This is because a highly accomplished vision of the past such as his better preserves its fascination. It becomes even more appealing when we realize that it also provided a thematic parallel to, perhaps even a model for, a popular imperial saga set in the future. The historical Marcus Aurelius as much as predicted all this, even if he was referring only to historical fact and not to works of the imagination, when he observed: "Look back over the past, with its changing empires that rose and fell, and you can foresee the future too. Its pattern will be the same."[36]

36. *Meditations* 7.49, quoted from Staniforth, *Marcus Aurelius: Meditations*, 113. Cf. Mann, "Empire Demolition," 332, on past and future.

XIV

Teaching Classical Myth and Confronting Contemporary Myths

Peter W. Rose

The most striking development since the first appearance of this essay has been the dramatic escalation and general success of the right-wing assault on education and culture. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, assessing the Reagan-Bush era, note the following developments:

> During these years, the meaning and purpose of schooling at all levels of education were refashioned around the principles of the marketplace and the logic of rampant individualism. Ideologically, this meant abstracting schools from the language of democracy and equity while simultaneously organizing educational reform around the discourse of choice, reprivatization, and individual competition.[1]

The Republican control of Congress, combined with President Clinton's apparent determination to steal Republican issues, has meant that the Clinton era has seen a vast escalation of rhetoric about improving education, but only token gestures have actually been enacted. Meanwhile the rhetoric of "choice in education" by means of school vouchers has already turned into reality.[2] William Bennett is still preaching a simplistic "moral literacy."[3] A host of right-wing culture warriors, usually

1. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education Still under Siege*, 2nd ed. (Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 1993), 1. My thanks to Steven A. Nimis for comments and suggestions on the first version of this essay; also thanks to many perceptive students who have helped enlighten me over the years.

2. "Few Clear Lessons From Nation's First School-Choice Program," *The New York Times* (March 27, 1999), A10.

3. See *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories*, ed. William J. Bennett (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

funded by right-wing think tanks, are hard at work discrediting any intellectuals in the public sphere who have dared to proclaim themselves progressive or who have even been admired by progressives. Nobel Prize–winner Rigoberta Menchú, earlier targeted by Dinesh D'Souza, is now the subject of a book-length assault.[4] The antifeminist backlash, well analyzed by Susan Faludi in 1991, has succeeded in muting, if not totally silencing, public objections to the most blatantly sexist advertising.[5] Verbal and physical violence against gays, including murder, has escalated grimly.

In the field of classics we have Mary Lefkowitz triumphantly "refuting" Afrocentrism to rescue Socrates and Cleopatra from any taint of Africa.[6] Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath have scolded classicists, myself included, for indulging in theory by hurling bizarre rhetorical questions that seem to imply the utter absurdity of classicists presuming to bite the hand of capitalism that feeds them.[7]

In the context of this alleged demise of classical education, making a case for the use of popular film in teaching classical culture or literature runs the inevitable risk of handing ammunition to the enemy. Without positioning myself like some Solon in the middle, I should also note that there is a less strident but perhaps more distressing attack from the left: Walter Benjamin, we are told, was against film; and the name of one of the founding fathers of cultural studies, Stuart Hall, in my view widely and justly re-

4. David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999). Cf. Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (1991; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1992), chapter 3 ("Travels with Rigoberta: Multiculturalism at Stanford"). Stoll's preface makes clear his real agenda: "dissecting the legacy of guerrilla warfare. . . . It continues to be romanticized, as illustrated by the aura surrounding Che Guevara, and it has hardly disappeared, as demonstrated by news reports from Colombia, Peru, and Mexico" (x). There are many "truths" to be revealed. Stoll is clearly not interested in the truth of the United States' heavy complicity in the chain of horrors inflicted on the "poor people of Guatemala," beginning with the CIA's coup d'état in 1954. For a thoughtful assessment of Stoll's book and issues of truth in Guatemala see Peter Canby, "The Truth About Rigoberta Menchú," *The New York Review of Books* (April 8, 1999), 28–33, and the exchange between Stoll and Canby, *The New York Review of Books* (October 21, 1999), 72–73.

5. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown Books, 1991).

6. Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). Contrast the review by Martin Bernal, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 96.4.5 (1996), published electronically.

7. Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (New York: Free Press, 1998). See Peter Green, "Homer Lives!" *The New York Review of Books* (March 18, 1999), 45–48, and the "Forum" on *Who Killed Homer?* in *Arion*, 3rd ser., 6 no. 3 (1999), 84–195, and 7 no. 2 (1999), 172–184.

vered on the left, is likewise invoked against the subtle elitism involved in using popular culture only to demonstrate its inferiority.[8]

In classics, apart from heated discussions of the various options available for teaching beginning and intermediate language courses, pedagogy is rarely discussed.[9] The explicit use of popular culture, while not unheard of, is equally rare. Indeed, educational theorist Henry Giroux points to this parallel between pedagogy and popular culture:

> Pedagogy is often theorized as what is left after curriculum content is determined. It is what follows the selection of ideologically correct content. . . . Popular culture is still largely defined in the dominant discourse as the

8. So Maria Wyke, "Classics and Contempt: Redeeming Cinema for the Classical Tradition," *Arion*, 3rd ser., 6 no. 1 (1998), 124–136 (review essay, *Classics and Cinema*), at 124 and 127. Wyke seriously misreads Benjamin, who argues that "theses about the developmental tendencies of art under present conditions of production . . . brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery—concepts whose uncontrolled (and at present almost uncontrollable) application would lead to a processing of data in the Fascist sense. The concepts which are introduced into the theory of art in what follows . . . are completely useless for the purposes of Fascism. They are, on the other hand, useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art." The quotation is from "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn (1968; new ed. New York: Schocken, 1969; rpt. 1986), 217–251; quotation at 218. Far from wallowing in nostalgia for a lost aura, as Wyke suggests, Benjamin dialectically points to its revolutionary potential in film: "in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film" (221). Regarding Hall see my note 22.

9. It is one of the merits of Hanson and Heath's book *Who Killed Homer?* that they engage directly with some of the problems. But their ideal teaching situation seems limited to large lectures in which they envision a charismatic lecturer mesmerizing passive students with a heavy dose of "Greek wisdom." I find quite disturbing the relentlessly repeated assumption that the goal of truly effective teaching on this subject is to make students be "like the Greeks" and that this is best achieved by those who are themselves most "like the Greeks." It is clear from Hanson's *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization* (New York: Free Press, 1995), why he considers himself like a Greek. After assuring us that he has "lived on the same ranch for all of my forty years" (xiii), he proclaims his central thesis: "agrarian pragmatism, not intellectual contemplation, farmers, not philosophers, 'other' Greeks, not the small cadre of refined minds who have always comprised the stuff of Classics, were responsible for the creation of Western civilization" (xvi). But even if we grant that this is entirely true as stated, there seems a curious contradiction between his view and the indictment of those of us who are not full-time farmers but full-time teachers of that "stuff of Classics" which was, for better or worse, actually composed by a "small cadre of refined minds." It must be a sign of the times that both *The Other Greeks* and *Who Killed Homer?* were republished by the same academic press in the same year (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

> cultural residue which remains when high culture is subtracted from the overall totality of cultural practices; it is the trivial and the insignificant of everyday life, a form of popular taste often deemed unworthy of both academic legitimation and high social affirmation.[10]

Not without some misgivings, but with no apologies, I will here examine my use of contemporary film in teaching mythology. I will both outline and interrogate my rationale for doing so. I describe how I have presented Greek myth and offer a detailed account of the uses to which I put some specific films: *Clash of the Titans*, *Jason and the Argonauts*, *Return of the Jedi*, and *Superman*. Two of these are based on Greek myths, two evoke contemporary American myths. Finally, I will attempt to sum up the implications of this sort of pedagogy. Since pedagogical practice is an eminently personal as well as a political act embedded in a concrete time and place, I make wider use of the first person pronoun than I would do in the critical analysis of a text. Readers should assess the relevance of what I have done or now do in the light of their own specific pedagogical circumstances and goals.

1. Rationale

The first question I pose to myself in this connection is: "What am I doing when I teach a course in ancient Greek mythology?" Mythology was not something most classicists were taught in graduate school, nor did it occur to most classics departments to offer it as an undergraduate option until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when more standard offerings had been decimated by the call for relevance. Today, although I have seen no hard statistical data, I suspect from my direct experience in a variety of institutions that at a great many colleges and universities mythology courses draw the largest number of students taught by classicists.[11] They not only constitute a deeply invested bread-and-butter issue for classicists' material well-being but for many students they also represent their *only* exposure to the civilization of ancient Greece. The first factor has tended to foster a certain meretricious mindlessness in some presentations

10. *Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday Life*, ed. Henry A. Giroux and Roger I. Simon (Granby, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 1989), 221.

11. A January 1999 e-mail posting on the teaching of classical mythology at the University of Maryland confirms my impression: the myth course "is . . . crucial to our department's financial well-being. . . . approximately two thirds of our students each year are enrolled in only one of our courses"—the myth course.

of the subject.[12] The second is a consideration that should recall us to our moral responsibilities as educators of future citizens.[13]

Beginning in the 1980s, the political significance of teaching the classics in general came under considerable scrutiny. On the one hand, classical texts are a key component in the educational agenda of the New Right, most clearly identifiable in the positions taken by President Reagan's secretary of education, William Bennett, and in the highly popular bestseller by Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*.[14] For both Bennett

12. See John J. Peradotto, "Myth and Other Languages: A Pedagogic Exercise, with a Preface on Interpretative Theory in the Undergraduate Classroom," *The Classical World*, 77 (1984), 209–228. He begins his meditation on the problem of teaching theory in the classroom with an ironic allusion to the passing of a "Golden Age . . . in which classical mythology could be taught in innocent disregard of interpretative theory, by the simple dissemination of the data" (209). That "Golden Age" is still alive and well in classics departments where theory is rigorously absent from the classroom, not to mention from the studies of professors.

13. On the issue of educating for citizenship see especially Giroux, *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life: Critical Pedagogy in the Modern Age* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), especially chapter 1 ("Schooling, Citizenship, and the Struggle for Democracy"). As noted earlier, the obliteration of effective, critical, and engaged citizenship from the goals of American public education is a high priority of the New Right's educational agenda.

14. Bennett's general views may most clearly be seen in William Bennett, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education, 1983). Follow-up: Bennett, *American Education, Making It Work: A Report to the President and the American People* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education, 1988). See also Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). The most explicit contemporary case for a fixed and ultimately despairing view of human nature of which I am aware is laid out by classicist Thomas Fleming, *The Politics of Human Nature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1988; rpt. 1993). He concludes solemnly: "The laws and decrees enacted by human government are mutable and sometimes tyrannical, but the laws of human nature, curled in the spirals of the genetic code, are unchanging and just. More than just, they are justice itself in this sublunar sphere" (231). The final phrase suggests the fundamentally religious inspiration of his doctrine, despite all the invocation of the pseudoscience of sociobiology. See also his citation, in refutation of Christian civil disobedience, of Saint Paul's injunction: "let every person render obedience to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those in authority are divinely constituted, etc." (224). For some assessments of the pedagogical implications of such agenda see Aronowitz and Giroux, "Schooling, Culture, and Literacy in the Age of Broken Dreams: A Review of Bloom and Hirsch," *Harvard Educational Review*, 58 (1988), 172–194, and in the same issue Peter L. McClaren, "Culture or Canon? Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Literacy," 213–234. For a well-documented overview see Ellen Messer-Davidow, "Manufacturing the Attack on Liberalized Higher Education," *Social Text*, 36 (1993), 40–80. See now also Aronowitz, *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

and Bloom, the classics constitute immutable reservoirs of fixed truth about a fixed human nature, a fixed human condition. So taught, the classics can convey to students precisely the message of the severe limits of possibility that it has been the goal of the New Right to impart to the dominated majorities of the world.[15] On the other hand, subordinated groups such as women, African Americans, and other ethnic minorities whose historical relation to Western civilization is by no means unequivocally positive have raised serious and legitimate questions about the misogynistic, patriarchal, and ethnocentric strains embedded in the classical texts. All of these developments have made it, I hope, somewhat more difficult for classicists to see their pedagogical activities as devoid of political implications. What the late J. P. Sullivan said about the teaching of history is equally true of the teaching of the classics: there can be no unideological teaching. The question is whether teachers are consciously aware of their approach and perspective.[16] Although Greek literature has been more directly implicated in this debate, Greek mythology, which we know primarily from Greek literary texts, can, depending on how we present it, also be enlisted in support of a certain politics of a critically unexamined, allegedly monolithic Western tradition. We all know of mythology courses in which the students learn a few hundred names in the interest of cultural literacy, see some fleshy Renaissance nudes to bring home the continuity of the tradition, and perhaps even listen to an opera or two—all without the slightest hint that there is anything distinctly *odd*, distinctly *different* about Greek myth seen from the perspective of the twentieth-century United States. Indeed the prime goal of many mythology teachers is to demonstrate with a vast panorama of

15. Giroux gives a succinct summary of the constituent elements, implications, and positions of this phenomenon in *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life*, 220–221.

16. J. P. Sullivan, "Editorial," *Arethusa*, 8 (1975), 6. What I find most galling, if all too predictable, in the pronouncements of New Right ideologues is their pretense to be apolitical: They attack the left for injecting politics into the previously pure garden of classical studies. Mary Lefkowitz, for example, explains with a coyly impersonal construction that "there is a need . . . to indicate that the motives behind it [Afrocentrism] are political, and that this politicizing is dangerous because it requires the end to justify the means" (*Not Out of Africa*, xiii). Hanson and Heath protest that they are "more interested in the behavior and the culture of the Classicist than in his politics" (*Who Killed Homer?* xvi) after offering the tendentious claim that "our present Western notions of constitutional government, free speech, individual rights, civilian control over the military, separation between religious and political authority, middle-class egalitarianism, private property, and free scientific inquiry . . . derive from the ancient Greeks" (xvi). This list is soon recycled as "a free market, democracy, military dynamism, technology, free speech, and individualism" (xviii).

repeated motifs that "there is something deeply human" in these motifs' very persistence.[17]

While there is a serious, perhaps necessary, case to be made for the basic unity of the human species, I agree with anthropologist Clifford Geertz that "it may be in the cultural peculiarities of people—in their oddities—that some of the most instructive revelations of what it is to be generically human are to be found."[18] Thus for me the liberating potential for students of an encounter with Greek civilization in general and with Greek myth in particular is first and foremost the possibility for engaging with the culturally Other. Not that there are no continuities or similarities available or worthy of study. But I see my first responsibility as challenging the belief of most of my students that anything different from what they know is either undesirable or unattainable. The profoundly ahistorical or antihistorical cast of most of what constitutes students' cultural experience—something that therefore deeply determines their own subjectivities, their own perceptions of their individual and collective life options—seems to me a major obstacle to the transformation of our society into one that is truly democratic and humanely decent.[19] To put it differently, if I ask myself why so many students seem easily to consent to a view of the future characterized by an escalating threat of human extinction through war and environmental pollution, by ever more bitter divisions between the self-centered rich and the desperate poor, between the First World and the Third, between the white minority and the colored majority, between the empowered male half and the exploited female half of humanity, their acquiescence seems to me due to the success of their cultural environment in conveying to them the message that they are powerless to change a world whose parameters are dictated by

17. Cf. Erling B. Holtsmark, "The *Katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema" in this volume. It is not surprising that Holtsmark invokes Jung and his archetypes.

18. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 43. He acknowledges that "'the basic unity of mankind'" is "the governing principle of the field [of anthropology]" (36) but then argues: "Culture, the accumulated totality of such patterns [organized systems of significant symbols], is not just an ornament of human existence—but the principal basis of its specificity—an essential condition for it" (46).

19. Giroux, *Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life*, 15, cites a recent survey: "The majority of young people in grades seven through twelve believed that some form of global catastrophe would take place in their lifetimes. [In] discussions with high school students across the country, very few of them believed that adults can effect any changes in democracy working as collective citizens. . . . None of them had studied an interpretation of *history* in which trade union struggles, civil rights struggles, or feminist struggles had any impact on *changing* the course of human history" (my emphases).

an immutable human nature. Of course, to call this posture ahistorical or antihistorical is to invoke a conception of history as the realm of possibility, where a whole set of choices from the most individual to the most broadly societal have directly led to the conditions of possibility in any particular social and historical context.[20] A serious encounter with a different civilization can be liberating if we present that other civilization not simply as a repository of *better* choices but rather as a model of a social totality in which the *consequences* of choices in various spheres—economic, political, social, educational, cultural—introduce students to the very fact of choice and thus break the hold of the belief in "natural" necessity.[21]

Students cannot, I believe, readily deal with such an encounter if it is completely divorced from the mechanisms by which they deal with the rest of their daily experience. This seems to me the most relevant context for understanding broadly the role of popular culture in the experience of students. It is not a matter of seeking a level of relevance that merely confirms their current individual perceptions of what is important. In differing degrees and different contexts depending on a whole array of socioeconomic factors, rock music, advertisements of all sorts, games, toys, street practices (e.g., males casting remarks at passing females), television, computers, and film all play a decisive role in students' attempt to forge a sense of themselves and their moral values and life options.[22] By incorporating elements of that culture in a course on ancient mythology, I hope to engage the students in a double, if not exactly simultaneous, interrogation of their own cultural practices as well as those of a radically different society.

There is, I believe, a particular similarity between popular culture and mythology that constitutes an additional pedagogical attraction in such a combination and, at the same time, a special problem. Both myth and popular culture appeal to students, when they do appeal, on a visceral level, which students are extremely reluctant to subject to an intellectual scrutiny they tend to reject as "cold." With both sorts of cultural experience students are especially likely to complain: "Why can't we just enjoy the stories? Why do we have to ruin them by analyzing them?" Not just concepts or systems of beliefs are at stake; pleasure is at stake.[23] Of course, the degree of particular students' emotional investments in any given cultural object will depend on a host of very specific factors—their economic level, class background, and gender most obviously, but also their age. Here I mean only that the age at which students have first encountered some of the more mythic films I use plays a great role in the depth of their emotional investment in *not* subjecting them to analysis. There are some students who are particularly resistant to the appeals of Greek mythology and some who may be particularly resistant to the sorts of films I have tried to use. I can only say that the students I teach seem, by and large, to feel rather strongly the visceral attraction of both myth and film. My institution, Miami University, is part of the Ohio State system, but its rural location and exclusive entrance mechanisms have brought an extremely homogenized, well-to-do, white middle-class student body. The proportion of minority students, despite some strenuous recruitment efforts inspired by federal legislation, remains strikingly low (7.44 percent) for a tax-supported school.

2. Course Overview

Since everyone who teaches Greek myth seems to do it very differently and since any assessment of the usefulness of my approach to film implies, at least in part, an assessment of the context in which I use it, I will try briefly to describe the overall structure of my course and the assumptions underlying this structure.

The most basic problem I perceive in presenting Greek myth may be summed up in the tension between—to use Claude Lévi-Strauss's terms—the synchronic approach and the diachronic approach: between, on the one hand, treating Greek myth in its entirety as a meaningful, internally self-reinforcing system of narratives and, on the other, presenting mythic narrative as itself a historical problem, a problem to which Greek culture

20. To quote Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 45 (perhaps in a sense quite unintended by him): "we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of lives but end up having lived only one."

21. I owe my conception of the "social totality" primarily to György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, tr. Rodney Livingston (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971; rpt. 1999).

22. Giroux, *Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday Life*, 18: "The popular cannot be ignored because it points to a category of meanings and affective investments that shape the very identities, politics, and cultures of the students we deal with." This seems to me the best answer to Wyke's attempt in "Classics and Contempt" to enlist Stuart Hall's very early (1964) comment on using film.

23. This point is made especially well by Lawrence Grossberg, "Teaching the Popular," in *Theory in the Classroom*, ed. Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 177–200. For a more radically skeptical view of the pleasure of spectacle in cinema see Dana B. Polan, "'Above All Else to Make You See': Cinema and the Ideology of Spectacle," in *Postmodernism and Politics*, ed. Jonathan Arac (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 55–69.

offered a variety of solutions over time.[24] Many contemporary critical approaches that I find engaging in various degrees are radically ahistorical and treat myth as a mode of discourse preceding historical consciousness. Accepting, so to speak, myth's own philosophy of time, they proceed to analyze particular myths with little or no interest in the impact of historical changes on the meanings of myths. Among these are Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic approaches, Lévi-Straussian structuralist analyses and, with a few equivocations, the work of such figures as Bronislaw Malinowski, George Dumézil, and Mircea Eliade.[25] For them history is at best an intrusion; the interpretive enterprise consists in finding the atemporal cores of meaning. On the other hand, one of the traditional fascinations of a history of the written remnants of Greek culture involves tracing the emergence of an ever-growing self-consciousness in the poets about narrative as itself a problem and the parallel forging of an increasingly abstract language.[26] Side by side we find either the attempt to force narrative to bear an ever heavier burden of abstractly conceived meaning or the movement toward a nonnarrative alternative, signaled by the development of strident critiques of Homer and Hesiod in the Presocratics and culminating in Plato's head-on assault on narrative and poetry.

My course attempts to introduce students to both ahistorical and historical dimensions of the study of myth by, in a sense, covering the ground

24. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology* [vol. 1], tr. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963; rpt. 1978), 202–228. The familiar theme of the movement from *mythos* to *logos* has been set on a footing different from the simple progression its original German propounders envisioned—for example, Wilhelm Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1942; rpt. New York: Arno, 1978)—by the research of Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Perry*, ed. Adam Parry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), and Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (1960; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), on the oral nature of Homeric verse. See Carlo Brillante, "History and the Historical Interpretation of Myth," in *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 91–138, especially 96, where his primary source on the impact of orality is the work of anthropologist Jack Goody.

25. Jungians include the prolific Joseph Campbell and Erich Neumann. For bibliography and a brief assessment of these and others named in the text see John Peradotto, *Classical Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography* (Urbana, Ill.: American Philological Association, 1973; rpt. 1981). I should point out, however, that Lévi-Strauss in one essay directly explores the impact of history on myth, yet his title suggests the ultimate incompatibility of history and myth as he conceives it: "How Myths Die," in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 2, tr. Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 256–268.

26. See especially Eric A. Havelock's numerous works, in particular *A Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963; rpt. 1987) and *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

twice. (Miami University has a fifteen-week semester. I would have a hard time indeed compressing my approach into a ten-week quarter, but I hope at least some of my assumptions about how to teach myth are adaptable to such a time-frame.) In the first half of the course I use Tripp's *Handbook* to present the major stories in as detailed and interpretively neutral a manner as possible.[27] At the same time I introduce students to three critical approaches. The psychoanalytic approach (Bruno Bettelheim, Sigmund Freud, Philip Slater) stresses the parallels between myth and dreams as a radically narrative means of dealing with what society defines as unacceptable desires and fears.[28] The structuralist approach (Lévi-Strauss) offers both a methodology for grasping the grammar, so to speak, of these peculiar narratives and an account of their function, that is, to overcome unresolved intellectual contradictions in a spurious repetitive spiral of narrative mediations. Finally, the overtly political, historical approach (Malinowski, Karl Marx) stresses the role of myth as a self-interested source of validation for actual social and political institutions—in short, as ideology.[29] Students are invariably shocked at the heavy theo-

27. Edward Tripp, *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology* (New York: Crowell, 1970). There are several reprints under slightly different titles.

28. From the voluminous output of Sigmund Freud I usually assign selections from chapter 6 ("The Dream-Work") of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vols. 4 and 5 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), and selections from *The Ego and the Id* (*Standard Edition*, vol. 19). Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), is rather eclectically Freudian. I find his analysis of "Jack and the Beanstalk" (183–193) not only a relatively painless introduction to Freud but, because of his insightful use of the repetitions in the story, a nice anticipation of the approach of Lévi-Strauss. Philip E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968; rpt. 1992), has an implicit historicizing dimension despite the primary emphasis on Freudian categories: Slater's whole analysis depends on the peculiar dynamics of the family in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, a period for which we have abundant if indirect evidence. This approach excludes the question of the nature of the Greek family during the period when the broad outlines of Greek myth were drawn, presumably in the Mycenaean period, as Martin P. Nilsson argued in *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932; rpt. 1983).

29. I usually assign the well-known essay by Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology" (1926), rpt. in *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (1948; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1984) and as *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1971). I realize that I am grouping Malinowski with ahistoricists. Nonetheless his concept of myth as a "charter" for specific historical claims offers a decisive basis for grasping one key aspect of a historicizing approach to myth as ideology. For Marx I usually assign the selections and comments in *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680–1860*, ed. Burton Feldman and Robert Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972; rpt. 1975), 488–504.

retical component in a course many of them take because they associate myth with stories of a painlessly self-evident meaning. The variety of theoretical perspectives that I offer not only reflects what I find most relevant to the study of myth but also aims at introducing students to the very fact of theoretical variety. Conversations with students have led me to conclude that they are rarely confronted with more than one theoretical set of assumptions in any given course, and even that one view is rarely placed within the theoretical background that has formed their teacher's pedagogical practice. Moreover, my bias toward primary theoretical texts—Freud, Lévi-Strauss, Marx in their own words rather than in a potted summary—derives from my conviction that students are more empowered if they come to realize that with a little effort and adequate help from their instructor they can understand major thinkers as those thinkers actually expressed themselves. If we are serious about developing genuine critical thinking in our students, these future citizens must develop the capacity to grasp the significant presuppositions of the intellectual, moral, and political options offered them. To assume that only graduate students are fit to engage with serious thinkers is to doom the majority of college graduates to permanent intellectual puberty. I find it ironic that so many New Right ideologues lament the inadequate study of great books of the past while expressing their horror or scorn of professors who dare bring into the classroom the work of the finest minds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

3. The Perseus Myth

In the second half of the course I include a necessarily abbreviated historical survey from Homer to Plato. Film plays a key role in my attempt to effect a transition between the halves of the course—to suggest the explanatory power of some ahistorical approaches (psychoanalytic and structuralist) and at the same time to confront the students with the reality of historical change. The primary vehicle for this encounter is a film based on the Perseus myth, *Clash of the Titans* (1981).

The students have already read a considerable number of myths in Tripp's *Handbook* and are familiar with the critical approaches mentioned earlier, including Slater's analysis of the ambiguity of snake symbolism as part of an "oral narcissistic dilemma." I now ask them to read Slater's analysis of the Perseus myth and view *Clash of the Titans*. I then ask them to analyze the film's and Slater's contemporary approaches in the light of the ancient data on the myth available in the *Handbook*. The vehicle for their response has sometimes been an in-class hour test, sometimes an outside essay. The size of my classes, usually fifty to sixty students, precludes the dialogic explorations of popular culture advocated by progressive theorists. At the same time, I see distinct advantages in asking the students to write about the film before I have said anything about it. Not only do I write abundant comments and questions on their texts, but I also devote at least a full class after the hour test to summarizing the range of their comments, offering my own understanding of the film, and inviting their comments. Because they have already engaged with the film on their own, they are often readier to speak up on these occasions than they might be otherwise, despite the inhibiting size of the class.

I am well aware that a majority of classicists who know of Slater's work do not like it; in general, Freudian approaches to classical mythology have met with indifference at best, active scorn at worst. I doubt anything I could say in this context would convert the committed anti-Freudian, so I address my comments to those willing to entertain the possibility that there is something of value in this approach. Personally I can only endorse John Peradotto's assessment of Slater:

> Classical specialists will find here and there points of misplaced emphasis over which to argue, but to merit the right to criticize Slater as he deserves they must be prepared to venture into his bailiwick at least as deeply as he has come into theirs.[30]

Slater's general thesis is based on Freud's view that the emotional life of adults is significantly determined by their earliest relationships to those who bring them up. He argues that the circumstances of Greek society that dictated the relative seclusion of legally married women and encouraged the relative nonparticipation of fathers in the rearing of young children led to a deeply ambivalent mother–son relationship. This pattern is reflected in the misogyny and male narcissism prevalent in Greek myth. In the absence of a strong husband and father, the mother simultaneously pushes the male child to be an overachiever and makes emotional demands on him that fill him with a sense of terror and doom. He wants complete possession of the mother to nurture him literally and, metaphorically, to

30. Peradotto, *Classical Mythology*, 29. See also Richard S. Caldwell, "The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Greek Myth," in *Approaches to Greek Myth*, 344–389. Caldwell calls Slater's book "the most important contribution to the subject since Freud" (386). Caldwell's own introductory book is very useful: *The Origin of the Gods: A Psychoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; rpt. 1993). I have long been impressed by Frederick Crews's lapidary formulation of the Freudian problematic; he defines human beings as "the animal destined to be overimpressed by his parents" in "Anaesthetic Criticism," in *Psychoanalysis and Literary Process*, ed. Crews (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1970), 1–24; quotation at 12.

foster his ideal self-image. But the very intensity of her emotional concentration on him fills him with fear of being "engulfed" by the mother. Slater calls this ambivalence the "oral-narcissicistic dilemma" and seeks to organize the major hero figures of Greek myth as, in effect, a system of different attempts to overcome this dilemma. Thus Zeus' exaggerated displays of sexual prowess are one way of attempting to deny the threat by overcompensation. Orestes' or Alcmaeon's mother-murder is another extreme solution, echoed in various slayings of female monsters. Dionysus illustrates "identification with the aggressor," becoming like the threatening mother in hopes of dispelling her threat. Lame Hephaestus, variously rejected by both parents, represents symbolic self-emasculation in the hopes of ingratiating himself with his ferocious mother. Apollo is presented as primarily dealing with the threatening female by "antisepsis"—by a posture, not always successfully maintained, of hostile distance from all hints of female fertility. Heracles, whose name furnishes Slater with his title, *The Glory of Hera*, illustrates the richest variety of responses: vast displays of male potency, repeated triumphs over female monsters, transvestism with Omphale, homosexuality with Hyllus, symbolic mother-murder of Megara, and finally tragic defeat at the hands of Deianeira, whose name means "man/husband-destroyer."

Within this configuration Slater presents Perseus under the rubric of "maternal de-sexualization." Perseus, completely deprived of any positive adult male role models, perceives males solely as sexual competitors for his mother Danae's attentions. Acrisius, Danae's father, who imprisons her in a tower or under ground to keep away suitors, especially his brother Proetus, out of fear that the child will kill him as predicted by a prophecy, only mirrors Perseus' own obsessive concern with his mother's chastity—the motive force behind his heroic quest for the Medusa head and his subsequent murder of Polydectes and company. Perseus' fascination with his mother's sexuality is further evidenced by the strong emphasis on looking at the forbidden place—"scopophilia" in Freudian terms—at the same time that he is terrified by the prospect of the ferocious return gaze should he be caught looking. Here the parallels of Actaeon, torn to shreds for seeing forbidden female nakedness, or Tiresias, blinded in some accounts for the same crime, come to mind.[31] Perseus' radical solution to the dilemma of a mother he wants desperately to keep but whose sexuality is frightening for him is to cut off the offending part.

31. Slater does not cite these directly, but see *The Glory of Hera*, 327. See also Caldwell, "The Blindness of Oedipus," *The International Review of Psychoanalysis*, 1 (1974), 207–218. The "equivalence of Oedipus and Teiresias" (208) is a key element in his analysis, substantially recapitulated in his contribution to *Approaches to Greek Myth* cited earlier.

Slater's identification of the Medusa head with the mother's genitalia is the centerpiece of his analysis. Those who find in Medusa's paralyzing look quaint folklore of the evil eye or the Sartrean horror of the reifying stare of the Other will not be moved by Slater's citation of a sexual psychopath's dream in which the pubic hair of an adult woman is perceived as menacing snakes.[32] The same skepticism will perhaps greet the rest of his argument on this point, which I need not summarize here. I only note that he sees the sexual nature of the assault on Medusa confirmed by the resulting births of Pegasus, Chrysaor, and various snakes from the drops of Medusa's blood.

Slater interprets Perseus' rescue of Andromeda and eventual marriage to her as essentially replays of his relationship with his mother. Slater emphasizes the visual element in Perseus' falling in love after he sees her enchained naked body, another fight with a monster in which he again uses a sword, another encounter with an older suitor, Andromeda's uncle, and another use of the Medusa head to immobilize the opposition. Slater sees as deeply significant the fact that Perseus brings both his mother and his new bride back with him to Argos. Slater's general assessment of the heroic pattern of Perseus' career emphasizes the hero's helplessness—his constant reliance on help from desexualized Athena and from multiple magic devices (flying sandals, cap of invisibility, etc.)—and the brutal violence of his solution to the problem of maternal sexuality.

Finally, Slater focuses briefly on the myth of Bellerophon, a figure also connected with Proetus and the winged horse born at the decapitation of Medusa.[33] Slater finds confirmation of the motif of fear of the mother's sexuality in Bellerophon's disastrous encounter with Proetus' wife, who seeks his death when he declines her sexual advances. He also notes that Plutarch preserves a story that the hero was stopped cold in his assault on a city when the women of the city came out and displayed their genitals to the bashful hero.[34]

32. For alternative interpretations of the myth see Edward Phinney, Jr., "Perseus' Battle with the Gorgons," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 102 (1971), 445–463; Thalia Feldman, "Gorgo and the Origins of Fear," *Arion*, 4 (1965), 484–494; Hazel Barnes, *The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), chapter 1: "The Look of the Gorgon." See Slater, *The Glory of Hera*, 318–319.

33. James J. Clauss, review of *Classics and Cinema*, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 3.4 (1992), 305–310, chides me for not focusing on the many interconnections between the Perseus myth and other myths borrowed and adapted in the film. This is one connection that seems to me relevant to an interpretation of the *meaning* of the myth, an aspect often neglected by the collectors of parallels.

34. Slater, *The Glory of Hera*, 334. Cf. Plutarch, *On the Bravery of Women* 248.

Clash of the Titans was generally panned by those critics who took any note of it, but it did reasonably well at the box office.[35] The screenplay was by Beverley Cross, who had earlier written *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) for director Don Chaffey and other fantasy or historical adventures; the film was directed by Desmond Davis, whose films *Girl with Green Eyes* (1964) and *A Nice Girl Like Me* (1969) had earned him a reputation for "an empathy for women's plight in modern society."[36] Special effects were by Ray Harryhausen, whom reviewers often saw as the sole source of any interest in the film. At the time I first introduced it into the course, usually about half of my students had already seen the film. To my surprise that percentage has held or even increased in recent years. Such is the video revolution.

I discuss the details of the film's plot primarily in the context of the students' observations. But for those who have not seen it, I point out that the most striking innovation of the film over the myth is the nearly complete suppression of Danae from the plot: She is out of the picture after some five minutes. Secondly, the female monster, Medusa, although still central to the plot of the film, is presented as dramatically secondary to a male sea-monster, the Kraken, who is not even a figure from Greek myth. (*Kraken* is a German word for a giant octopus of the kind that appears in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*.)

In asking students to compare Tripp, Slater, and *Clash of the Titans*, I juxtapose three very different entities: the already heterogeneous ancient evidence distilled in an eclectic handbook, an analytic academic discourse, and a popular film. I wish I could say that I substantially advanced the students' appreciation of the specificity of those different modes. For a modern student, film literacy should be a fundamental component of any cultural literacy worthy of the name, and there is a flourishing film studies program at my university. However, none of the students who have taken my myth class seems to have taken the introductory film studies course. Thus, apart from a scattering of comments directed at elements in the myth that are compatible or incompatible with translation to the filmic medium, I do not attempt to teach them film literacy.

35. Heavily ironic review titles were typical: for example, David Ansen, "Andromeda Strained," *Newsweek* (July 6, 1981), 75–76; Richard Corliss, "For Eyes Only," *Time* (June 22, 1981), 22; John Coleman, "Near Myth," *New Statesman* (July 3, 1981), 22–24.

36. Ephraim Katz, *The Film Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Fred Klein and Ronald Dean Nolan (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 337.

What do I want and what do I get from the students? On the simplest level I want to see the extent to which they have recognized how the film version radically cut, selected, transformed, and supplemented the available narrative data, most of which Slater had at least attempted to account for. On a deeper level I hope that they would explore the ideological implications of the most blatant omissions and additions in the film with a view to gaining some historical perspective on their own society's cultural production by contrasting it with that of ancient Greece. I do not expect, but would welcome, some exploration of the ideological aspect of Slater's emphases in his use of the ancient data. Alas, omitting social and political aspects of the interpretation of myth in favor of an exclusive focus on the sexual dynamics of the nuclear family comes as naturally to contemporary students as it does to Slater. My instructions to the students read as follows:

> Choose at least *five* mythemes (i.e. an action linked with a subject, a symbolic object, creature, or significant event) from the narrative material associated with Perseus (everything in the *Handbook* about the royal line of Argos). Consider whether these mythemes are typical of Greek myth as you have studied it: Do you see any suggestive parallels, and what sorts of concerns seem to be associated with these motifs? Examine what happens to these mythemes in Slater and in *Clash of the Titans*. What role do they play in Slater's interpretation? Are they included, altered, or omitted in the film? What are the *consequences for the myth's meaning* of the treatment of these elements in the film? Consider the changes—omissions, transformations, additions—and ask yourself what these reveal about the differences between Greek society and our own society. How much of the original meaning as you and/or Slater interpret it is left in the film? If the meaning of the film is different, what *does* it mean?
>
> The point of this exercise is to make as concrete as possible a comparison between Slater's and the filmmakers' use of the same material, to find out what you have learned about analyzing Greek myth and the myths of your own culture.

On the whole, the most successful aspect of the experiment is the students' application of the psychoanalytic approach to the film. While there are those who inevitably explain the relative absence of the mother as due to the fact that the Greeks liked incest whereas it is not so popular in America, many recognize the ways in which the film demonstrates the de facto return of the repressed unconscious material. They note the relentless imagery of flying, which begins with the credits and includes the addition of a monstrous turkey vulture carrying the virgin Andromeda through the air, Pegasus imported from the Bellerophon story, and the magic mechanical owl, an obvious import from the recent *Star Wars* (1977). Cumulatively this emphasis tends to confirm for many students

Slater's focus on the element of phallic display in the myth and his insistence on the relevance of Bellerophon to the Perseus narrative. The repeated losses of the hero's sword, in particular to a snake, suggest the pervasive fear of sexual inadequacy that Slater stresses. Despite the heavy shift toward the romance of Perseus and Andromeda, some students note the carryover of misogyny in the film, focused in the mother obsessed with her son (Thetis and Calibos) and echoed in the vain mother Cassiopeia, who boasts not of her own beauty as in the ancient version but of her daughter's. Medusa is still a terrifying female, and the seemingly gratuitous addition of her long tail and phallic weapon (bow and arrows) escalates the threat she poses and shifts it from the otherwise exclusive interest in her stare.

At the same time many students notice the centrality of voyeurism, of unobserved staring with clearly erotic overtones when Perseus is spying on Andromeda asleep—not to mention the audience's spying on her bathing. The frightening stare of Medusa is echoed in the ferocious stare of the living stone of Thetis' statue. The panic of the cannibalistic Graeae when they lose their eye is vividly evoked in the film and duly noted by students. Despite the relative absence of the mother, some notice that the film's opening few minutes stress a heavily sexualized image of the mother–son relationship by her nude nursing of her son and by the flamboyantly nude stroll of mother and son along the sounding surf. Built into the narrative of the film, but opposed to the ancient material, is the precondition of the hero's facing the explicitly devouring Graeae and an immobilizing Medusa before he sexually consummates his relationship with Andromeda, whose appearance is most like his mother's when she is seen nude in her bath. In fact, some students even speculate on the possibility that a heavier-breasted actress than Judi Bowker, perhaps even the same actress who played Danae, stands in for Bowker in the nude bathing scene where the actress's face is invisible. Most note the film's striking emphasis on Zeus' relentless involvement in the fate of his son, whereas for Slater Zeus in the ancient myth is the quintessential absent father. Most students attribute this change to the "superiority of modern American fathers." Some add that the addition of Ammon, not a god but a ham tragedian, insists on the availability of a nonthreatening father figure who repeatedly offers decisive advice and encouragement. Indeed the film, which multiplies hostile or dangerous females (all the goddesses, but especially Thetis, the Graeae, and Cassiopeia) while omitting the "maternal" role of Athena and limiting "positive" female images to the dubious examples of Danae and Andromeda, is arguably more patriarchal and misogynistic than the Greek myth. One student noted that Andromeda's dream of flying with a bird to meet her former suitor suggests the dangerousness of female sexuality even in this most innocuous-seeming of virgins.

But despite the film's striking suppression of the lecherous uncles Proetus and Phineus and of Polydectes, who as suitor of Danae is the major and motivating hostile male in the myth, there are some hostile males (Acrisius, Calibos, the Kraken) whose function is, as in the myth, to block Perseus' access to the female object of desire. One student even argued that Calibos' association with downing the winged horse, an element completely lacking in the ancient material, confirmed his symbolic role as a potentially castrating father figure.

The appeal to the students of psychoanalytic elements is clear in their perceptive focus on the repetition of snake symbols. They note that snakes are at the base of Zeus' throne; that the snake gliding over Perseus' sword renders him temporarily impotent and is allied with the devouring threat of Cerberus; that Medusa, in addition to her writhing coiffure of snakes, has a long snaky tail; that Calibos not only has a long, frequently undulating tail but also uses a long whip as his prime weapon; that the Kraken, too, uses his enormous tail as a weapon against Perseus on his winged horse. To be sure, some of these are associated with clearly male phallic conflict. But Slater's insistence on the ambiguity of the snake symbol to include as well the engulfing female threat seems confirmed in some of these instances.

The most common, if not unanticipated, disappointment for me in the responses of students is their relative lack of critical distance from the contemporary ideology pervading the film. Despite the hopes raised for a more enlightened perspective from a classically educated screenwriter and a director noted for his empathy with women, the film celebrates traditional heterosexual romance in terms that completely objectify the nubile female while denigrating adult women. It celebrates American fatherhood under conditions which little justify it.[37] It reinforces the fetishism of mechanical gimmicks as the solution to all problems and indulges in blatant racism by adding the embodiment of evil in the only black character in the film, Calibos (whose name appears to be a mixture of Caliban and Setebos, perhaps influenced by Robert Browning's poem "Caliban upon Setebos"). Comments on the students' analyses and discussions in class offer an opportunity to explore some of these issues.

37. A study done in 1972 of the amount of time spent on child care in twelve countries came up with the startling conclusion that American fathers spend an average of twelve minutes per day on child care. See Carol Tavris and Carole Wade, *The Longest War: Sex Difference in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1984), 287. One would like to believe that there has been a dramatic improvement since then, but there is room for doubt. I am indebted to Judith de Luce for bringing this study to my attention.

The pedagogical advantages of a film of an ancient Greek myth are more or less comparable in *Jason and the Argonauts*, although there are fewer psychoanalytically interesting details to which the students might respond. There is a close parallel in the film's censorship of the "uncanny" elements—the myth's powerful female and helplessly dependent hero are replaced by a helpless and vacuous female typical of Hollywood and an assertive macho hero.[38] The philandering of the hero and the revenge of Medea are completely repressed from the purely romantic narrative of the film, while both the psychoanalytic and political motivations for the quest for the Golden Fleece—its symbolic role in the fusion of sibling rivalry and dynastic intrigue so striking in the ancient mythic material—are omitted. Thus, like *Clash of the Titans*, it allows students an opportunity for assessing the concrete differences between the ideological norms of male–female relations in their own society and those explored in ancient Greek myth. At the same time I must acknowledge that the inherently transhistorical claims of the Freudian approach tend to undermine attempts to historicize such relations. Although Slater presents his study of Greek myth as a cautionary tale to suburban America with a clear sense that there are choices in how societies organize sexuality and gender identities, the intellectual excitement of a Freudian approach, particularly to those who are encountering it for the first time, derives in great measure from the discovery of similarities in human psychic responses to comparable situations.[39]

A modern version of an ancient myth initially seemed a good choice for my course because it offers clear grounds for comparison and contrast, but this choice had a number of potential drawbacks. The distancing implicit in an ancient myth, in which human royalty and the omnipotence of pagan gods are natural assumptions and the primary focus is on issues of family romance, makes it difficult to raise issues of ideology apart from those of gender roles without incorporating a far more serious study of ancient Greek society and history than I find possible in a single semester. Thus there seemed a built-in limitation to the private sphere in my sticking with these modern versions of ancient myths. This difficulty seems to me due only in part to the brevity, unavoidable in my course, of my focus on the political functions of ancient myth. More important, I think it stems from the heavy bias of ancient Greek myth itself toward

38. I allude here in particular to Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny," *Standard Edition*, vol. 17, 217–252.

39. A nuanced attempt to confront the ahistoricism of Freud while retaining some of his insights is in Page duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988; rpt. 1991).

the dynamics of personal affective relations. Perhaps because the close intertwining of the personal and political in the initial Mycenaean context was as unrecoverable for the Greeks of the historical period as it is for us, the reworking of the old stories was primarily ethical on the conscious level and on the unconscious level a vehicle for exploring in fantasy the tensions of ancient Greek relations between the sexes.[40]

5. *Return of the Jedi*

Focusing on contemporary mythic films like *Superman* or *Return of the Jedi*, which more explicitly subordinate the private to the public sphere, has the advantage of inviting students to take seriously the more overtly political implications of contemporary myth-making. Their prior introduction to psychoanalytic approaches enables them to see critically sorts of relationships in these films that they previously took to be "natural." Students are also less resistant to analysis of films from their own cultural context than was the case with their initial experience of *Clash of the Titans*. I am not sure whether I wear down their resistance or, as I prefer to believe, they are beginning to reap some of the pleasure of understanding how myths are trying to "think through us," in Lévi-Strauss's famous formulation.[41] There is, I hope, some compensation for the lost pleasure of spontaneous ideological recognition, that unconscious assent to the image of ourselves seductively proffered in the film, in the empowerment of exercising some critical control over the images that beckon

40. For an intriguing, if rather fanciful, attempt to reconstruct a historical Perseus see Cornelia Steketee Hulst, *Perseus and the Gorgon* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1946). In the wake of Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987; rpt. 1990), the attempt to find an Egyptian connection seems somewhat less fanciful. For the more blatant political uses of myth among the Greeks see Martin P. Nilsson, *Cults, Myths, Oracles, and Politics in Ancient Greece* (1951; rpt. New York: Cooper Square, 1972). For the Mycenaean foundations of Greek myths see Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*. Some intriguing more recent explorations of the political use of myth are in *Myth and the Polis*, ed. Dora C. Pozzi and John M. Wickersham (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). I have explored the political use of myth in Pindar and Greek tragedy in *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth: Ideology and Literary Form in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), chapters 3–5. See also my "Historicizing Sophocles' *Ajax*," in *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues on Athenian Drama*, ed. Barbara Goff (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 59–90.

41. See Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, vol. 1, tr. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969; several reprints), 12.

us to subjection. What we lose in the assurance of a familiar world we gain in a new freedom to reject what Louis Althusser calls the ideological interpolations—the summons—to be the sorts of individuals who fit all too easily into an unsatisfactory status quo.[42]

As in *Clash of the Titans* and *Jason and the Argonauts*, the mythic element in George Lucas's *Return of the Jedi* (1983; directed by Richard Marquand) and in *Superman* is most obvious in the special effects that take us into a realm beyond the rules of everyday reality. At the same time a number of more or less obvious signs point to a historically real world; and it is not difficult, once the question is posed, for students to recognize some of them. In *Return of the Jedi* the helmets of Darth Vader and of the soldiers of the Evil Empire echo Nazi uniforms.[43] In conjunction with the authoritarian tone of those in power and the abject—even robotlike—obedience of the ruled, these visual elements reinforce other associations with the images of twentieth-century totalitarian societies. The focus on an ultimate weapon, the Death Star, to quell all resistance resonates with the origins of the atomic bomb and the increasing menace of the military industrial complex. Students in the 1980s readily associated the rebels with various media images of Nicaraguan "Freedom-Fighters" against "totalitarian Communism." Depending on their knowledge, often minimal, of the 1960s, they could see links between the centrality of the Force and the "consciousness revolutionaries" of that era. Most, however, saw the Force as a direct analogue to Christian faith asserting itself against godless Communism. To this extent students could feel a largely comforting recognition of the eternal verities of the Cold War's standard repertory of ideological representations. The nominal ending of the Cold War (nominal in that there has been only a token reduction in the military

42. See Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 36–42 ("The Aesthetics and Politics of Recognition"). On "subjugation" and "recognition" see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, tr. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–186.

43. On fascist and conservative overtones in the first *Star Wars* film see Dan Rubey, "*Star Wars*: Not So Far Away," *Jump Cut*, 18 (1978), 9–14. Obviously, much of what I say about *Return of the Jedi* also holds true of the first film, which inspired President Reagan to dub the Soviet Union the "evil empire" and his critics in turn to dub his fantasy-ridden Strategic Defense Initiative "Star Wars," revived recently by Republicans and Democrats committed to socialism for the rich, however far-fetched the rationale. My choice of the later film is due partly to its popularity at the time I was working out my approach to myth and partly to greater complexities arising from the presence of the Ewoks and a more elaborate focus on rebellion. On the Strategic Defense Initiative see now Penelope FitzGerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

budget) and the desperate attempt of Hollywood to replace the reliable villains of yesteryear with terrorists—Middle Eastern (James Cameron's *True Lies* [1994]), Irish (Phillip Noyce's *Patriot Games* [1992], Alan J. Pakula's *The Devil's Own* [1997]), and, yes, Russian (Wolfgang Petersen's *Air Force One* [1997])—has not yet produced a fully mythic response, at least not to my knowledge. On the contrary, just when I began to fear that the *Star Wars* material was getting dated for my students, Hollywood with its predictable penchant for predictable profits started re-releasing the old saga and even added another installment to it.

When, in dealing with *Return of the Jedi*, I raised the issues of Vietnam, Central American insurgency in El Salvador or Guatemala against United States–backed oligarchies, or the long record of United States support for apartheid in South Africa, the discussion would grow more heated and confused. What is the point of reference, for example, of the Ewoks, primitive peoples who triumph over the high-tech agents of empire both by stealing their own weapons and by imaginative acts of daring? If the rebellion stands for American democracy, why is it led by a royal princess, and why is the Force restricted to a hereditary elite?[44] Discussion along these lines can at least introduce students to the whole phenomenon of ideological messages that seem to be intentionally mixed in order to tap audience awareness of various contradictions in the world and allay anxieties by the sheer confusion of clear and unclear parallels to their own world.

A particularly striking instance of this mixed-message phenomenon may be illustrated by the echoes of American race relations in this film. On the one hand, Lando Calrissian, played by popular black actor Billy Dee Williams, is a loyal friend who is given the prestigious command of the attack on the Death Star. We seem to have a clear liberal image of complete and unproblematic integration of black people into white middle-class society. Yet the same character is portrayed as a cynical traitor earlier in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Moreover, some explanation needs to be given for the choice of James Earl Jones, one of the finest black actors in America, to do the voice of the very essence of evil, Darth Vader, who is always clothed in black from tip to toe. The racist symbolism seems all the more blatant when we see a white actor with a distinctly different, vaguely English voice representing the redeemed Vader, renamed Anakin. Students who notice or are confronted with these issues inevitably pro-

44. The inspiration of the saga in the Roman Empire is elaborated in Peter Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 233–237. See also Martin M. Winkler, "*Star Wars* and the Roman Empire," in this volume.

duce very different explanations. But the entire experience introduces them to a level of consciousness about their own entertainment that is quite new to them.

Furthermore, their rather extensive immersion in Freudian analysis from the earlier part of the course enables them to recognize the symbolism of Sarlacc, a very fleshy-looking hole in the sand, surrounded by rows of teeth reminiscent of the Greek monster Scylla. The comparably toothy devouring mouth of the monster Rancor and the hideously detailed mouth of Jabba the Hutt can give rise to a more elaborate interrogation of the film's gender politics. Like Perseus, Luke Skywalker is a young man without a father; but unlike Perseus, he has no mother figure in his life. His only female interest is Princess Leia, who turns out to be his sister. Students cannot miss the film's tantalizing play with the motif of incest familiar from Greek myth. Beside the extreme paucity of females in the film there is the heavy proliferation of father figures (Obi-Wan Kenobi, Yoda, and Anakin—the good, i.e., "white," side of Darth Vader) and the strong male bonding of Luke and Han Solo, the latter troubled only by the ambivalence of the only female figure's love for both. Luke's initial mission is to save Han; this is the portion of the film where Luke is most threatened by huge, toothy, devouring mouths and where the sexual aspect of Leia, heretofore predominantly cold, arrogant, and stereotypically bitchy in a full-length white dress, is heavily emphasized by her reduction to a scantily clad, chained appurtenance of Jabba the Hutt. On the other hand, female students sometimes see in Leia's power and initiative, together with the position of authority assigned a black woman in the rebel army command, a clear and positive reflection of the impact of the women's movement on popular culture. (My seventeen-year-old daughter described Leia as a "kick-ass woman.")

Luke's climactic confrontation, his "destiny," is with the evil father Darth Vader, and students again and again note the strong Oedipal pattern in this major part of the narrative. Some point out that the phallic Jedi weapon given Luke by another father figure, Obi-Wan Kenobi, allows him to retaliate for Darth's earlier symbolic castration of him. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Vader had cut off Luke's right hand; now Luke cuts off the same body part from his father. Thinking about this invites students to consider just how "healthy" or "natural" an image of American family and of gender roles this particular myth evokes, one that clearly was and is enormously popular.

At the same time, they are made extremely uncomfortable by any discussion of the male bonding between Han Solo and Luke, and most find preposterous the idea that C3PO, with his high voice, slender, glitzy form, self-conscious display of vast knowledge, and constant maternal chiding of his companion, the fellow droid R2D2, makes fun of a particular gay stereotype. The patronizing stereotype, however, of the "primitive" Ewoks, who mistake this fancy golden machine, C3PO, for a god, escapes no one. However, those students who attempt to analyze this juxtaposition of cultures tend to ignore any contemporary reference to Third and First World relations in favor of a completely unhistoricized invocation of Lévi-Strauss's opposition between nature and culture. This response suggests some of my difficulties introducing an unfamiliar and powerful critical model and then attempting to offer some qualification or critique of that same model. If students get it at all, they tend to adopt it hook, line, and sinker.

6. *Superman*

Finally, Richard Donner's *Superman* (1978) is particularly useful for stressing the historicization of myth. Indeed, one might even say that the film is in some sense *about* the historicity of myth. Beginning with a black-and-white evocation of the original appearance of the comic strip in 1938, the film constantly invites its older viewers to savor, however ironically, the historical disjuncture between the ideology of the 1930s and the realities of the late 1970s. On the simple narrative level, the comedy of Clark Kent's befuddled search for a phone booth, the traditional site of his quick-change act to emerge as Superman, in an age when phone booths have been replaced by small see-through plastic windshields, invites the audience to register the change. Similarly, the comic irony of Lois Lane's first comment on Clark Kent, when she overhears him arranging to have half his salary sent to his old mother back in Kansas ("Are there any more like you back home?"—to which the answer is a calculatedly simple "No") confronts an audience of the sophisticated present with the unabashedly hokey nature of the original concept of Superman. Finally, in her penthouse patio interview with Superman the full weight of the historical gap is spelled out when Superman offers his famous credo of "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" and Lois comments: "You'd have to come up against every politician in the country." Audiences who had lived through the hasty disappearance of Spiro Agnew from the vice-presidency in the face of serious fraud charges, the revelations of Watergate, the Saturday night "massacre" of the special prosecutor, the resignation of Richard Nixon in the face of certain impeachment, and the hasty pardon from his old ally Gerald Ford are here invited to an ideological recognition not entirely reassuring.

But observing the reactions of students in the 1980s to this film suggests just how deeply its nostalgia for what seemed the simpler politics of

a bygone era anticipates the willful simplemindedness of politics in the 1980s, not to mention the relentless cynicism of politics in the 1990s. Younger audiences do not notice the little ironic reminders of a changed and corrupt present. Brought up on an endless diet of crime films and television police shows, they are inclined to participate in the simple Manichaean dualism of criminals on the one side and good policemen and prison wardens on the other. Nothing in the explicit politics of the film undercuts the public role of Superman as helpful adjunct of the status quo, which, apart from Lois Lane's cynical comment, is presented as unequivocally good.

On the other hand, the sexual politics of the film, especially when juxtaposed to comparable Greek myth, can suggest a historical slippage from the initial Superman myth that in turn sheds light on other sorts of politics. If one asks students for the nearest Greek parallel to Superman, it is usually only a matter of seconds before they bring up the name of Heracles. If then they are asked for the clearest differences between the two, a perception of a radically different role of sex in the careers of the two heroes virtually imposes itself, especially if they have read Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*. In the 1990s, with the establishment of a sex-symbol television Heracles who resists all sexual engagement, students may lose sight of the Greek version. In any case, the original conception of Superman underlines his "real-life" repression as a shy milquetoast, never able to communicate effectively with the ever inaccessible Lois Lane.[45] As such he is the direct antithesis of the relentlessly sexual Heracles, whose hyperbolic sexual accomplishments include sleeping with fifty virgins in a single night and murdering his host and destroying an entire city to win the object of his lust. On the psychoanalytic level, both Heracles and Superman appear as classic instances of overcompensation in fantasy for the hopeless inadequacy of real-life performance. But whereas Heracles' violent ambivalence toward an organized social role is a key component of his traditional mythic interest, the Superman–Clark Kent of the comic book is the epitome of desexualized submission to the order of his society. A contradiction, however, emerges fairly clearly in the first Superman film and is made explicit in the second, released in the United States in 1981, when Superman has to surrender his superpowers through a heavily elaborate ritual in order to have intercourse with Lois Lane. Apparently, by the early 1980s some explicit sex is so crucial an element in selling a film, even one presumably directed primarily at a preteenage audience, that the filmmakers had to scrap what is perhaps the single most essential feature of the original mythic conception of Superman, his desexualization.

45. I am indebted to Bobby Seale, former leader of the Black Panther Party, for first bringing to my attention this aspect of Superman in an address delivered at Yale University in 1970.

Students who have studied Slater's analysis of the flying motif in the Perseus myth are quick to see the sexual symbolism of Superman's long flight with Lois. The use of his X-ray vision shortly before to reveal the color of Lois's underwear only confirms the strategic departure from the wimpy Puritanism of the original hero. Asking why these changes were necessary leads directly to questioning a society in which the overwhelmingly dominant ethical imperative is to make a profit—the American way far more clearly than anything to do with Truth and Justice. The economic imperatives of film production contradict both the loving ironies of eras juxtaposed in the film and the unlovely nostalgia for an era of overwhelming violence in support of simpleminded pieties. Needless to say, students are by no means inclined to acquiesce passively in such a reading of the film. My point, however, is not simply to convince them of my own views of the film but rather to engage them in a critical questioning of contemporary myths, which for most of them is essentially absent from the rest of their education. As one student wrote on her paper with obvious satisfaction: "For the first time, I've actually thought about what is important to us as Americans, instead of just sitting passively in front of a television screen and watching a movie as I would normally do."

At the end of the semester I am always distressed by all the fascinating points I was not able to fit in or get across in the time available. But insofar as I make conscious choices, I hope I have made clear why I am convinced that my emphasis on cultural difference is more enlightening for students than the potentially endless pursuit of continuities.

7. Summary

If twentieth-century linguistic theory has taught us anything, it is that meaning is not inherent in isolated objects of perception but arises from a linguistically mediated system of differences. I believe the same principle is relevant to the study of cultures. A genuine appreciation and critical assimilation of classical culture is only possible within the framework of an explicit juxtaposition to what it is *not*, a clear exploration of the ways Greek and Roman cultures differ from our own. This implies neither an idealization of Greek or Roman values nor a naive chauvinism about our own contemporary ones. On the contrary, the responsibility to contribute in whatever way we can to the formation of citizens capable of full participation in a true democracy requires that we take every opportu-

nity to engage our students in an ongoing critical dialogue with the received conglomerate of ideas, beliefs, and ideological practices into which they are born and which are constantly reinforced and adjusted in most of their schooling and in all forms of popular culture. To me, film seems a particularly fruitful vehicle for helping students assess the otherness of Greek culture at the same time that they are empowered to use that otherness to take a fresh look at their own culture. Films that either explicitly use Greek mythic material or offer self-consciously mythic narratives extrapolated from contemporary American culture offer teachers of ancient myth who are inclined to use them a valuable tool for engaging their students in this critical enterprise. Teachers of genre courses, most obviously comedy and tragedy, also have much to gain by directing their students' critical focus to film, the contemporary medium that most strongly fashions their own subjectivities. Although my own inclinations have led me toward Freudian and Marxist models of ideological critique, I do not think that the pedagogical usefulness of juxtaposing films with ancient myths or comedies requires any acceptance of those models—unless of course one accepts the proposition that only these models provide a ground from which to engage in a critical dialogue with the culture surrounding us, a culture that we as teachers must choose either to perpetuate or to interrogate.

XV

The Sounds of Cinematic Antiquity

Jon Solomon

Music is an integral part of most films, and this is certainly true for the hundreds of films set in Greco-Roman antiquity. But there is a special relationship between music and antiquity because, unlike literature, sculpture, or architecture, actual and audible examples of ancient music do not survive. The following essay, after tracing the history of the tradition of Greco-Roman music, will survey the variety of choices modern film composers have made in attempting to create or recreate a musical sound that could convey an atmosphere reminiscent of the ancient world.

Of the ancient arts, music stood apart from painting, sculpture, and architecture in that its end product was ephemeral. Such well-known masterpieces as Euphronius' calyx-crater showing the death of Sarpedon and the statue of Poseidon from Artemisium still reveal their original artistry. Surface chips and fissures, missing limbs, and added support struts might impair our total aesthetic perception of an ancient work of art, but at least it exists for our sense of sight to absorb, appreciate, and judge. This is actually less so for ancient literature. Most people who read, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* do so in translation because they lack knowledge of ancient Greek. Nonetheless, with the literary equivalent of those impairments or additions I mentioned, and in a language foreign to that in which it was originally written, the play exists in a condition quite satisfactory for both the lay public and the scholar.[1]

1. One might equate surface chips and fissures in a visual work of art to an alternate reading (*lectio varia*) of a word or phrase in a manuscript tradition, missing limbs or pottery fragments to gaps in literary texts (*lacunae*), and support struts to lines or passages added by a subsequent editor (interpolations). I am grateful to Kathleen Higgins for her bibliographical assistance and general expertise in musical aesthetics and to Stephen D. Burton for a critical reading of an earlier version of this essay.

Classical Myth & Culture in the Cinema

Edited by
Martin M. Winkler

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2001

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Buenos Aires Cape Town
Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kolkata Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
Paris São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

This volume is a revised edition of *Classics and Cinema* published 1991 by Associated University Presses, Inc.

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Classical myth and culture in the cinema / edited by Martin M. Winkler.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-19-513003-0; ISBN 0-19-513004-9
1. Myth in motion pictures. 2. Mythology in motion pictures.
I. Winkler, Martin M.
PN1995.9.M96 C59 2001
791.43'615—dc21 00-056665

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

Contents