Are You Not Entertained?: Classicists and Cinema
The Ancient World in the Cinema by Jon Solomon; Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema by Martin M. Winkler
Review by: Maria Wyke

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Are you not entertained?: Classicists and Cinema

Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*. Revised edition (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), XIX + 364 pp.

Martin M. Winkler (ed.), *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*. Revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), IX + 350 pp.

Talk in Hollywood and on the web for much of 2001 and 2002 included rumours about who would finally win the race to release a biopic of Alexander the Great. One website on Alexander[1] conveniently provided links to others that speculated enthusiastically on the details of impending films and television series.[2] Would it be a blockbuster directed by Oliver Stone, or one starring Leonardo DiCaprio, or one produced by Dino De Laurentiis? Or would it be a ten episode mini-series to be broadcast by the HBO network and based on the historical novels by Mary Renault?[3] After the success of *Gladiator*, released in May 2000, antiquity's renewed advance into popular culture sweeps on relentlessly.

Classicists, however, have had a long (even an intimate) relationship with cinema that has been highly ambivalent. In 1970, Gilbert Highet (a great advocate of the merits of studying the classical tradition) produced a relatively measured review in response to the otherworldly Rome he had recently seen in *Fellini-Satyricon*. It is good cinema, in Highet's view, and Fellini has become "more than an interpreter of Petronius. He is a competitor. He is a creator." This cinematic Rome is a memorable world of the imagination, whose figures and scenery exist in another dimension that can only be entered through the doors of hallucination. The film director perceptively renders ancient Rome as our dream world. The classicist, nonetheless, expresses concern about issues of probability (which he distinguishes from historical accuracy): "Take the banquet. Does Fellini really think that Romans dined lying on their stomachs? They did not. It would make anyone feel sick, particularly with so much coarse food being shoved at them. Does he really believe that, just before a dinner party in Rome, all the guests bathed naked in a swimming pool lit by scores of candles?" Highet wonders quite what advice Fellini had been given by his historical consultant Luca Canali of the University of Pisa, especially given that the Italian classicist had in turn sought the advice of his country's leading authority on Petronius, Ettore Paratore.[4]

Thirty years later another classicist's engagement with film production has become the object of much closer and more intense scrutiny, including her own. Shortly after the release of *Gladiator*, Kathleen Coleman of Harvard University posted on the University of Pennsylvania classics list a detailed description of her experience as

1. See http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/alexander/11.html. Downloaded 20 June 2002.
2. Such as http://www.filmfodder.com or http://www.upcoming.movies.com.
3. According to a headline in the trade journal *Daily Variety* for 21 February 2002, with location shooting due to begin in India in autumn 2002, "Stone pulls ahead in 'Alex' pic derby."
4. "Whose *Satyricon*—Petronius's or Fellini's?", in: Robert J. Ball (ed.), *The Classical Papers of Gilbert Highet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 339-48, reprinted from *Horizon* 12.4 (1970) 42-7. Some of Highet's comments on *Fellini-Satyricon* are quoted in both volumes here under review.

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consultant to DreamWorks (the producers of the epic film).[5] Responding immediately to criticism on the classics list of the film's historical inaccuracies, she distinguished between the responsibility she accepted as a scholar and that denied to her as a film consultant. Her remarks have been so widely disseminated and discussed that they have even become a key text in a university course on medieval history in film.[6] Perhaps because she was so closely implicated in the film's screening of imperial history and, in particular, its representations of gladiatorial combat, Coleman is centrally concerned with the issue of historical authenticity. She states that she was appalled by all the distortions and errors that appeared in the final cut of *Gladiator*. The fault lies not with her, however, as she had no control over the use the film company ultimately made of her advice. In those scripts she had seen, she had tried rigorously to identify and comment upon every detail pertaining to authenticity, not just of plot, but also of dialogue and stage direction. She had recommended to no avail that other experts be present on location during the shooting of specific scenes, such as the opening battle sequence. Eventually, she asked in vain that her name be removed from the film's credits because she was so "deeply disillusioned by the final product, which makes virtually no attempt to represent an authentic Roman past." Finally, in her posting, she concedes that at least *Gladiator* is likely to bring students into the classrooms of university classics departments, where they can then be disabused of the Roman history they have learnt from Hollywood.

Such interested students now have at their disposal revised editions of two volumes on classics and cinema which I certainly had been unable to obtain for my university library when I began to teach an undergraduate course on Rome on Film in the early 1990s. The republication of these two volumes is therefore most welcome. *The Ancient World in the Cinema* by Jon Solomon is slightly revised and updated from its original publication in 1978, and now incorporates passing references to *Gladiator*. *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema* edited by Martin Winkler (revised from its original publication as *Classics and Cinema* in 1991) contains several new chapters and a substantial new introduction. Although the latter's central concern is with Greece, and with cinematic explorations of its literature and myths, it carries on its cover a still from Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934), possibly in recognition of the immense interest that historical films set in antiquity now attract. Given this interest, and the growth of debates about classics and cinema, I would like to use my review essay on these two revised volumes as an opportunity to explore along the way various thoughts on the past, the present and the future of cinema in classical studies and of classical scholarship on cinema. As popular culture, especially cinema, sweeps into the arena of classical studies, we (as classicists) should ask ourselves the same question Maximus poses to the spectators who are internal to the film *Gladiator*: Are you not entertained?[7]

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5. Her comments can still be found at http://omega.cohums.ohio-state.edu/hyper-lists/classics-l/00-06-01/0926.html.
6. Run by the historian Paul Halsall of the University of North Florida, the course is entitled Myth, Epic and Romance: Medieval History in Film. See http://www.unf.edu/classes/medieval/film/ for its bibliography. Downloaded 21 June 2002.
7. In chapter 13—"Win the crowd"—on the *Gladiator* DVD. The leading screenplay writer and co-producer of *Gladiator*, David Franzoni, noted in an interview that the film itself was partly about modern anxieties over the power popular entertainment holds over people. The interview can be found at http://www.wga.org/craft/interviews/franzoni2001.html. My thanks to Nick Lowe for drawing it to my attention.

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Research and teaching

The inflexion of these two volumes (henceforth S. and W.), together in their original and their revised versions, provides a neat index of the changes that have taken place over the last twenty five years in classicists' attitudes to and their scholarship on cinema. *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, scarcely altered from its first edition, retains its avowedly popular and ironic tone. S. himself describes the work as a coffee-table book that surveys—pretty comprehensively—over four hundred films from the beginnings of cinema to the present that are set in or allude to the ancient world (itself very broadly defined to encompass not just Greece and Rome, but also Mesopotamia, Judaea, Egypt, Babylon, Persia and the ancient Orient) and ranges over many genres (both classical, such as epic, tragedy, comedy and satire, and filmic, such as musicals, animation, pepla and porn). The whole is structured according to a "musaic order" (xvi) that enlists the ancient muses one by one to head its nine chapters. Any implicit suggestion that cinema is the tenth muse who subsumes all the others is here presented as a matter of pure whimsy. *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, however, is a work of much greater academic ambition. Its collected essays are far more focussed: mainly on cinematic appropriations of Greek literature and myth; exclusively on sound film; mostly concerned with what W. repeatedly calls "literate cinema" or "cinema of substance." In contrast to his brief apology which opened the original edition in 1991, W. now includes a bold, substantial, and illuminating introduction that quotes film makers and theorists (such as Jean Cocteau, Abel Gance, and Sergei Eisenstein) in support of cinema as a tenth muse, or as a young child whose parents are to be found in the traditional arts of the west (pp. 14-16). Cinema at last takes up its rightful place in the classical tradition.

When S. first published his work on antiquity and cinema in the late 1970s, as he now observes in a new preface (xv-xvi), classicists seemed largely uninterested in the study of popular culture's diverse appropriations of ancient Greece and Rome, and cinematic appropriations in particular seemed to be on the wane. Since then, he notes, there has been a proliferation of classical allusions, adaptations, and historical reconstructions in feature films and television series (and, one could add, in new media such as computer games and internet technologies), as well as an ever-increasing body of classical scholarship on film and popular culture more generally. To the revised editions of S. and W. we can now add, for example, Marianne McDonald, *Euripides in Cinema: The Heart Made Visible* (1983; rpt. Boston: Greek Institute, 1991); Kenneth MacKinnon, *Greek Tragedy into Film* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986); my own *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud and Donald T. McGuire Jr (eds.), *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Ulrich Eigler (ed.), *Bewegte Antike: Antike Themen im modernen Film* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002); and a vast array of articles, including a substantial number by Martin Winkler himself of which one was most recently published in this journal.[8] Moreover, we learn from W. (pp. 4-5) that cinema is now well established as an aspect of classical studies both in classical degree programmes and in

8. Winkler, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori?* Classical Culture in the War Film," *IJCT* 7.2 (Fall 2000) 177-214.

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academic conferences. In fact, it was thanks to his own valiant efforts that the American Philological Association ran a three-year colloquium on Classical Antiquity in the Cinema from 1996 to 1998. Since then KINHMA (Friends of Classics and Cinema), a group affiliated to the APA, has been chartered to organise panels from 2001 to 2005 under the direction of a contributor to W.'s collection, Hanna Roisman. In 2001 the theme was the films of Stanley Kubrick, in 2002 ancient history and epic in film. Papers continue to be invited for the future panels.

W. also usefully observes that classicists' enthusiasm for cinema as an educational tool (as much as their disdain) dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1920, for example, an article in *The Classical Weekly* entitled "Media of Salvation" and written by George Hadzsits of the University of Pennsylvania distinguished between the relative merits of classical scholarship and film spectacle in the education of high school students: "In place of the mosaic representations of human life and its problems, extracted from one page, one paragraph, and even one sentence, a brilliant revelation is brought to mind and to eye of the totality of ancient life in all its vitality" (quoted in W., p. 6). Towards the end of the twentieth century, and on into the new millennium, however, continuing enthusiasm for the teaching of cinema by classicists has been met by extensive and relentless criticism. In W.'s volume, using the sustained metaphor of warfare, Peter Rose describes how the issue of pedagogy has taken on considerable ideological force in the United States. Explaining with great care how he utilises contemporary film in teaching his university course in Greek mythology, Rose first draws attention to the dramatic escalation and success of political assaults on such methods of classical education (pp. 291-4). For right-wing critics, cinema enters classical studies not as a triumphant gladiator but as a kind of Trojan Horse ready to bring down high culture's last bastion.

It is in such an ideologically charged context that it is possible to understand how Rose, in this revised essay, has misunderstood my review of the original volume as an attack on the teaching of cinema, rather than as a piece of self-reflection from within the ranks of those who research cinema and teach it in our classical degree programmes.[9] In my review of *Classics and Cinema*, written I should add from the apparent safety of the United Kingdom, I argued that cinema should not enter classical studies purely as a pedagogic hook with which to bait students so that they might then progress on to the study of "real" culture. It should not be forced to operate as a demonstration of the continuing vitality of classical culture (the "look classics is even here so it must still be worth studying in itself" approach, you could say).[10] As W. argues in his introduction and Rose demonstrates in his detailed course outline, cinema does not deserve to be studied as merely a convenient because attractive entry point into classics, but as itself a lively and vigorous aspect of the classical tradition. It would seem that as the ancient world becomes ever more embedded into popular culture, the presence of cinema in classical studies becomes ever more hotly contested.

9. Peter Rose has since acknowledged in a personal communication that he was too quick to misread my original review.

10. See further Wyke, "Classics and Contempt: Redeeming Cinema for the Classical Tradition," *Arion* 6.1 (1998) 124-36.

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Historical reconstruction

S.'s book is an entertainingly anecdotal, lavishly illustrated survey. To his readership of classicists, as opposed to the film fans at whom the volume is also directed, he defends the merits of cinema through sympathetic judgements on its makers (their films should be evaluated according to the limits of their objective and the relative success of its execution, p. 37; allowance should be made in this medium, as it is in others, for mythopoetic licence, p. 110). His account includes on occasion breathless, present tense plot summaries and enthusiastic catalogues that often echo amusingly the quantitative style of studio press books and fan magazines in a narrative of numbers: the chariot race in *Ben-Hur* (1959) required seventy-eight trained thoroughbreds fitted to eighteen 900-pound chariots, a million-dollar Antioch circus set, forty thousand tons of sand and crushed lava, and took three months to shoot (pp. 207-8).

On films involving historical reconstruction (by far the longest chapter), S. speaks only in the most general terms of how they might tell us about our own century and about our modern perception of antiquity. He claims that the route to critical success consists in a simple balance between historical authenticity and dramatic effectiveness (p. 25), and finds that balance best represented in the work of DeMille (p. 29). Yet an interesting pattern does emerge from S.'s fragmented analysis (fragmented because, as a cataloguer, he dwells on only one or two telling details of individual films and, as a classicist, he follows ancient rather than cinematic chronologies). For its iconography of antiquity (the particulars of architecture, decor and costume), cinema has borrowed extensively from nineteenth-century academic paintings, which themselves borrowed from the results of archaeological excavation. For its narratives of antiquity (the spectacles, the romance, the persistent theme of paganism versus Christian piety), cinema has regularly borrowed from popular historical novels which, in their turn, have borrowed from academic historiography or even directly from ancient sources such as Plutarch and the early Church fathers. The development of historical films set in antiquity thus intriguingly intersects with developments in archaeological science and classical scholarship. Investment in the production of the most spectacular historical films takes place during periods of technical or economic change in film industries (at the beginning of feature-film making, location shooting and camera movement, c. 1900s-1910s; during the early sound era in the 1930s; inaugurating and legitimating widescreen in the 1950s and 1960s; and, we could add, now, with the introduction of computer graphic imaging [CGI] – itself one of the most distinctive features of *Gladiator*). The representation of antiquity's spectacles puts on display and celebrates cinema's own capacities for visual spectacle.

In the last twenty five years, such patterning has received much closer attention from both classicists and film historians, in other books and articles, online journals and websites. Unfortunately, given the utility of S.'s book as an introduction for students to the diversity of films set in antiquity, S. has not thought to include in the revised edition reference to such material, although he does welcome its emergence.[11]

11. For an up-to-date bibliography, including reference to relevant websites, and more detail on the position of *Gladiator* in the history of films set in antiquity, see now Anja Wieber, "Auf Sandalen durch die Jahrtausende – eine Einführung in den Themenkreis 'Antike und Film'," in: Ulrich Eigler (ed.), *Bewegte Antike: Antike Themen im modernen Film* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002) 4-40. The rest of the volume is concerned with adaptations of classical literature to screen, for which see below.

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Given S.'s omission, the absence of discussion of historical films in W.'s volume, my own engagement (I must confess) with their analysis and, crucially, their substantial number, continuing production and submission to widespread public discussion, I would like to dwell for a moment on the work that has been done and could still be done on this aspect of classics and cinema.

From outside the realm of classical studies proper, there exists an abundance of literature on film as a form of historical representation. Two English-language journals, for example, have conveniently produced special issues that collate some of the most important theoretical explorations of the relation between film and history: *American Historical Review* 93.5 (1988) and *Screening the Past* 6 (1999).[12] The term 'historiophoty,' invented by Hayden White, marks out the specificities of film as a predominantly visual historical medium distinct from, but related to, the traditions of historiography. Robert A. Rosenstone examines the issue of the representational adequacy of historical film, while Pierre Sorlin, influenced by the French Annales school, describes historical film as one manifestation of society's memory of the past whose functioning depends on the situation in which that society finds itself. In these theoretical explorations of the mode of historical narrative ventured by film, cinematic history is often construed as analogical, as constructing a past through which the present may be viewed. Cinema's historical reconstructions are, therefore, bitemporal rather than merely anachronistic. Their created pasts provide types or anti-types for the present, allegorical representations or estranged retellings. We, not the projected past, are their real concern.[13]

For classicists, therefore, a central issue concerning cinema's historical reconstructions may well lie in the particular utilities of ancient Greece and Rome on screen as opposed to other periods of history and other cultures; in the evident preference for Rome over Greece (S. devotes fifty three pages to Roman history films, nine to Greek); and for certain periods and people over others (neither the Gracchi nor Augustus, for example, are noted cinematic figures in contrast to the repeat appearances of Spartacus, Julius Caesar, Cleopatra and Nero). The resonances that ancient Greece and Rome have for modern audiences are distinct and specific. They result from a long and highly complex tradition that, to a large extent, determines the trajectories of their appropriation by cinema. The reconstruction of these past worlds on screen is not promiscuously created but often highly nuanced and carefully chosen. What new meanings are bestowed on Greece and Rome, we should ask, in the cycle of resignification in which cinema holds such an important position?[14]

Cinema's historical reconstructions of the classical world should not be examined in isolation from their origins in nineteenth-century modes of historical discourse nor from their interrelations with the wider cultural discourses of their period of production. By this means, we can see how cinema's classical worlds have addressed, and

12. The special issue of this electronic journal on visual media and history can be located at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/current/cc47.html#cc6, where a convenient summary is provided by the editors (Arthur Lindley and Antony Guneratne) of the development of professional study of film as an historical medium.
13. For this summation, I am indebted to the article in *Screening the Past* 6 (1999) by Arthur Lindley, "The ahistoricism of medieval film."
14. My formulation here of the questions classicists should ask of cinema is highly indebted to Dominic Montserrat.

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continue to address, modern concerns about, for example, politics, religion, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and popular culture itself. Concerning politics, much work has already been done on Roman history films, especially those produced during the "golden age" of Hollywood's epic blockbusters which frequently deployed early Christian Rome in particular to narrate, through historical analogy, the triumph of American political ideals and values over those of the Fascist, Nazi and Communist regimes.[15] The social and political structures of ancient Greece have proven much harder for Hollywood, or other film industries, to think with. While much political analysis has been undertaken on the transformation of Greek literature and myth to screen – see, for example, in W.'s collection Marianne McDonald's reading of *Iphigenia* (dir. Michael Cacoyannis, 1977) as a reflection on the Greek civil war and the rule of the colonels (pp. 90-101) – a book-length study of Greek history films remains to be written. We can only hope that the current spate of film and television productions concerning Alexander the Great will stimulate and facilitate just such a publication.

Analyses of the analogical mechanisms by which films set in ancient Rome have explored modern concerns about religion and gender demonstrate additionally that such cinematic appropriations of the classical past have often become very meaningful to those who have viewed them and have even filtered into their everyday lived experience. In a recent study of the galley slaves in the novel and the films about the fictional Ben-Hur, for example, Simon James notes in passing the immense religious importance the novel's representation of his encounter with Christ took on for Americans, which the films then sustained and strengthened. A fraternal system of lodges grew up across the United States hosting Ben-Hur performances, recitations and costumed rituals. Text and then film became part of the religious education of American children.[16] On gender, and in particular the cinematic representations of Cleopatra, Mary Hamer has demonstrated how female spectators were encouraged to identify with the Queen of Egypt and to carry that identification out of the cinema into department stores where they could purchase Cleopatran cosmetics, clothes, and other fashion accessories in order to reshape their bodies and their femininities according to her screen image.[17] Similar analyses of sexuality in cinema's classical worlds are only just developing, and this despite the centrality of both Greece and Rome to homosexual identity politics, their popular perception as sexual playgrounds, and the long tradition of dressing pornographic films in classical costume. As ever, cinema's historical reconstructions of ancient Greece are underrepresented in these studies.[18]

S. retains his most entertaining descriptions for the formulaic, cartoon worlds of the Italian pepla (or "sword and sandal" films), almost two hundred of which were

15. For examples of such work and further bibliography, see the volumes concerned with Rome listed in the "Research and teaching" section of this review.
16. Simon James, "The Roman galley slave: *Ben-Hur* and the birth of a factoid," *Public Archaeology* 2.1 (2001) 35-49.
17. Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: Histories, Politics, Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993). Cf. Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams, and Distortions* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990) and my own analyses of cinema's Cleopatras and Messalinas in *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
18. Cinema's Roman sexualities are discussed in several of the essays contained in Joshel, Malamud and McGuire, *Imperial Projections*, while Malamud's own essay on *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* opens up questions of Jewish ethnicity expressed through Roman comedy.

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pumped out from the late 1950s into the mid-1960s. Set in an indistinct classical past (more often Greek than Roman, more often quasi-mythic than historical), they are filled with pointy-bearded despots and pointy-chested queens whose peoples are rescued from oppression by the heroic exploits of a heavily-muscled outsider, the very paragon of strength and justice, who eventually rides off into the sunset with his chesty, blonde sweetheart. But, among film historians, even such B-movie works as *The Giant of Marathon* (1959) or *Caesar the Conqueror* (1963), as well as the most famous and successful *Hercules* (1957), have been read in the context of the political anxieties of Italians in the aftermath of the Second World War and, in particular, concern over their relations to the victorious United States from where a large number of the bodybuilders who starred in these films originated.[19]

Catalogues and electronic databases

S.'s book, however, does recognise and catalogue extensively the huge diversity of cinematic approaches to antiquity, though, in so doing, he effectively undermines his own suggestion that "antiquity films" constitute a single, unified genre in any sense. Rather the classical worlds of cinema cross the whole spectrum of film genres. Thanks to S.'s diligent research, we learn that cinema has produced not just sophisticated European adaptations of various Greek myths and tragedies, but an animated spoof in *Greek Mirthology* (1954), whose protagonist is Popeye; not just Hollywood's ponderous, blockbuster Roman religio-epics, but a musical aqua-comedy on Hannibal's invasion of Italy (*Jupiter's Darling*, 1955); not just complex translations of Roman literature to screen such as *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969), but a Japanese animated feature based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Winds of Change*, 1978). It seems almost churlish to mention that there are, inevitably, some omissions. As just one example (or rather, I should say, the only example that occurred to me), *The Warrior's Husband* (1933) was directed by Walter Lang for Fox Pictures. It constitutes a conservative satire on male and female roles in the society of 1930s America, dressed up as a narrative of the military and erotic submission of the anti-marriage, emancipated Amazons to the Athenian army, gallantly led by a virile Theseus.

Other catalogues and surveys of classical world films are now available in book form, such as that written by the *Variety* journalist Derek Elley, *The Epic Film. Myth and History* (London: Routledge, 1984), *Epic Films: Casts, Credits and Commentary on over 250 Historical Spectacle Movies* by Gary A. Smith (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991), and Domenico Cammarota, *Il cinema peplum* (Rome: Fanucci, 1987). But all such catalogues will soon be completely superseded by the commercial and academic databases that are now burgeoning online. I offer here no comprehensive summary, but just a few examples. Janice Siegel (aka Dr. J), of the Department of Foreign Languages at Illinois State University, provides a "Survey of Audio-Visual Resources for Classics" that includes some details of films and interactive CD-Rom games set in Greece or Rome, as well as listing educational documentaries on video or historical novels on tape.[20] Other filmographies are supplied by Nick Lowe, of the Department of Classics at Royal Holloway, University of London, and Paul Halsall of the Department of History at the University of North Florida, the latter ranging from films set in prehistoric

19. See, for example, Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) 145-83.
20. See http://lilt.ilstu.edu/drjclassics2/.

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times, through the biblical era, to the Roman empire.[21] Already, while details of *The Warrior's Husband* cannot be found in S.'s survey, they can be found on the web. Some information is supplied by the website dedicated to the actor David Manners, who played Theseus;[22] The Internet Movie Database provides a title match, as well as picking up the film on searches for character, plot, or cast biographies, and provides further details of cast and credits, awards and reviews, user comments and keyword links, in this case, to films about amazons, female-dominated societies, homosexuality, ancient Greece and prehistory.[23] S., nonetheless, is to be lauded for his inclusivity, even if it has to be attained at the expense of depth. *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, by virtue of its range, indicates quite how much work there is still to be done on classics and cinema.

Theory, classics and film

W.'s volume, in contrast to the sweep of S.'s, is centrally concerned with Greece, and with cinematic adaptations of its myths and literature. On the use of myth, S. has no space to provide theoretical foundations for the comments he makes on the films listed. He notes only that Greek myths provide surreal stories, powerful heroes, spiritual profundity and fantasy (p. 101), all of which is difficult to film (p. 131), and that these myths are relatively unfamiliar and without theological engagement for most film spectators (p. 133). In contrast, *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema* is theoretically explicit. At the outset, W. declares that the volume's approach will be based broadly on reader-oriented theories of literature (pp. 9-11). This approach, in the view of W., justifies the volume's focus on films as texts, the construction in several essays of typologies of narrative structure, and the almost total absence of illustrations (except for the film stills supplied by the director Cacoyannis as a visual essay on his film *Iphigenia*).

This is a surprising announcement on two counts. Firstly, it has long been recognised within film studies that cinema operates with different modes of production, dissemination and consumption than literature. A literary approach to cinema would thus preclude engagement with much work in film studies on, for example, theories of the gaze and the process of spectatorship.[24] The construction, on the level of theory, of a parallelism between the structures of classical literature and narrative film would also seem to require that attention be focussed on what W. calls "cinema of substance" in his introduction and "literate" or "artistic" cinema in his own essay on John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), rather than on the whole gamut of films to which S. has drawn attention. Secondly, this explication of the volume's theoretical position does not do justice to its range (essays on *9 to 5* and *Star Wars* are included) nor to the more specifically cinematic analyses undertaken by some of the contributors (Marianne McDonald writes of spectatorial identification in her reading of *Iphigenia*; Mary-Kay Gamel discusses camera movement in *Chinatown*; even W. himself utilises the wordless gesture and the look to interpret the tragic features of *The Searchers*).

21. See, respectively, http://www2.rhbnc.ac.uk/Classics/NJL/films.html and http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbookmovies.html.
22. At http://www.davidmanners.com/warriorshusband.html.
23. See http://www/imdb.com.
24. See, for example, Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993).

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Much more suggestive to me in W.'s introduction is the teasing reference to Plato's allegory of the Cave as almost an ancient anticipation of the physical environment of the cinema (pp. 11-13). W. teases because Plato's Cave has long since had a central role in film theory. In essays on the cinematic apparatus, Jean Louis Baudry drew on Plato's allegory, equating film images with the shadows on the cave wall, in order to theorise the role of the spectator in the cinematic experience.[25] So familiar has the metaphor of Plato's Cave become in film theory, that the phrase can stand in for cinema in the titles of articles and books. Perhaps W. is hinting here at an issue that engages some of his contributors more explicitly, namely the dynamic relationship that has long existed between ancient poetics and modern film theory. While Baudry drew on Plato, Sergei Eisenstein borrowed from classical rhetoric, especially Aristotle's *Poetics*, better to articulate the techniques of his cinematic art (as J. K. Newman itemises in W.'s volume, pp. 193-218). This interconnection between ancient and modern theory justifies, in Newman's view, the application back to classical literature of Eisenstein's poetics of cinema. There immediately follows in W.'s volume exactly such a look back at classical literature's "cinematic aesthetics" or "visual kinetics" elucidated from the perspective of film techniques such as montage or shifts of focus. Fred Mench's cinematic reading of the *Aeneid* (pp. 219-32) is in fact a reprint of an essay that first appeared in 1969. His innovative approach, however, has since had many successors in the field of classical literary criticism. To name just one example with which I am most familiar, Laura Mulvey's now canonic essay on visual pleasure in narrative cinema has often been invoked by classicists as a route to the interpretation of gender play in ancient erotic poetry.[26] W.'s introduction, as well as the essays by Newman and Mench, draw to our attention that the close engagement of classics and cinema extends even to the levels of theory and critical practice.

Adaptation

Classicists have generally met cinema's adaptations of ancient literature to screen with far more interest, and occasional admiration, than its reconstructions of ancient history. Thirty years ago, Gilbert Highet enthused that Federico Fellini had become not just an interpreter of Petronius, but even his competitor in the construction of a fantastical Roman world. His review is discussed both by S. (p. 278) and, in W.'s collection, by J. P. Sullivan (pp. 258-71), who likewise categorises the Italian film director as a "creative translator" of his Latin source. In the landscape of adaptations, classicists have found firmer footing because, while film may not be felt capable of attaining the status of viable history, it has been thought capable of offering its spectators an imaginative rereading of classical literature. Such a cinematic rereading may even become constitutive of a classical work's meaning for modern audiences, and then be permitted entry into that work's reception history (so Sullivan, p. 271).

Early in W.'s volume are collated three very distinct approaches to the examination of Greek tragedy's adaptation to film, with specific reference to Michael Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia* (1977) and its relation to Euripides' play *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Framing an inves-

25. Baudry, "Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus" and "The apparatus: metapsychological approaches to the impression of reality in cinema," in: Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 286-318.
26. Examples are noted in Wyke, *The Roman Mistress*, p. 7.

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tigation of that relationship by Marianne McDonald are first an interview with the film director and the actress Irene Papas (who played Clytemnestra), and then a visual essay on the film comprised of fifteen stills selected by the director himself. The inclusion of both interview and visual essay is a fine reminder of just how numerous are the avenues we have available through which to reach an analysis of film adaptations. Yet they are also, in equal parts, frustrating and tantalising. Directors can be notoriously difficult to interview—Fellini was regularly evasive, or eloquent but contradictory (as Highet himself noted). Cacoyannis and Papas here appear to have opted for relatively unproductive generalities. Asked why he employed Greek tragedy as an instrument to address current events, the director does not get much further than suggesting, more or less, that there are connections between ancient and modern Greece, and that the plays are great and timeless: "like mirrors in which you can see all of life" (p. 80). Tantalisingly, however, both director and actress also make passing reference to issues that deserve attention in much greater depth. There are those which have commonly engaged critics: such as the distinction Cacoyannis mentions between his interest in Greek tragedy and that of Pasolini in Greek myth; questions of selection and addition; and of how film makers choose to deal with the mechanics of Greek tragedy—chorus, masks, gods. Less common is the following question both director and actress raise: how do you perform an ancient Greek person? They talk of physique, looks, method of expression and acting style but only superficially so. For these reasons, in my view, the later visual essay cannot match up to the model provided in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). Cacoyannis simply does not give us enough clues to a productive reading of his choice and juxtaposition of stills. But the layout of W.'s volume does importantly remind us that any analysis of a film adaptation should include performance and camera work.

Interview and visual essay can be contrasted with the much more enlightening analysis that has been placed between them. McDonald examines the distinctive techniques available for representing suffering on film in contrast to its performance on the ancient stage (pp. 90-101). Tragic suffering is rendered more concrete, and transformed into a more immediate visceral experience for modern spectators, because the roaming eye of the camera allows us momentarily to share the perspective of, and therefore identify with, the ancient protagonists. Moreover, whilst the director in interview seemed most reluctant to pin his film to any specific political interpretation, the critic helpfully offers a reading of *Iphigenia* as temporally layered, evoking simultaneously Euripides' own time, the Greek civil war and the rule of the colonels: simply put, its heroine embodies Cyprus misused by Agamemnon's junta.

Marianne McDonald's essay joins a rich and ever expanding body of classical scholarship on the adaptation of Greek tragedy to film, including her own book, that of Kenneth MacKinnon and, most recently, the collection edited by Ulrich Eigler (all cited above). And, throughout, W.'s volume also draws attention to many works from outside classical studies on adaptations of ancient literature to screen by directors such as Fellini, Cacoyannis and Pasolini (although readers might have been better served by the inclusion of a collated bibliography—and filmography—at the volume's close).[27] Here I would merely like to draw attention to new possibilities for research that will

27. Eigler's collection forms a useful companion to W.'s as it centres not on Cacoyannis but Pasolini, while also including a chapter on the *Medea* directed by Lars von Trier and another on *Fellini-Satyricon*.

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be generated by two British projects which plan to interconnect the documentation and the study of ancient drama on screen with that of ancient drama on the modern stage (where both the investigation of performance and the use of interviews have been long established as interpretative methods).

The Reception of the Texts and Images of Ancient Greece in Late Twentieth-Century Drama and Poetry in English, directed by Lorna Hardwick and based at the Open University,[28] is a research project whose stated aim is to document and analyse, through a series of case studies, the theatrical and literary surge of interest in Greek texts and drama that occurred in the late twentieth century. Of relevance here is that the project has as an additional goal the production of a database of transmission that will include film. Consequently, once it is completely assembled, the database may allow a researcher to connect details and criticism of Cacoyannis's filmed *Iphigenia* with those of his staged productions.[29] Similarly, *The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama*, founded by Edith Hall and Oliver Taplin in 1996 at Oxford University, plans to provide a forum within which to coordinate research on the international production and reception of classical plays since the Renaissance. And it too proposes to include film both in its archive of physical materials and its database (planned to be open for public access by 2003).[30] Already the project has produced a volume of essays entitled *Medea in Performance, 1500-2000* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), edited by Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Oliver Taplin, that includes an essay by the film historian Ian Christie on screened versions of Medea. In these new research contexts, the pairing classics and cinema becomes an even more complex, but intriguing, triad: classics, cinema and the stage.

Parallelism, allusion and quotation

A step away from the more immediate interaction between cinema and classics represented by historical reconstruction and adaptation is that of formal or thematic parallelism. Six of the fifteen essays in W.'s volume are broadly concerned with structural similarities between ancient myth, tragedy or comedy and films which possess modern settings. I was critical of aspects of this type of analysis in my original review of *Classics and Cinema*[31] (as are both Mary-Kay Gamel and Peter Rose in W.'s collection itself) and still think that it should be undertaken with care if it seeks the status of work that elucidates the intersection between classics, the classical tradition and cinema. In one of the new additions to the revised volume, for example, Hanna Roisman explicitly suggests only a very limited aim for her comparison of narrative strategy in the *Odyssey* and *The Usual Suspects* (1995): namely to demonstrate the validity of Aristotle's observation that what is convincing is what one can be convinced by (p. 52). If this was really all that was at stake, would her needs best be met by *The Usual Suspects*, and how would interpretation of the film—or of the *Odyssey*—be served by such a comparison?

28. Details of which can be found at http://www2.open.ac.uk/ClassicalStudies/GreekPlays.
29. See http://www5.open.ac.uk/csdb/ for the current state of the database.
30. For further details see http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/.
31. See fn. 10 above. [For a recent sample study coming out of the Open University project see Lorna Hardwick, "Classical Texts in Post-Colonial Literatures: Consolation, Redress and New Beginnings in the Work of Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney," above in this volume (*IJCT* 9 [2002/2003] 236-256). — W.H.]

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Rather than retrace my previous arguments here (themselves plotted within an overarching concern about the disadvantages of formulating the relation between classics and cinema as one between high and popular culture), I propose to consider briefly some of the problems and possibilities inherent in analysing structural parallels between classical literature or myth and contemporary cinema. In W.'s volume itself, Mary-Kay Gamel criticises a comparative approach where a narrative analysis that relies on the uncritical acceptance of Aristotelian categories and Jungian theories of recurring archetypes dominates (pp. 148-71). The volume's opening essay by Erling Holtsmark on the *katabasis* theme in such film genres as the western, detective thriller and Vietnam war film could well be a case in point (pp. 23-50). Simply put, such comparisons tend to focus on basic similarities in narrative structure—in this particular case, a hero's journey into and out of a hell of self-discovery—with a corresponding suppression of film's visual style and performance, of the tradition of story-telling that intervenes between the classical past and the present, and of difference or change between the comparanda. Peter Rose, likewise, is critical of comparative analyses that enlist ancient Greek myth to construct an allegedly monolithic western tradition of a continuous human nature (esp. pp. 296-7). He urges the importance of deploying historical as well as atemporal methods of comparison (favouring a Marxist, as well as a psychoanalytic and structuralist, approach) and of pressing the question: what about the otherness of Greek myth?

Most of the comparative essays in W.'s volume are more subtle than these criticisms might imply, since they acknowledge to various degrees the specificities of film style and the importance of a diachronic perspective. Roisman, for example, notes that in translation from the Homeric poems to the Hollywood cinema screen orality's formulation of mendacity is transcribed into flashback, camera movement and voiceover, while Winkler observes that one new filmic dimension to the tragedy of *The Searchers* is constituted by the director's use of the landscape of Monument valley (p. 134). Yet, while most of the essays also set the comparanda in their own historical moment of production (Gamel points out that ancient Greek drama plays out its myths from the point of view of the Athenian citizen, and that *Chinatown* is a distinctively American tragedy), little attention is paid to the long tradition of storytelling that has intervened between Aristotle and Hollywood. Herein lies another interesting possibility for new research. In *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Nick Lowe traces the formation of western storytelling and the historical emergence of the classical prototype in the ancient genres of epic, tragedy, comedy and the novel. Cinema obviously belongs to the other end of that tradition, but the genealogy of its narrative structures needs to be traced back to antiquity via their dependency on intervening sources such as the modern novel or, more interestingly still, popular guides to screenplay writing which themselves are based on a somewhat deviant reception history of Aristotle's *Poetics*.[32] Mere juxtaposition can never be a sufficient means for assessing the complex relations of similarity and difference between classical culture and its manifestations in cinema.[33]

To my mind, classicists' readings of films with non-classical settings are often

32. Both Lowe and Gamel (p. 161) note this intriguing connection between Aristotle and Hollywood.

33. This methodological criticism is equally valid for Solomon's systematic juxtaposition of ancient visual images and modern film stills.

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most successful and persuasive where they can expose and illuminate sustained, complex, even deliberate, evocations of antiquity that are then made to resonate with the specific significations of ancient Greece and Rome in the modern world. Winkler's own studies of what I here term classical "allusion" and "quotation" are handy illustrative examples. To his revised collection, W. has added a new essay of his own on *Star Wars* (pp. 272-90). Although George Lucas (the director of the trilogy) has a well-documented enthusiasm for the hero myths described by C. G. Jung and popularised by Joseph Campbell, W. offers a far richer reading than one focussed exclusively on classical parallellisms might have allowed. W. traces back a specific reception history for the multiple allusions in *Star Wars* to narratives of Roman empire: the trilogy's most direct source is one of Hollywood's own Roman history epics, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (dr. Antony Mann, 1964), which itself drew on Edward Gibbon's eighteenth-century *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the latter of which also heavily influenced the development of the science fiction genre via its exploitation as model for the construction of Isaac Asimov's Galactic Empire in his mid-twentieth-century *Foundation* trilogy. W. asks: what is the point of these classical allusions?; what work do they do to construct the meaning of the films? In the context of the middle to late twentieth century, the Roman empire of film and fiction, whether directly or indirectly represented, is always coloured by its recent active deployment as a model for Nazi Germany (and, we might add, by its evocation in apocalyptic visions of what post-war, imperial America might become). Similarly, nostalgic talk of resurrecting the virtuous republic recalls the use to which the Roman republic was put by the Founding Fathers as model for the very formation of the United States. If Darth Vader is shaped to match the contours of the sinister praetorian prefects of ancient Roman historiography, the fatherly Obi-Wan fits into the frame of a Marcus Aurelius who can then represent for modern Americans a lost golden age of spiritual enlightenment and the proper exercise of imperial power. The utility of this essay for interpreting some aspects of *Gladiator* will not be lost on those classicists who are familiar with the recent historical film.

Outside the confines of *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, here in this journal, Winkler has also examined the function of quotation from Greek and Latin texts in the war film, such as the celebrated and infamous *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* of Horace *Odes* 3.2.[34] W.'s description of the opening of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) is instructive: in a German classroom, in 1914, a professor misappropriates Horace to exhort his students to enlist. After the mass, industrialised slaughter of the First World War, the film reexamines modern education in a tradition of individual heroism which had once been cloaked in the authority of antiquity. Here classical scholarship on cinema intersects with the history of education in the classics. The outcome is a much tighter, and thicker bond between classics and cinema than that woven by the explication of structural parallels.

Classicists and cinema in the computer age

In the last few years, points of contact between classicists and cinema have proliferated thanks in no small part to new internet technologies. When Jon Solomon first undertook his research for *The Ancient World in the Cinema* in the 1970s, he could only

34. See fn. 2 above.

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access most of the films in which he was interested through film archives, screenings in film seasons, or through commercial film banks, thus allowing him only a limited, or even a singular, viewing (xv). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when I was preparing my book on Roman history films, extra-cinematic documentation such as press books and reviews were mainly accessible only in holdings such as those of the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Southern California, the Margaret Herrick Library (Los Angeles), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Library of Congress (Washington), and the British Film Institute (London). Compare now the material available online concerning *Gladiator* (2000). Ross Scaife, of the Department of Classics at the University of Kentucky, has set up a website on *Gladiator* that provides a number of links to other websites and online movie databases which themselves furnish a vast array of information about the film.[35] Searching through these websites and databases, and others to which they in turn are linked, the research possibilities for a classicist become legion: to buy the video or digital video disc, the poster, the book, the soundtrack; to access with ease a synopsis, cast and credits, awards and nominations, trailers and clips, premiere photographs and production stills, and the official production notes and film biographies supplied by the studio DreamWorks SKG; to scrutinise interviews with various participants; to read some two hundred and sixty previews and reviews collated from newspapers and magazines; to skim the official studio fansite as well as a Yahoo bulletin board which contains over one thousand unofficial comments from quizzical spectators and ardent fans (dating from the anticipations of January 2000, through the release period starting in May, to the launch of the video and DVD in November, and on to the Academy Award ceremonies in March 2001, right up to the present).[36] Reciprocally, should they so wish, film fans can access through Scaife's website both popular and academic literature online regarding the emperor Commodus, gladiators and arena games (such as the online encyclopaedia of Roman emperors *De imperatoribus Romanis*, or a book review written by Donald Kyle of the Department of History at the University of Texas at Arlington for *The Ancient History Bulletin* in 1997 entitled "Rethinking the Roman Arena: Gladiators, Sorrows and Games" that concerns scholarship by Thomas Wiedemann, Carlin Barton and Paul Plass).[37]

At least two important points emerge from this catalogue of internet materials. Firstly, many spectators of *Gladiator*, just to judge from some of the messages left on the Yahoo bulletin board, are interested in questions of the film's relation to history. They do not accept passively the classical world reconstructed on screen but actively respond to it, and compare it with other histories of imperial Rome with which they are familiar. Classicists would do well to study such bulletin boards as partial documentation on how classical world films may be interrogated and consumed. Secondly (and most relevantly to the theme of this review), classicists are actively involved in the establishment of vast electronic networks of information that can lead from film to classical scholarship and vice versa. Moreover, it is not just online that this intersection

35. See http://www.uky.edu/AS/Classics/gladiator.html.

36. Most informative are the details on *Gladiator* supplied by the Yahoo movie database (http://movies.yahoo.com) and the Movie Review Query Engine (http://www.mrqe/com).

37. See http://www.roman-emperors.org/commod.htm and http://www.trentu.ca/ahb/ahb11/ahb-11-2-3g.html. [The latter has been taken down since Dr. Wyke wrote this review article, but is archived on http://web.archive.org. – W.H.]

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of classicists, classics and cinema occurs: university academics such as Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, David Potter and Kathleen Coleman herself appear on the DVD of *Gladiator* in a documentary programme that was originally produced for the Learning Channel ("Gladiator Games: The Roman Blood Sport") and is, in this context, heavily spliced with footage from the film; a British Museum exhibition ("Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome") which ran a few months after the release of *Gladiator* included, alongside its displays of ancient artefacts, footage of Hollywood's arena combats and a collection of posters advertising gladiator films. Our discipline has undoubtedly benefited from cinema's renewed interest in antiquity, in ways that Kathleen Coleman may not have foreseen.

In the introduction and at various points throughout *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, the case is made for the value of cinema to classicists (and the value of classicists to cinema): cinema reduces the temporal distance between antiquity and today, rebuilding the ruins of Greece and Rome and filling them with living beings; it readily reveals connections and differences between antiquity and modern societies, and exposes the mechanisms whereby modern cultures use the classical past to interrogate the present; its study can illuminate classical cultures and their literatures, just as a classical perspective can enrich readings of individual films. To these we can now add that cinema brings classics out into a very public domain and makes the interrogation of antiquity and the classical tradition available globally. Classicists may not need cinema to be the "salvation" of our discipline, but it can be our ally. Certainly it is not just entertainment.

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