harvard Divinity School, has been pilloried and shamed for daring to suggest that a fourth-century AD Coptic papyrus might contain a story—an alternate myth—about Jesus having a wife.[23] King herself has never alleged that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was married, but the very concept of "Jesus' wife" has been considered blasphemous because it appears to threaten the truth-value of the canonical Gospels and the fundamental tenet that Christian tales are not mythology but fixed and incontrovertible truths. What would it mean if some early Christians were comfortable talking about the Messiah's wife?

To quote popular Catholic blogger Dominic Pedulla, "Have we really regressed, after 4,000 years of divine revelation, to seeing the Trinity the way the Greeks saw the gods, sneaking into human bedrooms disguised as humans, in order to impregnate human beings so as to create demigods, in the process committing adultery against their divine mates?"[24] Pedulla suggests that to accept the authenticity of this papyrus is to align the tales of Jesus heretically with those of Zeus. Furthermore, Pedulla assumes that Jesus having an active sexual life requires debauchery and chaos, similar to Detienne's interpretation of myth. For Pedulla, myths about Jesus having a wife—even in unpopular texts—invalidate his equation with *logos*, that force of truth, reason, and civilization, and threaten the dominance of patriarchal, male-centered Christian texts. The canonical virtuous woman in Christianity is, of course, a virgin.

Both *Life of Brian* and *Agora* directly confront this problematic relationship between female sexuality and Christian "truths." *Brian* directly courts this controversy of sexualized Biblical tales by suggesting that Brian's mother (and by analogy, Jesus') might not have been a virgin blessed with a miracle but a prostitute named Mandy who slept with her Roman overlords. In *Agora*, Amenábar dramatizes a historical anecdote about Hypatia: she rejected Orestes, who was in love with her brilliant intellect and beautiful outward form, by giving him a bloody menstrual rag signifying her physical, feminine nature. Hypatia challenges Orestes' fantasy of her perfection by presenting him with her *logos* of biological messiness. By implication, her religious maidenly counterpart, the Virgin Mary, must also have had menstrual cycles and a human body. Amenábar also challenges conventional authority by reversing the standards for *mythos* and *logos*; the scientific fact of Hypatia's menstrual cycle is the truth, whereas the Christian Orestes is only telling himself a romantic fantasy.

These films also emphasize the distinction between the acceptability of public speech and creative activity for men, and the problematic nature of women's speech and stories. In *Life of Brian*, the male characters are the creators of myth and propaganda alike, while the women either are passive receivers of tales or have their versions of the story largely ignored. Brian's mother failed to dispel the crowd's desire for a heroic savior: "He's not the Messiah! He's a very naughty boy. Now go away!" Brian's lover Judith echoes whatever the other members of the People's Front of Judaea (PFJ) tell her, even accepting that Brian wishes to die on the cross when he is quite obviously trying to escape. While the leader of the Followers of the Gourd, one of the Brian-worshippers' rival cults, is a woman, she is portrayed as an inept interpreter of Brian's supposed message. Both Reg, the leader of the PFJ, and Brian shape their myths by pontificating through monologues about their views on faith, morality, and the Romans. However, just as in

the Christian canon itself, women remain largely in the audience, in contrast to Greek tragedy.

The most obvious and relevant of *Life of Brian*'s commentaries on gender roles, however, is the film's emphasis on cross-dressing, especially in a scene reminiscent of Aristophanes' comic play *Ecclesiazusae*: male actors play women who are wearing fake beards and adopting gruff voices to pretend to be men. But rather than attempting to participate in a political assembly, the Pythons' women want to attend a stoning. The general stereotyping of the female characters as shrewish mothers, naive objects of desire, or credulous believers also echoes Aristophanic stereotypes of women.[25] Indeed, the all-male Pythons go so far as to ridicule Romans by calling them "Wo-mans," in Pilate's effeminate lisp.

Late in *Agora*, Bishop Cyril reads out the purported writings of Paul regarding appropriate roles for women and women's public speech from an ornate, elegant Bible. He then commands the assembled Romans and Alexandrians to kneel and pay reverence to these particular scriptures. To accept Christianity, in Cyril's representation, is also to accept misogyny as divinely ordained and therefore to deny both Hypatia and her teachings. At first, the Roman governor Orestes, Hypatia's former devoted disciple, refuses to kneel. But the physical book of the New Testament becomes the symbol of the religion, and Orestes' refusal to accept its literal truth nearly gets him massacred by an angry mob of monks. By emphasizing the authority of the literal text of the scriptures, Amenábar directly confronts

Figure 16.1 Cyril of Alexandria (Sami Samir) confronts Orestes (Oscar Isaac) in *Agora* (2009). Focus Features/Newmarket Films.

later Christian resistance to mythologizing and reinterpreting these holy texts.[26] At the same time, by choosing an issue like a woman's right to speak in public, which the vast majority of twenty-first-century Christians support, Amenábar points out the innate problems of a fossilized religious text. He argues implicitly that a literally interpreted Bible may no longer carry much resonance or moral weight for a modern audience.

While portraying the rigid and misogynistic aspects of early Christianity in *Agora*, Amenábar also offers a more merciful and generous representation of the Christian faith. In the scenes where Davus converts to Christianity, Amenábar emphasizes the aspects of Christian moral teachings that have remained consistently praiseworthy in Western culture, such as feeding the poor and treating all people equally. The camera zooms in on the thankful faces of those receiving bread from Davus, while Davus himself is enlightened by this new form of morality and compassion. Like the Pythons, Amenábar suggests that the teachings of Jesus are not the problem. Instead, he argues that the true danger lies in a refusal to reinterpret and retell Biblical texts for each new generation. That rigidity contrasts with the creativity and openness of the classical Greek dramatists that Amenábar employs.

Myth and Greek Drama

Despite the tension between *mythos* and *logos*, the Pythons and Amenábar were conscious of the potential reactions of a faithful Christian audience. One way in which they sought cultural authorization from sources other than Church officials was by evoking some of the tropes and structures of ancient Greek drama. Despite their pagan origins, the comedies and tragedies of the ancient Greeks are still revered in Western culture. Thus the Pythons and Amenábar tempered the controversial nature of their works by aligning them with recognized forms of high culture. Specifically, both of these films utilize one of the most characteristic features of Greek drama: scenes featuring large groups that interrupt the principal characters' narrative in order to explore larger themes of religion and politics.[27] In other words, they serve the function of the choral sequences familiar to audiences of classical Greek comedy and tragedy, in which a group with a fixed civic or religious identity provides counterpoint to the protagonists' struggles.

Life of Brian introduces the PFJ in an actual marble amphitheater, the local provincial Roman theater of Carthage, in modern-day Tunisia.[28] The first shot of the PFJ shows the group seated on marble benches, like an audience or a chorus down in the orchestra. The initial dialogue among the various members of the PFJ and their new recruit Brian highlights their incoherent beliefs and chaotic organizational structure. As befits the satirical

view of a chorus, their energies are dedicated more toward attacking other revolutionary groups than toward actually confronting the Romans. *Agora* features numerous mobs of varying ethnic and religious compositions; a key scene involves street fights between pagan and Christian gangs. Since all of these mobs revel in the destruction and terror that they cause, Amenábar emphasizes that no particular religious group has a monopoly on orgiastic violence. In one of the most dramatic scenes in the film, the Christian monks known as *parabolani* destroy the Serapeum, which housed the Library of Alexandria. The monks throw the Library's priceless scrolls through the air and behead the classical statues, singing "Hallelujah" while the camera pans around them in a dizzying circle. The cinematography focuses on the ritualized movements, the music, and the anonymity of the fanatical monks, driven by their religious faith into a dance of destruction.

In both films, these groups fulfill choral functions reminiscent of Greek drama—with a twist: the cinematic choruses represent the forces of violence and chaos, while the protagonists are the voices of reason. In the first scene of *Life of Brian*, a bored crowd of women leaves Jesus' sermon of gentleness and peace in order to participate illegally in the stoning of a man whose only crime was to tell his wife, "This fish was good enough for Jehovah." Later on, the PFJ and its rival groups engage in petty violence against one another, rather than effecting meaningful change in their society. For example, in response to Brian's unnecessary crucifixion, the PFJ sings "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" while a rival group commits mass suicide. Neither accomplishes any good, either for Brian or the PFJ's cause. In their destruction of the Library, the *parabolani* chorus quite literally destroys knowledge and the arts and ultimately murders Hypatia herself. Furthermore, the polytheist and Jewish choruses are presented as the equals of the Christian monks in their immorality.

Rather than the chorus serving as a harmonizing intermediary between the audience and the catharsis happening on stage, the chorus in these films becomes itself a figure of pathos or terror. This criticism of "groupthink" remains consistent, regardless of the nature of the group. The Pythons equally satirize the infighting of left-wing intellectual radicals and the Jewish housewives who stone the hapless fish-lover. In *Agora*, the riots start when the polytheists terrorize the Christians, but during the course of the film polytheists, Jews, and Christian mobs are both victims and attackers. Unthinking groups who blindly accept myths rather than analyzing and reinterpreting them are the source of evil and violence in both films. Hypatia and Brian, the questioners, are the heroes—but also the victims.

Since the audiences of *Agora* and *Life of Brian* cannot find wisdom in the voice of the people, they are pushed to identify with the protagonists, even though Hypatia and Brian are largely irreligious, disconnected from

their communities, and self-motivated seekers of their respective truths and justice who refuse to accept others' myths blindly. Despite the ancient Roman settings of these films, Hypatia and Brian's values and goals are more contemporary than ancient. Such characters provide another means of assuaging the discomfort and tension of these religiously themed films for a Christian audience. At the end of both *Agora* and *Life of Brian*, viewers can rest peacefully knowing then that neither they nor their heroes have been blasphemous or violent; such behavior is reserved for the lowly mobs.

Conclusion: Myth and Dogma

What do these films end up saying about the power of myth versus truth? Confronting his former classmate Synesius, now a Christian bishop, Orestes argues that Cyril has misinterpreted Jesus' message: "He's twisting His words." Synesius persuades Orestes that nuanced reading of scripture is unacceptable: "He read what is written . . . The Scripture is correct . . . Brother, don't you see your insult to God, in front of everyone? . . . [T]ell God you believe in what is written." Reluctantly, the sobbing Orestes kneels and proclaims his devotion even to the Christian scriptures that denigrate his female teacher. Meanwhile, the Christian *parabolani* destroy the secular scientific texts in the Serapeum, leaving the Bible as the only readily available source of written truth. For Davus, the Biblical stories and charitable actions of the Christians, as preached by the *parabolani*, are more compelling than the scrolls contained in Hypatia's Serapeum. Although Amenábar exalts Hypatia and the reason she teaches, he acknowledges that science and scientists lose their followers and perish because myth, masquerading as truth in scripture, is more powerful than mathematics.

Eric Idle proclaimed, "All that is valuable should be capable of surviving humour."[29] Amenábar and the Pythons do not reject Christianity in their films, but they put it to new tests by offering up alternative interpretations of its key narratives, following in the footsteps of ancient Greek dramatists. If the original Gospels remain worthwhile, in this view, then they can be refashioned for a modern audience without destroying the value of their core message. The literal truth becomes less significant than the moral resonance for each new audience.

Notes

1. Zeitlin (1996), esp. 346–48.
2. Goldhill (1986) 2–4; Edmunds (1990) 13–15; Bultmann (1984) 9–10; Jaspers and Bultmann (1958).

3. Bultmann (1971) 39–45.
4. Veyne (1988) 1–3.
5. Edmunds (1990) 2–5.
6. Detienne (1981) 92–96; see also Brillante (1990) 123–25. Detienne attributes this view first to Plato (*Republic* 377a; see Grube and Reeve (1997)), but this interpretation has been disputed by later scholars; see Edmunds (1990) 1–3.
7. McDermott (1989) 9–24.
8. For "Prime Minister's Question Time," see Blair (2006); on the Falklands episode, see Bhaskar (2009).
9. "Jesus and Brian: A Conference on the Historical Jesus and His Times," Department of Theological and Religious Studies, King's College, London, June 20–22, 2014. See also Crossley (2011) 93–94, Davies (1998) 400–414, and Dyke (2002) 229.
10. Quoted in Chapman et al. (1979) 5.
11. Chapman et al. (1979) 1.
12. Chapman et al. (1979) 4.
13. Gilliam's quote is from the bonus feature "The Story of Brian" on the 2008 DVD entitled *The Immaculate Edition*.
14. Nash (2010) 215.
15. See Kilpatrick (1950) 76–81.
16. See the review by Scott (2010).
17. See Rist (1965) 214–15; *The Letters of Synesius* 16 in Fitzgerald (1926); for the text of *Suda* 4.644, see Adler (1928–1938).
18. Rist (1965) 222–23; see also Wessel (2004) 15–111.
19. See James (1983) 19–21.
20. Paul (2013b) 232.
21. Catholic News Agency, "Civil groups protest new anti-Christian film" (October 7, 2009).
22. See Holleran (2012).
23. The historical authenticity and date of this papyrus is still a matter of scholarly debate at the present time; see King (2014).
24. Pedulla (2012).
25. Foley (1982); Henderson (1987).
26. Paul (2013b) 237.
27. See Foley (2003).
28. Chapman et al. (1979).
29. Quoted in Nash (2010) 219.

17

Divine Animation: *Clash of the Titans* (1981)

Dan Curley

Clash of the Titans (1981) is not for purists.[1] While the film focuses on the hero Perseus (Harry Hamlin), renowned for beheading Medusa and rescuing the princess Andromeda from a sea monster, it presents some striking changes to the classical myth. The winged stallion Pegasus no longer springs from the decapitated Gorgon's body, nor does he abandon Perseus in mid-story. Rather, he is the last of Zeus' sacred herd, tamed by the hero and transformed into a trusty steed. The goddess Thetis (Maggie Smith) plays an unexpectedly crucial role, as does her son—not Achilles, as in the Homeric poems, but the monstrous invention Calibos (Neil McCarthy, in close-ups), who replaces Phineus as Perseus' traditional rival for Andromeda (Judi Bowker). Finally, the film boasts a rather peculiar conception of the Titans promised in its title. The many anthropomorphic children of Ouranos (Sky) and Gaia (Earth) are replaced by Medusa and the Kraken, the latter imported from Scandinavian lore to supplant the generic Greek sea monster.[2]

Mentioning these changes is not to challenge their authenticity—as Jon Solomon reminds us, "This is no way to watch a movie"[3]—but to acknowledge and embrace them. The film embodies what we expect from any retelling of myth, visual or literary: innovation, in abundance. Even as myths deploy traditional characters and situations, each version brings new elements and emphases. There was no "single, authoritative, canonical version of the traditional stories."[4] Athenian tragedy, a genre with which cinema has much in common, provides useful examples. Tragedians customarily modified tradition, and audiences expected them to do so.[5] The Perseus myth was a fixture of the Greco-Roman stage, and dramatists

strove to create distinctive plays from it.[6] Likewise, *Clash of the Titans* tailors the myth for movie-going audiences.[7] It matters less whether the film agrees with other versions of the myth than how it handles myth. For the purposes of this chapter, the first function of myth is change.

Another important function of myth since antiquity is a work's self-awareness as a myth-making enterprise.[8] *Clash* takes place in a self-consciously fictive cosmos, whose mortal and immortal characters participate in fashioning the story. The immortals, however, deserve primary consideration. Unlike the gods of *Troy* (2004), who are obscured to the point of atheism,[9] *Clash*'s prominent Olympians not only wield supreme power over human beings but also use their power to implement the expected innovations. Furthermore, their actions emulate the craft of the film's co-producer and visual effects director, Ray Harryhausen (1920–2013), and knowingly conflate divine intervention with Harryhausen's trademark animation. The movie is doubly self-aware, as a myth negotiating its place among versions of the Perseus myth and as cinema with special techniques for bringing myth to life. The theology that emerges from instances of such divine self-consciousness has profound implications for Harryhausen and his legacy.

"Characters and Fantastic Creatures": Cinematic Myth

Clash of the Titans is the capstone to Harryhausen's groundbreaking career.[10] More than any other motion picture artist, Harryhausen developed the cinematic lexicon of modern science fiction and fantasy films. The root of this genre-specific vocabulary was, and remains, animation. Harryhausen was a master of stop-motion animation and its painstaking, frame-by-frame adjustments to inanimate objects—specifically, his creation of detailed and fully articulated models of fantastic creatures. His visual idiom, "Dynamation," integrated stop-motion and live-action footage through techniques such as rear projection, matting, and cross-cutting. In the best Dynamation sequences, human and non-human characters interact convincingly, if not seamlessly, on screen. Although the method seems quaint in an age of computer-generated imagery (CGI), by enabling the dynamic representation of otherworldly monsters and beasts, including those of classical myth, it ushered in a new era of speculative storytelling. Harryhausen noted in his memoirs, "Greek and Roman myths contained characters and fantastic creatures . . . ideal for cinematic adventures."[11] As in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) before it, *Clash of the Titans* demonstrates that film, and by extension Dynamation, is a viable medium for myth-making.

An outstanding example of Dynamation is the duel between Perseus and Medusa.[12] The six-minute sequence, which Harryhausen edited himself, builds tension by keeping the monster off screen, in the shadows. When the

Gorgon is finally revealed, her appearance is a far cry from the conventional female body with an unsightly head.[13] Blue scales cover her entire form, which is serpentine from the waist down, complete with a rattlesnake's tail. In addition to her petrifying stare, this Medusa wields a bow and arrow with deadly accuracy. Given the film's concern with transforming the myth, a re-imagined monster is expected; most of its creatures have been remade or invented. Medusa's "performance" is worthy of surprise and delight, from the unexpectedly weary manner in which she drags herself along on her forearms—a homage to the legless character Half Boy (Johnny Eck) in *Freaks* (1932)[14]—to her vivid expressions as she seeks out her quarry. Her eyes, enlivened by "Joan Crawford lighting,"[15] paradoxically attract the audience's gaze, even as Perseus must avert his own. In enabling two mythical adversaries to share the screen, Dynamation aptly renders the fantastic. A bravura sequence like this can only be seen "at the movies."

Although Harryhausen deserves recognition as an auteur who often worked alone by choice or necessity, he himself acknowledged that his films are collaborations: "Not one film I have worked on can I truly say is 'mine.'"[16] His collaborators on *Clash* included assistant animators Steven Archer and Jim Danforth, model-maker Janet Stevens, director Desmond Davis, producer Charles H. Schneer, and screenwriter Beverley Cross (1931–1998, the co-writer of *Jason and the Argonauts*). The contributions of the versatile Cross, who was a playwright, librettist, novelist, and Oxford-trained historian (as well as Maggie Smith's husband), should not be overlooked. *Clash* was always meant to be a Dynamation showcase, but it was Cross who prodded Schneer and Harryhausen to finally make the film.[17] His inventive screenplay matches Harryhausen's effects with a well-honed literary sensibility, exhibiting extensive "understanding and knowledge of the scope of Greek myth"[18] while commenting wryly on the action.

"Let Loose the Kraken!": Divine Interventions

Cross' script exposes the divine machinery that drives the film, after initially plunging the viewer *in medias res* on earth: upon a tempestuous shore, Acrisius (Donald Houston) orders his daughter Danaë (Vida Taylor) and her infant son Perseus to be sealed in a wooden cask and sent into the sea. The exposure of mother and child is one of the myth's most traditional motifs.[19] By this opening, *Clash* aligns itself conspicuously with tradition: Acrisius proclaims his status as ruler of Argos while denouncing Danaë and Perseus by name. Such patent exposition leaves no doubt as to whose myth this is. In addition, the scene establishes a clear cosmic hierarchy: gods on high, mortals below. Stretching his hands heavenward, Acrisius invokes "Zeus and all . . . gods of high Olympus," a gesture that affirms

this cosmic order. Meanwhile, an Olympian is already present: a seagull, seen after the cask plummets into the water, is revealed to be a disguised Poseidon (Jack Gwillim). As mother and son are swept away and Acrisius marches off, the god takes wing and abandons this human cruelty.

Poseidon's departure from the Argive shore initiates a departure from the canonical Perseus myth. During the opening credits, which mark the exposure sequence as a prologue, the gull soars over sweeping mountain vistas to Olympus. The domain of the gods is alight with thunder and lightning, its marble columns and turrets nestled among jagged peaks. Assuming his anthropomorphic form, Poseidon reports the fate of Danaë and Perseus to Zeus (a magisterial Laurence Olivier) and his fellow deities. Against the objections of Hera (Claire Bloom), Zeus declares that Acrisius' kingdom will be destroyed by wind, flood, and, for good measure, a Titan: "Let loose the Kraken!" This dramatic beginning is both conventional and novel. On the one hand, it confirms that the movie is not only a myth but also an epic, which genre often begins with divine councils: call this scene *Clash of the Titans*, book one.[20] On the other hand, even without the appropriation of the Kraken, the destruction of Argos is a bold and programmatic innovation. Any expectations that Acrisius will follow mythic tradition and die by Perseus' hand are demolished along with his city.[21] From the start, the film associates changes to the Perseus myth with divine intervention.

As in Greek myth, chief among *Clash*'s pantheon is Zeus; as Perseus' father, he guides his son as the movie proceeds. Yet Thetis also has agency, and she redresses the thunder-god's mistreatment of her son, Calibos, by meddling with Perseus, lately grown to manhood on Seriphos. According to tradition, Perseus should next run afoul of King Polydectes, who would set him the impossible task of defeating Medusa. But Thetis creates an altogether different path by transporting the sleeping youth to Phoenician Joppa, which labors under Calibos' curse. Here he becomes betrothed to Andromeda well before her sacrifice to the Kraken, which Thetis will demand after Cassiopeia (Siân Phillips) boasts of her daughter's beauty. The Perseus-Andromeda romance does not result from a chance rescue on the hero's return journey. It is the film's heart, inspiring a quest for the Gorgon's head in order to defeat the Kraken. As interventions go, Thetis' has greater consequence for Perseus' story than Zeus' revenge against Argos.

"Arena of Life": Animating Gods

In the movie's fictive cosmos, a new version of the Perseus myth emerges from divine interventions that lend, as Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones puts it, "structure and force" to the plot.[22] The gods implement their will in a special chamber on Mount Olympus beside Zeus' throne room; the special

chamber contains a scale model of a classical dramatic theater. Harryhausen dubbed this model the "arena of life,"[23] suggesting if not mimicking a gladiatorial amphitheater, with the qualifier "of life" evoking the concept of animating in its deepest etymological sense (from the Latin verb *animare*, "to endow with a soul, to enliven"). Terracotta figurines, each representing a mortal on earth, line the chamber walls. The gods interfere with humans' lives by selecting their corresponding figurines and manipulating them in the arena.

It is natural to construe this practice in magical terms,[24] but it also has relevance to the cinema, and specifically to animation. So too in *Jason and the Argonauts* the gods move both human- and monster-shaped pieces over an earthly game board. Just beyond the metaphor of gods as gameplayers lurks that of gods as animators,[25] which *Clash* develops in full. The film's Olympians frequently demonstrate divine power by moving inanimate objects: Thetis speaks through her own statue, then causes it to shatter; Zeus gives Perseus' shield a Cockney accent.[26] But the "arena of life" places the tools of Harryhausen himself—a miniature set and characters—directly in their hands.

The gods use the arena four times during the movie. The initial three instances are programmatic, clustering toward the beginning and instigating mythical innovations. The first of these occurs during the destruction of Argos, when Zeus crushes the figurine of Acrisius and kills his mortal counterpart. Down on earth, the king enters his palace and senses a change in the wind. On Olympus, Zeus leans over the arena and snatches up a figurine, identifiable as Acrisius' from his declamatory stance in the prologue. A point-of-view close-up shows the god's left hand clenching the statuette, with the arena's *orchestra* (stage area) and *cavea* (seating area) in the background. A cracking sound precedes a close-up of the human Acrisius, still surveying the sky. His face registers discomfort, while the cracking sound continues over the next two shots. The figurine begins to crumble in Zeus' hand, while on earth Acrisius is racked with pain. His body stiffens, and his head jolts skyward. The Kraken rages; the city is flooded. Soon Acrisius lies dead amid the rubble, while Zeus, seen in profile against a bank of niches, stares gravely downward. Where his hand once held a whole figurine, there is now only dust.

The second instance, as cruel as the first, begins with Zeus proudly displaying Perseus' adult figurine: "He's had a happy childhood, with the advantage of a strong body and a handsome face. What more could any mortal desire or deserve?" Thetis steps forward: "And what of my son, Calibos?" Selecting a human figurine comparable to Perseus' in stature and charisma, Zeus catalogues Calibos' crimes—including hunting the god's winged horses to near extinction. He places the statuette, seen from above,

in the arena. "He will become abhorrent to human sight . . . He'll be transformed to a mortal mockery, the shameful mark of his vile cruelty." While Zeus pronounces Calibos' fate, the camera zooms past the figurine into a full-screen close-up of its shadow on the arena floor. The shadow, animated on cels, raises its arms and places its hands behind its head to form horns; it stoops over, sprouts a tail, and rises again. The camera pulls back to show the figurine, now hunched and brutish, which Zeus replaces on the wall. "This," he affirms, "is my final judgment."

Thetis is responsible for the arena's third usage. Aggrieved at Calibos' punishment, she curses Andromeda's prospects for marriage: "If my son is not to marry her, then no man will!" She then addresses Perseus' figurine:

> The son of Zeus is to be left to the whim of chance, while mine is punished with deformity. It is time for chance to intervene. Time you saw something of the world, Perseus. Time you came face-to-face with fear. Time to know the terrors of the dark and look on death. Time your eyes were opened to grim reality.

Her words are heard partly in voice-over as the real-life Perseus beds down on Seriphos. In a high-angle close-up, the youth lies on his back and gazes at the sky. The full moon, seen in a reverse low-angle shot, dissolves into Thetis, momentarily framed within its orb. "Far to the east, across the sea, in Joppa," she decrees, turning the figurine onto its back and lowering it off screen into the arena. In a ground-level composite shot of the theater at

Figure 17.1 Zeus (Laurence Olivier) holds the figurine of Perseus in *Clash of the Titans* (1981). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Joppa, the figurine dissolves into the sleeping Perseus, while Thetis' larger-than-life arm recedes upward and out of the frame. She looks down upon him, towering over the theater, and fades into the heavens.

"Zeus Complex": Theology and Teleology

These patently cinematic gestures privilege animation as the film's most important kind of divine intervention. The gods are the prime movers of *Clash*'s story, crafting their own master plots on Olympus. Mortals are animated, with the somewhat static scenarios of the arena fully mobilized on earth. Pulverizing the figurine of Acrisius not only ensures his death but also makes it that much more painful and spiteful. Calibos' disfigurement registers in his figurine's distorted shadow. Perseus' relocation from Seriphos shows the closest correlation between heavenly cause and earthly effect. For the first time, the arena itself doubles for a man-made structure: the theater at Joppa, where myths are created and re-created. The significance of the theater as a fictive space in both worlds cannot be overstated. On Olympus, Thetis conjures an entirely new storyline for Perseus, placing him in harm's way and interrupting the tranquil existence that Zeus endorses. On earth, meanwhile, Perseus steps into a new, heroic role within the theater precinct, where the gods provide him with an impressive panoply, "weapons of divine temper," before he ventures into the wider world. Yet Thetis' intervention has more consequence; from the vantage point of the arena, her complete reconfiguration of Perseus' life makes her, for the moment, the superior animator.

Just as the craft of the animator informs the gods' handiwork, so that handiwork speaks to the relationship between Harryhausen and his own creations. The animator who bends miniatures to his will and shapes their stories has a divine status: both controller and creator. Harryhausen invoked these roles in his memoirs, speculating about his own "Zeus complex" and enthusing over "the art of . . . creating an artificial life-force" in his characters.[27] The divine animator is sometimes benevolent. Early in the film, Zeus cradles Danaë's figurine; toward its end, he "reanimates" the prostrate statuette of Perseus, restoring its original upright position and his exhausted son to health. Likewise, in publicity photos Harryhausen looms proudly over his creations or bestows upon them a guiding hand. Nevertheless, like the divinities of *Clash*, Harryhausen can also "terrorize . . . and awe mankind."[28] When not engendering fear or awe in viewers, most of his creatures, exemplified by Medusa, are subjected to violence or danger little different from what the terracotta figurines encounter at the hands of the gods. Given the spectacles made possible by Dynamation, perhaps "arena" is an appropriate term for the replica on Mount Olympus after all.

Why do gods animate, innovate, or otherwise intervene in human affairs? The immortals ponder such matters in their final council. Thetis condemns Perseus' success as "a dangerous precedent." Hera wonders, "What if courage and imagination were to become everyday mortal qualities?" Zeus concedes that gods would be unnecessary, but remains confident: "There is sufficient cowardice, sloth, and mendacity down there on earth to last forever." That the role of the Olympians is to cultivate exemplars of the best human qualities resonates with Harryhausen's storytelling agenda: "Maybe one day someone will again have the courage to make a picture that is pure imagination, with real heroes and real villains."[29] Zeus and Harryhausen each posit a cosmos with room for heroes, whose stories evolve from challenges set by divine animators. Their stories, in turn, inspire and endure. Zeus' last act in the film is to set the myth of Perseus "among the stars and constellations":

> As long as man shall walk the earth and search the night sky in wonder, they will remember the courage of Perseus forever. Even if we, the gods, are abandoned or forgotten, the stars will never fade.

The night sky will preserve and project the myth, now told in its entirety. This outcome surely appealed to Harryhausen, whose life's ambition was to enchant audiences in the dark.

"I Won't Leave You Out": Succession Myths

As if fulfilling Zeus' prediction of a new order, Warner Bros. remade *Clash of the Titans* in 2010. Balanced between fidelity and iconoclasm, the remake uses CGI to render not just its creatures but every aspect of its cosmos. These tensions come home to roost in the remake's treatment of Bubo, the original's (in)famous mechanical owl. This divine gift to Perseus is at home in the cosmos of the 1981 version of *Clash*: the owl is the work of Hephaestus, the inventor of wondrous, automated creations,[30] and thus another example of divine animation/intervention. As the poet Ammon (Burgess Meredith) and Bubo celebrate Perseus and Andromeda's wedding, the poet remarks, "This would make a fine heroic poem . . . or perhaps a play." To Bubo's anxious chirps and whistles he replies, "Oh, don't worry. I won't leave you out." Ammon confirms not only the film's status as myth but also Bubo's rightful place within it.

Contrast this exchange with the owl's cameo in the 2010 version of *Clash of the Titans*. Perseus (Sam Worthington) discovers Bubo buried in a musty chest: "What is this?" "Just leave it," answers the veteran warrior Solon (Liam Cunningham), brushing both Bubo and Perseus aside.[31] This is a

programmatic moment of succession, in which the younger generation of filmmakers replaces its elders. To "just leave" Bubo is to adopt the digital approach of CGI over Harryhausen's "digital" handiwork, and to remake the 1981 film with an entirely different set of motivations.

A succession in special effects technology brings a succession in aesthetics. Bubo is emblematic of Harryhausen's whimsical, idiosyncratic touch—quite literally.[32] Harryhausen frequently criticized CGI as being overused in speculative filmmaking and diluting its own impact; Dynamation, by contrast, "created a fantasy world that was so rare."[33] Such rarity owes much to Harryhausen's hands-on approach, which the gods of his movie sanction by handling their figurines: lifting them up, laying them down, cradling or even crushing them. Stop-motion animation, while fostering the illusion of autonomous motion, documents the contact between animator and model. Perfection is not necessarily the goal. The somewhat unrealistic movement of his creatures, observed Harryhausen, "encouraged the sense that one was watching a miracle."[34] In other words, the animator's visibly invisible hand is precisely what marks Harryhausen's brand of effects as special. CGI, however, distinguishes itself through limitless renderings of the fantastic, all the while hiding its traces. If Dynamation calls attention to its process, digital animation strives for a seamless and, consequently, immersive viewing experience. However realistic or tactile a CGI character appears, the invisible hand of the animators is virtual, and has unparalleled reach.

That reach is evident in the 2010 version of *Clash of the Titans*, which offers an "arena of life" for the twenty-first century—one that obscures its tactile use, apart from Zeus (Liam Neeson) briefly contemplating a statuette of Perseus. The new arena, a vast aerial panorama of the earth, surpasses the original in scale and detail. It teems with vivid, digitally rendered topography: mountains, forests, plains, lakes, oceans, and clouds. No longer relegated to a side chamber, the arena encompasses the whole of the Olympian throne room. The gods, their thrones suspended over the terrain and surrounded by niches, inhabit the arena alongside the figurines. Zeus' throne alone rests atop a low flight of stairs at the edge of the arena, perhaps as a sign of his cosmic superiority.

The dire implication for the immortals—that they are subject to a higher animating power, like mortals in the original movie—is borne out in the many computer-generated displays of godhood, from the sheen on their armor, to Zeus' lightning, to the noxious aura of Hades (Ralph Fiennes). In the 1981 version of *Clash of the Titans*, the hand of the animator is conspicuous, whether of Zeus or Thetis, or the absent-but-present hand of Harryhausen.[35] In the remake, the animator's unseen hand holds the very gods in its grasp. The usurpation of Olympian authority from one film to

the other suggests a succession in theology. Monotheistic audiences of the new millennium might prefer formidable, but not omnipotent, deities. If so, the 2010 version of *Clash* fulfills such spiritual expectations, eroding the gap between gods and mortals, who must occupy the same computer-generated universe. Whereas the original film offered a pantheon of divine animators, the remake's pantheon has become divinely animated.

Notes

1. My thanks to the editors and to audiences of earlier lectures and presentations for helpful comments and suggestions.
2. In the film, Zeus calls the Kraken "the last of the Titans." Later, the Stygian Witches proclaim, "a Titan against a Titan!" to describe the use of Medusa's head as a weapon against the Kraken: the "clash" of the film's title.
3. Solomon (2007) 86 offers this helpful mantra to classicists perturbed by *Troy* (2004) and other blockbusters based on Greco-Roman antiquity.
4. Sommerstein (2005) 164. Burian (1997) 178–80 describes Greek tragedy in similar terms: "repetition and innovation."
5. Compare Sommerstein (2005) 169: "Since no dramatist ever presented a story in precisely the same way as any of his poetic predecessors, the audience could be certain that the play . . . would contain some completely novel features or combinations of features."
6. On remains of tragic (and comic) Perseus plays, see Odgen (2008) 13–17, 69–72.
7. Hankin (2010) 461 reports producer Ray Harryhausen's reaction to those who criticized his changes to the Perseus myth: "They don't realize that when you transpose any story to the screen, you have to compose it in such a way that it will build up logically and hold an audience for an hour and a half. For example, in *Clash* we had to introduce Pegasus early in the picture, but we couldn't have done that if we had adhered strictly to the myth." Wilk (2000) 210 likewise accounts for the movie's innovations in cinematic terms.
8. Exemplary studies of self-conscious myth are March (1987) and Hinds (1987).
9. Keeping the gods off screen in *Troy* was partly a reaction to the divine presence in *Clash of the Titans*: see Winkler (2009) 218.
10. On Harryhausen's career: Wells (2002) 90–101, Bellin (2005) 71–73, Rickitt (2006) 188–90, and Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) 129–31. The three-volume survey of Hankin (2008–2013) has set a new standard for comprehensiveness.
11. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 261.
12. On this sequence, see Pettigrew (1999) 139–41, Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 271–75, and Hankin (2010) 500–506.
13. See Wilk (2000) 31–54.
14. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 273.

15. In *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and other films, Crawford "moves in and out of shadows, or when stationary has a light across only her eyes," noted in Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 273.
16. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 265.
17. Hankin (2010) 461. Harryhausen began considering a Perseus film in the late 1950s; Cross' first treatment dates to 1969: see Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 261.
18. Llewellyn-Jones (2007) 426.
19. Gantz (1993) 302.
20. Llewellyn-Jones (2007) traces the film's anthropomorphic gods and their interest in human affairs back to the epic tradition.
21. Perseus traditionally kills Acrisius with a discus: Gantz (1993) 310.
22. Llewellyn-Jones (2007) 437.
23. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 261.
24. Llewellyn-Jones (2007) 436 likens the figurines to "an ancient Greek . . . *kolossos* or a modern voodoo doll."
25. Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) 133.
26. An exception is Poseidon, who is shown breathing underwater and transforming himself.
27. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 282 and 265, respectively.
28. Llewellyn-Jones (2007) 436. For the gods as "benevolent protectors" or "callous chess-players" in *Jason and the Argonauts*, see Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) 132.
29. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 282, a conscious allusion to the gods' final council.
30. Hephaestean inventions in ancient sources include wheeled tripods, helper-maidens of gold, and the shield of Achilles (Homer, *Iliad* 17.372–613; see Allen (1931) for the text); Pandora (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 59–82; see Solmsen et al. (1990) for the text); and the robot Talos (Apollodorus, *Library* 1.9.26; see Frazer (1921) for the text), whom Harryhausen depicted in *Jason and the Argonauts*.
31. Bubo has a more sympathetic, if silent, cameo in *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), in which he is reunited with his maker, Hephaestus (Bill Nighy).
32. Or that of Steven Archer, Bubo's primary animator: see Pettigrew (1999) 128.
33. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 282.
34. Harryhausen and Dalton (2004) 282. Building on the work of structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov, Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011) 126–27 assert that the "naivety" of certain effects is essential to fantasy viewing.
35. In an instance of true presence, Harryhausen's hand stands in for Olivier's during the deformation of Calibos, moving the figurine to and from the arena; see Hankin (2010) 471.

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Filmography

Feature Films

300 (2006). Directed by Zack Snyder. Warner Bros.
The Adjustment Bureau (2011). Directed by George Nolfi. Media Rights Capital/Universal Pictures.
Agora (2009). Directed by Alejandro Amenábar. Focus Features/Newmarket Films.
Alexander (2004). Directed by Oliver Stone. Warner Bros.
The Amazing Spiderman (2012). Directed by Marc Webb. Columbia Pictures.
Amazons of Rome (*Le Vergini di Roma*) (1961). Directed by Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia. Cine Italia.
The Angel Levine (1970). Directed by Ján Kadár. United Artists.
Arena (*Naked Warriors*) (1974). Directed by Steve Carver. New World Pictures.
The Avengers (2012). Directed by Joss Whedon. Marvel Studios/Paramount Pictures.
Back to the Future (1985). Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Universal Pictures/Amblin Entertainment.
Batman (1989). Directed by Tim Burton. PolyGram Filmed Entertainment/Warner Bros.
Batman Begins (2004). Directed by Christopher Nolan. Legendary Pictures/Warner Bros.
The Beach (2000). Directed by Danny Boyle. 20th Century Fox.
Bedazzled (2000). Directed by Harold Ramis. Regency Enterprises/20th Century Fox.
Les Biches (1968). Directed by Claude Chabrol. Les Films de la Boétie.
Black Orpheus (*Orfeu Negro*) (1959). Directed by Marcel Camus. Dispat Films/Gemma/Tupan Filmes.
Blade Runner (1982). Directed by Ridley Scott. Warner/Ladd/Blade Runner Partnerships.
Body Double (1984). Directed by Brian De Palma. Columbia Pictures Corporation.
Brave (2012). Directed by Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman. Walt Disney/Pixar.
Bride of Frankenstein (1935). Directed by James Whale. Universal Pictures.
Bride of Re-Animator (1989). Directed by Brian Yuzna. Wild Street Pictures.
The Bridges of Madison County (1995). Directed by Clint Eastwood. Malpaso Productions/Warner Bros.
Bruce Almighty (2003). Directed by Tom Shadyac. Spyglass Entertainment/Universal Pictures.

La Caduta di Troia (1911). Directed by Luigi Romano Borgnetto and Giovanni Pastrone. Itala Film.
Casablanca (1942). Directed by Michael Curtiz. Warner Bros.
Casino Royale (2006). Directed by Martin Campbell. Columbia Pictures.
Cast Away (2000). Directed by Robert Zemeckis. ImageMovers/20th Century Fox.
Chocolat (2000). Directed by Lasse Hallström. Miramax Pictures.
Clash of the Titans (1981). Directed by Desmond Davis. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
Clash of the Titans (2010). Directed by Louis Leterrier. Legendary Pictures/Warner Bros.
Colossus and the Amazon Queen (*La Regina delle Amazzoni*) (1960). Directed by Vittorio Sala. Galatea SPA.
The Dark Knight (2008). Directed by Christopher Nolan. Legendary Pictures/Warner Bros.
The Dark Knight Rises (2012). Directed by Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros.
The Defiant Ones (1958). Directed by Stanley Kramer. United Artists.
Die Hard (1988). Directed by John McTiernan. 20th Century Fox.
The Empire Strikes Back (1980). Directed by Irvin Kershner. Lucasfilm.
Evan Almighty (2007). Directed by Tom Shadyac. Spyglass Entertainment/Universal Pictures.
The Family Man (2000). Directed by Brett Ratner. Beacon Pictures/Universal Pictures.
Footloose (1984). Directed by Herbert Ross. Paramount Pictures.
Freaks (1932). Directed by Tod Browning. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
From the Manger to the Cross (1912). Directed by Sidney Olcott. Kalem Company.
Ghost (1990). Directed by Jerry Zucker. Paramount Pictures.
Gladiator (2000). Directed by Ridley Scott. Universal Studios/DreamWorks.
Le Gladiatrici (*Thor and the Amazon Women*) (1963). Directed by Antonio Leonviola. Galatea SPA.
GoldenEye (1995). Directed by Martin Campbell. Eon Productions/United Artists.
The Gospel according to Matthew (1964). Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Arco Film/Lux Compagnie Cinématographique de France.
The Greatest Story Ever Told (1965). Directed by George Stevens. United Artists.
The Green Mile (1999). Directed by Frank Darabont. Castle Rock Entertainment/Warner Bros.
Hedwig and the Angry Inch (2001). Directed by John Cameron Mitchell. Killer Films/New Line Cinema.
Hercules (*Le Fatiche di Ercole*) (1958). Directed by Pietro Francisci. Galatea SPA.
Hercules (1997). Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. Walt Disney Pictures.
Hercules (2014). Directed by Brett Ratner. Paramount Pictures/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
Hercules and the Captive Women (*Ercole alla Conquista di Atlantide*) (1961). Directed by Vittorio Cottafavi. Comptoir Français du Film Production/SPA Cinematografica.
Hercules Unchained (*Ercole e la Regina di Lidia*) (1959). Directed by Pietro Francisci. Warner Bros.

The Hudsucker Proxy (1995). Directed by Joel Coen. Working Title Films/Warner Bros.
The Hunger Games (2012). Directed by Gary Ross. Lionsgate.
I Am Legend (2007). Directed by Francis Lawrence. Warner Bros.
Immortals (2011). Directed by Tarsem Singh. Relativity Media.
In a World (2013). Directed by Lake Bell. 3331 Productions/Roadside Attractions.
Iron Man (2008). Directed by Jon Favreau. Paramount Pictures.
Iron Man 2 (2010). Directed by Jon Favreau. Paramount Pictures.
It's a Wonderful Life (1946). Directed by Frank Capra. Liberty Films/RKO Radio Pictures.
Jason and the Argonauts (1963). Directed by Don Chaffey. Columbia Pictures.
Jesus Christ, Superstar (1973). Directed by Norman Jewison. Universal Pictures.
Kick-Ass (2010). Directed by Matthew Vaughan. Universal Pictures.
The Last Temptation of Christ (1988). Directed by Martin Scorsese. Universal Pictures/Cineplex Odeon Films.
The Legend of Bagger Vance (2000). Directed by Robert Redford. Allied Filmmakers/DreamWorks.
The Legend of Hercules (2014). Directed by Renny Harlin. Millennium Films.
Lethal Weapon (1987, 1989, 1992, 1998). Directed by Richard Donner. Silver Pictures/Warner Bros.
A Life Less Ordinary (1997). Directed by Danny Boyle. Channel Four Films/20th Century Fox.
Life of Christ (1906). Directed by Alice Guy. Gaumont Film Company.
A Little Bit of Heaven (2011). Directed by Nicole Kassell. Davis Entertainment/Millennium Entertainment.
Lord of the Flies (1963). Directed by Peter Brook. Two Arts Ltd.
Love Object (2003). Directed by Robert Parigi. Base 12 Productions/Catapult Films.
The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1956). Directed by Nunnally Johnson. 20th Century Fox.
Man of Steel (2013). Directed by Zack Snyder. Warner Bros.
The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962). Directed by John Ford. Paramount Pictures.
The Matrix (1999). Directed by The Wachowski Brothers. Silver Entertainment/Warner Bros.
May (2002). Directed by Lucky McKee. 2 Loop Film/A Loopy Production LLC.
Medea (1969). Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. San Marco/Les Films Number One.
Metropolis (1927). Directed by Fritz Lang. Universum Film AG.
Mildred Pierce (1945). Directed by Michael Curtiz. Warner Bros.
Minotaur, the Wild Beast of Crete (*Teseo contro il Minotauro*) (1960). Directed by Silvio Amadio. Illiria Film.
Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975). Directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. Michael White Productions.
Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979). Directed by Terry Jones. Handmade Films.
My Fair Lady (1964). Directed by George Cukor. Warner Bros.
Now, Voyager (1942). Directed by Irving Rapper. Warner Bros.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000). Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Touchstone Pictures/Universal Pictures/Buena Vista Pictures.
Olympus Has Fallen (2013). Directed by Antoine Fuqua. Millennium Films.
Orphée (1950). Directed by Jean Cocteau. Janus Films.
Papillon (1973). Directed by Franklin J. Schaffner. Allied Artists/Columbia Pictures.
The Passion of the Christ (2004). Directed by Mel Gibson. Icon Productions.
Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief (2010). Directed by Chris Columbus. 20th Century Fox.
Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters (2013). Directed by Thor Freundenthal. 20th Century Fox.
Pieces (1982). Directed by J. Piquer Simon. Almena Films.
Pompeii (2014). Directed by Paul W. S. Anderson. TriStar Pictures.
Prehistoric Women (*Slave Girls*) (1967). Directed by Michael Carreras. Associated British Picture Corporation.
Quo Vadis (1951). Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
Raiders of the Lost Ark (1983). Directed by Steven Spielberg. Lucasfilm/Paramount Pictures.
Re-Animator (1985). Directed by Stuart Gordon. Empire Pictures.
Rebecca (1940). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Selznick International Pictures.
Return of the Living Dead 3 (1993). Directed by Brian Yuzna. Bandai Visual Company.
The Robe (1953). Directed by Henry Koster. 20th Century Fox.
Rocky II (1979). Directed by Sylvester Stallone. United Artists.
Rocky IV (1985). Directed by Sylvester Stallone. United Artists/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
Rocky Balboa (2006). Directed by Sylvester Stallone. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Columbia Pictures.
Le Sang des Bêtes (1949). Directed by Georges Franju. Forces et Voix de la France.
Scarface (1983). Directed by Brian De Palma. Universal Pictures.
Scary Movie 3 (2003). Directed by David Zucker. Brad Grey Pictures/Dimension Films.
A Serious Man (2009). Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Working Title Films/Focus Features.
Shadow of a Doubt (1943). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Skirball Productions/Universal Pictures.
The Shawshank Redemption (1994). Directed by Frank Darabont. Castle Rock Entertainment/Columbia Pictures.
Silver Streak (1976). Directed by Arthur Hiller. 20th Century Fox.
The Skin I Live In (2011). Blue Haze Entertainment/Canal+ España/El Deseo.
Skyfall (2012). Directed by Sam Mendes. Eon Productions/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Columbia Pictures.
Snow White and the Seven Dwarves (1937). Directed by William Cottrell, David Hand, et al. Walt Disney Productions.
Spartaco (1952). Directed by Riccardo Freda. Associati Produttori Indipendenti Film.
Spartacus (1960). Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Bryna Productions/Universal Pictures.

Splice (2009). Directed by Vincenzo Natali. Gaumont/Copperheart Entertainment.
Star Trek Into Darkness (2013). Directed by J. J. Abrams. Bad Robot Productions/Paramount Pictures.
Star Wars (1977). Directed by George Lucas. Lucasfilm/20th Century Fox.
The Stepford Wives (1974). Directed by Bryan Forbes. Fadsin/Palmer/Bryan Forbes.
Stir Crazy (1980). Directed by Sidney Poitier. Columbia Pictures.
Stolen Face (1952). Directed by Terence Fisher. Hammer Film Productions.
Swiss Family Robinson (1960). Directed by Ken Annakin. Walt Disney Productions.
Taur, il Re della Forza Bruta (*Taur the Mighty*) (1963). Directed by Antonio Leonviola. Galatea SPA.
Terminator Salvation (2009). Directed by McG. Warner Bros.
Troy (2004). Directed by Wolfgang Petersen. Warner Bros./Helena Productions.
Unforgiven (1992). Directed by Clint Eastwood. Malpaso Productions/Warner Bros.
Vertigo (1958). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures.
What Dreams May Come (1998). Directed by Vincent Ward. Interscope Communications/PolyGram Filmed Entertainment.
The Wicker Man (1973). Directed by Robin Hardy. British Lion Film Company.
Wrath of the Titans (2012). Directed by Jonathan Liebesman. Warner Bros.
Les Yeux sans Visage (1959). Directed by Georges Franju. Champs-Élysées Productions/Lux Film.

Television Movies, Miniseries, and Series

Arrow (2012–). Created by Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim, and Andrew Kreisberg. Berlanti Productions and DC Entertainment/Warner Bros. Television.
Charlie's Angels (1976–1981). Created by Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts. Spelling-Goldberg Productions.
Clash of the Gods (2009). Directed by Christopher Cassell and Jessica Conway. The History Channel.
The Five People You Meet in Heaven (2004). Directed by Lloyd Kramer. Five People Productions, Inc./Hallmark Entertainment.
Game of Thrones (2011–). Created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss. HBO.
Gilligan's Island (1964–1967). Created by Sherwood Schwartz. United Artists Television.
Hercules (2005). Directed by Roger Young. Hallmark Entertainment/Lionsgate.
Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (TV movies, 1994; TV series, 1995–1999). Created by Christian Williams. Universal Pictures.
Jason and the Argonauts (2000). Directed by Nick Willing. Hallmark Entertainment/Panfilm.
Jesus (1999). Directed by Roger Young. Antena 3 Televisión/ARD/Beta Film.
Jesus of Nazareth (1977). Directed by Franco Zeffirelli. ITC (Incorporated Television Company)/RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana.
Joseph in Egypt (1995). Directed by Roger Young. Beta Film/Lube Productions.
Lost (2004–2010). Created by J. J. Abrams. Bad Robot Productions/ABC Studios.

Mad Men (2007–2015). Created by Matthew Weiner. Lionsgate Television/Weiner Bros./AMC.

Moses (1995). Directed by Roger Young. Antena 3 Televisión/Beta Film/British Sky Broadcasting.

Mother Teresa: In the Name of God's Poor (1997). Directed by Kevin Connor. The Family Channel/Hallmark Entertainment.

Noah's Ark (1999). Directed by John Irvin. Babelsberg International Film Produktion/Hallmark Entertainment.

The Odyssey (1997). Directed by Andrei Konchalovsky. American Zoetrope/Beta Film/Hallmark Entertainment.

Solomon (1997). Directed by Roger Young. ARD Degeto Film/Bet Film/British Sky Broadcasting.

Spartacus (2010–2013). Created by Steven S. DeKnight. STARZ.

Star Trek (1966–1969). Created by Gene Roddenberry. CBS Television Distribution.

St. Paul (2000). Directed by Roger Young. Ceská Televize/KirchMedia/LuxVide.

The Ten Commandments (2006). Directed by Robert Dornhelm. Actuality Productions/Hallmark Entertainment.

True Blood (2008–2012). Created by Alan Ball. HBO.

The Walking Dead (2010–). Created by Frank Darabont. AMC.

Wonder Woman. (1975–1979). Created by William M. Marston. Developed by Douglas S. Cramer and Stanley Ralph Ross. Bruce Lansbury Productions/Warner Bros. Television.

Xena: Warrior Princess (1995–2001). Created by John Schulian and Robert G. Tapert. Renaissance Pictures/MCA Television.

List of Contributors

Monica S. Cyrino is Professor of Classics at the University of New Mexico. Her academic research centers on the reception of the ancient world on screen and the erotic in ancient Greek poetry. She is the author of *Aphrodite* (Routledge 2010), *A Journey through Greek Mythology* (Kendall-Hunt 2008), *Big Screen Rome* (Blackwell 2005), and *In Pandora's Jar: Lovesickness in Early Greek Poetry* (Rowman & Littlefield 1995); and she is the editor of *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013), *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television* (Blackwell 2008), and *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph* (Edinburgh 2015). She has published numerous articles and book chapters and often gives lectures around the world on the representation of classical antiquity on film and television. She has served as an academic consultant on several recent film and television productions.

Meredith E. Safran is Assistant Professor of Classics at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and Co-Director of the Trinity Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies. Her research focuses on Roman literature and culture and the reception of classical antiquity in the media. She has written about epic motifs in the film *Angels & Insects* (1996) and the representation of Greek tragedy on film. Her current research project is a book about the construction of female civic identity in Roman historiography and political mythology. She regularly teaches a survey course on mythology as well as literature and cultural history courses that engage this material in Greek and Roman society and its modern reception.

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Antony Augoustakis is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include Roman comedy and historiography, Latin imperial epic, women in antiquity, classical reception, and gender theory. He is the author of *Motherhood and the Other: Fashioning Female Power in Flavian Epic* (Oxford 2010). He is the

editor of *Brill's Companion to Silius Italicus* (2010), *Ritual and Religion in Flavian Epic* (Oxford 2013), *Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past* (Brill 2014), and he is co-editor of the *Blackwell Companion to Terence* (2013).

Scott A. Barnard is a doctoral student in Classical Philology at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. His research interests include Homeric epic, ancient drama, classical rhetoric, and classical reception. His master's thesis explored the re-imagination of Homeric figures on the Athenian dramatic stage. His current dissertation project is on the impact of contemporary political turmoil on the dramas of Sophocles and Euripides.

David Bullen is a doctoral researcher in the Department of Drama and Theatre Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London. While his main research focuses on the cultural reception of Euripides' *Bacchae*, his interests include reception of Greek myth and tragedy in popular culture. He is also Co–Artistic Director of By Jove Theatre, a feminist ensemble that re-works myth for the twenty-first century.

Dan Curley is Associate Professor of Classics at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. His teaching and research interests include ancient tragedy, Latin poetry, and the classical world on film, focusing on the creation and transformation of mythical characters for reading and viewing communities. He is the author of *Tragedy in Ovid: Theater, Metatheater, and the Transformation of a Genre* (Cambridge 2013). His current project is a book-length study of classical myth and the cinema.

Seán Easton is Associate Professor of Classics and Director of Peace Studies at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. His research interests include Latin epic, the cinematic and literary reception of the Greco-Roman world, and the representation of peace in ancient and modern cultures. He has published on classical motifs in Terrence Malick's *The New World* and John Frankenheimer's *Seconds*, as well as on Lucan's *Pharsalia*.

Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr. is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of New Mexico, where his teaching includes a course on "Homeric Cinematography." His research focuses on Homeric epic, early Greek poetics and mythology, narratology, and cinema theory and technique. He is author of *Homeric Durability: Telling Time in the* Iliad (Center for Hellenic Studies 2013) and is currently working on an analysis of elements of Homeric epic via cognitive theory and film technique.

Hunter H. Gardner is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of South Carolina. She is the author of *Gendering Time in Augustan Love Elegy* (Oxford 2013), and a horror film enthusiast. She is currently working on an examination of violence and spectatorship in the STARZ *Spartacus* series and a monograph on plague narratives in Latin literature and their impact on representations of contagion in Western literature, film, and visual arts.

Beverly J. Graf is Adjunct Professor of Film Studies at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, and teaches in the Classics Department and the Entertainment Studies Department of the University of California, Los Angeles, and its Extension. Her academic research centers on film genre and the reception of the ancient world on screen. She has worked for many years as Vice President of Development for Abilene Pictures, contributing to such films as *Primal Fear*, *Fallen*, *Frequency*, *Hart's World*, and *Fracture*.

Alex McAuley is a doctoral student at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. In addition to his principal research on local culture and pluralism in Hellenistic Greece, he has several current and forthcoming articles and chapters on Hellenistic dynastic practice and ideology, royal women, and Greek federalism. In reception studies he focuses primarily on film and television series, particularly on the impact of 9/11 on depictions of the ancient world.

Stacie Raucci is Associate Professor of Classics at Union College in Schenectady, New York, where she teaches an undergraduate course on the ancient world in the cinema. Her academic research focuses primarily on Roman love elegy and the reception of the ancient world in popular culture. She is the author of *Elegiac Eyes: Vision in Roman Love Elegy* (Peter Lang 2011). She has published articles and delivered papers on the popularization of antiquity, Medusa Barbie, Roman orgies in film, and the Roman poet Propertius.

Anise K. Strong is Assistant Professor of History at Western Michigan University. Her research centers on Roman social history, gender and sexuality in the ancient world, and the reception of classical culture in modern mass media. She is finishing a book entitled *Roman Women and the Construction of Vice: Wicked Wives and Good Whores*. Recent articles address Roman toleration of ancient incest, sexuality in the HBO series *Rome*, and the treatment of ethnic intermarriage in Herodotus' *Histories*.

Kaelie Thompson is a doctoral student in the Department of Screen Arts and Cultures at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her master's thesis

examined gender and the spectator in the television series *Downton Abbey*, and she has presented on adolescence in the 1930s *Dead End Kids* film series. Her current interests include representations of gender and sexuality on screen, film theory, film history, and British heritage productions.

Vincent Tomasso is Visiting Assistant Professor in Classics at Ripon College in Wisconsin. He studies the Homeric poems and their reception, as well as the reception of antiquity in modern media. He has published and presented on the reception of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by Greeks living in the Roman Empire (Quintus of Smyrna, Triphiodorus) as well as appropriations of the classical world in film (*300*), television (*Battlestar Galactica*), and comics (*Sin City*).

Osman Umurhan is Assistant Professor of Classics at the University of New Mexico. His research interests include Imperial-era Latin satire, the geography of Rome, and the cinematic and musical reception of Greek and Roman antiquity. He has published on Juvenal's *Satires*, the New Testament book of Acts, and the reception of the Greco-Roman world in heavy metal music. His current book project examines Juvenal's use of Rome's landscape and its empire to reflect upon the formation of cultural and political identity.

Lisl Walsh is Assistant Professor of Classics at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Her research interests include Greek and Roman tragedy, gender and sexuality, and classical reception. She has published and presented research on Seneca and Senecan intertextuality, women's bodies in the Hippocratic Corpus, and the history of the Women's Classical Caucus. She is currently working on a book about Seneca's *Medea* and gendered concepts of the self in Roman imperial literature.

Index