

NEW VOICES IN CLASSICAL RECEPTION STUDIES
Conference Proceedings Volume One

“FROM GAMER TO ANIMATOR: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF ZEUS IN HARRYHAUSEN’S JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS AND CLASH OF THE TITANS”¹

© Stephen M. Trzaskoma, University of New Hampshire

Of the many films of Ray Harryhausen only two take their core subject matter from the ancient world, *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and *Clash of the Titans* (1981).² If we consider that both are explicitly mythic in their orientation, relate stories from the heroic legends of the Greeks, and also share a screenwriter in Beverley Cross,³ it will perhaps come as no surprise to find the later film in constant cinematic dialogue with its predecessor. From its opening scene, in fact, *Clash* reveals its indebtedness to *Jason*: both films begin with the hubristic actions of a wicked king toward a young woman and an infant. In each case the motif is derived from Greek source material, but in *Jason* the motif’s presence is less directly motivated by the emphases of the original legend.

When we consider the extant ancient sources on Jason, for instance, we find relatively little attention paid to the childhood of our hero or the threat that King Pelias represents to him in his infancy. Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*, without doubt the most important narrative account of the Jason myth and a model for much of the film, begins with Jason already grown to adulthood. Even a mythographic source such as the *Library* of Apollodorus, whose author is interested in encapsulating and summarizing the most important features of the myth, has no reference to Jason’s childhood aside from—if we are desperate to find one—an acknowledgment of his parentage (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.107). To be sure we can find the notion of a (vague) threat to Jason in the sources,⁴ but one suspects that the motif here, especially when combined with the motivation of a prophecy that the evil king tries to avoid, is imported either from knowledge of the various “hero patterns” developed over the last century and a half, or directly from another myth. The most likely donor myth is that of Perseus, which is of course the legend behind *Clash*—a curious coincidence that shows the two myths cross-fertilizing each other in the minds of Harryhausen and Cross from the earliest period.⁵ Such alterations to the source material, while somewhat disconcerting for those familiar with the ancient stories, must almost never been seen as accidents or the results of ignorance; Cross was well-familiar with the Greeks’ and Romans’ own versions of the tales, and Harryhausen has generally been open about the conscious decisions that went into altering them.⁶

The opening of *Clash*, in turn, though presenting a reasonably standard version of the casting of Danae and the infant Perseus into the sea, adds one element that does not belong to ancient versions of the myth: a scene of the destruction of the city of Argos by the will of the gods, which mirrors, in some sense—though it does not recreate precisely—the sack of the city we see at the start of *Jason*. The sequence of events is different, for one thing, but it is difficult to see how the story of a prophecy, the ruin of a city, a threat to a child, and his ultimate survival in one film can be imagined as unrelated to a similar story in the other simply because in one the threat to the child precedes the ruin of the city and in the other it follows upon it.

This sort of cinematic dialogue recurs in various parts of *Clash*, but as in the example above of the opening sequences, the relationship is never one of slavish imitation. So we can certainly recognize that *Clash*’s Poseidon sequences visually recall *Jason*’s Triton sequence, and our realization that Poseidon’s destructive release of the Kraken is very different from Triton’s saving of the Argo’s crew does not lessen the likeness, it only complicates it. Likewise, to return to the earlier example, the evil kings at the start of the films may both be evil, and both may find themselves addressing divinities in useless self-justification, but Pelias is trying to kill another man’s daughter and son and half succeeds, while Acrisius condemns his own daughter and grandson to no avail. The destruction of the later film’s city, too, can be seen to vary from its earlier model both, as I have mentioned, in terms of when it is accomplished in relation to the king’s actions (afterwards as a punishment rather than before as a necessary precondition) but also in how it is achieved (a Kraken-caused flood versus fire and sword).⁷

Harryhausen draws our eye to the tension between imitation and deviation. “As it was my task to visualize the story’s events,” he writes, “I was conscious that we had to avoid the same situations seen in *Jason*” (Harryhausen and Dalton 2003: 261). With subjects drawn from the same mythological tradition—with, in fact, many of the same divinities appearing in both films—and with the same

underlying visual aesthetic and many of the same themes, it would have been perfectly possible for Harryhausen and Cross to produce a self-congratulatory tribute to the earlier film consisting only of ineffective mimicry. Despite the inspiration provided by *Jason*, however, we almost never get imitation for imitation's sake. The most obvious point of contact in the visual storytelling is the divine apparatus and, in particular, the way in which action moves between the divine and mortal spheres and is visually mediated by the interchanging scenes of Olympus and earth,⁸ but I want to demonstrate in this essay that one of the later film's signal achievements is to use the ebb and flow of contrasting echoes with the earlier movie to enrich the narrative, both in terms of its script and its visuals.

The one element that seems to me central in this aesthetic is, in fact, the very way in which the relationship between gods and mortals is portrayed. It had occurred to me that *Clash's* miniature arena and figurines on Mount Olympus were a development from *Jason's* use of a chessboard on which the gods play with pieces that represent mortals. It was with some relief, therefore, that I found that Harryhausen openly acknowledges the relationship: "After reading an early treatment by Beverley, I felt it required a transition between the gods and the 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." Harryhausen speaks of the arena in rather utilitarian terms: "Zeus would put the figures in the arena, where the gods would control their destinies. It was a vital tool in introducing the characters of our story."⁹ Harryhausen elides a crucial distinction: the game board and the arena are similar, but only in *Jason* do the gods literally play a game; in *Clash*, the arena is a rather different device. In point of fact, as I will argue below, there is something of an elision here too in Harryhausen's characterization of it as an arena, for although it is freestanding with a circular external wall in the fashion of the Flavian Colosseum in Rome, its internal layout is very clearly that of a theater.¹⁰ Harryhausen does not have it wrong; rather he is not using the precise vocabulary of scholars, who carefully distinguish between amphitheaters (arenas, that is) and theaters proper. Moreover, he is interested here in the mechanical operation of the board and arena and rather underplays the nature of the thematic and narrative resonances they introduce into the two films. The fact is, however, that the building in *Clash* is not the location for games of any sort at all, whereas the game board in *Jason* is precisely that both literally and metaphorically.

Let us begin with *Jason*. A few minutes into the film, after the opening sequence of Pelias' hubris and its consequences, we have our first scene on Olympus. We see Zeus first among the gods, and he is looking into a pool of water, an effect that will be a recurring motif; it is how the gods track events on the world below. Important thematic elements are emphasized in the ensuing conversation between Zeus and Hera. Particularly prominent is the nature of fate and its relationship to the will of Zeus (a theme in mythological narratives since the *Iliad*), as well as the manner in which divinities interfere in mortal lives. Zeus assures Hera that Jason will avenge the violation of Hera's temple, but refuses to ordain more than that. "You must know by now," the king of the gods says to his wife, "I never arrange exact or precise details."¹¹ Divine control places constraints on human actors, but there is nevertheless room for mortals to manoeuvre. In this case, Hera wishes to guide Jason (and, on another level, the film's narrative) to success not because she doubts the outcome, but because she wishes to ensure that there are no further unforeseen consequences to her immediate interests. To prevent that outcome from being too foregone and boring a conclusion, Zeus agrees but places constraints on Hera. Although the game board has not yet been seen, from this moment the notion of gamesmanship will become an important touchstone in the film. Hera and Zeus will play a game with the mortals' lives, one with strict rules. Hera may help her team—Jason, that is—no more than five times. The king and queen of the gods then return to the pool and watch events unfold.

The gods play a double role in the narrative of *Jason* that this scene neatly encapsulates. On the one hand they are theoretically the all-powerful drivers of the events that make up the lives of the mortals below, but they normally do not intervene directly or shape events in detail. This apparent restriction is by choice, and Hera happily accepts the challenge of Zeus' limitations. And in terms of motivation, they engage in the world of mortals only for their own reasons—here, Hera is most vexed at the profanation of her temple—and only as a sort of game. At the same time, their distance from the everyday world of mortals and Zeus' refusal to allow regular intervention renders them mere spectators of events that they passively watch unfold. Hera's active role is unusual and restricted to a specifically ludic context—the game, and the limitations on her intervention mean that she too, along with the other gods who gather around the pool, will frequently function as a part of the audience of mortals' lives.¹²

This multiplicity of roles for the gods creates logical and narrative conundrums for several characters within *Jason*, but especially for Hera. Zeus has already declared that Jason will avenge Hera, so why must she help the hero in the first place? And the game is ill defined from the start: it has rules, but what sort of game is it when both players are trying to bring about the same outcome? In other words, what does winning mean in a game like that? It is the success of the visual aspects of the Olympian scenes that goes the furthest way toward plastering over the tensions that arise from the inconsistencies. We see Zeus and Hera playing a game, that is, actively “playing with mortal lives” from atop Olympus, sometimes sitting down at a literal game board, now see her interfering directly in the human world, and now see the pair with the rest of the divine family watching a reality television program from the comfort of a particularly opulent living room. Each set of visual cues aligns neatly with Hera’s actions at any particular moment and provides a consistency that does not necessarily withstand scrutiny at the level of logical storytelling. In the end, what unites the various divine roles is the emphasis on entertainment: whether they are playing a game with mortals on a board or watching mortals act out their lives on the “screen” of the magic pool, the gods are providing themselves with relaxation and amusement.

The visual equivalence of divine entertainment and human action is emphasized again very shortly in *Jason*; for after a bit of further action in the world below, we return to Olympus, where Hermes has brought Jason. We first see Zeus and Hera at their game with the board, and the discussion is explicitly ludic:

HERA: You win, my Lord. That is, the battle. Not the war. [*She moves two ships onto the board*]
 ZEUS: Oh, those waters are far too shallow for galleys. Hera, my dear, you really must learn to win without cheating. Or at least to lose gracefully.

So we have winning, losing, and cheating. The last is of some interest because one cannot have cheating without rules, and, as we have seen, Zeus has set the rules by which Hera must play. Or has he? There is a possibility that Hera has *already* cheated. If we return to the earlier scene in which Zeus stipulates that Hera may help Jason five times, one can see a peculiar smile on Honor Blackman’s face when she answers Zeus’ question about how many times Jason’s sister Briseis called upon her “by name.” It may be a simple matter of continuity, but in the scene in question, Briseis in fact uses the goddess’ name only once. Moreover, while Hera seems to stick strictly to the “five times” rule, she stretches it whenever she can (by answering two of Jason’s questions with one answer, for instance), and her final aid—the ambiguous scene with Triton and the Clashing Rocks—occurs after she has expressly told Jason that she can help him no more.

To return to the first scene with the game board, once Zeus has introduced Hera’s cheating, Hermes arrives a moment later and Zeus genially complains about a missing piece. The messenger god produces that piece—Jason, who is scaled to the size of the game board and stands on it among the other game tokens. So there is a literal equivalence: Jason is a pawn in the game and the board is the mortal world.¹³ What this scene really achieves, however, is to allow Honor Blackman’s Hera to explain the rules to Jason so he knows what sort of game he is a piece in. His response is to hold games of his own, calling the heroes of the Greeks to compete for a place on his crew. But these games are not just to man the *Argo*: they are further entertainment for the gods to watch on their flat screen, just as the whole voyage will be.

The gods enjoy themselves in a way that emphasizes the difference between themselves and mortals. While the mortals and gods alike celebrate the selection of the crew, Zeus reveals to the smiling Olympians that Hylas will come to a bad end, and after the ship is launched and the mortals begin to suffer, the gods continue to be amused onlookers, as we see only a few minutes later in the film. Later, as the Argonauts face the Clashing Rocks, the film recalls and clarifies the way in which the gods derive entertainment from the viewing of mortals. First, we watch another ship destroyed, and then we see the *Argo*’s crew ready themselves for the apparently impossible passage. “There’s no turning back on this voyage,” Jason says, but this is not a statement of heroic bravado. A moment later he explains bitterly why the journey must continue: “The gods want their entertainment.” We immediately cut to a shot of the gods’ viewing pool, and we hear Zeus’s voice: “Jason goes too far.” But Jason is correct, and Hera confirms it as she turns away from the sight on her screen: “Because he speaks the truth when the gods themselves go too far?”

Our view shifts back to the *Argo* long enough to see the Clashing Rocks close in on the ship. “We’re trapped,” Argus says to Jason, and then we the viewers are suddenly back on Olympus, where we hear Zeus speak: “Trapped, Hera.” The king and queen of the gods are now no longer at their screen but hunched over their game board. The rapid switch in locations and the intertwined dialogue of mortals and gods shows the correspondence of divine game playing and mortal lives and blurs the distinction between them. This uncertainty of agency is reinforced by another twinning of action and dialogue. Hera acknowledges Zeus’ move in the game: “It seems so. You’ve left me only one move.” She then moves Triton onto the board. Down below, where our view is transferred to again immediately, Jason too makes the only move available to him and also “plays” the Triton figurine (which looks the same as the gods’ game pieces) that Phineas had given him earlier. We end up, then, with something of a muddle, with no clear idea of who is responsible for saving the ship. Jason? Hera? Both? And if both, in what proportion? And once more we have the somewhat unclear connection between divine game and spectatorship joined together in the hunt for entertainment. But this is storytelling, not theology, and the visual effects match the action so well that most viewers would not have felt much of the dissonance.

Jason is certainly a film amenable to a fuller analysis of the role played by divine will and human freedom in its narrative, much more so than *Clash*, where there are only a few echoes of the humanistic (and, at times, even anti-divine) impulse we find at the heart of the earlier film.¹⁴ In *Jason*, in fact, the opening scene revolves around these very issues. King Pelias, assured by his seer that Zeus will deliver Aristo’s kingdom to him, holds his sword forth and says, “If I am protected by Zeus, I will have no need of this. I will lay it on the fire as a thank offering to the gods.” But when the seer warns Pelias that he will “when Zeus ordains, lose it to one of Aristo’s children,” the king takes his sword back. And after he has killed Aristo’s daughter, he asks Hera, when she prophesies his doom, “Why did Zeus drive me to kill this girl?” She replies, “Zeus cannot drive men to do what you have done. Men drive themselves to do such things, that the gods may know them and that men may understand themselves.” This both recollects the beginning of the *Odyssey*, when Zeus clearly lays the blame for human moral failings at the feet of the mortals themselves, no matter how much people wish to blame the gods, and establishes the theme for the film. Surprisingly, however, the evil king Pelias and the hero Jason have a great deal in common when it comes to their attitudes toward the gods.

Pelias is certainly a negative exemplum in his actions and his understanding of the gods’ will, but Jason’s situation is more complex. When the young hero describes his quest to Pelias (of whose identity he is unaware), he declares, “But the people need more than a leader. They must believe the gods have not deserted them. They need a miracle.” This sounds pious enough, but Jason himself does not believe in the gods, as he makes clear to the (disguised) Hermes, who urges him to ask the gods for help: “They will not answer those who believe in them. Why should they answer one who doesn’t?” And even after Hermes takes Jason to Olympus and proves the existence of the gods to him, the hero’s attitude is not straightforward. Zeus assumes Jason wants the gods’ help, but he does not. “What is it you want?” asks the king of the gods, “A ship? A crew?” “No,” our hero replies, “Those I can find myself.” And when it is revealed that the Fleece is in distant Colchis, Zeus returns to the matter: “Now that you’ve heard that, are you so sure that you will not need my help? Think carefully. I offered him a ship! A ship and a crew! And he refused me!” One of the other gods can be heard in the background shouting, utterly baffled, “Refused the help of the gods?” But Zeus is playing his own game here, and ends the scene by telling Jason, “I did well to choose you. The gods are best served by those who want their help least.” One wonders how Pelias would feel about that, especially when the crucial scene—Jason’s “playing” of the Triton figurine—occurs as Argus urges him to “Pray to the gods, Jason” but our hero replies “The gods of Greece are cruel. In time all men shall learn to do without them.” The figurine, we ought to remember, comes from Phineas, who believes in the gods but wants to do without them. “The gods have gone too far with me. They can punish a man so much and then one day he abandons *them*.” And although he has been commanded by the gods to deliver information to Jason, he does so only on his own conditions and at his own price. “You growl away all you like, Zeus,” he says as thunder resounds, “I mean what I say. Jason, I’ll tell you what you want to know only if you’ll meet my price.” The scene continues:

JASON: What is your price then?

PHINEAS: Free me from these tormenting Harpies.

ACASTUS: If Zeus sent those creatures to plague him, we'd be unwise to interfere.
 [Murmurs of assent from the rest of the crew]
 PHINEAS: That's my price.
 JASON: Then we'll meet it, Phineas. We'll make you the master of the Harpies.

This rejection of the desires of the gods and the wilful taking possession of their own fate is driven home at the end of the scene and the matter revolves around the all-important figurine.

PHINEAS: But what gods protect you?
 JASON: None now.
 PHINEAS: Then you won't pass the Clashing Rocks.

The seer then gives Jason the figurine from around his own neck. It is unclear whether Jason means that the gods no longer protect the Argonauts because Hera has used up her "five times" or because by freeing Phineas they have rejected the will of the gods more generally, but despite Phineas' apology that the figurine "isn't much" it is crucial to the Argonauts' escape. The central paradox, of course, is that the figurine comes to represent human action and will, but the successful "playing" of the figurine by Jason is complicated by Hera's simultaneous move of her own game piece and by the fact that the figurine produces an episode of divine intervention.¹⁵

There is at first glance almost none of this sustained exploration of the roles of the mortal and the divine in *Clash*, and certainly none of the overt anti-divine rhetoric from that film's hero. That is not to say that the ideas are entirely absent: Witness the final scene on Olympus, where Zeus tells Hera that the gods "would no longer be needed" if, as she says, "courage and imagination were to become everyday mortal qualities." Despite the very different tones, however, we have seen that eighteen years after *Jason* Harryhausen consciously repurposed the metaphor of mortals as miniatures to depict their relationship to the gods. At the same time, the very nature of the gods' interactions amongst themselves has changed radically. Here too the film opens with a mortal king's hubris followed by a scene on Olympus. *Clash's* Zeus is now enthroned and elevated above the other gods, who, though ultimately obedient to his will, will often oppose it as they can—particularly the goddesses, and especially Thetis. While the goddesses talk, Zeus is seen with the figurines, and after he selects and crushes the one representing Acrisius, we witness the death of that vile king and the destruction of his city, Argos. This establishes a precise equation between the figurines on Olympus and the mortals below.

In *Clash* it is now Zeus, not Hera, who is the protector of the hero and concerned with his survival and success, and when Zeus decrees that Danae will live safe and happy on the island of Seriphos, we cut briefly to our second glimpse of the figurines, and a few minutes later, after the montage in which Perseus grows up, we see Zeus again manipulate the figures. He first holds up that of Perseus for the admiration of the other gods and then displays the transformation of Thetis' son Calibos into a monster. Although Thetis approaches the figurines, it is clear that they belong to Zeus and are not the common property of the immortals. The goddess puts her hand up, but does not (yet) dare to touch the miniatures.

Such restraint is not to last, but it is important to note that when Thetis finally does approach the figurines and handles them in a subsequent scene, it is clear that this is a transgression, both in the sense that by the internal logic of the film she is opposing Zeus' will and what we might call the "proper" telling of the story, and through the visual clue that her actions take place in isolation. There are no other gods around, and certainly not Zeus, to witness her act. This is the first and only time that anyone aside from Zeus will touch the miniatures and that it is an impermissible act can be clearly discerned in Zeus' angry reaction.

If we compare the way in which the two films use the device of miniatures, we can see first of all that both use this method to encode divine control of human life, just as Harryhausen indicated. But both also employ the conceit to problematize the specific interaction of the will of Zeus and the other gods with fate or chance, a very old preoccupation among the Greeks themselves. But whereas *Jason* employs a gaming metaphor and there is a certain distance between the moves on the board and the action below—by which I mean there is usually a delay of some sort between the "moves" in the game and the action in the mortal sphere¹⁶—*Clash* shows a more direct connection in the

cinematography. Manipulation of the figurines is no longer merely a metaphor, in other words, but blends seamlessly into what happens on earth. When Calibos' figurine is transformed through animation, the character himself is transformed. And most importantly, when Thetis moves the Perseus figurine from his safe home on Seriphos and places him in the "arena," Perseus the *character* is moved, and through Harryhausen's cinematic special effects we see the goddess' hand on Olympus enter our world and remain the same hand, although at a drastically different sense of scale. And it is key that we notice that Perseus ends up not simply in a different place, but in one that corresponds directly and exactly to the Olympian model: a theatre.¹⁷ It is not an arena: Perseus and Calibos are not gladiators but competing potential protagonists.¹⁸

That correspondence of divine manipulation of figurine and the manipulation of mortal actors can be clearly seen in every episode in which the figurines appear. Zeus crushes Acrisius' figurine, and Acrisius dies. This is not merely a symbolic destruction of Acrisius, because as we can see for ourselves, the wicked king dies not, as his people do, from the destruction the Kraken inflicts on Argos, but from the direct application of pressure by Zeus' hand. The power of the figurines is consistently portrayed in the film and is the most potent way for the immortals to influence the story. In what at first seems a paradox, the direct intervention of gods in the world of mortals outside of the context of the figures/theater either has at best indirect consequences or at worst no real consequences at all. The gifts of the gods, for instance, the sword and shield and helmet which Zeus commands be given to Perseus to make up for Thetis' interference, lack permanent presence and are either lost or destroyed one by one as the film progresses.¹⁹

But what most distinguishes *Jason* and *Clash* is the decision on the part of Harryhausen and Cross in the latter to make Zeus the sole owner and proper manipulator of the figurines. In other words, unlike the pieces in *Jason* the figurines in *Clash* are not part of a divine game. The figures can be played with, to be sure, but they are not subject to a set of agreed-upon rules or moved on a board. Rather, they are animator's models, and in conjunction with the theater they are the tools by which one can create a visual narrative with them. Zeus has a story to tell—he stands in as the creator of our narrative—and he uses miniature models and a set to tell it. And when it seems as though the story will get away from him, that indirect action will fail to suffice, he alone has the power to right it. So we see toward the end of *Clash* when Perseus, despite his killing of Medusa, lacks the strength to go on and Zeus must intervene to ensure the story's proper outcome. It is no coincidence that this is the only scene toward the end of the film in which we return to the visual of the figurines in the arena.

In *Jason*, we had a specific metaphor of gaming on a board, and we saw that the notion of narrative "cheating" played a key role, but authorized cheating, if such a thing can exist, which allowed limited intervention by Hera in the ongoing action so long as she followed rules. The pieces on that board were static and, though representing mortal action and manipulated by the Zeus and Hera, were visually portrayed as distinct and separate from the mortals themselves. In addition to a self-imposed limitation on the gods' intervention, the divine apparatus was conceived of as passive in another way: as constituting an audience for the film that exists parallel to us as the real audience. This obviously mixed metaphor allows the potential for incoherence, but the rules of the game show us what is "in bounds" and what is "out." Moreover, the overt discussion of the gods' roles in mortal lives and the place of pagan deities in a historical framework ties in thematically to the themes of divine power, limitations, and cruelty that run through the film, giving it at least the illusion of consistency.

In *Clash*, by contrast, there is no game, there is only narrative, and while Zeus' intervention in righting the Perseus figure toward the film's end is clearly illicit in some sense—notice that he has no audience for his final manipulation of the Perseus figurine—it is he who makes the decisions about how the narrative will proceed. He is subject to the disapproval of those helping him make the movie (the goddesses), and their interference threatens at times to prevent his vision from coming to fruition (Thetis' moving of Perseus). Thetis would like to tell a completely different story, one in which Calibos is the hero and marries the princess. And the closest this disruption comes to actually taking place, of course, is when we see Thetis daring to animate one of Zeus' figurines herself. But Zeus the narrator/animator bends all to his will, ordering the gods to costume Perseus and forcing Athena to come up with another special effect, Bubo the owl, in order to put into effect his impossible demands. Zeus puts no restrictions on himself, even if others try to force some on him. And he is no passive member of an audience merely hoping that the narrative will proceed to his liking. The mixed metaphor of gamer and audience from the earlier film has been replaced in the later movie with the

image of Zeus as a moviemaker and animator. Even if *Clash's* conceit of mortals as miniatures is inspired by the game pieces in *Jason*, their import is entirely different and this is reflected visually in the interweaving of the figurines more closely with the live action.

Clash becomes, then, in my reading, a movie about telling stories and making movies, and not just any stories or movies, but heroic adventure stories with fantastic monsters, in which all is manipulated by the vision of the man in control of the figurines. That creator is liable to criticism and can occasionally be hedged in by others butting into the process, but in the end triumphs through the creation of a story with the proper (in this case, happy) ending. In an interview that Mark S. Zimmer conducted some years ago with Harryhausen,²⁰ the latter said, "I guess I have a Zeus complex. I like to manipulate these people as Zeus did in the early Greek concepts." What I am suggesting in this essay is that the situation is actually quite the reverse. Harryhausen has given his cinematic Zeus—an animator and storyteller working in the same genre and with the same medium—a "Harryhausen complex."

If the basic equivalence between *Clash's* king of the gods and its auteur is right, it is tempting to push this reading a bit further and speculate on the ways in which Zeus' techniques and dilemmas reflect Harryhausen's. Obviously in general terms it is easy to see the concern that both have for telling the story the right way and their love of heroic narrative despite the criticism and interference of others. *Clash* was notoriously Harryhausen's most expensive production and the film he made with the biggest stars at the biggest studio. And while he never lost control of making the film, it is clear that this production involved a process very different to his earlier experiences. First, Columbia Pictures backed out when faced with Harryhausen's requirements "if we hoped to complete the picture in the way we wished" (Harryhausen and Dalton 2003: 262). Second, although MGM eventually picked up the film and allowed it to proceed, the big stars cast and the large budget created a new set of problems for Harryhausen. Can it be that Zeus' concerns over telling his story reflect directly Harryhausen's about *Clash*? It certainly looks like it. The fact that only Zeus properly handles the figurines may reveal the usual method of the filmmaker, which was to control entirely every aspect of the special effects models from their creation to their use. *Clash*, by contrast, is the one film that Harryhausen brought in outside help: "Because of the extra pressures on the production, I brought in Janet Stevens...to assist me with most of the models, particularly Medusa and the Kraken" (Harryhausen and Dalton 2003: 264). But Stevens was not the only one: "Since I knew the models better than anyone, it made sense that I should assemble and look after them in times of need. This applied especially on *Clash*, when for the first time I had two animation assistants. As with the sculpting, it soon became apparent that the animation work would be too much for just one pair of hands" (Harryhausen and Dalton 2003: 264). Harryhausen goes on to note that despite the talents of these assistants, "I was still very reluctant to lose complete control of the 'hands on' animation. I remembered how Obie²¹ had ended up by overseeing and doing little, if any. I didn't want that. It was not how I worked" (Harryhausen and Dalton 2003: 265). And although he hired the assistants, Harryhausen continues, "I still managed to complete the majority of the hands-on animation myself. It wasn't that I wanted to say that this was my picture—not one film I have worked on can I truly say is 'mine,' as all pictures are team efforts. The real reason was that I preferred to work alone. In my mind I had the sequences laid out in rough, and I suppose I didn't want to impose what I envisaged on another animator." In this one way, then, Harryhausen and Zeus must be distinguished, for the god does precisely what the filmmaker wished to avoid. In spite of this, the parallels are too strong to ignore. The process of making the film—from conception to completion—seems to have fed back to Harryhausen and Cross, and in the end they encoded in Zeus an image of the animator struggling against outside pressure and unwanted help to tell an heroic tale in his own way, following his own vision.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Harryhausen, R. and T. Dalton. 2003. *Ray Harryhausen: An Animated Life*. London: Aurum Press.
- Llewellyn-Jones, L. 2007. "Gods of the Silver Screen: Cinematic Representations of Myth and Divinity," in: D Ogden (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, 423–438.
- Scapperotti, D. 1980. Interview with Berveley Cross, *Cinefantastique* 10/3: 4–11, 38–45.

Solomon, J. 2001 [1978]. *The Ancient World in the Cinema*. Revised and expanded edition. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Von Gunden, K. 1989. *Flights of Fancy. The Great Fantasy Films*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.

Wilk, S.R. 2000. *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Winkler, M.M. 2008. "Greek Myth on the Screen", in Woodard, R.D. (ed.). *Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 453-79.

¹ I am grateful to Steve Green and Penny Goodman for having organized the delightful and enlightening conference at the National Media Museum, where this paper was first presented. Likewise, I am glad to acknowledge how much I profited from the audience and my fellow panelists at that event. My thanks also to the journal's anonymous referee, whose suggestions improved this paper a great deal.

² Which is rather different than saying that they are the only films with classical visual or thematic elements, a point made by several other papers in this volume, particularly Tony Keen's.

³ To the extent that Harryhausen himself was clearly the dominant creative mind at work on the films, it is an easy trap—and one I make no attempt to avoid here—to attribute everything to him. Cross' screenplays are obviously vital components of the two films I discuss here, but without access to drafts of these, it is simply impossible to determine responsibility for individual details.

⁴ See Pindar, *Pythian* 4.109–115, for example.

⁵ In Harryhausen and Dalton (2003: 261), Harryhausen reveals that he had been thinking about a cinematic version of the Perseus legend in the 1950s, long before *Jason* was made. Cross, meanwhile, was only a few years after *Jason* himself already conceptualizing a cinematic version of the Perseus myth: "I had the idea for *Clash of the Titans* in 1969 while I was living in Greece, on an island called Skiathos. It's very close to Seriphos, the island where legend has it that Perseus, the son of Zeus, was washed ashore in a trunk" (Scapperotti 1980).

⁶ Solomon (2001: 117), in relating one instance of this openness from an interview with Harryhausen, goes on to remind us that such conscious change is in fact an ancient practice itself, since Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, and other classical authors "changed myths according to the requirements of their message, theology, or artistic style. That Harryhausen and Beverley Cross [in *Clash*] gave Pegasus birth before the death of Medusa...was an artistic decision guided by poetic license and aesthetic and narrative judgment." Cf. also Wilk (2000: 210–211).

⁷ It is not my purpose in this paper to produce an exhaustive survey of similarities, but they are not hard to find. Llewellyn-Jones (2007: 433), for instance, points out that early in both *Jason* and *Clash*, in both cases at the end of a scene on Olympus, there is a major compression of time during which each hero grows up in less than a minute of screen time. Exact correspondence is avoided, however. *Clash* uses a montage of clips of the growing Perseus interspersed with images of Zeus issuing commands to the gods, while the time passes almost instantaneously in *Jason* and we do not see any of the stages of the hero's upbringing.

⁸ Cf. Solomon (2001: 131): "Ray Harryhausen's SuperDynamation work...has the look of myth because his images belong to another world that looks different from ours. Monsters, magic, and metamorphoses abound, and [*Jason* and *Clash*] in particular take place in both Olympian heaven and on earth."

⁹ This and the preceding quotation are from Harryhausen and Dalton (2003: 261–262).

¹⁰ A point on which I now find myself to have been anticipated by Winkler (2008: 459).

¹¹ The Zeus of *Clash*, by contrast, would never utter these words, although he too, as it transpires, leaves a few details open-ended.

¹² For the screen as a device that assimilates the gods to the film's real audience see Winkler (2008: 458–459), who points out that the pool has nearly the same “aspect ratio” as a movie screen. This means, if we presume that Hephaestus is responsible, that he invented the first wide-screen high-definition television just as Homer in *Iliad* 18 revealed that that god made the first robots.

¹³ The board, in fact, is a map, and we can clearly see the outlines of the Greek mainland on it.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note in this regard that Von Gunden (1989: 96), in demonstrating that Cross' script for *Jason* is “unusually literate for a fantasy film and filled with intelligent dialogue,” gives four examples that all have to do with the tension between mortals and gods.

¹⁵ It is not particularly germane to the immediate context of this paper, but the narrative exploration in the film of the intervention of divine influence on the human stage ends with a demonstration of the futility of Hecate's power. She can produce the spectacularly cool skeletons at Aeetes' request, but they are unable to prevent Jason and Medea from escaping Colchis with the fleece.

¹⁶ And where there is no delay, as for instance in the interlaced divine/mortal scenes of the Clashing Rocks, which I discussed above, there is obfuscation of agency and cause and effect.

¹⁷ This is obvious not only from the architectural form of both model and theatre but from the fact that Ammon, Burgess Meredith's delightful playwright, lives and works there and makes his first appearance in full theatrical costume, including a tragic mask.

¹⁸ But, *pace* Winkler (2008: 459), although it is a place of viewing, it is not the same as the pool/screen on which the gods follow the action in *Jason*. In the Olympian theater of *Clash* there is no real action to follow, merely the abstraction of story telling, and the gods do not crowd around to watch anything in it. It is a place of the active *creation* of stories (as the corresponding theatre in Joppa is the place where Ammon makes his tales) rather than of the passive *consumption* of them.

¹⁹ The mechanical owl Bubo is the exception to this pattern.

²⁰ This is no longer available online but was kindly sent to me *per litt.* by Zimmer, who has my heartfelt thanks. Harryhausen uses such language elsewhere, but I happened across it first in Zimmer's interview with him, and it was that which provided the impulse for the present investigation.

²¹ That is, Willis O'Brien the lead animator for *The Lost World* and *King Kong*, whose later work as Harryhausen notes, involved less and less direct work with animation and more with conceptual and organizational tasks.