BOOK REVIEW

Classical Myth on Screen. Edited by MONICA S. CYRINO and MEREDITH E. SAF-
RAN. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. xxi + 257. Hardcover, £60.00.
ISBN 978-1-137-49453-5.

This book arises from the papers presented at a September 2012 Film and
History Conference, sponsored by the Center for Film and History at
the University of Wisconsin. This is a quite informative, useful book. As
the products of scholars such as Walter Burkert attest, the explication of myths
can be a complex business. Major mythology textbooks, such as Morford and
Lenardon' s *Classical Mythology* (Oxford 10th Edition 2013), have chapters out-
lining major scholarly approaches to understanding myths, their composition,
structure, relation to the cultures that produced or employed them, human psy-
chology, and so forth.

In 217 pages and seventeen chapters, our book's various authors deal with
over two dozen different movies, so obviously there is little space for such ex-
tended analysis. The editors' Introduction recognizes that, while Classical myths
loom large in our cultural vocabulary, what makes a movie please a viewer de-
pends on how well the story, characters and setting work together with the view-
er's knowledge and sensibilities, not any faithfulness to some 'original source';
and it is well known that even Homer's epics were only one version of the matter
of Troy. *The Wrath of the Titans* is not a bad movie because of its radical departure
from canonical sources. Basing a movie (however loosely) on a classical prece-
dent can give it a certain cultural weight, while providing a space for treating ma-
jor issues, offering scenes of adventure, eroticism, comedy, political polemic and
so forth. The archetypal nature of many classical plots allows them to play well in
overseas markets too.

This volume offers "responses to the question of how screen texts in our
contemporary media landscape embrace, refute, and reinvent the cultural herit-
age of classical antiquity" (5). The authors recognize how the 'classical' elements
in movies become mixed with other mythologies (e.g. biblical sources) and items
of pop culture and modern mythologies (the *Die Hard* type hero). Movies pre-
sent political and ideological arguments, some supporting the status quo (*Le*

Gladiatrici) some challenging it (*Hedwig*), and some subverting the ideal aspects of the modern use of the classical myth (*Body Double*).

The authors' relative neglect of hard-core comparative approaches and their somewhat associative approach (which might be termed 'archetype spotting') is more than made up for by cultural and media-studies approaches, and their over-all appreciation of movies and the forces that create them, seen particularly in Stacie Raucci's "Of Marketing and Men' Making the Greek Cinematic Hero, 2010–2014." Some of the articles would have been better if their authors had shown, as Raucci does in her article, more awareness of differences between ap-propriation and adaptation, or how a movie shares an archetype with a classical source rather than being construed as a borrowing from it.

The essays in this volume cover a wide and unexpected array of movies. They are divided into four parts (I) The Hero's Struggle; (II) Fashioning the Feminine?; (III) Negotiating the Cosmic Divide; (IV) Cinemyth Making.

This volume follows a more recent strain of research on "myth in the mov-ies" which does more doing than simply focusing on adaptations of Classical myth, as seen in movies such as "Clash of the Titans". Instead, the authors engage many fundamental elements shared (without necessarily conscious borrowing) by classical and modern productions, delving into many areas of cultural, political and media criticism. For space's sake I must let a few exotic sounding titles pro-vide examples of the range of movies and topics considered; Lisl Walsh's "Italian Stallion" Meets 'Breaker of Horses"; Achilles and Hector in *Rocky IV* (1985)"; Hunter H. Gardner's "Plastic Surgery: Failed Pygmalions and Decomposing Women in *Les Yeux Sans Visage* (1960) and *Bride of Re-Animator* (1989)"; and Lorenzo F. Garcia in "John Cameron Mitchell's Aristophanic Cinema: *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001)".

The chapters tend to focus on one mythological feature or theme. This vol-ume does not provide complete readings demonstrating how mythical elements work together to produce an overall meaning or story arc for a movie. To give an example, Vincient Tomasso in "The Twilight of Olympus: Deicide and the End of the Greek Gods" notes how the fairly nasty gods of the remade *Clash of the Titans* and its sequel *Wrath of the Titans* die, all but Hades, reflecting our current view of human advancement over ancient barbarisms. But this deicide is only one part of the adapted mythology of *Clash/Wrath*. One very important subplot con-cerns Io, who, like Juturna, resisted a god and became immortal, and who be-comes a surrogate mother and then wife to Perseus. She is the reason Perseus refused the heroic role Zeus expected him to take after *Clash*. But in *Wrath* Per-

seus fully accepts his heroic destiny, and hooks up (as per the usual myth) with Andromeda, who has been transformed from passive Kraken sacrifice to a warrior Queen, having accepted her heroic destiny, as does Antenor, Poseidon's problematical son. At *Wrath's* end Perseus hands Helios his sword, and asks him if it is too heavy to lift. The son (Freudian trigger warning) confidently raises it vertical. We see a similar hand-off of leadership to the next generation in *Immortals.* Or while Monica S. Cyrino in "Magic, Music, Race: Screening "Black Enchantment" after Black Orpheus" describes the Orpheus-like qualities of Tommy in *Oh Brother Where Art Thou?,* the reader is not given much of an indication of how this fits into Cohen brothers' eclectic treatment of the imagined Southern past, traditional music, and the conflict between fundamental religion and enlightenment perspectives in this adaptation of the *Odyssey.*

But to demand this would be to demand a far vaster and less accessible project. This book is full of unexpected insights and information not only of great use to the scholar, but especially to the non-specialist instructor interested in incorporating modern (and not obviously mythological) movies into a mythology class or a wide variety of other courses.

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