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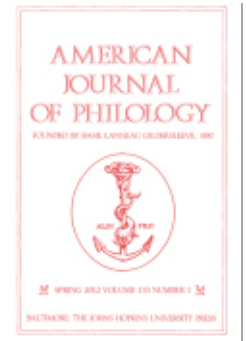
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**Cinema and Classical Texts: Apollo's New Light, and: Hellas on Screen: Cinematic Receptions of Ancient History, Literature, and Myth (review)**

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MARTIN M. WINKLER. *Cinema and Classical Texts: Apollo's New Light*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. xiii + 347 pp. 46 black-and-white figs. Cloth, \$99.

IRENE BERTI AND MARTA GARCÍA MORCILLO, eds. *Hellas on Screen: Cinematic Receptions of Ancient History, Literature, and Myth*. HABES 45. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008. 266 pp. 29 black-and-white plates. Paper, €48.

In the first chapter of *Cinema and Classical Texts: Apollo's New Light*, Martin Winkler refers us to three programmatic statements made by editors of this very journal, each one “representative of and instructive about changes in classical philologists’ responsibilities” (65): in 1987, Georg Luck praised his predecessor, Diskin Clay, for his “range and sensitivity” in overseeing the “ever-broadening profession” (*AJP* 108:v), while more recently, in 2001, Barbara Gold stated her intention to “publish work that stands at the intersections of various aspects of our discipline, that incorporates new and innovative approaches, and that opens up classical philology to different ways of thinking” (*AJP* 122:iii). For Winkler, this “opening up” of classical philology is at the heart of this book, and so it is fitting for this journal to offer some reflections on its achievements. In many ways it represents the culmination (if in no way the final conclusion) of a career trajectory which has established him as perhaps the leading scholar, in terms of both quantity and quality of output over the past couple of decades, on the relationship between the cinema and the ancient past: from his first edited collection (*Classics and Cinema* [London 1991], reissued with some revisions as *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema* [New York 2001]) to his ongoing examinations of the relationship between film and history, the most recent title focusing on *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. In his wake follows an ever-growing number of scholars, succeeding in positioning the study of “classics and film” as central to the flourishing discipline of classical reception studies. The other title under consideration in this review, Berti and García Morcillo’s *Hellas on Screen*, stands out from the crowd as the first collection of essays to offer a sustained appraisal of the variety of ways in which ancient Greece is tackled in the cinema. Winkler’s monograph, though, is far more distinctive in its approach, and so we shall begin here.

*Cinema and Classical Texts* sets out to open up classical philology by arguing for what Winkler terms a “classical film philology,” an approach which rests on two key assumptions: first, that cinema has a very great affinity with texts in general, and so can be subjected to the “close analysis that classical philologists are trained to carry out” (13); and second, that not only can films be analyzed using the tools of classical scholarship, but that films often demonstrate considerable continuity with the themes and content of classical literature. Whether or not filmmakers are consciously aware of this continuity, antiquity thereby maintains its presence, and most importantly its relevance, in the modern world.

The first assumption is explored in depth in the first chapter, “A certain

tendency in classical philology.” There is nothing new in saying that cinema is like writing, and that films can be considered as texts, but Winkler’s tour through the many filmmakers, theorists, and intellectuals who support this view (from Sergei Eisenstein to Orson Welles, Jean Renoir to Jean Cocteau) is deft and insightful, amassing a weight of opinion that is difficult to override, and yet remaining alert to the differences between film and literature, as well as its powerful similarities. Careful steps are taken to identify both. After establishing how films can be read as visual texts (especially so with the proliferation of DVD apparatus such as commentaries, or the existence of *variae lectiones* in the form of directors’ cuts), Winkler offers a resounding endorsement of *auteur* theory, showing how leading filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard assert creative and narrative control over their cinematic texts, before demonstrating how films can be “poetic,” drawing particularly on the work of Pasolini. He ends by urging classicists to join in with this close reading of films. Aware that this will seem odd to many, the book’s introduction, “The god of light and the cinema eye,” reaches out to the uncertain by setting up Apollo as the overseer of such an enterprise. Since cinema is writing in light, the god of light (in fact, more than that, the mover of light, as the first epigraph of the book declares: ΦΟΙΒΩΙ ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙ ΦΩΤΟΚΙΝΗΤΗΙ) acts as a kind of patron and guarantor of cinema’s central place in our culture; it becomes the “modern Apollonian art form” (2), the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which represents all of human experience. Since this is what classics has always concerned itself with, Winkler exhorts us to maintain our discipline’s prominence and relevance by reaching out to cinema, to ensure that we keep practicing a *philologia perennis et universalis* (and reassures us, with recourse to the Alexandrians, and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, among others, that we are capable of such things).

The remaining chapters each provide case studies of this “classical film philology” in action, providing evidence for the second assumption noted above. Chapter 2 keeps Apollo center-stage, looking at the myriad of ways in which he (and his Muses) may appear on screen, from the Apollo encountered in an episode of *Star Trek*, to the sculptural Apollo in Oliver Stone’s *Alexander*. The main argument here concerns what Winkler, following the Italian director Cottafavi, calls “neo-mythologism”: the cinema finds ancient mythology (and history) continually relevant, but equally feels no need to stick to the templates of antiquity, and so re-imagines myth (and history) as it suits. This examination of myth’s “variability and adaptability” (122) continues in chapter 3, “The complexities of Oedipus,” and argues for Freud’s importance in shaping the ways in which the Oedipus myth might be filmed. Chapter 4, “Patriotism and war,” considers how ancient models of martial heroism and sacrifice, as espoused in writers such as Homer and Horace, are refracted through films which very often seek to overturn the unthinking idealization of ancient heroism practiced by previous ages. The analysis of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and its subtle challenging of classical exemplars, is powerful, showing how the film expresses the fear that “Western civilization is running the danger of being obliterated by modern war, that we have reached the end of classical values and culture” (171). Helen of Troy is the

subject of chapter 5, focusing on how Helen's story needs to be rewritten to suit Hollywood propriety and morality (and showing how this fluid "neo-mythological" approach is entirely consonant with what happens in antiquity, too); and last, a wide-ranging chapter on "Women in love" takes in such topics as Cleopatra and Jean Cocteau's *Orphée*.

As even this brief outline shows, a vast range of films is discussed here, many of which have no easily discernible relationship with antiquity or its narratives but which Winkler still takes as evidence of its ongoing presence in the modern world. This forces us to confront the difficult question of what grounds we need in order to posit a meaningful relationship between film and ancient text or myth: the final chapter's discussion of the analogies between the film *Pleasantville* and Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* is a case in point. Winkler argues that the thematic connections between the two—their concerns with innocence, knowledge, sexuality—may be unconscious on the part of the filmmaker but can still be revealing. The value, or novelty, of such revelations may not convince all readers, but as a previous skeptic of this kind of approach myself, I would argue that, first, Winkler's explorations in this field are much more carefully argued, and so plausible, than many other attempts; second, and more importantly, that they challenge us all to reflect further on what we mean by reception. Even though a filmmaker may not consciously appeal to ancient precedents, if Winkler, as the film's "reader," identifies some thematic affinity between the two, then a relationship between past and present is surely enacted through his reception of the film; and if it can be carefully accounted for, as it is here, then it must be afforded some credence and meaning.

It is, in fact, Winkler's strong presence in this book, as an enthusiastic and deeply knowledgeable reader of both films and ancient texts, that is one of its strongest points. This is no dry analysis but rather feels like a celebration of what clearly begins as one man's passions but turns into something that ought to be meaningful for us all. It is lucid and convincing—and will no doubt appeal to many non-classicists—but it manages to combine this with a virtuoso demonstration of Winkler's detailed knowledge of both fields, with very lengthy footnotes throughout the book. Such displays of learning may intimidate, but they do make his construction of the relationship between cinema and classical texts all the more convincing, and it is to the book's credit that they are confined to supplementary notes, available for the interested to pursue, rather than obstructing the flow of the discussion. The weight of material covered by the book can be exhausting, especially given its sheer variety; but in that variety there is also richness.

In sum, the opening two sections of *Cinema and Classical Texts* should be required reading for scholars and students of classics and film, and reception studies in general, but as Winkler himself would wish, they have much to offer "conventional" philologists, who will find here that, far from cinema posing a threat to, or undermining, traditional pursuits, our study of it is both a "reaffirmation of classical philology and the study of ancient literature" (13) and a necessary assertion of the classical past's continued relevance. The case studies provide

examples of what might be done under the banner of “classical film philology” and stand as very good individual readings of the films themselves, but they represent only a selection. As Winkler himself says, they should therefore be taken by scholars “as an incentive to pursue their own lines of enquiry” (19)—and it is to be hoped that many will.

To judge the collection *Hellas on Screen* against that plea would be unfair, since it predates Winkler’s book (though, arguably, not his central ideas, which have already been tested in earlier publications, and indeed large portions of *Cinema and Classical Texts* had already been published in various forms elsewhere). But since a collection on ancient Greece and film is sorely needed (given the relative preponderance of Roman-focused scholarship in this field; only Gideon Nisbet’s *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture* [Exeter 2008] really sets out to tackle the particular challenges of filming Greece, and then only briefly), it is to be lamented that this collection is somewhat uneven. A key shortcoming of the collection as a totality (comprising thirteen essays, in addition to the introduction and Robin Lane Fox’s preface) is perhaps a result of what could also be perceived as one of its strengths, and that is its communication of the (often rich) variety of work on classics and film being carried out in continental Europe to Anglophone audiences. Of those thirteen contributions, ten are by scholars currently working in Spain, Germany, Italy, and Belgium, and so the collection as a whole is a timely demonstration that the UK and North America do not have a monopoly on this kind of work. However, all of the essays are in English, and without delving into the various circumstances under which individual pieces were written, or translated, it is obvious that many of them suffer as a result, with the English riddled with errors and infelicities in many (though absolutely not all) cases. Compounded by inconsistencies in referencing, items missing from bibliographies, and so on, this is something of an impediment. It is also the case that some of the contributions lack the rigorous analysis that Winkler demonstrated so superbly. Discussions of “Ancient Greece and the Children’s Animation Film” (Martin Lindner), for example, or Herbert Verreth on “Odysseus’ Journey Through Film,” do not go much beyond a cataloguing of relevant cinematic or televised material: interesting, but offering little that is new or particularly noteworthy.

That said, there are perhaps four or five outstanding pieces on which I shall briefly focus in the remainder of this discussion. They each, in their own way, reinforce Winkler’s claims by demonstrating with acuity and originality some of the further connections that might be made between cinema and classical texts. They fall into two main groups. First, a pair of essays on Greek tragedy in film, by Pantelis Michelakis (“*The Legend of Oedipus: Silent Cinema, Theatre, Photography*”) and Filippo Carlà (“*Pasolini, Aristotle, and Freud: Filmed Drama Between Psychoanalysis and ‘Neoclassicism’*”), work very well together. Michelakis’s examination of the 1912 film starring Jean Mounet-Sully is in fact a fascinating complement to Winkler’s work, proving how the skills of the classical philologist may be applied to film. Not only are close reading techniques of value here, but

so, too, is experience of working with fragments, since *The Legend of Oedipus* survives only through a few stills, and the briefest of clips, from which something of the silent film's own "neo-mythological" take on the Oedipus story must be reconstructed. Carlà also carries out a philological approach, this time analyzing how Pasolini's cinematic versions of tragedy are heavily informed by Aristotle's *Poetics*, as well as by the Freudian interpretations also privileged by Winkler. In both of these contributions, the close connections between these films and a range of ancient literary predecessors—not only the tragedies themselves—are displayed clearly and convincingly.

Clustering around another kind of cinematic Greek—Alexander the Great—are three rewarding articles by Anja Wieber, Ivana Petrovic, and Angelos Chaniotis. Petrovic's careful examination of how Oliver Stone's *Alexander* draws on Plutarch shows how the relationship with classical texts can be equally as meaningful when we move into historiography; although, as she demonstrates, Plutarch's account of Alexander, and so too Stone's, is as dependent on the templates of epic and tragic myth as anything else. Chaniotis' piece also serves as a spirited, and convincing, defense of the much-maligned 2004 film, praising the way in which Stone reflects on the contested sources and interpretations that have enveloped Alexander since antiquity. His observation towards the end of his essay is particularly valuable: "Sometimes we think that we contrast our times with antiquity. In reality, we are only contrasting two modern constructs: our constructed perception of ourselves, and our constructed perception of the past" (197). This seems to me a useful summation of the issues which concern Winkler, and some of the contributors to *Hellas on Screen*, and with which we might end here. When we study the intersections between ancient texts and modern film, we ought to be reminded above all else, that the visions of the ancient past provided in each are always shifting and open to rewriting and reimagining. It is our duty as classical scholars, surely, to keep interrogating those shifting visions of antiquity in whatever form they appear.

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