

RAY HARRYHAUSEN AND OTHER GODS:
GREEK DIVINITY IN *JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS*
AND *CLASH OF THE TITANS*

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Of Hollywood I sing, and ask thy aid,
O Muse who ever Pope and Swift obeyed:
Fit subject for satire and moral scorn,
Yet source of wit, our age's greatest form,
Where cheap and vulgar profit motives strive
With grace and art, whose glories still survive;
Where petty men, giant egoists, hold sway
Who sometimes block, who sometimes pave art's way;
Mankind in small, writ large for all unfurled,
The glory, jest and muddle of the world!
Say then, O Muse, how we can comprehend
This moral aesthetic mix from start to end?

So begins Canto I of William Park's elaborate mock verse-history of American cinema, *Hollywood – An Epic Production* (2003). Taking on the meter of Alexander Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, Park calls upon the Poetic Muse, with her gift for lyrical compression and radical editing jump-cuts, to act as patroness of our age's most essential and influential art form. In evoking his modern Muse, Park presents himself as the film industry's Homeric bard, the memory bank of the myths and legends of Hollywood's Golden Age, although what he gives us, in fact, is less an Homeric than an Hesiodic approach to Hollywood history. Thus at the dawn of movie history he tells us there were the Titans of the industry – the Griffithses, the Fairbanks, the DeMilles. Then there was the Golden Age of the Gods – Valentino, Swanson, Gable, Garbo, Dietrich, Chaplin, Crawford, Davies. The Silver Age witnessed the dominance of the heroes and heroines, mighty mortals hanging onto the coat-tails of the greater gods – Garland, Monroe, Heston, Kelly, Brando. At the same time, foreign gods were imported into the pantheon – Lamarr, Brynner, Lolobrigida – diluting the divine *ichor* of the Golden Age. Now we are in the Bronze Age (or one baser) of Hollywood's life-cycle, with actors blaspheming the notion of divinity and merely masquerading as heavenly beings – Farrell, Jolie, Cruise, and Kidman are not the stuff of divinity when compared to the gods of the Golden Age.

STAR WORSHIP

The connection between the ancient conception of divinity and the mass appeal of cinema is not a flippant matter; in fact some film theorists have suggested that watching a film has certain similarities to participating in religious ritual:

We pay our votive offerings at the box office. We buy our ritual corn. We hush in reverend anticipation as the lights go down and the celluloid magic begins. Throughout the filmic narrative we identify with the hero. We vilify the antihero. We vicariously exult in the victories of the drama. And we are spiritually inspired by the

moral of the story... The depth and intensity of our participation reveals a religious fervour that is not much different from that of religious zealots. (Hill 1992: 3)

And at the centre of the film-fan's religious experience lies his or her passionate belief in the incorruptible divinity of the movie stars themselves, as Jackie Stacey's investigation into female spectatorship and Hollywood cinema demonstrates (Stacey 1994). She notes how female audiences of the 1930s and 1940s frequently expressed their connection to female movie stars in terms of 'devotion', 'adoration' or 'worship'; that is to say, through the discourse of religious veneration in which stars became goddesses and no longer belonged to a mortal sphere. Typical responses run in this manner:

Film stars ... seemed very special people, glamorous ... and way above us ordinary mortals.

Rita Hayworth was the personification of beauty, glamour and sophistication to me and to thousands of others... She just seemed out of this world.

They were screen goddesses – stars way up in the star-studded galaxy, far removed from the ordinary hum drum lives of us, the cinema-going fans.

The old cliché 'screen goddess' was used for many stars, but those are truly the only words to define [those] divine creature[s].

Stars were fabulous creatures to be worshipped from afar.

(Stacey 1994: 142-3)

The worship of movie stars as goddesses involves a denial of the self, a common trope of religious devotion. Here the spectators lose their identities and put up barriers between themselves and the objects of their devotion on-screen. The screen goddesses can only be viewed from afar, when they choose to show themselves, epiphany-like, on screen or in fan magazines which fosters an intense (perhaps homoerotic) bond between the idol and the worshipper.

The connection between the movie star and the god or goddess figure is easy to make; more recently, however, scholars have reversed the focus on the god/goddess/movie star image. Robert Parker, for instance, has noted that the Olympian gods "were marvellous figures; their deeds and their loves as fascinating as those of film stars" (cited in Lane Fox 2005: 52). Robin Lane Fox has taken the analogy further:

Like superstars, gods and goddesses were said to have made love occasionally to mere mortals, never better than Poseidon who swept his girl away in the folds of a purple wave. Like film stars, gods might love a boy (as Zeus loved Ganymede, or Apollo the hapless Hyacinthus) and their female lovers were not always virgins. Unlike film stars, gods always made their lady pregnant. If a god made love to her twice in succession, she had twins. But she was also commanded not to 'kiss and tell'.

(Lane Fox 2005: 52)

MYTH AND THE MOVIES

Despite this surface devotion shown to the gods of the silver screen, Hesiod would have found an important element missing in the religious experience of contemporary movie worship. Film, with very few exceptions, has remained a profane art form in a profane society which perhaps thirsts for the divine. Some Hollywood directors, like Cecil B. DeMille, recognized this and attempted to pour sacred wine into decidedly profane bottles. But this

ambrosia was not always to the taste of those who bought the tickets and consequently the movie moguls decided to be money-makers, not myth-makers.

Nevertheless, ever since cinema's infancy, myth – and Greek mythology in particular – has been a mainstay of cinematic output, in that films either incorporate mythological names or characters in their titles (*The Andromeda Strain* (Wise 1971), *The Poseidon Adventure* (Neame 1972), *Black Narcissus* (Powell 1947), and so forth) or else recreate episodes from Classical mythology. Jon Solomon estimates that there have been over eighty mythological movies made by American and European film studios to date, proving that movie producers are keen to mine the depths of Classical myth for screen materials (Solomon 2001: 101). The recent release of films like Disney's animated feature *Hercules* (Clements & Musker 1997) and the blockbuster *Troy* (Petersen 2004) demonstrate that Greek mythology continues to play a significant role in the construction of ancient history in mass popular culture. As Martin Winkler puts it:

Ancient myths and archetypes recurring in films attest to the vitality of our own cultural tradition. Retellings of classical stories on film show that filmmakers have used the ancient material consciously in order to comment on their own times or that they unconsciously reflect cultural trends. Ancient myths can also provide instances of more or less imaginative entertainment. In such processes the classical sources may become imbued with a creative art and intelligence not readily apparent to a casual viewer. Openly commercial films set in antiquity, whose historical or mythological accuracy may leave much to be desired, can still reward a close engagement with their underlying qualities (Winkler 2001, 3).

Winkler identifies two types of cinematic approaches to mythology in film: a 'high art' permeated with 'intelligence', by which he refers to complex European art-house movies such as *Medea* (Pasolini 1970), *Phèdre* (Dassin 1962), and *Orphée* (Cocteau 1949) and a 'low art' film whereby the naive vision of mythology is dictated by commercial box-office necessity. Here Winkler no doubt alludes to the Italian 'peplum' movies of the 1950s and 1960s such as *Hercules Unchained* (Francisci 1959) and *Hercules, Samson and Ulysses* (Francisci 1961), which were big on muscles and mass-appeal, but low on budgets and historical integrity.

But this is too simplistic a breakdown, as Richard Buxton has recently recognized:

The enduring attractiveness of the ancient myths [is not] restricted to what [is] described as 'high' culture. If film, television and computer software are solid indicators of popular taste, then ... the popularity of films such as *Jason and the Argonauts* [and] *Clash of the Titans* ... and of the TV series *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* ... suggest that the decline in the cultural centrality of classical antiquity in most Western countries has far from extinguished the appetite for ancient stories. Such retellings should not be taken as a sign that the 'true meaning' of the myths has been forgotten or falsified. On the contrary: they are a sign of vigour, and should be welcomed as such.

(Buxton 2004: 245)

In this chapter I will explore how, between them, Harryhausen and Cross responded to Greek mythology and adapted aspects of its diverse output for the big screen. Rather than take on board the many and varied elements of their cinematic responses to the Jason and Perseus myths as a whole, I will focus here on how the two cinema artists visualize and utilize the Olympian gods (in many ways the starting point of this chapter), who play key roles in the films, as a means of assessing the filmmakers' appreciation and knowledge of original mythic and historical sources. It is not my intention here to show where the films diverge from received accounts of the ancient myths per se; instead I want to highlight how and why the Olympians are presented on film and to question how far their portrayals play with ancient conceptions of divinity (for which see, most importantly Sissa & Detienne 2000 and Otto 1954).

That said, it is important to have a brief synopsis of the films' plots, simply as a means of assessing how the gods are utilized within the narrative structures. What follows here are the very briefest outlines.

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS, 1960

Jason (Todd Armstrong) has been deprived of his kingdom by king Pelias (Douglas Wilmer) who, when Jason was still an infant, slaughtered his mother and siblings in the temple of Hera (Honor Blackman) at Corinth. The outraged goddess resolves to protect the child and gains the reluctant permission of Zeus (Niall McGinnis). When he reaches maturity Jason is brought to Olympus by Hermes (Michael Gwynn) and is told that he can regain his rightful throne by bringing home the Golden Fleece from Colchis. A ship is built by Argos (Laurence Naismith) and with the help of Hera, who appears as the ship's (misplaced) figurehead, Jason sets out with the Argonauts, including Hercules (Nigel Green) and Acastus (Gary Raymond). They encounter and defeat the bronze monster Talos, before imprisoning the harpies who have been terrorising the blind seer Phineas (Patrick Troughton). Jason and the Argonauts fight their way through the Clashing Rocks in order to reach Colchis and are saved from drowning by Hera who instructs Triton to save the Argo. Arriving at Colchis, Jason falls in love with princess Medea (Nancy Kovack), the priestess of Hecate. Her father, King Aeetes (Jack Gwillim) tries to prevent Jason taking the Fleece, but after killing the hydra which protects the Fleece, Jason and Medea flee the kingdom. Aeetes pursues them and sows the teeth of the hydra into the earth, whence spring skeleton warriors. With two of his men Jason fights and conquers the skeleton army before rejoining Medea onboard the Argo to sail towards their future.

CLASH OF THE TITANS, 1981

Zeus (Laurence Olivier) has fathered a child on Danae (Vida Taylor), whom she names Perseus. Her father, king Acrisius of Argos (Donald Houston) casts mother and child into the sea in a wooden chest, but they are saved by Zeus' interference. He commands Poseidon (Jack Gwillim) to release the sea-monster known as the Kraken, the last of the Titans, to destroy manhood. Years pass and Perseus (Harry Hamlin) grows to manhood with the help of Zeus and despite the complaints of jealous Hera (Claire Bloom). Thetis (Maggie Smith), angered when Zeus turns her son Calibos (Neil McCarthy) into a sub-human creature, transports Perseus to her cult-city of Joppa where he meets an actor named Ammon (Burgess Meredith) and falls in love with Andromeda (Judi Bowker), daughter of Queen Cassiopeia (Siân Philips). But Andromeda's suitors are required to answer impossible riddles or be killed. Having received several magical gifts from the goddesses Hera, Aphrodite (Ursula Andress), and Athene (Susan Fleetwood) and the god Hephaestus (Pat Roach), one night Perseus captures the winged horse Pegasus and flies to Calibos' lair where he learns the riddle that nightly he commands Andromeda to repeat. Calibos fights with Perseus and in the tussle, Calibos' hand is severed from his wrist. He offers the severed hand at the altar of his mother Thetis and demands vengeance. Perseus is betrothed to Andromeda and in a temple ritual Cassiopeia declares that her daughter is more beautiful than even Thetis. The already angry goddess is made furious and declares that Joppa will soon fall victim to the Kraken unless Andromeda is offered to him as a sacrifice of atonement. Perseus learns that the stare of the Gorgon Medusa will render any creature, even a Titan, lifeless, and so he seeks her out and cuts off her head. He returns to Joppa just in time to slay Calibos and save Andromeda from the Kraken. Perseus and Andromeda are married and immortalized in the stars by Zeus.

There is, however, one more film to consider here: a three-hour television version of *Jason and the Argonauts* (Willing 2000), produced by the Hallmark Entertainment company. This often sophisticated movie, with its intelligent script by Mark Skeet is a homage to the Harryhausen/Cross film that preceded it thirty years earlier, both in terms of special effects and the depiction of the gods. The basic narrative runs thus:

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS, 2000

The evil Pelias (Dennis Hopper) usurps the throne of his half-brother and marries his brother's wife, Polymele (Diana Kent). Her child, Jason (Mickey Churchill), escapes but returns years later as a young man (Jason London) to claim his royal patrimony. Pelias then threatens to kill Polymele unless Jason brings him the Golden Fleece of Colchis, where a dragon protects it. After Jason agrees to undertake a perilous ocean voyage to retrieve it, he assembles a crew that includes the mighty Hercules (Brian Thompson), the sporty Atalanta (Olga Sosnovska) and the musician Orpheus (Adrian Lester). On the long ocean voyage aboard the *Argo*, Jason overcomes many perils – passing through clashing rocks and fighting deadly Harpies – while Zeus (Angus MacFadyen) observes from the heavens and meddles in Jason's exploits, at one point employing Poseidon (Joseph Gatt) to hinder Jason's journey. But Jason is under the protection of Hera (Olivia Williams), who has vowed to aid him because of the devotion shown to her cult by Jason's mother. At Colchis, King Aertes (Frank Langella) forbids Jason to carry off the fleece, for it has long protected and sustained his realm. But he relents upon learning that the gods favour the youth. However, Jason must first prove himself by yoking a fire-breathing bull. With the help of the king's daughter, Medea (Jolene Blalock), Jason succeeds, survives further tests, kills the dragon, and returns with the fleece – and Medea. Zeus attempts to seduce Medea, but she spurns his advances. In Iolcus, Pelias gains control of the fleece, then sends 200 soldiers to kill Jason and his crew. But Jason kills Pelias, takes the throne and marries Medea. In Olympus Zeus and Hera are reconciled.

Ray Harryhausen has called Greek mythology “a rich source for fantasy projects and therefore stop-motion animation”. He has also noted that,

There are few other sources where you could find so many adventures, bizarre creatures and larger-than-life heroes. Most films in the genre, including the Italian sword-and-sandal epics of the '50s and '60s, had concentrated on the heroes, heroines and villains while more or less ignoring the creatures and the machinations of the gods. So I asked myself: what if we make a film that featured the creatures and the gods and used the humans to link the story? That was how *Jason and the Argonauts* was born.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2005: 99)

Aware of the liberties he and his fellow-filmmakers took with some of the key elements of the ancient myths, Harryhausen is nonetheless pleased with the final results: “I suspect the Greeks would have been pleased with what we did – even if the academics have not always been quite so impressed” (Harryhausen & Dalton 2005: 99). His paranoia about the academic credentials of the myth-movies are unfounded: after all Harryhausen himself has called Beverley Cross “an expert on Greek mythology” (Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 152). Certainly judging from early drafts of the scripts for *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Clash of the Titans*, Cross deserves the commendation. He investigated a myriad of mythic possibilities which could be incorporated into the filmic narratives before finally settling on the stories outlined above. Where did Cross find his materials? This is hard to answer. He left no notes which relate to his source materials and we must be alive to the idea that Cross, like many film artists and writers, derived source material not from ancient literature, but from handbooks, summaries, and intermediate works. Watching the films, it becomes clear that Cross' understanding and knowledge of the scope of Greek myth was extensive, but we can sense a meticulous comprehension of the minutiae of mythology in the more detailed aspects of his scripts, especially in scenes set in Olympus amongst the gods. There can be little doubt that Cross' conception of divinity as utilized in his movies and the subsequent re-working of *Jason*, derives from a thorough understanding of the epic approach to godhead, but whether this was lifted from Homer, Apollonius, or Virgil or for that matter Ovid or Apollodorus is impossible to say. All that can be said with certainty is that Cross' fashioning of the gods of the silver screen is modelled on predominantly epic forms.

I do not want to pronounce on the breadth of epic sources known and used by Beverley Cross and Ray Harryhausen: that is beyond the scope of a paper this size. One can probably read Virgilian, Ovidian, and Apollonian resonances in the films, and this might prove a rich area for

study, but here I will focus on Homer as the most prominent element in the filmic retelling of myths. This is logical, given the weight of influence Homeric epic had on all later retellings of the mythic themes (Dué 2009; Dowden 2011; Graf 2011; Létoublon 2011), for even the casual reader of Homer will know that the gods frequently intervene in human affairs, to such an extent that they can alter human behaviour and thought processes – imbuing a hero with courage, or limiting his desire for a vengeful frenzy of slaughter. This premise forms the basis for all later ancient reworkings of Greek myths as well as the filmic use of the gods, as the storylines cut between heaven and earth, showing the gods viewing, deliberating, or interfering in the lives of the on-screen heroes (Louden 2009). Yet to judge from the Homeric poems the representation of the gods is ambiguous – we are told that they are different from mortals in that they have no sense of earthly time, no physical bodies, and that they are terrible to behold. At the same time, Homer insists that they live lives remarkably like that of humans – they love, hate, suffer, even look like (admittedly beautiful) mortals, but have the ability to fly, become invisible, or conjure great strength (Slatkin 2011).

Cinematic interpretations of the gods delight in playing up these Homeric inconsistencies, and use the double-sided nature of Olympian divinity to augment the films' plots: gods are omnipresent and ever-watchful for the welfare of their mortal favourites, but they are simultaneously distracted from a specific action which often puts that cherished mortal into danger. In *Iliad* 14, for example, Hera seduces Zeus so that his attention will drift from his vigilant protection of the Trojan warriors, and his brief absence from his watching-post brings about a change of fortunes in the war. In *Clash of the Titans*, Zeus only has to turn his back on his beloved Perseus for an instant before Thetis is seen causing trouble for the vulnerable youth - as he sleeps, she reaches down from the sky and, with her hand, picks him up off his lonely but safe desert island and transplants him to her sacred city of Joppa: "It is time for chance to intervene", she declares, "Time you saw something of the world, Perseus. Time you came face-to-face with fear. Time to know the terrors of the dark and look on death; time your eyes were opened to grim reality. Far to the east, in Joppa, in the kingdom of Phoenicia." Thetis' malevolent action acts as the catalyst for the movie adventure to begin.

The 'us-and-them' ideology of mortal-immortal relationships becomes a vital element of the cinematic construction of Greek myth. But how is the polarity of powerful divinity and inferior mortality played up on screen? Filmmakers employ the full battery of cinematic armoury to create this opposition, which by and large follows Homeric models closely

OLYMPUS

The community of the gods live on Olympus, high in the sky – a space where time is unchanging (*Iliad* 1.497-9, 530; 8.199; of course one branch of the divine family, the Chthonic gods, live beneath the earth, while Hermes in his role as *psychopompos* – 'leader of souls' – can straddle both worlds; see Purves 2011b). That the gods belong by definition to a plane beyond that which mortals can touch or see is a given. If the gods decide to interact with men, disguised as beggars or nursemaids, or to move unseen among the battlefields of Troy, they do so only as visitors and always return to their Olympian home. Of course, that the physical mass of Mount Olympus can be seen from afar (it is even visible from Thessaloniki on a clear day) is another Homeric contradiction, for the folds of Olympus correspond to Heaven.

Interestingly, there is a clear development in the on-screen portrayal of Olympus between 1960 and 2000, in which the physical space of the home of the gods becomes increasingly abstract, reflecting, perhaps, the decline in the popularity of Christianity during the late Twentieth Century in favour of more esoteric spiritualities where formalized spaces for worship (churches, cathedrals) are of less importance as places of communal or personal religious devotion.

In the original version of *Jason and the Argonauts*, Olympus is envisaged as a vast, and essentially tangible, citadel with a monumental propylaea decorated with 'classical' friezes and flanked by immense white marble statues of Zeus and Athene opening up onto a gleaming white marble colonnaded hallway and a multi-levelled room constructed from giant veined-marble blocks. Ornate bronze lamps, chairs, footstools, cushions, and tables give the

impression of a lavishly furnished Neo-Classical stately home set amidst the clouds. This Olympus is very much a palace for the gods. Harryhausen explains his design decisions:

Olympus... had to look impressive and inspiring, but not cost too much, so we used a long-shot of [a] temple-like palace set where the gods are seen entertaining themselves, then combined that with a matte painting... We painted the set pure white with gold embellishments... As a final touch we later added in the lab an edge of mist around the frame.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 155)

The notion that this palace is otherworldly is strengthened not only by the misty edges of the screen frame but also by the camera panning upwards from the earth to the sky (usually passing through the clouds) as the story cuts from earth to heaven.

The same technique of aerial photography and cloud effects is utilized in *Clash of the Titans*, but here the realization of Olympus is more ephemeral. The establishing shot shows a mountain-top city of classical domes, colonnades, and pediments set against a background of an ethereal city inspired in part by John Martin's epic painting *Joshua Commanding the Sun to Stand Still* and in another part by Michael Gandy's early nineteenth century oil painting *Jupiter Pluvius*, and created in model form in one of the sound studios at Pinewood (Harryhausen & Dalton 2005: 18, 21). Working with the Production Designer, Frank White, Harryhausen recalls how

We created an Olympus that combined the look of paradise and a realistic dwelling for supreme beings, a reflection of the ancient Greek image of the home of the gods.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 265)

Externally Olympus appears to be a physically definable space, but on entering its halls all sense of logical scale and perspective evaporates. Zeus' throne room or council chamber is a vast, echoing, misty environment of immense proportions. Harryhausen explains that

We went for outsized columns (of which we could only see the bases), suggesting massive structures that could only be guessed at.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 265)

The set-dressings are radically modified and kept at a minimum when compared to the ostentations of Olympia in *Jason*. Here only huge circular mosaics ornament the floor; there is no redundant furniture and no superfluous décor, just vast empty vaporous spaces. The only necessary piece of set-dressing is Zeus' throne, raised on a lofty platform and decorated with golden lions and coiled snakes.

However, in keeping with the Homeric conception of Olympus being divided into specific areas, such as the bed-chamber where Aphrodite and Ares are discovered *in delecto* by Hephaestus and subsequently watched by the other gods (*Odyssey* 8.266-366), this cinematic heavenly mansion has many rooms too. Hephaestus, for example, is shown hard at work in his hot and dirty forge, just off-set from Zeus' throne room. Most importantly the same throne room has a semi-circular antechamber, decorated with archaic winged sphinxes, whose walls are pocked with hundreds of small niches containing terracotta statuettes of all the mortal inhabitants of the earth.

So in *Clash of the Titans* we are presented with a strange, non-descript, space made tangible by the clever use of divided spaces and rudimentary architectural indicators. None of this is encountered in the 2000 re-working of *Jason*, which opts for the most abstract presentation of the home of the gods. Computer animation affords a radical new vision of Olympus: the film opens in an expansive galaxy of stars and planets, the figure of Atlas upholding the flat disc of the Earth over which pour the waters of Ocean and out of which rise mountains and continents. A Zeus and Hera of cosmic proportions loom over the emptiness of space and the sky god, with a gentle wave of his hand, brings about the dawn of a new day – here represented by a diminutive fiery chariot of Apollo which traverses the screen (an idea possibly taken from Walt Disney's animated feature "Fantasia" of 1940). For much of the film,

however, Zeus and Hera are depicted in head-to-waist shots engulfed in clouds, usually in a split screen that depicts the diminutive mortal world below them. Their bodies blend into the hazy cloud formations, suggesting that the gods are not fully anthropomorphic nor is Olympus anything physical; the gods *are* Olympus and Olympus becomes corporeal in the figures of the gods.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM, TRANSFORMATION, AND METAMORPHOSES

For the audience to identify with the characters of the gods they are shown in human form. This is an epic tradition (Burkert 1985: 182-9). In Homer, with the exception of immortal *ichor* in place of human blood (*Iliad* 5.340; 16.459-60), the bodies of gods and mortals correspond entirely: their limbs are the same, their tissues and organs are identical (Purves 2011a). They groom and dress themselves like humans (Llewellyn-Jones 2011); in the *Iliad* we see that Hera's skin, like any mortal woman's, needs to be cared for with scents and oils (*Iliad* 14.170). Her white-armed beauty is not easily maintained.

The flawless bodies of the immortals are frequently depicted in Greek art, where the gods are usually given special attributes or costumes to remind the viewer exactly who's-who in the divine family: in the most simplistic terms Athene wears a helmet or carries an owl; Artemis has her quiver and bow; Dionysus his crown of vine leaves (Childs 1998; Woodford 2003). The on-screen gods are given many of the same attributes and wear costumes recognisably 'ancient Greek'. In *Clash of the Titans*, for example, all of the gods wear white robes, in imitation of sculpture, with slight variations to suggest character: Hera's head is veiled, Aphrodite's robe falls off one shoulder, Zeus wears a long-sleeved tunic beneath his *himation* in contrast to Poseidon who is bare-chested beneath his. As Harryhausen recalls:

[We dressed] the actors in white togas [*sic*], which were distinctly different to the humans' more earthy colours.

(Harryhausen & Dalon 2003: 155)

But cinema audiences cannot be trusted to recognize the signs spelled out through costumes and sets. Other methods need to be adopted to ensure that film viewers recognize different gods and, moreover, appreciate the essential qualities that individual gods incorporate. Therefore the on-screen image of the god and the movie star who plays the deity are often merged in the audience's subconscious in order to clarify the type of god being portrayed.

Harryhausen and his producer, Charles Schneer, got the idea of casting the Olympians with a bunch of international stars (Harryhausen and Dalton 2003: 262) and so in *Clash of the Titans* the phenomenon is knowingly played up to the film's advantage: Zeus, king of all gods, is hammed-up relentlessly by Laurence Olivier, king of all actors; Hera, his queen, is played by Claire Bloom, Olivier's leading lady at the RSC for many decades and something of a figure of elegant respectability in theatrical circles. The love goddess Aphrodite is the Swiss love goddess Ursula Andress, who like Aphrodite, arose from the sea in *Dr No* (1962) and set the world on fire. Thetis, the dry-witted sea goddess, is played to perfection by the caustic Maggie Smith (Beverly Cross' wife). Indeed, one of the major pleasures of *Clash of the Titans* is the preponderance in the cast of women who are 'of a certain age'. Claire Bloom, Maggie Smith, and Sian Phillips (as queen Cassiopeia) demonstrate effectively that it is entirely possible for female characters to be gorgeous, strong, and interesting *despite* being played by actresses over the age of twenty-five (in significant contrast, Ursula Andress does not speak a single line in the film, although off-screen, of course, she was – true to her Olympian character – conducting a passionate romance with Perseus).

The divine hierarchy of Olympus is therefore reflected in the casting of the characters, especially in terms of age and status. The gods 'frieze' in age to reflect their position in the Olympian genealogy: Zeus and Hera are depicted as the older generation, Athene is a young woman, Hermes a young man. The same principle is followed in the casting of particular actors in specific roles.

The clever work of the casting director permits an audience with limited knowledge of the Greek gods to immediately identify the character traits of the Olympians with the off-screen personas of the stars who portray them. To avoid any further confusion, however, the movies opt to show only a select handful of the many gods of the Greek pantheon: the remake of *Jason* depicts Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Apollo (briefly), and Eros; *Clash of the Titans* shows Zeus, Hera, Athene, Thetis, Poseidon, Hephaestus, and Aphrodite, while the *Jason* of 1960 highlights only Hermes, Zeus, and Hera (another clever piece of casting – with Honor Blackman as the Olympian queen). This movie stands alone, however, in depicting the wider family of the gods who are seen dotted around Olympus engaged in various leisurely pastimes and group together behind Hera and Zeus as curious observers when the mortal Jason is brought to visit them.

As an introduction to the gods in the 1960 version of *Jason*, Hermes, the messenger and herald of the gods, appears to Jason as an old man, a seer, who transforms himself into a god; the moment is captured in some rare surviving storyboard sketches: “The seer’s face becomes watery and is transformed ... into Hermes” (Harryhausen & Dalton 2005: 105). Harryhausen had some interesting ideas for Hermes’ transportation of Jason to Olympus:

In one of the early scripts Hermes, in the form of man, asks Jason to climb into his chariot, whereupon Jason witnesses his transformation into a god (but without any increase in size). The journey to Olympus is also interesting. With one pull of the reins the horses are transformed into unicorns and fire spits from the wheels of the chariot taking both Hermes and Jason into the sky. Sadly, the script was altered to save time and money, and we ended up with almost a straight transition to Olympus through a dissolve.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 155)

In the final film version, as he casts off his human guise, so Hermes grows in stature until Jason is dwarfed by the vast figure of the god. He places Jason in his hand and carries him heavenward before setting him down on a tabletop in the hall of the gods. Here the minuscule hero is examined by the giant figures of the Olympians who loom over him like curious children.

The parallel to this transformation scene is found in a famous passage from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (275-80), where the goddess casts off her restrictive mortal form and displays herself in all her divinity. As her golden locks fall around her shoulders, as sweet smells emulate from her robes, and light blazes from her body, so too she grows in size, dwarfing the frightened mortals at her feet. The Greek assumption that the gods are bigger than mortals is given wide rein in the movies. Both versions of *Jason and the Argonauts* play on this image, employing camera trickery to convey the diminutive scale of mortals compared to the massive proportions of the gods. Just as Hermes is shown, Demeter-like, in the process of growing, so too – and most famously – the (unnamed) sea god sent by Hera to aid Jason rises from the sea and towers above the Argo as he holds back the Clashing Rocks in order to secure Jason and his men safe passage. In the 2000 version, Zeus and Hera take on cosmic proportions as they recline on clouds and reach down to earth to physically interfere with the affairs of men: Zeus, for instance, dips his finger in the ocean and swirls the waters about in order to create a great storm. Poseidon is envisaged as a giant whose skin is formed by rocks and crags; he lies like an island in the calm sea until, angered by Jason and roused by Zeus, he stands up to his full height: the waters of the ocean reach up to his shins as he strides away, causing chaos in his wake. In *Clash of the Titans*, Thetis’ giant hand scoops the sleeping Perseus off his island home and places him down in the city of Joppa as her face appears in the moon and dominates the night sky. Why is scale an issue in the on-screen re-telling of these myths? In terms of *Jason and the Argonauts*, Harryhausen recalls that

Both the Art Director and I discussed how we could depict the actors as gods. We didn’t want to cut from the mortal world to the gods with barely anything to differentiate between them, so we decided to use a variety of images and designs to give the impression that the gods were truly omnipotent and dominated the world of humans. The obvious trick was to make the gods huge versions of humans. ... [Thus when] Jason arrives on Olympus in the hand of Hermes, he steps onto [a] board

game that Zeus has before him. For this confrontation with Zeus we built a full-sized board with oversized pieces on which [Jason] would deliver his lines upward, towards the camera, so as to appear as if he were talking to a gigantic Zeus. I used a travelling matte of [Jason], against yellow backing, of him with his back to the camera as Hermes places him on the chessboard. ... Combined with the gods looking down at him, it seemed that a tiny Jason is standing in front of them.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 154-55)

In addition to the stories of the gigantic scale of the immortals, Greek mythology is peppered with stories of gods shifting shape and metamorphosing into animal (or more abstract) forms; the seductions of Zeus are often played out against this background although Thetis is perhaps mythology's most advanced shape-shifter, morphing form from animal to reptile to fish in order to ward off the unwanted advances of the mortal Peleus (Forbes Irving 1990). However, this most fantastical of divine powers is (oddly) only infrequently used in filmic renditions of myth. *Clash of the Titans* uses the theme the most: Hermes takes the form of a sea bird (a common feature in transformation myths) in order to fly from earth to Olympus, and (more tentatively) Thetis' son Calibos is transformed on-screen (but in silhouette) from handsome youth to deformed monster, but otherwise there are no further on-screen metamorphoses. Allusion is made in the script, however, to Zeus' habit of morphing shape in order to seduce. Thetis, the most confirmed shape-shifter, leads the goddesses in criticising Zeus' womanizing:

Thetis: So many women, and all these transformations and disguises he invents in order to seduce them. Sometimes a shower of gold, sometimes a bull or a swan. Why, once he even tried to ravish me disguised as a cuttlefish...

Hera: Did he succeed?

Thetis: Certainly not!

Athena: What did you do?

Thetis: Beat him at his own game. I simply turned myself into a shark.

[*They laugh*]

As Harryhausen recalls, "Only Maggie Smith could deliver lines like that and get away with it" (Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 264).

EPIPHANIES

Closely related, in cinematic terms at least, to the notion of shape-shifting is the concept of the epiphany – the gods' appearances (through voice or physical manifestation; Burkert 1997) to mortals. Epiphanies have an irresistible draw for the film-maker since, like metamorphoses, they afford an opportunity for special effects and the furtherance of cinematic narration. They can take an overt form of display or a more subtle form of manifestation. A particularly popular tradition is that whereby an inanimate statue (or other artefact) takes on a living shape or else acquires the ability to speak. In the opening scene of *Jason and the Argonauts* (1960) the hero's eldest sister fleeing from Pelias' persecution takes refuge in the temple of Hera and throws herself at the feet of the *xoanon* of Hera, beseeching the goddess' aid. Hera appears on-screen in shadow, swathed in black veils and standing behind the statue, from whence she promises the girl help. While she does not inhabit the statue, she is identified as the power the statue represents. Later, however, when Jason builds the *Argo*, he places a similar wooden image of the goddess at the stern of the ship. This time the goddess' essence enters into the statue and animates it: Hera's great ox-eyes open and her voice, heard (at first) only by Jason and the audience, resonates from within the painted figurine. This conceptualisation of Hera caused Harryhausen some disquiet:

The Hera figurehead, located at the stern of the vessel, was designed so that the eyelids opened and the eyes moved, but I drew back from making the mouth move, as I felt most audiences would liken it to a ventriloquist's dummy, and it would then become borderline comedy. In the end we decided that Hera would communicate with Jason in his mind.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 153)

In *Clash of the Titans*, when Calibos enters the temple of Thetis and prays before an enormous white marble seated statue of his goddess-mother (“Beg your beloved lord Poseidon to let loose the Kraken”, he pleads), she responds to his prayer by appearing in the statue – a projection of Maggie Smith’s animated features thrown onto the white face of the statue. Later, when angered by Cassiopeia’s insistence that Andromeda is “even more lovely than the goddess Thetis herself”, Thetis smashes her cult statue, and the huge stone head, collapsed from its body, rolls forward to become animated once more as Thetis threatens to destroy the kingdom of Joppa unless it sacrifices the virginal Andromeda to the Kraken:

Hear me, vain and foolish mortal woman: you dare compare your daughter’s beauty to mine, and in my own sacred sanctuary? You will repent your boast and the cruel injury you have inflicted on my poor Calibos. ... For the insult you have given me, I demand the life of Andromeda!

And with that the statue collapses and the gods reveal their real powers.

Even Zeus opts to show himself to mortals: in *Clash of the Titans* he appears to Perseus reflected in the gleam of a golden shield, a gift to the hero from the gods. “Who are you?” asks Perseus. But Zeus gives nothing away: “Find and fulfil your destiny” is all he has to say, leaving it up to the wise old Ammon to comment, “The gods indeed move in mysterious ways”. In the *Jason* of 2000 his epiphany to Medea takes the form of a dream in which he transports the girl to an ‘other-world’ in order to seduce her.

In fact, the films use the device of dreams at several important junctures. In *Clash of the Titans* Andromeda’s dream-double, her spirit as it were, leaves her body each night and is taken to the lair of Calibos where nightly she learns a new riddle to test her suitors. Likewise, the adventure begins when, in sleep, Thetis visits Perseus and instructs him that his future lies in Joppa. Thetis also dictates the course of the story through her epiphanies in dreams. She declares:

If my son is not to marry [Andromeda] then no man will. My priests of Joppa are loyal. I will speak to them in dreams and omens. As my Calibos suffers, so shall Andromeda!

TIME AND SPACE

Filmic retellings of myth delight in playing games with the audience in terms of time and space. Film editing means that the audience can be transported effortlessly between mortal and divine worlds. Indeed, the on-screen frame can be blurred to incorporate two worlds into one shot: In *Jason and the Argonauts* (2000) for instance, long-shots show Zeus and Hera reclining within clouds which span across the sky of a Mediterranean seascape, and their limbs sometimes hang beneath the clouds, hands and fingers gently caressing seas or mountain tops. In the Harryhausen films, however, the physical demarcation of mortal/immortal space is more clearly defined. The gods are not omnipresent; they choose specific moments to examine (and sometimes interact) with mortals and therefore utilize a viewing portal over the mortal world. In *Jason* (1961), for example, it is a pool of water which serves as the viewing screen of humanity: Zeus and Hera are both seen gazing into the blue waters of the pool which shows them the action of their chosen hero on earth. In effect the audience sees the action from the gods’ point of view. But the audience is privileged in another way too – since they can observe the gods in action (without the gods’ knowledge) and thereby delight in the knowledge of the gods’ divine plans and machinations before the mortal on-screen heroes do. The cinema audience therefore has the ability to both eavesdrop on the gods and to witness the events of the story from their vantage point.

Similarly, the audience’s conception of time can be stretched and twisted. This is a strong feature of the myth movies, but not of Greek epic tradition *per se*. While Homer continuously establishes temporal connections to unite his poems to the world in which his culture is rooted, concepts of external time and inner time do not exist for him; only physical time

matters. He looks only at what happens outside in the bright, visible, concrete, unique, and real world so that the notion of an abstract time does not occur to Homer. There is no reference, therefore, to an immortal time, or of a time dissipation between the world of the gods and the world of men. The gods, immortal beings, ageless though they might be, do not operate within a separate time sphere; they share the same time scale as men. (The question of time in Homeric epic has been studied since antiquity: see Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451a 16-35; for modern discussions of Homeric epic and the concepts of time and narrative see Fränkel 1960: 1-39 and Bakker 2002: 11-13, 27-29).

In contrast, and right from its beginnings in the 1890s, the cinema has been obsessed with distorting the convolutions of time. When director D.W. Griffith proposed the use of flashbacks in his 1908 short film *After Many Years*, his wife recalled that panicky studio executives asked, "But how can you tell a story like that, jumping around in time?" (Schickel 1996: 56). Today, however, the cinema's tricks with time have become an accepted convention for its viewers; the movies have trained their viewers to follow the most contorted temporal patterns with such ease that it seems 'natural', and even the most routine films skip back and forth between narrative worlds (cross-cutting), and elongate or compress specific moments, as in films like *The Matrix* (Wachowski 1999), or even repeat incidents, sometimes from multiple perspectives, like the great Japanese film *Rashomon* (Kurosawa 1950), which looks at a single crime from several different perspectives. The dimension of time is important in any cinematic structure, and even some pop-culture films exploit cinema's ability to conjure with time to great box-office success; movies such as *Back to the Future* (Zemeckis 1985), *Terminator* (Cameron 1984), and *Peggy Sue Got Married* (Ford Coppola 1986) effectively play with cinema's ability to juggle conceptions of time and space.

The myth movies capitalize on the filmic twists of time to great narrative advantage, and one which highlights, moreover, the divergence between man and god. The idea of two parallel time scales running in opposition is highlighted towards the beginning of *Jason and the Argonauts* (1961). Having appeared (in mortal guise) to king Pelias, and having pronounced his future overthrow by "a man with one sandal", Hera returns to Olympus where she is chastised by Zeus for interfering with the affairs of mortals. She insists that her patronage is just and declares:

It will be twenty years before Jason becomes a man. Oh, an instant of time here on Mount Olympus, but a long twenty years for king Pelias [she gazes through the pool of water at Pelias on horseback]. He cautiously travels the roads of Thessaly. Yes Pelias, you have had years of watching and waiting for the one who must come to kill you. The man with one sandal.

Thus within a minute of on-screen 'real time' in Olympus, twenty years fly by for the mortal protagonists of the movie. The same convention is used in *Clash of the Titans*: as the voices of the gods are heard in conversation, an on-screen montage shows Perseus growing to his maturity – first as a toddler walking hand-in-hand with his mother on the sea shore, then as a young boy running and playing, finally as a young man galloping in horseback over the same shoreline. The time it takes Perseus to reach manhood (twenty years it would seem, like Jason) is encompassed by the time span of one brief Olympian tête-à-tête.

This incongruity in time helps explain the fleeting nature of the gods' interest in mankind: a lifetime's mortal toil is a moment's passing among the Olympians. At best prayer is a minor distraction for the gods. This explains Jason's lament in the 1961 film that, "the gods will not answer those who believe, why should they answer me, who doesn't?"

CONFLICT, INTERVENTION, AND IMMORTALITY

In Homeric epic one of Zeus' chief concerns is to keep the other gods in check and to continually reaffirm his divine leadership. This is not always an easy task. At the opening of *Iliad* 4 (1-84), for instance, Hera and Athene force Zeus to back down from his suggestion that the gods should put an end to the war (he ends up making an uneasy compromise agreement with his wife). Yet the respect the other gods have for Zeus is clear: they acknowledge the

fact that his decisions carry more weight than any of theirs. In film the same strain is placed on Zeus' powerful shoulders; he continually reasserts his authority, either with gentle coercion and good humour or with furious anger and bullying. In the *Jason and the Argonauts* of 1961, Zeus is the undoubted head of the pantheon and, when Hera decides to aid Jason's quest, Zeus is perturbed and suggests that she looks after the fate of Jason's infant sister, a role more becoming for a goddess. But when Hera insists that Jason will be her concern, Zeus condones that she may help the mortal on five occasions only and adds firmly, "That is my final word". Hera is an obliging wife in the 1961 *Jason and the Argonauts* (a role model for the Post-War women in the audience), but in the 2000 version the bitter Homeric-style quarrelling of Hera and Zeus has cosmic consequences. When they argue the skies darken, thunder rumbles, and storm clouds gather; when, at the end of the film they are reconciled and make love in heaven, the sun shines, the seas are calm and the earth is rich in colour, much like the effect Homer intended when the divine couple copulate on Mount Ida in *Iliad* 14. 291-360.

In *Clash of the Titans* the husband-wife relationship is of less interest than Zeus' interaction with the other Olympians – both as a group and as individuals. His pre-eminence among the gods is established visually, for only Zeus sits on a throne placed on a high dais. The gods attend on him as if in a formal court audience hall and as they look up at him on his throne they see lightening beams radiate from his head like a halo (the effect is created by laser-beams, a popular SFX in sci-fi and fantasy movies of the 1980s).

By and large, the gods obey Zeus' commands: when he instructs his brother Poseidon to "destroy Argos [and] release the Kraken", the sea god readily obeys. And yet Zeus, as we have seen, is the object of the goddess' smutty jokes and frequently has to contend with the gods' discontent. When he instructs Aphrodite, Hera and Athena to aid Perseus by bestowing gifts on them, Zeus specifies that Athena gives the mortal her pet owl. This instruction horrifies the goddess:

Zeus: It is my wish, my command! [Zeus leaves]

Athena: Never! Let great Zeus rage until even Olympus shakes, but I will never part with [my owl]

As a compromise Athena asks Hephaestus to fashion a mechanical owl as a gift for Perseus. It is a clockwork reproduction of her beloved Bubo which she bestows on the baffled Perseus.

In the Homeric epics the gods are very much concerned with human affairs. One reason for this involvement is the fact that many gods and goddesses who have mated with mortals have human children or human favourites participating in the Trojan War. The gods take sides in the war in accordance with their like or dislike of one side or the other. For example, Athene and Hera, who lost a beauty contest judged by the Trojan prince Paris, are fiercely anti-Trojan, while the winner, Aphrodite, dotes on Paris and favours the Trojans in the war.

This divine partisanship is highlighted in the myth movies too. Concern for their mortal offspring causes Zeus and Thetis to quarrel on several occasions, a conflict which, indeed, fuels the plot of *Clash of the Titans*. Thetis is adamant that laws of gender and hierarchy rule in Olympus and that while Zeus' philandering with diverse mortals and the subsequent birth of a clutch of infants may go 'unnoticed' in Heaven, the misdemeanours of any goddess leads to her chastisement. Thetis' crime of bearing a mortal child, Calibos, is punished with Calibos' own transformation from a handsome youth into a monstrous demon. Zeus, however, insists that Calibos was disciplined for a crime independent of his mother's transgression; he allegedly hunted and slaughtered Zeus' herd of sacred winged horses (only Pegasus remained). For this crime, Zeus declares, is Calibos turned into "a mortal mockery, a shameful mark of ... vile cruelty". Thetis weeps and begs Zeus to spare her son, but the king of Olympus is adamant: "This is my final judgement", he says. But when Zeus' back is turned, Thetis claims her right to avenge her son and her plan of action for her unrelenting torment of Perseus begins. Nevertheless, at the close of the film, and with Perseus' triumph over the Kraken, and over Thetis and her son, it is left to Zeus to gloat:

Zeus: Perseus has won. My son has triumphed!

Hera: A fortunate young man.

Zeus: Fortune is ally to the brave.

The interest and involvement of the gods in human lives have an important effect on the action of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The gods *universalize* the action of the poem. Because the gods take interest in human affairs, the events described in the epics are not just particular actions of little significance, but take on a universal meaning and importance that would have been missing without the gods. On the one hand, the involvement of the gods exalts human action. Thus, when Achilles in *Iliad* Book 1 considers killing Agamemnon, his decision not to kill could have been presented on a purely human level without the intervention of a deity, but we are shown exactly just how critical a decision it is by the involvement of Athena. Throughout the *Iliad* there is a tendency to present action consistently on two planes, the human and the divine. On the other hand, the gods also serve to emphasize the limitations of man, how short his life is and, quite paradoxically in view of the previously stated purpose, how ultimately meaningless human affairs are. The same justification for human-immortal interactions can be found in the myth movies. In *Jason and the Argonauts* (1961), the gods of Olympus spend their time meddling in the lives of mortal men, semi-divine offsprings, and favourites, who are depicted as clay chess-pieces to be manoeuvred by the likes of Zeus and Hera. When Jason is first brought to Olympus, as we have seen, he is placed on a giant chess board as a pawn in the great Olympian game. Although this has no Homeric (or later Greek) precedent, the rationale for the chessboard image is suggested by Harryhausen:

It was important to the story that the human characters feared the gods but also saw them as ... fickle by treating the mortals as chess pieces.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 155)

Thus, at the end of the film, with the Golden Fleece safely on board the *Argo*, and Medea's life having been saved by its magical powers, Zeus is able to say to Hera, over his chessboard:

For Jason there are other adventures. I have not yet finished with Jason. Let us continue the game another day.

In *Clash of the Titans* a similar, but more sophisticated device is used to show how the gods interfere with mortal lives: in the halls of Olympus one room contains, at its centre, a miniature arena with hundreds of tiny terracotta statuettes in niches all around the walls. These are the game-pieces which are taken from their recesses and placed into the centre of the arena by the gods. Each game-piece is made in the likeness of a human: Perseus, Calibos, Danae, Andromeda, and Acrisius of Argos each suffer a dramatic turn of Fate when their icons are placed into the arena. Like an ancient Greek magical *kolossos* or a modern voodoo doll, each terracotta statuette contains the essential life-force of the mortal being. Thus when Zeus decides to end Acrisius' life and to destroy Argos, he does so by taking the terracotta figure of Acrisius in his hand and crushing the clay to dust. As he does so, the audience is shown Acrisius in this throne room clutching at his heart in the midst of his death-throes.

Harryhausen has expanded on his decision to use the arena-motif in *The Clash of the Titans* in some detail:

As it was my task to visualize the story's events, I was conscious that we had to avoid the same situations seen in *Jason*, especially in the sequence featuring the gods of Olympus. After reading an early treatment by Beverley [Cross], I felt it required a transition between gods and mortals, similar to the chessboard used in *Jason*, which communicated to the audience that a deadly game was being played by the gods for the hearts and lives of the Greeks. I came up with using a miniature arena. Behind this 'arena of life' were niches containing hundreds of characters reflecting all the Greek legends. Zeus would put the figures into the arena, where the gods would

control their destinies. It was a vital tool in introducing the characters of our story, which is evident when Zeus takes the figure of Calibos and commands that 'He shall become abhorrent to human sight', whereupon the shadow of the tiny statue transforms into a monstrous creature. This tells you much about Zeus, and everything about Calibos, before the audience even sees him.

(Harryhausen & Dalton 2003: 261-62)

Yet despite the gods' control over the lives and fates of mortal characters, there remains in these films a sense of impending doom for the Olympians. Homer may not have conceived of an end for the gods, since for Homer the Olympians are as deathless as they are ageless; but for Beverley Cross writing the film scripts for *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Clash of the Titans* afforded him the post-modern opportunity to tell his audience that these gods, so feared and revered by the on-screen heroes, no longer exist. Their time has passed. Thus, in *Clash of the Titans*, Thetis, alarmed that Perseus has defied the will of the gods and has completed his task of saving Andromeda by his own mortal bravery, declares that he will set a "dangerous precedent". She continues:

Thetis: What if there 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.

So while human shortcomings remain, the gods will be needed – not to set the precedent for how life should be lived (for the gods of epic and of film do not set the model for a good life, in heaven or on earth), but to terrorise, inspire, and awe mankind. But should Zeus' vision of the future of the gods fail, he has one more possibility to ensure that, if nothing else, the legends of the Greeks will never be forgotten:

Zeus: Perseus and Andromeda will be happy together. Have fine sons... rule wisely... And to perpetuate the story of his courage, I command that from henceforth, he will be set among the stars and constellations. He, Perseus, the lovely Andromeda, the noble Pegasus, and even the vain Cassiopeia. Let the stars be named after them forever. As long as man shall walk the Earth and search the night sky in wonder, they will remember the courage of Perseus forever. Even if we, the gods, are abandoned or forgotten, the stars will never fade. Never. They will burn till the end of the time.

END CREDITS: THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

Given Zeus' confidence in the durability of the legends of the gods, it is sad then to acknowledge and lament the fate of *Troy* – the 2004 movie directed by Wolfgang Petersen (Winkler 2007). Reviewing the film in the week of its US release, the May 14th edition of *Entertainment Weekly* noted:

While [Brad] Pitt's character [Achilles] got tweaked, the rest of *The Iliad* went pretty darn Hollywood. Briseis, a slave girl captured by the Greeks – speechless in Homer's tale – becomes a royal priestess and love interest for Achilles... More notably, no gods interfere with battles in Troy. "I didn't want them in," says screenwriter [David] Benioff.

Yet the decision to eliminate the gods who drove the war was taken not out of any lack of respect for Homer, we are told: "[Homer] was such a genius in writing for his contemporaries with depth and poetry and the entertainment," Wolfgang Petersen says magnanimously. "[The *Iliad*] is very, very good. But I think if he would have looked down on us today, I think that he would smile and he would say: 'Take the gods out.'" Benioff, for his part, has admitted that "Zeus might strike me with a thunderbolt for leaving him out."

The editing out of the gods of *Troy* shows an astonishing lack of imagination on Petersen's part. He thought, he said, that they were "silly" and unnecessary to the plot. But the gods are central not only to the arc of Homer's glorious narrative, but to the symbolic heart of the *Iliad*.

To the Greeks, Fate was capricious, often unfair, and usually heartless: the good could perish miserably, and the bad could prevail. All that man could do was his best. His best hope was to be remembered well. And it is there we find the tragedy of Hector as he does battle with Achilles, son of the goddess Thetis: a battle he could not win, a battle against a man who was all but invulnerable, a man who was being helped by a goddess. And this tragedy is an echo of the tragedy that lies at the heart of the *Iliad*, the tragedy of the individual helpless before Fate. Thus, stripped of its tragic core, and its involvement with Fate, Petersen's pedestrian and pointless *Troy* never involves and never engages with its audience. We care nothing for Achilles, Paris, Hector or Helen whatsoever.

If Petersen thinks the concept of the gods "silly" he should have consulted the films of Ray Harryhausen who leaves plenty of room for the gods. The truly great myth movies – including recent made-for-TV versions – realize that the driving force behind the stories is the gods – their capriciousness, their irresponsibility, their shallowness, their cruelty. The cinema audience identifies so strongly with on-screen heroes like Jason and Perseus because we know that they are dealing with forces beyond our control, above our mortal capabilities. In this way, Jason and Perseus – heroes who never appear in Homeric epics *per se* – are given Homeric epic qualities on screen due to their direct involvement with the gods. The gods give the films their structure and force. Realizing this, let the final word go to Roger Ebert who, writing in the *Chicago Sunday Times* in April 1980 commented that:

Clash of the Titans is the kind of movie they aren't supposed to be making anymore: a grand and glorious romantic adventure, filled with quarrelling gods, brave heroes, beautiful heroines, fearsome monsters, and awe-inspiring duels to the death. It has faith in a story-telling tradition that sometimes seems almost forgotten, a tradition depending upon legends and myths, magical swords, enchanted shields, invisible helmets, and the overwhelming power of the gods.

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