

**PERSEUS ON THE PSYCHIATRIST'S COUCH IN  
LETERRIER'S *CLASH OF THE TITANS* (2010):  
HARRYHAUSEN RELOADED FOR 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY <sup>1</sup>**

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Leterrier's recent blockbuster, *Clash of the Titans* (2010), tells the story of the most famous adventures of Perseus, son of Zeus and the mortal Danaë, as he defeats the Gorgon Medusa before rescuing Andromeda, daughter of king Cepheus, from the gigantic sea monster. The basic details of these mythical adventures can be found in ancient sources. Furthermore, the film pays an immediate tribute to Desmond Davis/ Ray Harryhausen's 1981 film of the same name. On balance, the 2010 film shares a lot more in common with its filmic predecessor than it does with the ancient sources. There are some quite direct pointers to the old film in the new, such as the mechanical owl Bubo, fight scenes with scorpions, and Zeus' use of terracotta statuettes to symbolise divine control over humans on earth. We should, however, avoid pitting both films against an 'ancient tradition' as if it were a monolith: as always, both film-maker and ancient author engage in a creative and dynamic exercise of mythological choice when composing their stories. This is a point well acknowledged by one of our film-makers, Ray Harryhausen, who tells us that his choices are directed by both the cinematic medium in which he is operating and the intended family-oriented audience (Harryhausen and Dalton 2008: 99; 2009: 261). By way of introduction, I offer a short discussion of the major choices made for each film and the possible sources, both ancient and contemporary, that may have influenced them.<sup>2</sup>

i) THE CHOICE OF MONSTER

Leterrier opts for a sea monster called the Kraken, which immediately recalls the nomenclature of Harryhausen's 1981 creation. The monster is never so called in antiquity, but neither is it always called by the same name: most commonly *ketos* (the Greek for large sea creatures both mythical and real) or in its Latinised form *Cetus*, it is also referred to by the names of *Pistix* (e.g. Cicero, *Aratea* fr. 33.140 Soubiran), *Pristis* (Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.356) and *Belua* (e.g. Germanicus, *Aratea* 362).<sup>3</sup> This window of opportunity for license in naming the sea creature is taken up in the 1981 *Clash*, whose 'Kraken' comes from later, largely Norse traditions where it is used of a fearsome sea beast.<sup>4</sup>

ii) THE CHOICE OF WEAPON FOR THE HERO

Leterrier has Perseus kill the Kraken with the head of the Gorgon Medusa, as in the 1981 film. All makers of myth have a choice here. The Perseus of antiquity can be found pelting the Sea Monster with pebbles or, perhaps, volunteering to be eaten in order to slay the monster from within its innards.<sup>5</sup> But the most common methods of killing the monster are either by sword (*harpe*) or by the Gorgon's head. In fact, a fourth century BC Etruscan cup, which shows Perseus wielding both sword and Gorgon head, provides an appropriate visual for the parameters of choice within which most ancient authors on the subject operated.<sup>6</sup>

iii) THE CHOICE OF TRANSPORT FOR THE HERO

Leterrier follows the 1981 *Clash* in having Perseus travel on the winged horse Pegasus. Our fullest ancient accounts have Perseus endowed with the divine gift of winged sandals.<sup>7</sup> Taking on board the popular ancient tradition, then, the presence in both films of Pegasus as a noble flying steed for Perseus' endeavours against Medusa is a mythical anachronism, as Pegasus is widely believed to have been born from the blood that dripped down from Medusa's severed head.<sup>8</sup> Our film-makers bring the wondrous figure of Pegasus into the story at an early stage to make for a more impressive filmic experience, but in the process they are assimilating Perseus with Bellerophon, another mythical hero who is more readily charged with taming Pegasus and using his aid in battles with monsters (Chaimaera). Our film-makers are in good company, however, as slippage between the figures of Perseus and Bellerophon is attested in the ancient world from at least the mid fifth century BC.<sup>9</sup> In particular, there is in the medieval period an intertwining of the myth of

Perseus with those of Christian knights, a move which may well have projected the need for a steed back onto the classical Perseus (see Ogden 2008: 136-8).

The films of Leterrier and Davis/Harryhausen, then, share an obvious affinity with each other. And yet this should not deter us from recognising important differences between them. One particularly noticeable difference concerns the 'love interest' of Perseus. In the 1981 *Clash*, Perseus follows tradition in being captivated with love for Andromeda, albeit in a more obsessive manner than in the ancient sources: the traditional Perseus falls in love with Andromeda when he first sees her in chains,<sup>10</sup> whereas Harryhausen's Perseus meets her before this event when he watches her sleep and follows her sleepwalking. While Andromeda has a not insignificant part to play in the 2010 *Clash*, it is Io who captivates our hero, as Perseus forms an erotic union with her, not Andromeda, at the end of the film. Leterrier has exercised particular license here when one takes into account the (startling) fact that Perseus is not associated with any sexual partners, male or female, other than Andromeda in the mythical tradition.<sup>11</sup> We will discuss the reason for Leterrier's choice in this regard a little later.

But it is a more profound difference between the two films on which I want to focus: namely, the sustained meditation on the liminal status of Perseus in the remake.

At the end of the 1981 *Clash*, we are invited to listen in on a heavenly conversation about Perseus:

- THETIS:       What if there were more heroes like him? What if courage and imagination became everyday mortal qualities? What will become of us?
- ZEUS:         We would no longer be needed. But, for the moment, there is sufficient cowardice, sloth and mendacity down there on Earth to last forever.

The gods have great power over humans, and yet they are totally reliant on continuation of human worship to retain their relevance. The sense of divine insecurity implicit in this conversation is picked up in the 2010 *Clash*, which – in opposition to Zeus' final assessment – presents a world in which one man, Perseus, does indeed stand up to the gods and provide the ultimate challenge to their sense of self-importance. Centring not so much on his mythical exploits, the 2010 *Clash* demonstrates an intense psychological interest in Perseus' status as a demi-god, the two pathways of life that subsequently open up to him (divine or mortal), his negotiation of these pathways and, ultimately, the triumph of his human, mortal side. Indeed, Leterrier's careful choice of lead actor for the film should lead the informed viewer to expect this sort of storyline. Sam Worthington, who plays Perseus, has already established himself as an actor who plays characters faced with a choice between human and 'supernatural' existence, between man and machine in *Terminator Salvation* (2009) and, more famously, between human and blue humanoid Na'vi in *Avatar* (2009).

#### GOD, MAN, AND IN-BETWEEN IN *CLASH OF THE TITANS* (2010)

Leterrier's film presents, for the most part, a clear-cut distinction between the mortal and divine worlds ... and it is the gods who fare worse in any comparison.

The film opens with a kindly mortal fisherman (Spyros) who takes in the abandoned child Perseus after he has been found in the seaborne casket in the arms of his dead mother. The young Perseus' first appearance in the film sees him looking up towards a stormy sky (unbeknownst to him, towards his father's lightning) and questioning his identity in light of his adopted status. He is reassured by the fisherman that he will always be the boy's father, irrespective of bloodline. This bonding is reciprocated by the young Perseus: when Spyros later predicts that Perseus is destined for some greater purpose, Perseus softly comments "I have everything I want, right here", as the camera focuses lovingly on the unity of the mortal family – father, mother and daughter – as they huddle together in sleep on the fishing boat.

It is important to note already the extent to which this storyline is influenced by modern psychological concerns rather than Greek myth. First, this is the only version of the myth in which Perseus' mortal mother

Danaë dies en route in the casket: in other versions she not only survives but goes on to experience a problematic amorous encounter with Polydektos, the king of Seriphos.<sup>12</sup> In the 2010 *Clash*, then, Perseus' entire family is adopted, an unprecedented change to the myth which renders more acute our hero's central concern with his identity. It advances the relationship between Perseus and his newly adopted fishing family in a thoroughly modern psychological manner: the young Perseus, born into a new secure and collectivist (fishing) community, gains a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to family which will carry through into later life.<sup>13</sup> This strong psychological charge is absent from the 1981 *Clash*: though we see glimpses of a fishing community, this merely acts as a backdrop to the continuing relationship between Perseus and his real mother Danaë.

Coming back to the 2010 *Clash*, we can see that a very positive view of humanity is advanced from its outset. At the same time, however, the benevolence of the gods is called into question by Perseus' adopted father. He confesses that he has never understood the gods, and a prolonged period of unsuccessful fishing leads him to question the point of praying to them. The fisherman's simple, moral character commands authority and creates sympathy for mankind against the gods.

This impression appears to be complicated in the next scene, when a huge statue of Zeus is seen being pulled down from a cliff by soldiers from Argos. This may be felt to reflect badly on (impious) humans. However, the scene might, for a western audience, carry powerful and positive contemporary overtones of the celebration of liberty from oppression, if one thinks most famously of the iconic visual image of jubilant Iraqis toppling the huge statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2003: it is worth noting, in particular, the fact that in both events, the statue's feet remain in position as the main part of the body topples.<sup>14</sup>

Be that as it may, this act is certainly taken as a divine slur by Hades, who wreaks vengeance by killing the Argive perpetrators. But crucially, on his return to the earth's core, Hades also takes Perseus' innocent family mercilessly with him. Hades' divine retribution has not distinguished between guilty and innocent, which has the effect of restoring our sympathy for the mortals, even if it had been momentarily lost by the impetuous actions of some of its number. This portrayal of divinity stands in marked contrast to the 1981 *Clash*, in which the gods adhere to a fairly strong moral code: for example, Acrisius' crime is immediately punished with the release of the Kraken on Argos; Calibos and Andromeda suffer because of mortal sin, their own or that of their parents respectively. A similar moral code guides the gods in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963): Jason may be tested, but direct suffering is typically reserved for wrong-doing mortals such as Hercules and Phineus. In this way, the Harryhausen pantheon responds to the audience's Judaeo-Christian expectations of a benevolent divinity.<sup>15</sup> At no point in these Harryhausen films are the gods seen as wilful punishers of the innocent as they are in the 2010 *Clash*.

Perseus is now resolved to act against the gods, especially Hades, and although he learns from Hades that Zeus is his father, he refuses on several occasions to take a place among the gods as is offered him by virtue of his semi-divine status. Consistent with Perseus' viewpoint, heaven leaves an unfavourable impression throughout the film. Leterrier's divine court harbours cold individuals, centred around an atmosphere of inter-family strife between Zeus and Hades, neither of whom is portrayed significantly more favourably than the other. These gods impose their hierarchy on mortals, who are quite literally pawns, visualised by the terracotta statuettes of mortals that litter the divine court and its alcoves. This negative impression of the heavenly court is much more pronounced than in the 1981 *Clash*, where there is greater engagement between the gods to reveal a more humorous, sympathetic side to their character: for example, Thetis jokes with other deities about Zeus's disguises, and Athena is seen to show compassion for her owl, Bubo.<sup>16</sup>

In marked contrast to the gods, Perseus rejects hierarchical structures and carries on the mantle of his adopted father by taking in and providing leadership for those who are different from himself. In the earthly stories of gladiators in *Spartacus* (1960) and *Gladiator* (2000), the benevolence of the hero was enhanced by his ability to establish bonds across cultures, as both form close alliances with a black slave.<sup>17</sup> With this modern heroic desideratum transferred to the mythical sphere, Perseus is seen breaking down barriers between not just different types of men (soldiers and charlatans) and men and women (Io), but also man and

monster (the 'undead' Jin). This provides a distinct contrast with the 1981 *Clash*, in which Perseus leads a more traditional and colourless band of male mortal soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

Perseus' intention to pursue a mortal life at all costs is also visually and symbolically reinforced by his refusal to take up the sword that Zeus sends down to him: "I can do this as a man", he says resolutely. This stands in marked contrast to the divine gifts bestowed in the 1981 *Clash*, which Perseus has no hesitation in taking up and using to his personal advantage, especially the helmet of invisibility, which enables him to look upon Andromeda and capture Pegasus. There is even a piece of direct filmic intertextuality when Perseus quizzically picks up a mechanical owl from the stash of weapons in the palace -- a divine gift taken straight from the 1981 *Clash* which Harryhausen's Perseus had used to lead him to the witches and aid him in the ultimate battle with the Kraken. Our more earthly 2010 Perseus leaves this divinely-inspired contraption behind, opting instead for a trusty, mortally-wrought sword.

Perseus' concerted decision to pursue a mortal lifestyle does, however, carry significant risks. He manages to survive various life-threatening encounters, but only with difficulty and only thanks to the company that he has helped to build: Draco saves him from Acrisius, Io saves him from the scorpions, while the Jin saves him from its fatal venom (after Perseus had refused to pray to Zeus for help). Most tellingly, and with an ironic nod to the ancient tradition that endowed Perseus with winged sandals, our mortal hero even suffers the (human) wardrobe malfunction of a broken sandal strap during a four-day hike to reach the Stygian witches!<sup>19</sup>

But other characters try to persuade Perseus to embrace his divine side for the good of the group. Draco, who had already surmised from Perseus' speed at learning sword-fighting that he had a god within him, later accuses him of jeopardising the lives of men by refusing to embrace his divine skills and weaponry: "you are not just a man", says Draco, to which Perseus defiantly replies, "I choose to be". It is only when Acrisius wounds Io that Perseus is prompted to use the divine sword given to him to defeat his enemy. Acrisius' dying words beseech Perseus not to become one of the gods. Perseus, it would seem, has inevitably reached his crossroads -- does he go back to being just a man or does he continue to embrace his status as a superior being?

It is Io, ultimately, who encourages Perseus to think more broadly about the range of choices he has: "You are not just part man, part god -- you're the best of both". From this point, Perseus comes to realise that he can acknowledge his divine skills and attributes but exercise choice in directing them to the service of humankind rather than to imposing hierarchy and power over it. This helps him to secure the Gorgon's head and make use of Pegasus (whom we are told no mortal can ride), all of which directly benefits humanity in the form of rescuing Andromeda.

Perseus comes, then, to represent a liminal figure between the mortal and divine worlds, albeit with a consistent leaning towards his human side. By the end of the film, he has rejected both obvious pathways open to himself. Not only has he refused a position in heaven,<sup>20</sup> but he has also rejected a position of hierarchy in the mortal world -- kingship in the court of Cepheus -- in marked contrast to the ancient tradition and the 1981 *Clash*. In its place, Leterrier presents a hero who rides off into the distance, seemingly comfortable at last in his semi-divine status and his own choices within the two categories: one envisages him enjoying a mortal existence and using his powers to help other mortals -- an impression duly taken up in the sequel, *Wrath of the Titans* (2012). The 1981 *Clash* had ended with visual confirmation that Perseus, along with other players in the story, will become constellations. Leterrier has omitted any reference to such future divine trajectory for the hero, an entirely appropriate move in light of Perseus' consistent resistance to divine space and his embracing of the mortal world.<sup>21</sup> In its place, Leterrier interjects a conversation between Perseus and his divine father in which Zeus commends his son on his humane choices; this ends with a compliment that reverses the usual hierarchy, as Perseus offers ironic praise to his father: "that's almost human of you".

This downplaying of the natural hierarchy of gods and mortals is also visually expressed by the fact that gods and mortals share the same physical space and take on the same proportions in Leterrier's film. Zeus

appears to Perseus twice on earth in regular human size, as does Apollo in one of the many scenes deleted from the final version. In a similar vein, it is noticeable that Perseus' semi-divine status is in no way differentiated visually from other mortals, a far cry from an earlier cinematic tradition which depicted the screen demi-god as a muscle-bound hero.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, in the 1981 *Clash*, strong emphasis is placed on the awesome size of deities compared to mankind: note in particular the scene in which Thetis scoops up Perseus with her hand to transport him to another city. In this context, contact between gods and mortals takes place on a more supernatural level: a speaking statue of Thetis and Zeus' appearance in the gleam of Perseus' shield. Likewise in Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), Jason becomes a small figure when transposed to heaven, and his contact with Hera is always supernatural, typically via the figurehead attached to the Argo.<sup>23</sup>

Taking into account these underlying thematic priorities enables us to understand more clearly the reasons behind Leterrier's major mythical deviation which we mentioned a little earlier. Why does Perseus choose Io over Andromeda? Andromeda is a fully mortal woman, whereas Io informs us that she has taken on the divine quality of agelessness, a curse from a god for refusing his sexual advances.<sup>24</sup> Io, then, occupies the same liminal space between human and divine as Perseus, and as mentor and lover provides a more fitting life companion for our hero than Andromeda: in Io's own words, "There are gods and there are men – and there are those of us who are in between".

## ANCIENT DEMI-GODS AND CONTEMPORARY LIMINAL EXPERIENCES

It is perhaps the greatest irony of Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* that the producer has used the fantastical world of gods and monsters as a backdrop for articulating a very personal and inner struggle of a demi-god. In fact, in terms of its thematic priorities and narrative trajectory, our film shares the greatest affinity with Disney's *Hercules* (1997). Disney's Hercules shares Perseus' predicament of being a mortal with godly attributes, and as he faces social stigma because of his supernatural strength, Hercules gains a similar passion to learn who he really is and where he belongs. On finding out that Zeus is his father, and in marked contrast to Perseus, Hercules aspires to a life in heaven, a route open to him as soon as he has proved himself a 'real hero'. In true Disney fashion, Hercules becomes a hero only after he has shown strength of the heart – in saving the mortal woman Megara – and is welcomed by the gods into heaven, only to reject it in favour of a life on earth with Megara, learning at last where he truly belongs. The hero's trajectory in *Hercules* (1997) and the 2010 *Clash* is therefore quite similar, as both demi-gods come to terms with their identity and reject heaven to find fulfilment (with a woman) on earth.<sup>25</sup>

But there is no place for Disney's Christianised morality in the 2010 *Clash*, as its hero's struggles tap into a wide range of contemporary (western) psychological experiences that surround liminal figures who must negotiate their own identity. And I would maintain that the film encourages us to keep open a range of potential contemporary experiences, rather than imposing any straightforward mapping from film to social experience.

### i) BETWEEN GEOGRAPHICAL WORLDS: FOREIGNNESS, IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

First, it might be profitable to interrogate a little further the choice of actor for the lead role in the film. I mentioned earlier the ways in which Sam Worthington's previous major screen roles serve to prepare the viewer for a story involving split-identity. But is there anything to be noted in his status as an *Australian* actor? In the 1981 *Clash*, the imperious gods are played by English actors and actresses, as the heavenly court booms with the distinctly English stage accents of Laurence Olivier (Zeus), Maggie Smith (Thetis) and Claire Bloom (Hera); all but one of the deities is played by an English actor/actress, and the exception (Swiss actress Ursula Andress, who plays Aphrodite) has no speaking part at all. By contrast, the 'heroes' in this film (Perseus, along with his mentor Ammon) are distinctly American. This follows a popular paradigm of classical Hollywood film in recreating the American foundation myth of revolt against imperial British oppressors; see in particular Wyke (1997: 23, 71, 133, 139), Levene (2007: 389-94). The 2010 *Clash* presents a more diverse range of nationalities and accents in its cast – although the consistent villain, Hades, remains distinctly English in the person of Ralph Fiennes – but the choice of an Australian for the

lead helps to engender, from a western perspective, the view of Perseus as an 'outsider', as it taps into a recognised stereotype of the screen Antipodean. One thinks in particular of the success of the *Crocodile Dundee* franchise (1986-88) in popularising the depiction of the 'Australian abroad' as a solitary, innocent outsider; see especially Rayner (2000: 15-21, 94-6). The casting of Perseus as a more overtly-sounding 'foreign' individual may facilitate a connection with modern day issues of ethnicity and identity in a world of increased immigration and ethnic diversity within a single nation.

ii) BETWEEN WORLDS OF SEXUAL 'NORMALITY'

Secondly, any story which deals with an individual's negotiation of his special status has the capacity to be read as the sort of contemporary 'coming out' experience faced by people of diverse sexualities. The highly successful *X-Men* film franchise offers probably the most obvious commentary on the trials and tribulations of coming to terms with sexual identity. Conceived against the backdrop of the heightened (racial) prejudice of 1960's America, the X-Men have found big screen success in 21<sup>st</sup> century as a means of showcasing the progress of a diverse band of predominantly young 'mutant' individuals as they 'come out' to their special status, make their own choices about how to use their powers and interact with regular humans in a world of prejudice and social stigma.<sup>26</sup> The 2010 *Clash* plays a more subtle role within this discourse as we see a hero who, after a long period of refusing to embrace his 'specialness' in an effort to conform to the norms of human behaviour around him, finally achieves personal fulfilment by accepting all aspects of his make-up.

iii) BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH: RELIGIOUS SCEPTICISM AND PLURALISM

But the classical demi-god brings a distinctive element to the established brand of split-identity narratives: namely, he brings with him a divine element which is absent from the superheroes of graphical comic and science fiction. It is noticeable how popular the classical demi-god has been of late as a mythological subject around which to base a film: the last ten years alone have brought us Achilles (*Troy* (2004)), Percy (*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010)), Theseus (*Immortals* (2011)), as well as two chapters in the life of Perseus.<sup>27</sup> Status as a demi-god provides a privileged vantage point from which to reflect on the nature of heaven. Both Achilles and Percy do, with varying degrees of force, contemplate the morality and benevolence of the gods. Achilles is firmly of the opinion that it is one's own actions that count, and demonstrates visually his contempt for the gods by beheading the golden statue of Apollo at Troy. Percy Jackson, son of Poseidon, is critical of the gods' morality when he believes that it is their own lack of responsibility which prevents them from staying around to bring up their mortal children. This critical approach towards the traditional pantheon becomes a major focus of the 2010 *Clash* and reflects a 21<sup>st</sup> century age of increasing scepticism towards traditional divine hierarchies and a resultant religious pluralism and volatility. The film in fact presents the full range of religious viewpoints, from deep suspicion of traditional divine authority figures (see, for example, Perseus' mortal father) to the sort of fanatical devotion (in the form of Prokopion of Argos) that comes to represent any form of modern religious extremism.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, the demi-gods of ancient myth do not concern themselves with their 'special' identity, partly because what we might call 'conventional' parenting is a rarity for ancient mythical heroes, and partly because the exploration of the complexities in one's personal identity is a rather more modern psychological preoccupation. For contemporary western viewers, the negotiations of a demi-god, occupying two very different worlds, can act as a potent metaphor for a range of personal conflicts about the self that all of us face at some time or another, concerning race, sexuality and our place in the universe. Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* (2010) plays a noteworthy part in this popular trend of split-identity narratives, and in the process refashions a mythical character for 21<sup>st</sup> century to be more like us that we may at first realise.

FINAL VERDICT: A *CLASH* FOR OUR TIMES ...

The *Clashes* of 1981 and 2010 are clearly different from each other from a technological perspective, and the debate will continue as to whether CGI lends added vigour to the action or takes away the individualised charm that Harryhausen's mythical creations engendered. In this respect, I find myself in agreement with the

prescient words of Wilk (2000: 214-15): "It is, I suppose, only a matter of time before someone will make a movie in which the Gorgon is created via computer animation, but it won't have the soul of Harryhausen's Medusa." But it is the cultural shifts in the West from 1981 to 2010 which provide a more satisfying reason for the need for a remake, as the 2010 version speaks to a quiet revolution since the early 1990s which brings to centre stage negotiations of the self.<sup>29</sup> Thirty years have seen two Krakens released into two very different psychological worlds.

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<sup>1</sup> Oral versions of this paper were given at the 'Clash of the Titans' colloquium in Nov 2010 (Leeds) as well as the 'Animating Antiquity' conference. I am grateful to the audiences at these papers, as well as the anonymous reader for the Open University, for their comments and suggestions. I am particularly grateful to Penny Goodman and Emma Stafford for their detailed comments on an earlier written version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Definitive answers to the question of Ray Harryhausen's sources for classical mythology are not possible: Tony Dalton informs me that Ray himself can no longer remember.

<sup>3</sup> See further Le Boeuffe (1977: 127-8).

<sup>4</sup> See Harryhausen and Dalton (2008: 116). For the influence of the tradition of the Kraken on the film, see esp. Wilk (2000: 211). In the other major film of 2010 to deal with the Perseus myth, namely Columbus' *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, a more traditional line is taken when Percy visits a museum and translates the words of a sculpture which read 'Perseus defeats Cetus'. It is tempting to interpret this as a playful 'correction' to the Harryhausen/ Leterrier tradition, delivered in the suitably didactic forum of a school trip.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lycophron, *Alexandra* 838-42: "the golden-fathered eagle, the winged-shoed liver-wrecker [i.e. Perseus]. The hateful whale will be slain by the blade of the reaper, its innards stripped out."; for the Corinthian amphora (6<sup>th</sup> century BC) which appears to show Perseus pelting the sea monster with stones, see *LIMC* Andromeda 1.1 with Phillips (1968: 1-2), Ogden (2008: 67-9).

<sup>6</sup> See *LIMC* Perseus 192. Our fullest extant accounts of the battle, in Ovid and Manilius, feature the hero attacking the sea monster with a sword; cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.720, 725, 734, Manilius, *Astronomica* 5.594, 608. Perseus' use of the Gorgon head during this encounter appears to be a later variation to the myth; cf. Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.354-60 and further Gantz (1993: 308-9). Robert Graves' influential 20<sup>th</sup> century compilation of Greek myths opts for the sword as Perseus' weapon (1955: 240).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.665-6, Manilius, *Astronomica* 5.592; see further Ogden (2008: 43). Note once again a 'correction' to the Harryhausen tradition in Percy's use of (albeit fashionable) winged sandals in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* 280-1; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.782-6, 5.254-9; Apollodorus, 2.42. See also Graves (1955: 239). The cinematic potential of this motif is realised, nonetheless, in a revised form, as Medusa's head now gives rise to deadly scorpions, an event which recalls the mythical introduction into Libya of snakes born from the Gorgon's blood (for which cf. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.1515-17, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.614-20, Lucan, *Pharsalia* 9.619ff.); see Harryhausen and Dalton (2008: 123).

<sup>9</sup> For a depiction of Perseus, equipped with Medusa's head, riding a horse that appears to be Pegasus, see *LIMC* Gorgo 310a = *LIMC* Perseus 166b (c. 450 BC); for the mythical connection between Perseus and Bellerophon, see also Gantz (1993: 313-16), Wilk (2000: 135-42), Ogden (2008: 60-2).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Euripides' *Andromeda* (frs. 125 and 136 *TrGF*), Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.672-7, Manilius, *Astronomica* 5.567-72.

<sup>11</sup> See Ogden (2008: 82). The sequel, *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), does however pay some lip service to the mythological tradition: with Io now dead, the film follows the growing relationship between Perseus and Andromeda, who is both queen and military leader.

<sup>12</sup> For the various traditions, see Gantz (1993: 300-4).

<sup>13</sup> See discussion below as well as the beginning of the sequel, *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), in which Perseus, some ten years on, is choosing to replicate directly the life of his mortal father by living as a fisherman and fathering his young son, Helius. For a not dissimilar psychological trajectory for the hero in the Superman story, see Rosenberg (2008).

<sup>14</sup> There is an additional intertext here, accessible to the video-gaming community, from Sony's *God of War*. For the deep-rooted influence of the video-gaming culture on the 2010 *Clash*, see Nisbet (2010), Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011: 220-1).

<sup>15</sup> For a similar Judaeo-Christian reconfiguration of the classical pantheon in filmic adaptations of the *Odyssey*, see Roisman (2008: 320-5).

<sup>16</sup> The presentation of a cold-hearted and selective divine court may have been a late decision on the part of Leterrier, as several of the edited scenes from the film involve interaction between a wider range of deities, especially Apollo; see Faraci (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Produced against the backdrop of American black civil rights activities, *Spartacus* (1960) alludes to contemporary acts of racial prejudice and black activism and promotes through its (white) hero a model of behaviour for the contemporary viewer; see Wyke (1997a: 68), Cyrino (2005: 118-19). *Gladiator* (2000) is produced in a somewhat different climate, by which time the hero's multicultural sensitivity is an expectation, although there is some debate as to whether the relationship between Maximus and the Numidian Juba promotes equality or harks back to an age of racial hierarchy; see Rose (2004: 162-3).

<sup>18</sup> This change in warring personnel also bears witness to the growing feminist movement of the past forty years, which has had a profound effect on the mythical screen hero's female counterpart. In Harryhausen's 1963 *Jason and the Argonauts*, the traditionally fearsome Medea is stripped of all her sorceress' ways to fit the model of vulnerable female waiting to be rescued by Jason. Twenty years later, in the 1981 *Clash*, Andromeda has the strength of character to insist that she accompanies the heroes in their (male-oriented) quest, but she is subsequently left behind and positioned at a safe distance from any fighting (I am grateful to Penny Goodman for pointing out to me Andromeda's intermediary gendered position here in the 1980's). But in the post-Xena world (1990's), Io proves to be a female warrior who is at least as adept on the battlefield as her male counterparts; the same can be said of Annabeth in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010) and the more militarily-experienced Andromeda of *Wrath of the Titans* (2012).

<sup>19</sup> Although, as Sue Hamstead rightly reminds me, the depiction of a man with one sandal maintains an air of ancient heroic pedigree and menace, as it recalls the pose of Jason against which king Pelias was warned in an oracle; see Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 4.71-8, Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1.5-7.

<sup>20</sup> A point made less subtly in one of the many scenes cut from the original film, whereby Perseus travels to Olympus to hand back the magic sword; see Faraci (2010).

<sup>21</sup> Leterrier in fact opens his film with a starscape, as a voice-over (later identified as Io) announces that "the oldest stories ever told are written in the stars". But Io's story stretches from the dawn of time to Perseus' birth, crucially omitting any reference to our hero's stellar trajectory beyond his time of earth.

<sup>22</sup> For the tendency to cast award-winning bodybuilders in the role of the demi-god Hercules in 1950's and 1960's, see Wyke (1997b: 63-8), Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011: 70-3), Stafford (2012: 232-6).

<sup>23</sup> See also Harryhausen and Dalton (2009: 155), Blanshard and Shahabudin (2011: 140-3) and Llewellyn-Jones in this volume. *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010) presents an interesting combination of these two traditions when, at the end of the film, Poseidon appears bigger than Percy when he is acting as a god, but converts to Percy's size when the conversation moves to more earthly domestic, father-son concerns.

<sup>24</sup> In light of her commonly-attested status as a nymph, the ancients would naturally have thought of Io as immortal. The image of Io as an originally mortal woman for whom agelessness was later bestowed as a result of divine sexual advances suggests contamination with another ancient figure, Juturna; for Juturna's lament at the curse of her immortality, see Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.875-84. Once again, standard mythological tropes are reconfigured in the service of the film's central focus on divine immortality in their dealings with mortals. This thematic drive might also lie behind the decision to depict Medusa with a more beautiful face in the 2010 *Clash* in comparison to its predecessor: we are invited to sympathise with a wronged and metamorphosed woman, rather than to treat her as a barbaric entity. For the meta-theatrical dimension to Io, which picks up meta-theatrical ploys in the 1981 *Clash*, see Goodman (2010) and (2011).

<sup>25</sup> A similar earth-bound trajectory in the Hercules story is adopted by other, lower-budget animation versions of Hercules made around the time of Disney's production; for Golden Films' *Hercules* and Pulse Distribution

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and Entertainment's *The Invisible Hero Hercules*, see Lindner (2008: 44-5, 46-7). The motif finds its filmic origins in Francisci's 1957 *Hercules*; see now Stafford (2012: 232-3, 237-9).

<sup>26</sup> See *X-Men* (2000), *X2* (2003), *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009); for a psychological reading of these films, see further Lyubansky (2008), Clyman (2009). So enthralling is this general storyline that it has spawned popular TV dramas which centre on 'special' people negotiating 'normal' life: see *Heroes* (four seasons, 2006-10), *Misfits* (three seasons, 2009-11), and *Being Human* (three seasons so far, 2009-11), which brings a vampire, a werewolf and a ghost into a flat-sharing arrangement!

<sup>27</sup> Although it should be noted, in the case of *Immortals* (2011), that Theseus is not presented as a demi-god.

<sup>28</sup> See further Goodman (2011). The use of the classical world to comment on contemporary religious extremism finds its fullest expression in Amenábar's hard-hitting *Agora* (2009).

<sup>29</sup> The early 1990s appears to mark a noticeable increase in popular screen interest in split-identity narratives; note, in addition to those productions mentioned above, how science fiction TV has provided a particularly fruitful hunting-ground. Half-human characters such as Data (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 1987-94) and Seven of Nine (*Star Trek: Voyager*, 1995-2001) have to negotiate the unfamiliar world of human social mores before finding their own (valuable) place within it. Moreover, the Cybermen of *Doctor Who* are re-imagined, from unfeeling aliens in 20<sup>th</sup> century episodes to individuals who are distinctly half-human in 21<sup>st</sup> century renditions. It is tempting to point to the collapse of communism, and the ensuing struggle for national identity in the West, as a significant catalyst for the growth in such narratives; see e.g. Woodward (2004: 24). The use of the classical world to articulate split-identity narratives may, however, be at an end, if the two most recent films, *Immortals* (2011) and *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), are in any way representative: as mentioned above, *Immortals* rejects a semi-divine Theseus in favour of a hero who is fully human, and both films narrow the gap between human and divine by rendering all beings mortal.