

*Edited by* KONSTANTINOS  
P. NIKOLOUTSOS

ANCIENT  
GREEK WOMEN  
IN FILM



CLASSICAL PRESENCES

OXFORD

---

CLASSICAL PRESENCES

*General Editors*

Lorna Hardwick     James I. Porter

---

## CLASSICAL PRESENCES

Attempts to receive the texts, images, and material culture of ancient Greece and Rome inevitably run the risk of appropriating the past in order to authenticate the present. Exploring the ways in which the classical past has been mapped over the centuries allows us to trace the avowal and disavowal of values and identities, old and new. *Classical Presences* brings the latest scholarship to bear on the contexts, theory, and practice of such use, and abuse, of the classical past.

---

# Ancient Greek Women in Film

Edited by  
KONSTANTINOS P. NIKOLOUTSOS

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

**OXFORD**

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,  
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.  
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,  
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of  
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Oxford University Press 2013

The moral rights of the author have been asserted

First Edition published in 2013

Impression: 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in  
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the  
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted  
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics  
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the  
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the  
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form  
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press  
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013945563

ISBN 978-0-19-967892-1

As printed and bound in Britain by  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and  
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials  
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

---

## *Acknowledgements*

This volume had its genesis in a panel of the same title organized at *Feminism & Classics V: 'Bringing it All Back Home'*, which took place at the University of Michigan in May 2008. The panel laid the foundations for an ongoing collaboration among an international group of classicists, the result of which is the present collection. I would like to thank the OUP anonymous referees for their insightful comments and suggestions, as well as the series editor, Lorna Hardwick, for embracing the project enthusiastically since its inception. A special debt of gratitude is due to Mary-Kay Gamel for soliciting three of the essays included here when she acted as co-editor. She made important recommendations, on both a theoretical and practical level, for which I am most thankful. She contributed immensely to the success of the project and was with us all the way in spirit after her withdrawal. Special thanks are also owed to the OUP commissioning editor, Taryn Das Neves, and the production editor, Kizzy Taylor-Richelieu, for their help and guidance with all matters related to the publication of this volume. The College of Arts and Sciences at Saint Joseph's University generously provided funds for the creation of the index, for which I am most grateful. Finally, I would like to thank all my contributors for their commitment, patience, and support during the entire process.

Ruby Blondell's essay was previously published in *Classical Receptions Journal* 1 (2009): 1–26 and is reprinted by kind permission of Oxford University Press. Some paragraphs from my own chapter are included in an article in *Classical World* 106.2: (2013): 261–83 and are reproduced by permission of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States. Many of the images are DVD stills taken under fair use policy for academic use.

*Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos*  
*Philadelphia*  
*15 October 2012*



---

## Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
Introduction <i>Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos</i>	1
<b>Part I. Helen</b>	
1. Gazing at Helen: Helen as Polysemous Icon in Robert Wise's <i>Helen of Troy</i> and Michael Cacoyannis' <i>The Trojan Women</i> <i>Bella Vivante</i>	19
2. 'Third Cheerleader from the Left': From Homer's Helen to <i>Helen of Troy</i> <i>Ruby Blondell</i>	51
<b>Part II. Medea</b>	
3. Medea's Erotic Text in <i>Jason and the Argonauts</i> (1963) <i>Kirk Ormand</i>	75
4. Pasolini's <i>Medea</i> : A Twentieth-Century Tragedy <i>Susan O. Shapiro</i>	95
5. Rebel and Martyr: The <i>Medea</i> of Lars von Trier <i>Annette M. Baertschi</i>	117
<b>Part III. Penelope</b>	
6. 'Madonna and Whore': The Many Faces of Penelope in <i>Ulisse</i> (1954) <i>Joanna Paul</i>	139
7. Why is Penelope Still Waiting? The Missing Feminist Reappraisal of the <i>Odyssey</i> in Cinema, 1963–2007 <i>Edith Hall</i>	163
<b>Part IV. Other Mythical Women</b>	
8. The Women of Ercole <i>Arthur J. Pomeroy</i>	189



---

9. Annihilating Clytemnestra: The Severing of the Mother– Daughter Bond in Michael Cacoyannis’ <i>Iphigenia</i> (1977) <i>Anastasia Bakogianni</i>	207
10. Mythic Women in Tony Harrison’s <i>Prometheus</i> <i>Hallie Rebecca Marshall</i>	235
<b>Part V. Historical Women</b>	
11. Between Family and the Nation: Gorgo in the Cinema <i>Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos</i>	255
12. Representing Olympias: The Politics of Gender in Cinematic Treatments of Alexander the Great <i>Kirsten Day</i>	279
13. ‘An Almost All Greek Thing’: Cleopatra VII and Hollywood Imagination <i>Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones</i>	305
<i>Bibliography</i>	331
<i>Index</i>	365

---

## List of Figures

1.1 Helen (Rossana Podestà) in <i>Helen of Troy</i> , dir. Robert Wise. Credit: [THE KOBAL COLLECTION]	25
1.2 Helen (Irene Papas) with Menelaus (Patrick Magee) in <i>The Trojan Women</i> , dir. Michael Cacoyannis. Credit: [THE KOBAL COLLECTION]	44
3.1 Close-up of Medea (Nancy Kovack) as she watches Jason battle the Hydra in <i>Jason and the Argonauts</i> , dir. Don Chaffey. © Columbia Tristar Home Video, a subsidiary of Sony Pictures Digital, inc. All rights reserved.	92
4.1 The Dioscuri in <i>Medea</i> , dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini	106
4.2 The Two Centaurs (Laurent Terzieff and Gerard Weiss) in <i>Medea</i> , dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini	113
4.3 Medea (Maria Callas) in <i>Medea</i> , dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini	115
5.1 Film Logo, <i>Medea</i> , dir. Lars von Trier	129
5.2 Medea (Kirsten Olesen) and Jason (Udo Kier) in <i>Medea</i> , dir. Lars von Trier	131
5.3 Medea (Kirsten Olesen) after completing her revenge in <i>Medea</i> , dir. Lars von Trier	135
6.1 Penelope (Silvana Mangano) in her bedchamber in <i>Ulisse</i> , dir. Mario Camerini. Credit: [LUX FILM/THE KOBAL COLLECTION]	143
6.2 Circe (Silvana Mangano) and Ulysses (Kirk Douglas) in <i>Ulisse</i> , dir. Mario Camerini. Credit: [LUX FILM/THE KOBAL COLLECTION]	153
9.1 Clytemnestra (Irene Papas) and Iphigenia (Tatiana Papamoschou) on the journey to Aulis in <i>Iphigenia</i> , dir. Michael Cacoyannis	220
9.2 Agamemnon (Kostas Kazakos) tries to separate mother and daughter in <i>Iphigenia</i> , dir. Michael Cacoyannis	227
9.3 Iphigenia in her mother's embrace in <i>Iphigenia</i> , dir. Michael Cacoyannis	228
11.1 Gorgo (Anna Synodinou) embracing Leonidas (Richard Egan) in <i>The 300 Spartans</i> , dir. Rudolph Maté	261
11.2 Artemisia (Anne Wakefield) in the Tent of Xerxes (David Farrar) in <i>The 300 Spartans</i> , dir. Rudolph Maté	270
11.3 Gorgo (Anna Synodinou) and Ellas (Diane Baker) spinning and weaving in <i>The 300 Spartans</i> , dir. Rudolph Maté	271
12.1 Olympias (Danielle Darrieux) with her son Alexander (Richard Burton) in <i>Alexander the Great</i> , dir. Robert Rossen	286



---

## *List of Contributors*

**Annette M. Baertschi** is Assistant Professor in the Department of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies at Bryn Mawr College. Her research interests include Roman literature, especially imperial poetry, Greek and Latin epic, ancient drama and performance, Latin meter as well as the reception of the classical world. She has published articles and reviews on Lucan, Seneca, and witches and sorceresses in ancient literature, and has co-edited a large collection of essays entitled *Die modernen Väter der Antike. Die Entwicklung der Altertumswissenschaften an Akademie und Universität im Berlin des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 2009). Currently, she is finishing her book *Necyiae: Visions of the Underworld in Neronian and Flavian Epic*.

**Anastasia Bakogianni** received her Ph.D. in Classics from the University of London. She is currently a Lecturer in Classical Studies at the Open University. She also holds a post as a Research Fellow at UCL. Her first monograph, *Electra Ancient and Modern: Aspects of the Reception of the Tragic Heroine*, was published by the Institute of Classical Studies in 2011. She has also edited a forthcoming two-volume collection of essays entitled *Dialogues with the Past* on aspects of the reception of Greco-Roman culture. Her interests lie in Greek tragedy and culture and its reception, particularly in opera, cinema, art, and poetry. She has published articles on all these aspects of the reception of Greek drama.

**Ruby Blondell** is a Professor of Classics at the University of Washington in Seattle. She has published widely on Greek literature, philosophy, and the reception of myth in popular culture. Her books include *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford University Press, 2013); *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge 2002); *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides* (co-authored) (Routledge 1999); *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge 1989).

**Kirsten Day** is Associate Professor of Classics at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL, USA. Her research interests include women in classical antiquity and classical representations in popular culture, on which topics she teaches classes and has published several articles. She also edited a special issue of *Arethusa* (41.1: 2008) entitled *Celluloid Classics:*

*New Perspectives on Classical Antiquity in Modern Cinema* and served as chair for the 'Classical Representations in Popular Culture' area at the Southwest Texas Popular/American Culture Association conferences from 2002–2013.

**Edith Hall** is Professor of Classics at King's College London and Consultant Director of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford University. Her numerous publications include *The Theatrical Cast of Athens* (OUP, 2006), *The Return of Ulysses* (2008), *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (OUP, 2010), and *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy* (OUP, 2012).

**Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones** is Senior Lecturer in Ancient History in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh. He specializes in Achaemenid Persia, Greek socio-cultural history, ancient dress, and the reception of antiquity in popular culture. He is the author of *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* (The Classical Press of Wales, 2004), *Ctesias' History of Persia: Tales of the Orient* (Routledge, 2010), *King and Court in Ancient Persia* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and the forthcoming *Designs on the Past—How Hollywood Created the Ancient World*. He has published extensively on the use of antiquity in cinema and popular culture and served as a historical advisor to Oliver Stone during the making of his movie *Alexander*.

**Hallie Rebecca Marshall** currently holds a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at Oxford University. Her postdoctoral research is on classical reception in the late eighteenth century. She has published articles on the work of Tony Harrison, Jocelyn Herbert, Ted Hughes, Sarah Kane, and Aristophanes.

**Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos** is Assistant Professor of Latin and Ancient Studies at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. He has published a number of articles in the fields of Roman elegy, ancient history on film, and the classical tradition in Latin America and the Caribbean. Besides this volume, he has also edited a special issue of *Romance Quarterly* (59.1: 2012) entitled *Reception of Greek and Roman Drama in Latin America*. He is the recipient of the 2008 Paul Rehak Prize from the Lambda Classical Caucus and the 2012–2013 Loeb Classical Library Foundation Fellowship from Harvard University.

**Kirk Ormand** is Professor of Classics at Oberlin College. He is the editor of *A Companion to Sophocles* (Blackwell, 2012), and author of *Controlling Desires: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Praeger, 2008), *Exchange and the Maiden: Marriage in Sophoclean Tragedy* (University of Texas, 1999), and articles on Hesiod, Euripides, Sophocles, Lucan, Ovid, and Clint Eastwood. His next book, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and Archaic Greece*, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

**Joanna Paul** is a Lecturer in Classical Studies at the Open University. Her research in the field of classical reception studies covers a number of different areas, with a particular focus on reception in contemporary popular culture. She has published on a variety of cinematic receptions of antiquity, from Fellini to *Alexander*, and her monograph on *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition* is also part of the Classical Presences series (OUP, 2013). Her current projects include further work on the modern reception of Pompeii, and research into childhood engagements with antiquity, in both pedagogical material and children's literature.

**Arthur J. Pomeroy** is Professor of Classics at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He is the author of *The Appropriate Comment: Death Notices in the Ancient Historians* (1991), *Arius Didymus: Epitome of Stoic Ethics* (1999), *Theatres of Action: Papers for Chris Dearden* (co-edited with John Davidson, 2003), *Roman Social History: A Sourcebook* (with Tim Parkin, 2007), 'Then it was destroyed by the Volcano': *Classics on the Large and Small Screen* (2008), and various articles on a wide range of Latin authors and on the reception of the ancient world in modern film and television.

**Susan O. Shapiro** received her Ph.D. in Classics from the University of Texas at Austin. She is Associate Professor of History and Classics at Utah State University. Her articles on Herodotus, Greek intellectual history, and Catullus have appeared in *The Classical Journal*, *Classical Antiquity*, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, and *Syllecta Classica*. She is also the author of *O Tempora! O Mores! Cicero's Catilinarian Orations: A Student Edition with Historical Essays* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

**Bella Vivante** is Professor of Classics at the University of Arizona. Her numerous publications include 'The Primal Mind: Using Native American Models to Study Women in Ancient Greece' in *Feminism and Classics* (1992), *Women in Ancient Civilizations* (1999), translator, with

commentary, of Euripides' *Helen*, in *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides* (1999), *Events That Changed Ancient Greece* (2002), *Daughters of Gaia: Women in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (2007/2008), *Helen: Ancient and Modern Icon of Femininity and Poetic Creation* (forthcoming).

---

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos*

This collection examines cinematic representations of women from the realms of ancient Greek myth and history. The chapters discuss how female figures from these two domains are resurrected on the big screen at different historical junctures and are embedded in a narrative that serves different purposes (artistic, commercial, political) depending on the director of the film, its screenwriter(s), the studio, the country of its origin, and the time of its production. Nearly all the chapters included in this volume engage in a comparative analysis of ancient accounts and their cinematic adaptations, but expand the scope of their search beyond the question of whether or not filmic recreations of antiquity are faithful reproductions of the details of the source text(s). Employing a diverse array of hermeneutic approaches (gender theory, feminist criticism, gaze theory, psychoanalysis, sociological theories of religion, film history, viewer-response theory, and personal voice criticism), the essays assembled here aim to cast light on cinema's investments in the classical past and decode the mechanisms whereby the female figures under examination are extracted from their original context and are brought to life to serve as vehicles for the articulation of modern ideas, concerns, and cultural trends. The goal of the collection as a whole is to explore not only how antiquity on the screen represents and in this process often distorts, compresses, contests, and revises antiquity on the page but also, most importantly, why cinema reconstructs the classical past in a frequently eclectic fashion.

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the OUP anonymous referees, as well as to the following readers for their insightful comments, suggestions, and criticisms that helped me sharpen the focus of my argument: Anthony Corbeil, Lorna Hardwick, Maria Marsilio, Pantelis Michelakis, and Martin Winkler. All mistakes remain with me alone.



Written by established and emerging authorities in classical reception studies from across the globe, the thirteen essays that make up this volume examine a wide range of films (in terms of genres, budget, distribution, and audience appeal) produced in different countries<sup>2</sup> during a period of ninety years (1917–2007). The volume discusses both big studio features and independent productions. The films fall into the following categories: silent, black-and-white, epic, peplum, action, adventure, drama, comedy, made-for-television, art house, and poetry films. These are either films set in Greek antiquity or reworkings of ancient themes situated in a modern setting. The commercial success and critical acclaim of individual films are of interest here insofar as they can illuminate the social, economic, and cultural context of a film's production and reception.

The book is divided into five sections. The first three are devoted to Helen, Medea, and Penelope respectively. These female figures have captivated the imagination of many directors from both sides of the Atlantic and are therefore granted a special place in the collection. The fourth part examines representations of women from the realm of Greek myth that have received a lesser degree of attention in the medium, but nonetheless carry a high cultural, artistic, and political charge. The list of these mythical figures includes Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Iole, Deianeira, Omphale, Io, and the Nereids. The last section of the collection focuses on three historical figures: Gorgo, Olympias, and Cleopatra.

#### ANCIENT GREEK WOMEN IN FILM AND CLASSICAL RECEPTION STUDIES

The study of ancient Greek women on the screen has not received adequate attention in current scholarship on the reception of classical antiquity in cinema and on television.<sup>3</sup> This book aims to fill this critical vacuum and make an original contribution to this field by enriching our

<sup>2</sup> Most of the films are American, Greek, and Italian productions or co-productions. The volume also examines films from Denmark, France, Germany, and Great Britain.

<sup>3</sup> This is the first collection devoted entirely to a topic that has been treated sporadically in recent scholarship on classics in film. Previous studies include McDonald (2001: 90–1, 95–6, 98–100); Cyrino (2007b); Allen (2007); Cavallini (2008); Roisman (2008); Blondell (2009); Potter (2009); Shahabudin (2009: 206–14); Winkler (2009: 210–50); Carney (2010); Niko-loutsos (2010); Bakogianni (2011: 153–94); Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011: 73–5; 118–21; 210–13). This is by no means an exhaustive list of works on the topic. See also the essays in this volume for further bibliography. I regret I have been unable to consider Michelakis (2013) as well as the various essays in Renger and Solomon (2012) and Cyrino (2013). These publications were not available by the time the final typescript of this volume was sent to press.

knowledge of the ways in which the ancient world is recreated, used, and (almost always) abused in modern popular culture. The arrangement of the essays in thematic units allows the readers of the collection to trace the reception history of Greek women in the medium across time, region, and genre, and obtain a clear picture of the commonalities, variations, and cultural patterns involved in their filmic transplantation. One of the collection's main objectives in examining representations of the same female characters in films produced in different countries and historical periods is to illustrate not only their enduring appeal and polysemous role in the narratives in which they are inserted but also the mutability and continuous adaptability of their screen image. As the essays illustrate, this image is not static, or consistent with the features that these women are attributed in ancient literary and visual sources. It changes, in most cases radically, according to the sociocultural norms and stereotypes of the time in which the film is produced; the economic and technological conditions of its production; the political climate in which it is made; the vision of the producer, director, and screenwriter; the star image and nationality of the actress who plays the part, as well as her physical characteristics that are often taken advantage of in order to connote issues of power and transgression; the aesthetic expectations and moral sensibilities of the audience; and the stylistic and other conventions of the genre through which ancient female figures are revived on the big screen.

These parameters determine both the way ancient Greek women look and the way they act on screen. For example, as Bella Vivante discusses in her essay, in conforming to stereotypes of female beauty in post-World War II American society, the Helen of Robert Wise's 1956 epic film *Helen of Troy* is cast as a platinum blonde, fair-skinned bombshell, projecting onto Homer's heroine the glamour and sex appeal of a pin-up girl. By contrast, in Michael Cacoyannis' 1971 adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* Helen has olive skin and jet-black hair as an embodiment of Mediterranean femininity, passion, and sensuality. Cacoyannis' film builds Helen's screen image upon a fundamental principle in the history of classical reception, that of repetition with difference. In keeping with the textual tradition, it acknowledges Helen's power to victimize men with her looks; at the same time, the film exploits her iconic attraction on a metacinematic level by casting a Greek actress, Irene Papas, in the role of classical antiquity's most notorious femme fatale, thereby making a statement about ethnic continuity between ancient and modern Greece. Drawn from the pages of Athenian tragedy, Helen is fashioned in accordance with, and operates as a vehicle for the propagation of, notions of popular history, memory, and the nation. *The Trojan Women* is one of several case studies examined in this collection which illustrate that

filmic recreations of the classical past are not neutral or disinterested. They have affective dimensions, and are deeply implicated in contemporary cultural and political discourses.

Arthur Pomeroy's essay shows how similar popular perceptions about hair colour, body type, and national identity inform the portrayal of female characters who surround Hercules in Italian peplum films. For example, the role of Antea, the sexually voracious, vampy queen of the Amazons, in Pietro Francisci's *Le Fatiche di Ercole* (1958) is played by Gianna Maria Canale, whose dark black hair and curvaceous figure fit the stereotypical look of the southern Italian woman, termed *maggiorata fisica* (buxom beauty),<sup>4</sup> which was popularized by physically imposing actresses, such as Sofia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida. By contrast, Iole, the princess from Iolcus who is rescued by the mythical hero and falls in love with him, is cast as a slender, delicate girl played by Sylva Koscina. Her light hair and fair complexion suggest to the viewer either an American-style 'girl next door', most typically portrayed in cinema by stars like Doris Day and even sometimes by Marilyn Monroe, or an upper class Italian lady, since in Italy these features were traditionally associated with the affluent north or the Frankish aristocracy of the south. Antea is dark-haired and looks demonic; Iole has light auburn hair and looks angelic.

The examples discussed by Pomeroy show that identifying the multiple influences (industrial, technological, aesthetic, sociocultural) that shape celluloid antiquity requires methods and approaches other than the purely philological. Tracing these influences will help us develop a critical idiom for analysing cinematic versions of the classical past and investigate, more effectively, the complex ways in which they are produced to function as commentaries on the present. The image of the women who populate peplum films about Hercules and his adventures is not informed only by Italian history and geography. It is also symptomatic of American cultural hegemony and media imperialism in the age of globalization, which started in the 1920s and reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s (and continues to this day). Extracted from the world of ancient Greek myth, the women of Hercules are reanimated on the big screen and are allocated a hybrid look that bears testimony to the blurring of artistic boundaries between Europe and the United States in the post-war era and to the transcontinental dissemination and fusion of cultural elements and aesthetic trends caused by the massive migration of people at the time.

My own essay also investigates how antiquity and modernity intersect with each other on the big screen. Filmed at the height of the Cold War,

<sup>4</sup> For this trend in Italian cinema, see Celli and Cottino-Jones (2007: 81–82).

Rudolph Maté's *The 300 Spartans* (1962) implicates Gorgo in the US ideology of 'Containment' and homemaker lifestyle of the 1950s and early 1960s, projecting an image of her as a loving mother and wife who is devoted to her family and tends to her domestic duties. Almost half a century later, when Gorgo is resurrected on screen through Zack Snyder's smash hit *300* (2007), she is fashioned to suit the rhetoric of gender equality and is depicted as a dynamic queen who is actively involved in public life, despite the very fact that there was no such office for royal women in fifth century BC Sparta. My analysis shows that at different historical moments the same female figure from ancient Greek history is deployed in the medium to advance completely different modern positions.<sup>5</sup> This method of character reconstruction, termed *neo-mythologism* by Italian director Vittorio Cottafavi,<sup>6</sup> finds a parallel in ancient tragedy, in which female characters were appropriated from the realm of epic and were adjusted to serve the agendas of the playwrights and reflect the values and attitudes of Athenian society. Some of the surviving tragedies preserve different and sometimes even contradictory versions of the same myth. Electra, for example, continues to live at the palace at Mycenae and enjoy her royal status after the murder of her father, Agamemnon, in Sophocles' tragedy. Euripides, by contrast, portrays her as a peasant who is dressed in rags and lives in a poor household in his own play. Tragedy, the popular culture of fifth century BC Athens, undermines the idea of a canonical story with fixed details. The films examined in this volume form part of the same artistic tradition of reimagining and reinventing the ancient world for popular consumption.

In classical literature, this discursive method of refiguration applies to historical persons as well. In the aftermath of her defeat at the battle of Actium in 31 BC, Cleopatra VII Philopator is divested of her political powers and titles as a Ptolemaic ruler and enters the poetry of the early Augustan period in the form of a mistress from the dissolute East charged with an extraordinary amount of erotic allure and perversity. From protective queen of a powerful kingdom, as her public image is promoted on coins, inscriptions, and other visual material from pre-Roman Egypt, she is transformed into a barbarian whore in the work of Propertius, Horace, and Virgil, as Maria Wyke has most notably shown.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See also Martindale (2006: 4) and Kallendorf (2007: 3).

<sup>6</sup> See Winkler (2005); (2009: 16).

<sup>7</sup> Wyke (2002: 195–243).

In the last essay of the collection, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones traces a similar process of identity erasure in Hollywood recreations of the life of Cleopatra. With the exception of Joseph Mankiewicz's 1963 film, where her Greekness is acknowledged, albeit briefly and in jest, US filmmakers in general subdue her Macedonian ancestry and portray her, in terms of both narrative and costumes, as a Pharaonic monarch, thereby exploiting, for aesthetic and commercial reasons, the exotic and glamorous aspects of her Egyptian connection. The Hellenistic world that Cleopatra inhabited is anachronistically replaced on screen by buildings, symbols, and dresses from the time of the Egyptian New Kingdom.

Llewellyn-Jones' chapter calls attention to the conditioned and mediated character of cinematic antiquity. Although in promotion material they cultivate the expectation of a historically accurate portrait, Hollywood films perpetuate an identification of Cleopatra with Pharaonic Egypt, which has been firmly established in the western imagination since the mid-nineteenth century. Sold to audiences as accessible versions of ancient history, the Cleopatra biopics reproduce modern myths, clichés, and misconceptions about her, thereby proving to be a form of entertainment that pretends to offer high art, but in reality surrenders to the temptation of popular acceptance and profit. This treatment of Cleopatra reflects the attitudes of Hollywood producers and directors during the studio era toward what constitutes ancient history: a combination of folklore and factual information loaded with visual opulence, operatic music, and narrative ellipses, disjunctions, and eclecticism. This is not the history of Hellenistic Egypt, but rather a collage of fragments or 'sheets'<sup>8</sup> of history from different epochs.

Many of the films examined in this volume have been inspired by, and respond to, specific contemporary political events. The female characters in them are shaped to serve the propagation of the director's view about these events. Anastasia Bakogianni examines how modern Greek history informs Michael Cacoyannis' third adaptation of a Euripidean tragedy titled *Iphigenia* (1977). She argues that the film, produced in the aftermath of the collapse of the Greek dictatorship and the retaliatory Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, places renewed emphasis on the intersection between the public and the private spheres in Euripides' play by depicting the longing of men for war and power as a catalyst for the severing of the strong mother–daughter bond that characterizes the relationship between Clytemnestra and Iphigenia. The annihilation of the family and the forcible separation of the mother from her child in the

<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term from Landy (1996a: 153).

mythic past are, according to Bakogianni's reading of the film, a powerful allegory for the suffering of the Greek-Cypriot nation in the present and the images of thousands of mothers, shown in the media at the time, who were mourning the loss of their dead and missing children in the wake of the 'Attila' operation.

As Bakogianni's essay demonstrates, cinema extends tragedy's project of blurring the boundaries between myth and national history, thus pointing out the manifold ways in which the classical past can be used to shed light on and problematize the present. Hallie Rebecca Marshall builds an argument along similar lines in her essay on Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*, a film/poem in which the British writer draws on Aeschylus' play, as well as the reception of Prometheus in later European literary tradition, to discuss both the legacy of the coal mine closures that precipitated the bitter strike of 1984 by the National Union of Mineworkers in the UK and the concurrent collapse of the socialist dream in Eastern Europe. Investigating how and for what purpose Harrison reshapes the female figures of *Prometheus Bound*, Marshall argues that the chorus of the anonymous Nereids is used to express communal suffering. Io, on the other hand, becomes a symbol for the destruction of a single household due to severe economic hardship. Past and present are interblended on the big screen to provide a critique about social identity and political change.

This recontextualization of ancient Greek myth and its employment as a powerful tool whereby to expose and condemn political decisions and social practices at moments of national crisis illustrate the central position that classical antiquity occupies in modern artistic imagination. This, however, is hardly a new finding, for almost every publication in classical reception studies has sought to link the past to the present under the rubric of 'cultural continuity' and by identifying parallel constructed versions of myth and history in ancient and modern media. Charles Martindale has, alarmingly, pointed out this 'wider [scholarly] trend to collapse reception into cultural studies'.<sup>9</sup> This collection responds to this concern and shows that, as much as it is legitimate, it is also reductive to treat filmic reenactments of the ancient Greek world as a form of art that is filtered only through the lens of contemporary sociopolitical reality. A number of the films examined here do not draw, directly or exclusively, on ancient sources. Rather, they are responses to, and often symptoms of, modern appropriations of the ancient Greek world in film or fiction. These receptions form an important intertext that cannot be ignored in critical analysis.

For example, Zack Snyder's *300* is based on Frank Miller's 1998 comic book of the same title, which was in turn inspired by the 1962 historical

<sup>9</sup> Martindale (2006: 9).

epic *The 300 Spartans*. In other words, the 2007 blockbuster is the most recent in a ‘chain of receptions’<sup>10</sup> of the battle of Thermopylae in contemporary popular culture. Snyder’s Gorgo, as I show in my essay, cannot be examined in isolation from this artistic framework and be compared only to her Herodotean counterpart, since she is also constructed to evoke her cinematic and graphic precursors. Similarly, as Annette Baertschi demonstrates, Lars von Trier’s 1988 telefilm *Medea* is not directly informed by Euripides’ homonymous tragedy, but is based on its modern reception transmitted through a mediating text, the script of an unrealized film by renowned Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer. Dreyer, who drew loosely on the Greek play, had planned *Medea* to be his first film in colour and had allegedly travelled to Paris to offer the title role to Maria Callas, but he suddenly died of pneumonia in 1968, a year before the famous soprano played the part in Pasolini’s film. Von Trier resurrects Medea on Danish television by reproducing both the thematics and the aesthetics of his master’s script.

Baertschi’s essay shows that an investigation of the reception of Greek antiquity in the medium needs to take into full consideration the history of a film’s production—in particular the various routes through which ancient texts, images, and ideas have travelled, physically and metaphorically, across time, place, and media, and have come to influence modern directors and scriptwriters. Tracing these routes can shed light upon the artistic trends and stylistic innovations that shape antiquity on screen and can explain the shifts, variations, and inconsistencies in the reception history of its iconic figures within specific national contexts. As Lorna Hardwick has cogently put it, acknowledging the diasporic nature of classical texts:

... recognizes the shaping forces of the subsequent filters that have conditioned understanding of the texts without assuming that only one set of filters matters. It leaves room for investigating why any particular ante-text re-emerges under particular cultural conditions and for considering the extent to which the dynamics of its relationship with its ancient context are replicated or revised.<sup>11</sup>

Susan Shapiro, in turn, makes an eloquent case for the need to consider context when we examine cinematic reconstructions of the classical world. Her essay discusses Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Medea* (1969) and illustrates that the film is a synthesis of dominant theoretical approaches

<sup>10</sup> I borrow the term from Jauss (1982: 20). For the use of the term in classical reception studies, see, Kallendorf (2007: 2); Martindale (2007: 300); Paul (2010a: 15) and (2010b: 148).

<sup>11</sup> Hardwick (2007: 47). See also Hardwick (2003: 4, 32).

to myth and religion, advanced by some of the most influential philosophers of the last two centuries, such as Karl Marx, Sir James Frazer, Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Antonio Gramsci. Informed by these theories, Pasolini casts Medea as both innocent victim and vengeful sorceress. On the one hand, she represents the beneficent powers of nature and fertility and, on the other, the destructive forces of retribution and irrationality. The belief in and veneration of these elements are characteristics of the religious systems of archaic civilizations, as well as of those of the African nations, which were considered to be primitive civilizations in economically developed countries at the time of the film's production.<sup>12</sup> As Shapiro maintains, Medea and the Colchians symbolize the people of pre-industrialized societies who were forced to submit to the colonial powers of the modern world, as portrayed by Jason and the Argonauts. Pasolini appropriates the myth of Medea from classical literature and (in keeping with ancient mythopoeic practices) he transforms it into a new foundation story. Produced at the end of a decade that witnessed the collapse of European colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, the film 'decolonizes' Medea's story and antiquity in general. It liberates them from the normative epic style in which Hollywood studios—a multimillion-dollar empire—sought to portray the classical world in the 1950s and early 1960s, and opens them up to innovative, counter-hegemonic interpretations.

The essays outlined above illustrate two interrelated aspects of the reception of ancient Greek women in the medium. First, their screen image is the product of a process of hybridization between ancient depictions and modern cultural trends and ideologies. Second, their refiguration takes place at a particular historical moment, and the pastiches that make up their cinematic portrait are contingent upon that moment. The plasticity and adaptability that directors perceive as the very characteristic of the women of Greek myth and history undermine the expectation of a faithful rendition of the source text that some classicists may have<sup>13</sup> and illustrate a 'fusion of horizons'<sup>14</sup> that opens up new pathways for research into the diverse ways in which cinema draws on and transforms the classical world. For, in addition to films that recreate

<sup>12</sup> On the interpretation of Greek tragedy with primitive rituals in postcolonial contexts, see also Nikoloutsos (2010: 95–103).

<sup>13</sup> As Winkler (2009: 247) astutely remarks regarding the attitude of classical scholars to judge films set in the classical world on the basis of their historical or literary accuracy: 'Scholars who despair over the extent to which modern media distort the supposed truth of ancient myth or dismiss such versions as hopelessly inaccurate and therefore *infra dig* might do better to remember the ancients.' See also Paul (2010b: 146–47); Nikoloutsos (2013: 282–3).

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the term from Gadamer (1991): 306–7, 374–75.



---

sample content of Ancient Greek Women in Film (Classical Presences)

- [read online Spellscribed: Resurgence](#)
- [read online Adobe Dreamweaver CS6 Classroom in a Book pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [read Blackout book](#)
- [click Foreign Affairs \(September 2013/October 2013\) pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [download online Half Life](#)
  
- <http://paulczajak.com/?library/Personal-Identity--Complex-or-Simple-.pdf>
- <http://schroff.de/books/Lego-Star-Wars--Character-Encyclopedia-.pdf>
- <http://fortune-touko.com/library/Dwell-Magazine--October-2013-.pdf>
- <http://monkeybubblemedia.com/lib/Foreign-Affairs--September-2013-October-2013-.pdf>
- <http://fortune-touko.com/library/Half-Life.pdf>