

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

A COMPANION TO  
**ANCIENT GREECE  
AND ROME ON SCREEN**

EDITED BY  
ARTHUR J. POMEROY



WILEY Blackwell



**A COMPANION TO ANCIENT  
GREECE AND ROME ON SCREEN**

## BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO THE ANCIENT WORLD

This series provides sophisticated and authoritative overviews of periods of ancient history, genres of classical literature, and the most important themes in ancient culture. Each volume comprises approximately twenty-five and forty concise essays written by individual scholars within their area of specialization. The essays are written in a clear, provocative, and lively manner, designed for an international audience of scholars, students, and general readers.

### ANCIENT HISTORY

#### Published

A Companion to the Roman Army

*Edited by Paul Erdkamp*

A Companion to the Roman Republic

*Edited by Nathan Rosenstein and Robert Morstein-Marx*

A Companion to the Roman Empire

*Edited by David S. Potter*

A Companion to the Classical Greek World

*Edited by Konrad H. Kinzl*

A Companion to the Ancient Near East

*Edited by Daniel C. Snell*

A Companion to the Hellenistic World

*Edited by Andrew Erskine*

A Companion to Late Antiquity

*Edited by Philip Rousseau*

A Companion to Ancient History

*Edited by Andrew Erskine*

A Companion to Archaic Greece

*Edited by Kurt A. Raaflaub and Hans van Wees*

A Companion to Julius Caesar

*Edited by Miriam Griffin*

A Companion to Byzantium

*Edited by Liz James*

A Companion to Ancient Egypt

*Edited by Alan B. Lloyd*

A Companion to Ancient Macedonia

*Edited by Joseph Roisman and Ian Worthington*

A Companion to the Punic Wars

*Edited by Dexter Hoyos*

A Companion to Augustine

*Edited by Mark Vessey*

A Companion to Marcus Aurelius

*Edited by Marcel van Ackeren*

A Companion to Ancient Greek Government

*Edited by Hans Beck*

A Companion to the Neronian Age

*Edited by Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter*

A Companion to Greek Democracy and

the Roman Republic

*Edited by Dean Hammer*

A Companion to Livy

*Edited by Bernard Mineo*

A Companion to Ancient Thrace

*Edited by Julia Valeva, Emil Nankov, and Denver Graninger*

A Companion to Roman Italy

*Edited by Alison E. Cooley*

A Companion to the Etruscans

*Edited by Sinclair Bell and Alexandra A. Carpino*

A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome

*Edited by Andrew Zissos*

A Companion to Science, Technology, and

Medicine in Ancient Greece and Rome

*Edited by Georgia L. Irby*

A Companion to the City of Rome

*Edited by Amanda Claridge and Claire Holleran*

A Companion to Greeks Across the

Ancient World

*Edited by Franco De Angelis*

A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen

*Edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy*

# A COMPANION TO ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME ON SCREEN

*Edited by*

Arthur J. Pomeroy

Victoria University of Wellington  
Wellington, New Zealand

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2017

© 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by law. Advice on how to obtain permission to reuse material from this title is available at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

The right of Arthur J. Pomeroy to be identified as the author of the editorial material in this work has been asserted in accordance with law.

*Registered Office*

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

*Editorial Office*

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

For details of our global editorial offices, customer services, and more information about Wiley products visit us at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some content that appears in standard print versions of this book may not be available in other formats.

*Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty*

While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose.

It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services and neither the publisher nor the authors shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

9781118741351 (hardback)

Cover Image: © AF archive / Alamy Stock Photo

Cover Design: Wiley

Set in 11/13.5pt Galliard by SPi Global, Pondicherry, India

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

---

Notes on Contributors	ix
Introduction <i>Arthur J. Pomeroy</i>	1
<b>PART I The Development of the Depiction of Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen</b>	<b>15</b>
1 Greece and Rome on Screen: On the Possibilities and Promises of a New Medium <i>Pantelis Michelakis</i>	17
2 The Creation of the Epic: Italian Silent Film to 1915 <i>Irmbert Schenk</i>	37
3 From 1916 to the Arrival of Sound: The Systematization, Expressivity and Self-reflection of the Feature Film <i>Maria Wyke</i>	61
4 The Resurgence of Epics in the 1950s: Classical Antiquity in Post-war Hollywood <i>Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos</i>	91
5 Hollywood Ascendant: <i>Ben-Hur</i> and <i>Spartacus</i> <i>Fiona Radford</i>	119
6 The Peplum Era <i>Arthur J. Pomeroy</i>	145

<b>PART II Comedy, Drama, and Adaptation</b>	<b>161</b>
7 Hollywood Meets Art-House Cinema: Michael Cacoyannis's "Hybrid" Euripidean Trilogy <i>Anastasia Bakogianni</i>	163
8 Greek Tragedy as Theater in Screen-Media <i>Meredith E. Safran</i>	187
9 Greece and Rome on the Comic Screen <i>Lisa Maurice</i>	209
10 The Return of a Genre <i>Jerry Benjamin Pierce</i>	233
11 Franco Rossi's Adaptations of the Classics <i>Arthur J. Pomeroy</i>	253
12 <i>I, Claudius</i> and Ancient Rome as Televised Period Drama <i>Juliette Harrison</i>	271
13 Premium Cable Television <i>Monica S. Cyrino</i>	293
14 Thinking through the Ancient World: "Late Antique Movies" as a Mirror of Shifting Attitudes towards Christian Religion <i>Filippo Carlà-Uhink</i>	307
15 Non-western Approaches to the Ancient World: India and Japan—Classical Heritage or Exotic Occidentalism? <i>Anja Wieber</i>	329
<b>PART III Film Production and Ancient World Cinema</b>	<b>349</b>
16 Man to Man: Music and Masculine Relations in <i>Ben-Hur</i> (1925 and 1959) <i>Stephan Prock</i>	351
17 Visual Poetry on Screen: Sets and Costumes for Ancient Greek Tragedy <i>Alejandro Valverde García</i>	385
18 Filming the Ancient World: Have Film Historians Made a Spectacular Omission of Epic Proportions? <i>Harriet Margolis</i>	403



<b>PART IV The Ancient World as an Idea</b>	<b>427</b>
19 High Art and Low Art Expectations: Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture <i>Alastair J. L. Blanshard</i>	429
20 “Soft” Science Fiction and Technical Fantasy: The Ancient World in <i>Star Trek</i> , <i>Babylon 5</i> , <i>Battlestar Galactica</i> and <i>Dr Who</i> <i>Otta Wenskus</i>	449
21 The Ancient World is Part of Us: Classical Tragedy in Modern Film and Television <i>Anastasia Bakogianni</i>	467
22 Ancient World Documentaries <i>Fiona Hobden</i>	491
23 Mythology for the Young at Heart <i>Martin Lindner</i>	515
Index	535



# Notes on Contributors

---

**Anastasia Bakogianni** is Lecturer in Classical Studies at Massey University. She is the author of *Electra Ancient and Modern: Aspects of the Tragic Heroine's Reception* (Institute of Classical Studies, 2011). Her research investigates the ongoing dialogue between the classical past and modernity, in particular in the medium of film.

**Alastair J. L. Blanshard** is the Paul Eliadis Professor of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Queensland. Together with Kim Shahabudin, he is the author of *Classics on Screen: Ancient Greece and Rome on Film* (Bloomsbury, 2011). He is also an associate editor of the *Classical Receptions Journal* (Oxford University Press) and a series editor for Cambridge University Press's "Classics After Antiquity" series.

**Filippo Carlà-Uhink** is Lecturer in Classics and Ancient History at the

University of Exeter. The reception of classical antiquity in the visual and performing arts is one of his main research areas. He is now working at a project on the representation of antiquity in theme parks and themed environments.

**Monica S. Cyrino** is Professor of Classics at the University of New Mexico, USA. Her research focuses on the representation of classical antiquity on screen. Her books include *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), *Classical Myth on Screen* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), *Aphrodite* (Routledge, 2010), *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television* (Blackwell, 2008) and *Big Screen Rome* (Blackwell 2005). She has served as a consultant on several recent film and television productions.

**Juliette Harrison** is Senior Lecturer in Ancient History at Newman University, Birmingham. Her research focuses on Roman myth and religion and classical reception in popular culture, with publications on Rome, gladiatorial combat in popular culture, and Greek mythology in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Her monograph, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, was published by Routledge in 2013.

**Fiona Hobden** is Senior Lecturer in Greek Culture at the University of Liverpool, where her interests as an ancient historian extend to contemporary receptions of Greece and Rome. Recent research has focused particularly on television documentaries. She is currently co-editing *Ancient Greece on British Television* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming) with Amanda Wrigley.

**Martin Lindner** is Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Göttingen (Germany) and specializes in imperial Roman history and cultural history. He has published extensively on antiquity in films and TV series as well as in games, historical novels, comics, pop music, and other forms of classical reception.

**Harriet Margolis** has published on film, literature, and feminism in such journals as *Poetics Today*, *Semiotica* and *Cinema Journal*. Author of *The Cinema Ideal* (1988; reprinted Routledge, 2013), she is editor of

*Jane Campion's "The Piano"* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), co-editor of *Studying the Event Film: "The Lord of the Rings"* (Manchester University Press, 2006), and co-author of *Shooting Women: Behind the Camera, Around the World* (Intellect, 2015).

**Lisa Maurice** is Senior Lecturer at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. Her research interests center on the reception of the ancient world in modern popular culture and on Roman comedy, particularly the structure of Plautine plays. She has published widely on classical reception in modern popular culture, is the author of *The Teacher in Ancient Rome: the Magister and his World* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2013) and the editor of *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles* (Brill, 2015) and *Rewriting the Ancients: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction* (Brill, 2017).

**Pantelis Michelakis** is Reader in Classics at the University of Bristol. He works in the fields of Greek literature, Greek culture, and the classical tradition. He is the author of *Greek Tragedy on Screen* (Oxford University Press, 2013), *Euripides. Iphigenia at Aulis* (Duckworth, 2006), and *Achilles in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). He has also coedited *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), *Agamemnon*

*in Performance, 458 BC to AD 2004* (Oxford University Press, 2005), and *Homer, Tragedy and Beyond: Essays in honour of P. E. Easterling* (SPHS, 2001). He is currently working on a book on the reception of ancient Greece in silent cinema.

**Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos** is Associate Professor of Classics at Saint Joseph's University. He has published widely in the fields of Roman elegy, ancient sexuality, and classical reception. He is the editor of *Ancient Greek Women in Film* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and *Reception of Greek and Roman Drama in Latin America* (special issue of *Romance Quarterly*, 59.1: 2012). His honors include the 2008 Paul Rehak Prize from the Lambda Classical Caucus, the 2012–13 Loeb Classical Library Foundation Fellowship from Harvard University, and his appointment as Onassis Foundation Senior Visiting Scholar in South America in spring 2016.

**Jerry Benjamin Pierce** is Assistant Professor of History at Penn State Hazleton University. His publications include “Oliver Stone’s Unmanning of Alexander the Great” and “To do or die manfully: Performing heteronormativity in recent epic films”. His current research examines representations of homosexuality in films about the classical world.

**Arthur J. Pomeroy** is Professor of Classics at Victoria University of

Wellington, New Zealand. His publications include *Roman Social History: A Sourcebook* (Routledge, 2007) and *Then it was Destroyed by the Volcano* (Duckworth, 2008). He has written extensively on Silius Italicus, Tacitus, and the reception of the ancient world in film.

**Stephan Prock** is a freelance composer and musicologist residing in Boston. He holds a DMA in composition from Cornell University and his music has been widely performed in the United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. In addition to his compositional activities, he is currently writing a book on music and male subjectivity in post-war Hollywood cinema.

**Fiona Radford** (Macquarie University) has taught at Macquarie University and the University of Sydney and is currently a teacher at The Hills Grammar School. Her most recent publication is “Having his Cake and Eating it Too: Kubrick and *Spartacus*” in *Stanley Kubrick: New Perspectives* (Black Dog Publications, 2015).

**Meredith E. Safran** is Assistant Professor of Classics at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, where she specializes in Roman literature and culture and, from 2014 to 2016, served as the co-director of the Trinity Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies. She is the co-editor, with Monica S. Cyrino, of

*Classical Myth on Screen* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and the guest co-editor of a special issue of *Classical Journal* (111.1, October–November 2015) devoted to the role of performance in researching and teaching Roman comedy. She also serves as the Area Chair for Classical Antiquity at the annual Film & History conference in Wisconsin.

**Irmbert Schenk** is Professor emeritus at the University of Bremen, specializing in Media Studies, European Cinema History, and Film Reception. He has also taught in Italy, Argentina and Austria. His most recent books include *Kino und Modernisierung* (Schüren Verlag, 2008); *Das goldene Zeitalter des italienischen Films. Die 1960er Jahre* (edition text+kritik, 2008); *Film-Kino-Zuschauer: Filmrezeption* (Schüren Verlag, 2010); *Medien der 1950er Jahre* (Schüren Verlag, 2012); *Film und Kino in Italien* (Schüren Verlag, 2014).

**Alejandro Valverde García** is Professor of Classics at the IES Santísima Trinidad of Baeza, Spain. He is author of several works devoted to the reception of the ancient Greek tragedies in cinema and their use in teaching. He collaborates with the Spanish film journals *Filmbistoria* and *Metakinema*.

**Otta Wenskus**, born in Marburg/Lahn (Germany), studied Classical Philology and Linguistics at the universities of Göttingen (Germany), Florence (Italy), and Lausanne

(Switzerland). She was Visiting Scholar at the Institute for the History of Mathematics, Brown University, Providence, and taught at the universities of Caen (France), Göttingen, Osnabrück/Vechta (Germany), and Jena (Germany) before being appointed Full Professor at the University of Innsbruck (Austria) in 1994. Her main areas of expertise are history of science, bilingualism in Rome and reception studies.

**Anja Wieber** (Dortmund) is an independent scholar, after having been a lecturer in the Department of Ancient History at the universities of Bochum and Essen (1991–2003). Her research interests are women's history, slavery, history of education and reception studies. Among her publications are: *Zwischen Polemik und Panegyrik – Frauen des Kaiserhauses und Herrscherinnen des Ostens in den Res gestae des Ammianus Marcellinus* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1999); “Leben im Schatten der Planwagen? Zur Darstellung der Hunninnen im Film,” in C. Ulf and Robert Rollinger (eds.), *Frauen und Geschlechter. Bilder – Rollen – Realitäten in den Texten antiker Autoren der römischen Kaiserzeit*. (Böhlau Verlag, 2006), pp. 139–166; “Antike am laufenden Meter – mehr als ein Jahrhundert Filmgeschichte,” in M. Meier and S. Slanička (eds.), *Antike und Mittelalter im Film. Konstruktion – Dokumentation – Projektion*. (Böhlau Verlag, 2007), pp.19–41; “Women

and religion in epic films: The fifties' advocate for Christian conversion and today's pillar of paganism?" in F. Carlà and I. Berti (eds.), *Ancient Magic and the Supernatural in the Modern Visual and Performing Arts*. (Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 225–240.

**Maria Wyke** is Professor of Latin at University College London. In *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (Routledge, 1997), *The Roman Mistress: Ancient*

*and Modern Representations* (Oxford University Press, 2002), and *Caesar in the USA* (University of California Press, 2012) she explored cinematic reconstructions of ancient Rome in the film traditions of Italy and Hollywood. Following on from the collection she co-edited with Pantelis Michelakis, *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), she is currently writing a book on ancient Rome in silent film.





# Introduction

---

*Arthur J. Pomeroy*

As far back as we can trace, the stories that were transmitted in the Greek-speaking communities in the Mediterranean changed in focus and form in each generation. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are simply two outstanding examples of a series of narratives associated with the Trojan War, which themselves borrowed elements from Near Eastern stories in addition to legends that may have originated with the Indo-European ancestors of the Bronze Age Greeks. Other arts developed and, most importantly, came to be preserved. Versions of the earlier tales were depicted in the visual arts, in statuary and on Greek vases. They were also presented in dramatic form, particularly in classical Athenian tragedy, which, unfortunately, like a lost silent film, can only be reconstructed from the surviving scripts and a smattering of other evidence. For instance, we know something about the stage, but the *mise-en-scène* remains open to speculation, and the music and dancing that accompanied performance is almost entirely lost. The conquests of Alexander the Great spread Hellenistic culture further east, while Rome's conquest of Greece meant the absorption of Greek stories and style into a new empire. The Romans also created self-conscious imitations of earlier Greek stories, most notably in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the story of a defeated Trojan who defied all odds in creating a home for his people in Italy and so became the Romans' ancestor. Christianity, an off-shoot of Judaic traditions, in its desire to encompass all ethnic groups, found that it often had to absorb or be absorbed within Greco-Roman culture. In the West, Christianity preserved much from

---

*A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen*, First Edition.

Edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy.

© 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published 2017 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

the classical past and added the tales of the peoples of northern Europe. In the East, Islam became dominant, but stories of earlier times, such as the Alexander Romance, continued to thrive. It would take too long to describe the multiple receptions of the Greek and Roman worlds since the Renaissance: painting and sculpture, drama and opera, poetry and novels all offered new modes for serving up material from the past. In brief: adoption and adaptation, a process that continues to the present day as new media are explored and used in turn to explore tradition.

We tend to regard the display of moving images on film as a comparatively recent invention, but prior to the work of the Lumière brothers there were devices that displayed pictures (either photographs or drawings) sequentially to give the impression of continuous motion. Initially the viewer looked at a sequence of cards, but by the mid-nineteenth century machines had been invented to project the images on a screen. Such devices could entertain large numbers of viewers and so were in line with the development of public entertainment that followed the industrial revolution. These entertainments could wondrously recreate traditional stories. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) popularized the results of excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum, while drawing its immediate inspiration from Karl Briulov's recently completed painting depicting the destruction of the Roman city. While the rise of the railway and the lengthy journeys associated with this means of travel contributed to the success of romantic novels, the development of traveling shows by entrepreneurs such as Barnum and Bailey also pointed the way to extensive fireworks displays, culminating in the regular performance of pyrodramas involving the eruption of Vesuvius. The popularity of Lew Wallace's novel, *Ben-Hur* (1880), led to a Broadway stage version in 1899, employing live horses on treadmills to recreate the famous chariot race. This, in turn, inspired the Kalem company to film an unauthorized version of the story in 1907. This was accomplished using the Coney Island site and props that Pain's Fireworks Company had used for pyrodramas and recreation of Roman chariot races. Add in music (John Philip Sousa, for instance, published his *Last Days of Pompeii* suite in 1912), and most of the elements of modern film are ready.

The most important feature of cinema is not, then, the moving image, but the possibility of mass reproduction. The bodybuilder, Eugen Sandow, travelled the world displaying his physique (one based on Greek and Roman sculpture) and popularizing physical culture. While the possibility of becoming a global phenomenon owes much to modern transport, not to mention the opening of the world via European colonialism, Edison Studios' series of short films on Sandow in 1894 made it possible for audiences to view his display of muscle flexing anywhere and at any time. This ability to constantly

reproduce could also work against the new medium: it was often viewed as a form for mass consumption, linked to the vaudeville halls and travelling shows where early films were often shown and considered to be entertainment for the masses, while live theatre and concerts were the preserve of the élite. The corporate nature of film-making, unlike the individual authorship of the novel,<sup>1</sup> also challenged the common ideal of the singular artist. Others, however, might praise cinema as embodying the spirit of modern industrial development (Benjamin 1936) or as an essential instrument of education for the general populace that supported the growing democracies of the Western world.

Whether we consider the streams of “realism,” the documentary form visible in George Méliès’ *Arrival of a Train at Vincennes Station* (1896), or fantasy and magic, as in Méliès’ *The Vanishing Lady* of the same year, it is important that we take into consideration the investment in any film and its appeal to an audience in order to recoup its cost. While productions may have targeted audiences according to age or gender, for instance, from the beginning there was a wish to attract as large a group of viewers as possible. Cinematic “tie-ins” via product placement or marketing in conjunction with feature films begin quite early. The comparatively recent discipline of film studies has indicated the importance of understanding such features as the length of a film (is it a short, a television episode segmented by advertising breaks, or a full-length blockbuster, for instance). Technical matters also need careful consideration, such as the style of the camera work, the scenography, film stocks and picture ratios (including black and white, tinted, and color styles), sound (both accompanying music and sound effects or Foley), and a range of imaginary effects (double exposure of negatives, editing cuts, the use of Claymation or CGI). Then there are more general questions about the attitude of film-makers and audience (“the gaze”), expectations of actors and cultural biases (such as discussed in Richard Dyer’s studies of Hollywood stars and of racial stereotypes (1979, 1997)). Story types become complicated when considered as cinematic genres. Science fiction may remain identifiable when it changes medium, as may detective stories, but Film Noir and Expressionism are descriptions of visual phenomena and have no clear analogies in written form.

I have stressed the complexity of understanding film, because it is not uncommon for scholars of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and film-makers to talk past one another. The first can be seen in studies that describe depictions of the past as “un-historical.” Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000) is no more a documentary about the reign of Commodus than was its immediate inspiration, Anthony Mann’s *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) (cf. the essays in Winkler 2004). In turn, classicists can sometimes feel that they

are only consulted by film-makers for minor details, rather than “authenticity” in the overall depiction (Coleman 2004; Milnor 2008).

Classical themes, such as the depiction of characters from Greek mythology (Méliès’ *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1898) or epic (Méliès’ *Ulysses and the Giant Polyphemus*, 1905) or from Roman history (Georges Hatot’s *Nero Testing Poison on Slaves*, 1897), appeared at the very birth of the film industry. However, scholarly interest from classicists in the depiction of their area of research on the screen is comparatively recent. Jon Solomon’s *The Ancient World in the Cinema* (1978, revised edition 2001) began the serious scholarly treatment of such material and remains a basic reference. Marianne McDonald’s *Euripides in Cinema* (1983) indicated that it was possible to devote a monograph to the reproduction of drama in film. Yet perhaps the most significant advance in the cinematic reception of the past came in Maria Wyke’s *Projecting Rome: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (1997) which combined film history and gender studies to examine the depiction of the ancient world. Since then Martin Winkler has been especially prolific in editing or authoring a remarkable number of volumes on the classical world in the cinema and on television in general or on individual films (e.g., 2001, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2009) that are repeatedly cited in this volume. The ever-increasing number of monographs, chapters, and articles appearing every year indicates the topical nature of investigation of the depiction of ancient Greece and Rome.

To no small extent, this corresponds with didactic requirements. Courses in reception studies or film have become a regular part of the syllabus in the English-speaking world. As was the case with Greek mythology from the 1970s onwards, it is often hoped that this will attract sufficient student numbers to compensate for reduced enrolments in Greek and Latin language courses. There are excellent textbooks to assist here (Cyrino 2005; Blanshard and Shahabudin 2011). However, as with mythology, mere retelling of the material will not be sufficient to stimulate students and certainly will not provide any basis for theoretical analysis of the subject matter. Given that many classicists have come to the area through reception or adaptation studies, one trend is to analyze the depiction of the ancient world in a literary fashion, in accord with the literal translation of photography as “writing with light.” Cinema becomes drama, epic, or novel in a different medium, just as war, according to Clausewitz, was the continuation of politics by other means. For classicists, this also offers a reassuring priority to their area of expertise, historically and sometimes in status as well. However, the influence of reception studies means that there should not only be a comparison between the classical source and its later treatment, but also an attempt to explain why the two are not identical. Change may be the result of historical

circumstances (both political and economic), or the necessity to adapt to a different medium, or social and cultural differences. Such investigations have been particularly fruitful in revealing gender politics or racial and colonialist ideologies. At the same time, reactions to classical material bring into stark contrast aspects of the original. Analyzing a film from the 1950s requires both sensitivity to the differences between creations of that time and those contemporaneous with the modern audience, and also reflection on prior receptions and the earliest sources. The constant iteration of a figure such as Hercules makes the 1958 *Hercules* (*Le fatiche di Ercole*, “*The Labors of Hercules*”) much more interesting than a simple analysis of the adventure might suggest. In addition, film (and television) studies, through their emphasis on the technical means of creating and distributing a moving picture, offer wider insights into classical material on screen, in the same way that theater studies have deepened our understanding of classical drama.

Bearing in mind that the field is in comparative infancy (and that new films and television series continue to appear every year), this volume is intended to give an outline of what has already been achieved in many areas to assist researchers and students in the field. It also, in my opinion, presents considerably more new research than would normally be seen in survey volumes. It is structured to offer an outline of the development of the presentation of the Greek and Roman worlds from the beginning of cinema to the present day (Parts I and II), followed by discussions of cinematic techniques associated with this material (Part III); while the final chapters in Part IV consider some of the thematic issues that present themselves to researchers in the field. The subject area is restricted to ancient Greece and Rome: this excludes, for instance, films about ancient Egypt or productions associated with the Bible. The latter are so numerous and so entwined with other considerations as to require a separate volume. Where the Roman world and Christianity cross paths, as most notably in the film versions of *Ben-Hur*, but also in tales of persecution as Christianity develops (a staple of 1950s Hollywood cinema, as the Coen Brothers have recently reminded us with their 2016 film, *Hail! Caesar*), and in the world of late antiquity, that material is included.

Not everything has been discussed. I am conscious that there is a gap between the investigation of post-First World War silent films and that of the great Hollywood epics of the 1950s. A number of contributors do, however, consider the work of Cecil B. DeMille, whose *The Sign of the Cross* (1932; re-released 1944) may be seen as the link between this period and the 1950 version of *Quo Vadis*. A study of films of the fascist era, in particular Carmine Gallone’s *Scipio Africanus* (1937), is forthcoming (Pomeroy 2017). *Cleopatra* (1963) and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) are short-changed. However, Martin Winkler’s edited volume (2009) on the latter

should satisfy most readers. A full study of the Burton–Taylor film is highly desirable – in the meantime, the 2001 documentary by Kevin Burns and Brent Zachy, *Cleopatra: The Film that Changed Hollywood*, is a good introduction. A number of films of the post-2000 era (e.g., *Gladiator*, *Troy* and *Alexander*) have already had individual volumes devoted to them (Winkler 2004, 2007a; Cartledge and Greenland 2010) and so can be treated in passing in this volume. Non-English language productions may have been short-changed: the Romanian films from the 1960s involving the Romans and the Dacians (Elley 2013: 58–59) are sadly omitted, while it would be a truly Herculean effort to track down all classical references in Japanese animated films (*anime*). Still, Jarman’s *Sebastiane* (in Latin) receives its due. Television has not been fully discussed (no *Xena* or *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* – next time, perhaps ...). I am also conscious that there is much more that can be said about the techniques of creating films and television series, but the chapters in this volume should encourage others to continue this work. And while there is no piece specifically devoted to the important topic of gender studies, a number of the contributions show the importance of feminism, queer and masculinity studies as explanatory tools in this field.

Even more than printed material, film needs preservation. Film archives around the world are engaged in the recovery and restoration not only of much early material, but also of films from quite recent times whose stock has deteriorated with often frightening speed. These “texts” can also survive in multiple versions, depending on cuts and editing, and in various formats (most obviously in versions created for television, where wide-screen films have commonly been adapted to a standard 4 : 3 ratio, often by a process named “pan and scan,” and often cut to fit better with advertising breaks). Accordingly, Pantelis Michelakis begins the volume by initially considering the question of the survival of ancient films and access to this material, before raising the important question of why the very modern form of continuous photography should be interested in the ancient world at all. Many explanations have been offered for this phenomenon: Michaelakis stresses in addition that the past can offer not merely escapism, but an imaginative response to the rapidly changing world at the turn of the twentieth century. As he indicates, early films reference not merely the Greek and Roman worlds, but also versions of them created over the centuries. The importance of the spectators must not be underestimated, nor the means of impressing them. While early cinema is often thought of as a world of black and white, in reality many films were tinted in sections and a considerable number carefully colored for maximum effect. A case can be made for the “development” of techniques, but, as Michaelakis indicates, many examples would call into question any treatment of film history as simply a steady progression of cinema to its most recent forms.

The particularly successful development of film-making in Italy is traced by Irmbert Schenk. The expansion of its studios and the increase in length and complexity of the films produced, culminating in 1914 with Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria*, illustrates a desire for a national cinema recalling the country's history, while also reflecting the process of industrialization in the peninsula. However, the increasing demand for investment could not be sustained after Italy's entry into the First World War: the United States, which had previously lagged behind in large-scale productions, came to dominate, with the rise of the major studios of Hollywood. As Maria Wyke demonstrates, post-war Italian efforts showed few artistic or technical developments. In the meantime, American films such as *Cleopatra*, starring Theda Bara (1917), or *Ben-Hur* (1925), with Ramon Novarro in the leading role, indicate the rise of the star system that accompanied other developments in the Hollywood studio system. The chariot race in the latter became the standard for technology in the service of audience excitement until the even more impressive remake of 1959. Still, national cinemas continued to thrive, as in Germany through Manfred Noa's spectacular *Helen of Troy* (*Helena*, 1924) that has only recently been restored and made available, and in France, where ancient-world stories, whether recounted in elegiac or comic mode, could allow reflection on the country's recent losses,

The Second World War might be expected to have further reinforced the dominance of Hollywood, but in fact the American studios faced internal competition from the new medium of television. Konstantinos Nikoloutsos shows how many of the features of modern popular cinema, such as wide-screen photography and color film, developed in this era. "Blockbuster" movies showed all the features of studio film-making: lavish sets, international cast and crews, and often overseas locations, partially chosen for their exotic appeal, but also for financial reasons: for instance, to expend profits that could not be repatriated in countries where low-cost labor was readily available. The popularity of biblical stories (a staple of film-making from the beginning: Vander Stichele 2013) also encouraged screen versions of novels that showed the development of Christianity in the Roman World (for instance, *Quo Vadis*, *The Robe* or *Ben-Hur*), sometimes as updates of earlier Hollywood successes (*Ben-Hur*, *Cleopatra*). The competition with television and between studios also encouraged expenditure on an unheard-of scale, culminating in the financial crisis caused by the excesses of *Cleopatra* (1963). The internal machinations that accompanied these large productions are detailed in Fiona Radford's chapter, which provides a clear warning to those who would like to imply that there are specific intentions within these films. Even with considerable archival material at our disposal, it is often difficult to discover who made crucial decisions about plotlines and script. As is

shown very clearly with regard to *Spartacus* (1960), individuals may make their own contributions that can contradict or cancel the efforts of other members of the production team.

Hollywood's preeminence at the box-office internationally did not, however, preclude national cinemas. In my chapter I demonstrate how the peplum film was the love-child of traditional Italian entertainment films and Hollywood epic. Although it was a short-lived, if prolific, movement, the peplum was significant for the continuation of the film-making industry in Italy. It also had a long-lasting effect on the public imagination, especially in America, setting a pattern for the revival of the figure of Hercules on television thirty years later. Often mocked or reviled, the peplum has its own rules that, when recognized, help to explain the idiosyncrasies of this much-encompassing form.

The reign of Hollywood blockbusters set in the ancient world came to an end in 1965, only to be revived by Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* in 2000, and the Italian production of peplums also ceased around the same time. This does not mean that other cinemas and film genres were not interested in Greece and Rome: these and the new form of television are surveyed in Part II of this volume. In modern Greece, Michael Cacoyannis was equally successful with modern-day tales (*Stella*, 1995; *Zorba the Greek*, 1964) and versions of Euripidean tragedy. Anastasia Bakogianni traces the development of Cacoyannis's style, originally owing much to the theater but adopting many of the features of commercial cinema as time passed. Although, perhaps, Cacoyannis is not as "Art House" as his Italian contemporary, Pasolini, he clearly regarded his films as artistic productions and reached an international audience while stressing the continuity between ancient and modern Greece. By contrast, Meredith Safran details efforts to retain the theatrical in film versions of Greek tragedy as staged by the likes of Tyrone Guthrie, Martha Graham, Julie Taymor and Steven Berkoff. She also analyzes the relationship between theater and television, from a period where public television saw one of its duties to be the education of its viewers, to more recent times where commercial imperatives have come to the fore. The odd standing of Greek tragedy, which appears to be a special-interest art form but can be readily repositioned to raise contemporary social questions, is highlighted throughout.

Not that the ancient world need always be a serious topic, as Lisa Maurice brings out in her survey of comic treatments of the past. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* has been a major inspiration through to Spike Lee's recent *Chi-Raq* (2015), while the characters of Greek mythology have also been a steady source of mirth, particularly Hercules, whose colossal strength was already depicted in classical times as accompanied by astounding appetites. In



general, the Roman world receives more attention than the Greek, in part because the Plautine figure of the crafty slave has become part of Western theater, in part because Roman grandeur and imperial ambitions lend themselves to mockery. Monty Python's famous question, "What have the Romans done for us?", both acknowledges and mocks the importance of classical culture.

The answer, as Jerry Pierce indicates, is to provide us with vicarious enjoyment of decadence. The luxurious lifestyles of the rich and powerful that were one of the attractions for viewers of the 1917 *Cleopatra* return with a vengeance in *Gladiator* (2000), *Alexander* (2004), and *300* (2006). Still, in the age of the Kardashians, excess needs to be truly excessive. Joaquin Phoenix's Commodus is not simply bisexual, as Olivier's Crassus is depicted in *Spartacus*, but incestuous and a potential pedophile as well. Sexuality becomes a major driver in the narrative of series such as *Rome*, apparently reaching a climax in the STARZ network's *Spartacus*. To misquote Lord Acton, following Alistair Cooke, the voice of culture to America, "Power corrupts. Absolute power is absolutely delicious!" (Cooke 1998).

The significance of television as transmitter of the image of the past is examined in the next three studies. I analyze the "quality drama" that Franco Rossi produced for RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana), particularly underlining the director's desire to avoid the clichés associated with the recreation of classical literature and the portrayal of the ancient world. The foreignness of the past thus depicted allows the viewer to dwell on other universal themes, such as Odysseus's nostalgia for his home, Aeneas's concern for the survivors of the Trojan race, or the concern for the poor and powerless of early Christianity. BBC Television also produced a remarkable adaptation of Robert Graves' novel, *I, Claudius*. Juliette Harrison shows how the series fitted into the tradition of "classic serial," but was distinguished by its success in ambivalently depicting empire and class, which sets it apart from soap opera in a foreign setting. Its impact can be traced in both the films of the new millennium (it is no accident that Derek Jacoby plays the role of Senator Gracchus in *Gladiator*) and its television (in *Rome*, in general, and the character of a much younger Livia, in particular). The last study of small-screen drama is contributed by Monica Cyrino, the editor of several collections of essays on HBO–BBC *Rome* and STARZ *Spartacus* (Cyrino 2008, 2015; Augoustakis and Cyrino 2016). Rightly noting the commercial imperatives of such series (*Rome* was concluded in two seasons because of the excessive costs of production, while the lower-cost *Spartacus* could even add a prequel season in response to the lead actor's illness), she stresses that despite an interest in archaeological correctness, *Rome* has become not an historical site but a locus for fantasy, a predecessor to the medieval England of *Game of Thrones*.

The world of late antiquity in contrast to the period of early Christianity has tended to be the preserve of European cinema. This may be a sign of unwillingness in Hollywood to depict organized religion with its sectarian overtones. Still, as Filippo Carlà-Uhink demonstrates, there had been a reluctance even in predominantly Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain to portray state-sponsored religion post-Constantine the Great. From the 1970s, however, the crisis of the Roman Empire became a screen metaphor for the modern world, whether this be a crisis in faith, as in Roberto Rossellini's *Agostino d'Ippona* (1972), or the sexual politics of homosexuality (Derek Jarman's *Sebastiane*, 1976). Rising above a number of small-scale depictions of the late Roman world, Alejandro Amenábar's epic story of Hypatia in fourth-century Alexandria, *Agora* (2009), is particularly striking for its criticism of irrational religious belief when associated with power. That the film was not very successful at the box office indicates that successful cinema tends to reflect the conservative audience values of the time (cf. the uncontroversial *Gladiator* which earned much more at the box office than Oliver Stone's *Alexander*).

Moving further afield, Anja Wieber's study of the Indian film, *Sikandar*, Osamu Tezuka's Japanese animated *Cleopatra*, and the Japanese-Korean television anime, *Reign: The Conqueror*, highlights the question of the degree to which the classical world is a signifier of Western cultural dominance. If the history of Greece and Rome may have been placed in the service of imperialism, it is also possible for outsiders to use the same material to critique colonialism or to suggest that syntheses of occidental and oriental ideas are also significant in social development in both East and West.

Part III is a brief reminder that film is not merely a photo-play (as earlier cinema was sometimes called), but the combination of various artistic skills. Perhaps most significant is the role of sound, a theme that classicists working from printed texts are most likely to overlook. There were, of course, musical accompaniments to drama and pantomimes in the ancient world, but that material is almost completely lost. "Silent" cinema was rarely silent, since musical accompaniments were regular from early on, and might be distinctly loud (a full orchestra played Pizzetti's Fire Symphony at the premiere of *Cabiria* in Turin, April 18, 1914). The style of music also offered valuable clues as to the nature of events portrayed: in Chapter 16, Stephan Prock shows that the score to the 1925 version of *Ben-Hur* was deliberately reverential because of the religious sub-text of "A Tale of the Christ." By contrast, Miklós Rózsa's score for the 1959 remake not only sexualizes the power relationship between the Roman Empire and conquered Judaea, but also stresses the masculinity of the film's hero in line with contemporary expectations. As Prock indicates, however, this approach may also underline

questions about the relationships between the male leads, avoided in the 1925 film. At the same time, the triumphant “Christ” music plays a more pronounced role, since the figure of the Savior is notably silent in this modern “talkie.”

Alongside the music (and sound effects), the staging and costuming create an image within which the actors can perform and the cinematographers perform their magic. Although often overlooked, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presently awards Oscars for original scores, sound editing and sound mixing, visual effects, production design, makeup and hairstyle, and costume design. The visual design of Michael Cacoyannis’s *Electra* (1962) is obviously quite different from that of Pietro Francisci’s *Hercules* (1958). As Alejandro Valverde García demonstrates, this is to no small degree the work of the different art directors in reflecting the style of each production. It is impossible to cover the wide range of possibilities for depictions of the ancient world, but by discussing the films of Michael Cacoyannis, Valverde reveals how important art direction is in creating meaning within the cooperative enterprise that is realized in the final film print.

Most of the contributors to this volume would probably describe themselves generically as classicists (a sociologist and a musicologist are also among the participants): this refers both to the subject matter they study and the programs in which they are employed. Genre, however, may mean something else in film studies, as film historian Harriet Margolis shows. None would describe themselves as makers of ancient-world films, which has had the unfortunate effect of hiding a whole genre in film history from its specialists. The dangers of compartmentalizing in academic disciplines are here clearly indicated.

The final section looks at some of the siblings of ancient world films and television series, ranging from the lowly regarded to the Art House, from the insertion of classical themes and mythology in science fiction to serious documentaries. As always, the audience must be taken into consideration. Alastair Blanshard identifies accessibility (*Hercules* and gladiators are universally recognized, while *Virgil* is not) as the initial attraction of stories set in the past for film-makers. However, it is the excess of the past, whether it be the opulence of Nero’s court or the efforts of a demi-god, that appeals to the audience. The Roman side usually won out over Greek simplicity, but the “muscle-man” film, from Bartolomeo Pagano to Steve Reeves and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, has thrived from the silent period to the present day.

Science fiction series on television derive their appeal from a fantasy version of science. Otta Wenskus’s chapter makes clear that an equally imaginary treatment of the ancient past is thus a relatively simple insertion in the genre.

Particularly striking is the use of classical material to give an “intellectual” depth to the stories, a relic of the high versus low culture debate that has still not been settled. At the level of “Art House” cinema, Anastasia Bakogianni shows that the figure of Electra can still inform modern narratives. In Italy, Luchino Visconti (*Sandra*, 1965), in Hungary, Miklós Jancsó (*Electra, My Love*, 1974) and in Greece, Theo Angelopoulos (*The Travelling Players*, 1975), used the character from Greek tragedy to inform their depictions of their countries’ tragic past. But Electra is also reincarnated in Frank Miller’s Elektra, the heroine of DC Comics and two films and is adumbrated in the female Count of Monte Cristo of television’s *Revenge*. Reception may call into question traditional aesthetic judgements as much as support them.

Since the ancient world precedes the invention of photography, there are obviously no contemporary film records. Yet, as the attraction of film is the moving image, still images of Greek and Roman art and archaeology are insufficient. The dramatic aspects of documentary are highlighted by the inclusion of fictional segments or modern features, such as the voice of the newsreader, anachronistically applied to the past. Fiona Hobden shows the importance of the stress on authority in the narrative voices, how the documentary becomes an old-style classroom lesson where knowledge is imparted, but the audience is unable to question what they have learnt. We may feel that we are making a tour with an agreeable companion, but the power of academia abides. An alternative approach, of adapting the past to modern narrative genres, can be seen in *Cleopatra: Portrait of a Killer* (2009), drawing on modern crime fiction. The docudrama straddles both worlds: it may enable the viewer to gain a personal appreciation of the ancient world; its reflection can also be seen in the figure of the herald in the television series *Rome*. As Hobden notes, the re-use of Ian McNeice, the actor who played that character, to portray Cassius Dio, the historian, in *Portrait of a Killer* lends an odd authenticity from fictional repetition.

The audience is also important to Martin Lindner, who considers a particular sub-genre of features set in ancient Greece and Rome, films or television series specifically designed to attract youthful viewers. As he rightly notes, the actual audience may be much larger, including adults enjoying such productions and the parents who may be accompanying the youngsters (or at least sharing the room where the television is located). Disney’s *Hercules* (1997) is typical with a moral message for the young and ironic meanings for older viewers. That such films do not faithfully follow the traditional narrative is not a fault, but an indication of adjustments for children in the present day. Entertainment, not didacticism, is the prime mover. Still, the differences between East and West German versions of Odysseus, for instance, are interesting reflections of each community. Similar comments

can be made about the Korean, Japanese and Australian versions. To repeat the author's conclusion, after an extensive account of other young persons' films and television series, "for children" is not the same as "childish."

The range of studies in this volume, with contributors from numerous countries, is indicative of the resonance and vibrancy of studies of ancient Greece and Rome at present. Of course, each year results in not only new or revived receptions (as I write, *Ben-Hur* 2016 is the most recent release), but also better appreciation of material from earlier years. My thanks to my collaborators for their efforts. And my encouragement for those who will be writing on these topics in the years to come!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project was substantially assisted by grants from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. My thanks to Jake Arthur for translation from Spanish and Charlotte Simmonds for German. Especial thanks to Emily Simons who assisted with the editing of contributions throughout this project. Finally, I must acknowledge the assistance of the editorial staff at Wiley-Blackwell, most notably Haze Humbert and Danisha Sahedevan.

## NOTE

1. It may be noted that some authors had already experimented with the mass production model. For instance, Alexandre Dumas could be both prolific and fully enjoy the rewards of his work by entrusting others (most notably Jules Maquet) to develop the outlines that he rapidly sketched.

## REFERENCES

- Augoustakis, A. and M. S. Cyrino (eds.) (2016). *STARZ Spartacus: Reimagining an Icon on Screen*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Benjamin, W. (1936). L'Oeuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée. (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction). *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5(1): pp. 40–68.
- Blanshard, A. and K. Shahabudin (2011). *Classics on Screen: Ancient Greece and Rome on Film*. London: Bristol Classical Press.
- Cartledge, P. and F. R. Greenland (eds.) *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press (2010).

- Coleman, K. M. (2004). The Pedant Goes to Hollywood: The Role of the Academic Consultant. In Winkler (2004), pp. 16–30.
- Cooke, A. (1998). *Letter from America*, 15 May. Transcribed: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2brs6P4m5Gh5BsSGK7G47sh/indias-first-nuclear-tests-15-may-1998> (accessed August 9, 2016).
- Cyrino, M. S. (2005). *Big Screen Rome*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cyrino, M. S. (2008). *Rome Season One: History Makes Television*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cyrino, M. S. (2015). *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dyer, R. (1979). *Stars*. London: British Film Institute.
- Dyer, R. (1997). *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Elley, D. (2013). *The Epic Film: Myth and History*. London: Routledge.
- McDonald, M. (1983). *Euripides in Cinema: The Heart Made Visible*. Philadelphia: Centrum.
- Milnor, K. (2008). What I learned as Historical Consultant for *Rome*. In M. S. Cyrino (ed.), *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Pomeroy, A. J. (2017). Classical antiquity, cinema and propaganda. In K. Demetrious and H. Roche (eds.) *Brill's Companion to the Classics in Fascism and Nazi Ideology*. Leiden: Brill.
- Solomon, J. (2001). *The Ancient World in the Cinema*. 2nd edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (first edition, 1978).
- Vander Stichele, C. (2013). Silent Saviours: representations of Jesus' Passion in early cinema. In P. Michelakis and M. Wyke (eds.), *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 169–188.
- Winkler, M. M. (ed.) (2001). *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Winkler, M. M. (ed.) (2004). *Gladiator*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Winkler, M. M. (ed.) (2007a). *Troy: From Homer's Iliad to Hollywood Epic*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Winkler, M. M. (ed.) (2007b). *Spartacus: Film and History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Winkler, M. M. (ed.) (2009). *The Fall of the Roman Empire: Film and History*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wyke, M. (1997). *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History*. London: Routledge.

PART I

**THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE DEPICTION  
OF ANCIENT GREECE  
AND ROME ON SCREEN**

---





## CHAPTER ONE

# Greece and Rome on Screen: On the Possibilities and Promises of a New Medium

---

*Pantelis Michelakis*

Contrary to the widely held view that early films are largely lost, dozens of films related to ancient Greece, Rome and the other civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean survive scattered in film archives across Europe and North America. Only a small number of these films have been restored digitally and made available through home-video formats or online video streaming. The great majority of the films is accessible only through film prints available for onsite viewing in archival film collections with flatbed film-viewing facilities or in specialized film festivals. With the help of the “Treasures from the Film Archives” database of the International Federation of Film Archives, the open access database of the “Media History Digital Library” and the online catalogues of film archives, libraries and other institutions, one can trace a significant number of films made during the first twenty years of cinema. One can also collect valuable information about their production, distribution and exhibition with the help of ephemera such as production stills, screenplays, posters, reviews and film catalogues. What is distinctive about this body of archival films and its contexts? Why is it that a viewing technology and an art form associated with modernity turned its attention to antiquity from the very beginning? Which antiquity did it engage with? These are the questions that will form the basis for the discussion undertaken in this chapter.

---

*A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen*, First Edition.

Edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy.

© 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published 2017 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## Film or Cinema?

The focus of this chapter is on the first two decades of cinema, and more specifically on the period between the 1890s and the mid-1900s which is often identified as “early cinema” and the period from around 1907 to around 1913 which is often referred to as the “transitional period.” The cinema of this twenty-year period is often defined in opposition to the more familiar and mainstream types of cinema that follow it. It is called a period of “short films” (as opposed to “feature films”), or “trick films” (a dominant genre of the period to be eclipsed by the arrival of some of the more canonical genres with which we are familiar today), as “cinema of attractions” (as opposed to a cinema preoccupied with narrative causality and character development; Gunning 1990), as “kine-attractography” (as opposed to the more conventional “cinema”; Gaudreault 2011) or more broadly as a period of sensationalism or exhibitionism (as opposed to the realism or artistic maturity of later cinema). How to describe this period is inevitably implicated in debates about continuity and change in cinema history. It is also implicated in debates about what cinema is. Is it a technological medium, an art form or an industry? If cinema is understood as moving images, as filmstrips run in rapid succession to give the illusion of lifelike movement, it was born with Thomas Edison’s kinematoscope films or with Etienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotography films at the turn of the 1890s. If understood as filmstrips run through a projector, it was invented by the Lumière brothers in the mid-1890s. If understood as a social practice or as an art form, cinema was formed at a later stage, around 1910. The word “cinematograph” itself is a classicizing neologism (“writing of movement”) with a complex history: it is commonly associated with the camera invented by the Lumière brothers, but it was first coined by Léon Bouly for another motion picture device in 1892, whereas in its abbreviated form, “cinema” began to be used as a label for moving images only from the late 1910s.

It is common to see film history in biological terms, through a model of growth that raises questions about origins while also infantilizing cinema’s first two decades. It is also common to see film history in teleological terms, with the two most dominant modes being those of a drive towards artistic maturity (cinema as an art in an upward trajectory from primitive to sophisticated and from naïve to self-aware) and of a drive towards realism (cinema as popular culture moving from silent to sound to color to widescreen to 3D). These two narratives are often in tension (cinema as an art form versus cinema as popular culture), but they both cast early cinema in the same position of infantile lack and inferiority. Applying their logic within the period itself before 1914, one can argue for a progression from the shorter and

more naïve films of the 1890s to the longer, more complex, more sophisticated, artistically more mature and technically more competent and realistic films of the late 1900s and the early 1910s. This is certainly a way of thinking endorsed by many of the film practitioners of the time themselves and exploited to the full by the publicity campaigns around them in an attempt to gain an advantage over their competitors. In fact, a large number of films related to antiquity belong to the rather limited output of quality films, especially adaptations, produced from around 1907. The pressure to demonstrate that film had matured and that it needed to be taken seriously as an art form can be linked to the greater reliance on narrative complexity and psychological characters after 1906, with films such as *A Slave's Love* (1907), to some of the first artistically ambitious films aimed to attract middle-class audiences produced by the French company Film d'Art in 1908, such as *The Return of Ulysses*, to the cultural debate about moving pictures in the United States which starts with films such as *Julius Caesar* in 1908, and to the first international successes of Italian cinema between 1909 and 1911 with films such as *Nero* (1909), *The Fall of Troy* (1910) and *Odyssey* (1911).

There are, however, other interpretative possibilities that in recent years have gained more traction. One can argue that cinema as an institution did not really take shape until around 1910; that before this time, the practice of filmstrip projection should be seen not in relation to a cinema to come, but in relation to technological and artistic developments that began much earlier in the nineteenth century and of which the projection of filmstrips was not always the inevitable conclusion. For instance, the "cinematograph" could be linked to other inventions of the nineteenth century that were pre-occupied with still images, moving images, or projection and that were driven by the double imperative of science and entertainment: from photography and magic lantern slides to devices such as the phenakistiscope, the stroboscope, the tachyscope and chronophotography (Crary 1990). With the exception of photography, such devices may have now been reduced to mere technological curiosities, but their impact on nineteenth-century visions of antiquity must not be underestimated (however under-researched). Early films themselves are full of visual devices, both real and imagined. For instance, in George Méliès' *Long Distance Wireless Photography* (*La photographie électrique à distance*, 1908), a large fantastic machine is used to project on a screen an image of a small painting depicting the Three Graces. Upon projection, the Three Muses come to life, to the amazement of the photographer's clients. The machine that dominates the film frame compresses the various phases between film recording and film exhibition into something resembling real-time televisual liveness (Olsson 2005: 152). At the same time, the transformation of the motionless goddesses on the canvas to live

models on the screen demonstrates how the technology of the period seeks to transcend representational realism and promises access to the embodied reality of beauty and grace that traditional arts can only imitate.

The practice of projecting filmstrips can also be seen as coexisting with, drawing on, and competing against dominant forms of stage entertainment and display practices of a fin-de-siècle culture. Early cinema has an often-neglected affinity to visual spectacles of the period with a strong performative quality, such as magic sketches, magic lantern shows, fairy plays, pantomime and variety shows. When taken into consideration, this affinity plays an important role in early cinema's unique status and "troubling alien quality" (Gaudreault 2011: 34). For instance, in Méliès' *Long Distance Wireless Photography*, the animation of the pictorial depiction of the Three Graces situates the film not only in relation to real and imagined visual technologies of the period but also in relation to the entertainment world of vaudeville and more specifically to the popular performance practice of *tableaux vivants* or "living pictures." In another film by Méliès, *Jupiter's Thunderbolts* (*Le Tonnerre de Jupiter*, 1903), the king of the gods conjures the nine Muses in a hall of his celestial palace on Mount Olympus. The Muses first appear as statues before they then come to life, beginning to dance and sing for (and with) him, until their cacophony and unruliness make him dismiss them, at which point they are made to turn back to stone and then to disappear again. What we have here is the film's director, stage designer, producer and protagonist as the new master of the arts, with the power to conjure up painting, sculpture, song, music and dance, to combine them into an intermedial and interactive spectacle but also to quell their insubordination.

Another possibility for early film history is to argue that films of this period are not marginal for later cinema but central to it precisely because of their ability to combine the production and dissemination of popular entertainment on an unprecedented scale with the radical potential of intense artistic experimentation. Seen in this way, early cinema poses a challenge for distinctions that may seem familiar today but that emerged and consolidated only in later periods—distinctions such as those between high and low cinema, between self-reflection and realism, or between commercial and art-house cinema. Early cinema also questions the neo-Aristotelian focus on storytelling over spectacle that has informed much of the scholarly work on later cinema. In fact one can go a step further to argue that the potential of cinema as it emerged before 1914 has never been fully realized by the bifurcations of later cinema between commercial and art-house, between cinema as an art form and cinema as an industry.

What was that potential? At a very basic level it has to do with a profound reconceptualization of representation as a result of the emergence of new

audio-visual technologies for the storage, transmission and retrieval of knowledge. Seen as a medium rather than as an art form or industry (Ligensa and Kreimeier 2009; Albera and Tortajada 2010), film encapsulates an epistemic shift in the way the world, including antiquity, is perceived and understood, a shift that needs to be related to the emergence around 1900 or soon after of new disciplines including psychoanalysis, archaeology and anthropology, but also of new artistic movements such as modernism.

As the title of Méliès' *Jupiter's Thunderbolts* suggests, the true protagonist of the film is not Jupiter himself but his thunderbolts. Newly forged by Vulcan, they give him the thrill and excitement of power, but they also burn his hands, go off prematurely, and eventually force him out of the film frame. The thunderbolts prove a power superior even to the father of the gods himself, seizing control over the narrative and title of the film. As a film producer, director and actor, Jupiter may be able to assert the superiority of film over traditional arts but he fails to control the raw power of the technical objects at his disposal and the spectacle they create. The contrast between the antiquity of the first wizard of cinema and the antiquity of Karl Marx is illuminating. For Marx, alienation in modernity is understood as separation from the classical past and its mythologies: "What chance has Vulcan against Roberts & Co., Jupiter against the lightning-rod and Hermes against the Crédit Mobilier? All mythology overcomes and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in the imagination and by the imagination; it therefore vanishes with the advent of real mastery over them" (Marx 1993, 110). For Méliès, on the other hand, classical mythology and the imagination are not made irrelevant in the modern world. Rather, they are radically reconfigured in ways that help the spectator play out and perhaps work through the shocks of modernity, shocks related to the miraculous and uncanny force of an increasingly technologized environment and the ensuing complexities of the human condition within it.

## **Which Antiquity?**

Greece and Rome appear in a whole range of popular film genres of this period: fiction films such as fantasy films, optical trick films, comedies, historical dramas, animation and melodramas, but also non-fiction films such as travelogues, dance films, and filmed theater. Geographically, the majority of these films come from just three powerhouses of early film production, USA, Italy and France, but circulate widely around the globe: the scattering of surviving film prints in collections from Sao Paolo to Tokyo is sometimes directly related to the complex routes of early film distribution. Thematically,

the films of this period engage with Greece and Rome in a range of ways. Some of them relate to specific historical individuals (*A Modern Sappho*, 1905, *Julius Caesar*, 1908, *Nero* 1909, *The Death of Socrates*, 1909, *Cleopatra*, 1910), literary or artistic works (*An Artist's Dream*, 1897, *The Island of Calypso: Ulysses and the Giant Polyphemus*, 1905, *Ben-Hur*, 1907, *The Return of Ulysses*, 1908, *Lysistrata*, 1910) or classical locations (*A Trip to Greece*, 1908, *Ancient Rome*, 1909). Many films feature mythological characters and stories which are not directly linked to specific textual or visual narratives but which nevertheless have strong links to Greece and Rome: Hercules, Prometheus, Pygmalion, Orpheus, Narcissus, King Midas, the Minotaur. A third group of films features more loose connections to the Greco-Roman world, with the linguistic and pictorial identity of that world confined to isolated signs related to classical or classicizing architecture (film design, outdoor filming in Mediterranean-style gardens, filming on location in archaeological sites), costumes (white robes for women or tunics for men), or names. For instance, in some of the earliest film dances ever produced such as *Cupid and Psyche* (1897), *Neptune's Daughters* (1900), and *A Nymph of the Waves* (1900), there is very little other than the film title itself that allows us to draw a firm link between the mixture of dancing styles displayed on the screen (ballet and variety-style dancing) and the world of classical antiquity.

Some of the differences in the cinematic reception of Greece and Rome that become prominent in later periods (especially after the Second World War) are not totally absent from this period: Rome has a more distinct visual and thematic identity associated with the dramas of history; Greece is more malleable and more clearly linked to mythology and literary adaptations. Rome has associations with imperial politics, urbanism and Christianity; Greece has more to do with the imagination. Rome is made relevant to the modern world through analogy; Greece through symbolism. For instance, one could argue that the divide between the historical dramas of Rome and a Greece associated with the fantastical can be mapped onto the dichotomy between documentary realism and fictional fantasy as it emerges out of the contrasting cinematic styles of Lumière and Méliès. At the same time, however, there is a strong sense in which the films of this early period engage with Greece and Rome not so much as historically and symbolically distinct entities but as interrelated and often indistinct parts of a rich and vibrant classical tradition. Arguably, this is true for popular culture more broadly, including later types of cinema as well. The drive for early films to situate themselves squarely within the culture of classicism, first as newcomers and competitors with other arts but also, especially towards the 1910s, as its custodians, is at least as strong as any desire to mark categorical distinctions

within that culture. The dominant mode of the period is an irreverent process of aesthetic and cultural hybridity and homogenization of Greece and Rome, with little interest in issues of accuracy and fidelity towards sources or in distinctions between different eras, cultures, and styles. This goes hand in hand with a similarly strong interest in the ways in which classicism is opposed to, and often threatened by, the orientalism of Babylon, the Middle East and Pharaonic Egypt (Michelakis and Wyke 2013: 12–14).

This process of hybridity and homogenization operates simultaneously at a cultural level and at a narrative and aesthetic level and needs to be connected to film as a “total art form” (in the manner of Wagner’s opera). But for the purposes of this chapter it also needs to be connected to film as a “total medium” encapsulating a new episteme. The emergence of cinema creates new possibilities for the representation and conceptualization of Greece and Rome. Text-based and image-based models of antiquity are suddenly replaced by an embodied antiquity in motion. From a film-historical point of view, this turn to antiquity can be seen as a pragmatic ploy for respectability and artistic legitimation on the part of early cinema and its nineteenth-century predecessors. But from an epistemological point of view, this mode of referencing classical antiquity has far-reaching implications for the way in which Greco-Roman antiquity itself is perceived as the object of knowledge and perception around 1900. Cultures previously perceived as remote and inaccessible, the object of contemplation from a distance or the product of the imagination, are suddenly transformed into a vivid but fleeting reality to be experienced through the senses. Film makes possible the generation of new modes of perception and thought in modernity within which Greece and Rome become not only more vivid, but also more complex, dynamic, and enigmatic. This is not the first time that Greece and Rome enter modern popular culture (nineteenth-century photography, the novel, theatre and opera are important predecessors of cinema in this respect), but it is arguably the first time that they enter the modern imagination so pervasively across social, cultural and geographical boundaries.

Greco-Roman antiquity is important during this period primarily in terms of film form and content: plot, set design, costumes, acting styles, sound, and so on. Its bearing on issues of film genre, film theory and cinema architecture is very limited until around 1910. This is not surprising in view of the fact that cinema itself does not emerge as an institution with regulated production, exhibition and distribution practices and as an art form with its own aesthetic and narrative strategies until around this time. While the so-called “classical” film narrative that begins to consolidate in the late 1910s acquires its name as a result of an investment in classicizing terminology of film critics of later generations (Williams 2000), it is nevertheless entirely consistent

with the classicizing drive that manifests itself in various other ways from around 1910: film genres such as epic emerge and define their identity and generic parameters through engagement with ancient literary epics (Michelakis 2013b), the first screenwriting manuals invite reflection on film narrative through a return to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the first cinema palaces use neoclassical architecture, and the first theoretical writings on cinema create an archaeology of "writing in movement" that links cinema to ancient vase paintings, Greek tragedy, and other classical art forms (Michelakis 2013a, 1–3 and 111–117).

## Spectatorship

In mainstream commercial cinema the spectator is often perceived as being immersed in the action in the way that Roland Barthes describes for the widescreen films of the 1950s:

I am on an enormous balcony, I move effortlessly within the field's range, I freely pick out what interests me, in a word I begin to be surrounded [...] here I am, no longer under the image but in front of it, in the middle of it, separated from it by this ideal distance, necessary to creation, which is no longer that of the glance but that of the arm's reach [...] the balcony of History is ready. What remains to be seen is what we'll be shown there. (Barthes 1954)

The "balcony of history" is a concept that Barthes formulates in the 1950s in response to the novelty of CinemaScope, but at a fundamental level it describes a viewing experience that can be associated with both later and earlier types of cinema, including the first film epics of the 1910s. For instance in *The Fall of Troy* (1910) the spectator is invited to look at the burning city of Troy from the vantage point of Helen and Paris who stand on a balcony of the royal palace. The balcony of history gives unmediated access to past events as they unfold, but it also provides a safe distance from them, distance that makes possible to gain eyewitness knowledge of history for pleasure and education. In many ways Roland Barthes' balcony of history points towards the hugely influential (even if reductive and monolithic) scopophilic model of spectatorship advanced to describe the spectator of mainstream cinema (Mulvey 1989). Hidden in a darkened space, the spectator enjoys the spectacle on the screen voyeuristically. The spectacle itself stimulates voyeurism with the help of a narrative driven by suspense, by the promise of revealing what is constantly deferred.

A persistent narrative about early cinema spectatorship focuses on a very different kind of spectator, the naïve spectator who runs away in panic from



the fast-approaching train on the screen or who runs towards the screen in an attempt to save the heroine in danger. It may well be that such naïve spectators never really existed except perhaps as urban myths fuelled by cinema's own desire for attention-seeking publicity (Elsaesser 2009: 14–17). However the films themselves suggest modes of embodied viewing and modes of narrating which are very different from those associated with Barthes' balcony of history. Early spectators may often be cast in the role of the voyeur but equally often they are addressed in a direct manner. The spectacle on the screen is not based on a cause-and-effect narrative, where everything moves towards a resolution that holds the key to the questions raised by the plot. Rather, it is based on a succession of visually powerful scenes which are only loosely connected with one another, resulting in what Aristotle in the *Poetics* or modern critics of action movies would summarily condemn as “episodic plot.” Early cinema concentrates on moments of exciting spectacle of interest in themselves that aim to give the spectator pleasure through the quick arousal and satisfaction of curiosity. The early spectator is not just an eyewitness but someone who is complicit to this spectacle, who participates in it and experiences it through shocks and thrills. One question is at whose expense are the various tricks played—there are important issues here of gender, class and ethnicity. Another question is whether the pleasure derived from such films is “mere fun” or whether an aesthetic of shocks and thrills has more profound implications for how cinema relates to modern life as a symptom or as a reaction to it. While a more systematic examination of early cinema spectatorship might focus on broader issues of social identity as they interact with exhibition practices (Cooper 2005), the discussion that follows concentrates on two examples of how spectatorial responses are anticipated by early film narrative modes of address.

Georges Hatot's *Nero Testing Poison on Slaves* (*Néron essayant des poisons sur des esclaves*) was produced in 1897. In a narrative that is less than a minute long, slaves are brought before Nero's throne and are made to drink poisons, while Nero himself observes with intense interest their agony and death at his feet. The film consists of a single shot, with a static camera. No editing is involved in it, although careful prefilmic preparation is required for the sets, props, costumes, and the movement of the actors in and out of the frame. The issue of how violence is depicted on screen and why antiquity offers legitimate ground for the testing of the limits of acceptability and of the boundaries of censorship shows no sign of dying out in the age of video games and cable television. In that respect, and for all its simplicity, the film can be situated at the origins of a persistent feature of cinema's fascination with antiquity. The question of what kind of take the film offers on the display of violence (is it about violence or is it about display? Does it lead

to a critique or to a celebration of violence?) cannot be addressed without considering its engagement with previous representation of the same topic in the visual and performance arts or the broader debate about artistic attitudes towards pain and death that can be traced back to Lessing in the eighteenth century and to Plato in antiquity. The film can be read as a reductive take on the tragic story of the poisoner Locusta stripped down to a single scene devoid of narrative context. But, while bodily mutilation and violent shape-shifting are common themes in the magic trick films of this period, what we have here is a more realistic depiction of suffering closer to morbid forms of entertainment associated with the fairground, including non-fiction films featuring public executions and the electrocution of animals. As the emperor leans over and looks intensely at the agonizing death of the poisoned slaves, his mastery and control over the spectacle goes hand in hand with his bodily re-enactment of the victims' convulsions of pain. The film satisfies a curiosity not by suspense but by surprise. Like Nero, the spectator can experience the agonizing pain of the slaves again and again, at will, but not without impulsive bodily reactions that replicate the violent juxtaposition between life and death, presence and absence, power and submission as it is played out on the screen.

Another interesting example for how spectatorship works in early cinema is provided by George Méliès' *Pygmalion and Galatea* (*Pygmalion et Galathée*, 1898). As the online catalogue of the American Film Institute puts it, the film features Méliès as Pygmalion "at work in his studio on the statue of Galatea, who, on being completed, comes to life. He attempts to clasp her to his arms, when the bust leaves the body and crossing the room mocks at him standing with the lower portion of her body in his hands." Like numerous other films of this period, it features a male creator and a female statue, raising issues about the objectification of female beauty, the male-dominated world of artistic creativity and the relation between the animate and the inanimate. The film also draws on the popularity of the Pygmalion myth, animated statues, and the sculptural ideal in tableaux vivants, pose plastiques and popular theatre (Nead 2007: 45–104; Hersey 2009; Marshall 1998; Macintosh 2013). But whereas for most of these art forms the appeal of the story lies in the desire for animation and the transformative moment of transition from stone to flesh, in this film there is no room to develop anticipation or to reflect on the emotional effects of the miraculous transformation. Pygmalion runs hopelessly behind Galatea's animated statue and seeks in vain to clasp her in his arms, to regain control over his creation through haptic perception. The film turns the objectification of feminine beauty and the aestheticization of matter as a project of male desire and creativity to something that has its own agency and leaves no room for contemplation. If,

as Nead argues, “the dream of motion haunts the visual arts from the classical period to the present day” (2007, 45), the film shows how frenetic and erratic motion can be associated with the stirring up and frustration of desire, with disbelief and disorientation. If we should see in this film “the story of the invention of cinema itself,” with cinema, like the statue of Galatea, being a descendant of the automata of the Enlightenment (Wood 2002: 189), the film associates the life-like not only with the wondrous but also with the uncanny (Marcus 2007). What is more, it airs anxieties about the failure to separate between real life and the lifelike, the natural and the artificial, in a manner that keeps Pygmalion, the object of ridicule, at a distance from the spectator. Pygmalion, like other naïve characters of early cinema, is “‘trapped’ in the superabundance of data” of early cinema for the benefit of the spectator: in the age of mechanical reproduction and of commodity fetishism, proximity and possession come to be redefined not in tactile terms but in visual terms. Cinema shows spectators how not to behave, or as Elsaesser puts it “in the cinema—as in the modern world of urban display and self-display—the rule is ‘you may look, but you may not touch’” (2009, 16).

## Color

The oscillation between and within different types of polychromy and monochromy informs cinematic representations of antiquity throughout cinema’s history. If mainstream film genres of classical Hollywood celebrate their classicism through thematic and formal links with neo-classical discourses about beauty in glorious black and white, sword and sandal movies celebrate countercultural values through an aesthetic of intense colors associated with the foreign, the feminine and the vulgar. If Hollywood Technicolor seeks to remain subdued and diegetically motivated, experimentation with film color outside Hollywood goes for a stylization based on sensuous colors explicitly situated within larger intermedial contexts. For the purposes of this chapter, the most interesting moments in the cinematic history of color are those where polychromy and monochromy encounter each other within the space of the same film narrative. For instance, in Zack Snyder’s *300* (2006) there is a sharp juxtaposition between the saturated colors of orientalizing excess and the sepia monochromy of the Greek male body that stands for a broader clash of civilizations. In Oliver Stone’s *Alexander* (2004) the classicizing monochromy of white statues and architecture is once again set in opposition to the monumentality and sensual allure of orientalizing excess, though in this case the possibility of a reconciliation between the two is also raised. In Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000), two types of monochromy fight against each other: the

greyscale monochromy of imperial power clashes against the sepia monochromy of personal memory before they both give way to a republic of colors, a republic for which the film's protagonist fights to the death. This color coding of distinct cultural and ideological takes on antiquity does not confine itself only to the digital age. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1963), for instance, a polemical return to the aesthetic dissonance of ancient sculptural polychromy highlights color as an external "supplement" and as an autonomous means of expression contributing "to the dissolution of a fixed perspective" (Hanssen 2006: 132).

One of the most fascinating chapters in this history of oscillation between monochromy and polychromy in cinematic representations of classical antiquity comes from the silent era. Many of the films on Greece and Rome produced in the first two decades of cinema were made with the help of early color techniques ranging from toning and tinting to kinemacolor, demonstrating the link between the symbolic value of antiquity and the higher production and exhibition costs of film seeking to appeal to the middle classes. For the purposes of this chapter I want to concentrate on a small selection of color films produced by the French companies Pathé and Gaumont, and more specifically on the stencil effects used in these films, for three reasons. First, because the encounter between polychromy and monochromy in this body of films appears as an aesthetic norm, informing the composition of their narrative at all levels. Second, because this encounter of different attitudes towards color does not always manifest itself in terms of an ideological clash but often holds the promise of a synthesis. And third, because this body of films comes at a significant historical juncture, just before an aesthetic of monochromy prevails in a classicizing cinema coming of age but also across the arts, as modernism revisits and redefines the foundations of classical art.

The earliest among the films I want to discuss is one of the very last *Serpentine Dance* films to be made in the first decade of cinema, produced by Pathé in 1905 (often identified erroneously as "Loie Fuller" or descriptively as "Serpentine Dance by imitator of Loie Fuller"). The film begins with a bat flying through the air against the backdrop of a classical temple and a rural landscape. As soon as it lands on the ground, it is transformed into a female dancer waving "her voluminous costume-like wings" in the style of the American pioneer of modern dance Loie Fuller (see Figure 1.1). After two minutes of constant changes of shape and color, what enters the frame as a dark green bat finally vanishes as a colorful tornado, leaving behind an empty space. At one level, the film provides us with competing models for thinking about Greece, setting up a contrast between greyscale and static images in the background and a colorful movement that "obscures and dissolves the [human] body" in the foreground (Brannigan 2011: 23).



**Figure 1.1** Imitator of American modern dance pioneer Loie Fuller in “Serpentine Dance” film produced by Pathé, France, in 1905. Screen capture from DVD. © British Film Institute, 2012. For the tinting, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dda-BXNvVkQ>

Seen in this way, an intermedial clash is being dramatized here, with cinema siding with the performing arts of dance and vaudeville against the visual arts of painting and architecture. But to cast this dynamic juxtaposition of art forms and colors only in terms of a clash would be to underestimate the significance of bringing them together in the first instance. The echoes of Greek antiquity were always present in Loie Fuller’s technological spectacles of movement and light, both in the voluptuousness and mysticism of her movements and in the whiteness of her robes (Albright 2007). But, to my knowledge, this is the only dance film inspired by her choreographic work that brings out the connection of that work with classical Greece in its use of sets. The greyscale sets in the background, no less than the colorful dancer in the foreground, contribute to the same process of abstraction whereby the visual identity of Greece is reduced to isolated signs such as the temple, the robe, the harmony between (wo)man and nature. Seen in this way, the coexistence of monochromy and polychromy in this film does not seek to create hierarchies between the different strands of the classical tradition on which it draws but to break them down and reassemble them as a new type of spectacle in which they are inseparable.

In *Roman Orgy* (*L'orgie romain*), directed by Louis Feuillade for Gaumont in 1911, the effeminate emperor Heliogabalus appears to be in full control of the film's color palette just as he is in full control of the narrative. Scene after scene, his clothes have as many hues as the clothes of all the other characters put together. As the narrative progresses, this flamboyant spectacle of absolute power and excess is set up in opposition to the forces of order and reason that ultimately prevail. For instance, one of the orgies he organizes takes place under the watchful eye of Emperor Augustus, whose white marble statue stands right in the middle of the composition. The same contrast appears in a later scene, where Heliogabalus, pursued by the Praetorian Guard, hides in a room dominated by the solemn gaze of another monochrome marble bust. What we have here is a political and moral reading, if there is one, of monochromy and polychromy as contrasting forms of power: one of them associated with decadence, the other with law and order. Given the clarity of this juxtaposition, the final scene where the Praetorian Guard punishes the transgressive emperor comes as a surprise. All members of the guard wear colorful armor that competes in intensity with the clothes worn by Heliogabalus himself (Figure 1.2). The off-screen decapitation of the tyrant and the momentary glimpse of his severed head suggest that the proliferation of color in this final scene is not dissonant with a search for narrative closure. The progressive movement of the narrative towards order is depicted against the canvas of a history where the colorful pleasures of shock and horror offer enduring continuities.

Another useful example of the interaction between monochromy and polychromy can be found in the mythological adaptation entitled *The Marriage of Cupid and Psyche* (*Le mariage de l'amour*), produced by Pathé, probably in 1913. In the first scene, all characters appear in colored costumes against a similarly colored background representing a palace hall. The only character that stands out is the film's female protagonist, played by the dancer and actress Stacia Napierkowska, whose white dress highlights her statuesque beauty but also underscores her loneliness and isolation. The following scene features a divine assembly in which Venus and her companions are all dressed in white, against the subdued colors of the idyllic woodland that surrounds them. This scene reinforces the neoclassical associations of the white color with timeless beauty, but at the same time it comes across as lifeless and lacking in depth when compared to the world of the mortal characters of the previous scene. In the final scene, Psyche is seduced by Cupid in a sequence featuring a visual feast of food-bearing spirits that appear out of thin air, statues, flowers, tiger skin rugs on the floor, and other rich ornaments. This visual feast seeks to seduce the spectator in the way it seduces Psyche, not least by setting on display some of the "special effects of the fairy



**Figure 1.2** The emperor Heliogabalus about to be killed by the Praetorian Guard in the final scene of Louis Feuillade's *Roman Orgy* (*L'orgie romain*, France, 1911). Screen capture from digital copy of the print held at the EYE Film Institute in Amsterdam. For the tinting, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYOjJvhc8Vc>

and trick genres” (Yumibe 2012, 126). However, none of the spectacular items at the foreground of the composition appears in color. Colors are reserved only for the two characters of Psyche and Cupid themselves in the middle ground and the curtains and columns opening on to a garden in the background. What we have here is in many ways the reverse of what we found in the *Serpentine Dance* of 1905. Color appears to be the norm against which the divine, the miraculous, and the exotic are highlighted in black and white.

## Conclusion

The small and diverse sample of films discussed above allows us to trace a development in the use of film color from novelty to accepted norm within a relatively short period of intense artistic and technological experimentation with a specific coloring technique. More important than that, though, the

selective and partial application of color associated with stenciling allows reflection on larger debates about polychromy and monochromy. Each film frame opens up a different range of possibilities for the configuration of the relation between color and black and white. As well as mapping this diversity onto the rise and fall of a specific coloring technique in a specific national context, we may also use it as a starting point for thinking about the larger history of color in modernity as a history of discontinuous technological practices resonating with persistent aesthetic tropes.

Color and spectatorship are by no means the only two topics through which a discussion about Greece and Rome in early cinema might be undertaken. This chapter has touched on a number of other issues that relate to developments in film narrative and style, and to relations with other art forms and media. Various other topics could have been included, for instance under the general heading of modes of production, distribution and exhibition one could discuss sound, early cinema architecture, national traditions and cultural and socioeconomic contexts. While early cinema remains one of the most under-researched areas of the encounter between cinema and Greco-Roman antiquity, it raises historiographical, methodological and theoretical issues that can help challenge, or at least de-emphasize, teleological or essentialist approaches to cinema, popular distinctions between high art and popular culture or between commercial and art-house cinema, and familiar modes of film analysis including auteurism, stardom and genre criticism. Perhaps more importantly, it provides a deeper understanding of film and its contribution to the modern reception of Greece and Rome, not only in terms of cinema as an art form or industry but also in terms of film as a medium with the power to transform the types of knowledge that can be recorded and disseminated and the ways in which subjectivity is constructed in modernity.

## REFERENCES

- Albera, F. and M. Tortajada (eds.) (2010). *Cinema Beyond Film: Media Epistemology in the Modern Era*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press
- Albright, AC. (2007). *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1954). On CinemaScope. Trans Jonathan Rosenbaum <http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v3i3/barth.htm>. Accessed November 6, 2016.
- Brannigan, E. (2011). *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cooper, M.G. (2005). Spectatorship: Issues and debates. In R. Abel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. London: Routledge, pp. 600–603.



- Crary, J. (1990). *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Elsaesser, T. (2009). Archaeologies of interactivity: Early cinema, narrative, spectatorship. In Ligensa and Kreimeier, pp. 9–22.
- Gunning, T. 1990. The Cinema of Attractions: Early film, its spectator, and the avant-garde. In T. S Elsaesser and A. Barke (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame Narrative*. London: British Film Institute, pp. 56–62.
- Gunning, T. 2004. “Now You See It, Now You Don’t”: The temporality of the cinema of attractions. In L. Grieveson and P. Krämer (eds.), *The Silent Cinema Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 31–40.
- Hansenn, E. F. (2006). *Early Discourses on Colour and Cinema: Origins, Functions, Meanings*. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Hersey, G. L. (2009). *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jacobs, S. (2011). *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ligensa, A. and K. Kreimeier (eds.) (2009). *Film 1900: Technology, Perception, Culture*. New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing.
- Macintosh, F. (2013). From sculpture to vase-painting: Archaeological models for the actor. In G. W. M. Harrison and V. Liapis (eds.), *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 517–534.
- Marcus, L. (2007). Cinematic realism: “A recreation of the world in its own image.” In M. Beaumont (ed.), *Adventures in Realism*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 177–192.
- Marshall, G. (1998). *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marx, K. (1993). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin. Originally published in 1939.
- Michelakis, P. (2013a). *Greek Tragedy on Screen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Michelakis, P. (2013b). Homer in Silent Cinema. In P. Michelakis and M. Wyke (eds.), *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 145–168.
- Michelakis, P. and M. Wyke (2013). Introduction: Silent cinema, antiquity and “The Exhaustless Urn of Time.” In P. Michelakis and M. Wyke (eds.), *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–26.
- Mulvey, L. (1989). *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nead, L. (2007). *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c.1900*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Olsson, J. 2005. Communication. In R. Abel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. London: Routledge, pp. 150–152.

- Williams, C. (2000). After the Classics, the classical and ideology: The differences of realism. In C. Gledhill and L. Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies*. London: Arnold, pp. 206–220.
- Wood, G. (2002). *Edison's Eye: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*. New York: Knopf.
- Yumibe, J. (2012). *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

## FURTHER READING

Research on the reception of Greece and Rome in early cinema is complicated by the difficulty of accessing films and other archival materials of this period. Many early films exist only in film prints held in film archives and are available for viewing either onsite using flatbed facilities or in one-off screenings in specialized film festivals. However, this is a fast-changing research landscape, with a relatively steady flow of films being restored and digitized each year for release on DVD or through online video streaming. While such digital modes of viewing provide unrivalled access to and control over the filmic narrative, they nevertheless lack the performative dimensions, perceptual pleasures, and cognitive challenges of collective viewing of filmstrips projected on the large screen with live musical accompaniment. So far there has been no systematic attempt to identify which films of this period are available commercially or through online streaming. The single most authoritative source for locating film prints in film archives is the subscription-based and slightly out-of-date database “Treasures from the Film Archives” of the International Federation of Film Archives. The identification and collection of materials around films of this period requires extensive archival research. A good starting point is the open access Media History Digital Library (<http://mediahistoryproject.org/>) and the online catalogues of film archives, libraries, and other institutions such as the American Film Institute, the British Film Institute, the French Cinematheque, and the Library of Congress. An extensive list of films related to Greece and Rome which is particularly helpful for early cinema can be found in Dumont 2013. Basic information about many of these films can also be found in the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/>). Broad reference works on early cinema include Burch 1990, Elsaesser and Barker 1990, Grieveson and Krämer 2004, Abel 2005, Gaudreault 2011 and Gaudreault, Dulac and Hidalgo 2012. So far, the only collection of articles devoted exclusively to silent cinema and the Greco-Roman world is Michelakis and Wyke 2013. On the related fields of Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Shakespeare in silent cinema see respectively the works by Lant 1992, Shepherd 2013 and Buchanan 2011.

- Abel, R. (ed.) (2005). *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- Buchanan, J. (2011). *Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burch, N. (1990). *Life to Those Shadows*. London: British Film Institute Publishing.
- Dumont, H. (2013). *L'antiquité au cinéma: vérités, légendes et manipulations*. [http://www.hervedumont.ch/L\\_ANTIQUITE\\_AU\\_CINEMA/](http://www.hervedumont.ch/L_ANTIQUITE_AU_CINEMA/). Accessed May 30, 2015. Revised version of print edition originally published in 2009, Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions.
- Elsaesser, T. and A. Barker (eds.) (1990). *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: British Film Institute Publishing.
- Gaudreault, A. (2011). *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Gaudreault, A., Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo (eds.) (2012). *A Companion to Early Cinema*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Grieverson, Le. and P. Krämer (eds.) (2004). *The Silent Cinema Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Lant, A. (1992). The curse of the Pharaoh, or how cinema contracted Egyptomania. *October* 59: 86–112.
- Michelakis, P. and M. Wyke (eds.) (2013). *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shepherd, D. J. (2013). *The Bible on Silent Film: Spectacle, Story and Scripture in the Early Cinema*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



## CHAPTER TWO

# The Creation of the Epic: Italian Silent Film to 1915

---

*Irmbert Schenk*

### An Outline of Italy's Social and Ideological History

The unification of Italy as a nation state was achieved in 1861 under the auspices of the Kingdom of Piedmont. The capital of Rome, replacing the provisional capital at Florence, was only wrested from the Papal States by military force ten years later (an event depicted in *La presa di Roma*, the first Italian feature film, in 1905). The constitutional form of the state was a monarchy, not the republic which the civilian forces of the Risorgimento and revolutionaries of 1848 had been striving for. At the same time as unification, a division of the country arose: the unequal social development of northern and southern Italy. While the north embraced industrialization from 1880 on (relatively late in comparison with international trends), in the south, the almost exclusively rural economy stagnated with low productivity. This unequal development also holds for the era of economic development and euphoria at the turn of the century, when protectionism supporting industry further harmed the rural sector: this quickly allowed contemporary writers on the *Questione meridionale* (the “southern question,” as it was known after 1901) to speak about the south as a colonial market.

Here I will consider a few statistics. As late as 1914 in Italy, 55 percent of the population was working in agriculture with only 28 percent in industry

---

*A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen*, First Edition.

Edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy.

© 2017 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published 2017 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

(largely distributed across small enterprises). As a result, the 87 percent increase in production in the industrial sector between 1901 and 1913 was much higher than the European average. The social effects, that is, the spread of poverty and misery especially in the south and in many rural areas, become clearer if one considers that between 1909 and 1913 the average annual number of emigrants was 650,000 out of a total population of 36 million. Although underdeveloped overall, the education system in the south was also particularly underfunded. In 1911, when universal suffrage was extended to all men over thirty, half the population was still estimated to be illiterate (Villari 1977; Romeo 1978; Paci 1981; Fissore and Meinardi 1988; Carocci 1990; Procacci 1993; Mack Smith 1997; Romano and Vivanti 1999).

The manifestations of economic and social change unfold in various ways, but most important for the context of mass media are the effects on people's psychosocial identity that stem from this disparity in societal formation. On the one hand, the disparity is revealed in a peasant agrarian lifestyle, itself the product of the semi-feudal landed estates, the Church's power of sanction and a parasitic administration, and on the other hand, in urban living conditions, subject to capitalistic industrialization and modernization. These facts lead to the impression that the normative demands of the value systems of comparable social groups were differently perceived. A second assumption, however, appears to me to be more significant: that the process nevertheless set out the contradictions for everyone and that the outcome shaped the social and historical awareness of the populace, in a similar manner to the way in which the national identity of society as a whole is created by the conception of the individual. But how could this identity be shaped with such strong tension at the time of unification and the increase in contradictions during the period of the development of the national state?

The film historian Georges Sadoul (1973: III.1, 207) credits the background to the origin of the film *Cabiria*, dealing with the Punic Wars of ancient Rome, to Italy's successful colonial war of conquest in Libya in 1911–12. This act of Italian colonial imperialism, however, had as its prehistory a much less successful precedent in Eritrea and Somalia after 1885 and in the catastrophic defeat at Adua in 1896 during the first attempt to conquer Abyssinia (the war in Abyssinia in 1935–6 was, for Fascism, a sequel with the aim of "setting things right").

Throughout all these enterprises a central term of propaganda shows up: the notion of *mare nostrum*, the Mediterranean belonging historically, geographically, climatically and culturally to Italy. This was not simply propaganda to gloss over foreign affairs failures or low international regard for Italy. More significantly, it was linked to a spectrum of diffuse ideology, intended to paper over the lack of a contemporary empirical basis for the

creation of a overarching national idea of history and society as well as the unbearable living conditions of many, as outlined above. By that, I mean a return to earlier periods of believed or real national, military and cultural grandeur, as much fictitious and rhetorical as ideologically effective: for example, the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and above all Roman antiquity or (for the south) Magna Graecia. This sworn declaration of a unity of historical identity between Latinity and Italianness, between Humanism and Christianity as the (infantile) view of (manly) strength became the central moment of the construction of contemporary unity and identity. The core textual and atmospheric elements of an ideology that is as much comprehensive as it is diffuse are focused in this declaration; they likewise appear as a widespread pedagogical theme in education and culture. The formalisms of Italian literature, for instance, give an indirect impression of this; these declarations are pointedly expressed in the nationalist pathos of a D'Annunzio or in Marinetti's glorifications of war and power (their use as stepping stones for Fascism being not merely rhetorical). Pompous Roman architecture, such as the Palace of Justice and the National Monument to Victor Emmanuel II, is from this era, which also saw the founding of periodicals such as *Mare Nostrum*, *La Grande Italia* and *L'Idea Nazionale*.

In cinema, however, this take on history became its own genre, in the epic and history films Italian cinema was producing (particularly up until 1915). The unique aesthetic of these films lies in their realistically depicted expansion of filmed space. This, combined with the "rhetoric" of scenery, mass movement and gesticulation, enabled the films to medially take on the aforementioned demands of diffuse ideology in Italy as well as deliver them. At the same time, they were meeting the spatial power fantasies and desires for historical myths of audiences around the world. Before the First World War, Italy had captured a large share of the international film market with these productions.

## **The Origins of Italian Film-making**

As elsewhere, the formal written history of film-making begins in Italy in 1895, in fact on November 11, when Filoteo Alberini, an engineer at the Istituto Geografico Militare, patented a filming and projection machine in Florence. His *Kinetografo* worked in a similar fashion to the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe, but saw no practical use due to overpowering competition from the Lumières. The brothers' Cinématographe was not shown in Rome until 1896 (with a program announcing this as *fotografie animate*—"moving photographs"). Film production over the following ten years was

generally restricted to “real” subjects, that is, documentaries and current affairs films commissioned by or imitating the productions of the Lumières. The Milanese Italo Pacchioni can be regarded as a “national” pioneer in this field. With his brother Enrico, Pacchioni shot and projected films from 1896 onward with a homemade film-making device. The internationally famous quick-change artist Leopoldo Fregoli made films of his own variety numbers and occasionally also animated films after the fashion of Méliès. From 1898 to 1903, he showed the films under the trademark *Fregoligraph* as the fourth part of his show. He also had them shown as complete film programs to variety show audiences when he was absent.

The *caffè-concerto* and variety theater were the main venues for early silent movie distribution (especially imported films) in Italy. Up to ten films were generally incorporated into a program as a fifteen- to thirty-minute block. After 1904, the establishment of fixed cinemas in the cities accelerated (amidst the first expansion of the film industry with corresponding vertical labor divisions), and was complemented by playhouses doubling as cinemas in summer or during breaks in programming, and by the erection of open-air cinemas. The rise of the travelling carnival cinema did not have the same significance in Italy as it did in other European countries; due to topographical and social reasons, travelling cinemas largely appeared (particularly between 1903 and 1907) at carnivals and trade shows in northern Italy. This background of a cinema that was overall slow to develop may be why the middle classes in Italy were included in audiences, and theater practitioners and writers as workers, much earlier than elsewhere.

The first Italian feature film, the previously mentioned *La presa di Roma*, was filmed in 1905 by Alberini with the Roman company Alberini and Santoni, which he had just founded. In 1906, it changed its name to the long-lasting Cines. During the same period, around 1905 to 1907, further production companies emerged in Turin, Rome, Milan and Naples, which established the long-term geographical distribution of Italian film production. By the end of 1907, there were nine film production companies, replacing what had been until then artisanal or family producers. By 1915 there are said to have been eighty production companies; in 1907 500 cinemas were listed, in 1915 1,500 film theaters (Prolo 1951; Brunetta 1979; Sadoul 1973; Lizzani 1961; Bernardini 1981, 1982). Bernardini (1982: 22) doubts the number of cinemas given by Prolo; Brunetta, (1979: 57) speaks of fifty production companies in 1914.

These figures highlight the enormous, rapid development of the Italian film industry. However, this was hardly a systematic industry but rather an anarchic and speculative one composed of small operations with no



monopolistic concentration. The same holds for the heyday of the long historical and period drama films from 1912 to 1914.

This economic system, essentially unstable but flexible, enabled Italian cinema to come out of the international film industry crisis of 1908 to 1909 more quickly, despite the crisis being deepened in Italy by the internal economic slump, especially affecting new industrial branches such as automobile production. This was accomplished partly by the abandoning of films of one to two rolls and the ambitious lengthening of film durations (up to 4,500 meters for Pastrone's *Cabiria*),<sup>1</sup> and partly through the significance and gravity of the subject matter and objects portrayed in the feature films.<sup>2</sup> This led to the prototype of this "enlargement," the Italian "blockbuster" (costumed historical and period film), taking a leading international position. Unfortunately, the export boom necessary to finance the expensive epics, already in decline by 1914, collapsed completely when Italy entered the war on May 24, 1915. The extent to which this expansion may be attributed to Italy's sunlight, general climate, scenic and historical endowment and cheap workforce that could be employed in large numbers—all making for low-cost production conditions, as Jasset (1911) maintained (and which many other writers have since repeated)—remains open. What seems to me to be more influential is the huge number of Italian emigrants in Europe and the Americas, who may have constituted a large part of the impressive export audience. In the domestic market, the historical films spurred the incorporation of the middle classes into the audience, as much through the films' connection to academic ideological themes as through their ever more refined display of technical and aesthetic artistry in presentation.

One of the unique features of the development of Italian cinema should be accorded more than passing anecdotal reference. In the second phase of expansion after 1908, the fact that more and more members of the nobility were involved in business management and on boards of directors and trustees, is a striking expression of the precarious economic state of the production system.<sup>3</sup> That certainly promoted the influx of large amounts of speculative capital (mostly derived from real estate) and so enabled the production of ever more lengthy and expensive films. At the same time, however, it set up both in form and ideology a concentration on two genres: the epic historical and period drama films, with their appeals to nationalistic emotion; and the middle-class and aristocratic salon dramas, with their passions that were as much decadent as they were exquisite. The *divismo* of Italian silent film particularly took hold through the latter, especially in the form of the female divas, who appear as the femme fatales of the films (and objects of desire for the blue-blooded company directors and producers).<sup>4</sup> They brought sexuality (different from the coarseness of lowbrow comedies