OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

Elżbieta Olechowska

# THIS IS THE SONG THAT NEVER ENDS

## Classical Mythology in the Twenty-First-Century Audiovisual Series for Young Adults



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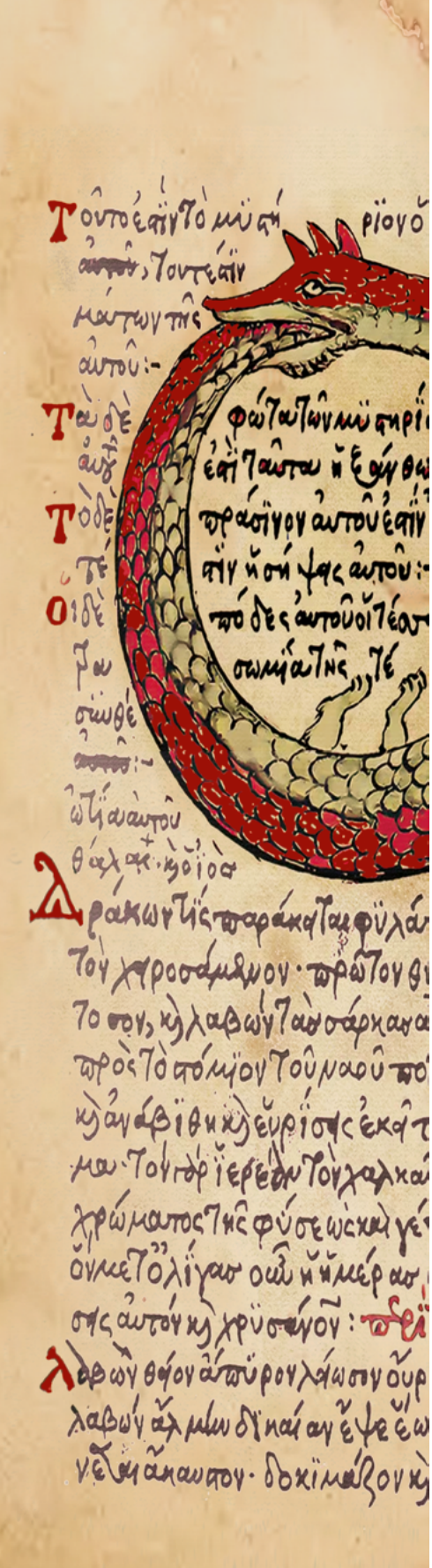
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WUW

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Reviewers
*Prof. Brane Senegačnik* (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)
*Dr Henry Stead* (University of St Andrews, Scotland, UK)

Commissioning editor
*Jakub Ozimek*

English language consultant
*Anna Olechowski*

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To Jerzy, my Godfather and *avunculus*,
on whose ninety-sixth birthday I wrote
the last words of this book and to whom
I owe what gave me the greatest
pleasure in life, my fascination with
the past and my love of music.

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# NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Elżbieta Olechowska is a media scholar and classical philologist, initially specializing in Latin textual criticism (Claudian's *De bello Gildonico* published at E.J. Brill, and three speeches by Cicero, dated to 54 BCE, in the series "Bibliotheca Teubneriana") and currently focusing on the history of classical scholarship and classical reception in audiovisual culture. Educated at the University of Warsaw, under the direction of Professor Kazimierz Kumaniecki, she worked for eight years at the University of Geneva and spent a year at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study. Affiliated with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Montreal for almost three decades, she published there the six-volume series "Challenges for International Broadcasting" (1991–2001), the monograph *The Age of International Radio: Radio Canada International 1945–2007*, and a number of training manuals on radio journalism. Since the academic year 2008/2009, she has been actively involved in several international research programmes at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales," University of Warsaw, including *Gnôthi seauton! Classics and Communism* and *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*.

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My children, Anna and Filip, certainly suffered from my unrelenting preoccupation with the audiovisual part of popular culture but showed exceptional patience when I could not wholly share their interests. Anna was directly and enormously helpful in reviewing my "English as a second language" vocabulary and style with her customary expertise and tact. Filip assisted me greatly in dealing with mundane affairs that otherwise would have threatened my comfortable existence required for this creative effort.

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In the spirit of fairness, I must not forget my friends and collaborators, who had to listen for several years to my frequent complaints and disaffected confidences about the slow and uncertain progression of the book; I would like to apologize to all of them for my self-indulgence and thank them for their tolerant patience – Zbigniew Kloch of my own "Artes Liberales" and David Movrin of the University of Ljubljana are high on that list.

Finally, the question of the title. "This is the song that never ends" is a phrase borrowed from the children's entertainer, ventriloquist, and puppeteer Shari Lewis (1933–1998). Her 1988 famous infinite-loop single-verse song provides a children's version of the concept of endlessness, which may be used to describe classical mythology's millennia-long and never-ending power of inspiration.

Warsaw, September 14, 2023

# INTRODUCTION



Zbigniew Karaszewski's artwork, based on aurochs, horses, and deer painted on the wall of Lascaux caves, France. Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY SA 3.0), accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lascaux_painting.jpg; user: Prof saxx (2007).

# *INTRODUCTION**

> The first two decades of the twenty-first century unequivocally belong to the series. Their influence on the modes of telling the story of the world (and therefore on our way of understanding that story, too) is revolutionary.
>
> Olga Tokarczuk, *Nobel Lecture*[1]

Stories! We crave them, we seek them, we cannot live without them. Called "a pervasive and perpetual human characteristic, like language, like play,"[2] they appeared when sentient life and cognition began. Survival instincts, inevitably, fuelled first non-verbal, then verbal communication; sharing what was known – facts – and then, what was imagined – fiction. In the ancient caves of Chauvet, Arcy-sur-Cure, Lascaux, Altamira, Greater Sunda Islands, and in hundreds of other places, engraved, painted, and carved images of prehistoric animals, humans, and therianthropic figures preserve powerful and mysterious visual stories. Most of them were discovered only in the twentieth century; they still remain enigmatic and are only superficially decoded. Judging by the sophistication of the images,[3] the language skills of that period must have been significantly

---

* Due to the nature of the material analysed in this volume, the Author chose to replace the series' editorial style sheet with a system adapted to the content.

[1] The phrase "unequivocally belong to," kindly suggested by Henry Stead, improves the original translation (Tokarczuk, 2019).

[2] A.S. Byatt, in her 2004 article in *The Guardian*, republished the same year, as the introduction to Maria Tatar's edition of *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*.

[3] "They've invented everything!" allegedly exclaimed Pablo Picasso after a visit to the Lascaux cave in 1940. This statement has been frequently quoted in various versions (see J. Jones, 2021), but without a confirmed source. If the assumption of neuroscientists that "complex language and sophisticated tool use and manufacture emerged at roughly the same time" (Lamm, 2014, 281) is valid, the high level of painting skills and tools apparent in cave art indicates that the cave artists were using a relatively sophisticated language.

complex,[4] reaching well beyond a simple exchange of basic information. Prehistoric cave art offers the first surviving manifestations of non-verbal storytelling. The hunting scene preserved in a cave on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi (Celebes) constitutes "the oldest [over 40 thousand years old] evidence for the communication of a narrative," while "the ability to invent fictional stories may have been the last and most crucial stage in the evolutionary history of human language and the development of modern-like patterns of cognition" (Aubert et al., 2019, 442).[5] At that time, *Homo narrans* was born.[6]

As life evolved, the need to share stories shaped storytelling modes, making them gradually more intricate, in parallel to the growing complexity of human existence. Stories had been ordering and explaining the surrounding world before science took over this never-ending task. However, there are areas of reality inaccessible to scientific methods. They continue to be interpreted from the individual perspective of storytellers, which, more than science, contributes to the awareness of what it might mean to be human. This process is necessarily

[4] According to evolutionary (Darwinist) psychology, "language evolved gradually from pre-existing cognitive capacities, contrary to the view of Chomsky and others that language and symbolic thought emerged abruptly, in a single step, within the past 100,000 years" (Corballis, 2013, 1). William Deresiewicz (2009) delivered a scathing critique of evolutionary psychology and its tendency to neglect contradictory evidence. He used as examples of literary Darwinists Joseph Carroll, Jonathan Gottschall, Denis Dutton, and Brian Boyd, best known as an expert on Vladimir Nabokov. Twelve years later, Elias Garcia-Pelegrin, Clive Wilkins, and Nicola S. Clayton (2021) reviewing the abundant and fascinating history of scholarship related to the evolution of language and storytelling skills, ignored Deresiewicz's arguments but highlighted the fact that the ideal suitability of language for storytelling did not preclude the existence of storytelling "prior to the evolution of language." Boyd, whom Deresiewicz calls "a clearer and more careful thinker than most of these other writers," states in a later paper that "humans almost from birth have story-craving minds" (2017). Jack Zipes, in his 2010 review of Boyd's *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, joins Deresiewicz's negative assessment of literary Darwinism and criticizes Boyd for inexplicable exclusion from his study of folk and fairy tales, "myths, legends, and other short narratives" (Zipes, 2010, 152–161). Deresiewicz's and Zipes's criticisms do not detract from the enjoyment of following Boyd's reasoning, heavily coloured by his fascination with Homer, in the chapter "From Zeus to Seuss: Origins of Stories" (Boyd, 2009, 209–379). A similar opinion was expressed by Mathias Clasen (2012, 430–431) in his review of Boyd's 2009 book.

[5] It seems intuitively right that hunting tales are among the first surviving fictional narratives as even today they retain their notoriously exaggerated and quasi-fictional character. I find particularly impressive the ritually overstated records of hunting successes in the royal Assyrian inscriptions, e.g., Assurdan II (934–912 BCE) allegedly killed 120 lions, Adad-nirari II (911–891 BCE) three times as many – 360, Assurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE) – 450 lions and 390 wild bulls, while Salmanasar III (858–824 BCE) boasted of killing 399 lions and 373 wild bulls (Bauer, 1933, 87–88; Cassin, 1981, 377–379; Olechowska, 2011, 275).

[6] The term *Homo narrans* was coined by the German ethnologist Kurt Ranke (1908–1985); see Uther, 2003, 146.

dynamic: people evolve, and their conditions change, and so do the stories mirroring people's environment, beliefs, needs, aspirations, and fears. In today's world, the crucial functions of stories include their ability to attract, captivate, and entertain readers, listeners, and viewers as well as satisfy the universally experienced hunger for narration; they are also expected to produce a deeply felt sensation of pleasure, a commodity in high demand.

Among many recent publications intended for non-specialists about how the brain works in relation to stories, two seem rather illuminating. The first, published in 2012, is a discussion of the theory of storytelling by Jonathan Gottschall supported by psychological and neuroscientific studies, among them research on brain scans observed during consumption of fiction and assessments of the command of social skills displayed by heavy consumers of fiction. When people consume stories, whether by listening, reading, or watching, they virtually transfer to fictional worlds and experience what the protagonists of these stories go through. Stories create and strengthen neural pathways required for appropriate reactions to challenges that may and do occur in real life. Bringing up the analogy of the flight simulator, a widely used and effective method of pilot training, Gottschall compares in the chapter "To Simulate Is to Do" consuming stories to a "life simulator," a safe method of exposing people to a wealth of virtual life experience and allowing them to face challenging dilemmas complete with solutions and related consequences (Gottschall, [2012] 2013, 59–67). The book focuses on the idea, highlighted also in the title,[7] that storytelling is the *differentia specifica* of the human species.

The second publication is the 2021 book by Angus Fletcher, entitled *Wonderworks: Literary Inventions and the Science of Stories*. It takes the reader on an easy stroll through forty-three centuries of literary texts, secure in the crucial importance of stories as corroborated by recent neuroscientific advances.[8] Fletcher, a neuroscientist doubling as a literary scholar, talks about human brains "being primarily narrative" and containing "action centers" powerfully affected and mobilized by stories that explain the world and illuminate challenges people face – "the problem of being human in a nonhuman world" (2021, 7). Stories "fix hearts and lift souls"; in their literary manifestation, they are:

[7] *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*.

[8] See also Raju Narisetti's interview with Fletcher, April 29, 2021, in McKinsey's "Author Talks" series, available online.

> a narrative-emotional technology that helped our ancestors cope with the psychological challenges posed by human biology. It was an invention for overcoming the doubt and the pain of just being us. […] It can still reckon with death and unshatter the psyche. It can still give us the stuff past the stars and the meaning immortal. (Fletcher, 2021, 9)

Throughout recorded history, stories have covered an infinite diversity of themes encompassing all that is, was, could, and could not be. Storytellers have been responding to the double challenge of providing relevant content and ensuring memorable performance: what to say and how to say it best, striving to achieve an optimal balance between their own needs and desires and the delight of their audiences, including their patron/sponsor. While the means available to storytellers multiplied and evolved, at times dramatically, the creative challenge, on the basic psychological level, remained the same. An ancient ἀοιδός (*aoidós*), a Hellenistic (or Byzantine) romance writer, a Celtic bard, a French *trouvère* or *jongleur*, a (*mutatis mutandis*) mendicant preacher of any order using in his sermons *exempla*, bestiaries, and lives of saints, an author of frame stories, of short stories, of fairy tales, of novels serialized in periodicals, creators of radio and television series, they all have dealt with different but largely comparable issues typical for the art and business of episodic narration in any era.

The relationship between the story, storyteller, and story recipient does not develop in a vacuum. It is shaped by "environmental" forces, such as, for instance, a wealthy patron's preference for a specific content, provision (availability) of space and time for telling the story, and the ear/eye readiness of the recipient. These are basically social, economic, and cultural factors that evolve and change from period to period, situating stories within their background and, at the same time, providing a 360° view of the phenomenon. The divide between active storytellers and passive story recipients has never been a strict dichotomy. Storytellers must learn their craft by listening to stories told by others. Once they master storytelling, they regularly revert to being recipients to broaden their repertory and improve their technique as well as satisfy their own hunger for stories. Active reception or appropriation of older stories is an obvious mechanism of storytellers' professional development and also a source of inspiration for content and form.

The first creative contact with narration occurs in early childhood, coinciding with the acquisition of language skills. Malcolm Gladwell's international bestseller

*The Tipping Point*[9] brought to the attention of a wider public the *Narratives from the Crib* (Nelson, [1989] 2006), a research project published in 1989 and conducted by Katherine Nelson, a developmental psychologist at Harvard University. It was based on 122 recordings (made over fifteen months) of stories Emily Oster, a two-year-old child, told herself before falling asleep. Inspired by an earlier study (Weir, 1962), this one revealed the importance of stories in early childhood manifested in monologues, crib speech, bed-time rituals essential in ordering reality, and specifically, in digesting real-life experience and recreating the world through narrative.[10] For Emily, storytelling was a tool that organized whatever happened on a given day in her life and expressed her expectations of what would and should happen the following day.[11] Children's dependence on stories, as creators and recipients, follows them into adulthood. The human need for stories, experienced by active creators or intellectually and emotionally engaged recipients, relies on imagination and familiarity with stories told in the past, often repeatedly, with or without variations. This need has always been with us during the millennia of human development and the entire lifespan of each human being. "Humans seem to have an adaptive predisposition for inventing, telling and consuming stories" (Aubert et al., 2019, 442).

In each period of history, this need has been satisfied by narratives well grounded in the corresponding reality. The television series became the privileged way to tell stories in the late twentieth century, initially sharing this position with film. In the twenty-first century, it left film behind. It multiplied its distribution platforms, becoming available on DVD, the Web, and international streaming services, watched on various screens, including computers and ubiquitous smartphones. This gradual departure from television as the leading distribution platform is reflected in recently favoured new terminology – audiovisual series or scripted show instead of television series (or serial). The position of the film has been somewhat blurred, first by theatrical movies being shown on television and then with the advent of the new platforms becoming available to watch for a fraction of the ticket price anytime and almost anywhere.

---

[9] Gladwell ([2000] 2009, 118–121) discusses the success of the television show *Sesame Street* achieved through "the brilliance of its writing and the warmth and charisma of the Muppets," in spite of its neglect of narrative, "the most important of all ways of reaching young children" (121).

[10] See especially Chapter 1, authored by Nelson, and Chapter 2, written by Jerome Bruner and Joan Lucariello (Nelson, [1989] 2006, 27–97).

[11] The book was published again, seventeen years later, with a foreword by the grown-up Emily Oster herself, now an economist at Brown University (Nelson, [1989] 2006, v–vii; Tkaczyk, 2020, 149).

The view expressed by a recognized mistress of the narrative craft highlights the cognitive interpretation of human experience as a perennial function of narration. It encourages us to take a look back at the origins and development of post-oral storytelling as closely interconnected with the social and cultural evolution of *Homo sapiens*. In her Nobel Prize acceptance lecture on December 7, 2019, Olga Tokarczuk talked about "a wholly new way of telling the world's story" developed in audiovisual series but practised already well over 2,000 years ago "in the myths and Homeric tales." When great writers share their insights about storytelling, scholars should pay attention and confront creators' thoughts with their own.

Contrary to the crib stories of the two-year-old Emily, stories presented in television series are rarely true; even those offering authentic or historical events are fictionalized for various reasons. Emily's narratives had cognitive and developmental functions. Fans of audiovisual shows look at stories differently than either Emily or Philip Pullman's evil harpies, who valued truth and authenticity so much that they agreed to show the ghosts the way out of the land of the dead in exchange for true stories.[12] Twenty-first-century viewers primarily want to be entertained, even though, depending on the series' genre, scripted shows assume quite a few additional functions and values, including cognitive, developmental, and cultural.

After over seventy years of existence, television reached significant levels of complexity in some of its productions, and along with popular culture in general, acquired the approval of psychologists and cultural scholars. Traditional criticisms and accusations of low standards and mediocrity have been toned down, and the positive effects of watching television have been discussed and accepted since the late twentieth century. Steven Johnson's 2005 bestseller, *Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter*, is the result of this change of perspective. Similar reasoning more specifically targeting television serials was offered by Jennifer Hayward in her 1997 book, *Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera*. This evolution of scholarly attitudes towards television is discussed at length in the 2017 insightful collective volume *Media of Serial Narrative* edited by Frank Kelleter. He calls serialization a storytelling practice

[12] In Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, people need stories even after they die. The new task and *modus operandi* is given to the Harpies by Lyra, who says that they will now "guide the ghosts from the landing place by the lake all the way through the land of the dead to the new opening out into the world. In exchange, they will tell you [the Harpies] their stories as a fair and just payment for this guidance" (Pullman, [1995, 1997, 2000] 2017, 782).

in popular-culture media. He analyses seriality in literature, film, and television venturing into non-English language productions, offering quite a few such examples, mainly German. Kelleter succinctly describes the foundation of the hunger for narration saying: "two basic impulses of storytelling – the satisfaction of conclusion and the appeal of renewal – are balanced through suspense and resolution" (Kelleter, 2017a, 9; see also Denson, 2011).

Like television in general, series have often been contemptuously dismissed as commercially driven popular entertainment for the masses, emphasizing their commercial rather than entertainment potential. In consequence, they were readily denied the status of an art form. Their omnipresence, success, and undeniable appeal appear suspicious to scholars, an attitude that carries seeds of patronizing criticism. Television series have been accused of lacking artistic values and originality, to say nothing of the nefarious, addictive impact on personality and causing mental disorders among the susceptible *hoi polloi* of all ages. Popular culture in general, and, specifically, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, saw the low opinion and contempt for the series gradually reverse.[13] Several impressive productions gained unanimous praise from viewers, critics, and scholars.[14] Prime-time television series, and more recently series produced by streaming services, tell long, complex, and absorbing stories, able to involve and connect viewers better than movies, even those produced as cycles.

## The What, Why, and How of the Volume

A cultural scholar with a strong background in both Classics and media naturally tends to look for areas where these disciplines meet and observes the dynamics of such encounters. Having researched for several years classical inspirations in all types of texts for adolescents and young adults,[15] I realized that my fasci-

[13] The first widely popular television series which fascinated scholars, launched the first wave of academic interest, and found a place in university curricula was the 1997–2003 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. See also the PhD dissertation by Nandita Dutta (2020), based on Angela Ndalianis's theory of screen and entertainment media.

[14] The examples most frequently quoted here are *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *The Shield*, *Deadwood*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *House of Cards* (Hilmes et al., 2014, 26 et passim; Goodlad, 2018, 869–870; Kelleter, 2017b).

[15] See my papers, written for Katarzyna Marciniak's European Research Council project, where I discuss these themes in *Harry Potter* novels (2016), Joann Sfar's comic books (2020d), both editions of the *Clash of the Titans* – 1981 and 2010 – (2020a), Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz's

nation with television series could be channelled with a reasonable expectation of success into a study of the genre focusing on a specific time period and limited to shows in some ways inspired by Greek and Roman mythology. Results of the 2015–2022 European Research Council (ERC) project *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* provide a natural launching pad for such an endeavour. *Our Mythical Childhood*'s research targets all cultural texts inspired by Classical Antiquity and addressed to children, young adults, and their so-called crossover publics. The present inquiry constitutes a logical and promising avenue for classical reception studies targeting specifically audiovisual series, provided that most if not all such productions were identified and acknowledged.

My approach to the genre concurs with Tokarczuk's broad vision of the time-honoured survival and evolution of storytelling and with the scholarly obligation to recognize and study this legacy. It has been the cornerstone of my enthralment with the phenomenal appeal and power of attraction demonstrated by television series across all contemporary cultures and generations of viewers. Like any riveting tale, the story of today's audiovisual series would benefit from investigating its origins. The goal would be to determine what kind of storytelling had satisfied the human need for stories during the long centuries before the advent of television. Accordingly, Chapter 1 of the present study, entitled **"The Audiovisual Series: A Prequel,"** provides a chronological and analytical review of narrative genres sharing the same essential (but not the only) function of delighting and entertaining the public. Readers may approach the chapter as a rite of passage to better understand how oral storytelling (which already encompassed visual elements) became recorded in writing and finally achieved its currently dominant form of serialized audiovisual narrative. Observing the historical evolution of this kind of storytelling from antiquity to the present day may illuminate the reason why television series effortlessly stepped into the millennia-long process of satisfying human hunger for compelling stories.[16]

The sheer number of television series produced in the twenty-first century across languages and cultures defy an individual scholar's attempt at fully grasping the phenomenon and impose a reduction of the scope of research

*Once Upon a Time* (2021), *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* (forthcoming a), Pullman's *His Dark Materials* and *The Book of Dust* (forthcoming b), and in various entries in the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* (e.g., on the BBC *Atlantis* and on Nick Willing's *Olympus*).

[16] See Martin M. Winkler's *Classical Literature on Screen: Affinities of Imagination* (2017, 1–4), on the genealogy of storytelling.

to a manageable perspective. Scholars naturally focus on series from their cultural areas, in parallel with shows in English, which account for most of the current global production[17] and constitute the main research material for the present study. In the tenth-anniversary edition of *American Gods*, Neil Gaiman wondered how he, an Englishman, dared to write about America, its soul, and gods. He came to the conclusion that it was a question of necessity: he had no choice (Gaiman, [2001] 2011, 539). *Mutatis mutandis*, I am asking myself a similar question: how does someone for whom English is a second (or third) language feel justified in analysing mainly American and British audiovisual series, undoubtedly missing countless allusions and intertextual references incomprehensible to a non-native speaker? Unsurprisingly, my answer is the same as Gaiman's. I had no choice if I really wanted to understand this genre's dominion over the twenty-first-century favourite screens. Waiting for those culturally and linguistically better equipped to do it was not an option for me. On the other hand, I am, so to speak, accustomed to dealing with this kind of handicap, sharing it with all classical philologists (with a hesitant exception of Greek scholars?), who try to understand texts not only written in languages that are not their mother tongues but studying speech and reality from thousands of years ago.

While staggeringly numerous, audiovisual series in English are accessible almost anywhere in the world. They are also the most frequently researched by scholars from all language areas. The worldwide availability of English-language series, as well as the fact that English is easily the most often used second language in the world,[18] ensure their impact on production in other languages, a part of which remains unknown to the global public. Streaming services, such as Netflix,[19] allow access to subtitled (or dubbed) shows from many countries.

[17] FX Networks' researchers provide statistics on the number of new (scripted) shows in the United States, produced for all platforms (broadcast networks, cable, and streaming) since 2009. Because of Covid-19, the numbers, which until 2019 had been showing a steady upward tendency, went down by 7% in 2020. Still, the 2019 peak was 532 shows compared to 200 in 2010. Streaming remains the main source of growth (Stoll, 2021; Lafayette, 2021).

[18] According to Dylan Lyons (2021): 20% of the global population or 1.35 billion people speak English; 360 million are native speakers; for almost 1 billion people English is their second language. For a 2021 regional breakdown of non-native English speakers, see the *Education First English Proficiency Index* (2021).

[19] There are many more such services (in Europe, e.g., HBO Max, Disney+, and Amazon Prime Video) but Netflix comes to mind first, as it is currently the largest streaming service in the world, available in 190 countries, even though not in China, Crimea, North Korea, Russia, and Syria, states known for their strict control over media. In Russia, the service was suspended on March 6, 2022, in protest against the February 24 Russian invasion of Ukraine (Jason Wise from EarthWeb posted

Still, the offer is, out of necessity, selective. Conference volumes centred on specific themes often disappoint readers who hope and fail to find discussions of series they consider essential. The problem is being gradually alleviated through synergy created in large international research projects combined with a narrowing of focus[20] and by specialized series of publications, each volume tackling a specific area of research.[21]

Greek mythology was an essential source of inspiration for the ancients themselves. The famous Greek playwrights wrote tragedies retelling myths in new versions; the titles of the plays read like a list of mythological heroes. Early Christians added the Old and New Testaments to the legacy of Greek and Roman literature. Antiquity, its literature and fine arts, influenced the elites of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as it was omnipresent in education; Latin was the language of the Church, and it was also a *lingua franca* for diplomats and intellectuals. Greek and Roman mythology as a source of topics and themes was ubiquitous in all arts during the Renaissance. Curiously, despite its admiration for the rule of reason and evidence of the senses, the Enlightenment developed an interest in folk and fairy tales. During the same period, people began to wonder whether the longstanding devotion to the great past was not excessive and did not hinder the development of originality, imagination, and inventiveness. The questioning of the worth and uses of antiquity in modern times, a recurrent theme debated in various ways and for various purposes

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the information in the 2022 installment of his report on Netlix, which has since been replaced by his December 12, 2023, report referring only to 2023 news).

[20] A good example of such an endeavour combining a large research team with a narrowed focus of study is provided in Katarzyna Marciniak's ERC Consolidator Grant, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, which made it possible to create the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* – still a work in progress – offering descriptions and analyses of hundreds of cultural texts inspired by Classical Antiquity including 126 audiovisual productions. Entries for the entire *Survey* were contributed by ca. 350 researchers and cover texts from 45 countries.

[21] Like, e.g., the series of monographs and edited volumes "Screening Antiquity," launched at the same time as the *Our Mythical Childhood* ERC Grant, in 2015, by Edinburgh University Press and edited by Monica Silveira Cyrino and Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones. By early 2022, the series numbered ten instalments: Rome, *Season Two*: *Trial and Triumph* edited by Monica Silveira Cyrino, Ben-Hur*: The Original Bluckbuster* by Jon Solomon, *Cowboy Classics: The Roots of the American Western in the Epic Tradition* by Kirsten Day, *STARZ* Spartacus*: Reimagining an Icon on Screen* edited by Antony Augoustakis and Monica Silveira Cyrino, *Designs on the Past: How Hollywood Created the Ancient World* by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Epic Heroes on Screen* edited by Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, *Ancient Greece on British Television* edited by Fiona Hobden and Amanda Wrigley, *Screening the Golden Ages of the Classical Tradition* edited by Meredith E. Safran, *Screening Divinity* by Lisa Maurice, and *Ancient Epic in Film and Television* by Amanda Potter and Hunter Gardner.

since the late Roman Empire, took in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries the form of the so-called Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns.[22] Under different guises, this debate continues today, with occasional classicist voices taking up the challenge.[23]

One way to bring the research material to a manageable scope is to focus the present inquiry clearly on series inspired by classical mythology, which *ipso facto* discounts shows inspired by ancient history. Yet, completely ignoring the "historical" series would be a mistake for one main reason: in contemporary popular culture, boundaries between mythology and ancient history are blurred, as they were already in antiquity when the Homeric Trojan War was not considered a fictional story. Historical figures, having passed the test of millennia, often acquire a mythical veneer and a quasi-mythological stature (for example, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Cleopatra VII Philopator), and as such have affinities with both history and mythology. Their image across centuries may fluctuate from hero to villain, and again, to hero; they may even acquire for a while the semblance of an ordinary human being. On the other hand, our knowledge of ancient history and its actors is frequently sketchy. The temptation to embellish the picture using guesswork and imagination appears overwhelming to scriptwriters but may also influence historians. "Historical" films and television series about antiquity rely, out of necessity, on many conjectures and semi-verifiable claims. When figures like the two centurions mentioned by Caesar (*Gall*. 5.44), Lucius Vorenus and Titus Pullo, who served in an unidentified legion, become characters in popular culture, whether in novels,[24] television series,[25] or games,[26] they are provided with fictional but fully developed personalities and complete biographies. An average viewer perceives today's images of antiquity in either "mythological" or "historical" shows as mirroring the same,

[22] Among the many publications related to this debate, Gilbert Highet's *The Classical Tradition* ([1949] 1985, 261–288) remains the most illuminating. See also his selected bibliography on the subject, p. 640, as well as the more recent works on the subject by Joseph M. Levine (1991, 1999).

[23] See, e.g., these two examples: Mary Beard's *Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures and Innovations* (2013) and Katarzyna Marciniak's "The Ancient Tradition in the 21st Century" (2013).

[24] The 1987 *Legion* tetralogy of the "Videssos Cycle" by Harry Turtledove; Colleen McCullough's *Caesar: Let The Dice Fly* (1997); Michael Livingston's *The Shards of Heaven* (2015) and *The Gates of Hell* (2016), which features the two centurions as loyal protectors of Cleopatra's children. Simon J.A. Turney's *Marius' Mules II: The Belgae* (2010) features both soldiers as centurions of Legio XIII.

[25] Vorenus and Pullo are among the characters of the 2005–2007 BBC–HBO two-season epic drama *Rome*.

[26] *Total War Rome II* (based on the series *Rome*) and *Expeditions: Rome*, a Danish role-playing game.

remote past, only occasionally distinguishable as different. What contributes further to this confusion is, on the one hand, the occasional presence of authentic historical figures in mythical shows, and on the other, the appearance of fictional (even mythological) characters in historical shows.

Another important distinction between these two types of series stems from differences in their purpose, intent, and function. In a mythological show, the function of entertainment dominates all others. In a historical series, the educational function prevails. Sometimes, a historical show veers towards historical reconstruction and documentary, questioning (or disregarding) the authority of historical sources and textbooks. Such shows may commemorate and highlight historical figures against a more or less fictionalized background of past events. Creative intentions behind a historical series may significantly diverge from those underpinning a mythological series. Their purpose is different, and they may include unresolved biases and deep-rooted cultural, ethnic, and ideological propensities or discontents. Ancient history is about nations as they were 1,500–2,000 years ago, having little in common with their twenty-first-century descendants. Yet, it is often viewed today through a lens coloured by what happened to these nations later and how they now view their past interactions with Greece and Rome. For example, a British show about the Roman conquest of Britain may be critical of the character and behaviour of Roman commanders,[27] a French one may favour Gallic heroes,[28] a German one may exaggerate victories of Germanic tribes,[29] and so on. There is nothing wrong with such approaches and they may lead to successful shows. However, the excessive ideological load often detectable in such productions may appeal to national audiences for whom they were designed but disappoint and frustrate viewers from other regions.

The scope of the present study is further pared down by discounting series which present no hard evidence that their creators were inspired by antiquity but include characters, themes, or structures that could potentially be compared to those from classical mythology and literature. Opening the boundaries of the discipline to encompass the so-called "masked encounters, shadows, and echos"

[27] See, e.g., the comedy series *Chelmsford 123* (Rory McGrath and Jimmy Mulville, 1988–1990) and the historical fantasy drama *Britannia* (Jez and Tom Butterworth, 2018–2021).

[28] See the animated series *Idéfix et les Irréductibles* (Charles Vaucelle, 2021) and the delayed *Le combat des chefs* (Alain Chabat, 2025).

[29] See, e.g., *Barbaren* (Barbara Eder and Stephen St. Leger, 2020–2022).

of Classical Antiquity has been occasionally proposed and practised.[30] While such an approach relies on more subjective premises, it remains a legitimate and promising position in specific cases; however, adopting it here could significantly blur the scope of the study. The *raison d'être* for this book is an attempt to provide a satisfactory review of the body of twenty-first-century audiovisual series from the point of view of directly evidenced classical inspiration. Such an assessment has not been produced yet and until it is, venturing into the vast expanse of conjectures, potential parallels, and alleged similarities appears premature and ought to be attempted only as studies of individual cases.

The classical education of elites ensured that antiquity and its heritage have remained relevant for centuries. The command of the two "dead" languages, especially Greek, gradually shrank and became a rarity but did not disappear; in contrast with the past generations of students bitterly complaining about the required effort and conditioned to detest their Latin masters, those who study Latin and Greek today do it predominantly because they want to and grumble about it much less. The study of Classics survived to the twenty-first century as an energetic and vibrant field, and unquestionably remains "a work in progress" according to Mary Beard (2013), an assessment much more helpful and meaningful than the quarter-of-a-century-old slogan, often repeated out of context, *Le latin est mort et bien mort* (Wacquet, 1998, 322).

The term *mythological inspiration* refers to a show's connections to classical mythology, its Greek and Latin literary sources, the languages of these sources, and visual and material culture. These connections may reach to antiquity itself or to later stages and layers of reception that have accumulated throughout history. The rather imprecise and vague term "inspiration," or "inspired," will gain more clarity if we add a list of possible instances (already played with and

[30] See the collection edited by Ricardo Apostol and Anastasia Bakogianni (2018), who use these labels and have even called their book *Locating Classical Receptions on Screen: Masks, Shadows, Echos*. See also Martin M. Winkler's book (2017) or Jennifer Ann Rea's chapter (2022, 66–81), in which she discusses the *Aeneid* and the apocalyptic science-fiction movie *Snowpiercer* (2013) by Bong Joon-ho, treating them as companion texts, even though the identified Virgilian echos do not appear intentional. Another example is *The Wire* (2002–2008), HBO's outstanding drama chronicling the vagaries of crime, law enforcement, politics, education, and media in Baltimore as the show follows a team of cops and the criminals they are after. Its creator, David Simon, publicly discussed the similarity of forces shaping the drug trade to the Olympic gods; he also said that the main concept behind the show – the inevitability of fate – is borrowed from the great Greek tragic playwrights. See Love, 2010, 487–507, where Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is identified as the main potential philosophical inspiration for Simon, who was never as explicit in his interviews.

variously identified by theorists of classical reception; Hardwick, 2003, 5–11)[31] supported by examples.

1. The most obvious example of a mythologically inspired series is a straightforward adaptation[32] or demonstrated adherence to one or more ancient texts, for instance, the 2018 BBC One and Netflix co-production, *Troy: Fall of a City*,[33] created by David Farr.
2. A retelling of myths with a change of focus (or point of view), like the 2003 miniseries *Helen of Troy* directed by John Kent Harrison.
3. An original retelling or re-imagining of myths based on a blend of ancient sources and the creator's vision, such as the 2013–2015 BBC *Atlantis* or Nick Willing's 2015 *Olympus*.
4. A modern paraphrase of an ancient source, such as the 2005 Dutch *Medea* directed by Theo van Gogh.[34]
5. Creation of original mythological plots within the universe of Greek myths, for instance, the ongoing 2020 series *Blood of Zeus* produced by Netflix.
6. Themes borrowed from classical mythology, used in single episodes or arcs in a series dealing with matters basically unrelated to antiquity, like the 2007 *Sarah Jane Adventures* (S01E03–04): "The Eye of the Gorgon."
7. Mythological objects or creatures and their powers are featured in an otherwise non-mythological environment, for example, the 2009–2014 *Warehouse 13* created by Jane Espenson and D. Brent Mote, or the 2014–2018 *Librarians*, developed by John Rogers.
8. Use of Latin and/or Greek expressions with various degrees of linguistic correctness in the many variations of witch/supernatural shows, such as Joss Whedon's 1997–2003 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Constance M. Burge's 1998–2006 *Charmed*, Maggie Friedman's 2013–2014 *Witches of East End*, Sera Gamble and John McNamara's 2015–2020 *Magicians*, 2016–2019

[31] For a review of various theoretical debates on classical reception, see Hardwick and Stray, (2008) 2011b, 2–5.

[32] Adaptations are of course rarely, if ever, simple. My favourite adaptation scholar, Linda Hutcheon, says in her 2006 book, *A Theory of Adaptation* (8–9): "as *a process of creation*, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; […] adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing."

[33] Full bibliographical data on all the titles quoted here are provided in Chapter 2, "Chronological Survey of Twenty-First-Century Audiovisual Series and Films Inspired by Classical Antiquity," under the date of release.

[34] Joel and Ethan Coen's 2000 *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* is another good example of a modern paraphrase, in this case in film.

*Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* developed by Ed Dexter, 2018–2022 remake of *Charmed*, Juan Carlos Medina, Alice Troughton, and Sarah Walker's 2018–2022 *A Discovery of Witches*, or Dennis Heaton's 2019–2020 *The Order*.

9. Use of a concept, a quote from an ancient author, an image, name, or title borrowed from antiquity, as in Bryan Fuller and Alex Kurtzman's 2017–2024 *Star Trek: Discovery*, as well as naming starships and titling episodes in the *Star Trek* universe and in the 1997–2007 *Stargate SG-1*.
10. Documentary or docudramatic attempts at explaining the origins of myths and rationalizing their message, for instance, Tom Pollocks's 2003 *The Real Jason and the Argonauts*, Natalie Maynes and Bettany Hughes's 2010 "Atlantis: The Evidence", or Nina Mavis Brunner's 2015 *Aus den Spuren von Odysseus*.

These criteria for the identification and gathering of mythologically inspired twenty-first-century audiovisual series included in the present inquiry were used to produce the second, fundamental chapter of the book – **"Chronological Survey of Twenty-First-Century Audiovisual Series and Films Inspired by Classical Antiquity"** – which lists in a strictly chronological sequence well over 400 titles of series, miniseries, feature films, television films, documentaries, and shorts. Even though the emphasis is on mythological inspirations, productions inspired by ancient history are included in the Survey to provide a more complete synoptic picture of the interest enjoyed by Classical Antiquity among film and television makers during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. In spite of the efforts that went into the compilation of the Survey, it would be preposterous (and naive) to claim that all such productions, even only in English or available with English dubbing or subtitles, are included there.

Why did I embark on such a time-consuming and labour-intensive task? Certainly not from latent masochistic tendencies but rather from insecurity and the related need for verification. Here, a confession related to methodology is in order. Since the early days of my philological adventure, half a century ago, when I began working as a textual critic and text editor, I was obsessed with collecting all extant manuscripts and all incunabula of the text I wanted to publish, examining their common and diverging traits, and trying to see if and how they were connected, and only then establishing the text according to the gathered evidence. It was the principle of textual criticism taught by my MA and PhD advisor, Warsaw University Ciceronian scholar Kazimierz

F. Kumaniecki (1905–1977).[35] A new study of the manuscript tradition was a must. I completed it for my 1978 edition of Claudian's *De bello Gildonico* and, again, for my 1981–1984 editions of three of Cicero's speeches from 54 BCE.[36] In the same spirit, I approached my much more recent (2015–2019) work on the reception of ancient theatre in communist Poland, compiling first all performances of ancient plays at national and regional theatres from 1945 to 1989. I was able to handle the resulting pool of statistical data with relative ease, having completed several courses in statistics a decade earlier, which were part of my MBA degree at Concordia University in Montreal. When classical reception in adolescent and young adult culture became my focus, I began by tackling specific cases – J.K. Rowling, Joann Sfar and Christophe Blain, *Once Upon a Time* S05E12–22, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* S03E01, 03, 18, Philip Pullman – simultaneously writing and reviewing entries for the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*. Faced with a mind-boggling volume and diversity of available productions, I realized that it would be impossible to paint a convincing general picture of the twenty-first-century audiovisual series inspired by classical mythology and to generate a valid assessment without reliable data on all (or almost all)[37] such productions.

To my knowledge, there is only one collection of reasonably complete data on audiovisual productions inspired by antiquity somewhat comparable to my Chronological Survey. However, it is different in design, scope, and intended goals. Hervé Dumont, film historian and director of the Cinémathèque suisse in Lausanne from 1996 to 2008, published it in book form, entitled *L'Antiquité au cinema*, in 2009, and in 2013 posted it online, updating it with content either missed or produced between 2008 and 2013. The title is a bit of a misnomer, as the approximately 2,200 entries listed in the book include not only theatrical films but also television movies, television series, and videos, beginning in the age of silent cinema. Dumont's *Antiquité* is monumental (over 700 pages) and covers pre-history, the Old Testament times, Mesopotamia, and Asia Minor, followed by Pharaonic Egypt, Greek mythology and Greek history, legendary

[35] On Kumaniecki's school of textual criticism, see Jerzy Axer's illuminating essay "Between Science, Art, and Forgery: Latin Textual Criticism as a Case Example" (2020, 21–29).

[36] The first two speeches, *De Cn. Plancio* and *De Rabirio Postumo*, share the same manuscript tradition. The third, *Pro M. Scauro*, is preserved in only one palimpsest. My efforts went into carefully studying its high-tech facsimile and investigating the original during my stay at the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in 1982. Angelo Paredi, who managed this unique institution for seventeen years, from 1967 to 1984, kindly let me study the library's treasure for as long as I needed.

[37] Potential omissions, while unavoidable, should be insignificant enough not to bring into question the main conclusions reached as a result of translating the Survey into the language of numbers.

Rome, Roman republican and imperial history, the New Testament and early Christianity, and finally, the Byzantine Empire, creating, according to Jean Toulard's preface, "un panorama de l'histoire de l'humanité vu par le cinema" (Tulard, 2013, vii). Dumont's main preoccupation as a historian is to study how film interprets history; the template he uses follows single events and historical figures. While his general structure is chronological and the overall sequence of historical ages has not been tampered with, each period is divided into chapters devoted to specific themes or heroes; in each chapter, individual productions are presented in a separate chronological order, starting from the earliest silent movies and continuing until 2013. Such a design greatly complicates the logistics required for assessing topics in conjunction with others created at the same, or at a different time. It provides otherwise valuable pictures of single themes but, contrary to a chronological survey, does not offer an easily achieved *vue d'ensemble*, or even a possibility of easily constructing one. Another significant shortcoming from the point of view of my purpose is the scope of Dumont's book. As it was published in 2013, it does not include productions from almost an entire decade or half of the studied period. The Chronological Survey presented in Chapter 2 tentatively also lists some films and series scheduled for 2023, 2024 and even 2025/2026 releases. Each entry, in addition to the data about the discussed production, is provided with a list of related studies.

Chapter 3, **"Handling the Data,"** discusses the status of classical reception scholarship to identify approaches and research practices from the beginning of the study of classical inspirations in film and television and to assess their usefulness in dealing with the data accumulated in the Chronological Survey of Chapter 2. The review of the scholarship shows the scope of the gap in existing research that the present study is attempting to fill. It suggests whether and how a reasonably comprehensive image of television series as the dominant genre of audiovisual classical reception can be produced.

Chapter 4, entitled **"Classical Antiquity in the Twenty-First-Century Audiovisual Series: An Overview in Numbers (and Words),"** is the next stage of the present study. The chapter intends to interpret the picture resulting from the significant amount of data on antiquity reflected in audiovisual productions, highlighting the favourite mythological themes and characters treated in these productions, their whys and hows, and the format and content categories most likely to refer to mythological themes. The outcome may encourage further reflection on the contributions of Graeco-Roman mythology to how

television series,[38] during the first decades of the twenty-first century, coloured the lens through which popular culture views the image of the world, life, interests, and imagination of its inhabitants. As far as I know, such a statistical picture combined with an interpretation of themes and main concepts was never attempted, possibly because Dumont's impressive work was not designed for digital manipulation and covers titles up to 2013, and also because nobody has yet come up with the idea of creating a thesaurus and concordance of audiovisual series inspired by antiquity, based on the template of, for example, the admirable French *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi* (*ThEMA*), a resource open to the general public and currently housing over 13,000 entries.[39]

There are many publications about the influence of antiquity on literature in practically all European languages.[40] There is also a considerable number of studies on audiovisual productions. However, most of them focus on film,[41] with classical reception in television added as an afterthought in a less favoured second part, or the studies combine both media under the inclusive banner of the *screen*,[42] with television treated selectively. Interesting chapters on selected aspects of classical inspiration published in collective volumes[43] often provide valuable insights, as do monographs featuring individual television series.[44] Studies centred on the reception of particular myths or mythological figures have produced reviews and analyses of specific strands of classical legacy across the ages.[45] The *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* (2023), still a work in progress

[38] The "television" part of the term, while still in active usage, is becoming something of a misnomer in today's reality of widespread on-demand viewing via computer, DVD, streaming services, and the ubiquitous smartphone. Hence my preference for the more inclusive label – "audiovisual."

[39] See *ThEMA: Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi* (n.d.) as well as the section on the medieval *exempla* in Chapter 1 of this book.

[40] See, e.g., Curtius, (1949) 2013; Highet, (1949) 1985; Grafton, Most, and Settis, 2010; Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow, 2014, as well as various edited volumes and companions, such as Hardwick and Stray, (2008) 2011a.

[41] See, e.g., Solomon, (1978) 2001a; Winkler, 2001; Nisbet, (2006) 2008; J. Richards, 2008; Michelakis and Wyke, 2013; Dumont, 2013.

[42] See Blanshard and Shahabudin, (2011) 2013 (who use the word "screen" but focus on film only); Cyrino and Safran, 2015; Pomeroy, 2017; Winkler, 2017; Apostol and Bakogianni, 2018.

[43] See, e.g., Bost-Fiévet and Provini, 2014; Rogers and Stevens, 2015 (in science fiction), 2017 (in modern fantasy); 2019 (in science fiction and fantasy).

[44] See, e.g., Cyrino, 2008c (*Rome*, season 1); Cyrino, 2015b (*Rome*, season 2); Augoustakis and Cyrino, 2017 (Starz *Spartacus*), 2022 (*Troy: Fall of a City*).

[45] See, e.g., Hall, (2008) 2012 (Ulysses); Augoustakis and Raucci, 2018 (epic heroes); Blanshard and Stafford, 2020 (Hercules); Lovatt, 2021 (the Argonauts).

although well advanced in the category of "Literature,"[46] offers (as of January 11, 2023) 126 entries on classically inspired films and television series produced in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The number of audiovisual texts created in the twenty-first century presented in the *OMC Survey* has barely reached 40 entries, which is significantly less than the well over 400 titles listed in the Chronological Survey compiled to provide material for the present inquiry.

The final chapter, **"In the Guise of a Conclusion,"** will rely on a scrupulous checking and re-checking of the available data in all logical configurations imaginable. The goal of the chapter is to pull together into a coherent image the main themes from Classical Antiquity recorded in the Chronological Survey and highlighted in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as to formulate the trends in classical reception active in the audiovisual serial narratives against the background of what reception scholars have suggested until now.

With that purpose in mind – which applies to the book as a whole – let us proceed with the introductory review of what happened up to the point when the genre studied here was born in the mid-twentieth century. This prequel to the audiovisual series begins, unsurprisingly, *ab ovo*, in "times immemorial," when storytelling was the only source of knowledge about the world and storytellers were held (presumably) in high regard. It delves deep into the history of episodic narrative. It covers the still accessible recorded legacy of human imagination in as much detail as can be squeezed into one book and by the efforts of one scholar. I offer no apologies to those interested in audiovisual series who may view my approach as leading well beyond their need to know because looking at the similarity of stories that have shared the power to delight, produced in each consecutive century and for many centuries, testifies if not to the existence of a vague common genealogical tree, certainly to a fascinating evolution of the creative drive to capture an audience who dreams of being captured.

[46] See the opening screen of the database, where totals for each category of entries are listed (as of January 11, 2023, it shows 1,072 literary entries).



# CHAPTER I

# THE AUDIOVISUAL SERIES: A PREQUEL

Zbigniew Karaszewski's artwork, based on a detail from the central medallion of the Vichten mosaic, depicting Calliope, the Muse of epic and elegiac poetry, together with Homer, around 240 CE, Musée national d'histoire et d'art, Luxembourg. Photograph by Carole Raddato, Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic (CC BY SA 2.0), accessed December 12, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central_medallion_of_the_Vichten_mosaic_depicting_Calliope,_the_Muse_of_epic_and_elegiac_poetry_together_with_Homer,_around_240_AD,_National_Museum_of_History_and_Art,_Luxembourg.jpg; user: Ser Amantio di Nicolao (2020).

Chapter 1

# THE AUDIOVISUAL SERIES: A PREQUEL

> Tenui licet cymba in vertiginosum mare crebisque implicitum scopulis novus descendam nauta, incertus nunquid opera precium facturus sim, si omnia leggero.
>
> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*[1]

Where does the television series come from?[2] What does its venerable pedigree, referred to by Tokarczuk, look like? These basic questions cannot be answered without a careful and documented review of the millennia-long history of narration, parts of which are barely remembered if not completely forgotten. A return to texts appears necessary, even though the journey across the massive narrative "continent"[3] is arduous for a lone traveller. Narratives are not created equal, and it may prove risky to proceed without adopting an organizing principle. Theoretical narration studies, such as the over half-a-century-old seminal book *The Nature of Narrative* by Robert Scholes and Robert L. Kellogg, even in its 2006 revised and expanded edition in collaboration with James Phelan, provide interesting but only partial insights.[4] Such studies – unsurprisingly – remain centred on literary narrative; the expressed general views lack a solid demonstration and may be interpreted as glib and facile, for example, "For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and a tale are required" (Scholes,

[1] Boccaccio, 2011, 16–17 (trans. Jon Solomon): "As a new sailor on a rather frail skiff I will descend into the vertiginous sea encircled by ubiquitous cliffs, uncertain as to whether the labour will be worth the effort of reading all the books."

[2] The distinction made in 1974 by Raymond Williams in *Technology and Cultural Form* between a "series" composed of almost stand-alone episodes (little narration is carried over from episode to episode) and a "serial" presenting narrative arcs gradually progressing during a number of episodes, is irrelevant and unnecessary here, as we approach the genre as a broader format encompassing two or more subgenres. For the evolution of these categories, see also Hilmes et al., 2014, 27, and Kelleter, 2017a, 12.

[3] I borrow the expression from Jean-Claude Picard's title *Le continent apocryphe* (1999).

[4] See the perceptive review of the 1966 edition of *The Nature of Narrative* by Dorrit Cohn (1969). Kent Puckett, in his *Narrative Theory* (2016), written half a century later, is obviously more up to date; he offers an excellent review of theories of narration, with the main focus on literature.

Phelan, and Kellogg, [1966] 2006, 4). Even chapters like "The Classical Heritage of Modern Narrative" (57–81), which sounds almost as a subtitle to the present book, display the authors' unquestionable erudition but prove unsatisfying to a classicist. The challenge facing scholars attempting to trace the evolution of storytelling lies in achieving a sensible balance between the enormity of detail and the desired credibility of a synthesis. How to recognize the narratives that have delighted, absorbed, and entertained their recipients, that is, played the same role as the twenty-first-century genre under investigation here, is the first methodological question. It must be emphasized here that the perspective from which the question is asked is necessarily that of a classicist and classical reception scholar who, outside of Graeco-Roman antiquity and Greek and Latin texts, relies on translation into modern languages and to a great extent on the existing scholarship.

## Episodic Storytelling: Its Diversity and Themes

A logical approach would be to establish criteria for identifying narrative genres that may have contributed to the development of the television series. What core elements define the television series that are shared by its narrative predecessors? A telltale indication and an essential formal criterion would be episodic structure originating in the oral tradition. A simple definition of such texts (whether pre-literate, literate, or audiovisual) may run as follows: a more extended narrative told in a series of instalments that may be "consumed" at least one at a time by individuals or by a group.[5]

Episodic narratives often take the form of continuous narration, for instance, ancient epic poems, Hellenistic romances, medieval *chansons de geste*, chivalric romances, and so forth. On the other hand, collections of stand-alone stories may be linked by a common theme and structure, for instance, New Testament Apocrypha, early Christian and medieval collections of hagiographies, *exempla*, medieval lays and fabliaux, epic and romance cycles or sets of stories possibly

[5] Group consumption is typical for the oral tradition; it also occurs, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of live spectacles, or cycles of films viewed in movie theatres. At the early stage of adoption of radio and later television technology, when very few households owned receivers, listening or watching in groups of friends and neighbours was quite popular and persisted for decades, especially in less opulent or communist economies, where receivers were often made available in community centres. From 1954 to 1968, I regularly watched television in the common room of the company which owned the building my family lived in in Warsaw.

connected by a frame, like *The Seven Sages of Rome* or its Eastern branch, *The Book of Sindibad*, and of course the *Decameron*, *Canterbury Tales*, and their numerous imitations, late seventeenth-century French fairy tales, and *One Thousand and One Nights* with its embedded stories introduced to the European culture as a collection only in the eighteenth century via the French translation (1704–1717) of Antoine Galland (1646–1715)[6] quickly and anonymously rendered in English (1706–1721).[7] The advent of the press and the growth of its accessibility in the nineteenth century launched weekly or daily instalments of new novels often by great writers who gained unprecedented steady access to massive numbers of readers still during the course of writing.[8]

Whether episodes are joined by narrative continuity or by a common theme and structure, such works present, in a measure suitable for the particulars of each story, a relatively steady range of fast action, adventure, dramatic tension, and romance, spiced with startling, improbable, magical or quasi-miraculous reversals; in other words, they should be able to retain the interest of large audiences and keep them asking for more. The popularity and influence achieved in its time by a text is an important criterion for its inclusion in the timeline spanning the gap between the glorious epic and the much less exalted ordinary television series; it can be gauged by the number of extant manuscripts, and, after the Gutenberg revolution, the number of printed editions, as well as the reception of the text by contemporary and later writers.

## Episodic Storytelling: A Roadmap

As the first step of our inquiry, literary texts defined as episodic narratives will be reviewed to form a sequence facilitating navigation through the narrative

[6] For Galland's biography, see Jack Zipes's stimulating and useful selection *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (2001, 827–828). The tales are arranged by themes.

[7] On the reception of *The Arabian Nights* and its global cultural importance, see Zipes, (1999) 2007, 53–64, and a recent monograph by Muhsin J. al-Musawi (2021). Also in 2021, the British-Syrian poet Yasmine Seale published a new English translation in a volume edited by Paulo Lemos Horta (*The Annotated Arabian Nights*, 2021).

[8] Today's writers admit, and writing coaches advocate, the need to redraft a novel at least ten times or so. It seems remarkable how these nineteenth-century authors were able to deliver every week an instalment of a novel *in statu nascendi* and still end up – at least some of them – with a coherent whole and, occasionally, a masterpiece.

continent. This rudimentary roadmap[9] will help us reach the second step – a more detailed discussion of the most important consecutive milestones making it possible to trace the evolution of episodic narrative as a broad genre.

The first literary genre that qualifies as episodic is **epic**, which came to us in a post-oral, literary version, divided into sections to be read as instalments. In the Hellenistic era, a second episodic genre added a less majestic growth ring to the family tree: the **Greek romance** and its satirical Roman variants.[10] Christianity introduced its own stories spiced with edifying moral flavours and produced **apocryphal apostolic romances**. The five apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (John, Paul, Peter, Andrew, and Thomas) were used by the Manichaeans as a collection already in the fourth century CE (see Klauck, 2008, 3). Latin apocryphal Acts featuring all Apostles, entitled ***Virtutes Apostolorum***, appeared as a collection in the eighth century, at the latest, and as individual texts possibly much earlier (see E. Rose, 2013, 57–96). Picking up the trail of apostolic romances, **hagiographies**, both Latin and Byzantine, ***exempla*** and **bestiaries** appeared, compiled with preachers in mind but attractive also to the growing masses of the faithful willing to replace sinful pagan entertainment with tales of divine miracles and heroic deeds of Christians persecuted for their beliefs. The cult of the saints, revitalized by the growing number of canonizations,

[9] While proofreading an earlier version of this chapter, I came across Christopher Booker's book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* ([2004] 2010), where the well-known British journalist and writer analyses the reasons why in the long history of fiction, the uncountable plots can be reduced to a handful of basic patterns or templates occurring separately, overlapping, or used in various configurations. Like Joseph Campbell's 1949 pattern of "the hero's journey," briefly discussed in Chapter 4, p. 326, the book is influenced by Carl Jung and integrates some of the Campbellian elements. While Booker's purpose is quite different from mine here, both relate to storytelling and initially apply a similar method to deal with the overwhelming literary legacy by introducing the concept I call a roadmap, Booker – a route-map ([2004] 2010, 7). The difference of purpose is best reflected in the choice of discussed texts, in part because Booker's main focus is on the last two centuries, but mainly because, unconcerned with genre, evolution, and chronology – concepts crucial in my study – he bundles together all categories of plots and specific to them archetypal characters created in all manifestations of culture, whether elite, popular, or in between, making his reasoning a stimulating and irresistible intellectual exercise but not a strictly scholarly one.

[10] The kinship between the Greek romance and the television series and the assessment of being "ephemeral and superficial" attached to both have been naturally noticed and discussed by scholars. See, e.g., Niklas Holzberg ([1995] 2005, 1), who mentions soap operas. Massimo Fusillo quotes the ancient writers' low opinion of the Hellenistic romance (Philostratus, *Epistles* 66; Persius, *Satires* 1.134; Julian the Apostate, *Epistles* 89b, 301b) but highlights the limits of useful comparisons: "the label of para-literature can be a good starting point to understand the role of the ancient novel in the system of literary genres, but must be then articulated according to the various idiosyncratic narrative and aesthetic strategies of the single works" (Fusillo, 2016, 21–22).

snowballed into extensive hagiographical collections culminating in the thirteenth-century ***Legenda aurea*** assembled by Jacobus de Voragine.

Cycles of legendary epic and chivalric romances flourished since the early Middle Ages and featured **matters of Britain** (the "frivolous and pleasant" Arthurian cycle ["Li conte de Bretaigne si sont vain et plaisant"]), of **Rome** ("wise and instructive" topics from Greek and Roman mythology, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar ["Cil de Rome sont sage et de san aprenant"]), and of **France** (*chansons de geste*, "proven to be true every day" ["Cil de France de voir chascun jor aparant"]);[11] fictionalized history absorbed also fantastic and magic elements. Translations from Latin into vernacular languages or from one vernacular to another (especially from French to English and vice versa) made the genre widely popular.

In order not to lose sight of Byzantium while following medieval chronology in the West, we return briefly to the **Byzantine** literary scene, which continued to be active and witnessed a revival of the Hellenistic romance in the Komnenian twelfth century, then launched into vernacular semi-epic proto-romance with ***Digenis Akritis*** set against the background of the borderlands and their struggles, and, finally, during the long Palaiologan Renaissance (1261–1453), produced vernacular romances with roots in the Komnenian novels, and characterized by "permeability as well as openness towards material of foreign origin" (Cupane, 2016a, 98). A large proportion of extant vernacular romances were based on foreign models,[12] such as the politically motivated *romans d'antiquité*, which provided some European royal and princely houses with Homeric ancestors. *The Trojan War*, for instance, is based on Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*, the only non-anonymous *roman d'antiquité* (Yiavis, 2016, 130–134). Homer was a beloved topic of Byzantine vernacular writers. The *Achilleid* and the *Byzantine Iliad* are far removed from the original epos focusing on Achilles and Paris, who become characters of a romance. The three surviving versions of the *Achilleid* vary in length from 763 to 1,820 verses and are considered by scholars to be separate works on the same topic. The *Byzantine Iliad* contains two stories put together, one about Achilles, and the other about Paris.[13] The

[11] Categorized by Jehan Bodel (1165–1210) of Arras – also an author of *fabliaux* – in the prologue to his *Chanson des Saisnes*, 6–11. Lines 9, 10, and 11, provided here in square brackets, are unfailingly quoted by all who study medieval literature; see, e.g., C.M. Jones, 2014, 2–3, or Boutet, 2019, 9–10.

[12] Kostas Yiavis (2016, 127) calculates that 43% of all vernacular romances written from the twelfth to the sixteenth century were adaptations.

[13] For a detailed discussion of both works, see Lavagnini, 2016, 234–257.

stream of vernacular romances continues until the fall of Constantinople and becomes entangled with folk songs since the proliferation of the Akritic cycle.

Returning to the West, we should mention **Marie de France**, active in the late twelfth century (1160–1215), who wrote courtly poems of love and adventure (***dits*** or ***lais***) in Francien mixed with Anglo-Norman; she also translated Aesop's fables. Both genres were listened to, and later read, piece by piece, rather than all in one session. The funny, less courtly equivalents, or cousins, of medieval *lais*, the **fabliaux**, are short narratives that feature many satirical representations of medieval society and make fun of its members using scatological and obscene humour. Some of the fabliaux were later reused by **Giovanni Boccaccio** (1313–1375) and **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1342/43–1400), and integrated into their tales.

In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, another set of stories in Latin – ***Gesta Romanorum*** – joined the previous compilations providing 200–300 (the number varies depending on the manuscript) legends and anecdotes from Greece, Rome, and more exotic places, which proved to be valuable not only to preachers but also to fourteenth-century masters of episodic narration, **Boccaccio** and **Chaucer**, to say nothing of the two-century-younger Elizabethan genius, William **Shakespeare**. Boccaccio, best known today for his ***Decameron*** (1353),[14] wrote later (1350–1360) a Latin mythography, ***Genealogia deorum gentilium***, which focused on the Greek and Roman pantheon;[15] he continued to revise and expand it until his death in 1375. Even more popular than the *Decameron*, it circulated in different manuscript versions for 100 years, until Wendelin of Speyer produced its *editio princeps* in Venice in 1472 (*ISTC*, ib00749000).

The fifteenth century returned to the matter of Britain, producing an English prose rendering of the Arthurian cycle and rekindling the appetite for the chivalric romance, this time disseminated in print: **Thomas Malory's *Le morte Darthur***, written in 1468–1470 and published in 1485 by William Caxton, who had nine years earlier printed the *editio princeps* of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the eight-book frame story dating from 1387–1400. Caxton's biographer, E. Gordon Duff, believes that no perfect copies of this small folio survived (Duff, 1905, 37), as they were, undoubtedly, destroyed through overuse.

[14] *Editio princeps* printed by Christoph Valdarfer in Venice, in 1471 (*Incunabula Short Title Catalogue* [hereinafter: *ISTC*], ib00725300).

[15] See the recent edition of the Latin text with an English translation by Jon Solomon, vol. 1 and vol. 2 (Boccaccio, 2011 and 2017); in January 2024, vol. 3 was still in preparation.

Philip the Good (1396–1467), the Duke of Burgundy, well versed in Classics and Greek mythology, who created the Order of the Golden Fleece,[16] asked his secretary, Jean Miélot, to translate Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium* into French. The work was completed in 1468, one year after the Duke's death. It appeared in print three decades later. Laurent de Premierfait (1360?–1418) did a French translation of the *Decameron* in 1411–1414, based on the Latin version produced by Antonio d'Arezzo and published in a modified version in 1485 in Paris by Jean Du Pré and Antoine Caillaut for Antoine Vérard (*ISTC*, ib00728800), under the confusing title *Livre de Cameron ou Cent Nouvelles*.[17]

The same Philip the Good commissioned another collection of stories compiled in 1462: *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, where thirty-six storytellers (historical figures from the court of Burgundy) recounted various anecdotes reflecting the period. It was previously tentatively attributed to Antoine de La Sale (1386–1460), Philippe Pot (1428–1493), or even the young Louis (1423–1483) (future Louis XI), who was kicking his heels at his uncle's court before succeeding his father, Charles VII, in 1461.

Frame stories, introduced a century earlier by Boccaccio, became a popular genre, practised and imitated by later writers, such as **Marguerite de Navarre** (1492–1549), who intended to produce her own *Cent Nouvelles*, but completed only seventy-two; the collection was published posthumously, in 1558, with many modifications by Pierre Boaistuau (1517–1566),[18] as *Histoires des amans fortunez*, and one year later as *L'Heptaméron des nouvelles de la Princesse*

[16] Philip the Good formed this chivalric order in 1430 at the occasion of his wedding to his third wife, Isabella of Portugal; it was originally inspired by Jason and the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece. The pagan mythological connection caused protests, which were neutralized by associating the order with the biblical story of Gedeon, whom God gave proof of his future assistance by first wetting the fleece with heavenly dew but keeping dry the surroundings and then by covering with dew only the surroundings and keeping the fleece dry. The Burgundian Golden Fleece came to be known as *Gedeonis signa*. The first seat of the Order in Bruges was decorated with tapestries illustrating the story of Gedeon. See Huizinga, (1924) 2019, loc. 1323–1337; see also Van Loo, 2021, 267–269. The eight huge tapestries (6 m by 100 m) designed by Baudouin de Bailleul from Arras were ordered in 1449 from weavers Robert Dary and Jean de l'Ortie. See Delmarcel, 1999, 29. The concept of Gedeon's Fleece, not only as a biblical story but as a symbol of God's promise of victory, was well known to the faithful since several centuries earlier because of its inclusion in the *Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*, "At Tierce," second stanza: "Hail, Gedeon's Fleece! Hail, blossoming Rod! Samson's sweet Honeycomb! Portal of God!" ("Little Office of the Immaculate Conception," 2012).

[17] See Gathercole, 1969, 300–301; Di Stefano, 1999, 160; and also the section "Novellas and Frame Stories" of the present chapter.

[18] See Marguerite d'Angoulême, 1558. He dedicates the book to Marguerite de Navarre on the title page, as well as in the introduction. Boaistuau is best known for his compilation of stories about strange things and monsters, *Histoires prodigieuses*, published in 1560.

*Marguerite de Valois, royne de Navarre*, printed in Paris by Vincent Sertenat in the original order restored by Claude Gruget.[19]

Petronius' *Satirica*, Apuleius' *Asinus aureus*, French fabliaux, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* make fun of the society and culture of their times. They use satire, ridicule, and frequently vulgar, even obscene humour. In the early sixteenth century, this ribald and hearty interpretation of reality became the main appeal of the so-called picaresque romance or novel developed in Spain, but also in Italy, Germany, and elsewhere, spreading through translation across Europe. The genre was imitated and appropriated during the next several centuries in many different national cultures, producing a picaresque myth and transforming it in the twentieth century into the neo-picaresque novel (see Garrido Ardila, [2015] 2016, 1–53; Godsland, [2015] 2017, 247–268).

The seventeenth century explored even more obviously fantastic stories: **fables** and **fairy** (or **wonder**) **tales**. In France, **Charles Perrault** (1628–1703), the champion of the Moderns in their quarrel with the Ancients (see Winkler, 2017, 44–45), after a career as secretary to the Minister of State, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, at the court of Louis XIV, began to compose fairy tales (*Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* or *Contes de ma mère l'Oye*, 1697). His younger contemporary **Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness de la Motte d'Aulnoy** (1652–1705),[20] an unconventional and colourful figure, wrote *Contes de fées* (1697), a year later *Les contes nouveaux ou Les fées à la mode*, many of which were inspired by folk tales; she even managed to support her family with the income from her writing. Fascination with fairy tales and their suitability as entertainment for children and as texts reinforcing moral education resulted eventually in more collections of tales, uplifting or not, but authored mainly by eighteenth-century women. Among them, **Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve** (1685–1755): "La Belle et la Bête" in *La jeune américaine et les contes marins* (1740), and **Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont** (1711–1780), who produced seventy volumes of fairy tales for children.

In the nineteenth century, fairy and folk tales attracted the attention of scholars in Germany, who collected, studied, and published them. The most influential and best-known were the famous **Brothers Grimm, Jacob Ludwig Carl** (1785–1863) and **Wilhelm Carl** (1786–1859).

[19] A copy can be viewed online at the Gallica repository (Marguerite d'Angoulême, 1559).

[20] For a recent confirmation of Mme d'Aulnoy's birthdate, see Volker Schröder's fascinating blog *Anecdota* (2021).

The development of the press – a medium episodic by nature – ensured the dissemination of a new narrative genre with roots reaching antiquity, **the novel**. It quickly caught readers' fancy, and their numbers mushroomed as literacy levels rapidly increased. Most late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels were published in instalments in the press of Europe and America. After a press run, they were usually published in book form. Gradually, the number of novels disseminated in the press diminished and dwindled to what eventually became a marginal phenomenon.

Writers who contributed to various press outlets on a large scale discovered the advantages of episodic storytelling and ventured into writing cycles linked by continuous narration, characters, setting, etc. Cycles of novels published in book form were successful but never reached the massive and immediate popularity of press instalments. The unopposed triumphal march of the novel continued through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, securing an important place on the narrative "continent" of the twenty-first century. In the late 1920s, **radio novels** appeared. Two decades later they were joined by the nascent **television series**, which fully blossomed in quantity in the late twentieth century and both in numbers and quality in the first decades of the twenty-first century venturing from television to new distribution platforms, such as Internet-powered streaming services. Having reached the end of our simplified roadmap from the epic tradition to audiovisual series, a hopefully useful guide through the thicket of the millennia-long accumulation of stories, we shall now proceed to a more detailed discussion of genres identified as "ancestors" of the television series, attaching greater importance to the earlier periods, further away from the traditional focus and expertise of media scholars.

## The Evolution of Episodic Storytelling

### Ancient Epic

"Epic begins at Sumer," according to Samuel Noah Kramer, the hero of my extracurricular high school readings. He dated Sumerian epic poems to "a good millennium before the Hebrews wrote down their Bible and the Greeks their *Iliad* and *Odyssey*" (Kramer, [1956] 1981, xxii and 223–244). This marvelous gift, brought to us by archaeology out of the ruins of Nineveh, is a series of stories recounting heroic deeds in words recorded on clay tablets, starting at the end

of the third millennium BCE (George, 2008, 11). After making a certain impact on the Bible, it went out of circulation, forgotten like the empire it was associated with and like its languages. The Sumerian epic remained buried in the metaphorical sands of history and the real sands of Upper Mesopotamia. It began to victoriously regain its place in the world's culture only after cuneiform writing, resembling bird scratches made in straight horizontal lines, was deciphered and the languages it recorded remastered in the late nineteenth century.[21]

During the Sumerian epic's long absence from human memory, the two Homeric poems and the Bible, containing Sumerian echoes, initially shaped the Mediterranean and eventually global culture. After the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE, the library housing Sumerian and Akkadian masterpieces never rose from ruins; the command of the languages and cuneiform writing were lost for even longer than the knowledge of Ancient Egyptian and hieroglyphics. When the language of the epic of Gilgamesh was forgotten despite having been so diligently recorded in clay, the Greek epic, originally oral, was only beginning to reach its fixed written form. The Ancient Greek language evolved and changed, but it suffered no significant rupture or lengthy absence comparable to the venerable Sumerian tongue.

Homeric epic remains today, and has been for over two millennia, a written literary text.[22] The oldest iconographical testimony to the war of Troy is a relief of the Trojan Horse on a burial πίθος (*píthos*) found on the island of Mykonos and dated to 675 BCE (see Andersen, 1997, 182–191). This proves only that the story was known at that date, not that the text of the *Odyssey* was already in the present form. The same is true of other evidence found on early vases depicting the blinding of Polyphemus by Odysseus.[23]

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[21] On December 3, 1872, George Smith presented to the Biblical Archaeology Society his translation of the story of the flood he found among tens of thousands of clay tablets brought to the British Museum from Nineveh in the 1840s by Austen Henry Laynard and Hormuzd Rassam. See Damrosch, 2007, 32–33.

[22] How and when exactly the oral epics transformed into written texts can never be established with any certainty. For a discussion of this issue, as well as of the orality, authorship, and dating of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, see West, 2011, 383–393.

[23] Martin West (2011, 393) mentions (without reference) a vase depiction of the blinding of Polyphemus, dated to 675 BCE. The Cyclops theme appears, e.g., on a proto-Attic black-figure amphora decorated by the so-called Polyphemus Painter, dated to 670–660 BCE (Eleusis, Archeological Museum 2630) and on a krater signed by the potter Aristonothos, found in Cerveteri (Caere), dated to 650 BCE, now at Musei Capitolini in Rome (Spivey, 1997, 56–58, 208). See a detailed analysis and discussion of the Polyphemus theme on vases dating from seventh–fifth centuries BCE in Grethlein, 2015, 203–206.

## Greek and Roman Romance

After the classical period, during which Greek masterpieces in theatre, poetry, philosophy, history, and rhetoric were produced, the new authors felt inadequate to compete with the unsurpassed canonical creations in the matured genres, which had already achieved perfection. The post-classical literature shone with erudition rather than with original talent. The overwhelming classical legacy became the raw material and a sandbox for philologists, commentators, compilers, anthologists, and mythographers – fascinated by the glorious past and still unable or unwilling to look beyond and turn their minds to the future. Experiments with sophisticated forms and a widened range of themes, including the life of ordinary people,[24] increased the distance between the authors and the general audience.

While the public's intellectual and entertainment needs were served mainly by the old masterpieces, the average readers required fodder to meet their tastes, something easily understood and more directly related to their reality. New genres designed to do just that appeared, rich in fast-flowing narration and driven more by the love of exciting action than by artistic aspirations. Independently from the actual content, each romance was divided into stories connected to the characters and the background. Each episode could be considered a stand-alone story, but the action also moved forward the main arc of the romance. Episodes were of a length suitable for reading or listening in one session.

The Hellenistic romance became the darling of the masses, stories "read until dead," of such popularity that few manuscripts survived to delight posterity. Most romances are known only by titles. The stories they told were – naturally – love stories, extraordinary adventures happening in exotic, strange, faraway parts of the world, tales of kidnappers, thieves, pirates, dramatic reversals of fortune, with frequent interventions of fate, magic, and oracles. At the same time, they also presented ordinary, everyday life and its current issues. The romance genre was disregarded in ancient literary theory. The novel met with the same disdain. Some scholars treat romances and novels as the same genre, while others view the novel as the successor of the romance in its historical development. More sophisticated segments of the ancient public considered romance unworthy of attention, gutter literature, suitable for quick consumption and fleeting pleasure. The refined public welcomed parodies that made fun

[24] In Hellenistic sculpture, movement, realism, and the proverbial old women finding solace in wine appeal to artists more than idealized divine statues without blemish.

of the romantic adventures beloved by the masses. Still, despite the widely shared view that the ancient romance was an elite phenomenon in terms of both the authors and the readers, the challenge of ubiquitous intertextuality and frequent reversals of heroes' social status displaying the oppression and suffering of those situated lower in the social hierarchy, amount to a critical view of the ancient society, undoubtedly addressed to a more diverse public (see Whitmarsh, 2008b, 72–87; Hunter, 2008, 261–271).

We may begin our discussion of the ancient romance with a papyrus that preserved a fragment of the love affair between **Ninus and Semiramis** dating from the first century BCE. Several later romances survived, namely, five complete works of the love and adventure variety, written between the first and the fourth centuries CE: **Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoë*** (first century CE), **Xenophon of Ephesus' *Anthia and Habrocomes*** or ***Ephesiaca*** (second century CE), **Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*** (eight books, second century CE), **Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*** (second century CE), and **Heliodorus' *Theagenes and Charicles***, or ***Aethiopica*** – ten books (fourth century CE). Very little beyond the title survived from **Antonius Diogenes' *The Wonders beyond Thule*** (first century CE), as well as from the thirty-five books of **Iamblichus' *Babyloniaca*** (second century CE). Several fragments from **Lollianus' *Phoenicica*** (second century CE) reveal a high degree of brutality, including cannibalism, obscenities, and debauchery, destined for a public of unrefined tastes (Sandy, 1979, 367–376). This may suggest a reason for the permanent loss of these texts – a medieval scribe in a saintly scriptorium would have shrunk from copying and possibly also from reading such abominable trash (if his Greek was up to the task of understanding the text). The more sophisticated romances did not survive well either. What remains of the later Romanized stories are significant fragments of **Petronius' *Satirica***, **Pseudo-Lucian's *Lucius the Ass***, and **Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (or *Asinus aureus*)**. The last one, preserved exceptionally in all eleven books, eventually became an ancestor of picaresque episodic novels.

While displaying many common features, the ancient romances listed above show significant differences: fast, action-driven *Ephesiaca* and melodramatic *Chaereas and Callirhoë* represent sentimental para-literature for well-read masses; the improbable, pastiche-like, full of *ekphraseis*, polyphonic *Leucippe and Clitophon* provides a mixture of erotic love and rural idyll; complete with a final Menandrean recognition, *Daphnis and Chloe*, and the neo-Platonic, mysterious and suspenseful, circular *Aethiopica* culminate in a spectacular *anagnorisis*, which is related to the Second Sophistic. Niklas Holzberg, in his introduction

to *The Ancient Novel*, emphasizes that "the narrative components of these novels bear a striking resemblance to the motifs which together constitute a typical plot for television soap operas [for example, Esther and Richard Alan Shapiro's *Dynasty*, 1981–1989]" ([1995] 2005, 1). Massimo Fusillo, in the first chapter of the edited volume *Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond*, entitled "Mapping the Roots: The Novel in Antiquity," discusses the "similarities [of romances] with modern feuilletons, soap operas, TV series," at the same time emphasizing that "the label of para-literature can be a good starting point to understand the role of the ancient novel in the system of literary genres, but must be then articulated according to the various idiosyncratic narrative and aesthetic strategies of the single works" (2016, 21–22). A recent study talks about ancient novels being fully appreciated and read for pleasure by relatively sophisticated readers – popular literature for educated elites – who were highly interested in sentimental love stories enriched by insights from different cultures and traditions (Alvares, 2022, 19–21). If we changed readers to viewers, it could be compared to the current Netflix offer. For tracking texts that satisfy the recipients' hunger for narration across the ages, the ancient romance is a perfect response to this need and an obvious part of a hypothetical lineage.

## Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles

With the advent of Christianity, the growing numbers of the faithful needed to satisfy their thirst for narration, with themes more oriented towards religion than pagan romances. The content of the narratives developed into the apocryphal tradition, whose potential volume was poetically defined by St John in the often-quoted concluding sentence of his Gospel: δὲ ἔστιν καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα ἃ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐποίησεν ἅτινα ἐὰν γράφηται ἕν καθ' οἶμαι οὐδ' τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν χωρήσειν τὰ βιβλία γραφόμενα (Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece; "Sunt autem et alia multa, quae fecit Iesus; quae, si scribantur per singula, nec ipsum arbitror mundum capere eos, qui scribendi sunt, libros," John 21.25 [Vulgate]; in English translation: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" [King James Version]).

Next to stories about Jesus, there were numerous apocryphal Acts of the Apostles dealing not only with St Peter and St Paul, like the canonical Acts, but also with some of the other Apostles. Apocrypha flourished during the second and third centuries CE, serving as pious Christian equivalents to the highly

popular and obviously pagan (that is to say sinful) Hellenistic romances (see *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu* [New Testament Apocrypha], [1978] 2017, 38). The structure of the apocryphal Acts is also episodic. They narrate the adventures of the Apostles, who travel to faraway, little-known countries, teach, perform miracles, and baptize the converts, in other words: *gesta*. These stories often end in the martyrdom of the Apostle, an event full of drama and natural tension – *passio* – corresponding to the happy end (lovers reunited) of the romances.[25] Scholars have discussed the relationship between the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles and Hellenistic romances in terms of potential mutual influence; the possibility that the apostolic Apocrypha hastened the demise of the romance is another valid hypothesis (see Klauck, 2008, 10–14; Starowieyski, 2017, 22).

Like the Greek romances (and television serials), widely popular Christian apocryphal texts were often criticized as excessively sensational, naive, and far-fetched. The fact remains that the canonical Scriptures leave many questions unanswered, and these *lacunae* beg for other narratives to satisfy curiosity and enchant the less-educated majority (as well as the better-educated minority) of the faithful. Early Christian writers, such as Tertullian, Eusebius of Caesarea, St Jerome, and others, were all weary of apocryphal texts and disapproved of them,[26] occasionally to the point of condemnation, mainly because of the risk of confusing people and spreading heretical tendencies. As the number of Apocrypha grew and their popularity continued unabashed, the Church Fathers began to correct them, often shortening the text and on the same occasion eliminating offensive and undesirable elements. The abundant manuscript tradition of the apocryphal texts in the major European regions preserved marginal notes, *lectio* marks, and vernacular glosses testifying to their wide use in liturgy, pastoral preaching, meditation, pious listening, and reading in cathedrals and monastic communities (E. Rose, 2013, 82, 92–96, et passim). Translations, adaptations, and new original apocryphal stories began to appear later in the vernacular everywhere in medieval Europe, for example, the mid-fifteenth- to mid-sixteenth-century Polish New Testament Apocrypha consisting mainly of translations, adaptations, and compilations; the most

[25] See Rosa Söder's study of motifs used in Greek romances present in the apocryphal Acts ([1932] 1969, 34–38); Rémi Gounelle (2004, 12) suggests to review the presence of these motifs again using categories established by Françoise Létoublon (1993); see also Starowieyski, (1998) 2020, 42–43, and his introduction to Chapter 1 of *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu*, (1978) 2017, 28–29.

[26] See the relevant quotations from the Church Fathers selected by Marek Starowieyski (*Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu*, (1978) 2017, 70).

impressive among them is *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa* [Meditations on the Life of Lord Jesus] called the *Rozmyślanie przemyskie* [Przemyśl Meditations] because the only surviving manuscript of the text was held until 1945 by the Library of the Greek-Catholic Chapter in Przemyśl. It is now part of the manuscript collection of the National Library of Poland, call number Rps 8024 (Michałowska, 2011, 747).[27]

The popularity of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles led to the formation of large collections of hagiographical texts, such as the ten volumes of the ***Virtutes apostolorum*** attributed to **Abdias of Babylon**, allegedly written in Hebrew, translated into Greek, and then into Latin, but probably written or re-written in Latin as early as the sixth century (see Klauck, 2008, 251–253; Starowieyski, [1998] 2020, 49).[28] There is ample evidence of such collections circulating in the eighth century, containing separate sections on the individual Apostles; among these manuscripts were legendaries and sets of stories about the martyrdom and lives of other saints (E. Rose, 2013, 58–59). They are discussed below, in the section "Latin Hagiographies."

## Greek Hagiographies

Byzantine hagiographical collections contained the lives of saints put together in the sequence of the saints' feast days, primarily for liturgical use. The texts were repeatedly recopied, rephrased, and reused; longer ones were redacted. The first liturgical collections date from the seventh century and continue into the late eighth century. Their appearance was probably caused by the need to deal with the sheer number of individual hagiographical texts in circulation. It was convenient for the clergy to have all texts for a given day in one place, followed by what was needed for the next day, and the next, etc. The Constantinopolitan church calendar establishing the sequence of the feast days became fixed between the mid-seventh and mid-eighth centuries (Høgel, 2002, 36–39). Byzantine liturgical collections came in two varieties: *synaxaria* and *menologia*. The main difference between them was the length of the text attributed to each

[27] A facsimile of the entire manuscript is available online (*Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa*, [post 1512]); the Polish New Testament Apocrypha were published together by Wojciech Ryszard Rzepka and Wiesław Wydra, under the title borrowed from the Gospel of John, 21.25 (quoted *in extenso* at the beginning of this section): *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg* [The Entire World Would Not Be Enough to Hold the Books] ([1996] 2008).

[28] For a discussion on the dating and origin of *Virtutes apostolorum*, see E. Rose, 2013, 59–66. Els Rose suggests that Gregory of Tours rewrote the Acts of Andrew (2013, 67–68). On the origin of the *Virtutes apostolorum* and its manuscript tradition, see also Steinová, 2014.

day; a *synaxarion* provided just a short notice about the patron saint. A *menologion* featured a more extended – occasionally quite long – narrative of the saint's entire life.

By the end of the eighth century, hagiography reached the rank of literature and flourished in Constantinople as its centre (Høgel, 2002, 50–53). Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905–959) commissioned a certain **Euaristos** to compile a *synaxarion* for the Hagia Sophia. It was preserved in approximately 300 manuscripts (Høgel, 2002, 55–56). A ten-volume ***menologion*** organized according to the liturgical year from September to the end of August contains 148 hagiographical texts of uneven length, mostly *martyria* and *vitae*. It was compiled by **Symeon Metaphrastes** (who died after 982) at the request of an unspecified emperor, possibly the same Constantine VII or Constantine VIII.[29] There are about 700 extant manuscripts of the *menologion* within the entire corpus containing 2,000–3,000 Byzantine hagiographical manuscripts (Høgel, 2002, 10–11).

Stratis Papaioannou calls this work "one of the most important Byzantine literary creations" and "the culmination of a long history of Christian storytelling in Greek" (in his preface to *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes*, 2017, vii–viii). Its popularity has been compared to another hagiographical collection, the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, discussed in the next section. Symeon's *menologion* was reproduced in the eleventh century almost as frequently as the works of Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, who were the most copied among early Byzantine authors and Greek Church Fathers (Papaioannou in *Christian Novels from the Menologion*, 2017, xi, xxv). Symeon was venerated as a saint and remained extremely popular in Constantinople for five centuries. Later, he was criticized and treated with scorn similarly to the thirteenth-century hagiographer Jacobus de Voragine, and like hagiography itself for being what it was, a collection of fantastic, improbable, sensational stories, riddled with historical inaccuracies, but able (despite or because of that) to uplift and entertain the faithful, whether monastic or lay, educated or not.

The 148 hagiographies included in Symeon's *menologion* are as a rule based on older texts; less than 20 are copied without modification; 120 are metaphrastic texts subjected to oral rephrasing – an interesting treatment of the originals described by **Michael Psellos** in his encomium of Symeon Metaphrastes. This

[29] See Christian Høgel (2002, 132–133), who argues that it must have been Constantine VIII.

fascinating insight into the writing and editing of such collections helps visualize this tenth-century craft:

> He had his preparations ready at hand and [had] a team of considerable size [composed] both of those who initially took down his dictation stenographically and of those who subsequently transcribed it [in full]; each group [worked] in support of the other, one producing an initial [text], the other a second [draft]. After them, the final redactors went over the written texts to compare them against the content intended [by Symeon] and to correct whatever [error] might have escaped the notice of those who drafted the texts, because [Symeon] could not possibly review the same [works] repeatedly [himself] due to their great number. However, although his eagerness for a [good] name was great and his attention [to the project] more than sufficient – or rather, exactly sufficient – for this [task], even so, the [harvest of] grain greatly surpassed the seeds sown, and the crop was such as never [before has been seen], even today. As a result, even if [Symeon] had applied himself to accomplish nothing else, and [even if] his other [achievements] taken together or individually were an insufficient basis for his renown, nevertheless the [fact that he] undertook such labour and accomplished [it] with such exactitude in addition to [his other achievements is] reason in itself aside from anything else for an *encomion* [in praise] of the man. (Psellos, 2014, "Encomion of his Excellency Symeon the Metaphrast" 3.14)[30]

It is easy to imagine such a team composed of Metaphrastes and his assistants, each with a specific task to accomplish and in a specific sequence, imbued with a strong cooperative spirit and a clear goal. In certain aspects, it was not unlike today's television series writing/producing team if we take into account a thousand years of evolution and revolutions.

Byzantine hagiography includes many literary forms or categories, potentially overlapping or even combined. Martin Hinterberger devotes a chapter in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography* (ed. by Stephanos Efthymiadis, vol. 1: [2011] 2020, vol. 2: [2014] 2016) to hagiographic literary genres and identifies them (sometimes they are components of hagiographies) as *passio*, *vita*, *translatio* (texts commemorating transferrals of relics), *miracula* (episodes of a saint's life), *Apophthegmata Patrum* (collections of sayings grouped by themes or in alphabetical order, relating to individual saints),

[30] I am quoting from the excellent annotated translation of Psellos' encomium by Elizabeth A. Fisher.

edifying stories (oral accounts eventually written down as episodes of lives or collected in sets), selections of biographies (groupings of short profiles), Acts (biographies of the Apostles or very significant saints), *hypomnema* (biographical facts), *enkomion* (eulogy of a saint, later also of a very important person), *metaphrasis* (a rhetorically reworked text), *epitome* (a shortened text), and hybrid genres (*vita* and *passio*, *vita* with conduct [way of life] and *miracula*, *vita* and *enkomion*, *vita* with conduct and *enkomion*) (Hinterberger, [2014] 2016, 28–49). *Metaphrasis*, this purely Byzantine invention, whether we call it a revision or rewriting, was used in a range of techniques.[31]

The narrative, stylistic, and thematic parallels between Byzantine hagiography and late Greek romance are briefly discussed by Panagiotis Roilos in his study of the poetics of the twelfth-century Komnenian romances.[32] Herbert Hunger even attributes to both hagiography and romance "a function comparable to that performed today by film, popular novels, and journalism" (1980, 11, cited after Roilos, 2006, 7). The similarity between hagiographical and secular narratives becomes quite obvious when the longer texts included in Symeon's collection are considered. Papaioannou calls them "Christian novels"[33] (2017, xiii–xiv) and convincingly argues that they qualify as such because the stories they tell are more fictional than historical (although the Byzantine public believed in their authenticity); their far-fetched plots emphasize relationships, desires, and emotions; they feature villains who try to prevent heroes from achieving their noble goals and do not hesitate to use violence and torture; their actions are driven by evil forces, supernatural interventions, and prophetic dreams. The main theme of the Greek romances – adventures of separated lovers seeking a reunion in spite of adversity – is replaced in the metaphrastic texts, like in the so-called apostolic romances, by a quest for God's approval,

[31] For the metaphrastic movement, see Høgel, (2014) 2016, 181–196; for the meaning and importance of *metaphrasis* in Byzantine literary culture, see Resh, 2015, 754–787; see also Daria D. Resh's unpublished PhD dissertation defended at Brown University in 2018; as well as the three recent fascinating books on the subject: Anne P. Alwis's chapter in *The Hagiographical Experiment: Developing Discourses of Sainthood* (ed. by Christa Gray and James Corke-Webster in 2020), the 2020 *Metaphrasis: A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and Its Hagiographical Products* (ed. by Stavroula Constantinou and Christian Høgel), and the 2021 *Metaphrasis in the Byzantine* Culture (ed. by Anne P. Alwis, Martin Hinterberger, and Elisabeth Schiffer).

[32] Roilos (2006, 7) quotes previous scholars whose views he shares, like Herbert Hunger, Hans-Georg Beck, and Alexander Kazhdan.

[33] Papaioannou edited and translated six of the longer *vitae* ("Kyprianos and Iustina," "Pelagia of Antioch," "Galaktion and Episteme," "Euphemia," "Barbara," "Eugenia") under the title *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes* (2017).

salvation, and everlasting glory in God's presence, complete with all imaginable (and occasionally preposterous) obstacles put on the road to that goal.

Symeon Metaphrastes' texts are distinctively performative; they were given a new sophisticated rhetorical polish not only to attract elites but also to sound well, as they were meant for public recitation. In spite of the rhetorical paraphrasing used by Symeon, the texts were written for all publics, the educated and the common: understanding of the content was ensured by repeated listening.[34] There are many manuscripts of the *menologion* with texts written in large and easy-to-read letters, with special punctuation designed to guide the reciter.[35] As Christian Høgel pointed out (2002, 143), prologues to quite a few lives announce to the faithful that they will experience pleasure, or even happiness, listening to the texts, an unusual promise, seemingly more appropriate for non-religious narratives, but, in fact, very much within the expectations of entertainment and satisfaction typical for widely popular comparable genres in all periods of history.

## Latin Hagiographies

The first Latin legendaries containing sets of hagiographies date from the mid-eighth century and include a considerable number of lives of Byzantine saints, some of them, but not all, translated from the now-lost Greek originals. Most of the translated texts are *martyria*.[36] The thirteenth century brings a new type of hagiographical collection, the so-called *legendae novae* or condensed legendaries; they were compiled for preaching friars whose audiences could not read and had no command of Latin. The Dominican Order network became the *spiritus movens* behind *legendae novae* from the first representative of the genre, **Jean de Mailly** (***Abbreviatio in gestis sanctorum***, 1225–1250), to **Vincent of Beauvais** (***Speculum historiale***, 1244–1264),[37] and **Bartholomew of Trent** (***Liber epilogorum in gesta sanctorum***, 1240–1250), to their

[34] This was emphasized by Psellos in his encomium; see Høgel's reasoning (2002, 140).

[35] Papaioannou speaks even of an "acoustic effect" due the "rhetorical amplification." He also mentions his attempts to maintain this punctuation in the translation (Papaioannou, 2017, xx, xxii).

[36] See the detailed analysis by Monique Goulet of four handwritten legendaries (three produced in France, one in Bavaria), dating to the period from 750 to the beginning of the ninth century. Goulet suggests that the Latin translations were probably done by oriental monks in monasteries established in the region between Calabria and Rome (2016, 243–256). For translations of Latin hagiographical texts into Greek, see Gounelle, 2005, 35–73, and Lequeux, (2016) 2020, 385–399.

[37] The most popular and widely disseminated part of the *Speculum maius* containing approx. 500 abbreviated hagiographies; see Paulmier-Foucart and Lusignan, 1990, 111–112.

culmination in the ***Legenda aurea*** (1260–1290) by the Dominican **Jacobus de Voragine** (1228–1298), a contemporary of another, more illustrious Italian friar from the same order, **St Thomas Aquinas** (1225–1274).

Disseminated through the Order's network across Europe, these legendaries survived in several versions, but none reached the fame and popularity of the *Legenda aurea* preserved in around 800 manuscripts, which were eventually (1470–1500) used to produce 173 editions – in Latin and in various translations – compared to 128 editions of the Bible published during the same period. The full Latin title was ***Legenda aurea sanctorum sive Lombardica historia***; in translations, titles varied from edition to edition. The majority of these incunabula were in Latin (ninety-seven); the remaining seventy-six editions were translations into Czech, Dutch, English, French, High German, Low German, and Italian (Seybolt, 1946, 332–336).[38]

Jacobus de Voragine compiled 153 lives of saints and arranged them according to the cycles of the *liturgical* calendar with added stories about Christ and the Virgin Mary. Without providing the date of each saint's feast, he presents them in the correct sequence corresponding to their chronological order within the year. These hagiographies are based on a series of sources: first, on the Apocrypha, such as the *Virtutes apostolorum*, later, on previous legendaries within the genre of *legendae novae*, such as those of Jean de Mailly, Bartholomew of Trent, and the encyclopaedist Vincent of Beauvais. The first of the three hagiographers distrusted Apocrypha and criticized their miraculous stories. The second, on the contrary, highly appreciated *prodigia* and fabulous narratives. Jacobus de Voragine combined both sources and occasionally added also *vitae* from the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, who depended for many of his texts on Jean de Mailly's *Abbreviatio*.[39]

The reasons why the *Legenda aurea* achieved such enormous popularity, while its sources all but disappeared, continue to puzzle scholars. Sherry L. Reames (Rice, 1986, 279–282) in her monograph entitled *The* Legenda Aurea*: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* devotes to this question the last chapter, "On the *Legenda* as a Medieval Best-Seller" (1985, 197–209), and suggests that the *Legenda aurea* was preferred to Jean de Mailly's *Abbreviatio* because, at the end of the thirteenth century, criteria for sainthood evolved, coming closer to Jacobus de Voragine's standards. They became more restrictive – from being inclusive

[38] Sherry L. Reames quotes only slightly lower figures: eighty-seven Latin editions and sixty-nine in translation into vernacular languages (1985, 4).

[39] See Gounelle, 1994, 168–169 et passim; Maggioni, 2008, 152–157.

(welcoming penitents – former sinners – and encouraging emulation) they veered towards being more exclusive and idealized (requiring an absolutely blameless life of virtue, highlighting overwhelming obstacles on the road to sainthood and featuring sensational and miraculous deeds). Such perfect, impeccable figures perforce resembled superhuman heroes and enjoyed supernatural powers, very much like saints from the *Legenda*, where there is no shortage of fabulous stories. The ideal of sanctity assumed a monastic pattern, prizing contemplative life detached from the world, spurning mundane activity, and nurturing abstinence, purity, and preserved innocence. The number of canonizations dwindled in spite of many candidates whose cults were undeniable locally, who were proposed but never recognized by the papacy.[40] Narrative episodes in the *Legenda* neglect the psychology of the characters, focusing on the action instead; they also develop in an entirely predictable manner. This predictability may be another reason for the book's success. Aviad Kleinberg compares it to the popularity of Hollywood films[41] with characters and action based on the same well-known scheme, easy to anticipate, reassuring, and satisfying (2005, 295–296, 341).

The *Legenda aurea*, while compiled and written for mendicant preachers, who favoured it over the other legendaries,[42] became a success among listeners and, as literacy and access to texts increased, among readers. The stories about saints satisfied the hunger for the fabulous and the sensational, and their religious content provided a pious excuse to those who felt the need for such justification. The wide reach of hagiographies in Latin and soon in most of the European languages made them part of the common heritage. The fact that people across the continent knew the same stories and venerated the same saints, next to the local ones, fostered a sense of unity and common culture.[43]

The very reasons for the popularity of the legendary became the basis for its decline and harsh scholarly criticism beginning in the late sixteenth century and extending to the seventeenth. The criticisms caused various attempts at defence on behalf of Jacobus de Voragine and this polemic continued well into the twentieth century.[44] **Jean Bolland** (1596–1665) responded to the growing need for less fabulous biographies of saints by beginning to publish in 1643 ***Acta***

[40] See André Vauchez's chapter entitled "L'évolution des critères de la sainteté de la fin du XII$^{e}$ au début du XV$^{e}$ siècle" (1988, 449–478).

[41] Also quoted in Le Goff, (2011) 2014, 43–44.

[42] On the basis of extant manuscripts Reames calculated that the clergy's preference for the *Legenda* could have reached the ratio of forty to one (1985, 198).

[43] See Kleinberg in *Histoire de saints. Leur role dans la formation de l'Occident* (2005, 253–254).

[44] A good summary of this long-standing polemic is provided by Reames (1985, 11–26).

***sanctorum***, a series of books admirable for their scholarship but rather unlikely to become bestsellers.[45] There is now a total of sixty-eight volumes arranged according to the calendar of the saints' feasts. The last volume (covering the month of December) was published in 1940, but the Société des Bollandistes, established in 1607, continues studying the lives of the saints and producing numerous scholarly books on this fascinating subject.[46]

Today, the readership and popularity of hagiographies are limited to experts and cannot compete with the appeal and reach of narratives provided by television series, even if *Acta sanctorum* conforming to the highest scholarly standards are readily available online. In our times, medieval legendaries have acquired a different function – they now provide contemporary readers with a window into the fascinating culture of the Middle Ages. The *Legenda aurea* is seen as an extraordinary text from the point of view of its content, as well as its fate. It is considered the most important and influential book of its times (Le Goff, [2011] 2014, 8), and as such continues to be republished enjoying the interest and admiration of medievalists, Church historians, and various incidental readers.

As a postscript to using the number of surviving manuscripts as a measure of popularity, as is often done in the case of the *Legenda aurea*, I would like to mention here a recent book entitled *The Anglo-Norman Historical Canon: Publishing and Manuscript Culture* by Jaakko Tahkokallio (2019). Using the example of three Anglo-Norman historians, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, the author shows the often ignored difference between publishing a manuscript and a printed book, highlights the "authorial" and "promotional" role played in the manuscript culture by authors, their "publishing circles" and "publishing frameworks" seeking to secure an audience through distribution of an appealing text, which then becomes part of the public discourse, and may lead – why not – to literary fame (Tahkokallio, 2019, 1–3, 77). The *Legenda aurea*, having been written by a Dominican friar for the use of Dominican preachers benefitted from a natural publishing circle and framework created by the Order's powerful network operating across Europe. The pre-Gutenberg writers who did not belong to circles ensuring the copying and distribution of manuscripts could not fare as well as Jacobus de Voragine.

[45] See Hippolyte Delehaye (1905) quoted by Reames (1985, 45).

[46] See information provided on the society's website (Société des Bollandistes, n.d.).

## *Bestiaria*

Lives of the saints were not the only genre of popular pious narrative in the Middle Ages that assumed a function similar to apocryphal texts during late antiquity. There were in fact two other narrative genres connected to hagiographies by their purpose, which was to assist the clergy in the composition of sermons: *bestiaria* and *exempla*. Like the fabulous lives of the saints, *bestiaria* reached well beyond their primary target of preachers and their public; their fascinating content and often marvellous illustrations delighted a much wider spectrum of listeners and individual readers. As a matter of fact, for the monastic scribes producing *bestiaria*,[47] as well as for the clergy using them in sermons, delight was only a by-product, incidental rather than intended, but presumably appreciated and even necessary as an educational aid in the case of more exotic animals. Moralizing animal tales were supposed to show the road to salvation by revealing allegorical meaning in the order and harmony of God-created nature.

The primary source for the medieval bestiaries is an anonymous Christian didactic text called ***Physiologus***, written in Greek sometime between the second and fourth centuries CE, probably in Alexandria. The oldest reference to a Latin translation appears in the so-called *Decretum Gelasianum* dating from the early sixth century. The translation is mentioned in the fifth part of the document, entitled "A Catalogue of the 'Apocrypha' and Other Writings Which Are to Be Rejected," and is listed between the apocryphal *Canons of the Apostles* and the *History of Eusebius Pamphili*.[48] The entry says: "The book Physiologus, compiled by heretics and called by the name of the blessed Ambrose."[49] The animal descriptions and stories presented in the *Physiologus*, often fantastic or concerning imaginary creatures (the unicorn, phoenix, sirens, etc.), resemble works by the paradoxographers flourishing in the second century CE and are indeed a more or less original compilation of older texts. In the descriptive/narrative part, the book contains many echoes of ancient texts, namely, Herodotus' *Historiae*, Aristotle's *Historia animalium*, Pliny the Elder's *Naturae historiae*,

[47] For a discussion of the relations between text and illustrations in bestiaries, see Dines, 2021, 91–103. See also Hassig, 1995.

[48] For an English translation of Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, see the two volumes in the "Loeb Classical Library" series (1926, 1932).

[49] *Decretum Gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis*, the English trans. by Glenn Davis (see "The Decretum Gelasianum," n.d.). St Ambrose's *Hexaemeron* indicates that he must have been familiar with the *Physiologus.*

Aelian's *De natura animalium*; the allegorical exegesis which follows descriptions of animals is underpinned by quotations from the Scriptures.

The Greek text, first during antiquity and then in the Middle Ages, underwent a complex process of transmission, many reworkings, additions, etc., which resulted in three main considerably different families of manuscripts. The first scholarly edition of the Greek *Physiologus* was produced by Francesco Sbordone in 1936; it was based on seventy-seven manuscripts belonging to the three branches of transmission, as well as on a fourth branch independent from the other three.[50]

Early on, the Greek text was translated into Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, and Armenian. The transmission of translations into Latin is, naturally, even more entangled,[51] as there were several different ones in circulation since at least the sixth century; on top of that, they were not just the same versions in a different language, but rather re-imaginings of the Greek originals with varying numbers of entries and different selections, often placed in a changed order. At first, the collections included twenty-six to forty-nine entries; later, the number mushroomed to over a hundred. The ninth- and tenth-century bestiaries presented further modified Latin versions of the *Physiologus*; the changes consisted primarily of added inserts of various lengths from Isidore of Seville's seventh-century *Etymologiae*.[52] There were, however, several relatively stable common elements found in most bestiaries: like the *Physiologus*, they began, as a rule, with an entry on the king of the beasts, the lion;[53] each entry featured a description of an animal and the symbolism of its nature, followed by a Christian interpretation of the moral dimension of the animal.

After Latin translations[54] came vernacular versions; the most important among them were translations into medieval French dialects based on the

[50] See Katarzyna Jażdżewska's introduction to her Polish translation of the Greek text based on Sbordone's edition (*Fizjolog* [Physiologus], 2003, 10–11).

[51] Latin bestiaries were preserved in ninety-five manuscripts, sixty of them illustrated. According to Ilya Dines's calculations, the number of entries ranges from 30 to 150 per illuminated manuscript, with the total of illustrations reaching 5,000 (2021, 92).

[52] Sarah Kay reviewed previous scholarship (M.R. James, 1928; McCulloch, 1962; Yapp, 1985; Dines, 2012) on the complex manuscript transmission of the *Physiologus*, its Latin translations, and their evolution into medieval bestiaries, convincingly arguing that instead of trying to establish a filiation among extant manuscripts, scholars should study their intersections (Kay, 2016, 119, 127–128, 130–132).

[53] See the passage on medieval bestiaries in my chapter of the *Birthday Beasts' Book*, "Simba the Gentlelion," (Olechowska, 2011, 283–285).

[54] The most popular version, featuring usually thirty-six entries, is known as the *Physiologus*; a related one, dating from the ninth or early tenth century and incorporating excerpts from Isidore

*Physiologus B*. The oldest extant French bestiary, a 3,194-verse poem entitled *Liber bestiarius*, was composed in England, in Anglo-Norman with a Latin prologue and rubrics, by **Philippe de Thaon** between 1121 and 1135; he dedicated it to Adeliza (Adelicia or Adelaida) of Louvain, called the Fair Maiden of Brabant, who married Henry I (also known as Henry Beauclerc), the widowed fourth son of William the Conqueror. This tribute to the Queen indicates that Philippe's intended audience was the courtly elite (Campbell, 2019, 152). As Henry I was a known enthusiast of rare animals and kept them in a deer park called Woodstock, he was probably Philippe's real patron.[55] ***Liber bestiarius*** is divided into three sections: beasts, birds, and stones; it features thirty-eight subjects (McCulloch, 1962, 47–54; Cordonnier, 2021, 57–58).

In the early thirteenth century (to be precise, in 1210, ca. ninety years after Philippe de Thaon wrote his poem), **Guillaume le Clerc de Normandie** wrote in verse the longest extant French bestiary (3,426 lines)[56] known as the ***Bestiaire divin***. Preserved in approximately twenty-five manuscripts dating from between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the *Bestiaire divin* describes thirty-three animals, two kinds of stones (diamonds and firestones), and one plant (the peridexion – or perindens – a tree described in the chapter about the dove).[57]

The prose bestiary of **Pierre de Beauvais**, also known as Pierre le Picard, because the oldest preserved manuscript of his work was written in Picard French, dates from before 1218 and includes thirty-eight chapters.[58] There are eight

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of Seville's *Etymologiae*, is called *B-Isidore*; it became the model for the French vernacular versions discussed here. Another ninth-century version of Latin bestiaries based on the *Physiologus B* but without additions from the *Etymologiae* is *Dicta Chrysostomi*: St John Chrysostome (347–407) allegedly translated the *Physiologus* (Kay, 2019, 32–36), or even wrote it. *Dicta Chrysostomi* was preserved in thirty-four manuscripts scattered all over Europe. See McCulloch, 1962, 41–44. An even more popular but closely related eleventh-century verse bestiary in mixed metres, containing only twelve chapters (about 300 lines), is known as the *Physiologus* of Theobaldus, abbot of the Benedictine monastery on Monte Cassino from 1022 to 1035 (McCulloch, 1962, 40–41; Kay, 2019, 35–36).

[55] See Alexander H. Krappe, who quotes as sources William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntington (1944, 325–327).

[56] Florence McCulloch (1962, 57) discusses the reason for a different number of lines (4,174) in Robert Reinsch's edition (Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1890). Célestin Hippeau's edition (Caen: A. Hardel, 1852) also provides a different number of lines: 3,944 (the text of the poem ends on p. 321). This edition reprinted in Geneva is available online (Guillaume le Clerc, 1970). See also the whole section on Guillaume le Clerc in McCulloch, 1962, 57–61.

[57] See Campbell, 2019, 152–153; for a description of several illustrated manuscripts (cat. nos 31–32), see Morrison, 2019b, 166–170.

[58] For a discussion of both of Pierre de Beauvais' versions, see McCulloch, 1962, 62–69. Another early thirteenth-century author of a verse bestiary in Norman French was Gervaise, whose work survived in only one non-illustrated manuscript: British Library, Additional MS 28260 (Campbell,

extant manuscripts of this bestiary. A longer version, previously also attributed to Pierre de Beauvais, is now considered the work of one of his imitators, written three decades later; it numbers almost twice as many chapters (seventy-one).[59]

Craig Baker, editor of de Beauvais' long version, presenting a thorough comparative textual analysis of this text and of **Richard de Fournival**'s (1201–1260?) innovative ***Bestiaire d'amour***, convincingly argues that contrary to previous findings, the latter is one of the sources of the former (2009, 61–78).[60] Preserved in twenty-three manuscripts (at least fourteen of them illuminated), *Bestiaire d'amour* is a new variation of the genre, as it combines bestiary with courtly poetry; it does not study the nature of animals to seek moral truths, but compares animal behaviours to human romantic strategies and adjusts the stories to the requirements of courtly romance and secular audiences.[61] De Fournival also breaks with the tradition of beginning with the lion and keeping the standard structure of *bestiaria*, that is, a collection of entries, each usually dealing with a single animal, followed by a moralizing interpretation. He changes the typical sequence of animals, and constructs his bestiary as one long story about many animals (approximately sixty), beginning with the rooster, and ending with the vulture, but coming back to the already discussed species when appropriate for the narrative.[62]

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2019, 155). The poem is 1,280 lines long; in the prologue, the author claims to have based his work on the *Dicta Chrysostomi*. According to McCulloch, Gervaise's claim appears justified (1962, 55–56; see also Kay, 2019, 35).

[59] See Baker, 2009, 61, and Baker's introduction to his 2010 edition of the long version (see *Le bestiaire. Version longue attribuée á Pierre de Beauvais* 9–14, 17–20), as well as his paper presented first in 2005 at the *colloque* of the Société internationale renardienne in Münster and developed in *Romania* 12 (2009); Pastoureau, (2011) 2020, 30–31; Morrison, 2019a, 171–172, describes Beauvais' bestiary under cat. no. 33.

[60] See also Gabriel Bianciotto, editor of the *Bestiaire d'amour* and the *Response du Bestiaire*, who reinforces Baker's reasoning; see his introduction, "La version longue a-t-elle servi de modèle á Richard de Fournival" (de Fournival, 2009, 58–68).

[61] See de Fournival (2009, 8–9); Pastoureau, (2011) 2020, 31–32; Campbell, 2019, 153–155.

[62] I am using the 2009 bilingual edition of the *Bestiaire d'amour*. De Fournival, educated at the University of Paris, owned a library holding 162 books listed in his *Biblionomia*, as Aleksander Birkenmajer suggested in 1919 (1970a, 121–122). This suggestion was generally accepted by scholars, e.g., by Bianciotto (2009, 15, 19–24), contested ineffectively by Thomas Haye (2010, 214–243) and validated again by Christopher Lucken, who concluded after a thorough analysis that the *Biblionomia* was a catalogue of de Fournival's real library augmented by many other titles. It constituted a map of thirteenth-century knowledge, and was offered to Amiens students as an intellectual incentive to widen their interests (Lucken, 2017, 63–96). In 1949, Birkenmajer also identified an astrological biography entitled *Nativitas* as de Fournival's autobiography (1970b, 222–235).

## *Exempla*

Bestiaries, which also are obviously considered sources of a specific type of *exempla*, provided preachers with easy-to-use, entertaining stories and their moralizing Christian interpretations. While animals in the bestiaries usually had a symbolic dimension, other animal *exempla* were straightforward stories about animal life mirroring human relationships. My favourite tale is the charming *exemplum de natura asperioli* preserved in **Peregrinus of Opole**'s sermon for *Domenica secunda post Epiphaniam Domini*, about a husband squirrel who chased his hungry wife away from the tree hollow where the couple stored their winter stash of nuts. The shrewd wife did not try to defy his authority openly, but, under threat of starvation, came up with a subterfuge: she found a back entrance to the cache and, to avoid being overheard by the husband, was shelling the nuts at the same moment as he was.[63]

The concept of the medieval *exemplum* has a different connotation from the classical Ciceronian definition of *exemplum*.[64] In the ancient sense, it was a rhetorical device used by lawyers addressing the courts. In the Middle Ages, it became a short, credible, and attractive explanatory narrative expressing a persuasive lesson, easily understood and remembered, used in sermons and addressed to all faithful. The *exemplum* takes on its medieval shape and function beginning in the eighth through ninth centuries; it thrives in monastic preaching orders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and later spreads to urban environments (Le Goff, Brémond, and Schmitt, 1982, 50–51). Gradually, *exempla* were removed from sermons and evolved into separate "collectibles" extracted

[63] See Szostek, 2011, 423–429. Jerzy Wolny, in his selection of seventy-one *exempla* from the *Sermones de tempore*, identifies the story as *exemplum* 5 (1978, 248–274); it is not listed in Frederic C. Tubach's *Index exemplorum* ([1969] 1981) – the only *exemplum* featuring a squirrel is Tubach 4584: "*Squirrel crosses sea.* Using his tail as a sail, a squirrel crosses the sea" ([1969] 1981, 348); Szostek, 2011, 428; Ryszard Tatarzyński's edition of Peregrinus de Opole's *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* (1997, 50). Peregrinus of Opole was a Polish Dominican preacher and confessor at the court of Przemysław of Racibórz in Upper Silesia. His Latin sermons, written in 1295–1304, survived in approx. 300 manuscripts and were published seven times before 1500: in Strasbourg by the Printer of Henricus Ariminensis (Georg Reyser?), ca. 1474–1479; in Ulm by Johann Zainer, not later than 1479; in Cologne by Heinrich Quentell in 1481; in Cologne by Johann Koelhoff the Elder, about 1481; in Strasbourg by the Printer of the 1483 *Vitas patrum* in 1484; in Strasbourg by Johann Prüss in 1493; and also in Strasbourg by Johann (Reinhard) Grüninger in 1495 (see *ISTC*). Tatarzyński in his 1997 edition of the *Sermones* (xxiii) gives the date of the Ulm edition as 1485. See again Szostek, 2011, 423–429.

[64] Cic., *Inv*. 1.49; *Rhet*. *Her*. 4.49, 4.62; see the convincing analysis of the definition of the *exemplum* and its evolution by Le Goff, Brémond, and Schmitt (1982, 27–38).

from their original homiletic context and grouped in sets for use by the clergy and laity as well.[65]

Model sermons, written by **Jacques de Vitry** (ca. 1170–1240), a French canon regular and later a cardinal, served as sources for collections of *exempla*. In the mid-thirteenth century, the number of such collections was significant – forty-six according to the list compiled by Jean-Thiébaut Welter.[66] To facilitate usage, *exempla* were grouped in a logical sequence of *distinctiones*, as, for example, twelve such sections ("De conversione," "De contritione," "De confessione," "De tentatione," "De daemonibus," "De simplicitate," "De Sancta Maria," "De diversis visionibus," "De corpore Christi," "De miraculis," "De morientibus," and "De praemio mortuorum" bring order to a total of 746 entries) in the ***Dialogus miraculorum*** (1219–1223) by the Cistercian **Caesarius of Heisterbach** (ca. 1180–ca. 1240),[67] ***Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*** (1250–1261; containing approximately 3,000 *exempla*) by the Dominican **Stephen of Bourbon** (1180–1261), or ***De dono timoris*** also known as ***Tractatus de habundantia exemplorum*** by another Dominican, **Humbert of Romans** (ca. 1190–1277; Berlioz, 2009, 549–558). An anonymous English Franciscan friar in around 1275 introduced the alphabetic order of rubrics in his ***Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium saeculo XIII compositus a quodam fratre minore anglico de provincia Hiberniae***, a practice adopted also by later compilers and gradually perfected by the addition of indexes and cross-references.[68]

Today, the study of medieval *exempla* appears miraculously simple thanks to the availability in open access of the *Thesaurus of Exemplary Tales from the Middle Ages* (*ThEMA*, abbreviation from *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi*), a live and growing electronic database housing – as of 2025 – sixty-five collections of *exempla* with the total number of indexed entries exceeding 14,500.[69]

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[65] We owe an interesting chapter on medieval collections of *exempla*, including those compiled in Slavonic countries, to Bronisław Geremek (1978a, 53–76), who discusses two Polish Dominicans, Martin of Opava (ca. 1215–1278) and Peregrinus of Opole (1260–1335), among other thirteenth-century authors.

[66] In his 1927 book entitled *L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du Moyen Age*. See also Schmitt, 1977, 5–21.

[67] As the title suggests, the text is composed in the form of a dialogue between a novice and his teacher, an effective and almost modern didactic method (Caesarius of Heisterbach, 1473).

[68] See Le Goff, Brémond, and Schmitt, 1982, 60–63; Elisa Brilli's edition of Arnoldus Leodiensis (2015, 165–167, 183), as well as the monograph on Caesarius of Heisterbach edited by Victoria Smirnova, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, and Jacques Berlioz (2015).

[69] For a full description of the *Thesaurus*, its origin, and advantages as a research tool, see Polo de Beaulieu and Collomb, 2009, 45–52; Smirnova, Polo de Beaulieu, and Berlioz, 2015, 22–23.

*ThEMA* is an ongoing project directed by Anthropologie Historique de Long Moyen Âge, a group created in 2016 to continue the approach to medieval studies pioneered by Jacques Le Goff at the Centre de recherches historiques at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS).[70]

Another large collection of Latin *exempla* – ***Gesta Romanorum*** – compiled anonymously either in England or, more probably, in Germany,[71] was initially meant for preachers. Later, it became very popular among the laity and was transmitted in over 390 manuscripts written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reaching the status of a bestseller (see Classen, 2017, 74; *The Anglo-Latin* Gesta Romanorum, 2019, xvii). It was printed for the first time in 1472 in Cologne by Johan Schilling for William Caxton, and, since then, twenty-five times before 1500; the first vernacular translation (Dutch) was published in 1481, the first German edition dates from 1489, French from 1508.[72] The *Gesta* were translated into many languages; a Polish edition, published in Kraków by Maciej Szarffenberg, dates from 1543 (Michałowska, 1999, 648–649).

There is no consensus as to the date when the *Gesta* were compiled, but the most recent edition of the so-called Anglo-Latin *Gesta Romanorum* convincingly argues that it could not have been much earlier than 1342, the date of its manuscript, Innsbruck Cod. Lat. 310. However, several branches of the textual transmission, different variants of stories, and shorter or longer collections suggest that they were compiled gradually, some earlier, before 1300, and some later (see Gesta Romanorum*: A New Translation*, 2016, xiii–xiv; *The Anglo-Latin* Gesta Romanorum, 2019, xxii–xxviii). There are indications that the first compiler could have been a Franciscan friar; favourable comments about preachers, Franciscans as well as Dominicans, suggest a connection to both mendicant orders (Gesta Romanorum*: A New Translation*, 2016, xiv–xv).

The anthology includes approximately 200 narratives of various types,[73] including fables, novellas, fairy tales, and legends. Usually, first comes a narrative,

[70] *ThEMA* is currently directed by Jacques Berlioz, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, and Pascal Collomb (see *ThEMA: Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi*, n.d.).

[71] For a discussion of the country of origin, see Nigel Harris's introduction to Gesta Romanorum*: A New Translation* (2016, xiv–xv), and the introduction to *The Anglo-Latin* Gesta Romanorum (2019, xxi–xxii), edited by Philippa Bright. For general information on the *Gesta Romanorum*, see Bennett, 2017, 859–862.

[72] See among other numerous incunable editions listed by the *ISTC* (See "[Search results:] *Gesta Romanorum*," n.d.).

[73] The number of stories varies depending on manuscript tradition and the branch of transmission. Classen suggests that out of 250 stories, only 181 were transmitted by earlier manuscripts (2017, 74). The 2016 English translation by Christopher Stace offers 181 stories of the so-called

and then, a strongly didactic *epimythion* provides sometimes surprising Christian allegorical meanings. The topics of the tales are quite diverse and testify to a high degree of familiarity with the main source of content, Classical Antiquity. Almost 100 years ago, the subject was studied by Ella Bourne, who calculated that approximately 95 of the 181 stories contain more or less pronounced classical elements; about 30 among them could be attributed to specific ancient authors, such as Seneca, Valerius Maximus, Pliny the Elder, Frontinus, Ovid, or Macrobius (see Bourne, 1923, 345–376; Gesta Romanorum*: A New Translation*, 2016, xvi–xix; Classen, 2017, 82–83). The War of Troy and its heroes, as well as Alexander the Great, all make an appearance in the *Gesta*.[74] On the other hand, the collection mirrors medieval mentality, concerns, and reality of existence, providing comments and advice in many daily-life situations, thoughts on human relationships, philosophical insights, assessment of people in power, human frailties and sins, the value of friendship, human and divine justice, legal dilemmas, and importantly, religious teaching. However, a significant aspect of the *exempla* relies on their *vis comica*, the potential to entertain, amuse, and produce laughter, bringing this genre marginally closer to the irreverent French fabliaux. Albrecht Classen considers the *Gesta Romanorum* "a central key to popular entertainment dominant in the later Middle Ages" (2017, 75).

The exceptional popularity of the *Gesta Romanorum* and their medieval bestseller status were certainly due to the universal appeal of the stories in spite of their pronounced moralizing character. In any case, to suit all recipients, the moral interpretation was clearly marked and followed the text of the story, and so listeners could tune out, and readers, if they were not particularly interested in the *epimythion*, could merely read the entertaining part (Classen, 2017, 73–98).

One of the sources of the *Gesta Romanorum*, an influential collection of thirty-three tales of the *novella* type rather than the *exemplum*, the first of its kind in Europe, appeared in the early twelfth century. Entitled ***Disciplina clericalis***, it was written by a fascinating figure, **Petrus Alfonsi**, a Spanish Jew from Al-Andalus who converted to Christianity, an astronomer, physician, and writer, educated in Hebrew and Arabic (see Thomas and Mallett, 2011, 356–362). At ease in the Qur'an, Talmud, and Christian Scriptures, Petrus translated moralizing

"Vulgate" text, based on Hermann Oesterley's 1872 edition excluding the 82 items added there from various sources (Gesta Romanorum*: A New Translation*, 2016, xv). The recent edition of the Anglo-Latin *Gesta Romanorum* contains 101 tales and an appendix presenting further 18 (*The Anglo-Latin* Gesta Romanorum, 2019).

[74] The title is a misnomer, as the *Gesta Romanorum* include a variety of non-Roman topics.

oriental tales from Arabic into Latin. Most of them were incorporated into the *Gesta Romanorum* (for example, *Disciplina clericalis* II, VI, IX, XII, XV, XIX, XXI, XXII) and later became a source and influence for Boccaccio's *Decameron* (see Brown, [2014] 2020, 88–90, 113–114).

## Medieval Epic:[75] *Chansons de geste*

In the West, the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries witness an increase in literacy among ecclesiastic as well as secular elites, but not yet among the general public. There is also a growing interest in literature and fine arts at royal and aristocratic courts; *jongleurs* sing *chansons de geste*, heroic epic poems about wars conducted centuries earlier, to small and large audiences. They go "from castle to castle, from fair to fair" (Short in his introduction to *La chanson de Roland*, 1990, 13). One of the first extant *chansons de geste*, ***Chanson de Roland***, tells the story of a Muslim ambush[76] and the battle of Roncevaux Pass in 778. Composed in the late eleventh century in Anglo-Norman, it became a model for the epic cycle of the *matière de France*, one of the three thematic areas of the *chansons de geste* and tales of chivalry commented upon by a *jongleur* active a century or so later in Arras, in the opening lines (3–5) of his ***Chanson des Saisnes***,[77] an evolved epic poem discussed below.

With the exception of elites and educated clergy, the general public was illiterate and could access the *chansons de geste* only by listening to the performance of the poems. Sung and recited, between 1,000 and 1,300 lines per recital, the early epic was heard rather than read. In parallel to oral presentations, the poems were copied and recopied, thus multiplying manuscripts that transmitted very similar but not identical texts with some fragments missing and occasional inserts addressed directly to the audience added, possibly indicating that a live performance was recorded in writing or dictated. It is theoretically possible but unlikely that the *jongleurs* sang while reading from expensive manuscripts; they were professional performers with a trained (but not infallible) memory who knew their songs by heart. *La chanson de Roland* reveals all features of an oral epic designed to maintain the listeners' attention: a linear and rapid course of action, frequent reversals, lack of long and detailed descriptions,

[75] The only medieval Byzantine epic, *Digenis Akritis*, mentioned already in the "Roadmap" section, p. 45, is discussed below with Byzantine vernacular romances.

[76] In fact, the ambush was set by the Basques, who were only assisted by Saracens (*La chanson de Roland*, 1990, 8–9).

[77] See the edition produced by Annette Brasseur: Bodel, 1989, 2–3.

not too many characters but all typical and easily distinguishable, stereotyped scenes, numerous dialogues, no interventions of the narrator; a rhythmic epic discourse using repetitions of epithets and formulas, symmetry, interconnected episodes, a balanced overall structure (*La chanson de Roland*, 1990, 12–16).

The phenomenon of the *chansons de geste* lasted 400 years, from the early eleventh to the fifteenth century, but did not remain static during that time; still, orality remained its crucial aspect in the composition, as well as in dissemination. The Middle Ages present an evolving literary landscape. By the thirteenth century, the difference between hagiographic tales and *chansons de geste* becomes more obvious, while the publics of both genres increase and include at the same time knightly elites and humble listeners (Suard, 1994, 21–22).

Contrary to the Homeric tradition, medieval epic focuses on concrete, historical past and while it is a past at least a century older and observed by a poet, not a historian, it does not refer to mythology but certainly to religion and faith. There are about 100 preserved *chansons de geste* in Old French; they split into three main cycles: featuring Charlemagne (***geste du roi***), lesser knights seeking fame in combats with the infidels (***geste de Garin de Monglane***), and knights who revolt against the king and betray him (***geste de Doon de Mayence***). There were also other, so-called secondary cycles, such as ***geste des Lorrains***, ***geste de Nanteuil***, two cycles of ***geste de la Croisade*** (the first: *La chanson d'Antioche*, *La conqueste de Jerusalem*, *Les chétifs*, and the second: *Le chevalier au cygne et Godefroy de Bouillon*, *Baudouin de Sebourc*, *Le Bastard de Bouillon*). *Chansons de geste* were obviously not confined to their native France; they branched out all across Europe, to Spain and Italy, England and Wales, the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark (see Suard, 2011, 363–384; C.M. Jones, 2014, 141–145). The way each cycle developed and grew to satisfy its recipients' desire to know what happened next and what happened before – through the addition of numerous "sequels" and "prequels" – appears if not similar, at least comparable to today's literary and audiovisual phenomena.[78]

The *Chanson des Saisnes*, mentioned above, was written in *langue d'oïl* by **Jehan Bodel** (1167–1210), a talented poet and a fascinating figure, worthy of at least a miniseries biopic. Almost all we know about him comes from his poems, which leaves potential producers of the biopic with a lot of blanks to fill, but then that is what makes such a project exciting and challenging. Bodel wrote *pastourelles* (first in *langue d'oïl*), fabliaux, one *chanson de geste*/romance,

[78] The so-called *enfances*, "childhoods" of the protagonists, constitute a type of "prequels" popular both in the Middle Ages and now.

a miracle play, and finally, *Congés*, a poignant farewell to the world upon entering a leprosarium (see Jacob-Hugon, 1998, 16–21; Brasseur, 2019, 9–12). When Bodel lists the three great literary themes in the prologue to the *Chanson des Saisnes*, he treats matters of France, Britain, and Rome as written in the same genre but entirely different in their content. He then proceeds to call *matière de Bretagne* light entertainment, *de Rome* – wise and educational, *de France* – demonstrably true (see Bodel, 1989, n. 97; Legros, 1987, 797; C.M. Jones, 2014, 2–3; Moran, 2019, 23). Scholars are unanimous in their assessment of Bodel's talent and recognize his originality in using innovative language and introducing realistic aspects of his lifetime. The *Chanson des Saisnes* is an epic poem veering towards romance (Jacob-Hugon, 1998, 150–151).

Before we start discussing in greater detail other medieval forms, such as chivalric romance, lays, and fabliaux, it would be appropriate to voice some general observations about literary genres in the Middle Ages. They are particularly slippery to grasp because, on the one hand, there are so many ways to approach and attempt to classify them, and on the other, medieval writers and their public did not seem to have been confused about them at all.[79] Patrick Moran (2019, 21–35) successfully argues that the criteria for defining medieval genres are based either on theme or on format: what the story is about or whether it is written in verse or in prose. These criteria are not entirely clear-cut because theme may influence format and vice versa; some themes favour specific formats, and some formats favour specific themes. Genres are – according to Moran – sets of distinctive traits that make possible a comparison between texts and highlight their similarities and differences. Using the example of epic combats, a theme most often treated by *chansons de geste*, Moran demonstrates that chivalric or courtly romances in their military episodes apply the pattern borrowed from the epic.[80] Melissa Furrow, on the other hand, convincingly demonstrates that while the *chanson de geste* developed in France as a well-defined epic genre, in England, it became undistinguishable from romance, with both terms being used interchangeably. This blending of the genres had political and literary reasons:

[79] For difficulties in defining medieval genres, in particular the lays, see *Three Old French Narrative Lays*, 1999, 89–90.

[80] On the relationship between *chansons de geste* and romance, specifically highlighting the fact that the majority of *chansons de geste* are contemporary with romance, see Sarah Kay, 1995, 1–5, 232–240, who provides a gender-oriented view of this relationship; see also the excellent review and assessment of the *chanson de geste* scholarship by Suard, 2011, 39–54; for historical and literary background of the genre, see Boutet, 2019, 415–419.

> Rather than being in generic opposition to romances, "chansons de geste" and their Middle-English descendants were romances in England, as central to the romance tradition as romances belonging to the Matter of Britain, or the so-called Matter of England, and very widely read. […] The trope of the battle against the Saracen enemy is exploited from the earliest days of romance in England as a way of eliding the awkwardness of military aggression within a Christian ideology. (Furrow, 2010, 72)

Among many differences in French medieval literature between the epic *chanson de geste* and chivalric romance stands out the way both genres reflect and shape values important to the social groups they portray. French vernacular epic and romance both cherish family ties and friendship but the epic hero is a member of a blood-related family and acts in the name of family solidarity and shared responsibility for its well-being. The hero of a romance, on the other hand, is an autonomous individual whose ancestry is less important than his sense of shared mission reinforced by friendship. The two genres correspond to two strands of chivalry, collective and individual (Abramowicz, 2017, 20–21). The difference between the epic *chanson de geste* and the courtly or chivalric romance disappears in the fifteenth century with the phenomenon of the *mise en prose* of epic poems resulting only occasionally in a simple translation, more often in a reworking of the same themes essentially producing the same story; or the story may be differently told and provide new details.[81]

## Ancient Themes

### Alexander the Great

The earliest surviving examples of what Bodel called *matière de Rome* were written in the twelfth century and contrary to the *chansons de geste* display strong elements of romance. *Matière de Rome* was Bodel's codename for Classical Antiquity, as it included Greek and Roman history and did not distinguish between mythological and historical times. One historical figure that fascinated people since antiquity and precisely since the fourth century BCE, the time when he lived his extraordinary life, was Alexander the Great (V. Bridges, 2018).

How did his story reach the Middle Ages?[82] Sometime in the first century CE, a certain **Quintus Curtius Rufus** wrote in Latin the ***Historiae Alexandri***

[81] For various effects of the fifteenth-century *mise en prose*, see, e.g., Pudo, 2015, 149–153.
[82] For the timeline, see Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, 2002, 17–19.

***Magni*** in ten chapters of which the first two are lost and the remaining eight incomplete. A fictionalized biography of Alexander the Great was mistakenly attributed to **Callisthenes of Olynthus**, a historian who accompanied Alexander on his Asian campaign but died before Alexander and could not have written about his death (see Stoneman, 2009, 150–152). For lack of a better candidate, the uncertain author was called **Pseudo-Callisthenes**.[83] The Greek original of the *Alexander Romance* was translated into Latin by **Julius Valerius Alexander Polemius** (possibly one of the consuls in 338 CE) under the title ***Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis***; it was epitomized in the eighth and ninth centuries in several versions, and later revised and expanded to include many other legends about Alexander. In the mid-tenth century, **Leo the Archpriest** (fl. 950 CE) brought to Naples from a diplomatic visit to Constantinople a copy of the ***Alexander Romance*** in Greek, which he eventually translated into Latin (see Chiesa, 2005).[84] It was at first entitled ***Nativitas et victoria Alexandri Magni***, and then adapted as ***Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni***,[85] the title used in a 1486 incunable edition published in Strasbourg by Georg Husner (*ISTC*, ia00397000). The twelfth century brings a number of developments: **Albéric de Pisançon** (ca. 1110–1125) writes in Franco-Provençal a ***Roman d'Alexandre*** about the hero's upbringing and early years; it was rewritten by a poet from Poitiers in decasyllabic *laisses* in ca. 1160 as Alexander's *enfances*. The following decade (ca. 1170), an episode surfaced about a cattle raid, exceptionally well written by a certain Eustache and entitled ***Fuerre de Gadres***; it was rewritten and incorporated into **Alexandre de Paris's *Roman d'Alexandre***, a 16,000-line poem from ca. 1185, which came to be known as the **Alexandrine Vulgate**. This massive work was composed of four branches and incorporated not only the *Fuerre de Gadres* but also two lost poems – about Alexander's achievements in India (by **Lambert le Tort**), and ***Mort Alixandre***. Alexandre de Paris's opus was also preceded by **Thomas de Kent's *Le roman de toute chevalerie*** (1175–1180), and a continuation by **Jehan le Nevelon**, ***La venjance Alixandre*** (1180).

**Gautier de Châtillon's *Alexandreis*** (1184–1187),[86] a Latin epic based on Curtius Rufus, followed by **Gui de Cambrai**'s (fl. 1190–1225) continuation, ***Le vengement Alixandre*** (ca. 1191), were the last instalments in the

[83] On the author, title, and date, see Nawotka, 2017, 1–5.

[84] See also Stone, 2016, 725.

[85] For medieval Latin renderings of Alexander's story, see Cizek, 2014, 115–177.

[86] For epic and historiographic values of the *Alexandreis*, see Tilliette, 2014, 178–197; for the manuscript tradition in the thirteenth century, see V. Bridges, 2015, 1–21.

twelfth-century Alexandrian saga. The theme was not left alone in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: new episodes, and interesting innovations were produced, such as the so-called ***Cycle du paon***[87] (1312–1340), the ***Nine Worthies***[88] described for the first time by **Jacques de Longuyon** in his ***Voeux du paon*** (1312). In the fifteenth century, several *mises en prose* appeared, including a historical romance, *Les faicts et les conquestes d'Alexandre le Grand*, written for the Burgundian court by **Jehan Wauquelin**[89] (ca. 1447), and a translation of Gautier de Châtillon's *Alexandreis* (1468).

The numerous translations and retellings in all major European languages,[90] as well as Middle Eastern and Asian, written since late antiquity and well into the Renaissance, suggest that Alexander constituted his own literary genre (Suard, 2016). An extraordinary historical figure, whose tale has been told and retold for over two millennia by many writers using several literary genres, naturally slid into the world of myths. His incredible deeds and exotic adventures gained miraculous and fabulous traits, and he himself, shedding the last threads of ordinary humanity, took on the role of a mythical hero (a 2015 Wrocław University conference on the *Alexander Romance* resulted in an excellent volume: Stoneman, Nawotka, and Wojciechowska, 2018).

A memorable *post scriptum* to his undying popularity was very recently provided by the British Library in London. Ursula Sims-Williams, Adrian S. Edwards, and Peter Toth curated an extraordinary and unique exhibition, *Alexander the Great: The Making of a Myth*, held from October 22, 2022, to February 1, 2023. Two-thirds of the displayed objects belonged to the British Library, and one-third were on loan from other public and private collections. A magnificent

[87] See Gaullier-Bougassas, 2011a, 7–31; for the court ritual of vows on the peacock or other birds, see Gaullier-Bougassas, 2011b, 255–330. The most famous example of the ritual is the Feast of the Pheasant at the Court of Burgundy, when on February 17, 1454, Philip the Good whipped his guests into a frenzy of increasingly more excessive vows to embark on a crusade to Constantinople. See Van Loo, 2021, 338–345.

[88] The "Nine Worthies" were a group of nine men of distinction, comprising three triads: classical – composed of Hector, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar; biblical – Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus; and Christian – King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Boullion.

[89] See Nigel Bryant's introduction in Wauquelin, (2012) 2019, 1–24.

[90] For Alexander's story in French, see Gaullier-Bougassas, Bellon-Méguelle, and Van der Meulen, 2014, 199–321; in Italian, see Campopiano, 2014, 323–362; in Spanish, see Arizaleta, 2014, 363–411; in English, see M. Bridges, 2014, 451–490; in German, see Masse and Thierry, 2014, 491–570; in Dutch, see Van der Meulen, 2014, 571–588; for Scandinavian versions, see Tulinius, 2014, 589–595; for Czech renderings, see Adde-Vomáčka, 2014, 597–604; for Russian and Serbian, see Koroleva, 2014, 605–617. About Alexander the Great in French medieval literature, see also Harf-Lancner, 2000, 51–63.

catalogue of the exhibition, offering much more than a traditional presentation of the event, includes ten papers about Alexander, his world, and his legacy, written by leading scholars.[91] Audiovisual reception of the story of Sikandar-e-Azam (as he is called in India) translates in the twenty-first century into a dozen films, a few television series, and a few documentaries. The most recent one, directed by Hugh Ballantyne, Mike Slee, and Stuart Elliott, was released on Netflix in January 2024, under the title *Alexander: The Making of a God* (see IMDb, n.d. a).

## *Romans d'antiquité*

Three main twelfth-century mythological romances which belong to Bodel's matter of Rome are called "romances of antiquity": ***Roman de Thèbes*** (ca. 1150), considered the first French *roman*[92] with clear connections to *chansons de geste*, an adaptation of Statius' *Thebaid*;[93] ***Roman d'Enéas*** (1156), based on Virgil's *Aeneid* (Cormier, 1974, 42–47); and ***Roman de Troie*** (ca. 1155–1160), a retelling of the Trojan War by **Benoît de Sainte-Maure** (d. 1173), based on two fake eyewitness accounts: Dictys Cretensis' *Ephemeris belli Troiani*, written in Greek in the late first century CE and translated into Latin in the fourth century, and *De excidio Troiae historia* by Dares Phrygius, a Trojan priest of Hephaestus; the text was allegedly discovered and translated into Latin by Cornelius Nepos but in fact the translation was done only in the late fifth century CE.[94] Six manuscripts of the *Roman de Thèbes* (2008, 7–9) survived, and nine of the *Roman d'Enéas*; the complete *Roman de Troie* was preserved in thirty manuscripts, and there are also twenty-eight manuscripts containing its fragments (see Jung, 1996, 22–23; Benoît de Sainte-Maure, [2017] 2020, 432–434).

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[91] The volume is edited by the ancient historian Richard Stoneman (2022a), who also contributed an introduction, "Origin and Growth of a Legend" (2022b), and the final chapter, "Death and Burial from Babylon to Walter of Châtillon (and Beyond)." Krzysztof Nawotka, a classicist at the University of Wrocław, discusses in the album the legend of Alexander's birth as transmitted by Plutarch (*Life of Alexander* 2.2) and in the Greek *Alexander Romance* (2022, 39–44). See also Nawotka, 2017, 37–142, and 2018, 11–27.

[92] See the edition by Aimé Petit (*Roman de Thèbes*, 2008, 34); for the dating, *Roman de Thèbes*, 2008, 20–26.

[93] The anonymous author operates a medieval "mise en roman" on Statius' *Thebaid*, between simple translation, abbreviation, omission of all remnants of obsolete rhetorics, and explanatory additions (*Roman de Thèbes*, 2008, 26–28).

[94] See Timothy D. Arner's preface to the (1966) 2019 edition of *The Trojan War: The Chronicles of Dictys of Crete and Dares the Phrygian*, vii–viii.

The general knowledge of mythology in the Middle Ages was grounded less on the original ancient literary texts than on Latin summaries or works of mythographers of not always reliable origin and quality, like the above-mentioned Dares Phrygius or Dictys Cretensis, whose *Ephemeris* in the Phoenician alphabet was allegedly found in his tomb in Knossos and gifted to Nero, who had it translated into Latin. Alan Cameron devotes a whole chapter to such fake accounts in his 2004 *Greek Mythography in the Roman World*, entitled "Bogus Citations" (124–163). The educational needs of medieval society included not only ancient authors but also means to understand what these pagans wrote about; hence collections of mythological stories more or less adjusted to the Christian faith through allegories.

Out of the three so-called Latin Vatican mythographers, only the third, longest text was written by an author of some literary talent demonstrating noticeable ease in coming up with interesting allegories. His name was most probably **Alberic of London**, Canon of Saint Paul's, active in the mid-twelfth century. The text of Mythographer I, the shortest of the three, dates to the eighth or ninth century; Mythographer II, anonymous like Mythographer I and active slightly later, produced a better-organized and one-quarter longer text (see *Mythographe du Vatican III*, 2005, 11–14; *The Vatican Mythographers*, 2008, 1–11, 101–205). Mythographer III's work survived in over forty manuscripts, indicating its popularity, especially in comparison to Mythographer I (one manuscript) and II (twelve manuscripts) (*Mythographe du Vatican III*, 2005, 15). A manuscript of Alberic's mythography was owned by Petrarch and Boccaccio. The latter must have used it as one of the sources for his monumental *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, which he worked on for four decades, until his death in 1375. Even though it became a widely distributed and popular masterpiece of medieval and early Renaissance scholarship, we cannot view it as part of the audiovisual series ancestry, as to be properly appreciated it requires a sophisticated level of education.[95] Next to Boccaccio's other works with mythological content, such as the 1361 *De mulieribus claris*, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, in the original Latin and in translations into major European languages, exercised a powerful influence on generations of later poets (Cameron, 2004, 249) providing them with mythological inspiration. During the almost 100 years that passed between Boccaccio's death and Wendelin of Speyer's *editio princeps*

[95] For issues related to Boccaccio's *Genealogia*, see Jon Solomon's "Introduction" to the first volume of his outstanding 2011 edition (i–xxxvii). Volume 2 was published in 2017, the final, third volume is still pending. For Boccaccio's metaphor of the poet as sailor (*Genealogia* 1, *Praef*. 40) used as the motto to Chapter 1, see Roberta Morosini's illuminating 2018 paper.

of 1472, many manuscript copies were produced, of which eighty-nine survived, complete or fragmentary (Solomon's introduction to Boccaccio, 2011, x–xi).

## Arthuriana

An often quoted anecdote from the *Dialogus miraculorum* (4.36) of Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1180–1240), the Cistercian hagiographer discussed above in the section on *exempla*, proves how popular the legendary King Arthur was, even in clerical and monastic circles.

> Capitulum XXXVI. *De domino Gevardo Abbate qui monachos in sermone dormitantes per fabulam Arcturi excitavit*. – At the occasion of a solemn feast, Abbot Gevardus, who preceded the present one, was exhorting us in the Chapter; noticing that many of us, especially among the converts, were sleeping and even snoring, he called in a loud voice: Listen, brothers, listen! I'll tell you a new, great story. There was a King whom they called **Artus**. Having said that, he did not continue the story but said: Brothers, you realize what a calamity it is. When I spoke about God, you were falling asleep; as soon as I said something frivolous, you became all ears and listened to every word. (Quoted after Horowitz and Menache, 1994, 111; Caesarius of Heisterbach, 2019, 244–245; trans. is my own)[96]

Just like mentioning Harry Potter or Daenerys Targaryen in a sleepy Latin class today, even though twenty-first-century teachers view predictable reactions of students as a fact of life, rather than a calamity or their own didactic failure.

While the first not entirely conclusive mentions of Arthur appear already in texts dating from the seventh and eighth centuries CE (Lupack, [2005] 2007, 13–24), his story, as we know it today, was told by a chronicler, **Geoffrey of Monmouth** (ca. 1095–1155) in ***De gestis Britonum*** (better known as *Historia regum Britanniae*), which he wrote in Latin between ca. 1123 and 1139 (see Lupack, [2005] 2007, 24–28; Aurell, [2007] 2018, 8). Almost 220 extant manuscripts of this work testify to its popularity in England and in France, with around 70 dating from the twelfth century.[97] Arthur is presented as a descend-

[96] "In sollemnitate quadam cum Abbas Gevardus praedecessor huius, qui nunc est, verbum exhortationis in Capitulo ad nos faceret, et plures, maxime de conversis, dormitare, nonnullos etiam stertere conspiceret, exclamavit: Audite, fratres, audite, rem vobis novam et magnam proponam. Rex quidam fuit, qui Artus vocabatur. Hoc dicto, non processit, sed ait: Videte, fratres, miseriam magnam. Quando locutus sum de Deo, dormitastis; mox ut verba levitatis inserui, evigilantes erectis auribus omnes auscultare coepistis."

[97] See Michael D. Reeve and Neil Wright's "Introduction" to the (2007) 2009 edition of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, vii–viii. The edition includes also the *Prophetiae*

ant of Brutus, a great-grandson of Aeneas himself, providing a Trojan ancestry to the kings of Britain.

The ***Prophetiae Merlini***, Geoffrey of Monmouth's short text, usually integrated with *De gestis Britonum*, was often copied, translated, and prophetically related to later events in British history; it also survived separately in seventy-nine[98] Latin manuscripts. They were identified and listed by Caroline D. Eckhardt, who considered her records far from complete in view of the inventories of the Latin manuscript collections of the French National Library and Vatican Library, unsatisfactory at the time (1982, 167–169). The list is compiled in the alphabetical order of cities where the manuscripts are held, which appears rather confusing and less useful than, for instance, a chronological presentation (Eckhardt, 1982, 172–176). Merlin's prophecies, while by their wealth of specific detail have nothing in common with typical ancient pronouncements from the Delphic Oracle or from the ill-fated Sibylline Books, remain enigmatic and introduce a new style of political prophecy full of inventive animal metaphors,[99] called Galfridic from the Latin form of the name Geoffrey.[100] Known also as a separate *Libellus Merlini*, it enjoyed popularity for centuries, was also widely considered a true prophecy and brought up whenever links to current events seemed to justify it. Merlin became the medieval embodiment of powerful but benevolent indigenous magic, a prophet, and a wizard, along with the young king, readymade heroes for audiovisual productions, like the 2008–2012 BBC series *Merlin*.[101]

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*Merlini* Geoffrey claims to have translated from British into Latin (142–159). He also talks about a certain very old book written in the British tongue, which was allegedly the original on which he based his entire *De gestis Britonum* ("Prologus," 4–5). Reeve validates his decision to incorporate the *Prophetiae Merlini* as Liber VII of *De gestis Britonum* (viii–ix).

[98] Reeve, in (2007) 2009, assessed the number of separate manuscript copies at "over 80" (viii).

[99] Additionally to the white dragon symbolizing the Saxons and the red representing the people of Britain, there is the boar of Cornwall, the German worm, a wolf from the sea, the lion of justice, lowing cattle, barking dogs, greedy kites, wolves with blunted teeth, lion's cubs, fishes of the sea, eagle nesting on mount Aravius, bulls with cut out tongues, a goat with golden horns and a silver beard, women moving like snakes, the lioness of Stafford, native birds, predatory wolves, a stag, buffalos, a hedgehog, a heron, a fox, a wolf, and a bear born from heron eggs, an ass, a mountain ox, a shaggy bearded goat, swans, fish, a crow, a fire-breathing worm, lions with the heads of goats, the raging boar of Totnes, vipers, a flying serpent. No surprise then, as Geoffrey says at the beginning of Book 8, that "Merlinus, ambiguitate verborum suorum astantes in ammirationem commovit" (Merlin reduced the bystanders to amazement with his riddling words) (Geoffrey of Monmouth, [2007] 2009, 160–161). The speeding swirl of unending, terrifying predictions cannot fail to overwhelm readers, including myself.

[100] Galfridus Monemutensis; see *De gestis Britonum*, "Prologus," 3.

[101] See the Chronological Survey in Chapter 2, under 2008. Productions about the Arthurian legend are listed in the Survey only if they feature themes related to antiquity. In the twenty-first

The most influential early adaptation of *De gestis Britonum* into Norman verse (ca. 1155) was done by **Wace** (ca. 1110–1174), a poet from Jersey, who entitled it ***Roman de Brut*** (Lupack, [2005] 2007, 28–29), Brut being evidently Brutus of the alleged Trojan ancestry (see Zink in his introduction to Chrétien de Troyes, 2002, 8). *Roman de Brut* was preserved in thirty-two manuscripts, approximately one-third of which are incomplete.[102] Wace purposefully omitted Merlin's enigmatic prophecies he certainly had problems interpreting but was the first to introduce the Round Table and its Knights being equal to each other (Delbouille, 1953, 172–199). Wace says that Arthur was believed not to have really died but was waiting in Avalon to return in the hour of need (see Sullivan, 2018, 3). He also mentions the existence of many oral tales about Arthur predating the *Roman de Brut*, which, while not a chronicle, like *De gestis Britonum*, and not yet a full-fledged courtly romance, is definitely well on the road favoured and taken by **Chrétien de Troyes** (fl. 1170–1185). His five romances, ***Erec et Enide*** (1170), ***Cligès*** (1176), ***Le chevalier de la charette***, and ***Le chevalier au lion***[103] (1177–1181), as well as the last, unfinished work, ***Le conte du Graal*** (1182–1190), are all written in verse, from two to four decades after Wace's *Roman de Brut*. The great importance of French medieval literature for the Arthurian legend was very adequately discussed by Philippe Walter in his *Dictionnaire de mythologie arthurienne* (2014, 7–24; see also Lupack, [2005] 2007, 85–92).

The fact that the *Conte du Graal*, an innovative theme of chivalric romance, was left unfinished due to the death of Chrétien de Troyes (or his abandonment of the story), created a strong narrative need for a continuation. At least four

century, relatively few movies or series were made about Arthur: in 2004 Antoine Fuqua's *King Arthur*, in 2005 the BBC's "Arthur: The Once and Future King," in the documentary series *In Search of Myths and Heroes,* in 2007 Doug Lefler's film *The Last Legion*, in 2011 Ben Mole's episode "King Arthur" in *Mystery Files* (S01E07), in 2017 Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: The Legend of the Sword* (planned as the first instalment of a long cycle of films but never continued), in 2019 Joe Cornish's underperforming *The Kid Who Would Be King*. In fantasy series, the 2011–2018 ABC *Once Upon a Time* included a rather villainous version of Arthur in S05E01–10 aired in 2015. *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* in its S02E12, "Camelot/300," aired on February 21, 2017, travels to 507 CE Britain, where Stargirl/Merlin from the Justice League is Arthur's spouse and the initiator and champion of ideals on which Arthur builds Camelot. She decides to remain at Arthur's side to see her mission through and not return to the twenty-first century.

[102] See Glyn S. Burgess and Douglas Kelly's preface to their translation of Benoît de Sainte-Maure ([2017] 2020, 2).

[103] See Walter's (2018) impressive analysis of *Chevalier au lion* comparing it to Theocritus and fairy tales and highlighting the transformation of myth into a chivalric romance driven by the abandon of paganism, a recovery of autonomy by the hero from the all-powerful Fatum, and by the integration of women and of a moral dimension into the chivalric action.

such medieval octosyllabic poems centred on the character of Perceval (the first one on Gawain) are known. An anonymous *continuation* appears before 1200; there, Gawain is seeking a mysterious bleeding spear, one of the three powerful objects of the myth of the Grail – the other two being a dish containing one Communion wafer and a broken sword. Because he does not ask about the meaning of the objects he must return to the castle and find out what they are. The next *continuation* follows soon after the first and is tentatively attributed to **Wauchier de Denain**;[104] the third, commissioned by Jeanne, Countess of Flanders and Hainaut (ca. 1199–1244), to **Manessier** (ca. 1230); the fourth to **Gerbert de Montreuil** (ca. 1226–1230). The second begins when Perceval meets his hermit uncle; Perceval fixes the broken sword but the blade remains imperfect. The third *continuation* starts with the last lines of the second. What was a "spear of the ogre" in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal* becomes here the centurion Longinus' spear with which he pierced Christ's side on the cross (see Lupack, [2005] 2007, 215–217; Walter, 2014, 235). The sword is fixed and then broken again. The fourth *continuation* makes Perceval go through various trials and ordeals before he returns to the castle of the Fisher King and there finally repairs the sword and simultaneously restores the deserted lands. The point of view becomes more Christian in each consecutive *continuation*; eventually, Perceval defeats the devil, inherits the throne from the Fisher King, and becomes a priest hermit in his old age. When he dies, the spear and the Grail go to heaven with him (see Lupack, [2005] 2007, 218–221).

The dish of uncertain shape and size from Chrétien de Troyes' *Conte du Graal* and its *continuations* was associated by **Robert de Boron** (late twelfth to mid-thirteenth century) with Christ's cup from the Last Supper and the cup into which Joseph of Arimathea collected Christ's blood from his body on the cross. Robert was inspired by New Testament Apocrypha and wrote a poetic trilogy, comprising ***Joseph d'Arimathie ou Estoire dou Graal***, ***Merlin***, and ***Perceval***, of which only the first part and 500 lines of the second survived. However, all three poems are extant in their prosaic versions.[105] They played a significant role in the development of the Arthurian legend. The cup and the spear remain potent narrative motifs in twenty-first-century audiovisual culture but their medieval religious meaning waned as they became instead magical objects

[104] For difficulties with the uncertain attribution to Wauchier, see Corley, 1984, 352–359.

[105] The translator claimed to have been Robert de Boron himself but is usually called Pseudo-Robert de Boron (Dauchy, 1996, 15). For a different theory on the relation between the poem and its prose version, see Linda Gowans's article in which she argues that Robert wrote prose and authored only the story of Joseph of Arimathea (1996, 1–17, 2004, 15–27).

sought by all who somehow learned of their existence, with forces of good trying to prevent forces of evil from wielding their power – a simplification particularly appealing to producers of movies and television series based on comic books and their superheroic characters.[106]

Before discussing other medieval narratives, as chronological order would suggest, we should wind down chivalric romance in its Arthurian instalments and skip ahead two centuries to one of the most popular late medieval authors, **Sir Thomas Malory** of Newbold Revell in Warwickshire (ca. 1414–1471). Inspired by Robert de Boron's *Merlin* and several other Arthurian tales,[107] Malory wrote ***Le morte Darthur*** (1469–1470), or *Le morte d'Arthur*, as it was later called in Middle English prose. A shortened text was printed in Westminster by William Caxton barely fifteen years later, in 1485 (*ISTC*, im00103000), and by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498 (*ISTC*, im00103100), making a total of two incunabula. In spite of the title suggesting a limit imposed on the content, Malory's book narrates Arthur's entire life but Lancelot, as an absolute ideal of chivalry, becomes the book's most important character. Only the last episode, "The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur," deals with how and why Arthur died and ends after his death with Lancelot's visit to Guinevere in a nunnery, where they decide as a penance not only to lead a life of prayer but never to see each other again. Lancelot renounced the world and served God with prayers and fasts at the hermitage of the Bishop of Canterbury; he was joined there by eight other knights who admired his example and accompanied him for six years. He was then ordained and a year later had three visions ordering him to go to Almesbury because the Queen was dying and he should bury her next to King Arthur. He went there with his knights and buried the Queen in Glastonbury. Since then he could not eat or drink normally and was soon dying himself. He asked to be taken to his home, Joyous Gard,[108] to be buried. Both Lancelot and Guinevere became noble embodiments of holiness and chivalric virtue. This pious and supremely edifying conclusion was undoubtedly in sync with what the original readers expected but it did not inspire twenty-first-century audiovisual creators, who – to my knowledge – never developed this worthy theme.

[106] For more details, see Chapter 3.

[107] For Malory's sources, see, e.g., Lupack, (2005) 2007, 134.

[108] Identified by Malory, in Caxton's edition, 21.12: "Some men say it was Alnwick, and some men say it was Bamborough as Bamburgh Castle" (Malory, n.d.; the e-book provides the text of *Le morte d'Arthur*, which is 349,638 words long).

## Narrative Lays

Until it was rationally approached and cracked, one variety of twelfth-century narrative had remained a persistent old chestnut for literary historians. **Marie de France** (active from 1160 to 1215), the celebrated author of twelve charming, short poems (varying in length from 118 lines – "Chevrefoil" – to 1,184 lines – "Eliduc"; see *Lais du Moyen Âge*, 2018, 234–241, 242–299; Whalen, 2011a, 1–30; Mickel, 2011, 31–54; Rothschild, 2011, 89–116) composed in Anglo-Norman, did not write what later ages thought she did. Marie spoke and wrote in her language, a Romance dialect originating from Latin, like the dialect of Île-de-France, and spoken at English courts from the times of William the Conqueror and the Norman Conquest to the early fifteenth century, even though Latin remained the official language of the English administration. Marie's use of the term *Breton lais* was misinterpreted as referring to her own poems. Several scholars since the early twentieth century have attempted to clarify the difficulties surrounding the Breton lays but the solution is due to Philippe Walter, the editor of the 2018 collection *Lais du Moyen Âge* (vol. 636 in the series "Bibliotheque de la Pléiade") containing Marie's poetry, as well as some anonymous lays and a number of poems by twelfth- and thirteenth-century identified authors. In his introduction, as well as in his 2019 paper (see Walter's introduction in *Lais du Moyen Âge*, 2018, xi–li; Walter, 2019, 1–19), Walter presents impeccable reasoning leading to the conclusion that Marie was not necessarily "de France" and did not compose any Breton lays herself. Marie wrote *récits* – stories – about old Breton songs, sung by singers, not recited without music, stories about why these songs were composed, and where they came from. "Pur queï il fu fet e dunt" (*Lais du Moyen Âge*, 2018, 236, "Chevrefoil," line 4). Marie's poems tell us that such songs existed but only Marie's *récits* about them have survived. There are no extant actual Breton lays, probably because they belonged to the oral (specifically to sung or musical) tradition, residing only in the memory of their performers and listeners, and as such followed them into oblivion. However, other kinds of narrative lays did survive along with the eleven poems by Marie de France; most of them were anonymous but some were clearly attributed, for instance, Jean Renart's "L'Ombre" (*Lais du Moyen Âge*, 2018, 545–593), Girard's "Amours" (638–663), Henri de Valenciennes' "Aristote" (664–687),[109]

[109] Some scholars consider this *lai* to be a fabliau; see Smithies, 2016, 139–140.

Robert Biket's "Le Corn" (748–777), Renaut's "Ignaure" (832–865), and Huon le Roi's "Le Vair Pallefroy" (912–977).[110]

Medieval writers rarely, if ever, limited themselves to just one genre, preferring to try their hand at a wide range of formats. Marie de France, who next to her *récits* wrote some fabliaux and adapted or translated many fables (Brucker, 2011, 209–236), is a good example of that trend and so is the previously mentioned talented jongleur, Jehan Bodel. The main theme of the extant lays is *fin amor* and its components, *la maladie d'amour*, courtly rituals of Eros, and the sovereign position of the lady featured in the lay. The poem usually begins with a prologue and ends with a conclusion or a moral lesson. It relates an adventure and the course of a love story including trials, obstacles, and chivalric endeavours, all against the background of an aristocratic court.

## Fabliaux

Alongside lofty and serious themes there is usually a strand of stories meant to satisfy the need for humour and laughter. Hence, among dozens of decorous and exalted *chansons de geste* from the late twelfth to the early fourteenth century flourished irreverent and hilarious fabliaux composed in rhymed octosyllabic couplets and originally performed by jongleurs (Żółkiewska, 2006, 45–55). Several decades ago, Peter Dronke (1973, 275–297) argued that fabliaux have a much older literary origin masked by the urgent need for amusing, down-to-earth stories felt by the emerging French middle class. For Dronke, next to the *exempla* and animal stories from the bestiaries, which both surely influenced them, fabliaux also had Roman ancestors, for example, Petronius, Phaedrus, and Apuleius, as well as early medieval ones, such as the Goliardic *Carmina Cantabrigiensia* composed in the mid-eleventh century and delighting in the same themes. Dronke called fabliaux "amusing stories of deception and outwitting, especially of a sexual kind" (1973, 276). *Carmina Burana*, dating from the mid-eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries (*Love Lyrics from the* Carmina Burana, 1993), are another example of extant Goliardic poetry. Jan M. Ziolkowski suggests that Latin short forms "from 1200 and earlier set the stage for the rise of short fiction in the vernaculars, which led eventually to the collections that have been identified as the earliest fairy tale collections" (2007, 236).

[110] Numbers in brackets refer to pages in the same bilingual edition published by Walter in 2018; for a discussion of extant lays, see also *Three Old French Narrative Lays*, 1999, 7–11.

Irrefutable proof of the great appeal of fabliaux is provided by Boccaccio (Brown, [2014] 2020, 225–227), who reworked quite a few for his *Decameron*, manifesting more originality than Chaucer, whose *Canterbury Tales* also rely on French fabliaux and contain many similar plots. Both of these fourteenth-century masterpieces belong to the genre of the frame narrative and are discussed below in a separate section.

The majority of the ca. 160 extant fabliaux are anonymous. However, some were written by known authors, for example, Marie de France, Jehan Bodel (see Jacob-Hugon, 1998, 221–267),[111] Gautier le Leu (b. 1210?) by whom we have ten,[112] Rutebeuf (ca. 1230–1285) (Żółkiewska, 2006, 53–54), who, like Bodel, was also the author of more saintly fare, *Le miracle de Théophile* or *La vie de Sainte Helysabel*, Jean de Condé (ca. 1275–1352), who authored five extant fabliaux (Żółkiewska, 2006, 54), or Watriquet de Couvins (b. 1300?), whose two fabliaux we can still enjoy (see Żółkiewska, 2006, 54; Colombo Timelli, 2019, 549). Fabliaux, highly popular in the Middle Ages, were reluctantly studied or simply ignored by modern French scholars, who were shocked by their obscenity and hesitated to admit the French origin of the genre and its input into the national identity, preferring to look for an oriental provenience.[113] The satirical picture or even the caricature of medieval morality shown in the fabliaux was considered shameful rather than amusing. Especially that in the harsh light shined by the authors on human deception, dishonesty, hypocrisy, greed, lust, unfaithful and devious women, cuckolded husbands, rapacious and lascivious priests, cowardly knights, and lazy farmers, there was not even a dash of censure or condemnation, on the contrary, an admiration for the cunning of a smart crook or any other successful evildoer and an amused mockery of their victims, as well as lots of unabashed and very explicit descriptions of sex (see Muscatine, 1998, 281–292; Bloch, 1998, 293–307).

Connections between fabliaux and *exempla* are obvious from their manuscript tradition: they were frequently preserved in the same collections. Earl Jeffrey Richards in his chapter "Lire les fabliaux aujourd'hui" (2011) highlights the fact that *exempla* extant in manuscripts containing fabliaux were often related to the miracles of the Virgin Mary. According to Richards, these collections

[111] Eight fabliaux composed by Bodel have survived; see Żółkiewska, 2006, 52–53.

[112] See Livingston, 1951, 139–269; Thomas Bertram Wallace Reid (1953, 212) agrees with Charles H. Livingston (1951, 131) that Gautier le Leu "is probably a better representative than Rutebeuf of the jongleur as author."

[113] See R. Howard Bloch's "Introduction" (*The Fabliaux*, 2013, xv–xvi) to the bilingual, Old-French and English, edition of fabliaux translated by Nathaniel E. Dubin.

reflect the theological disputes of the thirteenth century, with the corruption of the Church, the target of many fabliaux, and the advocacy for the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, symbolizing purity that must be restored to the Church, being the favourite, mutually enhancing themes of Franciscan preachers, who were employing both kinds of stories in their sermons (E.J. Richards, 2011, 144–146). The use of questionable *miracula* attributed to the Virgin Mary lowered the tone of *artes praedicandi* and was criticized by St Thomas Aquinas, and later by Dante, but, as Richards points out, the collections of fabliaux included serious Marian stories and were possibly assembled to prevent scandals caused by indiscriminate use of far-fetched *fabulae ignotae* (see E.J. Richards, 2011, 140–142).[114] Brian J. Levy demonstrated the affinity between *exempla* and fabliaux by identifying a dozen of obviously related stories from Jacques de Vitry's *Sermones vulgares* and three from the Dominican Etienne de Bourbon's *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus* (see Levy, 2005, 123–124; see also Levy, 1984, 311–321).

Fabliaux, these medieval – potentially embarrassing – literary pearls, are very difficult to translate from Old French into modern languages, especially because of the number of *jeux de mots* (Corbellari, 2004, 61–71), to say nothing of literary and historical allusions well beyond the grasp of an average twenty-first-century reader or even scholar. The best rendering of fabliaux into English was published along with the original text in 2013 by a brilliant translator, Nathaniel E. Dubin. Reading these "English-speaking" fabliaux, placed opposite their Old French originals, one fully agrees with R. Howard Bloch's assessment expressed in his introduction to that edition: "Dubin reproduces the world and the feeling of the medieval tale and finds linguistically and culturally resonant equivalents for words and things, poetic patterns, and patterns of thought that travel joyfully from the Middle Ages to the present" (*The Fabliaux*, 2013, xvii).

The satire and low humour of the fabliaux, similar in spirit to ancient comedy and also to the later ancient romance, remain as a robust literary and cultural

[114] St Thomas, in his *Responsio ad lectorem Bisuntinum de 6 articulis*, states: "Non enim decet praedicatorem veritatis ad fabulas ignotas divertere. […] Nec aestimo huiusmodi frivola esse praedicanda, ubi tanta suppetit copia praedicandi ea quae sunt certissimae veritatis" (For it does not seem fitting that a preacher of the truth turn to unknown fables. […] I do not judge a frivolity of this sort to be proclaimed when there are so many certainly true things that are suitable for preaching" (trans. Ryan J. Brady; see *Response to the Lector of Besançon*, 2017). See also Dante, *Paradiso*, 29.109–117: "Christ did not to his first disciples say, / 'Go forth, and to the world preach idle tales,' / But unto them a true foundation gave; […] Now men go forth with jests and drolleries / To preach, and if but well the people laugh, / The hood puffs out, and nothing more is asked" (trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1867).

strand throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and continue in later periods, finding their audiovisual expression in the twentieth- and twenty-first-century British sitcoms, such as Talbot Roswell's *Up Pompeii!* (1969–1970), Rory McGrath and Jimmy Mulville's *Chelmsford 123* (1988–1990) or the 2013–2022 comedy series *Plebs* featuring young provincials who come to Rome and try to get by without either funds or particular skills (see, for instance, Cull, 2001, 162–190).

## Twelfth-Century Byzantine Revival of the Greek Romance

Written in Atticizing Greek for sophisticated Byzantine elites, four twelfth-century romances testify to the astonishing revival of a genre dormant for 800 years. Their authors modelled their works on *Leucippe and Clitophon* by Achilles Tatius, the *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, and the prose romance *Chaereas and Kallirhoe* by Chariton, but they are certainly no straightforward imitations, as their detractors claimed.[115] Intense literary activity during the Komnenian Renaissance combined with economic prosperity produced favourable conditions for reclaiming and creatively reworking the Greek heritage.[116] The truly unique facts about this revival are that (1) the four romances were written not far apart in time,[117] (2) their four authors probably knew or

[115] See Niklas Holzberg ([1995] 2005, 78), who in his book on the ancient novel mentions Constantinople without discussing it in any meaningful way, and says: "where they continued to be copied and, in the twelfth century, were even imitated." Panagiotis Roilos (2006) summarizes scholarship on Byzantine novels listing many negative judgements: Adamantios Korais attacked them vehemently for lack of artistic taste and vulgarities; Erwin Rohde found them distasteful; Karl Krumbacher saw in them the worst example of Byzantine literature; for Cyril Mango, they were "unbelievably tedious"; Constantine Trypanis saw them as the low point of Byzantine poetry. Starting in the second half of the twentieth century, the negative attitude makes place for an increasingly sympathetic scholarship (Roilos, 2006, 16–17). Roderick Beaton gives a more satisfactory review of scholarly reactions to the four revival romances in his *Medieval Greek Romance* ([1989] 1996, 2–4); see also Elizabeth Jeffreys's introduction to *Four Byzantine Novels*, (2012) 2016, ix–x. For an analysis of the relations between the Komnenian romances and their models, see Nilsson, 2016, 40–46.

[116] About Byzantine fantasy writing during the Komnenian Renaissance, see Kaldellis, 2008, 260–270. The theme of love and its treatment, also in comparison with the Komnenian romances and the relationship between Komnenian and Palaiologan narratives, was debated by Panagiotis Agapitos with Carolina Cupane, Martin Hinterberger, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Marc Lauxtermann, Ulrich Moenning, Ingela Nilsson, Paolo Odorico, and Eustratios Papaioannou in 2004, for the journal *Symbolae Osloenses* (Agapitos, 2004). For a discussion of the readership of the Komnenian romances, see J.B. Burton, 2008, 272–281. For various aspects of Byzantine storytelling, see Cupane, 2014, 41–48, and Cupane and Krönung, 2016.

[117] Nilsson suggests that it happened during the two decades between ca. 1135 and 1155 (2016, 40).

at least were aware of each other, and (3) as far as we can determine, the romances were a one-off for all these authors (J.B. Burton, 2008, 272–274).

Two of the four romances (**Theodore Prodromos**' *Rhodanthe and Dosikles* and **Niketas Eugenianos**' *Drosilla and Charikles*) were written in twelve-syllable verse, **Constantine Manasses**' *Aristandros and Kallithea* in fifteen-syllable verse, the so-called πολιτικὸς στίχος (*politikòs stíchos*), while the fourth romance is in prose (**Eumathios Makrembolites**' *Hysmine and Hysminias*).[118] Constantine Manasses' poem is preserved only in fragments, some of them fairly substantial; they survived as excerpts quoted by late thirteenth-century writers: Maximos Planoudes, Makarios Chrysokephalos, and a non-identified anthologist (*Four Byzantine Novels*, [2012] 2016, 277–278).

## Vernacular Byzantine Romance

The first known poem in early demotic Greek, ***Digenis Akritis***[119] (transliteration varies between Akritas, Akrites, and Akritis), a heroic proto-romance bordering on epic, and according to Roderick Beaton "the most important precursor of the fully-fledged revival of the romance genre in the twelfth century" ([1989] 1996, 31), is based on such sources as Achilles Tatius, Heliodorus, and Eumathios Makrembolites (*Digenis Akritis*, 1998, xliv–xlvii). It went through centuries-long formation before reaching the versions (far from identical) which continued to evolve before settling sometime in the twelfth century or even later (*Dijenis Akritas*, 1998, 25). Some scholars date the surviving versions to the mid-tenth century,[120] or ca. 1100 (see Beaton, [1989] 1996, 31–32),[121] or after 1150 (Borowska in *Dijenis Akritas*, 1998, 48). The primacy of one version over the others was long debated and, finally, rejected. The next important question, whether the poem ever reached a truly finalized text, cannot be answered (see Beaton and Ricks, [1993] 2016). Six fairly different versions of the poem have survived, each in only one manuscript, the longest one (3,709 lines)

[118] For a recent English edition with introductions to each author, see *Four Byzantine Novels*, (2012) 2016.

[119] For a series of essays on various aspects of *Digenis Akritis*, see the 2016 Routledge reprint of Roderick Beaton and David Ricks's 1993 volume entitled *Digenes Akrites*.

[120] See Stilianos Kiriakidis, who studied relations between all surviving versions of the poem, discussed by Małgorzata Borowska in *Dijenis Akritas*, 1998, 23.

[121] For a review of the historical context of the poem, see the Polish edition published by Borowska: *Dijenis Akritas*, 1998, 25–37.

was preserved in a fourteenth- to fifteenth-century codex in Grottaferrata.[122] There was one short prose version and five poetic versions written in the same fifteen-syllable *politikòs stíchos*, as Manasses' *Aristandros and Kallithea*, setting the standard for later vernacular romances which proliferated during the Palaiologan period (1261–1453).[123] A seventh version, which preserved an incomplete text – dating possibly from the thirteenth century – was translated (or adapted) into Old Russian and discovered in two eighteenth-century manuscripts.[124] One cannot help wondering whether Homer's epic would have met the same fate of surviving in many different versions without a definitive text if it had begun to develop a millennium later, like *Digenis Akritis*.

Małgorzata Borowska titled her 1998 Polish edition of the poem (translated into decapentasyllabic verses despite this metric form being alien to the Polish language) *Dijenis Akritas. Opowieść z kresów bizantyńskich* [Digenis Akritas: A Tale from the Byzantine Borderlands], as it presents the adventures of a man from two cultures (son of an emir and a Christian Cappadocian Greek mother) who defends the borderlands of the Byzantine Empire against Arabs and bandits (ἀπελάται; *apelates*). In English, the name of the hero (and title) has been rendered as *Twyborn the Borderer* by John Mavrogordato in his Oxford edition of 1956 (see also his introduction in *Digenes Akrites*, [1956] 1970, xiv) or *Two-Blood Border Lord* (Jouanno, 2016, 260).

The extant Byzantine romances composed in the vernacular are certainly not translations or adaptations of Western romances but take up many themes from French literature, in particular the themes of the court and the judgement of Eros. However, they owe the most to the learned Komnenian romances (Cupane, 2019, 43), as we can see in *Livistros and Rodamne*, the longest romance (ca. 4,600 lines), composed at the Nicaean court in the mid-thirteenth century by an anonymous author; in *Belthandros and Chrysvantza*, also anonymous, written in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, in 1,348 political verses; and in *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, of 2,607 political verses, written between 1310 and 1340, possibly by Andronikos Komnenos Palaiologos, cousin of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328) (Cupane, 2019, 40–62), or Andronikos Komnenos Branas Doukas Angelos Palaiologos, son of the half-brother

[122] See Jeffreys's edition of the poem (*Digenis Akritis*, 1998, xv); as well as Borowska's (*Dijenis Akritas*, 1998, 8–13).

[123] As mentioned in the "Roadmap," Palaiologan romances were either original vernacular compositions or adaptations of Western European models. See also Beaton, 1989, 345–355.

[124] For a discussion of the poem's manuscripts and various versions, see, e.g., John Mavrogordato's introduction to his edition (*Digenes Akrites*, [1956] 1970, xi–xxvi).

of Emperor Michael VIII (1223–1282).[125] Carolina Cupane compares the vernacular romances to the learned ones (2016b, 480) and formulates four main characteristics of the former:

1. They are normally transmitted anonymously.
2. A considerable gap can be ascertained between their date of composition and the time of their written transmission.
3. All of them are poetic works using the same fifteen-syllable verse (also called political verse = *politikòs stíchos*) and are actually composed in mixed language that incorporates vernacular and learned elements and abounds with repetitions and formulaic expressions.
4. Last but not least, they do not represent fixed texts; there are rather different versions of a given story characterized by a high spectrum of linguistic variation in diction as well as in morphology.

Two other vernacular romances were mentioned in the "Roadmap" section, the *Tale of Achilles* (*Achilleid*) in three different versions and the *Tale of Troy*, the so-called *Byzantine Iliad* (1,166 verses).[126] Contrary to the earlier Greek romances – with the exception of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* – magic and magical objects play an important role in *Livistros and Rodamne* and *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe* (Fonseca, 2020, 244–258), a recurring theme in twenty-first-century audiovisual series.

Greece did not lose its fascination with romances once the Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance. *Erotokritos* is a dramatic epic romance composed by **Vikentios Kornaros** (1553–1614) in the dialect spoken on the island of Crete and set to 10,000 fifteen-syllable rhymed lines performed with the accompaniment of music since the early seventeenth century.

## Novellas and Frame Stories[127]

Here is as good a place as any to confess that during my early, purely philological, classicist career, I found of little interest anything less ancient than at least

[125] The debate on the identification of the author is reviewed by Beaton ([1989] 1996, 104, 219, 246), who favours the nephew.

[126] For the dating and the manuscript tradition of the two works, see Beaton, (1989) 1996, 102–104, 106–110, 116; more recently both works were summarized and analysed in Lavagnini, 2016, 240–248.

[127] For a general discussion and review of medieval frame stories, see Bonnie D. Irwin's article (1995, 27–53).

silver Latin or pre-Byzantine Greek. I followed the same mistaken tendency during my first visit to Athens in 1967 when I would not "waste time" on Roman monuments. At that time, I had only a basic idea about medieval and Renaissance literature, and I still remember my surprise when I learned that after the ***Decameron***, Boccaccio practically abandoned Italian and from a superb vernacular writer transformed into a Renaissance scholar using Latin as his language of choice. In my ignorance, I thought it was the other way around: that a perfect foundation in Latin allowed him to graduate to his pioneering mastery of Italian. My bad. Since then, I have been fascinated by the Middle Ages and have appreciated rather than derided medieval Latin. As Boccaccio's most recent English translator, Wayne A. Rebhorn, confirms in his "Introduction," it was Boccaccio's "life-changing encounter with Petrarch" in October 1350 that caused the transformation (Boccaccio, [2013] 2015, loc. 304). Luckily, the *Decameron* was almost ready by then.

The only set of stories to appear in Italian before the *Decameron* was anonymous (1280–1300). Like Boccaccio's collection, ***Il Novellino*** or ***Le cento novelle antiche*** contained 100 stories, but they were short, simple anecdotes without the rhetorical or artistic advantage of a frame, often about historical figures but emphasizing their type rather than real historical models,[128] contrary to the stories of *Decameron* Day 10, developing the psychology of specific characters, such as Charles of Anjou (called by Boccaccio "King Charles the Old," discussed by Fiammetta in story 6).

The well-documented and omnipresent medieval symbolism of numbers deeply impacted the collection's structure, with obvious references to Dante's *opus magnum*, labelled "divine" by Boccaccio. Among them, 100 stories like the 100 *canti*, division into three large sections, and frequent allusions to Dante's text. The content itself owes a lot to the courtly romance and its ideals, but there is also a naughty *boccaccesco* side focusing on fabliaux-like themes of lower-class aspirations to superior wit and cunning in the pursuit of basic desires for pleasure, wealth, and sexual satisfaction, generating in the process a biting social satire and making fun of all those who are tricked and those who play tricks on others.[129] However, in describing the pleasures of the flesh, Boccaccio remains not only less specific than is the usage in the French fabliaux but decidedly more discreet.

[128] E.g., Frederick II of Hohenstaufen dynasty as a *good prince*. See Mühlethaler, 2017, 31–32.

[129] On the influence of fabliaux on the *Decameron*, see Brown, (2014) 2020, 166–215; the same author provides in the "Appendix," pp. 225–227, a list of over thirty fabliaux corresponding to Boccaccio's tales.

Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* – either the original or later versions of individual tales – provided Boccaccio with moralizing content and a link to the oriental frame structure.[130] Boccaccio sets up the scope of the moral intent in the proem to the *Decameron*, which famously begins: "Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti"[131] – "It is a matter of humanity to show compassion for those who suffer" (Boccaccio, [2013] 2015, loc. 1150–1154, trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn), and explains that the "one hundred stories, or fables, or parables, or histories, or whatever you wish to call them" (3) are *recounted* to give comfort and advice to women in love but more accurately, to provide them with *la dolcezza e il piacere* – sweetness and pleasure, as he promises his lady readers in the introduction to Day 1. In other words, pure entertainment. There is a theme for stories to be told each day and a poem is sung at the end of each day. Day 1 makes no restrictions and participants can talk on the topic of their choice. Day 2 is devoted to stories about people who "after suffering through many misfortunes, arrive at a happy end beyond anything they could have hoped for" (76). On Day 3, "they speak of people who have relied on their resourcefulness to acquire something they really desired or recover something they had lost" (220). Day 4 is spent listening to stories about "those whose love came to an unhappy end" (300). On Day 5, the theme, sounding like borrowed straight from a Hellenistic romance, is: "lovers who, after terrible accidents or misfortunes, finally found happiness" (388). On Day 6, "they speak of those who, having been provoked by some elegant witticism, have replied in kind, or who, with a prompt retort or a strategic maneuver, have managed to avoid danger, loss, or ridicule" (472). On Day 7, participants listen to stories about "tricks that women, either for the sake of love or for their self-preservation, have played on their husbands, whether those tricks were ever discovered by them or not" (518). On Day 8, more about tricks, this time about those "women are always playing on men, or men on women, or men on other men" (592). On Day 9, like on Day 1, there are no restrictions on topics (693). On Day 10, "they all speak of those who have acted with liberality or magnificence, whether in matters of love or otherwise" (752).

Well-distributed in manuscript form before the first print editions, the *Decameron* was copied by Boccaccio himself and by Florentine *copisti per passione*

[130] See Rebhorn's "Introduction" to his translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron* ([2013] 2015, loc. 464–471), as well as Brown, (2014) 2020, 114–126. All English quotations are from Rebhorn's translation, the page number is provided in brackets.

[131] For Italian quotes from the *Decameron*, see Vittore Branca's edition ([1980] 1992).

as Vittore Branca called these amateur scribes.[132] There are eleven known Italian incunable editions of the *Decameron*: the first one printed in Naples (1470), five in Venice (1471, 1481, 1484, 1494, 1498), one in Mantua (1472), one in Bologna (1476), one in Milan (1476), one in Vicenza (1478), and one in Florence (1483).[133] There are two early editions of the *Decameron* translated into German by a certain Arigo (the Italian version of Henry) tentatively identified as Heinrich Schlüsselfelder (also known as Henricus Martellus Germanus from Nuremberg, who lived in Florence in the household of the Martelli family from 1448 to 1496); three French editions by Laurent de Premierfait (ca. 1360?–1418) and one Spanish by an unknown translator.[134]

Almost three decades younger than Boccaccio, **Geoffrey Chaucer** (1340–1400) wrote his incomplete ***Canterbury Tales*** between 1387 and 1400, that is, twelve years after Boccaccio died and over three decades after he wrote the *Decameron*. Planned as a collection of 120 stories told in a storytelling contest by thirty pilgrims during a round trip to and from the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury (two tales told per person on the way there and two on the way back), it ended up as an unfinished set of twenty-four stories, only two of them in prose ("The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee"); there are no tales from the return trip from Canterbury and not all pilgrims tell their stories.

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[132] For a discussion of the *Decameron*'s manuscript tradition studied first by Branca and, more recently, by Marco Cursi (2007), see Clarke, 2011, 95–128.

[133] ID numbers and details about these editions are provided in the *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue*: ib00725200, Naples?: Printer of Terentius (Pr 6748), about 1470?, the so-called *Deo gratias* edition, four copies in existence, two imperfect; ib00725300, Venice: Christophorus Valdarfer, 1471, four copies, two imperfect; ib00725400, Mantua: Petrus Adam de Michaelibus, 1472, four copies, one imperfect; ib00725600, Bologna: Balthasar Azoguidus, 1476, three copies, two imperfect; ib00725700, Milan: Antonius Zarotus [for Marco Roma], 1476, one copy; ib00725800, [Vicenza]: Johannes de Reno, 1478, fourty-four copies, two imperfect; ib00726000, Venice: Antonius de Strata, de Cremona, May 30, 1481, seven copies, four imperfect; ib00726500, [Florence: Apud Sanctum Jacobum de Ripoli, May 13, 1483], three copies, two imperfect; ib00727000, Venice: Baptista de Tortis, May 8, 1484, five copies; ib00728000, Venice: Johannes and Gregorius de Gregoriis, de Forlivio, June 20, 1492, thirteen copies, two imperfect (the first Italian edition illustrated with woodcuts; a copy bound with a 1492 illustrated *Novellino* from the same imprint was sold by Christie's in 2010 for over £360,000); ib00728300, Venice: Manfredus de Bonellis, de Monteferrato, December 5, 1498, nine copies, two imperfect.

[134] See the *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue*: ib00730000 [German], Ulm: [Johann Zainer, about 1476], twelve known copies, four imperfect; ib00731000 [German], Augsburg: Anton Sorg, October 18, 1490, eight copies, three imperfect; ib00728800 [French], Paris: [Jean Du Pré (printer of Paris) and Antoine Caillaut], for Antoine Vérard, November 22, 1485, three copies, all imperfect; ib00729000 [French], Paris: for Antoine Vérard, [between October 1499 and May 30, 1503], three copies; ib00729300 [French], Paris: widow of Michel Le Noir, 1521, one imperfect copy; ib00731500 [Spanish], Seville: Meinardus Ungut and Stanislaus Polonus, November 8, 1496, one copy.

There are obvious and close links between Boccaccio and Chaucer;[135] some of the similarities result from the frame structure. While the storytellers in the *Decameron* are all from the same Florentine milieu with their stories providing diversity, Chaucer's pilgrims themselves are very diverse and so are the genres of their tales. Among the latter are stories of romance, fabliaux, folk tales, animal fables, a life of a saint, miracles, a manual for penitents, tragedies, satires, history, sermons, and *exempla* (see Turner, 2020, 1). In his two earlier frame narratives, Chaucer (like his friend John Gower discussed later in this chapter) avoided genre diversity.

The *Canterbury Tales* were not only influenced by the *Decameron* but also by other works written by Boccaccio. "The Knight's Tale," the first in the set, borrows the plot from the *Teseida* (1339–1340) but departs from the Boccaccian epic veering towards romance and wasting no time on the psychology of the characters.[136] "The Miller's Tale" is a response to and a parody of the previous story in the form of a combination of two fabliaux (see Nolan, 2020, 73–88). "The Man of Law's Tale" resonates with many other tales (see Sanok, 2020, 89–104); it may resemble a saint's life, and reflects conflicts between different religions, mainly Christianity and Islam, displaying a lack of tolerance and a misogynist attitude. "The Wife of Bath's Tale" (see Scala, 2020, 105–121), provided with its own prologue, features the most recognizable character of the whole collection, a woman who was married five times and has a clear understanding of what marriage entails and of the miserable status of women; she is also a cloth seller experienced in business matters and the only non-clerical woman among the pilgrims. "The Clerk's Tale" (see Crocker, 2020, 136–150), first told by Boccaccio in the final story of the *Decameron*, translated into Latin by Petrarch, recounts the cruel and monstrous tests of the medieval virtues of wifely obedience and constancy. These tests include an alleged killing of the heroin's children and the humiliation of a supposed annulment of her marriage, which was obtained to allow the husband to marry again. The trials are imposed by the Marquis of Saluzzo on a peasant wife, Griselda, and conclude with the return of the children and a happy ever after for the couple. "The Pardoner's Tale" (see Lavezzo, 2020, 166–177) deals with the greed and corruption of the clergy; "The Prioress's Tale" (see Kruger, 2020, 178–190) features a vain, hypocritical, and shallow woman for whom monastic life has less to do with religious

[135] Chaucer had the opportunity to see Boccaccio's manuscripts during his visits to Italy. Many of these manuscripts contained marginal commentaries and glosses. See Clarke (2011, 95–128) on the influence of paratextual material in Italian manuscripts on Chaucer.

[136] For an analysis of "The Knight's Tale," see, e.g., Miller, 2020, 59–71.

faith than with secular comfort; she tells a standard medieval anti-Semitic horror story about a young boy murdered by Jews. "The Nun's Priest's Tale" (see Bose, 2020, 191–204) is a satire on courtly love. Each teller and each tale add another aspect to the entertaining and occasionally disturbing image of the late fourteenth-century society. Frank Grady's 2020 *Cambridge Companion to the Canterbury Tales* includes a useful, up-to-date "Further Reading" section related to the collection in general and separately to each individual tale (255–266; see also in the same volume Coley, 2020, 121–135, and Travis, 2020, 151–165).

Both works, the *Decameron* and *Canterbury Tales*, as well as their eastern equivalent, *One Thousand and One Nights*, contain plenty of tempting material for audiovisual creators to choose from and adapt,[137] as has been masterly demonstrated by Pier Paolo Pasolini in his *Trilogia della vita*: *Il Decameron* (1971), *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), and *Il fiore delle mille e una note* (1974).[138] The last instalment in the trilogy begins with an epigram (from *Le mille e una notte*): "La verità non sta in un solo sogno, ma in molti sogni" (Truth lies not in a single dream but in many; Pasolini, [1995] 2018, 687, own trans.). Pasolini plays the role of a pupil of Giotto in the first film, and of Chaucer himself in the second; he does not appear in the third.[139] Curiously, after successfully adopting the frame structure in the first two films, he removed from the third the character of Scheherazade, who distracts the King with her stories, thus disposing of the frame mechanism. He allows the stories to flow on their own, one after another; Islam is practically ignored, with Allah, omnipresent in the original, invoked only twice in the film.

Regarding the audiovisual presentation of the *Canterbury Tales*, not surprisingly, the BBC has been irresistibly drawn to serializing it and produced in 1969 a seven-episode series featuring adaptations of the "Prologue" and thirteen selected tales.[140] In 1975, the corporation returned to Chaucer and provided the tales with a twentieth-century setting and a radical change of venue: from the pilgrimage to a saint's shrine to a trip to a rugby match. Entitled *Trinity Tales*, the six-episode modern rendering of selected stories takes viewers on

[137] To my knowledge, nobody has attempted to recreate on screen any of the three collections in their entirety, not even the *Canterbury Tales*, the shortest of the three.

[138] For a discussion of Pasolini's adaptations in the *Trilogia della vita*, see Rumble, 1996; on pp. 100–134, he focuses on the *Decameron*.

[139] Originally, there were scenes with Pasolini playing himself and expressing his views on sexuality and politics but they were eliminated from the final cut; see Pasolini, (1995) 2018, 672–673.

[140] Written by Martin Starkle and Nevill Coghill, co-directed by Michael Bakewell, Roderick Graham, and John Glenister, and produced by Ronald Travers. Each episode was 50 minutes long; the series was aired from October 23 to December 4, 1969.

a bus journey from Wakefield to Wembley Stadium in the company of supporters of a local rugby league club.[141] A three-part animated series, *The Canterbury Tales*, was produced in 1998–2000 by BBC Wales (in association with HBO and several other companies) using various animation techniques and offering a choice of language – English, Middle English, and Welsh. The series adapts three of Chaucer's tales in each of the first two episodes and four in the third episode.[142] Three years later, the BBC produced another anthology of this time modern paraphrases with live actors, selecting six among the best-known tales ("The Miller's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Tale," "The Knight's Tale," "The Sea Captain's Tale," "The Pardoner's Tale," and "The Man of Law's Tale"). While the stories are told along a traditional pilgrims' route in Kent, the mechanism of the frame story was dispensed with resulting in a series of single dramas.[143]

Returning to the fourteenth century, we should mention a friend of Chaucer, the poet **John Gower** (1330–1408), who was initially highly regarded but forgotten within three centuries.[144] He wrote the ***Confessio Amantis*** (1386–1390), a long poem composed of didactic tales told during the confession of sins against love by an aging poet (Amans), seeking absolution from a priest of Venus, Genius. The priest hears the confession structured according to the seven deadly sins and instructs the poet in courtly and Christian love. Possibly under Chaucer's influence and contrary to his previous habit of writing in Anglo-Norman French or Latin, Gower used octosyllabic English couplets to create this 33,000-line poem in eight books preceded by a "Prologue." Each part – the "Prologue" and all eight books – begin with four to eight introductory lines in Latin.[145] A complete *Confessio Amantis* was preserved in forty-nine manuscripts, with fragments surviving in sixteen (see Pearsall, [2004] 2010, 74–78, in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard). As to the print history, there are thirty-one

[141] Written by Alan F. Plater, author of the comedy *Trinity Tales or The Road to Wembley*, directed by Tristan de Vere Cole and Roger Tucker, and produced by David Rose. It was aired on BBC Two from November 21 to December 26, 1975.

[142] Written and directed by Jonathan Myerson, produced by Martin Lamb, Penelope Middelboe, and Christopher Grace. Aired from December 21, 1998, to October 18, 2000; each episode was 28 minutes long.

[143] Six different writers wrote scripts for the six episodes, and four different directors worked on the series. It was produced by Kate Bartlett with the original idea and executive production by Laura Mackie and Franc Roddam. The anthology aired between September 11 and October 16, 2003.

[144] Shakespeare used the story of Apollonius of Tyre from the *Confessio Amantis* in *The Comedy of Errors* (1594), an adaptation of Plautus' *Menaechmi*, and later in *Pericles* (1608); see Cooper, (2004) 2010, 99.

[145] See Winthrop Wetherbee's article ([2004] 2010, 181–196) in which he discusses the Latin opening of Book 1 starting with *Naturatus amor*…

known copies of William Caxton's incunabulum printed in Westminster in 1483 (*ISTC*, ig00329000). The next edition was produced by Thomas Berthelette in 1532 and reprinted in 1554.

Many stories in the *Confessio Amantis* have roots in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; others may borrow from the Bible or have medieval sources, such as the Arthurian legend. The editors of a recent monograph on Gower discuss the difference in approach to contemporary themes between him and Chaucer (see also Sobecki, 2017, 630–660), concluding that:

> whilst Chaucer tended to engage with the social, political and religious controversies of the day obliquely or in an allegorical form, Gower explicitly addressed the conflicts which divided his contemporaries. (Rigby and Echard, 2019, xx)

This may have been one of the reasons why Gower more rapidly lost his edge and relevance in the eyes of later generations.

Looking at the further development of the frame story brings us to France, where Laurent de Premierfait's translation of the *Decameron* inspired imitators. The fate of this translation has been studied extensively.[146] Boccaccio begins the prologue saying: "Intendo di raccontare **cento novelle**" (My intention is to tell one hundred stories; Boccaccio, [1980] 1992, vol. 1, 8). Translated into French, the words *cento novelle* (*cent nouvelles*) became the title of the collection, while the original one, *Decamerone*, was "amended" by the cavalier printer of the *editio princeps* of 1485, Antoine Vérard, to *Livre de Caméron*, in several subsequent editions appearing as *Le Caméron* (see also Salwa, 1998, 182; Viet, 2012, 287; Robin, 2017, 231). Vérard was guilty of taking liberties with the text, making many arbitrary changes to Premierfait's translation, such as shortening the prologue and introductions to each of the ten days of the action and adding moralizing conclusions at the end of every tale. While this mutilated version of the *Decameron* significantly influenced Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* (1545–1549),[147] the queen was conscious of its shortcomings and commissioned a new translation published by Antoine Le Maçon in 1545; dedicating to her his work, he called her Marguerite de France.[148]

[146] See, e.g., a brief discussion by Nora Viet (2017, 273–274), as well as her 2008 PhD dissertation and further articles on the importance of the French translations of Boccaccio (2012, 2018, 2020).

[147] The debt the *Heptaméron* owed to the *Decameron* and *Le livre de Caméron* is discussed by Viet (2012, 287–302).

[148] *Le Decameron de Messire Iehan Bocace Florentin, nouvellement traduict d'italien en françoys par Maistre Anthoine Le Maçon conseiller du Roy & tresorier de l'extraordinaire de ses*

Returning to the chronological order, we will now deal with a fifteenth-century French collection inspired by Boccaccio, *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, dated to ca. 1462 (Devaux and Velissariou, 2016), and two similarly entitled later frame stories (1515 and 1536), before discussing Marguerite de Navarre. As already described in our "Roadmap," the first collection – intended to become the French *Decameron* – was commissioned by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy; its author is unknown or at least uncertain, but it seems to have been a single writer who attributed 100 stories to thirty-six men (see Dufournet, 2016, 15),[149] historical members of the Burgundian court, including the Duke himself and one mysterious figure named only *l'Acteur*, a medieval term for someone who acts and executes tasks.[150] The Burgundian *nouvelles* display a significant diversity of categories and moods while remaining within the genre of a short tale. As the first translator of the collection into modern French (see *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, 2005, 15), Roger Dubuis, stated in his "Préface" (*Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, 2005, 35): "cette ouverture de la nouvelle à tous les sujets était bien délibérée de la part de l'auteur" (the author quite deliberately opened the tales to all topics; own trans.). The diversity of the themes combines with the unity of the genre. Dubuis (*Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, 2005, 35–36) deduced from the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* the anonymous author's vision of the genre based on four requirements: related facts must be authentic, or at least taken seriously by the reader; the story must be recent (*nouvelle*); it must be brief; and finally, most importantly, the story must be worth telling. While the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* show the multifaceted and often oppressive social reality of the late Middle Ages, it is "non dans le tragique, mais dans une allégresse opulente" (not through a tragic lens but rather in a joyful opulence; Dufournet, 2016, 29, own. trans.).

**Philippe de Vigneulles** (1471–1527) was a merchant from Metz in the Duchy of Lorraine, who in addition to his craft had historical and literary interests. He produced several manuscript volumes of Lorraine chronicles, published

*guerres*, Paris: Etienne Roffet, 1545. On the connections between the *Heptaméron* and both French translations of the *Decameron*, see Viet, 2012, 287–302. For a list of all French translations of Boccaccio's opus, see Gathercole, 1969, 300–309. The list includes a twentieth-century gem – the 1950 edition of *Contes de Boccace* featuring Jacques Prévert's poetic translations of selected tales, twenty-six black-and-white illustrations by Marc Chagall, and twenty-six colour reproductions of the Duke of Burgundy's illuminated manuscript (5193, Bibliothèque de L'Arsenal).

[149] For identification of the tellers, see Roger, 2016, 177–185.

[150] For a general description of how the collection was received at the Burgundian court, see Van Loo, 2021, 361–362. About the role of *l'Acteur*, see Roger Dubuis's "Préface," 23–24, to his 2005 edition of the collection (*Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*).

in part in 1834.[151] His most enduring work remains a frame story under the purposefully borrowed title ***Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles***. He wrote it between **1505** and **1515**. Rather surprisingly, the book remained unpublished until 1972.[152] It is a collection of fabliaux-style stories, all meant to be funny and entertaining. The source of humour in all tales is the same: the cunning guile of the aggressor and the gullible innocence of the victim. Both themes reveal an ugly and brutal reality and caution the audience while making them laugh with an overtone of schadenfreude.[153]

**Nicolas de Troyes** (born during the first half of the sixteenth century), a saddler from Champagne, wrote ***Le grand parangon des Nouvelles nouvelles*** between 1535 and 1537. At the beginning of this book, he admits to borrowing his stories from what he read elsewhere (literature) and what he heard from others (oral tradition); to these well-known plots he added tales based on his own adventures (life) (see Kasprzyk, 1963, 247). The *editio princeps* published in 1866 by Émile Mabille contains fifty-one stories (printed in Brussels by Jules Gay and in Paris by Ernest Gouin).[154] Over a century later (1970), a selection of tales was edited by Krystyna Kasprzyk in Marcel Didier's series "Société des textes français modernes."

**Marguerite d'Angoulême** (1492–1549) was born three decades or so after the completion of the Burgundian *nouvelles*. She was the older sister of the future King of France, Francis I (1494–1547), and the author of the fourth known French frame story, the ***Heptaméron*** (1545–1549). Already as the royal sister, she married *secundo voto* Henry II, King of Navarre, and became Queen of Navarre in 1527; since then she was known as **Marguerite de Navarre**. She died before she was able to complete her planned 100 tales distributed among ten days and ten tellers (five women and five men). The finished seventy-two stories covered seven days and the beginning of the eighth day. The title corresponding to the number of tales – *Heptaméron* – was added by the second publisher, Claude Gruget, in 1559. The first publisher, Pierre Boaistuau, in 1558, almost a decade after the author's death, entitled the book *Histoire des amants fortunez*. He took considerable liberties with the text, including

[151] As reported by Charles H. Livingston (1923, 162): *Les chroniques de la ville de Metz, recueillies, mises en ordre et publiées pour la première fois, par J.-F. Huguenin*, Metz, 1834. See also de Vigneulles's bio in the same paper.

[152] Edited by Livingston as vol. 120 of the series "Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance" published by the Librairie Droz in Geneva. See Noiset, 1989, 130.

[153] See also the analysis of the tales conducted by Marie-Thérèse Noiset (1989, 131–137).

[154] About this and other nineteenth-century editions of Nicolas de Troyes, see Kasprzyk, 1963, 8–10.

the omission of five stories, the shortening of many tales, and changes in the sequence, making a second corrected edition necessary. It was issued a year later by Claude Gruget, who restored the original order of tales and dedicated the book to Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne III de Navarre, who became queen after the death of her father in 1555.

The frame of the *Heptaméron* is similar to that of the *Decameron*. After a three-week stay at a spa in the Pyrenees, a group of notables embark on the return journey. An older widow, Oisille (possibly modelled on Louise of Savoy, Marguerite's mother, who died in 1531), stranded by a turbulent flood and having lost her horses and servants, finds shelter at the Premonstratensian Abbey of Our Lady of Serrance. She is joined there first by one and later by a group of other stranded travellers who also lost their horses and many servants in the flood and in a skirmish with local bandits. Unable to continue their journey home, they decide to have a bridge built. The construction is to take at least ten days, which they intend to pass telling stories, like in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but, contrary to the Italian collection, choosing only stories about events that really happened (according to the "Prologue"; Margaret, Queen of Navarre, 1894, 99–116). The names of the ten storytellers appear artificial, in part because they are intended to conceal the identities of the real historical figures on which the characters are based. Unfortunately, there is no consensus as to the identity of all the models. Apart from Oisille, mentioned above, there is Parlamente, who is traditionally identified with Marguerite herself mainly because her views correspond to those Marguerite was known to hold (see Irwin, 1995, 43). She tells one story every day but the order in which the travellers speak is never the same. She selects the theme for the first day and tells the last, tenth story on that day; she then narrates the third tale on the second day, the first on the third day, the tenth on the fourth day, the first on the fifth day, the seventh on the sixth day, the fourth on the seventh day, and the first on the eighth day.

On the seventh day, Oisille, as the last person to speak, tells the striking story of the Châtelaine de Vergy known already from a popular early thirteenth-century romance (see, for instance, Abramowicz, 1993, 73–82). Like all of Marguerite's tales, it is allegedly true. It involves a less-than-virtuous and spiteful Duchess of Bourgogne, her besotted husband, his beautiful widowed niece, and his young protégé knight. Because the knight's low birth makes an official union with the Duke's niece undesirable, they conduct a secret romance. The Duchess lusts after the knight, but he declines her advances, and the scorned lady reports to the Duke that the knight propositioned her. When questioned by the Duke, the knight confesses his secret romance exacting a pledge

of silence. The deceitful Duchess forces her husband to reveal the name of the knight's lover and then publicly taunts her with the knowledge. The lady, devastated by the knight's indiscretion, dies in his arms of a broken heart. He joins her in death, killing himself with a dagger. The Duke, shattered by the tragedy and his wife's perfidy, stabs her with the same dagger and departs to fight the Turks. When he returns, he leaves the duchy to his son and retires to an abbey he founded in expiation for killing his wife, where he also buried her, his niece, and the knight. Two rather unexpected moral lessons are discussed at the close of the tale: first, that excessive earthly affections make us forget God's love, and second, that men often go to war and become heroes to avoid having to deal with an unappealing marriage.

Twenty-four out of the seventy-two tales show priests and monks in a very critical light. In fourteen of these cases, the criticized clergyman belongs to the Franciscan order. It is not so much the morality of the clergy that Marguerite is targeting but rather their pastoral and doctrinal shortcomings. Evidently, other vices are also brought to light; in particular, three are mentioned the most often: debauchery, greed, and conceit, the opposite of the three Franciscan vows – chastity, poverty, and obedience. Women who place their unconditional trust in the clergy and treat them as semi-divine beings usually become their victims, either seduced or swindled of their money. However, not all women in Marguerite's stories are helpless; some see through the lies and use their wits to bring down the predators.[155]

## Sixteenth-Century Picaresque or Rogue Novel

In parallel to centuries of sophisticated courtly romance about and for the highest spheres, stories of tricksters of low birth but high cunning, able to run circles around the noble targets of their wits, continued to circulate in various European countries. Late cousins of Petronius' *Satirica* and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, they were told by their wily protagonists, who recounted their often incredible adventures satirizing chivalric literature, its authors, and readers.[156] Collections of such adventures were written by anonymous authors and published from the early sixteenth century on. The reality of a country like Spain, where the

[155] See Gary Ferguson's article (2010, 151–163), where he discusses Marguerite's tolerant and liberal views combined with devout Catholicism, which resulted in her criticism not of the Church as such but rather of the excesses of mendicant orders.

[156] For a discussion of the origins and development of the picaresque novel, see Garrido Ardila, (2015) 2017, 1–23.

incredible riches of the New World created high consumption of luxury goods combined with a lack of respect for hard work and virtues of thrift and moderation, promoted parasitic vagrancy and pauperization subsisting on minor thefts, fraud, deception, dishonest gambling, and finally, generalized petty crime and professional begging.[157] In the mid-fifteenth century, the world of poverty found its reflection in German catalogues of different categories of beggars, their *modus operandi*, and their secret language. The early sixteenth century brings a printed edition of the *Liber vagatorum*, republished forty times during the two following centuries.[158] The Spanish *picaro* had *Till Eulenspiegel*[159] as his German pre-picaresque equivalent, translated into Polish before 1540 and enthusiastically adopted in the form of the figure of Dyl Sowizdrzał,[160] who acquired local traits and became a *łotrzyk*, the Polish rogue, the model character for an entire literary trend in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Miłosz, [1969] 1983, 52–53).

Due to their plebeian, ribald, often scatological, and obscene humour, Eulenspiegel's adventures became proud successors to the medieval French fabliaux and collections of funny stories, such as the Florentine **Franco Sacchetti**'s (ca. 1330–1400) *Trecentonovelle*, or **Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini**'s (1380–1459) *Liber facetiarum*. The concept of plagiarism was foreign to ancient authors, who proudly, and in various ways, demonstrated their familiarity with previous writers as an homage and proof of their erudition. Authors and compilers of story collections, whether anonymous or not, borrowed narratives and themes from wherever they could find them, usually without any attribution – determining sources of these stories became a staple of scholarship. Critical editions of all types of such collections, frame stories and fairy stories included, display detailed concordances showing a variety of diverse influences without detracting from the quality of the studied literature.

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[157] See Bronisław Geremek's analysis of the social background of Spanish picaresque literature in *Świat "opery żebraczej". Obraz włóczęgów i nędzarzy w literaturach europejskich XV–XVII wieku* [The World of the "Beggar's Opera": The Image of Vagrants and Paupers in Fifteenth–Seventeenth-Century European Literatures] (1989, 180–225).

[158] See Geremek (1989, 294), who quotes D.B. Thomas's edition of the *Liber vagatorum*'s English translation (1932, 19–36).

[159] The oldest edition was published in Strasburg in 1510 or 1511 but various versions of Till's adventures circulated orally in the fifteenth century (Geremek, 1989, 228). See also the introduction to *Sowiźrzał krotochwilny i śmieszny* [Eulenspiegel, Facetious and Funny], 2005, vii–ix.

[160] *Sowa* = 'owl' in Polish, *zdrzało* = 'mirror' in Old Polish. The English translation of Eulenspiegel is Owlglass.

The character of Eulenspiegel inspired a variety of writers and eventually found its way into children's literature, film, and television. Charles-Théodore-Henri de Coster (1827–1879) transformed the character into a Flemish national prankster hero who outsmarted the Spanish oppressors of his country. His 1867 *La légende et les aventures héroïques, joyeuses et glorieuses d'Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays de Flandres et ailleurs* became an international best-seller translated into many languages. Almost a century later it was filmed by the legendary French actor Gérard Philipe (1922–1959), who played the main role, co-directed, and co-produced the movie with Joris Ivens (1898–1989), a Dutch documentary producer and a communist, like Philipe. During filming, Ivens, not entirely comfortable in a film of fiction, decided to reduce his role to an associated producer on behalf of DEFA, the East German state studio. The actor also co-wrote the script for this first co-production between France and the German Democratic Republic (in German Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR). The story of the proletarian hero premiered – certainly not by accident – on November 7, 1956, the (thirty-ninth) anniversary of the October Revolution.[161]

Almost two decades later, in 1975, Rainer Simon (b. 1941) directed another version of *Till Eulenspiegel* for DEFA. It was based on a story written by Christa (1929–2011) and Gerhard (1928–2023) Wolf. It featured an Eulenspiegel more revolutionary than in the 1956 French co-production, a real hero for a Soviet bloc country (see Hilzinger, 1986, 77–90).[162] In 1977, Alexander Alov and Vladimir Naumov adapted de Coster's novel, co-wrote the script, and produced two feature films for Mosfilm, later reformatted in a five-episode television miniseries entitled *Legenda o Tile* [Legend about Thiel].[163] Like the ancient Spartacus, the Renaissance Till Eulenspiegel became the embodiment of a noble freedom fighter or even a proto-communist.[164]

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[161] See the fascinating story behind Gérard Philipe's film told by Camille Beaujeault (2014, 58–79).

[162] Christa Wolf was one of the most successful East German writers, better known to classicists for her two later novels inspired by antiquity, her international bestseller *Cassandra* (1983) and the less popular *Medea* (1996), her first publication after the damaging public debate about the writer's role as a beneficiary of the communist system opposing the German reunification in 1990. For *Cassandra*, see Weingartz, 2009, 37–57.

[163] For the reception of the adventures of Till Eulenspiegel until 2005, see Radosław Grześkowiak and Edmund Kizik's introduction to their edition of the Old Polish translation (*Sowiźrzał krotochwilny i śmieszny*, 2005, v–xl).

[164] About the popularity of Spartacus, Lenin's favourite ancient hero, who figured in novels, plays, and comic books written in the Soviet Union, all Soviet bloc countries, and well beyond, see, e.g., the essays by Oleksii Rudenko, Miryana Dimitrova, and Scott Lyall in the 4.2 (2022) issue of *Clotho* (edited by David Movrin, Elżbieta Olechowska, and Henry Stead), entitled *A Proletarian*

In contrast with the collections of funny stories and anecdotes so popular during the Renaissance, which featured many, usually anonymous, characters, Owlglass is a fully identified hero in all his adventures. An irreverent prankster who brings, if no actual change, at least hope and psychological relief to the oppressed by ridiculing the oppressors and their might. Two decades after World War Two, when the horrors of Nazism had been exposed and interpreted in all genres of audiovisual art and from all points of view, came the time for the ridicule, parody, and laughter displayed often by the same type of prankster heroes. The two very different series of this kind that stayed with me, and judging by their long-lived popularity also with many other viewers, are the Polish 1966–1970 series *Czterej pancerni i pies* [Four Tank-Men and a Dog], used on the one hand as a communist indoctrination tool but, on the other, as a surreptitious smuggling of anti-regime comments, and the British 1982–1992 sitcom *'Allo 'Allo!*, which offered a lighter image of the war but also made fun of previous serious war sitcoms, such as the 1977–1979 *Secret Army*.

A discussion of Renaissance funny stories would be incomplete – from the point of view of a book written in Warsaw – without a brief mention of Mikołaj Rej (1505–1569), the first Polish author to write exclusively in Polish.[165] He converted to Calvinism in his late thirties and this earned him heavy criticism from the Counter-Reformation Jesuit writers, but also because of his anticlericalism, critical view of the papacy, and frequently obscene humour. In 1562, he wrote *Źwierzyniec* [The Bestiary], a large collection of eight-line epigrams in four parts with an appendix composed of 211 humorous eight-liners. In the 1574 posthumous edition of the *Bestiary*, the number of epigrams in the appendix grew to 236 and received a separate title: *Figliki* [Little Pranks]; they were printed with a running head in the body of the text, on *verso* pages *Facecye albo* [Facetiae or], and on the *recto* of the following pages: *śmieszne powieści* [Funny Stories].[166] The shocking difference between Rej's high moral ground of an admirer and promoter of virtues and his often coarse and obscene *facetiae*

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*Classics: The Relationship between Ancient Greek and Roman Culture and World Communism from 1917*. The dozen or so Spartacus-related entries in the Chronological Survey in Chapter 2 testify to the continued fascination exercised by the hero on audiovisual creators and their audiences in the twenty-first century.

[165] It was uncharitably suggested that he had to write in Polish because his Latin was not up to par; see Miłosz, 1983, 57.

[166] The edition printed by Maciej [Matys] Wirzbięta (1523–1605) in Kraków is available online (Rej, 1574). After leaf 147v ending the fourth chapter of the *Bestiary*, pagination restarts from 1r with the title *Figliki* and continues until 38r. The long subtitle may be rendered as follows: adventures of various people you can read about at leisure, for fun.

is seen as a sign of his times, inspiration by ancient, medieval, and later writers of satirical stories, and finally, as an expression of caution for young readers. Ignacy Chrzanowski (1866–1940), who produced one of the first modern analyses of *Little Pranks*, reviewed Rej's sources showing the spectrum of his inspirations (see Chrzanowski, 1894, 321–376). His student, Julian Krzyżanowski (1969, 7–18),[167] continued Chrzanowski's and Aleksander Brückner's (1905, 253–263) discussion of sources; he highlighted Rej's familiarity with Eulenspiegel-style plebeian literature.

## Fairy Tales

The fairy or wonder tale presents a challenge due to its "double" identity of an oral (audio) and literary genre on the one hand, and its significant appeal for today's viewers of audiovisual series on the other. I came across three scholars who, while using different methods, attempted a task that could be seen as similar to the present chapter in regard to this genre: Graham Anderson, Jan M. Ziolkowski, and William Hansen. Anderson studied first the ancient origin of a number of fairy stories widely known today (for example, Cinderella, Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, Red Riding Hood, Bluebeard) and claimed to have found comparable tales in Sumerian myths, Ancient Egypt, and most of all, in Greek and Roman literature ([2000] 2005). In fact, what he found were not similar stories but rather themes and motifs.[168] Fantasy, a genre closely related to wonder tales, is the subject of Anderson's 2019 book, *Fantasy in Greek and Roman Literature*, in which he offers a taxonomy of fantasy motifs and records their presence in Ancient Greek and Latin texts, suggesting that as a genre, fantasy is not a creation of the nineteenth century but originates in antiquity. Both books, without providing a convincing interpretation of either ancient fairy tales or fantasy, offer a valuable and stimulating basis for further research.

Ziolkowski, in turn, tackled the origins of fairy tales by studying their connections to medieval literature. The scope of his research, and to a certain degree also the purpose of his *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales* (2007), are not quite the same as mine in this chapter but he recognizes the value of studying the ancestry of genres popular today in view of the basic psychological human need for narration:

[167] See also a more recent discussion of Rej's *Figliki* by Paweł Stępień in his 2013 monograph *Śmiech w czasach ostatecznych. Tematyka religijna w* Figlikach *Mikołaja Reja* [Laughter in the Last Days: Religious Themes in Mikołaj Rey's *Little Pranks*].

[168] Christine Goldberg pointed it out in her review of Anderson's book (2001).

> Our culture, even our mass culture, could benefit from informed looks at past literature, even so far back as the Middle Ages and beyond. The heroes of comic books, video games, and best-selling children's literature hold the same enormous appeal among popular audiences as do the writings of Joseph Campbell (1904–87), because people have an insatiable desire for stories that hold the promise of deep meaning – of revelation, therapy, life lessons, escape, and entertainment. (Ziolkowski, 2007, 4)

The medieval antecedents of fairy tales and in particular of mythical female figures of fairies or sorceresses, like Morgan and Melusine in the French *romans d'antiquité*, are thoroughly discussed by Laurence Harf-Lancner in her (very recently reprinted) 1984 book. William Hansen, equally at home in Greek and Roman literature and in folklore studies, provided in his 2002 *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, and especially in the 2017 *Book of Greek and Roman Folktales, Legends, and Myths*, many desirable elements missing in Anderson's publications, namely, tight definitions, a satisfying glossary, and an impressive anthology of 369 well-translated and annotated excerpts from ancient texts (grouped thematically and numbered for easy reference). His comprehensive approach and clarity in organizing the discussed material strongly appeal to a classicist who can only claim interest but not scholarly expertise in folklore studies.

While fairy or wonder tales, folk tales, and their universal themes have been a more or less visible part of popular culture since antiquity, it is **Giovanni Francesco Straparola** (ca. 1485–1558),[169] the highly popular author of the narrative frame *Le piacevoli notti* printed in Venice in 1550, who is considered the first vernacular writer of fairy tales. Among the twenty-five stories constituting his first volume, he incorporated a dozen fairy and folk tales, as he did three years later in the following volume, including only five such tales among a total of forty-eight. Twenty-two stories among those published in the second volume were translations of Latin prose *novellae* out of eighty-one authored by the sixteenth-century Neapolitan writer **Girolamo Morlini**.[170] Seventy-three stories (out of seventy-five) end with an often obscene riddle that needs to be solved. The process of solving the riddle is clearly more important than the solution itself, as only fifteen riddles are successfully deciphered.[171] The frame

[169] For Straparola's biography, see Zipes in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 2001, 841–842.

[170] See Donald Beecher in his introduction to the 2012 edition of *The Pleasant Nights* (Straparola, 2012, 14). Morlini published his ***Novellae, Fabulae,* and *Comoedia*** in 1520. See also his brief biography in *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition* (2001, 836–837).

[171] See Rosaria Iounes-Vona's analysis of Straparola's riddles (2020, 49–62).

is provided by thirteen consecutive nights spent in a beautiful palazzo on the island of Murano in the Venetian Lagoon, where exiles from a political conflict in Milan arrive after a stay with acquaintances in Venice and amuse themselves singing, telling stories, and riddling.

**Giambattista Basile** (ca. 1576–1632), from Naples, like Morlini, wrote in the Neapolitan dialect a frame story composed exclusively of literary fairy tales, marking the transformation of the genre of frame tales into the innovative genre of a collection of fairy tales. In part certainly influenced by Straparola, and titled *Lo cunto de li cunti overo lo trattenemiento de peccerille*, it was definitely not written for children in spite of the title. The collection was published posthumously by the author's sister Adriana, a successful singer, in 1634–1636, under the anagrammatic pen name Gian Alesio Abbatutis, and contained fifty stories told by ten storytellers during five days; for that reason, it was later called the *Pentamerone*.[172] Basile's *cunti* provide a unique satirical view of Neapolitan society, which spares none of its components.

Basile's work has proved attractive to Italian filmmakers. Inspired by the collection, the Neapolitan director Francesco Rosi (1922–2015) in 1967 made a Franco-Italian film called *C'era una volta*[173] starring Sophia Loren and Omar Sharif. In 2015, Matteo Garrone (b. 1968) adapted three of the tales in the genre of fantasy/horror calling the movie *Il racconto dei racconti*.

The late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fairy-tale movement began in France as an oral fashion in intellectual and literary circles. As a literary trend, it was launched by the publication of two collections in 1697: **Charles Perrault**'s and **Baroness de la Motte d'Aulnoy**'s. Both authors have already been briefly discussed at the beginning of Chapter 1 as the trailblazers of the French literary fairy tale. Perrault, a retired civil servant, prolific writer, and since 1671 member of the French Academy, published *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, eight stories in prose under his son's name – Pierre Perrault Darmancour – to improve

[172] For Basile's biography, see *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 2001, 824–825. For an illuminating discussion of the collection, the writer, and his literary milieu, as well as for an excellent translation from Neapolitan dialect into English, see Nancy L. Canepa's edition of *The Tale of Tales*, (2007) 2016.

[173] While I like best my own translation of the Italian title, there are in fact three other versions in English: *More Than a Miracle*, *Cinderella Italian Style*, and *Happily Ever After*. The French title is, rather surprisingly, *La Belle et le Cavalier*. The Polish translation of the Italian phrase "C'era una volta" is "Był sobie raz," literally meaning 'There was once'… The verb "to be" is in the singular, implying that the story will be about one main character, hence the need for a second, more inclusive phrase beginning a fairy tale: "Dawno, dawno temu" = 'A long, long time ago,' which is always rendered by the English formula "Once upon a time," as an opening of the story or used as a shorthand expression for the genre.

the boy's chances of finding an interesting position.[174] Jack Zipes, in his short 2001 biography of Perrault, suggested that the writer used "his son's name to mask his own identity so that he would not be blamed for re-igniting the *Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns*" (*The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 2001, 839).[175] Baroness de la Motte d'Aulnoy[176] was a prolific and influential author in spite of her bad behaviour, which resulted in almost a decade of punitive confinement in a Parisian convent, where she must have written the bulk of her stories. The years after her return to free society were much less productive. Her 1697 title, *Contes des fees*, introduced a term that became universally adopted for the genre but in its English equivalent – fairy story – used only since 1750 (see Zipes, [2012] 2013, 22).[177] D'Aulnoy herself did not use the term for her next title when she published *Contes nouveaux ou Les fées à la mode* in 1698, but it must have already met with the approval of her fellow *conteuses* if **Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, Countess de Murat** (1670–1716), member of the same circle, had her book *Contes de fées* published in January of the same year by the Parisian printer and bookseller Claude Barbin.[178]

Jack Zipes in "The Meaning of Fairy Tale within the Evolution of Culture"[179] focuses on d'Aulnoy and her role in the creation and development of the genre. Discussing her Graeco-Roman and medieval sources, Zipes quotes scholars who previously studied this subject, including Laurence Harf-Lancner (1984) and Nadine Jasmin (Zipes, [2012] 2013, 28–37) concluding that d'Aulnoy's sources of inspiration were remarkably eclectic and included Greek and Roman mythology, medieval romance, and folklore.[180]

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[174] The collection included "La Belle au bois dormant," "Le Petit Chaperon rouge," "La Barbe bleue," "Le maître chat ou le Chat botté," "Les fées," "Cendrillon ou la pantoufle de verre," "Riquet à la houppe," and "Le Petit Poucet." See Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin's biography of the writer (2018, 274–286), in which she provides the details of the publication of Perrault's fairy tales and brings to life this fascinating figure, detailing how, since the year of the publication, his own fate and that of his children took an unfortunate and even tragic turn.

[175] For a review of the phases of the French Quarrel, see Highet, (1949) 1985, 278–282.

[176] For her biography, see *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 2001, 821–823; important documentary evidence relative to her imposed lengthy isolation is discussed by Schröder (2021) on his blog, *Anecdota*.

[177] For a discussion of the term *conte de fées*, see Jasmin, (2002) 2021, 447–451.

[178] Barbin was criticized for publishing a considerable number of women authors. A mocking neologism, *barbinade*, is recorded by *Dictionnaire de Trevoux* (1711); it describes Barbin's publications as a total waste of time. See Grande, 2011, 22–27; for the entry in the dictionary, see p. 27. Fairy tales and their uses continue today to generate strong emotions; see Zipes ([2012] 2013, 40), who calls Disney films based on fairy tales "a corporate fraud."

[179] Chapter 2 of his 2012 *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*.

[180] See in particular Jasmin's analysis of d'Aulnoy's reception of Ovid and Apuleius (Jasmin, [2002] 2021, 61–79). For medieval folklore, see Lindahl, McNamara, and Lindow, 2002.

**Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve** (1685–1755) lost her profligate husband and the remains of her fortune at the age of twenty-six and thus had to support herself. An author of novels and fairy tales, she is best known for writing an extended version of "La Belle et la Bête" published in *La jeune américaine et les contes marins* (1740). It was appropriated by her much younger contemporary, **Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont** (1711–1780),[181] as an unacknowledged source for the story that later became so popular.[182]

Jeanne-Marie de Beaumont was forced by a failed marriage to work as a governess in London, where she spent seventeen years, married again, and brought up several children. During that time she started writing and publishing books and short stories of a moralizing nature and was apparently the first author of fairy tales designed for children. As a governess and then mother, she had an obvious, practical need for such stories, contrary to her predecessors, who were driven by the requirements of sophisticated literary salons, where stories were recited by and to the habitués. The title of one of her several dozens publications, lengthy according to the fashion of the day, describes well her literary output: *Magasin des enfans et Dialogues d'une sage gouvernante avec ses élèves de la première distinction, dans lesquels on fait penser, parler, agir les jeunes gens suivant le génie, le tempérament et les inclinations d'un chacun… on y donne un abrégé de l'histoire sacrée, de la fable, de la géographie, etc., le tout rempli de réflexions utiles et de contes moraux* (published in London by Haberkorn, 1756). French literary fairy tales, like fabliaux and *nouvelles* before them, served as adult entertainment and society games for cultured grown-ups, later reorienting their target public towards children, losing some of the less age-appropriate features, and adjusting their didactic message.

The most shining example of a shift in storytelling can be seen in early nineteenth-century Germany, where interest in folklore, oral, anonymous folk tales, and their universal motifs shared by various cultural and geographic regions is best represented by two brothers from Hanau in Hesse. The brothers, **Jacob Ludwig Carl** (1785–1863) and **Wilhelm Carl** (1786–1859) **Grimm**[183] took fairy tales out of the salons and focused on German folklore as the raw material of national culture, capable of contributing to the unification of a future German nation. Unlike later field folklorists, they would invite local storytellers, ask them to perform, and write down their narratives. The first anthology,

[181] For her biography, see *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition*, 2001, 835–836.

[182] See Élisa Biancardi's edition of G.-S. Barbot de Villeneuve published in 2008 by Honoré Champion, 26–69.

[183] For their biographies and works, see Zipes, (1999) 2007, 65–83.

*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, published in 1812, included 86 tales; the one the brothers considered final, the seventh edition published in 1857, had well over twice as many – 210 and became an international bestseller. As Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster, celebrated the bicentennial of the first publication of the tales in 2012, the number of German editions reached 1,600 and the number of languages it has been translated into exceeded 160. It is considered the most popular German book of all time.[184]

The history of fairy tales, whether anonymous folk stories or literary creations, is profoundly multinational: Italian, French, and German stories are only the tip of the iceberg. Every culture and language has its own; some travel the world and are widely shared, while others remain at home. Like mythological stories, in audiovisual culture, they are regularly reinterpreted and reimagined; villains, victims, and heroes change places and are seen from different perspectives, responding to the evolving sensibilities of creators and their publics (Greenhill and Rudy, 2014). The audiovisual series is a genre ideally suited to new renderings of fairy-tale themes, as high approval ratings, novelizations, and numerous home media editions indicate in the case of, for example, the 1958–1961 NBC *Shirley Temple's Story Book*, 1982–1987 Showtime *Shelley Duvall's Faerie Tale Theatre*, the 1995–2000 HBO *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales for Every Child*,[185] the enchanting 2000 NBC miniseries *The Tenth Kingdom*, the four-episode 2008 BBC *Fairy Tales*, two more recent shows – 2011–2017 NBC *Grimm* and 2011–2018 ABC *Once Upon a Time*[186] – and the most recent, 2018–2020 CBC *Tell Me a Story*.[187]

## Seriality in the Age of the Novel

In the nineteenth century, with the significant increase in literacy, as well as with urban demographics bolstered by the Industrial Revolution, the press became a mass medium providing news but also entertainment found in part in sensational news generated by urban crime and the establishment of police forces, but mainly in serial, or episodic, fiction affordable for all. The press, a medium serial *par excellence*, offered a distribution platform for literature and inevitably

[184] Listen to *Grimms' Fairy Tales – A Celebration* online (2012). See also Philip Pullman's 2012 (republished in 2013) version of the Brothers Grimm tales.

[185] Still (as of March 3, 2023) streaming on HBO Max.

[186] *Grimm* ran for six and *Once Upon a Time* for seven seasons.

[187] This CBS series is based on the 2014 Spanish Antena 3 anthology series *Cuéntame un cuento*.

influenced how it was created and consumed. In the Victorian era (1837–1901), seriality became the mechanism of choice to captivate audiences by satisfying their entertainment and narrative needs. Seriality also ensured regular feedback from readers, who did not shy from communicating to the writers their own preferences as to the fate of their characters, generating a surprising amount of pressure on the writers, who already struggled to keep editorial deadlines.[188] The burgeoning press gave the masses access to quality literature; this phenomenon was observed globally in the nineteenth century, but novels written in English have been attracting most of the attention of international scholars. The main authors who benefitted from this phenomenon are of course widely known: first and foremost, Charles Dickens (1812–1870), starting with his *Pickwick Papers* (March 1836 to October 1837) and continuing with all his other novels, including, in monthly instalments, *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–1844), *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857), and in weekly instalments, *Great Expectations* (1860–1861). Other writers publishing novels in instalments included: William Makepeace Thackeray, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In France, among others, Alexandre Dumas, Gustave Flaubert, and Jules Verne.

The perceived affinity between Victorian literature and television series provided the impetus to develop a new field of research: the study of the last two centuries of seriality. While the basic assumption of the present chapter relies on the existence of a millennia-long history of episodic narration, the smaller the time gap between episodic genres, the more evident becomes their kinship, allowing it to be studied in finer detail.[189] Of particular interest here is volume 63 (2013) of the bi-annual journal *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* (*RaVoN*), which changed its title to *Romanticism on the Net* (*RoN*) in 2017,[190] entitled *Television for Victorianists*, edited by Caroline Levine, and composed of eight papers. The stated purpose of the issue is to answer the question:

> how and whether we should link the Victorian novel to the new serial television. All of its contributors begin from a shared starting point: we are all

[188] For a solid analysis of the production and creation of serialized Victorian novels, see Delafield, 2015.

[189] A much older origin of seriality was obvious to scholars of Victorian literature, such as Bill Bell; they highlighted "a new lease of life" the serial found "in the 1830s" (Bell, 1993, 125).

[190] Distributed digitally on June 16, 2014.

> scholars who have immersed ourselves in the Victorian novel, its forms and genres, its contexts, its publication processes, its audiences, its political and social values, its blind spots and its extraordinary artfulness. We are also all scholars who have respect for the televisual, and treat television shows as serious art forms worthy of critical attention. And we share an urgent sense that it is important to get right how we connect *then* to *now*. What divides us, however, is precisely how we think one should approach historical difference and formal similarity. (Levine, 2013, par. 5)

As this chapter's purpose of identifying episodic narrative genres has been achieved through the confirmation of the crucial importance of seriality in nineteenth-century novels, there is no need to plow through and detangle the sometimes complex reasoning used by the eight scholars who contributed to this issue of *RaVoN*. I prefer instead to quote the closing statement of Iwan Kreilkamp, who says:

> the best and most fitting tribute we can pay to our favorite Victorian novels is… simply to leave them alone and so to acknowledge their intractable difference and distance from us. (2013, par. 34)

Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Polish novelists very often contributed to the press, including frequently in editorial capacities. They also used this connection to serialize their novels and invited others to do the same. To name only the best-known, outstanding Polish writers: **Henryk Sienkiewicz** (1846–1916),[191] Nobel Laureate in 1916, started his career as a journalist; he wrote a historical novel about Rome under Nero, ***Quo vadis***, which he serialized in 1895 in *Gazeta Polska* [Polish Gazette] (Warsaw), in *Czas* [Time] (Kraków), and in *Tygodnik Poznański* [Poznań Weekly] (Poznań);[192] previously (1884–1888), he published in the same way his trilogy on seventeenth-century Poland, and later (1900), his history of the war with the Teutonic Knights in the fifteenth century. **Bolesław Prus**'s[193] (1847–1912) historical novel ***Faraon*** [Pharaoh] (about Ramses XIII) was serialized in 1895 in a Warsaw weekly; **Stefan Żeromski**[194] (1864–1925) serialized his novel ***Syzyfowe prace*** [The Labours of Sisyphus] under the pseudonym Maurycy Zych in the Kraków daily

[191] For Sienkiewicz's novels, see Miłosz, 1983, 308–314.

[192] On the influence on Sienkiewicz of the Roman novels, specifically Petronius' *Satirica*, see Sandy and Harrison, 2008, 316–317.

[193] See the chapter on Prus in Miłosz, 1983, 291–303.

[194] See the chapter on Żeromski in Miłosz, 1983, 365–369.

*Nowa Reforma* [New Reform] in 1897. **Władysław Reymont**[195] (1867–1925) published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* [Illustrated Weekly], from 1902 to 1908, his four-volume novel ***Chłopi*** [The Peasants], for which he received the Nobel Price in 1924. All these writers published their work in book form after the press instalments were completed.

Serialized novels covered a wide spectrum of themes, in fact, certainly as plentiful as audiovisual series. Epic sagas, a number of historical topics fictionalized to varying degrees, biographies – *vies romancées*, contemporary social themes, psychological dramas, adventures, romances, detective and crime stories, satires and parodies, war stories, science fiction, and fantasy. A large proportion of them belonged to popular culture, but there was no shortage of artistic achievement.

## Episodic Narratives in Radio and Television

Initially, episodic radio novels were texts of books already published, read one chapter at a time by announcers (often well-known actors) at scheduled times. While listening to instalments of novels on the radio never went entirely out of fashion,[196] original productions in the form of live episodic radio drama shortly gained significant audiences, as can be seen in the history of radio across the world, starting in the early 1920s.[197] Examples of episodic radio narratives of remarkable longevity have been broadcast by all major national stations, to quote just the longest-running productions: the BBC's *The Archers*, a rural soap opera (pilot aired in 1950, regular episodes began in 1951), still going strong on BBC Four, or the American CBS *Guiding Light*, which ended after seventy-two years and 15,762 episodes in 2009, out of which a television version started on CBS in 1952, with CBS radio continuing the programme in parallel with television until 1956, all in all, fifteen years of radio drama (since 1937) and fifty-seven of television serial. In my native corner of the world, two weekly radio dramas, created in post-World War Two communist Poland, survived the test of time and the country's return to democracy and continue to attract a sizeable audience: *Matysiakowie* [The Matysiaks], about a Warsaw working-class family, and

[195] See the chapter on Reymont in Miłosz, 1983, 369–371.

[196] I remember listening religiously to a famous Polish actress, Irena Kwiatkowska (1912–2011), who in 1969 read on the Polish Radio Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* in daily 15-minute afternoon slots. These recordings can still be accessed in the Polish Radio's audiobook project, available at the YouTube channel Radiobook (2021).

[197] For a basic history of radio, see Jędrzejewski, 2003, 4–84.

*W Jezioranach* [In Jeziorany], about farmers living in a small rural community. The former was launched in 1956, right after the October Thaw, with popular actors. The latter, designed as a rural equivalent of *The Matysiaks*, began in 1960 and rapidly became highly successful. While both reflected social changes occurring in Poland, they were never crudely propagandistic; when martial law was imposed in 1981, both programmes were temporarily suspended.

As becomes quickly evident to any student of the history of broadcasting, radio people were the first to work and create for television; genres of radio shows were adapted and transformed for the new medium and rapidly evolved into fully original productions in many subgenres.[198]

## Television Series

Here comes to mind George Steiner's memorable reasoning from his 1961 *The Death of Tragedy* explaining why the novel upon becoming a mass medium eclipsed theatre:

> The nineteenth century is the classic age of low-cost mass printing, of serialization, and the public reading room. The novelist, the popularizer of humane and scientific knowledge, the satirist, or the historian now had far readier access to the public than the playwright. The history of the decline of serious drama is, in part, that of the rise of the novel. […] To see mirrors held up to nature by expert hands, the literate public had no particular need of theatrical performance. […] The spectator had become the reader. In the seventeenth century, a Dickens and a Macaulay would most likely have been playwrights. Now the greater audience lay elsewhere. (Steiner, [1961] 1980, 118)

We can paraphrase and adapt Steiner's assessment to the advent of radio and television and say that the reader became, first, a mass listener and then, a mass viewer. In the twenty-first century, a Dickens and a Macaulay would have most likely become television series scriptwriters.

In spite of the strongly and inescapably collaborative character of film creation, the film director came to be considered if not its single then at least its

[198] An almost anecdotal but striking example of a radio genre transforming into an equivalent television show was Edward M. Morrow and Fred W. Friendly's 1950–1951 CBS weekly hour-long radio programme *Hear It Now*, followed in 1951 by *See It Now*, broadcast by Morrow and Friendly on CBS television until 1958. The programme was credited with dealing a blow to Senator Joseph McCarthy, as presented in George Clooney's extraordinary film *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005); Morrow's sign-off ending the programme inspired the film's title.

main author, an approach that privileged visual style over story and characters. Television series, contrary to films, value the story and characters above all else. The creative side evolved along with the technical development of tools, a change especially dramatic in the second half of the twentieth century, when the single author (and director) almost disappeared from the television landscape, having been replaced – out of necessity – by a team of creators, each with a specific task, with new functions coming to the fore, as required. The various creative functions, such as writer, director, and producer, became eventually, first in the United States, and then in Europe, subordinate to the "showrunner," who may also write, direct, and produce, but is, primarily, the show's creator and guardian of the central concept, line, and perspective. Each episode, especially in longer series, may be directed by a different director, written by a different writer, or very often by more than one writer. In that situation, the showrunner assumes the role of the "auteur."

In the case of adaptations of contemporary literary texts and their living authors, the role of the "guardian" is occasionally assumed by the author, often based on a contractual clause. Recent examples of writers closely involved in the audiovisual adaptations of their works in various capacities, from scriptwriter to showrunner, to executive producer, include stars of the literary world, such as Philip Pullman, Neil Gaiman, J.K. Rowling, and George R.R. Martin.[199]

Technology and viewing habits have changed, and linear time has become optional, as people can now watch not only whenever they want but also whole seasons or several episodes in one session, indulging in so-called marathon viewing, jumping between instalments, fast-forwarding, etc., and watching favourite episodes or whole seasons again and more than once. The multiplication of distribution platforms has reinforced the on-demand character of audiovisual stories. The market for new stories in the world of creators who fashion them for the public, often at great expense, steadily increases, but, naturally, some prove more successful than others. A simple way to minimize the risk of financial failure is to find a theme that seduces viewers because they are already potentially familiar with the characters. Once the audience is acquired, new narrative strands are added, as long as the ratings are high enough. In the introduction

[199] Pullman is listed as executive producer for the BBC–HBO 2019–2022 *His Dark Materials* series, and so is Gaiman for the Netflix series *The Sandman*; Rowling was credited as producer for the two last *Harry Potter* films, and as screenwriter and producer for the first three parts of *Fantastic Beasts*. Martin, who is a novelist, screenwriter, and producer (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1987–1990), wrote and produced *Game of Thrones*, executive-produced a 2018 television series based on his novellas *Nightfliers*, and, in 2022, created and is currently executive-producing *House of the Dragon*, a prequel to *Game of Thrones*.

to the 2014 critical symposium comparing recent television series to feature films, published by the *Cinéaste* magazine, Jared Rapfogel says that:

> the last decade or so has seen significant changes in scripted television. A medium dominated by commercial imperatives that seemed brutally indifferent to artistic achievement has seen the development of new structures that depend on critical acclaim and viewer devotion, that give space to creators to carefully craft their series, and that have birthed numerous shows worth taking seriously. (Hilmes et al., 2014, 26)

Television networks and streaming services involved in the production of original series usually trust in ratings when they decide to order another season or cancel a series – such decisions may meet with criticism. Cancellations must face the potential wrath of frustrated fans, who deeply feel the need for a continuing narration. And yet, in practice, the viewers cannot hope to change the mind of decision-makers, even if they manage to organize a campaign rapidly. Voices of protest get lost in the sheer number of productions and the diversity of choice being continuously offered on the market, whether in episodes stretched from week to week or as entire seasons dropped on streaming platforms at once and binged on if attractive enough. Today audiovisual series can easily compete with film even in regard to the visual impact. The change occurred gradually during the last decade. Excellent writing and evolving characters and plots accompany viewers, becoming part not only of their entertainment but of serious reflection and a better understanding of human nature. Showrunners and writers were not alone in invigorating the series and shattering its comfortable but unimaginative standards. Cinematographers, many of whom came from indie films, when that part of the industry abandoned medium-budget productions, added their contribution to the increasing excellence of aesthetic criteria. "Never before has television *looked* so good, from inventive camerawork to glossy lighting" (Nevins, 2018).

There are other, external reasons for the shrinking distinction between feature films and audiovisual series. Streaming services have made film and audiovisual series exist in the same space and time, accessible in the same kind of display, with the distinction between the so-called big and small screen blurred to extinction.[200] The Covid-19 pandemic closed movie theatres for many

[200] Michael Z. Newman, in Chapter 2 of his very useful and accessible 2022 *The Media Studies Toolkit*, entitled "Industry" (11–33), discusses how the American film industry is involved in the television business as the same companies and people may produce feature films and television

months and wreaked havoc with new releases enforcing home viewing. As people slowly learn to live with this mutating virus, reopening theatres and launching premieres may at some point return to pre-epidemic levels but newly developed viewing habits will not go away. They will become a permanent feature of daily life, co-existing with movie-going, just like the time- and space-saving remote work, which found its growing niche in the world of labour.

* * *

What useful lesson may be learned from revisiting episodic narratives from before the advent of audiovisual series and renewing acquaintance with texts that today's average consumer of audiovisuality usually knows nothing or little about and leaves undisturbed on their dusty shelves? Especially if this revisiting is done on the level of pure enjoyment of the art of narration in its infinite diversity, for practical reasons referring to relevant scholarship only when required. The obvious and greatest beneficiary of the exercise is undoubtedly the author herself as the enjoyment combines with relative certainty that the resulting reflection and conclusions are based on solid familiarity with the texts, a *conditio sine qua non* of such research. Hopefully, this unavoidably subjective draft of the long history of episodic narratives will provide the audiovisual series with a coherent pedigree and its viewers with a better rationale for watching.

Taking the time to view stories from the wide spectrum of thousands of years, gradually diminishing the distance to the present, century by century, clarifies the image of what drives change and how it periodically reaches a point of stability to find a balance that is as fleeting as the circumstances of each time allow. The greatest advantage is the recognition of purpose in any creative activity, in relation both to the creators and to the receivers in an environment evolving physically, socially, and spiritually. Returning to Boccaccio's words used as a motto for this inspection of the ancestry of audiovisual series, how do we answer his doubts? Was reading all the books worth the effort? For a reception scholar, by definition interested in more than one period of culture but hardly ever expert in more than a few, it provided a unique and welcome opportunity to experience texts selected from those areas of literary history less frequented by outsiders. The resulting image – not of an unbroken genealogical succession but of a timeless universality of human entertainment needs and creative

series. See also Hilmes et al., 2014, 27–38; an interesting point is made in this article about the future of video games, which generate more revenue than film or television and have significant artistic potential.

motivations – may be of some benefit to scholars accustomed to different approaches and viewers who watch audiovisual series just like their ancestors consumed myriads of similar stories on their favourite topics and in preferred styles, unapologetically seeking pleasure.

Olga Tokarczuk's claim that the "first two decades of the twenty-first century unequivocally belong to the series"[201] appears to be universally accepted and shared across cultures using the Internet as a means of access. While she highlights the ancient and classical origins of this dominant narrative genre, she refers to the contemporary series in general, not specifically to one of its manifestations, such as series inspired by antiquity. The number of scripted television series broadcast in the United States in 2022, after a Covid-related decrease in 2020 (496), a full recovery with an additional hike in 2021 (559), reached 599 (see Stoll, 2023). Series produced in other countries are not included in the count. The Chronological Survey presented in Chapter 2 is an attempt to list all series inspired by antiquity aired from 2000 to 2023. It has over 400 entries; compared to the American statistics only, it is a relatively small number. In the absence of studies reflecting the global production of such series, the recent polls by various media organizations let the viewers compare notes about their favourite shows and may offer some indication of the popularity of the "inspired" series. It appears, however, that the larger the intended scope of the poll, the less reliable the results. Two recent polls of this kind conducted in the United Kingdom by otherwise highly reputable media – *The Guardian* and BBC Culture – were supposed to produce a list of 100 best television shows of the twenty-first century. The first was published in 2019, and the second in 2021. The two lists are similar but hardly the same. Contrary to the BBC, the *Guardian* does not claim to have produced a definitive ranking and presents a list of favourite shows suggested by television writers, obviously a subjective one. In turn, BBC Culture conducted a poll among 206 television critics, journalists, academics, and people from the industry in forty-three countries to arrive at a quasi-scientific list of 100 best television shows produced in the twenty-first century (see "The 100 Greatest TV Series," 2021). How do these polls compare to the shows inspired by antiquity listed in the Chronological Survey in Chapter 2? Dismally. Both lists overlap only once with the Survey: the 2004–2009 remake of *Battlestar Galactica* was voted in as number 70 in the BBC poll, and in the *Guardian* titles are not in a numbered sequence. This is no doubt rather frustrating for classicists, but there is no reason to wring our hands in despair because a basic review of the

[201] Quoted at the beginning of the Introduction, p. 19.

BBC poll puts this result in proper perspective. First, however, another disappointing fact: among the 460 titles reported altogether, only two more productions figure simultaneously on the BBC's and our list – a witch-school show, *The Magicians* (2015–2020), and the spy thriller *Killing Eve* (2018–2022); a single voter selected each and neither production made it to the final list.

The BBC poll is a so-called expert sample, but it was not disclosed how the experts were chosen. Most participants are described as journalists writing about television, some affiliated with a media organization, and others freelancers. It is unknown whether they answered a blanket invitation or a personal one. Of the 206 voters, 48 were from the United Kingdom, 29 from the United States, 14 from France, 8 from Spain, 7 from Canada, 6 from India, 6 from Nigeria, 5 from Germany, 5 from Sweden, 5 from China (and 2 from Hong Kong and 1 from Taiwan), 4 from Finland, 4 from Denmark, 4 from Colombia, and 4 from Ireland. The number of voters from the remaining twenty-seven participating countries varies between one and three. The voters appear to have been selected in a random and quite disproportional ratio, and the result has no statistical value. It indicates the popularity of shows produced within a specific time span, among a particular group, and does not reflect the views of the real audiences. The value of this kind of poll is additionally brought into question by other lists of the best twenty-first-century shows, such as the already referred to 2019 list of the top 100 compiled by the *Guardian*, which is similar but far from identical.[202]

There is, of course, nothing wrong with attracting the attention of television viewers with such gimmicks. Still, they should be treated as an amusing and somewhat childish exercise in trivia, not as serious scholarship. Both polls, as unscientific and unreliable as they are, confirm that audiovisual series inspired by antiquity are few and far between against the vast ocean of other productions.

* * *

Armed now with a somewhat better understanding of where the twenty-first-century audiovisual series comes from, we will be able to navigate with more ease the expanse of the ocean filled with over two decades of creative efforts of the film and television industry inspired by Classical Antiquity, presented in chronological order in the next chapter.

[202] Compare data by BBC Culture ("The 100 Greatest TV Series," 2021) and the *Guardian* (Abbott et. al., 2019).

CHAPTER 2

# CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AUDIOVISUAL SERIES AND FILMS INSPIRED BY CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY



Zbigniew Karaszewski's artwork, based on Giacomo Zampa's fresco depicting Chronos, eighteenth century, Palazzo Monsignani, Forli, Italy. Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zampa,_Giacomo_%E2%80%94_Allegorie_der_Zeit_%E2%80%94_18._Jhd.jpg; user: Mateus2019 (2021).

Chapter 2

# CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AUDIOVISUAL SERIES AND FILMS INSPIRED BY CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

> Nosti enim quoniam labor improbus vincat omnia, audentesque iuvet fortuna, et multo magis Deus ipse nunquam deserens sperantes in se.
>
> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*[1]

## The Purpose and Design of the Survey

Upon undertaking the "remorseless labour" of identifying and describing audiovisual productions created in the current century, I was fully aware that the resulting image cannot be complete but I hoped that it may be representative enough to be useful and not misleading. As it would be counterproductive to study audiovisual series to the exclusion of other audiovisual genres created in the same period, the Survey also lists television films, feature films, and shorts, whether animated or with live actors. The only requirement for a title to be included in the Survey is a classical inspiration ranging from adaptations of ancient texts, retellings, or paraphrases of myths to mythological fantasy and mash-ups, quotations or mentions of ancient authors or anecdotes, whether mythological or historical, use of Ancient Greek and Latin in incantations or even titles alluding to antiquity.

There are some popular audiovisual series that could have been but were not included in the Chronological Survey, such as the multiple *Star Wars* and *Deadwood* (2004–2006). *Star Wars*, for instance, evokes parallels to dictators and the creation of a corrupt empire, in particular Julius Caesar and the end

[1] Boccaccio, 2011, 16 (trans. Jon Solomon): "You know that 'remorseless labor conquers all,' that 'fortune helps the daring,' and, even more, that 'God himself never deserts those who have hope in him.'"

of the Roman Republic. It would be, however, difficult to prove that such a parallel could be considered inspiration. *Deadwood*, on the other hand, in the initial intention of its creator, David Milch, was to be situated in Rome under Nero (54–68 CE). As he says in his 2022 memoirs, he was obsessed with St Paul and his preaching during Nero's murderous and chaotic reign (Milch, 2022, 142–147, 152–158). HBO changed Milch's mind about the setting because the series *Rome* (2005–2007) was already in the works (even though the period it covered preceded Nero's reign). As a "reinvented and reinvigorated" classical American western, *Deadwood* received a Peabody Award, the most prestigious recognition of excellence in American radio, television, and online programming.[2]

While it could be argued that the popular animated series for young children *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* (2010–2019), produced by Hasbro, along with its many film spinoffs, enjoys a fan base including older children and even some adults, its target audience consistently remains much younger than that of the audiovisual series researched in this study and thus the show is not listed here.[3] I learned about a series for children and teens, aired in Australia in 2006–2010, too late to include it in the Survey. It is entitled *$H_2O$: Just Add Water*. Created by Jonathan M. Shiff, it tells the story of three girls who unexpectedly realize they are mermaids and have powers over water.

The myth of Cupid and Psyche, preserved by Apuleius (124–170 CE) in his *Golden Ass*, was at the origin of the fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*. However, television series paraphrasing this story were already removed by several reception steps from the classical model and retained only a few motifs common with the *Golden Ass*. For that reason, productions such as the 2012 science-fiction police procedural *Beauty and the Beast*, fantasizing the story in a contemporary setting, or the Disney 2017 live-action remake of the 1991 outstanding animated musical are also not listed in the Survey.

The listings are grouped in chronological order based on their first broadcast or release. Each listing is presented under several headings. The first provides basic identification, such as the title, credits, and release date. The credits include the names of creators, directors, writers, and producers,[4] but the names

[2] See the rationale for the award at the Peabody Awards website (Peabody Awards, 2004).

[3] In spite of the strong endorsement of the series as being an example "of the fusion between antiquity and the contemporary" by Priscilla Hobbs (2015, 209), the occasional, rather random appearance of a few classical characters does not transform a fairy tale for young children into a mythologically inspired story for young adults.

[4] Only the key members of larger creative teams are listed, followed by the usual abbreviation "et al."

of cinematographers, music composers, or cast are not listed. While vital for the production's success, and in the case of actors, often more important and memorable to the average viewer than directors, they are irrelevant to the purpose of the present research.

The second heading introduces the genre, number of seasons and episodes, as well as their length. When a single episode is listed, its place within the series is indicated, for example, the twenty-fifth episode. Documentaries or docudramas included in the Survey are a sort of by-product of the inquiry, which focuses on fictional storytelling. They provide a glimpse of an undoubtedly larger number of such productions, especially in languages other than English, under-represented in the Survey. The third heading specifies classical content with elements of the story if relevant, as well as comments, sources, and awards. The entries end listing references to studies that discuss the title (full bibliographical records are provided in the References at the end of the volume). All data in the Survey are presented using abbreviations in a condensed, quasi-telegraphic style in well over 400 entries; some are single episodes listed separately because they show mythological inspiration significant enough to merit an individual description. The Survey reflects the twenty-odd years of audiovisual production inspired by Classical Antiquity. Chapter 3 explains how the data extracted from the Survey are handled, allowing us to illuminate the situation further with a number of pie charts and graphs; these tools highlight genres, formats, techniques, as well as content and themes.

*Nota bene*. The Survey will be posted separately online at the website of the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA) at the University of Warsaw, allowing regular updates.

# Chronological Survey of Audiovisual Series and Films Inspired by Classical Antiquity (2000–2023)

## 2000

1. **1995–2001, *Xena: Warrior Princess*** (US). Created by John Schulian and Robert Tapert, developed by R.J. Stewart and Sam Raimi, prod. by R. Tapert and S. Raimi for Renaissance Pictures; first aired from September 4, 1995, to June 18, 2001; in 21st c.: from S05E09, January 10, 2000, to S06E22, June 18, 2001; DVD released 2003–2005, 2010–2016.
   **Genre & length**. Television series, an original version of mythology combined with historical elements, centred on heroes and mortals, fantasy, SF; 6 seasons, 134 episodes, 45–48 min. each.
   **Classical content & comments**. Time of action: mythological characters in the 1st c. BCE, but a jumping timeline takes the action into a twisted mythological or historical past. Greek mythology mixed with fictionalized historical figures features an alternate universe, the heroine's supernatural conception (!), the twilight of the gods, prophecies, deicide, and resurrection. Seasons 5 and 6 centre on Xena's child, Eva (later called Livia, then Eva again), who was prophesied to bring about the end of the Olympic gods and, for that reason, was targeted by them. Asian mythological motifs join the increasingly fantastic mix: classical / Roman historical / Christian / SF / fantasy. 25 years after the Ides of March, Caesar escapes from the Underworld, takes the three Fates hostage, and uses their loom to rewrite reality, making Xena his co-ruler of Rome. Gabrielle and Xena snatch the loom and explode it, ending the existence of the alternate world. *Xena*, a spin-off of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995–1999), belongs to S. Raimi's Xenaverse franchise, as does *Young Hercules* (1998–1999).
   In the 21st c., the show won 3 awards for music (Joseph LoDuca): the 2000 and 2001 ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards for Most Performed Underscore and the 2001 Amy Award for Outstanding Music Composition for a Series.
   **References**. Gwenllian Jones, 2000, 403–418; Futrell, 2003, 13–26; Hayes, 2003; Ross, 2004, 231–255; Young, 2005; Tigges, 2007, 2010, 441–455; Potter, 2010b, 97–122; Zeiler, 2013, 229–245; Tomasso, 2015b, 151–155; Stevenson, 2017, 154–169; Willis, 2017, 111–116; Strong, 2018, 155; Maurice, 2019b, 194–195; Solomon, 2020, 506–523; N.J. Lowe, 2021, 193–209; McGeough, 2022, 224, 237, 282.

2. **1995–2001, *Star Trek: Voyager*** (US). Created by Rick Berman, Michael Piller, and Jeri Taylor, showrunners: Brannon Braga (1998–2000) and Kenneth Biller (2000–2001), prod. by Rick Berman for Paramount Network Television; aired on UPN from January 16, 1995, to May 23, 2001.
   **Genre & length**. Television series, military SF, a space odyssey; 7 seasons, 172 episodes, 44–45 min. each.
   **Classical content & comments**. Based on Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*, a sequel to *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. 10 earlier episodes referenced antiquity: "Prime Factors," S01E10, March 20, 1995; "Lifesigns," S02E19, February 26, 1996; "Darkling," S03E18, February 19, 1997; "Favorite Son," S03E20, March 19, 1997; "Concerning Flight," S04E11, November 26, 1997; "Message in a Bottle," S04E14, January 21, 1998; "Latent Image," S05E11, January 20, 1999; "11:59," S05E23, May 5, 1999; "Barge of the Dead," S06E03, October 6, 1999; "Dragon's Teeth," S06E07, November 10, 1999; "Pathfinder," S06E10, December 1, 1999. For 21st-c. episodes, see under the date of broadcast.
   **References**. Austin, 2010, 61–81; Schueller, 2023; A. Smith, 2023; Simard, 2023.

3. **1997–2003, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). Created, directed, written, and prod. by Joss Whedon et al. for Mutant Enemy Productions, Sandollar Television, Kuzui ENT., 20th Century

Fox Television; aired on The WB from March 10, 1997, to May 22, 2001, and continued on UPN from October 20, 2001, to May 20, 2003; in 21st c.: from S04E11, January 18, 2000, to S07E22, May 20, 2003.

**Genre & length**. Television series, supernatural horror, fantasy, school story, coming of age, a witch show, a hidden world of witches, vampires, demons, gods; 7 seasons, 144 episodes, 42–51 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. Classical hero archetype, Hellmouth – entry to the Underworld, Pandora's Box, "Fortune favours the brave" (Virgil's *Aen*. 10.284), epic heroes Aeneas, Achilles, and Odysseus correspond to Riley, Angel, and Spike; deicide; twilight of the gods. J. Whedon continued Buffy's theme in the series of comic books *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Eight*, Dark Horse Comics, 2007–2011; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season Nine*, DHC, 2011–2013.

**References**. Yeffeth, 2003, and Wilcox, 2005, are 2 examples of so-called Buffy studies. See also press comments about *Buffy*'s 20th anniversary, e.g., Mangan (2017); it was *Buffy*, not the *Sopranos*, that brought scholars to the study of television series. Ross, 2004, 231–255; Young, 2005; Cocca, 2014, 215–236; Jenkins, 2015, 1–9; South, 2018, 161–175.

4. **1997–2007, *Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Created by Brad Wright and Jonathan Glassner, written by B. Wright, J. Glassner, et al., directed by Mario Azzopardi, Martin Wood, et al., prod. by B. Wright, J. Glassner, Robert C. Cooper, et al. for MGM Television etc.; aired on Showtime (S01–05) and Syfy (S06–10), from July 27, 1997, to March 13, 2007; in 21st c.: from S03E15, January 19, 2000, to S10E20, March 13, 2007.

   **Genre & length**. Television series, military SF, fantasy; 10 seasons, 214 episodes, 44 min. each.

   **Classical content & comments**. Time of action: the present with some time travel; a fantasy explanation of Egyptian, Greek, and Norse mythologies; the language of the ancients strongly resembles Latin. Names of SG-1 starships: *Apollo*, *Aurora*, *Daedalus*, *Odyssey*, *Phoenix*, *Prometheus*. The last one is also the title of episode 121 of the series (2002), which is not otherwise classically inspired. See also individual episodes listed under the year of broadcast. A sequel to Dean Devlin and Ronald Emmerich's 1994 *Stargate* movie. Part of MGM's Stargate franchise. The series was followed by 2 sequels, direct-to-DVD movies without additional mythological inspiration; they are not listed in the Survey.

   **References**. Olechowska, 2016, 408–409.

5. **1998–2000, *Mythic Warriors: Guardians of the Legend*** (US). Directed by Jim Craig, written by Peter Colley and Kathy Slevin, prod. by Nelvana Ltd and Marathon Productions for CBS; aired on CBS from November 7, 1998, to January 22, 2000.

   **Genre & length**. Animated television series, a retelling of myths, an adaptation of a cycle of novels; 2 seasons of 12 episodes, 30 min. each.

   **Classical content & comments**. "Persephone and the Winter Seeds," "Daedalus and Icarus," "Atalanta, the Wild Girl," "Prometheus and Pandora's Box," "Bellerophon and Pegasus," "Psyche and Eros," "Cadmus and Europa," "Castor and Pollux," "The Hounds of Acteon," "Phaeton: The Chariot of Fire," "Jason and Medea," "Damon and Pythias," "Androcles and the Lion," "Ulysses and Circe"; in the 21st c.: "King Midas: The Golden Touch" (January 15, 2000), and "Hercules and the Titans" (January 22, 2000). Based on Laura Geringer Bass's 8-volume cycle of novels, *Myth Men: Guardians of the Legend*, 1994–1997. Alternative title for the television series: *Mythologies: Guardians of the Legend*.

6. **1998–2006, *Charmed*** (US). Created by Constance M. Burge, directed by John T. Kretchmer et al., showrunner and exec. prod.: Brad Kern, co-prod. by C.M. Burge, Aaron Spelling, and E. Duke Vincent for Spelling Television and The WB; aired from October 7, 1998, to May 21, 2006; in 21st c.: from S02E09, January 13, 2000, to S08E22, May 21, 2006.

**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, a witch show, a hidden world of the supernatural; 8 seasons, 178 episodes, 40–45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Classical mythology motifs begin appearing only in season 4: "Hell Hath No Fury" (S04E03), "Muse to My Ears" (S04E09), in season 5: "Siren Song" (S05E04), "Oh My Goddess" (S05E22, S05E23), and once in season 7: "Little Box of Horrors" (S07E18). See individual episodes listed under the date of broadcast. The title of the pilot, "Something Wicca This Way Comes," paraphrases *Macbeth*, Act 4, sc. 1: "[By the pricking of my thumbs] / Something wicked this way comes." See also the song sung by the students' choir in the 2004 movie *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, which starts with: "Double, double, toil and trouble / Fire burns and cauldron bubbles."
**References**. Beeler and Beeler, 2007; Beeler, 2007, 101–111; Potter, 2009, 217–236, 2010b, 97–122, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g.

7. **"Inter arma enim silent leges."** S07E16. ***Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*** (US). Directed by David Livingston, written by Ronald D. Moore et al., prod. by Rick Berman et al. for Paramount Television; aired on March 3, 1999; in Europe, aired on January 8, 2000.
**Genre & length**. 166th episode of a television series, military SF; 7 seasons, 176 episodes, 45–46 min. each.
**Comments**. Cic., *Mil*. 4.11. The quotation is credited to Cicero by one of the characters; starship USS *Bellerophon*, planet Romulus, part of the Star Trek universe.

8. ***The Animated*** **Odyssey** (US, LT). Directed by Valentas Aškinis, written by V. Aškinis, Frixos Constantine, and Jack Pitman, prod. by Gary Kurtz for HBO and Vilanima Animation Film Studios in Vilnius; aired on HBO from January 10 to January 31, 2000.
**Genre & length**. Animated television miniseries in 4 parts, a retelling of the *Odyssey*; each part runs for 25 min. The first full-length (101 min.) Lithuanian animation, *Odisėjo nuotykiai* [The Adventures of Odysseus], was released in Lithuania in 1998 and the same year in Russia as *Разрушение Трои и путешествие Одиссея* [The Destruction of Troy and the Voyages of Odysseus].
**Classical content & comments**. The English-language miniseries, composed of: 1. "The Trojan Horse," 2. "The Cyclops," 3. "Circe, Hades, and the Sirens," 4. "Odysseus' Return," was reformatted by G. Kurtz at Vilanima Animation Film Studios. It was criticized for clunky movements and awkwardly dubbed dialogues.

9. **"Muse."** S06E22. ***Star Trek: Voyager*** (US). Directed by Mike Vejar, written by Joe Menosky, prod. by Rick Berman for Paramount Network Television; aired on UPN on April 26, 2000.
**Genre & length**. 142nd episode of a television series; more details under the series listing; this episode runs for 44 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A planet similar to Ancient Greece in the Homeric era. Epic drama staged in an open-air theatre. Reflects the Ancient Greek society's fascination with theatre and the use of plays about the supernatural guiding mortals in real life. Gods are called Eternals.
**References**. Meyer, 2009, 46–77.

10. ***Gladiator*** (US). Directed by Ridley Scott, written by David Franzoni, John Logan, and William Nicholson, prod. by Douglas Wick, D. Franzoni, and Branko Lustig for Scott Free Productions, Red Wagon Entmt, and Dreamworks Pictures; released on May 1, 2000.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized historical epic drama; 155 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized Roman imperial history; the film produced the so-called *Gladiator* effect (increased interest in Roman and ancient history) and launched a revival of the historical epic genre, e.g., *Rome* (2005–2007). Based on Daniel P. Mannix's non-fiction book *Those About to Die* (1958). *Gladiator* received 5 Oscars in 2001, including Best Film and Best Actor; 4 BAFTAs. R. Scott has directed a continuation (30 years later), *Gladiator II*, released in the US on

November 22, 2024, written by Peter Craig and produced for Parkes/MacDonald Image Nation, Red Wagon Films, and Scott Free Enterprises. See the 2024 listing.
**References**. Solomon, 2001a, 95, 2004, 1–15, 2013, 17–39; G.A. Smith (1991) 2004, entry 101; Winkler, 2004b, 2004c, 87–110, 2004d, 16–30; Ward, 2004, 31–44; Coleman, 2004, 45–52; Eckstein, 2004, 53–72; D.S. Potter, 2004, 73–86; Pomeroy, 2004, 111–123; Cyrino, 2004, 124–149; P.W. Rose, 2004, 150–172; Russell, 2007, 156–186; Nisbet, (2006) 2008, 68–70, 81, 114; Albu, 2008, 185–204; J. Richards, 2008, 174–179, 2014, 19–35; Burgoyne, 2011a, 82–97; Blanshard and Shahabudin, (2011) 2013, 216–237; Paul, 2013a, 145–174; McGeough, 2022, 8–9, 292–296; Kidd, 2024.

11. ***Jason and the Argonauts*** (US). Directed by Nick Willing, written by Matthew Faulk and Mark Skeet, prod. by Robert Halmi, Sr.; aired on Hallmark Entmt on May 7, 2000.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, mythological fantasy; 2 parts, 90 min. each
**Classical content & comments**. Greek mythology, a paraphrased retelling of the myth of the Argonauts.
**References**. Solomon, 2001a, 115; Dumont, 2013, 144; Olechowska, 2018a; Lovatt, 2021.

12. **"Life Line."** S06E24. ***Star Trek: Voyager*** (US). Directed by Terry Windell, written by John Bruno and Robert Picardo, prod. by Rick Berman for Paramount Network Television; aired on UPN on May 10, 2000.
**Genre & length**. 144th episode of a television series; for other details, see the series listing; this episode runs for 45 min.
**Classical content**. The Trojan Horse Project – a holographic infiltration technique intended to deceive the enemy. No other classical allusions.

13. ***O Brother, Where Art Thou?*** (US). Written, directed, and prod. by Joel and Ethan Coen, prod. for Touchstone Pictures, Universal Pictures, StudioCanal, Working Title Films, and Blind Bard Pictures; released on May 13, 2000.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, criminal comedy-drama; 107 min.
**Classical content**. A paraphrase of Homer's *Odyssey* set in Mississippi in 1937, during the Great Depression. The film won several awards, including for soundtrack and score, Best Cinematography from the British Society of Cinematographers, and George Clooney's Golden Globe Best Actor (2001).
**References**. Paul, 2013a, 86–92; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 65–95; Platte, 2019, 65–82; McGeough, 2022, 48.

14. ***Así es la vida... / Such Is Life*** (MX). Directed by Arturo Ripstein, written by Paz Alicia Garciadiego, based on Lucius Annaeus Seneca, prod. by Álvaro Garnica, Laura Imperiale, José María Morales, et al. for D.M.V.B. Films, Filmanía S.L., etc.; released in May 2000.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, paraphrase of a myth, based on an ancient play; 98 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern paraphrase of Seneca's *Medea*. Michelakis, 2013, 220 (discussing Medea's various modern modes of transport from Corinth), mentions the automobile used in A. Ripstein's film.
**References**. Winkler, 2017, 65–67; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 221–248.

15. **"Restless."** S04E22. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). Directed and written by Joss Whedon, exec. prod. by J. Whedon, Gail Berman, Sandy Gallin, et al. for Mutant Enemy, Kuzui Enterprises, Sandollar Television, and 20th Century Fox Television; aired on The WB on May 23, 2000.
**Genre & length**. 78th episode of a television series; for other details, see the series listing; it runs for 44 min. The episode is the 4th season's finale.

**Classical content & comments**. Buffy, Willow, Xander, and Giles prepare for a relaxing evening of watching videos, but instead they all fall asleep and have strange dreams. Willow's dream is shown first; it begins with her painting on Tara's back a love poem by Sappho in Ancient Greek.
**References**. Jenkins, 2015, 1–8.

16. ***Orpheus & Eurydice*** (GR). Directed, written, and prod. by Paul Pissanos for Pissanos Int'l Film & TV Productions; released on September 6, 2000.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, retelling of a Greek myth; 124 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The myth of Orpheus (here, he is a son of Apollo) and Eurydice. Includes Orphic rites and Dionysian mysteries. Certain modifications of the myth: Orpheus dies killed by an evil sorceress, Aglaonike, for his role in defending the temples of Zeus from black-magic-wielding Bacchae.

17. ***Cleopatra: Daughter of the Nile***. ***The Royal Diaries***, Part 1 (US, CA). Directed by Randy Bradshaw, written by Lori Lansens, prod. by Deborah Forte for Scholastic Productions; aired on HBO on September 9, 2000; DVD released on July 1, 2008.
**Genre & length**. A cycle of three short television films, historical fantasy, teen drama; 26 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Egypt, 57 BCE. A teenage Cleopatra flees from Egypt to Rome to escape assassins sent to murder her father, Ptolemy XII Auletes. In Rome, she learns the Latin language and Roman traditions to convince the Senate to restore her father to the throne of Egypt and prepare herself to succeed him eventually. The book series "Royal Diaries" (published by Scholastic) includes 20 novels. The film is based on the bestselling 1999 book *Daughter of the Nile* by Kristiana Gregory. The "Royal Diaries" DVD contains *Elizabeth I: Red Rose of the House of Tudor* and *Isabel, Jewel of Castilla*.

18. **2000–2002, *Sheep in the Big City*** (US). Created, written, and directed by Mo Willem, co-written by David Wain and Joey Mazzarino, co-directed by Maurice Joyce, Tom Warburton, et al., prod. by M. Willem, Kris Greengrow, Bruce Knapp, et al. for Curious Pictures and Cartoon Network; aired on Cartoon Network from November 17, 2000, to April 7, 2002.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, comedy, SF time travel; 2 seasons of 26 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. S01E09, Chapter 2: "It Was Many Shears Ago." The Sheep time-travels to Ancient Greece, an idyllic rural country where people are friendly, feed the Sheep, bathe it, and strange Centaurs come to dance for it. Unfortunately, it realizes it is being groomed as a sacrifice for Lady Medusington, who has a wig of angry bunnies instead of hair. The Sheep escapes to its own time and place.
**References**. Kłos, 2018.

## 2001

19. ***Vercingétorix, la légende du Druide-roi / Druids*** (FR, CA, BE). Directed, prod., and written by Jacques Dorfmann, co-written by Anne de Leseleuc, Rospo Pallenberg, and Norman Spinrad for TF1 Int'l, Transfilm, La Mutualité Française, SMK Ltd, and Téléfilm Canada; released on January 14, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a fictionalized history of the Roman conquest of Gaul; 124 min.
**Classical content & comments**. After witnessing the tragic death of his father, Celtill, at the hands of his uncle Gobannitio in 52 BCE, Vercingétorix, brought up and trained by Druids, returns to Gergovia and reclaims the Arvernian throne. He defeats the Roman legions at Gergovia but

becomes trapped in the fortress of Alesia. Caesar cuts off all food supplies and defeats the Gallic tribes, which attempt rescue but lack a clear chain of command. Vercingétorix is taken to Rome to be executed. A "super-patriotic" and naive version of events leading to a total failure of the movie; the public and the critics were unanimous. Disappointed by the movie's flop, N. Spinrad novelized a recovered 3rd version of the script in 2003 under the title *The Druid King*.
**References**. G.A. Smith, 2004, entry 72; Dumont, 2013, 325.

**20.** ***Attila*** (US, LT). Directed by Dick Lowry, written by Robert Cochran, prod. by Paul Lichtman and Robertas Urbonas for Alphaville Films, Attila Productions, Michael R. Joyce Productions; aired on USA Network on January 30–31, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, fictionalized Roman history; 2 episodes, 88 min. each.
**Classical content**. 5th-c. invasion of Rome by Huns led by Attila.

**21.** **"I Was Made to Love You."** S05E15. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). Directed by James A. Contner, written by Jane Espenson, prod. by Joss Wheddon, J. Espenson, Garret Davies, et al. for Mutant Enemy, Kuzui Enterprises, Sandollar Television, etc.; aired on The WB, on February 20, 2001.
**Genre & length**. 93rd episode of a television series; for other details, see the series listing; this episode runs for 60 min. with commercials.
**Classical content & comments**. April is a robot designed to love its creator, who finds her boring after a while and abandons her, expecting her batteries to expire shortly. She looks for her creator everywhere very aggressively and becomes a threat. Buffy finally disables her. A paraphrase or allusion to the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea.
**References**. P. James, 2011, 205.

**22.** ***Voyage of the Unicorn*** (US, CA). Directed by Philip Spink, written by James C. Christensen and Dan Levine, prod. by Matthew and Michael O'Connor for Babelsberg Int'l Film Produktion, Basset Productions Inc., Hallmark Entmt, Sextant Entmt Group; aired on Hallmark on March 2–3, 2001; DVD released in 2007.
**Genre & length**. Television film in 2 parts, a book adaptation, a fantasy inspired by mythology; total length 170 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A mythology professor and his daughters, Miranda and Cassandra, grieve the loss of their mother, who was an illustrator and painted fantastic creatures. The girls, together with their father, embark on a ship made real by the professor's wishes to visit mythical worlds. They meet creatures from several cultures, among them classical, such as the Sphinx, Harpies, the Minotaur, a dryad, Medusa, a unicorn, and mermaids-sirens. Adaptation of J.C. Christensen's 1996 fantasy novel *Voyage of the Basset*. Motto of the ship: *Credendo vides*. 2002 Gemini Award for Best Visual Effects and 2002 Leo Awards for Feature Length Drama: Best Cinematography, Best Overall Sound, Best Sound, Best Production, Best Costume Design.

**23.** **"Human Error."** S07E17. ***Star Trek: Voyager*** (US). Directed by Allan Kroeker, written by Rick Berman and Michael Piller, prod. by Kenneth Biller, R. Berman, et al. for Paramount Network Television; aired on March 7, 2001.
**Genre & length**. 164th episode of a television series; for other details, see the series listing; this episode runs for 45 min.
**Classical content**. 24th c. CE. Icheb, a Brunali teenager rescued from the Borg, says to Seven-of-Nine: "*Don't kill the messenger*. It's Sophocles, *Oedipus rex*. I've been studying Earth literature as part of my Academy training."

24. ***Moulin Rouge!*** (US). Directed by Baz Luhrman, written by B. Luhrman and Craig Pearce, prod. by B. Luhrman, Martin Brown, and Fred Baron for Bazmark Productions; distr. by 20th Century Fox; released on May 9, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, jukebox musical, romantic drama; 128 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Various sources, especially *La bohème*, but the director insisted on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as his inspiration. A huge artistic and commercial success, the movie was awarded many prestigious prizes.
**References**. McGeough, 2022, 147.

25. ***Gladiatrix*** (UK). Directed by Jeremy Freeston, prod. by Pauline Duffy, Mark McMulle, Jack E. Smith, et al. for Yorkshire Associate Producers in assoc. with Discovery UK, Channel 4 Television Corp., and History Television; aired on Discovery Channel on May 15, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Television documentary movie; 50 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A documentary about the discovery of a woman's tomb in Roman Britain provided with a gladiator's grave goods. It discusses gladiators and wonders whether women fought in the arena.

26. ***Atlantis: The Lost Empire*** (US). Directed by Gary Trousdale, prod. by Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Feature Animation; distr. by Buena Vista Pictures Distribution; released on June 3, 2001.
**Genre & length**. An animated feature film, SF, adventure, fantasy; 96 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Plato's mention of Atlantis; the film is clearly influenced by Jules Verne's *Voyage au centre de la Terre*. 2002 Golden Reel Award for Best Sound Editing – Animated Feature Film.
**References**. Mik, 2018.

27. **"Never Look a Trojan in the Gift Horse."** S01E01b. ***Time Squad*** (US). Created, directed, prod., and written by Dave Wasson, co-directed by Eddie Soriano, co-written by Carlos Ramos and Michael Karnow, prod. by Robert Winthrop for Cartoon Network Studios; aired on Cartoon Network on June 8, 2001. The series ended on November 26, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 2nd segment of an episode of an animated television series, SF comedy; 2 seasons, 26 episodes, each containing two 11-min. segments.
**Classical content & comments**. The title puns a well-known expression. The Time Squad time-travels to Troy on the King's birthday when the Greeks bring the Trojan Horse as a gift. Instead of warriors, the horse is filled with sweets by Sinon, the Greek in charge of the stratagem. The King is not pleased. Next, a wooden giraffe filled with chocolate is offered to the King, another idea by Sinon, but the King hates chocolate. Finally, Sinon constructs a giant wooden soldier and conceals wild horses inside. The horses end up ruining the city. The name Priam is not mentioned.

28. **"To Hail with Caesar."** S01E04a. ***Time Squad*** (US). Created, directed, and co-written by Dave Wasson, co-written by Carlos Ramos, prod. by Robert Winthrop for Cartoon Network Studios; aired on Cartoon Network on July 13, 2001. The series ran from June 8, 2001, to November 26, 2003.
**Genre & length**. An episode of an animated television series, SF, science fantasy, comedy; 2 seasons, 26 episodes, each containing two 11-min. segments.
**Classical content & comments**. Caesar appears twice in the *Time Squad* series (in an order contrary to the chronology of events): in the episode "To Hail with Caesar" (46 BCE) and with Cleopatra in "Shop Like an Egyptian" (51 BCE). In the first case, the History Instability Alarm goes off on the Time Squad satellite – Julius Caesar requires their assistance. The city is in shambles, the lions in the Colosseum are weak, and Caesar is tired of being a leader. The Squad helps to restore order to Rome, but the Romans choose a member of the Squad, Tuddrussel, as the leader

by acclamation. When Larry from the Time Squad sides with Tuddrussel, Caesar asks him: *Et tu, Larry?* Caesar challenges Tuddrussel to a duel and easily wins because Otto from the Squad has taught him karate. The crowd declares Caesar the victor.

29. ***Mythquest*** (CA). Directed by Stefan Scaini, Rob W. King, Paul Schneider, et al., written by Ian Barr, Lienhard Wawrzyn, Jeffrey Cohen, et al., prod. by David Braun, Kevin DeWalt, Wolfram Tichy, et al. for David Braun Productions, Minds Eye Entmt, Myth Quest Productions Inc., etc.; aired on PBS from August 25 to November 17, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Television series for children, fantasy, various mythologies including Greek; 1 season of 13 episodes, 49 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Two teenagers, Alex and Cleo, look for their father, who has disappeared in a computer programme that allows the player to travel into myths and take the place of mythical characters. The search for their father becomes universally dramatic and urgent – a fight to save the world against a trickster god bent on erasing all myths from existence. 3 episodes refer to Greek mythology: 1. "The Minotaur" – Alex becomes Theseus, 4. "Orpheus" – Alex becomes Orpheus, and 8. "The Oracle" – Cleo becomes the Delphic Oracle.

30. ***The Arena*** (RU, US). Directed by Timur Bekmambetov, written by John William Corrington, prod. by Roger Corman for New Horizon Home Video; released on August 28, 2001.
**Genre & length**. A direct-to-video feature movie, fantasized Roman history; 92 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A remake of 1974 *The Arena* directed by Steve Carver and Jo D'Amato. Enslaved Amazons are forced to fight in the arena as gladiators.
**References**. McGeough, 2022, 196–197.

31. ***Hedwig and the Angry Inch*** (US). Directed and written by John Cameron Mitchell, prod. by Christine Vachon, Katie Roumel, and Pamela Koffler for Killer Films; released on September 12, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, adaptation of a rock musical; 92 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on a 1998 musical, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, by Steven Trask and John Cameron Mitchell about a gay East German rock singer. The story is inspired by Aristophanes' speech on love from Plato's *Symposium* (189c–193e). There are strong links between the film and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*.
**References**. Garcia, 2015, 173–182.

32. ***Quo vadis*** (PL). Directed and written by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, prod. by Mirosław Słowiński and Jerzy Kajetan Frykowski for Studio Filmowe Kadr and Chronos Film, co-prod. by Telewizja Polska and HBO Polska; released on September 14, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, adaptation of a novel, fictionalized Roman history; 170 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's 1896 novel set in the time of Nero, a love story against the background of the great fire of Rome and the persecution of Christians. A fictionalized story with historical figures, such as Nero, Acte, Poppaea Sabina, Seneca, Petronius, Aulus Plautius and Pomponia Graecina, and St Peter, as well as fictional characters of the young lovers, Vinitius and Ligia. Love is stronger than tyranny, and Christian faith is stronger than pagan beliefs. The most expensive film in Polish cinematic history (PLN 75 mln). The same team produced a television series of 6 episodes; see below, under the year of broadcast (2003).
**References**. Skwara, 2013, 163–174, 2015, 149–157; Ostrowska, 2020, 282–300.

33. **2001–2005, *Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Created by Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, prod. by R. Berman, B. Braga, et al. for Paramount Network Television, Braga Productions, and Rick Berman Productions; aired from September 26, 2001, to May 13, 2005.

**Genre & length**. Television series, military SF, action/adventure; 4 seasons, 98 episodes, 42 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A space *Odyssey*. No particular mythological references or inspirations, except individual episodes with titles alluding to antiquity or, even less frequently, to a specific myth or concept. See such episodes listed under the year of broadcast. Based on Gene Rodenberry's *Star Trek*, chronologically a prequel to *Star Trek: The Original Series*.

34. **"Hell Hath No Fury."** S04E03. ***Charmed*** (US). Directed by Chris Long, written by Krista Vernoff, prod. by Brad Kern, Aaron Spelling, et al. for Paramount Pictures, Spelling Television, and Viacom Productions; aired on The CW on October 11, 2001.
**Genre & length**. 69th episode of a television series, fantasy, witch show, a hidden world; 8 seasons, 178 episodes, 40–45 min. each. This episode runs for 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Three nameless demonic Furies pursue and kill all murderers. As in Euripides' *Orestes* 260, they are called dog-faced (κυνώπιδες): Φοῖβ', ἀποκτενοῦσί μ' αἱ κυνώπιδες γοργῶπες, ἐνέρων ἱέρεαι, δειναὶ θεαί (Phoebus, these bitch-faced fierce-eyed ones mean to kill me, these priestesses of the dead, dread goddesses!; trans. David Kovacs) (*Elektra* 1342, ἀλλὰ κύνας). See the listing for the series in 2000.
**References**. Potter, 2009, 217–236, 2018b.

35. **"Terra nova."** S01E06. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Directed by LeVar Burton, written and prod. by Rick Berman, Brannon Braga, et al.; aired on October 21, 2001.
**Genre & length**. 4th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A Latin title alluding to the content but no mythological inspiration.

36. ***Hera Purple: Devil Goddess*** (KR). Directed, written, and prod. by Kil-chae Jeong for Jeong Kil-Chae Productions; released on October 27, 2001.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, horror/thriller; 93 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A beautiful woman commits a series of gruesome murders. She seduces and then kills her sexual partners. At the same time, a woman seeks relief from nightmares in which she is possessed by the goddess Hera, who exacts revenge on men guilty of committing rape on the woman in the past by seducing, torturing, and killing them.
**References**. Maurice, 2019b, 96–97.

37. ***Harry Potter and the Philosopher's*** [aka Sorcerer's] ***Stone*** (UK, US). Directed by Chris Columbus, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Hayman for Warner Brothers, Heyday Films, and 1492 Pictures; released on November 4, 2001.
**Genre & length**. First of a cycle of feature films, fantasy, witch show, school story, an adaptation of a cycle of novels; 152 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on J.K. Rowling's first *Harry Potter* novel, published in 1997. Fluffy, the three-headed dog guarding the Philosopher's Stone, is inspired by Cerberus.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Olechowska, 2016, 384–410; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie, 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

38. **"Muse to My Ears."** S04E09. ***Charmed*** (US). Directed by Joel J. Feigenbaum, written by Krista Vernoff; series created by Constance M. Burge and prod. by Aaron Spelling, Brad Kern, and E. Duke Vincent for Paramount Pictures, Spelling Television, and Viacom Productions; aired on The CW on December 13, 2001.
**Genre & length**. 75th episode of a television series, fantasy, witch show, a hidden world; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The Charmed Ones are trying to stop daemonic warlocks from enslaving the Muses and making their inspiration work for the forces of evil.
**References**. Potter, 2018c.

39. **2001–2002, *Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR). Written, directed, and prod. by Bruno Bianchi, exec. prod. by Olivier Dumont and Jacqueline Tordjman for Night Storm Productions, Saban Entmt, and Fox Kids Europe; aired on France 1, ZDF, Spanish La 2, RAI 2, and Fox Kids in the US, in 2001–2002.
**Genre & length**. An animated television series, paraphrased retelling of myths; 1 season of 26 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Mount Olympus is systematically attacked by harpies under the command of the wicked Dracchus, who swore that he would take over the enormously powerful Orion's belt worn by Jupiter to reinforce his rule. There is a prophecy about a young mortal who would someday help the gods vanquish Dracchus. During a battle, Jason appears, a young teenager fascinated by mythology. Assisted by Mercury and his friends, Jason is able to face many dangers and monsters, such as Medusa, Hydra, the Minotaur, or the Cyclops, and use the power of the belt to prevail over any foe.

40. ***Atlantis, der verlorene Kontinent*** (DE). Directed, written, and prod. by Roswitha Haas for Dingo Pictures; released on video in 2001.
**Genre & length**. An animated video for children; 44 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A Greek boy named Petros finds a map of Atlantis in a bottle on the beach. A speaking dolphin shows him the entrance to the underwater city, where a technologically advanced race (the Atlanteans) live a peaceful life. He finds there the girl who put the map in the bottle and who is the reason Petros is allowed to stay on the condition that he would not reveal Atlantis's existence to anybody. Low-quality dubbing into English.
**References**. M. Lindner, 2017, 527–528.

41. ***Herostratus*** (AM, US). Directed and written by Rouben Kochar, co-written by Armen Vatyan, prod. by Blue Lion Entmt-Hayfilm Studio; released in 2001.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized Greek history; 118 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The story of Herostratus, who set fire to the temple of Artemis in Ephesus in 356 BCE. An award at the International Film Festival in Mexico.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 658.

## 2002

42. ***The Bacchae*** (US). Directed and written by Brad Mays (based on Euripides), prod. by Lorenda Starfelt and John Morrissey for LightSong Films and Rebours Productions; released in 2002.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, staging of an ancient tragedy; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Dionysus comes back to Thebes to launch his worship. He enchants local women to participate in a festival of dance and wine, but Pentheus, King of Thebes, insults the god by refusing to agree to such a cult. Dionysus takes him into the mountains, where he dies at the hands of the crazed worshippers (among them Pentheus' mother, Agave). Based on a highly successful performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* directed in 1997 by B. Mays at the Los Angeles Complex.

43. ***Astérix et Obélix. Mission Cléopâtre*** (FR, DE). Written, directed, and co-prod. by Alain Chabat, prod. by Claude Berri for Katarina et Renn Productions, co-prod. by TF1 Film Production, Canal+, CNC, Chez Wam, and La Petite Reine; released on January 30, 2002.
**Genre & length**. Live-action feature film, "comédie de péplum," a satirical take on Roman history, an adaptation of a comic book; 107 min.

**Classical content & comments**. The story of Cleopatra, according to a comic-book version. Based on Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny's *Astérix et Cléopâtre* (1963). The most popular of all comic-book adaptations in France. The total number of tickets sold was 24.8 mln; repeats on TF1 in 2009–2021 were viewed by approx. 41 mln people (cf. data at, e.g., JP Box-Office, n.d.). Chabat released a remastered version on July 5, 2023.
**References**. Galipeau, 2023.

44. **"Shop Like an Egyptian."** S01E13a. ***Time Squad*** (US). Created, directed, and co-written by Dave Wasson, co-written by Carlos Ramos and Michael Karnow, prod. by Dave Wasson and Gwynn Adik for Cartoon Network Studios; aired on February 1, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 1st segment of the 13th episode of an animated television series, SF comedy; 2 seasons, 52 episodes, each contains two 11-min. segments.
**Classical content & comments**. 51 BCE. Cleopatra wants to transform pyramids into shopping malls. At the request of Otto of the Time Squad, Caesar comes from Rome and helps convince Cleopatra to leave the pyramids as they are and concentrate on ruling the country. Season 1 aired from June 8, 2001, to February 1, 2002.

45. ***Orpheus and the Underworld: I Love You to Bits*** (AU). Directed by Nathan Jurevicius, prod. by Vishus Productions, flash animation by Square i for ABC and the University of Melbourne; released in 2002.
**Genre & length**. An animated short, a paraphrase of a myth; 3:33 min.
**Classical content & comments**. As Orpheus sings, "I believe – in you – and me – forever…," Eurydice, fleeing from a beast, is bitten by a snake. Orpheus drives off in his colourful van until the car falls off a cliff. He wakes up in a black-and-white Underworld. On the shore of the River Styx, he meets Charon, who starts singing with him while taking him across the river; Cerberus on the other shore goes to sleep when Orpheus sings. Orpheus goes down to Tartarus in an elevator. He sees Sisyphus and Tantalus and possibly Arachne being punished. Hades and Persephone are moved too, and let him take his wife to the elevator. They sing, she disappears, he returns to the River Styx, and his body disintegrates into bits; see the title and the lyrics. The film was produced as part of the (now defunct) *Winged Sandals* project designed to teach classical mythology.
The short won the Best of the Best AIMIA Award for Best E-Learning or Reference in 2003, and two other awards in 2004.
**References**. Riverlea, 2020.

46. **"Persephone: A Tale from Greece."** S02E13.***Animated Tales of the World*** (US). Directed by Sergey Olifirenko, series created by Christopher Grace, prod. by Christmas Films for Children's Television Trust Int'l, 2001–2004; aired on HBO Family on February 10, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 26th episode of an animated television series; 3 seasons and 39 episodes; S02E13 is 13 min. long.
**Classical content**. A retelling of the myth of Persephone. The series presents a selection of stories (folk tales and myths) from many countries worldwide.

47. **"Tales from the Public Domain: D'oh, Brother Where Art Thou?"** S13E14. ***The Simpsons*** (US). Directed by Mike B. Anderson, written by Andrew Kreisberg, Josh Lieb, and Matt Warburton, prod. by Mike Scully and George Meyer for Gracie Films and 20th Television (Animation); aired on Fox on March 17, 2002. The DVD of season 13 was released in 2010.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a famous American animated television series (1989–); 33 seasons, 714 episodes, 21–22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The title paraphrases the title of the Coen brothers' 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* The episode is a humorous retelling of the *Odyssey*. Homer Simpson (Odysseus) brings the Trojan Horse to the King of Troy. He and his companions come out of the

Horse and conquer the city. No proper sacrifices were offered to Zeus, Dionysus, and Poseidon. Dionysus tries to kill Odysseus with a lightning bolt but instead sends Atlantis into the deep sea. Poseidon punishes Odysseus and his crew by sending them first to the Sirens and then to Circe. Odysseus eats pigs, who are, in fact, his enchanted crew. When he finally reaches Ithaca, he kills all of Penelope's suitors.

**48.** **"Vox sola."** S01E22. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Directed by Roxann Dawson, written and prod. by Rick Berman, Brannon Braga, et al. for Paramount Network Television and Paramount Television; aired on May 1, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 22nd episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content**. A Latin title alluding to the content of the episode but without classical inspirations.

**49.** **"Repeat Offender."** S02E07a. ***Time Squad*** (US). Created, directed, and co-written by Dave Wasson, co-written by Carlos Ramos and Michael Karnow, prod. by Robert Winthrop for Cartoon Network Studios; aired on Cartoon Network on June 14, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 1st segment of an animated television series, SF, comedy; 2 seasons, 26 episodes, each containing two 11-min. segments.
**Classical content & comments**. Time Squad members are taking Blackbird to a rehab centre for recidivists but stop in Athens, where they meet Socrates, a fitness instructor, with his students exercising on stationary bikes. They crash his bike and demand that he immediately switch to teaching philosophy. He complies.

**50.** **"Cure."** S06E10. ***Stargate SG-1*** (US, CA). Directed by Andy Mikita, written by Brad Wright, Jonathan Glassner, and Damian Kindler, prod. by D. Kindler, A. Mikita, B. Wright, et al. for Double Secret Productions and Gekko Film Corp.; aired on Sci Fi on August 16, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 120th episode of a television series, military SF; 10 seasons, 44 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Egeria, a Roman nymph, protector of fountains and childbirth, and advisor to the legendary Roman ruler Numa Pompilius, helped him to establish laws. She had been a Goa'uld who was against enslaving humans. Her descendants were the Tok'ra fighting against the Goa'uld. Egeria was captured by Ra, who put her in stasis, closed her in a Canopic jar, and entombed her on the planet Pangar. The inscription on the tomb said: "Here lies Egeria, betrayer of the Goa'uld. May she suffer for all eternity." SG-1 saves Egeria from the inhabitants of Pangar, who force her to produce mindless symbiotes they use to make a miracle drug.

**51.** ***Simone*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Andrew Niccol for New Line Cinema; released on August 23, 2002.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, satirical SF, paraphrase of a myth; 118 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern paraphrase of Pygmalion and Galatea. When a capricious movie star abandons her director, he creates an AI character to replace her. The director becomes more of a Narcissus than Pygmalion. The AI's excellent performance brings back the star.
**References**. P. James, 2011, 246–254.

**52.** **2002–2003,** ***Mission Odyssey*** (FR, DE). Created by David Gilson, written by Claude Scasso, prod. by Michael Lessa for BAF Berlin Animation Film GmbH & Co. Produktions KG, Marathon Filmproduktion, and Marathon Animation; aired on M6, from September 6, 2002, to March 12, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, a free adaptation of Homer; 1 season, 26 episodes, 24 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A children's version of the *Odyssey*. Poseidon makes a wager with Athena that Odysseus and his crew, who failed to properly honour him in Troy will never

return to Ithaca. Poseidon puts all sorts of obstacles and monsters in the way of Odysseus and his ship, *Navis*, some of which are borrowed from other Greek myths, e.g., Medusa, the 3 Fates, Pandora's Box, Chiron and the island of the Centaurs, Harpies, Atlantis, Lycaon, the Golden Fleece, the Horn of Plenty. The stories connected to each character evolve differently than in ancient sources.

53. **"Spartacus – Gladiator gegen Rom."** S06E04. ***Geheimnisse der Geschichte*** (DE). Directed and written by Günther Klein, prod. for ZDF; aired on Arte on September 7, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 34th episode of a docudrama series with anonymous actors, Roman history; 8 seasons, 51 episodes, 51 min. each.
**Classical content**. A German docudrama series with episodes about various periods of history, including Ancient Roman history.

54. ***Lisístrata*** (ES). Directed and written by Francesc Bellmunt, prod. by Ramon Tello and Marc Martí for Laurenfilm S.A.; released on September 13, 2002.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, an adaptation of a comic book; 89 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Ralph König's 1987 *Lysistrata*, inspired by Aristophanes' comedy. After 2 decades of the Peloponnesian War, Athenian and Spartan women decide to force their men to conclude peace by refusing to have sex with them. When the soldiers have difficulties fighting, the generals order them to practise "circumstantial homosexuality," which, on the one hand, improves their fighting potential but, on the other, takes away their will to fight as they fall in love with their enemies. Finally, peace is restored despite the failure of the women's strategy.

55. **2002–2003, *Stargate Infinity* / *Stargate: Le dessin animé*** (US, FR). Created by Eric Lewald and Michael Maliani, directed by Will Meugniot, prod. by Andrew Heyward and M. Maliani for MGM Television Entmt, Les Studios Tex, and DIC Entmt Corp.; aired on Fox Box, Disney Channel France, and M6 Kids Block from September 14, 2002, to March 24, 2003. DVD: MGM and 20th Century Fox, August 13, 2007; Shout! Factory, May 13, 2008 (4 discs).
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, SF adventure, for pre-teen children; 1 season, 26 episodes, 26 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A Stargate team protects a chrysalis discovered in Egypt against aliens who want to capture it. The chrysalis develops into a non-ascended ancient girl with supernatural powers. A French-American series cancelled without resolving unfinished storylines. No cross-over appeal. Does not belong to the *Stargate* canon.

56. **"Siren Song."** S05E04. ***Charmed*** (US). Directed by Joel J. Feigenbaum, written by Krista Vernoff, prod. by Brad Kern, Aaron Spelling, et al. for Paramount Pictures, Spelling Production Company, Viacom Productions, and WB Television Network; aired on October 6, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 92nd episode of a television series, fantasy, witch show, a hidden world of the supernatural; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The Siren here is a demon bent on revenge for having been burned at the stake as a punishment for adultery committed with a married man, while he was absolved from any guilt. She seduces men with her enchanted song and then immolates them together with their wives using flames from her own burning. A mythological monster reimagined as a victim of discrimination. DVD: season 5 featuring "Siren Song" released on March 6, 2006; on February 3, 2014: all seasons. See the listing for the series in 2000.
**References**. Potter, 2018d.

57. ***Kiddy Grade*** (JP). Directed by Keiji Gotoh, written by Hidefumi Kimura, prod. by Gimik and Gonzo Digimation; aired on Fuji Television from October 8, 2002, to March 18, 2003.

**Genre & length**. Anime series, SF; 24 episodes, 23–24 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The spaceship on which the main characters travel is called *La Muse*, and sister spaceships bear the names of individual Greek Muses: Calliope, Clio, Terpsichore, Erato, Euterpe, Thalia, and Polyhymnia. No other mythological inspiration.

58. ***Clone High*** (CA, US). Created by Phil Lord, Christopher Miller, and Bill Lawrence, directed by Ted Collyer and Harold Harris, prod. by Kim Cleary, P. Lord, C. Miller, et al. for Touchstone Television; season 1 aired on Teletoon and MTV from November 2, 2002, to March 2, 2003; seasons 2 and 3 aired on HBO Max from May 23, 2023, to February 1, 2024.
**Genre & length**. An adult animated television sitcom, satire, SF; 3 seasons of 33 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Clones of famous historical figures attend a high school. Cleopatra is among the 5 main characters, and Julius Caesar is a secondary character (appearing in 7 episodes). A satire of popular teen series, in particular, *Dawson's Creek* and *Beverly Hills, 90210*. The characters are caricatures of their models and represent stereotypes of high-school students. Cleo Smith is a vain and mean popular cheerleader with 2 boyfriends. The series is geared to a less sophisticated audience, and the characters were chosen because of the degree of recognition they enjoy. Gandhi, as a comic relief far removed from the image of the real person, was highly criticized in India. Low ratings ended production after 1 season, but a small group of loyal fans and 2 of the creators, P. Lord and C. Miller, managed to engineer a 2-season revival.

59. ***Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*** (UK, US). Directed by Chris Columbus, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Hayman for Warner Brothers, Heyday Films, and 1492 Pictures; released on November 3, 2002.
**Genre & length**. 2nd feature film in a cycle, an adaptation of the 2nd novel in a cycle of 7, fantasy, witch show, school story; 161 min.
**Comment**: Adaptation of J.K. Rowling's 1998 *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Olechowska, 2016, 384–410; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 253–277; Goldie, 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

60. **2002–2003,** 올림포스 가디언 **/ *Olympus Guardian*** (KR). Directed by Lee Ki-seok, Park Byung-soon, written by Jeon Hye-yeong, prod. by Cho Hong-jun for SBS, SBS Productions, SBSi, Gana Entmt, Dong Woo Animation; aired on SBC from December 11, 2002, to July 30, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, a retelling of myths; 39 episodes, 20 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Two elementary school students, siblings, a boy and a girl, visit their artist father's studio. They find there a mythology book. The father reads the book to the children, a chapter per episode. Occasionally, the stories are slightly modified compared to the versions known from sources. E.g., episode 3: Hope from Pandora's Box helps create human beings; episode 7: Zeus kills Arachne with his thunderbolt; episode 22: Hades does not kidnap Persephone; she goes with him willingly; episode 34: Hector dies pushed by Achilles down into a deep ravine. Aspects potentially inappropriate for young viewers are adapted. Episodes: 1. "Gods of Olympus," 2. "Fire of Prometheus," 3. "Pandora's Box," 4–5. "Love and Soul: Part I and Part II," 6. "Who Is the Most Beautiful Goddess?," 7. "Athena and Arachne," 8. "Story of Hermes," 9. "Story of Atalanta," 10. "Daphne Turned into a Laurel," 11. "Baucis and Philemon," 12. "Bellerophon and Pegasus," 13–14. "Adventures of Perseus: Part I and Part II," 15. "Wings of Icarus," 16. "Zeus and Io," 17. "Cadmus and Dragon of Ares," 18. "Echo and Narcissus," 19. "Midas, Hand of Gold," 20. "Phrixus and Helle," 21. "Orpheus and Eurydice," 22. "Love of Hades," 23. "Birth of Hercules," 24. "Twelve Labours of Hercules," 25. "Resurrection of Hercules," 26. "Love of Artemis," 27. "Argonauts: 50 Heroes," 28. "Argonauts: Finding the Golden Sheep [*sic*!]," 29. "Theseus and Minotaurus,"

30. "Phaeton's Golden Chariot," 31–33. "Adventures of Odysseus: Part I, Part II, and Part III," 34. "The Story of Achilles," 35. "Trojan Horse," 36. "Eos and Tithonus," 37. "An Unspoken Story: Flowers," 38. "An Unspoken Story: Monster," 39. "An Unspoken Story: Constellation."

## 2003

**61.** ***A Miami Tail*** (US). Directed by Melvin James, written by Colin Costello and Stephanie Alese Jordan, prod. by J. Ronald Castell, Doug Schwab, Pamela White, et al. for Breakaway Films, Canvas Films, and R.A.P. Filmworks; released on January 30, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, modern paraphrase of an ancient comedy; 84 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A paraphrase of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. A contemporary young girl attempts to eliminate crime and violence in her neighbourhood by convincing her girlfriends to refuse sex to their gangster boyfriends.
**References**. Winkler, 2017, 160–163.

**62.** ***Ben-Hur*** (CA, US). Directed and co-prod. by William R. Kowalchuk, Jr., written by Abi Estrin Cunningham, co-prod. by John Stronach for Agamemnon Films and Tundra Productions; DVD: February 15, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Animated film, direct-to-video, a book adaptation; 80 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Small changes compared to previous adaptations, such as miracles performed by Jesus, who heals Ben-Hur's family from leprosy and Massala from lameness. Based on Lew Wallace's 1880 novel, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. Prod. by Charles Heston's company Agamemnon Films; Judah Ben-Hur is voiced by Heston.
**References**. Solomon, 2016.

**63.** **"Pompeii and Circumstance."** S01E12. ***What's New, Scooby-Doo*** (US). Directed by Tom Mazzocco and Scott Jeralds, written by Ed Scharlach, prod. by Joseph Barbera and Sander Schwartz, et al. for Warner Bros. Animation; aired on February 22, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 12th episode of an animated television series for children; 3 seasons, 42 episodes, 20 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The title alludes to Edward Elgar's first 1901 march, "Pomp and Circumstance." Shakespeare coined the expression in *Othello*, Act 3, sc. 3; now, it is an outdated expression of patriotism and excessive ceremony. During Scooby and his gang's vacation in Italy, an alleged zombie gladiator terrorizes Pompeii. This is revealed as part of a scheme to facilitate commercial development by removing ancient artifacts and throwing them into the Vesuvius crater. Their discovery would have stopped development.

**64.** ***Helen of Troy*** (US). Directed by John Kent Harrison, written by Ronni Kern, prod. by Adam Shapiro for Fuel Entmt; aired on USA Network on April 20, 2003. DVD released in 2003 by Universal Studios and USA Cable Entmt.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, a retelling of a mythological epic; 2 parts, 87 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The *Iliad* and earlier related events (Paris' childhood, Paris' judgement, Cassandra as a child, kidnapping of Helen by Theseus at the wedding of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; Helen's brothers, Castor and Pollux, recover her from Athens and kill Theseus). A retelling of the myth focused on the title character. Menelaus, as narrator, tells "the true story" of the fall of Troy. Agamemnon, power-hungry and ruthless, is the main villain. He offers his daughter Iphigenia as a sacrifice to the offended Artemis, manipulates his weak brother, and humiliates Helen. Achilles is a brutal giant. Paris kills him, and is in turn is knifed by the deceitful Agamemnon, who also cuts Priam's throat, rapes Helen in front of Menelaus, and meets his death

at the hand of his wife, Clytemnestra. Nominated for several awards, received the Visual Effects Society Award for Outstanding Models and Miniatures.
**References**. J. Richards, 2008, 186–187; Winkler, 2009a, 234–242, 2017, 358.

65. **"Nymphs Just Wanna Have Fun."** S05E19. ***Charmed*** (US). Directed by Mel Damski, written by Andrea Stevens and Doug E. Jones, prod. by Brad Kern, Aaron Spelling, et al. for Paramount Pictures, Spelling Production Company, Viacom Productions, and WB Television Network; aired on April 20, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 107th episode of a television series, fantasy, witch show, a hidden world of the supernatural; 45 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Nymphs guard an eternal spring in a forest with the help of a satyr who plays pipes for them. Demons want to find the spring because its waters give eternal life to those who drink from them. A demon kills the satyr, and another demon pretends to be a satyr and fools the nymphs to let him drink from the spring. He cannot be killed, but the nymphs transform him into a harmless tree. The story shows that change is good, and the nymphs can live without a satyr and continue guarding the source and nature in general.
**References**. Potter, 2018e.

66. ***Manfast*** (US). Directed and written by Tara Judelle, prod. by T. Judelle, Vesco and Emile Razpopov, et al. for Kali Films; released on April 30, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, modern paraphrase of an ancient comedy; 95 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Loosely inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the film tells the story of 4 independent girlfriends, who live together and publish a zine. Financial problems with the magazine lead them to agree to a grad student's proposal to restrain from any physical contact with men for 100 days. The story attracts media attention, especially when the father of one of the girls offers a million-dollar reward to the man who breaks the imposed restriction. The 2005 winner of the La Femme Filmmaker Award.

67. ***The Matrix Reloaded*** (US). Directed and written by the Wachowskis, prod. by Joel Silver for Village Roadshow Pictures, NPV Entmt, and Silver Pictures; released on May 7, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, SF action, 2nd in a cycle of films; 138 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Sequel to the 1999 *The Matrix*. Names and concepts from Greek mythology: Niobe, the Oracle (a programme announcing prophecies within the Matrix, destabilizing its equations), Persephone (wife of the Merovingian, both are programmes), Morpheus (the character is based on Neil Gaiman's Morpheus from the graphic novel *The Sandman*, 1989–1996), who offers people a choice, a blue pill, which lets them continue dreaming in the Matrix, or a red pill, which allows them to enter a potentially painful reality.

68. **"Oh My Goddess."** S05E22–23. ***Charmed*** (US). Directed by Jonathan West (Part 1) and Joel J. Feigenbaum (Part 2), written by Krista Vernoff and Curtis Kheel (Part 1) and Daniel Cerone (Part 2), prod. by Brad Kern, Aaron Spelling, et al. for Paramount Pictures, Spelling Production Co., Viacom Productions, and WB Television Network; aired on May 11, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 110th and 111th episodes of a television series, fantasy, witch show, a hidden world of the supernatural; 45 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Paige finds reference to the Titans in the *Book of Shadows*, the Halliwell family's grimoire. The Titans were frozen because there was no other way to stop them. She wants to vanquish them with a potion, but it has no effect on the Titan Meta; on the contrary, Paige herself is turned to stone. When Meta rejoins the other Titans, Cronus and Demetrius, Cronus kills her for bringing a 3rd white lighter. The witches are unable to vanquish the Titans. Previously, the Titans were defeated by humans, who were given powers by the Elders. They did not stop there but demanded to be worshipped as gods. That is how the Olympians came to be,

although they eventually abused their powers. The Titans attack the Elders and kill most of them using the white lighters' power to orb (moving objects and people by a mental command) as transport. The witches become goddesses of war, love, and earth. Quotes from Archimedes ("Give me one firm spot on which to stand, and I will move the earth") and Tacitus ("Reason and judgement are the qualities of a leader") are used by the goddess of war (Paige). The witches bring back order and peace and relinquish their powers.
**References**. Potter, 2009, 217–236, 2018f.

**69.** **"The [Delphic] Expanse."** S02E26. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Directed by Allan Kroeker, written and prod. by Rick Berman and Brannon Braga, et al. for Paramount Network Television and Paramount Television; aired on May 21, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 52nd episode of a television series, military SF, action, adventure, time travel; 43 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Episode 26 is entitled "The Expanse," but in the episode, the Expanse is called Delphic Expanse; it is an unknown and potentially dangerous region of space where a Vulcan spaceship, the *Vaankara*, was destroyed – an analogy to the Bermuda Triangle.

**70.** **"Orpheus."** S07E04. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed and written by Peter DeLuise, co-written by Brad Wright and Jonathan Glassner, prod. by J. Glassner, Richard Dean Anderson, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc.; aired on June 27, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 136th episode of a television series, military SF, fantasy, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. "According to Greek mythology, Erebus is a place where condemned souls pass as soon as they die." The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and specifically Orpheus' katabasis inspired P. DeLuise to write and direct the episode in which Teal'c journeys to hell to save his son Ry'ac and Master Bra'tac.

**71.** ***Julius Caesar*** (US, UK, NL, IT). Directed by Uli Edel, written by Peter Pruce and Craig Warner, prod. by Giuseppe Pedersoli, Jonas Bauer, et al. for ARD Degeto Film, De Angelis Group, Five Mile River Films, Global Entmt Productions Holland BV, Smile Production, TNT, and Victory Media G-p; aired on TNT on June 29–30, 2003.
**Genre & length**. A 2-part television miniseries, a fictionalized biopic; 90 min. per part.
**Classical content & comments**. Julius Caesar's fictionalized biography covers the years of 82–44 BCE, including all major events but ignoring Caesar's office as *flamen dialis* or his close relationship with Crassus. There are other inaccuracies, such as a completely different version of Sulla's death. It is almost 3 hours of packed action with factual shortcuts but insufficient character development and motivation/causality, which could have created a better flow. Despite technological progress since Enrico Guazzoni's 1914 movie, it is far from flawless. The Italian biopic released in November 1914 was obviously connected to Mussolini's admiration for Caesar as his role model.
**References**. G.A. Smith, 2004, entry 37; Dumont, 2013, 302, 310–311.

**72.** ***Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. The Cradle of Life*** (UK, US, JP, DE). Directed by Jan de Bont, story by Steven E. de Souza and James V. Hart, script by Dean Georgaris, prod. by Lawrence Gordon and Lloyd Levin for Mutual Film Company, BBC Films, Tele München Gruppe, Toho-Towa, Lawrence Gordon Productions, and Eidos Interactive; released on July 21, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, SF fantasy action/adventure; 117 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An earthquake on Santorini (the ancient Thera) uncovers underwater ruins of the temple of Luna, allegedly built by Alexander the Great. Among the treasures, there is a glowing orb that can locate the "Cradle of Life." An archaeologist / treasure hunter, Lara Croft, and a psychopathic billionaire genius compete to recover the orb. A box is floating in an acid spring in the "Cradle of Life" in Africa. The place is protected by a local tribe and by supernatural

forces. A rationalized myth of Pandora's Box, "Pandora cried tears of acid" – the billionaire wants to use the box to reduce Earth's population but is defeated by Lara, who leaves the lethal box where the gods hid it. Based on the video game *Tomb Raider* by Core Design. Sequel to *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, 2001.

**73.** ***Code 46*** (UK). Directed by Michael Winterbottom, written by Frank Cottrell Boyce, prod. by Andrew Eaton for United Artists, UK Film Council, BBC Films, and Revolution Films; released on September 2, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, dystopian SF, inspired by the myth of Oedipus; 93 min.
**Classical content & comments**. In a future reconfigured by biotechnology, there are 2 classes of people: those who live in big cities and those who are forced to live outside in very challenging conditions. Some try to cheat the restrictive system and are subject to criminal investigation and punishment. An inspector falls in love with a suspected fraudster in The Sphinx, a company issuing access documents. When the woman becomes pregnant, routinely conducted genetic tests reveal that she is a clone of his mother (code violation 46), and her pregnancy is automatically terminated. They want to be together and try to hide, but the system wipes the man's memory and returns him to his previous life; the woman is exiled to the desert with her memories intact. The film alludes to the tragedy of Oedipus and Jocasta.
**References**. Michelakis, 2013, 223–224.

**74.** ***Boudicca / Warrior Queen*** (UK, RO). Directed by Bill Anderson, written by Andrew Davies, prod. by Patrick Irwin, Andrei Boncea, et al. for Box TV and Medio Pro Pictures; aired on ITV on September 28, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television film, fictionalized Roman Britain; 97 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized history: the uprising of the Iceni led by Queen Boudicca in 60 or 61 CE. Historical inaccuracies: Emperor Claudius died in 54 CE, but the Icenian King Prasutagus, Boudicca's husband, in 61 CE, i.e., not at the same time as the emperor.

**75.** ***Colosseum: Rome's Arena of Death*** (UK). Directed, written, and prod. by Tillman Remme, exec. prod. by Jonathan Stamp and Laurence Rees for the BBC, Discovery Channel, France 2, and NDR; aired on BBC One on October 13, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television docudrama, "a true story," Roman history; 59 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The story of a gladiator, Verus, against the background of the building of the Colosseum, the death of Vespasian, the 79 CE eruption of Vesuvius, and the inauguration of the Colosseum. A happy end: at the inaugural games, Verus must fight to the death his friend Priscus, but Titus interrupts the fight and sends both of them wooden swords, i.e., freedom, to the enthusiastic reaction of the crowds. See Mart., *Spect*. 29.

**76.** ***Pompeii: The Last Day*** (UK). Directed and written by Peter Nicholson, co-written by Edward Canford-Dumas, prod. by Michael Mosley, Ailsa Orr, Mark Johnston, et al. for the BBC, TLC, NDR, and France 2; aired on BBC One on October 20, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television film, docudrama, Roman history; 90 min.
**Comment**. Awarded Prime Time Emmy for Outstanding Sound Editing for Nonfiction Programming in 2005.

**77.** ***Who Killed Alexander the Great?*** (UK, US). Directed by Chris Lethbridge, prod. by Atlantic Productions; aired on National Geographic Channel, Discovery Channel, and BBC Five on October 22, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television docudrama, investigation of a homicide, Greek history; 52 min.

**Classical content & comments**. 323 BCE. The circumstances of Alexander the Great's death were never fully explained. A Scotland Yard detective conducts an investigation and may have found the answer: an overdose of medication.

**78.** ***The Matrix Revolutions*** (US). Directed and written by the Wachowskis, prod. by Joel Silver for Village Roadshow Pictures, NPV Entmt, and Silver Pictures; released on November 5, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, SF action, 3rd in a cycle of films; 129 min.
**Comment**. Sequel to the 2003 *Matrix Reloaded*. Niobe, Morpheus, Persephone, the Oracle; see the entry on *The Matrix Reloaded* for more information.

**79.** **"Boudicca."** S01E04. ***Warrior Women with Lucy Lawless*** (CA, UK). Directed and written by Renny Bartlett, prod. by Andrew Burnstein, Bettina Hatami, and Denman Rooke for October Films, Exploration Production, and Discovery Channel; aired on Discovery Channel on November 12, 2003.
**Genre & length**. 4th episode of a television docudramatic series; 5 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. 5 historical women warriors, 1 per episode: 1. "Joan of Arc," 2. "Grace O'Malley," 3. "The Real Mulan," 4. "Boudicca," 5. "Lozen, Apache Warrior." Narrated by Lucy Lawless. Episode 4 on the history of Roman Britain, revolt of the Iceni.

**80.** ***Oldboy*** (KR). Directed and co-written by Park Chan-wook with Hwang Jo-yun and Lim Junhyung, prod. by Lim Seung-yong for Show East; released on November 21, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an adaptation of a manga, neo-noir thriller; 120 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Inspired by *Oedipus rex*. The main character is named Oh Dae-su to signal the inspiration; a yoga pose symbolizing Apollo, a daughter – Mido – corresponding to Antigone; Oh Dae-su cuts off his tongue instead of gouging his eyes, as Oedipus did. Spike Lee's 2013 remake of *Oldboy* is not listed in the table as its inspiration is too far removed from antiquity. It is based on a Japanese manga series, *Oldboy* (1996–1998), by Garon Tsuchiya and Nobuaki Minegishi. Grand-Prix of the Jury at the 57th Cannes Film Festival in 2004.

**81.** ***Big Fish*** (US). Directed by Tim Burton, written by John August, prod. by Arne L. Schmidt, Bruce Cohen, et al. for Columbia Pictures, Jinks/Cohen Co., The Zanuck Co., and Tim Burton Productions; released on December 4, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fantasy, an adaptation of a novel; 125 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Strong affinity with the *Odyssey*, an absent father fighting monsters during his magical travels, an unresolved conflict between father and son; a siren. See Hall, (2008) 2012, 30, referring to this movie, as well as to the *SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (2004): "The important point is no longer whether any particular screenwriters have drawn on the *Odyssey*, or indeed ever read it, but that they would almost all self-consciously cite the *Odyssey* as a key text in the history of adventure narrative. This epic's status, at least in Hollywood, has once again – and in a new sense – become a matter of legend." An adaptation of Daniel Wallace's 1998 novel *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions*. Use of themes not only from Homer's *Odyssey* but also from James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

**82.** ***L'Odyssée*** (CA). Directed by Dominic Champagne, written by D. Champagne and Alexis Martin for CBC/Radio-Canada; aired on December 7, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Live television transmission from a repertory theatre.
**Classical content & comments**. A theatrical adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*, staged first in 2000 in Ottawa, at the Theatre du Nouveau Monde, and later at the Theatre Maisonneuve in Montreal, Quebec. Text of the adaptation publ. in 2003 by Dramaturges. Aired in the weekly Sunday show *Les beaux dimanches*.

**83.** ***Battlestar Galactica*** (US). Directed by Michael Rymer, written by Ronald D. Moore and Glen A. Larson, prod. by David Eick Productions, R&D TV ENT., and Studios USA; aired on December 8–9, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, military SF, space saga; 2 episodes, 90 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Lords of KOBOL bear the names of Olympic gods and seem to play similar roles. There are also 12 colonies and 12 models of Cylons, each with some affinity to the Olympic gods. A 3-hour pilot preceding the remake series (2004–2005). The original series was broadcast from 1978 to 1979.
**References**. Tomasso, 2015a, 243–259.

**84.** ***Quo vadis?*** (PL). Directed and written by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, prod. by Mirosław Słowiński and Jerzy Kajetan Frykowski for Telewizja Polska, Studio Filmowe Kadr, and Chronos Film, co-prod. by HBO Polska; aired from December 25, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, an adaptation of a novel, fictionalized Roman history; 6 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Comment**. Filmed at the same time as the 2001 film adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel. See above, under the year of broadcast.
**References**. Skwara, 2013, 163–174, 2015, 149–157.

**85.** ***Cold Mountain*** (US, RO, IT, UK). Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, prod. by Sidney Pollack, William Horberg, Alfred Berger, et al. for Mirage Enterprises, Bona Fide Productions, Castel Film Romania, and Cattleya; released on December 25, 2003.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an adaptation of a novel, historical fiction; 154 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Charles Frazier's 1997 book *Cold Mountain* about a Confederate soldier who is wounded and deserts near the end of the American Civil War. He journeys back to his sweetheart, encountering many hardships and obstacles. A *nostos*, reminiscent of the *Odyssey* more obviously in the novel than in the film.
**References**. Edith Hall (2013, 163–185), after discussing the film, compares it to the Coen brothers' 2000 *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

**86.** ***The Real Jason and the Argonauts*** (UK). Directed by Tom Pollock for Atlantic Productions, Granada Int'l, and Discovery Channel; released in 2003.
**Genre & length**. Documentary film; 55 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The documentary explores the myth of the Argonauts and whether it may have been based on facts. The real Jason could have been a Greek who embarked on a voyage towards the unknown eastern shore of the Black Sea, looking for trade opportunities. Contributions from classicists of several specialities are illustrated with expert CGI.
**References**. Colavito, 2014, and Lovatt, 2021, do not mention this documentary.

**87.** ***Imperium: Augustus*** (UK, IT, ES). Directed by Roger Young, written by Eric Lerner, prod. by Luca Bernabei, Ferdinand Dohna, and Salvatore Morell for EOS Entmt, Lux Vide, RAI, and Telecinco; released in 2003.
**Genre & length**. Television film, 1st part of a cycle, fictionalized history; 200 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized Roman imperial history. 1st of the 5-part British-Italian-Spanish cycle of films for television about the history of the Roman Empire, 2003–2010. For other installments of the cycle, see under the year of release.

## 2004

**88.** ***Spartans at the Gates of Fire*** (UK). Atlantic Productions; released in 2004.
**Genre & length**. Docudrama, Greek history; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 480 BCE, the Pass of Thermopylae was defended to the last man by 300 Spartans in a heroic, patriotic sacrifice. Classical scholars, expert CGI, and a retelling of the story combine in an attempt to reveal the truth behind the myth.

**89.** **"Chimera."** S07E15. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by William Waring, written by Brad Wright, Jonathan Glassner, and Robert C. Cooper, prod. by J. Glassner, Richard Dean Anderson, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc.; aired on January 30, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 147th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 44 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Chimera is a fire-breathing tribrid monster made up of a lion, a goat, and a serpent; the human–Goa'uld nature of Sarah/Osiris adds a threatening aspect to their dream interaction, making the analogy suitable.

**90.** **"It's All Greek to Scooby."** S02E14. ***What's New, Scooby-Doo?*** (US). Written by George Doty IV, directed by Russell Calabrese, prod. by Joseph Barbera and Sander Schwartz for Warner Bros. Animation; aired on Kids' WB! on March 27, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 28th episode of an animated television series for children; 3 seasons, 42 episodes, 21 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. The origin of the expression: Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 1, sc. 2: "But, for my part, it was Greek to me" (Servilius Casca to Cassius about what Caesar said when offered the diadem). Plut., *Caesar* 61 – speaks only of Caesar declining the diadem with a gesture. Spring break in Greece: the members of the gang are cursed at the airport and meet a Centaur, who attacks them; they enter a maze and cannot get out following their thread because someone has cut it. The 9th *Scooby-Doo* series of Hanna-Barbera Saturday morning. Warner Home Video released single-season DVDs first, then complete sets starting in 2003.
**References**. Mik, 2019d.

**91.** ***Spartacus*** (US). Directed by Robert Dornhelm, written by Robert Schenkkan, prod. by Ted Kurdyla for Kurdyla Entmt, Fuel Entmt, Vesuvius Productions, and USA Cable Entmt; aired on USA Network on April 18–19, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries in 2 parts, an adaptation of a historical novel; 174 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Roman fictionalized history: 71 BCE slave revolt. *Spartacus* is a 1951 novel self-published during Joseph McCarthy's era by Howard Fast, a member of the Communist Party at the time. Disillusioned with communism, he strongly criticized its excesses in 1957. DVD prod. by Universal Pictures Home Entmt, August 22, 2010.

**92.** **"The Roman Invasions."** S01E05. ***Historyonics*** (UK). Directed by Simon Everson, written and presented by Knick Knowles, prod. by Annie Heather; aired on BBC One on May 2, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 5th episode of a television series, docudrama; 1 season of 6 episodes, 30 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. In 55 BCE, Caesar invaded with 2 legions; in 54 BCE, he brought 5 legions and crossed the River Thames. He demanded a tribute as a condition of his withdrawal. In 43 CE, Emperor Claudius ordered 3 legions to land in 3 different places on the British coast. Near the River Medway, the legions fought victorious battles with the tribes. Complete Roman control over the province Britannia was established during the next 100 years. It is the only episode in the series dealing with antiquity.

**93.** ***Troy*** (US). Scripted by David Benioff, directed by Wolfgang Petersen and co-prod. with Diana Rathbun and Colin Wilson for Warner Bros., Helena Productions, Latina Pictures, Radiant Productions, Plan B Entmt, and Nimar Studios; released on May 13, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a retelling of an epic; 163 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Adaptation of Homer's *Iliad* combined with *Posthomerica* by Quintus of Smyrna. Various modifications of the sources: Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Ajax die at Troy; Helen and Paris manage to escape; the characters of Hecuba and Cassandra are eliminated from the plot. The main figure is Achilles, who pursues his glory regardless of the cost. After the death of his friend Patroclus – there is no hint of anything more between them than friendship – he hides with other companions in the Trojan Horse. During the sack of Troy, Paris shoots him in the heel, and he dies. Briseis is Hector's cousin, and she kills Agamemnon with a dagger. DVD was released in 2005 by Warner Home Video. A director's cut was released in 2007.
**References**. G.A. Smith 2004, entry 312; Wieber, 2005, 137–162; Winkler, 2007c, 2009a, 223–233, 2015; Aziza, 2008, 197–199; J. Richards, 2008, 178–179; Blanshard and Shahabudin, (2011) 2013, 235; Krass, 2013, 153–173; Proch and Kleu, 2013, 175–193; Dumont, 2013, 190–192; Martín-Rodríguez, 2015, 203–223; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 39–64; Davies, 2019, 37–52; Curley, 2022b, 17–32; McGeough, 2022, 288–291.

**94.** ***Imperium: Nero*** (IT, UK, ES). Directed by Paul Marcus, written by Paul Billing and Francesco Contaldo, prod. by EOS Entmt and Lux Vide for RAI and Telecinco; released on May 23, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 2nd part of a cycle of 5 television films; 197 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized Roman history. The life of Nero, from the murder of his father by Caligula to his suicide. Many historical inaccuracies, e.g., related to the death of Caligula, Nero's relations with Acte, Poppaea's death, and repeated attempts on his mother's life. 2nd film in the 2003–2010 Italian-British-Spanish cycle *Imperium*. It was criticized for being much too long and sanitized. The DVD was released in November 2005.
**References**. Winkler, 2017, 299–312.

**95.** ***Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*** (UK, US). Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Heyman and Chris Columbus for Warner Bros. Pictures, Heyday Films, and 1492 Pictures; released on May 23, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 3rd film in a cycle, an adaptation of a novel in a cycle, fantasy, witch show, school story, hidden world; 142 min.
**Comment**. Based on J.K. Rowling's 1999 *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* novel.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

**96.** ***Rubicon***: ***Samuel Johnson Prize*** (UK). Directed by Alison Grist, written by Tom Holland, prod. by David Okuefuna and Mark Bell for the BBC; aired on June 9, 2004.
**Genre & length**. A short historical documentary, Roman history; 12 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Caesar crossed the river Rubicon with his army, breaking Roman law and launching a civil war that ended the Roman Republic. In 2003, T. Holland wrote a non-fictional book, *Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic*, which received the Hessell-Tiltman Prize in 2004.

**97.** ***King Arthur*** (UK, US, IE). Directed by Antoine Fuqua, written by David Franzoni, prod. by Jerry Bruckheimer for Touchstone Pictures, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, World 2000 Entmt, and Green Hills Productions; released on July 7, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized Roman Britain; 126 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Artorius Castus, King of Britain. It differs from the Arthurian legend and allegedly relies on archaeological findings. Arthur is a Roman officer, and Guinevere

is a Celtic warrior; the Knights of the Round Table are Sarmatians, whose battle cry is, inexplicably, RUS! They were taken as children from their homes as a sort of tribute to Rome for a service of 15 years. Merlin is a Celtic chieftain who wants Arthur as an ally against Rome. The Roman legions withdrew from Britain in 467 instead of 410; St Germanus of Auxerre died already in 448; Pelagius was not a bishop but a monk and could not have been executed in Rome because, in 467, he was already long dead.
**References**. J. Richards, 2008, 183–184; Davies, 2019, 113–128, 145–158.

**98.** ***Les champions d'Olympie / Die Helden von Olympia*** (FR). Directed and written by Philippe Molins, prod. by Antigone Gavriatopoulou and Xenofon Koutsaftis for Arte-Gédéon Programmes-Ville d'Olympie-TSR-TVE-ERT-Sky; aired on TSR on July 12, 2004, on Arte on July 26–30, 2004, and August 2–5, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television series, docudrama; 9 episodes, 26 min. each + an additional 100 min.; see below, *Olympie – vaincre pour Zeus / Olympia – Wettkampf für die Götter*.
**Classical content & comments**. A docudramatic series describing the ancient Olympics consisting of 9 episodes: 1. "The Selection of Athletes," 2. "First Steps in Antiquity," 3. "The Life of an Athlete," 4. "The Secret of the Javelin," 5. "Olivier's Marathon," 6. "Three Falls to Win," 7. "Ancient Brothers," 8. "The Pentathlon," 9. "The Night before the Games." It was created with the participation of modern athletes and ancient historians and archaeologists before the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens.

**99.** **2004–2009,** ***Stargate Atlantis*** (CA, US). Created and prod. by Brad Wright and Robert C. Cooper for Acme Shark Production and MGM Worldwide Television; aired on Syfy from July 16, 2004, to January 9, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television series, military SF, action/adventure; 5 seasons, 100 episodes, 43 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Rationalization of myths, SF interpretation of history. Continuation of the SG-1 universe. The city of Atlantis flourished many thousands of years ago on planet Lantea in the Pegasus galaxy. However, its inhabitants – the race of Ancients known from *Stargate SG-1* – were unable to defeat their enemies and had to submerge the city in the ocean and abandon Lantea. Starships: *Daedalus*, *Odyssey*, *Apollo*, *Phoenix*. A spin-off of *Stargate SG-1*, a prequel to *Stargate Universum*.

**100.** ***First Olympians: A Horizon Special*** (UK). Prod. by Cameron Balbirnie for the BBC and Discovery Channel; aired on BBC Two on July 23, 2004.
**Genre & length**. A television documentary; 51 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The bone structure of a skeleton discovered in Italy may have belonged to an ancient athlete. Scientists comment on the ancient Olympics and modern athletes (Loughborough University) test equipment used by athletes competing in the ancient pentathlon. A special episode of *Horizon*, season 41.

**101.** ***The Ancient Greek Olympics: 1. Death or Glory. 2. Playing to Win*** (UK). Directed by Anthony Thomas, prod. by Carlton Int'l, TWI, PBS, and CPB; aired on Channel Four on July 24–31, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, docudrama; 2 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Comment**. Docudrama with anonymous actors.

**102.** ***Olympie – vaincre pour Zeus / Olympia – Wettkampf für die Götter*** (FR). Directed by Philippe Molins, prod. by Antigone Gavriatopoulou and Xenofon Koutsaftis for Arte-Gédéon Programmes-Ville d'Olympie-TSR-TVE-ERT-Sky; aired on Arte on August 8, 2004.
**Genre & length**. An additional episode of a television series, see above, *Les champions d'Olympie / Die Helden von Olympia*; 100 min.

**Classical content & comments**. The athletes compete in various ancient sport disciplines. They complete their training and arrive in Olympia to participate in the Games at the Olympic stadium, fully reconstructed in Morocco.

**103.** **"Jason and the Argonauts."** E01. ***Greek Gods and Goddesses*** (UK). Directed and prod. by Jean Claude Bragard for BBC Worldwide, BBC Manchester, and TLC; aired on BBC One on August 8, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television film, the first part of a documentary miniseries; 54 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An Olympic athlete (triple jump), Jonathan Edwards, follows Jason and the Argonauts on their journey to find the Golden Fleece. The reality is shown as underlying the myth.

**104.** ***Gory Greek Gods*** (UK). Directed, written, and prod. by Arif Nurmohamed, exec. prod. by Ruth Pitt for the BBC; aired on BBC Three on August 12, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries in 2 episodes, a documentary combined with rotoscope animation; 60 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. The episodes are entitled "Divine Sex" and "Divine Violence." The rotoscope animation creates a comic-book impression suitable for presenting the Greek gods as a sort of gangster family.
**References**. Maurice, 2019b, 25, 47–49.

**105.** **"The Odyssey."** E02. ***Greek Gods and Goddesses*** (UK). Directed by Jean Claude Bragard, prod. by Ruth Pitt for BBC Worldwide, BBC Manchester, and TLC; aired on BBC One on August 15, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television film, 2nd part of a documentary miniseries; 54 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The Olympic athlete Jonathan Edwards follows Odysseus fighting with his warriors in the Trojan War and during his return voyage from the war to Ithaca.

**106.** **"Lilli und Atlantis."** S01E04. ***Hexe Lilli*** (DE). Written by Armin Prediger, prod. by Michael Coldewey and Tilo Seiffert for Magma Films, Trixter Productions, and Vivatoon; aired on September 9, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 4th episode of an animated fantasy television series with mythological elements; 23 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A magic book has taught Lilli how to time-travel not only to historical places but also to mythological ones. With her little dragon, Hector, she embarked on visits to many exciting destinations, some of them ancient. In this episode, she travels to the lost city of Atlantis.
**References**. M. Lindner, 2017, 527–528.

**107.** **2004–2009, *Battlestar Galactica*** (US). Developed and written by Ronald D. More, co-written by Toni Graphia, Bradley Thomson, et al., directed by Michael Rymer, Marita Grabiak, Allan Kroeker, et al., prod. by R.D. More and David Eick for David Eick Productions, R&D TV, NBC Universal Television Studio (2004–2007), Universal Media Studios (2008–2009), and Universal Cable Productions (2009); aired on Sky 1 and Sci-Fi Channel, from October 18, 2004, to March 20, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television series, military SF; 4 seasons, 76 episodes, 44 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A re-imagined version of Glen A. Larson's 1978–1979 series. The 65th Annual Peabody Award "for pushing the limits of science fiction and making it accessible to all" (Peabody Awards, 2005).
**References**. Liedl, 2010, 189–208; Pache, 2010, 132–136; Wetmore, 2012; Garvey, 2014, 215–228; L'Allier, 2014, 285–297; Bataille, 2014, 465–482; Tomasso, 2015a, 243–259; Ahl and Fau, (2011) 2016, 134–135; Safran, 2022a, 201–216. Meredith E. Safran's monograph on *Battlestar Galactica* is announced in Edinburgh University Press' series "Screening Antiquity" for 2025.

**108.** **"Lilli und Herkules."** S01E08. ***Hexe Lilli*** (DE). Written by Mar Hodkinson, prod. by Michael Coldewey, Tilo Seiffert, and Gilles Waterkeyn for Magma Films, Trixter Productions, and Vivatoon; aired on October 25, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 8th episode of an animated fantasy television series with some mythological elements; 23 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Lilli meets young Hercules at his school, where another student, a Minotaur, bullies him. Lilli defends Hercules against the bully. See also the entry on episode 4, "Lilli und Atlantis."
**References**. M. Lindner, 2017, 521.

**109.** **"Julius Caesar's Greatest Battle."** S23E11. ***Timewatch*** (UK). Directed by Melanie Archer and William Lyons, prod. by the BBC; aired on BBC Two on November 5, 2004.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a documentary television series (launched in 1982), docudrama; 50 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The siege of Alesia. In the longstanding BBC series *Timewatch*, 2 episodes deal with great Roman leaders. There are also installments on Roman archaeological finds from the Hadrian Wall and Atlantis (2010).

**110.** **"Minutes."** S06E05. ***French & Saunders*** (UK). Created and written by Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders, directed by Ed Bye, prod. by the BBC; aired on BBC One on November 12, 2004.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a television comedy sketch series; 30 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A spoof of the 2004 *Troy* in a comedy series created by a popular comedy duo. Thetis promises fame to Achilles, whom she calls Spartacus, Alexander, and then Troy.
**References**. Paul, 2013a, 297.

**111.** ***Et tu*** (US). Directed and written by Christopher Lyon, prod. by Bruce Hennigan for Perennial Media; released on November 12, 2004.
**Genre & length**. A short, Roman history; 15 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Ceasar's murder. C. Lyon plays Brutus. Produced in Shreveport, Louisiana. Perennial Media was founded by C. Lyon and Luke Lee (cinematographer), and this was the first film they produced.

**112.** ***The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*** (US). Directed, co-written, and co-prod. by Stephen Hillenburg, co-written by Paul Tibbitt, Aaron Springer, et al., co-prod. by Julia Pistor for Nickelodeon and United Plankton Pictures; released on November 14, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Live-action/animated feature film, fantasy comedy; 87 min.
**Classical content & comments**. It was initially planned as the finale for the animated series *The SpongeBob SquarePants* created by S. Hillenburg for Nickelodeon. Instead, it became the 1st part of a 3-part cycle; the animated series still continues and was, as of 2024, one of the longest-running American animated series. A mythical hero's quest to prevent a hostile takeover of the world and recover King Neptune's stolen crown ends with success, as a mermaid helps the hero win a battle with a Cyclops.
**References**. See Edith Hall ([2008] 2012, 80), who comments on the *Odyssey*'s influence on Hollywood writers in relation to the 2003 *Big Fish* film.

**113.** ***Alexander*** (US, DE, FR, UK, NL). Directed and co-written by Oliver Stone, co-written by Christopher Kyle and Laeta Kalogridis, prod. by Moritz Borman, et al. for Warner Bros., Intermedia Films, Pacifica Film, Egmond Film & Television, France 3 Cinéma, IMF Internationale Medien und Film 3. Produktions KG, Pathé Renn Productions, and WR Universal Group; released on November 16, 2004.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized biopic; 175 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Greek fictionalized history: Alexander the Great's biopic, private life and military conquests. Narrated by Ptolemy I Soter, Alexander's companion, general, and founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The film was harshly criticized, especially in America, for making Alexander's alleged love affair with Hephaestion, compared to the Achilles–Patroclus relationship, the central plot of the biopic. Partly based on the 1973 Robin Lane Fox novel *Alexander the Great*. 2004 Golden Schmoes Award for the Most Disappointing Film of the Year; 2 Stinkers Bad Movie Awards (for most intrusive musical score and worst fake accent); Camerimage Silver Frog award; 2006 Yoga Award for the Worst Foreign Director. 3 later DVD versions: 2005, director's cut; 2007, *Alexander Revisited: The Final Unrated Cut*; 2014, *Alexander: The Ultimate Cut*, which sold over 4 mln copies.
**References**. R. Lindner, 2005, 50–66; Nisbet, (2006) 2008, 125–135; Wieber, 2008, 147–162; Petrovic, 2008, 163–183; Chaniotis, 2008, 185–201; J. Richards, 2008, 179–183; Cartledge and Greenland, 2010; Pomeroy, 2011, 155–160; Blanshard and Shahabudin, (2011) 2013, 235; Curley, 2018, 177–181; Tomasso, 2018, 211–214; Davies, 2019, 53–74; Stoneman, 2022b, 27; McGeough, 2022, 283–288.

**114.** **"Prometheus Unbound."** S08E12. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by Andy Mikita, written by Damian Kindler, prod. by Jonathan Glassner, Brad Wright, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc.; aired on December 21, 2004.
**Genre & length**. 166th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comment**. The title of Aeschylus' play also corresponds to the situation the starship *Prometheus* and its crew found themselves in.

**115.** ***Gladiatress*** (UK) Directed by Brian Grant, written by Nick Whitby, prod. by Graham Broadbent, Bruce Davey, and Damian Jones for Mission Pictures and Stock Productions; released to video by Icon Entmt Int'l in 2004.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized history of Roman Britain, comedy; 85 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 55 BCE, Caesar's first unsuccessful attempt to conquer Britain. Roman legions were stopped by 3 Celtic warrior sisters, Smirgut, Dwyfuc, and Worthaboutapig. Romans speak English with an exaggerated Italian accent. Filmed late in 2002 in the UK, partly in Hampshire, using costumes and weapons from Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*. A more vulgar British equivalent of *Asterix*, a spoof of the *Gladiator*. The writer and the 3 main actresses hail from the BBC One sketch show *Smack the Pony*, which ended in 2003.

**116.** ***Alexander the Great: The Man behind the Legend*** (UK). Series: ***Beyond the Movie***. Directed, written and prod. by Helen Fitzwilliam for National Geographic Television and Film Production; aired in 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television docudrama, fictionalized Greek history; 52 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A documentary based on academic insight and re-enactment of historical events focusing on the figure of Alexander the Great.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 246–247.

**117.** ***Αλέξανδρος ο Μέγας. Μύθος και πραγματικότητα*** **[Alexander the Great: Myth and Reality]** (GR). Directed by Zinon Ramos, prod. by Nikos Ramos for RD Artworks; aired in 2004.
**Genre & length**. Television documentary series, Greek history; 6 episodes, 30 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Episodes: 1. "The Kingdom of Macedon," 2. "Education of Alexander," 3. "The Conquest of Asia Minor," 4. "Pharaoh of Egypt," 5. "The Conquest of Persia," 6. "The Master of Asia." A presentation of Alexander based on solid research, with the participation of the archaeologist Maria Akamati.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 246.

**118.** ***Ecuba*** (IT). Directed by Giuliana Berlinguer and Irene Papas, original trans. of Euripides' play by Salvatore Quasimodo, prod. by Mauro Berardi for Luna Rossa Cinematografica in collab. with La Fondazione "La Scuola di Roma"; released in 2004.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a staging of an ancient play; 84 min.
**Classical content & comments**. After the fall of Troy, when Agamemnon prepares to sail for Greece, Hecuba, his captive, suffers further tragedies: her daughter Polyxena is sacrificed to the shades of Achilles, and the news comes that her son, allegedly safe with the King of Thrace, is dead. She takes revenge by blinding the King and killing his 2 children. Agamemnon agrees with Hecuba that the punishment is just and is cursed by the blinded Thracian. Euripides' *Hecuba* was filmed during 5 performances of the play at the Università di Tor Vergata in Rome. Presented at the Festival of Taormina in 2005.

**119.** ***The Trojan Women*** (US). Directed and staged at the LA Whitefire Theater by Brad Mays for Ark Theater Company and prod. by Ark Filmpro; released in 2004.
**Genre & length**. A documentary film about a live theatre performance; 88 min.
**Classical content & comments**. After reconfiguring the opening dialectical prologue with Athena and Poseidon into a televised CNN report on the "War in Troy" to be shown on the theatre's dual video monitors, the director worked with a brave and resourceful cast to create a modern variant of *Trojan Women* reset in contemporary Iraq. Euripides' tragedy was filmed at the WhiteFire Theater in Los Angeles in April 2003.

## 2005

**120.** ***Λουκουμάδες με μέλι*** **[Doughnuts with Honey]** (GR). Written and directed by Olga Malea, co-written by Apostolos Alexopoulos and Cristina Kallas, prod. by Kostas Lambropoulos and Tasos Papandreou for Papandreou A.E., Greek Film Center, Mega Channel, etc.; released on January 7, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an "Aristophanic" comedy; 86 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A comedy that successfully deals with serious problems, such as death, child molestation, abuse of power, and destructive obsession with body image.
**References**. Slapšak, 2013, 263–269.

**121.** ***Elektra*** (US). Directed by Rob Bowman, written and co-prod. by Mark Steven Johnson, Frank Miller, and Zak Penn, co-prod. by Stan Lee, Brent O'Connor, et al. for 20th Century Fox, New Regency Productions, etc.; released on January 8, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fantasy, martial arts; 97 min.
**Classical content & comments**. On Elektra's necklace, the name in Greek characters is misspelled: ELEXTPA. Elektra Natchios, a Marvel Comics character, is killed and resurrected by a blind martial-arts master – no other allusions to antiquity. A sequel to the 2003 *Daredevil* written and co-prod. by M.S. Johnson.
**References**. Bakogianni, 2017, 468–469, 481–482.

**122.** ***Medea*** (NL). Directed by Theo van Gogh, written by Theodore Holman and Gijs van den Westelaken, prod. by G. van den Westelaken and Mardou Jacobs for Column Film and AVRO TV (Algemene Vereniging Radio Omroep); aired from January 8 to February 12, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, paraphrase of a myth; 6 episodes, 50 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A paraphrase of Euripides' *Medea* set in contemporary Dutch politics. Medea, the daughter of the Speaker of the Dutch Senate, falls in love with a businessman, Jason, and helps him to further his political ambitions; when he betrays her, she exacts

revenge. Special jury prize at the 2005 Nederlands Film Festival; Best Fiction at the 2006 Cologne Conference, both for the series and for T. van Gogh, who was murdered by an Islamist fanatic on November 2, 2004, shortly before the release of the series.

**123. "Daedalus."** S04E10. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Directed by David Straiton, written by Alan Brennert and Ken LaZebnik, prod. by Rick Berman, Brannon Braga, et al. for Paramount Television Network and Paramount Television; aired on UPN on January 14, 2005.
**Genre & length**. 86th episode of a television series, military SF action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. *Daedalus* is a direct reference to the myth: an inventor of transporter technology ordered his son to test the invention. The transporter malfunctioned, causing the son to fail to materialize at his destination. For the following 10 years, the father tried to find him. When he finally did, it was to watch his son die.

**124.** ***The True Story of Alexander the Great*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Jim Lindsay, co-prod. by Craig Haffner, Donna E. Lusitana, et al. for Lindsay Productions and the History Channel; aired on the History Channel on January 25, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Video, docudrama, Greek history, a biopic; 150 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A re-enactment of historical events involving Alexander the Great, focusing on a relatively objective treatment of his personality and achievements.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 246.

**125. "Murder in Rome" / *L'affaire Sextus, 81 avant J.C.*** S24E02. ***Timewatch*** (UK). Directed and co-prod. by David Stewart, written by Colin Swash, co-prod. by John Farren for BBC One and Discovery Channel, in assoc. with France 3; aired on BBC Two on March 4, 2005.
**Genre & length**. An episode in a long-standing television series (launched in 1982); 50 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Cicero's early career. The 3-day trial procedure of 81 BCE was reconstructed based on the speech *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*, whom Cicero defended on the charge of murdering his father. The accusation had the support of Chrysogonus, the influential freedman of Sulla, which presented a risk for the defender. In his speech, Cicero emphasized the accused's lack of hesitation and fear. The film, on the other hand, shows him hesitant and scared. Another inaccuracy concerns the role of Caecilia Metella (called Metellus!), which, in the movie, is much more important than what we know from the speech. Tom Holland was a historical consultant for the episode; see S23E11 aired in 2004.

**126. "Little Box of Horrors."** S07E18. ***Charmed*** (US). Created by Constance M. Burge, directed by Jon Paré, written by Cameron Litvack, prod. by Aaron Spelling and E. Duke Vincent for Paramount Pictures, Spelling Production Company, Viacom Productions, and WB Television Network; aired on April 24, 2005.
**Genre & length**. 152nd episode of a television series, witch show, a hidden world; 8 seasons, 178 episodes, 40–45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A demon who wants to use a magical box as a weapon pretends to be its guardian and asks the witches to help her find it. The box appears in the room of a student named Hope, who opens it and, when a dark mist is released, closes it again. Piper, with the disguised demon, Katya, visits Hope, to whom the demon explains what the box is and promptly steals it. Hope is, in fact, the true guardian of the box, Pandora, who was previously able to control her powers and put the ills back into the box. The witches save her from Katya and convince her that her destiny is to guard the box and the world from the bad things kept inside. The heroine is transformed from a silly woman too curious for her own good into a purposeful and responsible person enjoying the help of like-minded friends – a pastiche of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

**127.** **"Demons."** S04E20. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Directed by LeVar Burton, written by Manny Coto, prod. by Rick Berman, Brannon Braga, et al. for Paramount Television Network and Paramount Television; aired on UPN on May 6, 2005.
**Genre & length**. 96th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The episode features a fanatic leader of a race-purity movement and his secret headquarters, which hint at similarity with the Underworld. They operate an Orpheus Mining Facility there. No other allusions to antiquity.

**128.** ***Hercules*** (US). Directed by Roger Young, written by Charles Edward Pogue, prod. by Robert Halmi, Sr., and Robert Halmi, Jr., for Hallmark Entmt, MAT Movies and Television Productions, Project IV KG/Coote-Hayes Productions; aired on NBC on May 16, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, mythological fantasy/adventure; 2 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A considerably altered version of Hercules' myth. It is presented as a struggle between the worship of Zeus and Hera. Alcmene, seduced by Zeus during the absence of her husband, Amphitryon, gives birth to Hercules. 3 characters have a negative attitude towards Hercules: his mother rejects him, his brother Iphicles is envious, and Hera hates him. His only protector is Amphitryon. Nominated for the 2005 Outstanding Sound Editing Emmy Award; won 2006 OFTA Best Visual Effects. The subtitle on the September 6, 2005, DVD: *Half God. Half Man. All Power*.
**References**. Safran, 2015, 133–145; Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell, 2020, 545–566.

**129.** **"Alexander the Great."** S01E01. ***Battleground: The Art of War*** (US). Directed by Isaac Florentine, prod. by Brett Forbes, Gary Tarpinian, Tim Evans, et al. for Morningstar Entmt and Pixel Monger; aired on Discovery Channel on May 28, 2005.
**Genre & length**. 1st episode of a television docudrama series, Greek history; 47 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A reconstruction of the battle of Gaugamela, Alexander's strategy and tactics.
**References**. Morison, 2006; Dumont, 2013, 246.

**130.** ***Dido and Aeneas*** (DE). Directed by Peter Schönhofer, choreographed by Sasha Waltz. A recording of a performance at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin; aired on Arte on June 25, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Recording of an opera; 105 min.
**Classical content & comments**. British Baroque composer Henry Purcell's (1659–1695) opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1688), with a libretto by Nahum Tate (1652–1715). DVD publ. in Lepizig by Arthous Musik, in 2005.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 262.

**131.** ***Empire*** (US). Written by Tom Wheeler, Sara B. Cooper, Chip Johannessen, and William Wheeler, directed by John Gray and Kim Manners, prod. by Carrie Henderson, Nick Gillott, et al. for Storyline Entmt, Touchstone Television, and ABC; aired from June 28 to July 26, 2005.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, fictionalized Roman history; 6 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The same timeline as *Rome*, 2nd series, starting in 44 BCE, just before Caesar's assassination, and continuing until Octavian takes over power in Rome. Portrayals of Octavian, Cicero, Mark Antony, and others are visibly inaccurate. Cleopatra is absent. Historical events are also shown without any regard for sources. A fictional Vestal, Camene, and just as fictional Caesar's bodyguard, gladiator Tyrannus, are important characters. Lots of violence and gore. Criticized as imitative of the 2000 *Gladiator*. Won the 2006 Visual Effects Society Award for Outstanding Compositing in a Broadcast Program, Commercial, or Music Video.

**132.** ***Olympus Guardian: Gigantes Counterattack*** (KR). Directed by Kim Joon, written by Jun Hye-young, prod. for G. & G. Entmt; released on July 28, 2005.

**Genre & length**. Animated film, mythological fantasy; 87 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on the 2002–2003 South Korean animated television series *Olympus Guardian*, which is based on 20 volumes of *Greek and Roman Myths in Comics* by Jun Hye-young. See the entry on the television series under the year of broadcast.
**References**. Mik, 2021a.

**133. "Ex deus machina."** S09E07. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by Martin Wood, written by Joseph Mallozzi and Paul Mullie, prod. by Jonathan Glassner, Brad Wright, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc., aired on Sci Fi on August 26, 2005.
**Genre & length**. 181st episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The title is a paraphrase of the Latin expression *deus ex machina*, which Euripides introduced to the ancient theatre to expedite action through divine intervention; later, it came to mean an unexpected and out-of-the-blue turn of events.

**134. 2005–2007, *Rome*** (IT, UK, US). Created by John Milius, William J. MacDonald, and Bruno Heller; directed by Michael Apted, Allan Coulter, Alan Poul, et al., prod. by B. Heller, J. Milius, W.J. MacDonald, John Melfi, and Ann Thomopoulos for HD Vision Studios, the BBC, and HBO; aired on HBO, BBC Two, and RAI 2 between August 28, 2005, and March 25, 2007.
**Genre & length**. Television series, Roman historical drama with some fictional characters; 2 seasons, 22 episodes, 44–65 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized Roman history: the action of season 1 takes place between 52 and 44 BCE, and season 2 covers the years 44 to 30 BCE. Exorbitant production costs caused a shortening of the series from the planned 5 seasons to 2.
**References**. J. Richards, 2008, 187–190; Cyrino, 2008a, 130–140, 2008b, 1–10, 2015a, 1–10, 2017, 293–299; Solomon, 2008b, 11–28; Tatum, 2008, 29–41; Milnor, 2008, 42–48; Haynes, 2008, 49–60; Brice, 2008, 61–77, 2015, 25–35; Cooke, 2008, 78–86; Weiden Boyd, 2008, 87–99, 2015, 74–87; Futrell, 2008, 100–116; Augoustakis, 2008, 117–129, 2015, 117–127; Daugherty, 2008, 141–152, 2015, 182–192; Toscano, 2008, 153–167, 2013, 123–135, 2015, 48–60; Seo, 2008, 168–178; Allen, 2008, 179–192; Briggs, 2008, 193–206; Raucci, 2008, 207–218, 2015, 105–116; Strong, 2008, 219–231; Lockett, 2010, 102–112; Chiu, 2015, 13–24; Pomeroy, 2015, 36–47; Almagor, 2015, 61–73; Maurice, 2015a, 88–102; A. McCullough, 2015, 128–140; Day, 2015, 141–154; Harrisson, 2015, 155–168; Kelly, 2015, 169–181; Johnston, 2015, 193–205; McAuley, 2015, 206–218; Potter, 2015, 219–230; Cufurovich, 2018, 1–15; Magerstädt, 2019, 221–248.

**135. 2005–2006, *Engineering an Empire*** (US). Directed by Marc Cannon et al., written by Ted Poole et al., prod. by Randy Martin for KPI Productions, Kraylevich Productions Inc., and Mechanism Digital; aired on the History Channel, from September 13, 2005, to December 25, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, historical docudrama; 14 episodes, 52 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Historical docudrama about the world's empires. 6 episodes out of 14 are about empires flourishing during Classical Antiquity: "Rome" aired September 13, 2005; "Greece" aired October 16, 2006; "Greece: Age of Alexander" aired October 23, 2006; "Carthage" aired November 6, 2006; "The Persians" aired December 4, 2006; "The Byzantines" aired December 25, 2006.

**136. *Orpheus*** (US). Written and directed by Joel Rose (he also plays the title role), assisted by Gregory Gray (camera), prod. by Jo Harden, Corey Mesler, et al. for Matrix Production Services; released on October 23, 2005.
**Genre & length**. A short with significant music; 31 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern version: Orpheus is a rock star and flirts with Persephone. Eurydice dies in order to join Hades. Orpheus is shocked to remember that he loves her.

He descends to the Underworld, looking for her. It was shown at the Indie Memphis Film Festival on October 23, 2005.

**137.** ***Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*** (UK, US). Directed by Mike Newell, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Heyman for Warner Bros. Pictures and Heyday Films; released on November 6, 2005.
**Genre & length**. 4th feature film in a cycle, fantasy, witch show, school story, coming of age; 157 min.
**Comment**. Adaptation of J.K. Rowling's 2000 *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* novel.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

**138.** **2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). Directed by Brad Goodchild, created and developed by Chris Bartleman and Michael Lahay, prod. by C. Bartleman, Blair Peters, and Scott Dyer for Studio B. Productions and Nelvana Ltd; aired on Teletoon from December 31, 2005, to June 22, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, urban fantasy, action/adventure; 2 seasons, 52 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. All Greek gods, heroes, and the standard monsters, including Medusa and her sisters + Kraken. Cronus escapes Tartarus, and 7 teenage descendants of Greek heroes vanquish him, as prophesied. Season 1 was released on DVD in 2008. Available on Amazon Prime since 2016 and Retro Rerun (YouTube) since 2019.

**139.** ***Hannibal: Enemy of Rome*** (UK). Atlantic Productions; released in 2005.
**Genre & length**. Docudrama, biopic, Roman history; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 218 BCE. Hannibal took his army from Carthage to Rome, crossing the Alps with 38 elephants. The battle at Cannae was the tragedy of a commander betrayed by his troops. Rome is called the Roman Empire, even though it was still a republic.

**140.** ***Herod: Behind the Myth*** (UK). Atlantic Productions; released in 2005.
**Genre & length**. Docudrama, biopic, Roman history; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on the latest research and illustrated with impressive CGI, it presents the proverbial bad guy in a different light, as a techno visionary whose achievements are, e.g., the largest artificial harbour in the ancient world or the Temple of Jerusalem.

**141.** ***Spartacus: Behind the Myth*** (UK). Atlantic Productions; released in 2005.
**Genre & length**. Docudrama, biopic, Roman history; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 73 BCE. A successful revolt and a serious threat to Rome from a gladiator at the head of an army of rebellious slaves. Squashed by Crassus in a mercilessly brutal manner. An attempt to uncover the true events and reasons behind the layers of myth. Rome is prematurely called the Roman Empire in 73 BCE.

**142.** **"Jason and the Golden Fleece."** S01E04. ***In Search of Myths and Heroes*** (UK). Directed by Sean Smith and Gregory Doran, written and presented by Michael Wood, prod. by Krishan Arora, Dalton Delan, Leo Eaton, et al. for the BBC and PBS; aired in 2005.
**Genre & length**. 4th episode of a television documentary miniseries; each episode is 55 min. long.
**Classical content & comments**. The last episode of the series previously presented the Queen of Sheba, the search for Shangri-La, and "Arthur: The Once and Future King." "Jason and the Golden Fleece" reviews the state of research on the myth and takes the viewers on a trip on the Aegean Sea and the Black Sea, looking at archaeological evidence. From there to Georgia, where M. Wood imagined to have found the origin of the myth in the sheepskin used in gold panning, as suggested by Strabo and taken up by Tim Severin, the author of another documentary and book about the Golden Fleece, in 1985. M. Wood published a companion volume, *In Search of Myths and Heroes* (2005).
**References**. Colavito, 2014, loc. 6149; Lovatt, 2021, vii, 134, 189.

**143.** ***Spartacus*** (IT). Directed by Orlando Corradi, written by Luciano Scaffa, prod. and distr. by Mondo TV; aired in 2005.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, fictionalized history; 1 season, 13 episodes, 26 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Sanitized for young viewers, the series emphasizes the characters' sense of justice, honour, respect for others, and human dignity in conditions of debasement and injustice. The story of the uprising starts with Spartacus' condemnation to become a gladiator. It ends with his lieutenants, Gallus and Egizius, integrating the Roman society after the fall of the uprising.

## 2006

**144.** ***The Women of Troy*** (UK). Euripides' text adapted and co-prod. by Rob Faulkner and Wynn Moran, directed and co-prod. by Phil Hawkins for Philm Company; released on January 1, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Feature film released direct-to-video; 88 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Adaptation of Euripides' play produced as the 2004 staff film at the Catholic Xaverian College Manchester, played by A-level drama class students and directed by a recent alumnus. "Hawkins's version, *The Women of Troy*, is more interested in the psychology of the individual protagonists than women's struggle [contrary to Michael Cacoyannis's 1971 adaptation]" (Benady, 2006). Award for Best Direction at the New York Independent Film & Video Festival 2006. "Xaverian has covered the production budget by selling more than 100 copies of the film at £45 a piece to schools in the UK, US, Australia and Oman" (Benady, 2006).

**145.** ***Astérix et les Vikings / Asterix og vikingerne / Asterix and the Vikings*** (DK). Directed by Stefan Fjeldmark and Jesper Møller, written by S. Fjeldmark and Jean-Luc Gossens, prod. by Thomas Valentin for A Film A / S-M6 Films, Mandarin SAS, and 2D3D Animations; released on April 5, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, animated adventure, adaptation of a comic book, fictionalized history of Roman Gaul; 78 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The action takes place in Roman Gaul, in the Asterix-verse, but there are no other recognizable classical themes in the movie. Animation based on the comic book *Astérix et les Normands* (1966), minor elements come from other Asterix albums.

**146.** ***Spartacus: Gladiator War*** (US). Directed by Dan Oliver and Tom Pollock, prod. by Charlotte Wheaton for Atlantic Productions, TBC, and National Geographic Channel; aired on NGC on April 6, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Television film, docudrama, Roman history; 52 min.
**Comment**. Participation of historians, reconstruction of events, etc.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 301.

**147.** ***Hannibal: Rome's Worst Nightmare*** (UK). Written by Matthew Falk and Mark Skeet, directed by Edward Bazalgette, prod. by Ailsa Orr for BBC One; aired on May 14, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Television film, docudrama, Roman history; 90 min.
**Classical content**. The Second Punic War and Hannibal's Italian campaign, including the crossing of the Alps with troops and war elephants.

**148.** ***Pan's Labyrinth / El laberinto del fauno*** (ES, MX). Directed, written, and prod. by Guillermo del Toro, co-prod. by Bertha Navarro, Alfonso Cuarón, et al. for Estudio Picasso, Tequila Gang, Esperanto Filmoj, and Sententia Entmt; released on May 20, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, dark fantasy, horror; 120 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Despite the translation of the title, the magical being in the film is not the Greek god Pan but the Roman Faunus. The mythological motifs of the Labyrinth, the Faun, and Persephone combine with a fairy-tale plot transferred to the 1944 Spanish Civil War – a significant box-office success. Among many prizes, it received 3 Academy Awards, 3 BAFTAs, 7 Goyas, and 7 Ariel Awards. The film was novelized in 2019 by G. del Toro and Cornelia Funke, under the title *Pan's Labyrinth: The Labyrinth of the Faun*, publ. by Katherine Tegen Books (New York).
**References**. Zipes, 2011, 355–359; Warner, 2016, 176; Cotta Vaz and Nunziata, 2016; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 187–219.

**149.** ***The Minotaur: Curse the God, Slay the Beast*** (UK, LU, FR, DE, ES, IT, US). Directed and prod. by Jonathan English, written by Nick Green and Stephen McDool; released on DVD by Lions Gate on June 20, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, direct-to-video, mythological horror; 93 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Loosely based on the myth of the Minotaur. The action takes place in Crete during the reign of Deucalion.

**150.** ***Medea 2*** (ES). Directed by Javier Aguirre, written by Jesús Luque Moreno, J. Aguirre, and Lucius Annaeus Seneca, prod. by J. Aguirre et al. for Actual Films; released in July 2006.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, adaptation of an ancient play; 86 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Medea's revenge on the faithless Jason as told by Seneca. Abandoned by her husband and exiled by Creon, Medea kills her sons, ruins the city of Corinth, and kills both Creon and his daughter, Creusa. An adaptation of Seneca's *Medea*.
**References**. Llagüerri and Sebastià, 2013, 491–521.

**151.** **"Flesh & Blood."** S10E01. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by William Waring, written by Brad Wright, Jonathan Glassner, and Robert C. Cooper, prod by J. Glassner, B. Wright, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc.; aired on Sci Fi on July 14, 2006.
**Genre & length**. 195th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An unattributed and slightly mangled quotation from Ovid, *Met*. 1.85–86 (see Olechowska, 2016, 408–409); *ex uno disce omnes*; Verg., *Aen*. 2.65–66: *Accipe nunc Danaum insidias, et crimine ab uno disce omnes*. The faithful Tomin, the husband of Vala Mal Doran, the unwilling mother of Adria the Orici, says: *From one, all will learn*.

**152.** **"Morpheus."** S10E02. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by Andy Mikita, written by Brad Wright, Jonathan Glassner, and Joseph Mallozzi, prod. by J. Glassner, B. Wright, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc.; aired on Sci Fi on July 21, 2006.
**Genre & length**. 196th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 44 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. The title alludes to Teal'c remaining in a trance-like dream. Erebus is the name of a planet under Ba'al's control, where minerals required to construct a Goa'uld mothership are being mined.

**153.** **"The Pegasus Project."** S10E03. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by William Waring, written by Brad Wright, prod. by Jonathan Glassner, B. Wright, et al. for Stargate SG-1 Productions (II) Inc. etc.; aired on Sci Fi on July 28, 2006.
**Genre & length**. 197th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Pegasus galaxy, the alleged location of Atlantis, could only be Pegasus Dwarf Irregular Galaxy – not to be confused with Pegasus Constellation, one of the patterns of stars on the sky visible from Earth and catalogued by Ptolemy (100–170 CE).

**154.** ***Operation Lysistrata*** (US). Directed and prod. by Michael Patrick Kelly, co-prod. by Suzanne Hayes for Aquapio Films; released on September 7, 2006.

**Genre & length**. Documentary film; 85 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Operation Lysistrata was an international peace initiative of global readings of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* led by Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower in March 2003, in New York City and 59 countries against the war on Iraq. M.P. Kelly's film documents this initiative.
**References**. Winkler, 2017, 163.

**155.** **"Greece: Age of Alexander."** E02. **"The Persians."** E08. ***Engineering an Empire*** (US). Directed by Mark Cannon and Hassan Ildari, prod. by KPI Productions, Kraylevich Productions, and Mechanism Digital; aired on the History Channel on October 23 and December 12, 2006. See listing no. 15 for the whole series.
**Genre & length**. Television series, docudrama, Greek history; 2 episodes, each 52 min.
**Classical content**. 3 themes from ancient history.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 659.

**156.** ***Ancient Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*** (UK). Co-directed and co-written by Nick Murphy, co-directed by Nick Green, Christopher Spencer, et al., co-written by James Wood, Andrew Grieve, et al., prod. by Matthew Barrett and Mark Hedgecoe for the BBC, ZDF, and Discovery Channel; aired on BBC One between September 21 and October 26, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Television docudrama series, Roman history; 6 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. One of the purposes of the series was to correct all historical inaccuracies committed in the series *Rome*.1. "Caesar": from the Battle of Alesia to the Ides of March. 2. "Nero": from the Great Fire of Rome to Nero's suicide. 3. "Rebellion": from the 1st Jewish war to the destruction of Jerusalem. 4. "Revolution": Tiberius Gracchus: from the distinguished service with Scipio Aemilianus in Africa to his murder in the riots caused by his alleged royalist ambitions. The brother Caius Gracchus does not appear in the episode. 5. "Constantine": from the victorious Battle of the Milvian Bridge to Licinius' defeat at Chrysopolis and the Council of Nicea. 6. "The Fall of Rome": Barbarians attack Rome, and the Goth Alaric takes the city; Honorius' sister, Galla Placidia, marries Athaulf after Alaric's death. Outstanding British historians served as consultants: Mary Beard was a consultant on "Caesar," "Nero," and "Revolution"; Martin Goodman consulted for "Rebellion"; Averil Cameron for "Constantine"; and Peter Heather for "The Fall of Rome."

**157.** **"The Fiendish Five."** S01E09–10. **"The True King."** S01E11–12. ***Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monsters*** (US, JP). Based on a manga by Kazuki Takahashi; aired on 4-Kids Entmt on November 4–25, 2006.
**Genre & length**. 4 episodes of an animated television miniseries; 1 season, 12 episodes, 30 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Alexander the Great is a magical character split into a good and evil person. When his evil part, embodied by Dr. Alex Brisbane, is defeated, he is praised as a true king and his good soul is allowed to rest in the afterlife. The long fight involves various dragons, magicians with futuristic and magical weapons, and other quasi-mythical characters. A continuation of K. Takahashi's 2003–2004 *Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters*, season 4.

**158.** **"Greeks Bearing Gifts."** S01E07. ***Torchwood*** (UK). Directed by Colin Teague, written by Toby Whithouse, prod. by Russel T. Davies and Chris Chibnal for BBC Wales and CBC; aired on BBC Two on November 26, 2006.
**Genre & length**. 7th episode of a television series, SF, fantasy, time travel; 50 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An alien stranded on Earth calls herself Philoctetes – in Greek mythology (Trojan War), an archer abandoned for 10 years on the island of Lemnos because of an ill-smelling wound. A spin-off of *Doctor Who*.
**References**. Potter, 2010a, 79–93.

**159.** ***300*** (US). Directed and co-written with Kurt Johnstad and Michael N. Gordon by Zack Snyder, prod. by Gianni Nunnari, Mark Canton, Bernie Goldman, and Jeffrey Silver for Legendary Pictures, Virtual Studios, Atmosphere Entmt, MM, and Hollywood Gang Productions; released in the US on December 6, 2006.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, adaptation of a comic book, epic historical action, Greek history; 117 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized story of the 2nd Persian invasion and Battle of Thermopylae. Ephors, bribed by Xerxes, refuse their support to Leonidas. He takes his best 300 soldiers on an "excursion" to the Hot Gates of Thermopylae. Xerxes approaches Leonidas but fails to convince him to surrender. When Xerxes' "Immortals" fail to take the pass, he launches a massive attack and forces allies to flee. A traitor shows Xerxes a secret trail, avoiding the pass of Thermopylae. In Sparta, Gorgo convinces the Council to form a coalition with Athens, Corinth, and Megara against Persia. At the Hot Gates, before all Spartans perish, Leonidas wounds Xerxes and then succumbs to Persian arrows. The Greek coalition celebrates Leonidas' sacrifice. Based on Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's 1998 comic book. Globally released in 2007.
**References**. Murray, 2007, 11–35; J. Richards, 2008, 184–186; Cyrino, 2011, 19–38; Blanshard and Shahabudin, 2011, 236–237; Beigel, 2013, 65–78; Lauwers, Dhont, and Huybrecht, 2013, 79–94; Jenkins, 2015, 113–119; Winkler, 2017, 24–296; Llewelyn-Jones, 2018, 191–205; Tomasso, 2018, 214–216; Davies, 2019, 75–112.

**160.** ***Αλέξανδρος ο Μέγας*** **[Alexander the Great]** (GR). Directed by Paul Pissanos for Pissanos Int'l Film & TV Productions; released in 2006.
**Genre & length**. Docudrama, Greek history; 82 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Docudrama re-enacting Alexander's relations with his mother and his teacher Aristotle. The film covers his entire life.
**References**. Dumont, 2013.

**161.** ***Alexander the Great*** (IT, KR). Directed by Youngki Lee and Dea-Hong Kim for Orlando Corradi-Mondo TV Group-Difarm; released in 2006.
**Genre & length**. Animated video, Greek history; 80 min.
**Classical content**. History of Alexander the Great.

## 2007

**162.** ***Who Killed Julius Caesar?*** (UK). Atlantic Productions; released in 2007.
**Genre & length**. Television docudrama, Roman history; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 44 BCE, the Ides of March, Caesar is murdered. In 2007, a forensic investigator of the Carabinieri, Luciano Garofano, conducts a state-of-the-art investigation into Caesar's death and reaches an unexpected conclusion.

**163.** **"D-Yikes!"** S11E06. ***South Park*** (US). Created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, written and directed by T. Parker, prod. by T. Parker, M. Stone, et al. for Parker-Stone Productions and South Park Studios; aired on Comedy Central on April 11, 2007.
**Genre & length**. 159th episode of an animated television sitcom; 22 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A parody of Zack Snyder's 2006 film *300*. A lesbian bar called Les Bos is being taken over by Persians led by Rauf Xerxes, but its clients resist the takeover like the Spartans did at Thermopylae in 480 BCE. The teacher, Mrs Garrison, discovers she is a lesbian and seduces Xerxes, who is revealed to be a woman exercising at Curves (a women's only gym), like Mrs Garrison.

**164. 2007–2008, *The Roman Mysteries*** (UK). Directed by Paul Marcus, Jill Robertson, Marcus D.F. White, written by Olivia Hetreed, prod. by BBC TV; aired on BBC One between May 8, 2007, and August 13, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Television series, adaptation of books for children, fictional detective stories; 2 seasons, 10 episodes, 30 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. In the port of Ostia, 4 adolescents under the care of a patrician woman, Flavia Gemina, solve a series of mysteries, save Pliny the Elder from drowning, observe the eruption of Vesuvius, are kidnapped by pirates, prevent an assassination of Titus in Rome, save Jewish captives who fled the destruction of Jerusalem, etc. A series for children, designed to provide information on 1st-c. Rome. Based on Caroline Lawrence's books published in 2002. Pliny the Younger, in his letter to Tacitus (*Epist*. 6.16.11), at the request of Tacitus, describes the death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, who instead of fleeing from the vicinity of Mount Vesuvius, decided to join his friend Pomponianus at Stabiae and to the last moment refused to believe that a major volcanic eruption was indeed underway: "Fortune favours the bold; try to reach Pomponianus." Not this time. Episodes: 1. "The Secrets of Vesuvius," 2. "The Pirates of Pompeii," 3. "The Assassins of Rome," 4. "The Dolphins of Laurentum," 5. "The Enemies of Jupiter," 6. "The Gladiators from Capua," 7. "The Trials of Flavia Gemina," 8. "The Colossus of Rhodes," 9. "The Fugitive from Corinth," 10. "The Slave Girl from Jerusalem."

**165. *Last Stand of the 300*** (US). Directed and written by David Padrusch, co-written by Alexander Emmert and Matt Koed, prod. by D. Padrusch and M. Koed for Limulus Productions and Mechanism Digital; aired on the History Channel on May 27, 2007.
**Genre & length**. Television film, documentary; 91 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A documentary re-enactment of the Battle of Thermopylae.

**166. *United 300*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Andy Signore, co-written by Daniel Hartley and John Carreon for SecretSauce.tv; released on June 3, 2007.
**Genre & length**. A short, parody; 5 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A spoof of two 2006 movies, *United 93* and *300*. German terrorists led by Jerxes attempt to take over flight United 93. However, the access to the pilot cabin is defended by Spartans under the command of Leonidas. 2007 MTV Award for Best Filmic Parody.
**References**. Poole, 2013, 95–121.

**167. "Dominion."** S10E19. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Directed by William Waring, written by Alex Levine, and Alan McCullough, prod. by Jonathan Glassner, Brad Wright, et al.; aired on Sci-Fi on June 15, 2007.
**Genre & length**. 213th episode of a television series, military SF, action/adventure; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Starship *Odyssey*, Clava Thessara Infinitas (ancient for 'Key to Infinite Treasure'). Two Goa'ulds, Athena and Quetesh (Vala), tried to find this treasure, named after the first of them, Athena's treasury. However, it was neither recovered nor proven to be a hoax.

**168. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*** (UK, US). Directed by David Yates, written by Michael Goldenberg, prod. by David Hayman and David Barron for Warner Bros. Pictures and Heyday Films; released on June 28, 2007.
**Genre & length**. 5th feature film in a cycle, fantasy, witch show, school story, a hidden world; 138 min.
**Comment**. An adaptation of J.K. Rowling's 5th novel, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003).
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie, 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

**169.** ***Barbaren gegen Rom. Die Germanen. Meilensteine der Früh-geschichte Europas*** (DE). Directed by Judith Voelker, Stefan Koester, Schoko Okroy, and Alexander Hogh, prod. by Christian Feyereabend and Uwe Kersken for Westdeutscher Rundfunk in co-prod. with Gruppe 5 Köln Film-produktion, Arte, and SBS-TV Australia; aired on Arte from July 21, 2007.
**Genre & length**. A television docudrama, fictionalized Roman history; 4-part series, 52 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Episodes: 1. "Barbaren gegen Rom," 2. "Die Varusschlacht," 3. "Entscheidung am Limes," 4. "Im Zeichen des Kreuzes." The story is told from the point of view of a fictional tribal priestess called Basena.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 327.

**170.** ***The Last Legion*** (UK, IT, FR, TN, SK). Directed by Doug Lefler, written by Jez and Tom Butterworth, prod. by Dino, Martha, and Raffaella De Laurentiis for De Laurentiis Co.; released August 17, 2007.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized Roman history, action, adventure, adaptation of a novel; 102 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 5th-c. Western Roman Empire is taken over by the chief of the Goths, Odoacer, right after the coronation of Romulus Augustulus, who is imprisoned in Tiberius' villa on Capri from where the 3 remaining Roman legions rescue him. He takes with him Caesar's sword, which he found in the villa. The Senate and the Eastern Empire give their support to Odoacer. Romulus flees to Britain with his tutor Ambrosinus to rejoin the 9th legion there. He finds the legion disbanded, but when a war begins with the locals, the legionaries return to join the fight. Using Caesar's sword, Romulus prevails and, after a victory, embeds the sword in a stone. Romulus marries a Celtic girl, Igraine, and takes the name Pendragon. They have a son, Arthur, who is guided by Ambrosinus/Merlin. The sword in the stone, inscribed "ES CALIBUR," awaits him (from Greek χάλυψ, *khálups* – steel). Based on the 2002 novel *L'ultima legione* by Valerio Massimo Manfredi.
**References**. Davies, 2019, 129–144.

**171.** ***Médée miracle*** (FR, IT). Directed and prod. by Tonino De Bernardi, co-prod. by Stéphanie Andriot, Ronald Chammah, and Richard Kravetz for Lontane Provincie Film, Stella Films, Les Films du Camélia, and Arte France Cinéma; released in September 2007.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, paraphrase of a myth; 81 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Modern paraphrase of the myth of Medea and Jason. Irene, a foreigner, is married to Jason, a Frenchman. They live in Paris and have 2 daughters. Jason leaves her for a French girl, and this betrayal destabilizes Irene.

**172.** ***Lars and the Real Girl*** (US). Directed by Craig Gillespie, written by Nancy Oliver, prod. by Sarah Aubrey, John Cameron, et al. for MGM, Sydney Kimmel Entmt, and Lars Productions; released on September 16, 2007.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, paraphrase of a myth; 106 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern version of the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. An immature and fragile young man is unable to form a relationship with a girl and, as a safe substitute, orders a silicone doll. His family goes along with that. After some time, he tells them that she is dying and, after a period of grief, is able to begin a relationship with a colleague from work.
**References**. P. James, 2011, 259–266; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 337–359.

**173.** **"The Eye of the Gorgon."** S01E03–04. ***The Sarah Jane Adventures*** (UK). Directed by Alice Troughton, written by Phil Ford, prod. by Phil Collinson, Russell T. Davies, Julie Gardner, and Matthew Bouch for BBC Cymru Wales; aired on CBBC on October 1 and 8, 2007.
**Genre & length**. 3rd and 4th episodes of a television series, SF fantasy; 5 seasons, 53 episodes, 25–30 min. each, a 60 min. special and a 5 min. short.

**Classical content & comments**. Rationalization of the myth of the Gorgons. Gorgons are an alien race; one of them lives in the body of an Abbess. 3 Gorgons came to Earth and enchanted the nuns at the Abbey to serve them. The snakes are energy, not real reptiles. Sarah Jane reads the myth of Perseus and Medusa to a child. She says that Greek mythology originates in reality: when Poseidon fell in love with Medusa, a jealous Athena transformed her into a monster. The Gorgon dies when she is shown a mirror. *Doctor Who*'s spin-off for a younger audience.
**References**. Potter, 2018j, 168–186, 2018h.

**174.** ***Sa Majesté Minor / His Majesty Minor*** (FR, ES). Directed, co-written, and co-prod. by Jean-Jacques Annaud, co-written by Gérard Brach and Sandro Agénor, co-prod. by Jaume Roures and Xavier Castano for Repérages, Malvarrosa Media, Mediapro, and StudioCanal; released on October 10, 2007.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a mythologically inspired comedy; 101 min.
**Classical content & comments**. On one of the Cyclades, in the 17th c. BCE, Minor, a mute half-wild orphan, lives with pigs. He explores a mythological forest where he encounters the god Pan. The god introduces him to the delights of sex. Back in his village, during the olive harvest, Minor climbs a tree to observe Clytia, a girl he fancies. He accidentally falls from the tree and dies but somehow revives and regains speech. The villagers consider it a miracle and make him King. He begins sweeping reforms and construction projects but is soon forced out. He flees to Pan to lead a life of fun and games. J. Annaud's impressive filmography includes *The Name of the Rose* (1986), *The Bear* (1988), *The Lover* (1992), *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), *Two Brothers* (2004), *Wolf Totem* (2015), and the most recent *Notre-Dame brûle* (March 16, 2022). The 2007 film was a box-office flop.

**175.** ***Cleopatra*** (BR). Directed and written by Júlio Bressane, co-written by Rosa Diaz, prod. by Lucia Fares and Tarcisio Vidigal for Grupo Novo de Cinema e TV; released on November 23, 2007.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a historical biopic; 116 min.
**Classical content & comments**. J. Bressane's "lyrical vision" of Cleopatra won 6 main awards at the Brasília Film Festival in 2007.

## 2008

**176.** ***Astérix aux Jeux olympiques / Asterix bei den Olympischen Spielen*** (FR, DE, ES, IT, BE). Directed by Frédéric Forestier and Thomas Langmann, an adaptation of René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo's comic book with dialogues by T. Langmann, prod. by Jérôme Lateur et al. for Pathé-Renn Productions, La Petite Reine, etc.; released on January 13, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Feature film prod. for television, fantasy, an adaptation of a comic book, fictionalized Roman history; 117 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Several characters were added to the original comic book: the 2 lovers, Lovesix and Princess Irina, as well as Brutus, who is the antagonist. Asterix and Obelix must win the Games to make it possible for the lovers to marry. Brutus is trying, on the one hand, to have his team win, and, on the other, to remove Caesar from the picture. Based on the 1968 album *Asterix at the Olympic Games* by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo. A number of real-life sports stars participated in the movie, e.g., Michael Schumacher, Jean Todt, Zinedine Zidane, Tony Parker, and Amélie Mauresmo.

**177.** **"Gnothi seauton."** S01E02. ***Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*** (US). Directed by David Nutter, written by Josh Friedman, Ashley Miller, and Zac Stentz, prod. by J. Friedman, John Enbom, John Wirth, et al.; aired on Fox on January 14, 2008.

**Genre & length**. 2nd episode of a television series, SF fantasy; 2 seasons, 31 episodes, 44 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. The Greek title of the episode. The main character, Sarah, has her own version of the aphorism: "Know thyself, and thou shalt know all the mysteries of the gods and the universe."
**References**. Wenskus, 2017, 457–458.

**178.** ***Absurdistan*** (DE, FR). Directed, written, and prod. by Veit Helmer, co-written by Zaza Buadze, Servet Golbol, and Gordan Mihic, co-prod. by Linda Valdez for Veit Helmer Filmproduktion, Südwestrundfunk (SWR), Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), and Arte; released on January 20, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, a paraphrase of an ancient comedy; 88 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. There are problems with providing water to a remote village. Men are lazy and reluctant to repair the system. Women react by refusing to have sex until men fix the problem. V. Helmer received the 2008 Special Award at the Bavarian Film Awards, the 2009 International Fantasy Film Award at Fantasporto, and the 2009 Grand Prize for Best Feature Film at Mediawave, Hungary. Erwin Prib won the 2008 Film Award in Gold for Best Production Design at the German Film Awards.
**References**. Maurice, 2017, 212.

**179.** ***Meet the Spartans*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, co-prod. by Peter Safran for Regency ENT., New Regency, and 3 in the Box; released on January 25, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a parody of a popular movie, Greek history; 83 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Xerxes is an evil god-king of Persia bent on conquering Greece. King Leonidas of Sparta and his dozen or so warriors are defending their country. Idiotic dialogues, visual allusions to celebrities. "A tired, unfunny, offensive waste of time, *Meet the Spartans* scrapes the bottom of the cinematic barrel" (RottenTomatoes, n.d. b). Nominated 5 times for the 29th Golden Raspberry Awards.
**References**. Blanshard and Shahabudin, (2011) 2013, 193; Poole, 2013, 95–121; McGeough, 2022, 161–162.

**180.** ***Odysseus and the Isle of the Mists*** (UK, CA, RO). Directed by Terry Ingram, written by Brook Durham and Kevin Leeson, prod. by Jamie Goehring and Kirk Shaw for Plinyminor and Sci-Fi Channel; released on February 15, 2008; DVD released in 2015 by Voltage Pictures under license from 101 Films.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, mythological horror, fantasy; 92 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Homer wrote an additional, very dark book of the *Odyssey*. Vampire-like creatures kill humans and drink their blood. They can be killed only with a wooden stake driven through their heart. They are children of a villainous version of Hades and Persephone.

**181.** **"Spartacus."** S01E03. ***Heroes & Villains*** (UK). Directed by Tim Dunn and Al Imran Nilo, written by Colin Heber-Percy and Lyall B. Watson, prod. by Matthew Barrett et al. for the BBC and ERT (Hellenic Radio & Television); aired on February 29, 2008.
**Genre & length**. 3rd episode of a television anthology series, historical biopic, docudrama, Roman history; 1 season, 6 episodes, 55 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Rome, 73 BCE. Spartacus' bio from the more favourable and sympathetic modern point of view. The tragedy of enslavement includes the separation of families and the hopeless life of gladiators. The story is narrated by a veteran gladiator, Oenameaus, who took Spartacus under his wing. The series *Heroes & Villains* (2007–2008) features Napoleon, Attila the Hun, Spartacus, Hernán Cortés, Richard the Lionheart, and the Shogun (Tokugawa Ieyasu).

**182.** **"The Fires of Pompeii."** S04E02. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). Directed by Colin Teague, written by James Moran and Steven Moffat, prod. by Phil Colinson for the BBC; aired on April 12, 2008, on BBC One and the next day on BBC Three.
**Genre & length**. 41st episode of the 2005 *Doctor Who* television series, SF, time travel, action/adventure, fictionalized Roman history; 45 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The day before the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE. The Doctor realizes that aliens have engineered the eruption. Based on the BBC's 2003 *Pompeii: The Last Day* and the Caecilius family from *Cambridge Latin Course* first published in 1970 (the last edition issued in 2022).
**References**. Hobden, 2009, 147–163; Keen, 2010; Gierszewska, 2016, 305–314; Wenskus, 2017, 462–463; Potter, 2018j, 168–186.

**183.** ***Cassandra*** (MX, US). Directed, written, and prod. by Mauricio Chemovetzky for Like Fire Productions; released on April 22, 2008.
**Genre & length**. A short paraphrase of a myth; 27 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Poetic reinterpretation of *Trojan Women*: on the Mexican side of the US border, there is a shady bar frequented by American soldiers, Las Mujeres de Troya, owned by Doña Hecuba. General Agamemnon demands the company of Hecuba's innocent daughter, Cassandra. She agrees to his request over the protestations of her mother because she wants to cross the border to the US. Based on Euripides' play.

**184.** ***Il ginocchio di Artemide / Le genou d'Artémide*** (IT, FR). Directed by Jean-Marie Straub, written by Cesare Pavese, prod. by Martine Marignac for Pierre Grise Productions, filmed at the Teatro Francesco di Bartolo in Buti, May 24, 2007; released on May 1, 2008.
**Genre & length**. A mythologically inspired short; 27 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Mythological symbols – Orpheus and Demeter – related to the mystery of existence and human destiny. Based on Cesare Pavese's *Dialoghi con Leucò* (1947). 2 older gentlemen exchange speeches on basic philosophical themes. The film is a recording of a stage performance. See also a continuation of Pavese's *Dialoghi* in J.-M. Straub's *L'inconsolable* of 2011.
**References**. Winkler, 2020b, 258.

**185.** ***Rome: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*** (US, UK). Directed by Robert H. Gardner, Rex Piano, Alexander Emmett, et al., written by A. Emmett, Carrie Gardner, and Kate Youngdahl, prod. by Beth Dietrich Segarra, R.H. Gardner, et al. for Gardner Films; aired on the History Channel from July 21 to October 13, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Television docudrama series, Roman history; 1 season, 13 episodes, 43–60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. 1. "The First Barbarian War." 113 BCE, Marius repels the Ciberian attack. 2. "Spartacus." 73 BCE. 3. "Julius Caesar." From the conquest of Gaul. 4. "The Forest of Death." 9 CE, the Varian disaster in the Teutoburg Forest. 5. "The Invasion of Britain." 47 CE, Claudius' attempt at conquest. 6. "The Dacian Wars." 102 CE, Trajan takes Sarmizegetuza and its riches but fails in Parthia. 7. "Rebellion and Betrayal." 161–180 CE, Marcus Aurelius' reign. 8. "Wrath of Gods." Early 3rd c. CE, the challenge of Christianity. 9. "The Soldiers' Emperor." Late 3rd c. CE, Roman borders are vulnerable to foreign invasions. 10. "Constantine." Diocletian ends the crisis of the 3rd c. Constantine abolishes the tetrarchy and reunites the empire. 11. "The Barbarian General." Theodosius' valued general is the Vandal Stilicho. 12. "The Puppet Master." 450 CE, Rome is at the mercy of barbarians. 13. "The Last Emperor." 475 CE, *magister militum* Orestes makes his son Romulus Augustulus emperor. Flavius Odoacer deposes him after less than a year on the throne. Docudrama with a reconstruction of battles and the use of silent actors.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 291.

**186.** **2008–2012, *Merlin*** (UK). Created by Julian Jones, Jake Michie, Johnny Capps, and Julian Murphy, prod. by Julie Gardner and Bethan Jones for Shine TV; aired on BBC One from September 20, 2008 to December 24, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Television series, early medieval fantasy, witchcraft, adventure; 5 seasons, 65 episodes, 45–50 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A when-they-were-young take on the Arthurian legend. Greek and Old English spells. Nominated for many awards, won BAFTA for visual effects in 2011. Sold to 180 countries, available on Netflix.
**References**. Nelson and Walton, 2014, 45–63; Marciniak, forthcoming a.

**187.** **2008–2009, *Valentine*** (US). Directed by Kevin Dowling, created and written by Kevin Murphy, prod. by K. Murphy, Courtney B. Conte, et al. for Media Rights Capital, Baked Goods Productions, and Valentine's Day; originally aired on The CW between October 5, 2008, and July 19, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television series, comedy-drama; 1 season, 8 episodes, 42 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The Los Angeles-based Valentine family are, in fact, Olympic gods who try to ensure that mortals have happy romantic relationships. The gods may become mortals themselves if they are unable to bring soulmates together. The Valentines seek help from Kate, a romance novelist. Among the members of the family are Aphrodite (Grace), her husband, Ari (Ares), her previous husband, Ray (Hephaestus), and her son Danny (Eros), who is sweet on Kate. Phoebe (the Titan) functions as an oracle and seeks counsel from the Fates about the pairing of mortals. She is attracted to the barman Leo (Hercules). Aunt Circe is a marijuana dealer. There is also Bastet from the Egyptian pantheon, who may take a human or feline form and is hostile to the Valentines; at some point, she murders Ari using the Adamantium Blade stolen from Ray, the only weapon that can kill a god. 1st season was intended to include 13 episodes, but a production delay led to the cancellation of the show. The previously filmed episodes were aired in the summer of 2009.
**References**. Maurice, 2019b, 121–122.

**188.** ***The Reader*** (US, DE). Directed by Stephen Daldry, written by David Hare, prod. by Bob and Harvey Weinstein, Anthony Minghella, et al. for the Weinstein Company, Mirage Enterprises, and Studio Babelsberg; released on December 10, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an adaptation of a novel; 124 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Post-WW2 German generation's difficulties in dealing with the Holocaust and guilt, living among potential war criminals, the shame, atonement, and the banality of evil. An illiterate former Nazi concentration camp guard asks her young lover to read aloud to her. He reads scenes from Homer's *Odyssey*, which is emphasized more than in the novel. It reflects the fact that the German high-school curriculum included Homer. The film was heavily criticized for evoking sympathy for an Auschwitz guard. Adaptation of Bernhard Schlink's 1995 novel *Der Vorleser*. An Oscar for Best Actress and a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actress were awarded to Kate Winslet.
**References**. Niven, 2003, 381–396 (about the novel); Solomon, 2022, 41–42.

**189.** ***Cyclops*** (US). Directed by Declan O'Brien, written by Frances Doell, prod. by Roger and Julie Corman and Israel Ringer for New Horizons Picture; aired on the Sci-Fi Channel on December 12, 2008.
**Genre & length**. Television film, action, adventure, fantasized Roman history; 94 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Rome, 1st c. CE. Tiberius is the emperor and rules as a tyrant. When his general Marcus Romulus captures a Cyclops ravaging the countryside, Tiberius sends him and the mythological creature to the Colosseum to fight, but they unite forces with revolted slaves and want to depose the emperor. Adaptation of the French *bande déssinée* writer Alexis Nolent's 2006 graphic novel *Cyclopes*.

**190.** ***The Spirit*** (US). Scripted and directed by Frank Miller, prod. by Deborah Del Prete, Gigi Pritzker, and Michael E. Uslan for OddLot Entmt and DarkLot Entmt; released on December 25, 2008; DVD released on April 14, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Neo-noir superhero mythological feature film, adaptation of a comic strip; 103 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A contemporary complex treasure hunt for Hercules' life-giving blood results in finding the Golden Fleece. The story is based on a newspaper comic strip by Will Eisner, *Spirit*. It appeared as a regular insert in 20 Sunday newspapers from June 2, 1940, to October 5, 1952. Later, some occasional new stories or stories by different authors were published.

**191.** **2008–2009, *Resonabilis echo. La légende d'Echo et de Narcisse*** (CH). Directed, written, and prod. by Claude Aubert; amateur movie shot in Lausanne, VD, Switzerland, 2008–2009.
**Genre & length**. A short film, a retelling of myths; 42 min.
**Classical content**. The myth of Narcissus and Echo according to Ovid, *Met*. 3.358–401. Echo, Narcissus, Jupiter, Juno, a dryad, and Ovid, as the narrator.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 136; Winkler, 2020b, 304.

**192.** **2008–2013, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars***, Series 1–5 (US). Created by George Lucas, directed and written by Dave Filon et al., prod. by George Lucas et al. for Lucasfilm Ltd.; aired on the Cartoon Network from 2008 to 2013.
**Genre & length**. Animated 3D CGI television series; 108 episodes of ca. 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. An amalgam of inspirations, among them Classical Antiquity, and in particular the theme of the ancient past, moral maxims similar to Hercules' choice, "know yourself," Stoic rejection of extremes, defying prophesied destiny, a political structure reminiscent of the Roman Republic, transformation into an empire, Jedai symbols and designs have a classical look, colonnades, and temples of classical inspiration, military equipment, monsters, labyrinths, names, slavery. 40th Daytime Emmy Awards: Outstanding Special Class Animated Program; 41st Daytime Emmy Awards: Outstanding Special Class Animated Program.
**References**. Parisi and Scheppke, 2009; Charles, 2015, 281–298; Nevin, 2018a.

**193.** ***Rome Unwrapped*** (UK). Exec. prod. by Anthony Geffen, series directed and prod. by Dan Oliver for Atlantic Productions; released in 2008.
**Genre & length**. Television series, docudrama, Roman history; 8 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Experts revisit Roman history based on evidence. They focus on places and people (e.g., on ordinary people during Pompeii's last 24 hours as seen in recent digs), showing and discussing Caesar's bust found under the bed of the River Rhône, weapons and letters on tablets, the invasion of Britain and the Colosseum. Expert use of dramatization and CGI to illustrate the past.

## 2009

**194.** ***Wonder Woman*** (US). Directed by Lauren Montgomery, written by Michael Jelenic, prod. by Bruce Timm for Warner Premiere, DC Comics, and Warner Bros. Animation; released on March 3, 2009.
**Genre & length**. A direct-to-DVD animated superhero film; 73 min.
**Classical content & comments**. It is a mythologically inspired fantasy with Wonder Woman in modern-day America fighting the god of war, Ares, who escaped the Amazons' jail. Based on the 1987 *Gods and Mortals*, a comic book by George Pérez, scripted by Greg Potter and Len Wein.

**195.** ***Cleopatra: Portrait of a Killer*** (UK). Directed by Paul Elston, prod. by Richard Bradley and Steffan Boje for Lion Television; aired on the BBC on March 23, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television film, docudrama, Roman history, Egyptian history; 59 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Docudramatic reconstruction of events prompted by the discovery of the skeleton of Arsinoe, the sister of Cleopatra, in a tomb. Cleopatra and Mark Antony are the main suspects in Arsinoe's violent demise.

**196.** ***Cupid*** (US). Created by Rob Thomas, directed by Bharrat Nalluri, Michael Fields, Michael Grossman, et al., prod. by R. Thomas, Jennifer Gwartz, et al. for ABC; aired from March 31 to June 16, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television series, romantic comedy inspired by myth; 1 season, 7 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern paraphrase of the myth of Eros and Psyche. A revival by R. Thomas and ABC of their 1998–1999 series *Cupid*.

**197.** ***Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*** (UK, US). Directed by David Yates, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Heyman and David Barron for Warner Bros. Pictures and Heyday Films; released on July 7, 2009.
**Genre & length**. 6th feature film in a cycle of 8, an adaptation of a novel, fantasy, witch show, school story, coming of age; 153 min.
**Comment**. An adaptation of J.K. Rowling's 2005 novel, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie, 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

**198.** **2009–2014, *Warehouse 13*** (US). Created by Jane Espenson and D. Brent Mote, directed by Chris Fisher, Constantine Makris, et al., prod. by Jack Kenny, David Simkins, and Drew Z. Greenberg for Universal Cable Productions; aired on Syfy from July 7, 2009, to May 19, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Television series, SF mystery, fantasy, comedy-drama; 5 seasons, 64 episodes, 42–44 min. each; pilot runs for 87 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Magical artefacts from various periods of history, including ancient ones, are held at the Warehouse. The first Warehouse was allegedly built by Alexander the Great in 336–323 BCE to house magical objects acquired as spoils of war. It was later transferred to Ptolemaic Egypt and was run by Regents tasked with collecting artefacts and managing the Warehouse. When Egypt became part of Rome, Warehouse 3 was established in the Western Empire, Attila the Hun controlled Warehouse 4, and Warehouse 5 was located in Byzantium. 2010, "Reset." S02E12: wings of Daedalus, Plato's originals, the rod of Asclepios, the Minoan trident. 2011, "The New Guy." S03E01: statues of Zeus and Hera, the "Janus" device. "Emily Lake." S03E11: Janus' coin. 2012, "A New Hope." S04E01: Pandora's *píthos*. "Fractures." S04E06: Spartacus' retiarius. "Endless Wonder." S04E07: the rod of Asclepios, a bowl made from the ruined Colossus of Rhodes. "Second Chance." S04E08: a shrapnel from Spartan armour. "The Ones You Love." S04E09: Pliny the Elder's Amber Scroll. "Runaway." S04E16: a Pompeii amphora dispensing hot lava. 2014, "Endless Terror." S05E01: Theodosius of Bithynia's sundial. Passim, bastardized Latin slogans. Novelized by Greg Cox (*Warehouse 13: A Touch of Fever*, 2011), the author of many *Star Trek* novels and other SF novelizations, such as *The Librarians*. It was streamed on Peacock.
**References**. Olechowska, 2016, 407.

**199.** ***Rome: The Last Frontier. 1: Onslaught. 2: Revolt. 3: Downfall / Y Rhufeiniaid*** (UK). Directed by Jeff Morgan, prod. by Green Bay Media-Parthenon Entmt-S4C Greenbay, South Wales; aired on the History Channel on July 15, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, docudrama, Roman history, Roman Britain; 3 episodes of 49, 50, and 49 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Reconstruction of battles, silent actors. 1. Claudius, in need of a military victory, decides to invade Britain in 43 CE under the command of Aulus Plautius. Claudius visits Britain while riding an elephant. The Iceni, Silures, and Ordovices revolt against Governor Scapula. Caratacus heads the uprising but is betrayed and taken to Rome with his family. Claudius offers him clemency. 2. Later, the Iceni rise again under the leadership of Boudicca, threatening Roman rule in Britain. 3. Focus on the Roman administration of Britain. Produced in English and Gaelic versions.

**200.** ***Hellhounds*** (CA). Directed by Rick Schroder, written by Paul A. Birkett and Jason Bourque, prod. by Robert Halmi, Sr., Robert A. Halmi, et al. for Muse Entmt Ent. and RHI Entmt; aired on SyFy on July 19, 2009; DVD released on February 16, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television film, direct-to-video, horror; 83 min.
**Classical content & comments**. At the wedding of Demetria and Kleitos, the groom's friend Theron, secretly in love with Demetria, decides to poison her wine and dispatch her to the Underworld. A witch tells Kleitos that Demetria is being forced to marry Hades. Kleitos descends there with his companions through a volcano. They drink an elixir to protect them from the fire they must traverse. They pass through a labyrinth after depositing her corpse outside the entrance. The maze is patrolled by demonic hounds partial to human flesh. Theron, unable to kill Kleitos, dies himself and wakes up in Hell. In exchange for a longer life, he promises Hades to deliver Demetria to him but fails and must return to Hell. 21st movie in the film-on-video series *Maneaters* of 28 installments (from June 7, 2007, to October 24, 2015) prod. by RHI Entmt for SyFy.
**References**. See Dumont, 2013, 653: "Du cinéma-bis horrifique et bon marché, fabriqué en studio à Bucarest."

**201.** ***Clash of the Gods*** (US). Directed by Christopher Cassel and Jessica Conway, written by C. Cassel et al., prod. by Bill Hunt et al.; aired on the History Channel between August 3 and October 12, 2009; *Clash of the Gods: The Complete Season* released on 3 DVDs on February 16, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a documentary retelling of myths; 1 season of 10 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. "Zeus," "Hercules," "Hades," "The Minotaur," "Medusa," "Odysseus: Curse of the Sea," "Odysseus: Warrior's Revenge," and also, on the 3rd DVD disc: "Beowulf," "Tolkien's Monsters," and "Thor."
**References**. Hobden, 2022, 135–151.

**202.** ***La guerre des fils de lumière contre les fils des ténèbres / The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*** (FR). Directed by Amos Gitai, prod. by Agav Films and France 2; released at the Locarno International Festival on August 5, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Television film based on a spectacle that adapted Flavius Joseph's *The Jewish War*, Roman history; 102 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The title of the movie comes from the scrolls of the Dead Sea. Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the rest of the Jewish War, according to Flavius Joseph. A reflection on the contemporary Middle East against the background of ancient history.

**203.** ***My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done*** (US, DE). Directed by Werner Herzog, written by Herbert Golder and W. Herzog, prod. by Eric Bassett for Industrial Entertainment, Defilm, and Paper Street Films; released on September 5, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, crime drama, an adaptation of a true story inspired by a Greek tragedy; 91 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A Boston University classicist, Herbert Golder, was fascinated by the story of Mark Yavorsky, an actor at the University of San Diego, who was cast to play Orestes in Euripides' play, became mentally unstable, and murdered his mother with an antique

sword. W. Herzog wrote the script with Golder and directed a movie only loosely rendering Yavorsky's story but following his descent into madness triggered by Orestes' matricide.
**References**. Michelakis, 2013, 118–123.

**204.** **"Freaks & Greeks."** S07E04b. ***The Fairly OddParents*** (US). Directed by Gary Conrad, written by Tom Krajewski for Nickelodeon Animation Studios, Frederator Studios, and Billionfold Studios; aired on September 30, 2009.
**Genre & length**. An episode of an animated television series, fantasy comedy for children; 12 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The parents of the main character, Timmy, leave for "a Toga Party" to eat alleged Greek food, and the Fairly OddParents take the child to Mount Olympus and the unending party of bored Olympic gods. Medusa's arrival causes destruction and the party moves to Timmy's apartment led by Elvis the Centaur. Zeus, Poseidon, and Artemis are fascinated by modern appliances. The party, scared by the Medusa-like evil babysitter who broke out of the basement where she was locked, moves back to the now-rebuilt Olympus, where life is a constant party with no accountability, responsibility, or consequences for the gods. The protagonist's parents, who leave him with an evil babysitter, behave as irresponsibly as the Olympians.
**References**. Mik, 2020c.

**205.** ***Agora*** (ES). Directed and written by Alejandro Amenábar, co-written by Mateo Gil, prod. by Fernando Bovaira for Telecinco Cinema and MOD Producciones Himenóptero; released on October 9, 2009.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized biopic, Greek history; 126 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The story of the astronomer Hypatia, 4th-c. Alexandria. An interesting background of the conflict between religion and science, ancient culture, and early Christianity. A number of inaccuracies: Hypatia was, in fact, around… 60 at the time of her death, no longer a young woman. Also, Alexandria of the late 4th and early 5th c. CE was already a Christianized area in an officially Christian empire and Christianity was not viewed there as uneducated, superstitious, backward forces. The film received 7 Goya Awards and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Feature Film Prize for 2009 at the Hamptons International Film Festival.
**References**. Dzielska, 1995; Dzielska and Ponikło, 2010; Paul, 2013b, 227–241; Wieber, 2015, 237–240; Strong, 2015, 195–206; Carlà-Uhink, 2017, 321–322; Davies, 2019, 159–168; Curley 2022b, 17–32.

**206.** ***Cléopâtre – la dernière reine d'Egypte*** (FR). Directed, written, and choreographed by Kamel Ouali, prod. by Jean-Claude Camus for CLN Spectacles-Bomba's Productions; released in December, 2009.
**Genre & length**. A live spectacle recorded on DVD, a musical comedy, Roman history, Egyptian history; 124 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Life of Cleopatra from her meeting with Caesar until her death. The musical was taped in Brussels where the super-spectacle was staged at the Forest National arena. Cleopatra is shown as a modern, independent woman; she sings: "Je suis une femme d'aujourd'hui, une femme qui se dévoile et qui suit ses envies, je vis sans faire de compromis, mon coeur est tout à moi, mon corps n'est pas soumis." The spectacle included 22 musical tableaux in a contemporary style of music. Numerous CDs with songs from the musical were sold.

**207.** ***Little Hercules in 3D*** (US). Directed by Mohamed Khashoggi and Robert Boris, written by R. Boris, prod. by M. Khashoggi, Gary Fears, Marco Garcia, et al. for Little Hercules, Innovate Entertainment, and i.e. Effects; released in 2009.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, paraphrase of a myth; 92 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Zeus forbids a young Hercules from visiting mortals on Earth. Hera helps him to go there. He attends a school in Burbank and does well in a track and field

competition, although the Babylonian Marduk tries to interfere. His father is very proud of him and lets him experience life as a human. A somewhat poor production.
**References**. M. Lindner, 2017, 521.

**208.** ***Medea/Medea*** (RU). Directed, written, composed, and prod. by Natalia Kuznetsova; released in 2009.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, rhythmodrama, adaptation of a play; 66 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Seneca's play. Medea speaks in Georgian, the language of Colchis.
**References**. Winkler, 2017, 82–84.

## 2010

**209.** ***Caprica*** (US, CA). Directed by Michael Nankin, Jonas Pate, et al., created by Remi Aubuchon and Ronald D. Moore, written by R.D. Moore, R. Aubuchon, Jane Espenson, et al., prod. by R.D. Moore, David Eyck, J. Espenson, and Kevin Murphy for Universal Cable Productions; aired on Syfy between January 22 and November 30, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television series, SF space opera; 1 season, 19 episodes, 42 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Ancient and Modern Greek were used as the languages of the Taurons in *Caprica*. Not being focused on survival, it differs from *Battlestar Galactica*; it also is a story set among the rich and famous, like a high-life soap or a Greek tragedy setting. The time of action, 58 years before the destruction of the 12 colonies of the Lords of Kobol, is a natural moment to explore the ethics of artificial intelligence. A spin-off prequel to the 2004–2009 *Battlestar Galactica*, followed by the 2012 *Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome*.

**210.** ***Spartacus: Blood and Sand*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Steven S. DeKnight, Robert Tapert, et al. for Tapert-Donen-Raimi; aired on Starz from January 22 to April 16, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television series; 1st season of a fantasized Roman history, 13 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Comment**. Beginning of the 3-season Starz series on Spartacus, with a 2011 prequel, *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena*.
**References**. Cyrino, 2017, 299–305; Magerstädt, 2019, 249–279; Hobden and Potter, 2020, 29–54; McGeough, 2022, 192, 296–297.

**211.** ***Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). Directed by Chris Columbus, screenplay by Craig Titley, prod. by Karen Rosenfelt, C. Columbus, Michael Barthan, et al. for Fox 2000 Pictures, 1492 Pictures, Sunswept Entmt, and Dune Entmt; released on February 2, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an adaptation of a novel for teens, school story, mythological fantasy adventure, coming of age; 119 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Today's Olympus is on the 600th floor of the Empire State Building in New York. Percy (a 21st-c. version of Perseus) Jackson, an American teenager, is Poseidon's son. He participates in quests (to recover Zeus' thunderbolt and Persephone's 3 pearls), descends to the Underworld to bring back his mother, and participates in various fights on the way. One of the movie's premises is the current interdiction (not fully adhered to) for the major gods to produce more children with mortals. The themes of absent parents and the fate of abandoned children are highlighted in the relations between demigods and their imperfect sires. Based on Rick Riordan's 2005 novel *The Lightning Thief*.
**References**. Blanshard and Shahabudin, (2011) 2013, 144–145; Paul, 2013a, 119–122, 2017, 231–242; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 307–332; MacNeill, 2018; Mik, 2019a, 130–146; Foster, 2020, 181–198.

**212.** **"Cleopatra."** S01E10. ***Mystery Files*** (UK). Directed by Ben Mole, prod. by Richard Sattin, Carl Hall, et al. for Parthenon Entmt; aired on the National Geographic Channel on February 9, 2010.
**Genre & length**. 10th episode of a television series, docudrama, Roman history, Egyptian history; 30 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A docudrama with anonymous actors (Ptolemy XIII and XI, Caesar, and Octavian). How was a young girl able to manipulate 2 powerful Romans? See "Alexander the Great" in the same series (2011). The remaining episodes of season 1 did not deal with Classical Antiquity (Nostradamus, Jack the Ripper, Robin Hood, Princes in the Tower, Rasputin, Billy the Kid, King Arthur, Leonardo da Vinci, Abraham Lincoln, Man in the Iron Mask, the Romanovs).

**213.** ***Clash of the Titans*** (US, UK). Directed by Louis Leterrier, written by Travis Beacham, Phil Hay, and Matt Manfredi, prod. by Basil Iwanyk, Kevin De La Noy, and Richard D. Zanuck for Warner Bros.; released on April 2, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, myth paraphrased; 106 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Another variation on the myth of Perseus. A remake of Ray Harryhausen's 1981 *Clash of the Titans*. Strong similarities, including the Norse mythological sea monster, Kraken. The use of CGI provides an obvious source of difference. The goddess Io, who protects and guides Perseus, is killed by Acrisius but given back a mortal life by the grateful Zeus; she becomes the hero's wife; Andromeda will have to wait her turn in the *Wrath of the Titans*. Medusa is much better looking than in 1981 but becomes a monster when in her petrifying mode. In the remake, the gods do not play chess. Based on Beverely Cross's script for the 1981 *Clash of the Titans*.
**References**. S.J. Green, 2013, 75–85; Paul, 2013a, 118–120; Gloyn, 2013, 64–75; Curley, 2018, 181–183; Tomasso, 2018, 216–218; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 12–143; Maurice, 2019b, 25–26 et passim; Kulpa et al., 2020, 47–82; McGeough, 2022, 212.

**214.** ***Ben-Hur*** (CA, ES, UK, US). Directed by Steve Shill, written by Alan Sharp, prod. by Roger Corbi and Simon Vaughan for Akkord Film Produktion, Drimtim Entmt, FishCorb Films, Muse Entmt Ent., and Zak Productions; first aired on the CBC on April 4, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television mini-series, a biopic of a fictional character, a book adaptation; 2 parts, 90 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A sensational romance set in the 1st c. CE, a Bible soap opera with Jesus Christ, story of going from riches to rags to riches, pirates, slavery, faith, miracles, revenge à la Monte Cristo, crucifixion, redemption, a chariot race. Based on Lew Wallace's 1880 novel *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. 2010 ACTRA Montreal Award for Oustanding Female Performance (Emily VanCamp), 2010 Gemini Award for Best Visual Effects, 2011 CSC Award for Cinematography in TV Drama (Ousama Rawi).
**References**. Solomon, 2016.

**215.** ***Centurion*** (UK, FR). Directed and written by Neil Marshall, prod. by Christian Colson and Robert Jones for Pathe, Celador Film, Canal+, and UK Film Council; released on April 23, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, action thriller, fictionalized Roman history, history of Roman Britain; 97 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 2nd c. CE, the 9th Legion's disappearance in Caledonia. The fort Pinnata Castra is taken by Picts (ruled by King Gorlacon), who kill the entire garrison except for centurion Quintus Dias. The Roman governor sends Legio IX against the Picts, but their local scout leads them into an ambush, and all perish. Dias survives again; he reaches governor Agricola, who tries to have him killed to prevent the divulgation of what happened to Legio IX. He survives the attempt and rejoins his local Briton girlfriend, Arianna, who lives alone and is shunned by her people as a witch. A fast-paced and convoluted story of a manhunt through less-civilized regions of Roman Britain. Plenty of cruelty, brutality, gore, and human perfidy. One of several takes on

the mystery of the lost Legio IX Hispana popularized in the UK by Rosemary Sutcliff's novel; see the 2011 film *The Eagle*.
**References**. M. Lindner, 2015, 159–161; Gardner, 2018, 156–170; Davies, 2019, 129–158; Elliott, 2021; McGeough, 2022, 297–298.

**216.** **"Atlantis: The Evidence."** S14E01. ***Timewatch*** (UK). Directed and prod. by Natalie Maynes, written by Bettany Hughes for BBC Northern Ireland; aired on BBC Two on June 2, 2010.
**Genre & length**. A special 2010 episode of a television documentary series; 60 min.
**References**. Foka, 2018, 187–202.

**217.** **"The Pandorica Opens."** S05E12. **"The Big Bang."** S05E13. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). Directed by Toby Haynes, written by Sydney Moffat, prod. by Piers Wenger, Beth Willis, et al. for BBC Wales; aired on BBC One on June 19 and 26, 2010.
**Genre & length**. 2 consecutive episodes of a television series, SF, time travel, adventure; 1st episode: 49 min., 2nd: 55 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An unknown Vincent van Gogh painting called *The Pandorica Opens* presents a mythical place where the most dangerous creature in the universe is kept locked. The Doctor travels to Roman Britain, where at Stonehenge, they find the Pandorica. Rory, the fiancé of the Doctor's assistant, Amy, is transformed into a Roman centurion. The dangerous creature hidden in the Pandorica is a younger Doctor who then attempts and succeeds in saving the world from collapse by jumping to different periods of time and fixing what needs to be corrected. The name of the painting alludes to the mythological Pandora's Jar, which held all the evils of humanity. The 2011 Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form.
**References**. Klęczar, 2016, 267–285; Gierszewska, 2016, 305–314; Potter, 2018j, 168–186; Scully, 2018.

**218.** ***Klioubatra / Cleopatra*** (EG, SY). Directed by Wael Ramadan, battles directed by Ian Van Temperley, written by Kamar El Zaman Aloush, prod. by Arab Screen, Tarek Siam, Mostafa Shafiq, et al.; released on August 11, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fictionalized history, Ancient Roman/Egyptian history; 1 season, 30 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The 1st half of the series deals with Ptolemy XII's relations with his children, his court, and Rome, as well as with the royal children's conflicts and quarrels about succession. Caesar's meeting with Cleopatra happens only in episode 20, two-thirds into the series. Soon, she is the queen of Egypt and is expecting a child. In the next episode, she arrives in Rome with her son, and Caesar's assassination is being plotted leading up to the Ides of March. Cleopatra and Caesarion flee to Egypt with the help of Mark Antony, who confesses his love but returns to Rome to marry Octavian's sister. Cleopatra focuses on her son's education and later marries Mark Antony. Octavian attacks Egypt and wins the war. The Queen refuses to turn over her husband to Octavian in exchange for her continuing rule. Mark Antony and Cleopatra die in a double suicide, each upon hearing about the other's death. The 11 happy years Cleopatra spent with Mark Antony and their 3 children are barely mentioned. The 1st television series about Cleopatra, produced in Egypt, was broadcast as a Ramadan special in 2010. Zahi Hawass, head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, criticized the series for historical inaccuracies in the plot (especially Cleopatra's affair with Karry), costumes, and sets (AFP, 2010).

**219.** **2010–2012, *Hispania, la leyenda*** (ES). Written by Ramón Campos, Natxo López, Gema R. Neira, et al., directed by Carlos Sedes, prod. by R. Campos, Pedro García Caja, et al. for Bambú Producciones; aired on Antena 3 from October 25, 2010, to June 25, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fictionalized Roman history, Roman Spain; 20 episodes, 60 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. 150 BCE – the 3rd war with Carthage – the pretor, Servius Sulpicius Galba, is given Hispania as his province and continues fighting with Celtiberians. In Lusitania, in the western part of the Iberian Peninsula, he massacres the disarmed locals contrary to the Senate's directives. A shepherd, Viriatus, a survivor from the village of Caura, organizes a guerilla resistance against the Romans. Lusitanian troupes grow and defeat the legions. Viriatus travels to Rome in search of his daughter, Altea, sold as a slave to Galba's son, Fabius. He later rejoins the war in Lusitania and is nicknamed *terror Romanorum* after his many victories over the legions. He perishes murdered in 139 BCE by 3 defectors bribed by the Romans. Based on Diodorus Siculus. Premio Iris (Atv) 2012 Best Actor for Lluís Homar, Spanish Actors Union 2013 TV Male Lead Performance for Roberto Enriquez. A sequel: *Imperium*.
**References**. Cueto Asín and George, 2013, 117–129.

**220.** ***Gods and Monsters: Homer's* Odyssey** (UK). Directed and prod. by John Holdsworth, written and presented by Simon Armitage, exec. prod. by Jonty Claypole for the BBC; aired on BBC Four on November 8, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television film, docudrama; 60 min.
**Classical content**. A British poet follows the travels of Odysseus.
**References**. Hobden, 2022, 135–151.

**221.** ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1*** (UK, US). Directed by David Yates, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Heyman, David Barron, and J.K. Rowling for Warner Bros. Pictures and Heyday Films; released on November 11, 2010.
**Genre & length**. 7th feature film in a cycle of 8, an adaptation of a novel, fantasy, witch show, school story, a hidden world; 146 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An adaptation of the 1st half of J.K. Rowling's 2007 novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie, 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

**222.** ***Greek Myths: Tales of Travelling Heroes*** (UK). Directed by Arif Nurmohamed, written and presented by Robin Lane Fox, prod. by Eamon Hardy and A. Nurmohamed for BBC Four; aired on November 15, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television film, a documentary; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A discussion on the origin of Greek myth with archaeologists Sylvian Fachard, Irene Lemos, Evangelia Tsoukala, and others.

**223.** ***Pompeii: Life & Death in a Roman Town*** (UK). Directed and written by Paul Elston, prod. by Richard Bradley and Cassian Harrison for Lion Television and Brave New Media; aired on BBC Two on December 14, 2010.
**Genre & length**. Television film, a documentary, Roman history; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A discussion between experts, a historian, an archaeologist, and a bone expert about what we can learn about the lives of the victims of Vesuvius' eruption from their remains. Mary Beard (*Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town*, 2008), Cambridge archaeologist Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Mattia Buondonno, a Pompeii guide, and Fabian Kanz, a forensic anthropologist, were all participants in the movie.

**224.** ***Young Alexander the Great*** (EG, UK, GR, US). Directed by Jalal Mehri, written by Dan Renton Skinner, prod. by Jeffrey Taylor, J. Mehri, Sam El-Adl, et al. for El-Adl Film Productions, Film One Media, etc.; released in December 2010.
**Genre & length**. Feature video, Greek history, a fictionalized biopic; 90 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Alexander's childhood in Pella (Macedon), his education with Aristotle, his first romantic relationships (only heterosexual), the taming of his horse, and the first battle at the age of 17, during which he saved his father's life and finally became regent of Macedon. Ancient history for teens, a "by-product" of Oliver Stone's 2004 movie.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 246.

**225.** ***Swimming Pool*** (CZ). Animated and directed by Alexandra Hetmerová, prod. by Bára Příkaská for FAMU Production; released in 2010.
**Genre & length**. An animated short, mythological fantasy; 6:34 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A Centaur and a Mermaid. 2 strangers meet in a pool at night and swim together, performing a romantic dance. The pool guard comes and orders them to leave. When they are revealed as a Centaur and a Mermaid, he runs away screaming. They dive back into the pool. 17 international awards, including the Anima 2011 Award for Best Student Short Film (Brussels) and the 2011 Monstra Festival Best Short Audience Award (Lisboa). Part of an MA assignment at FAMU.
**References**. Zarzycka, 2018b.

**226.** **2010–2011,** ***I'm a Monster*** (IE). Directed by Alistair McIlwain, prod. by Deirdre Barry and Richard Morss for Monster Entmt, Ireland; aired in 2010–2011.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, mythology; 52 episodes, 2 segments of 11 min. per episode. For children aged 4–8.
**Classical content & comments**. Greek mythology. A brief retelling of myths involving monsters. Episodes 6, 13, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 35, 38, 44, and 48 feature mythological monsters: Cyclops, Medusa, Basilisk, Echidna, Furies, Kraken, Minotaur, Centaur, Charybdis, Sirens, and Hydra.
**References**. Bazylczyk, 2018.

## 2011

**227.** ***Spartacus: Gods of the Arena*** (US, NZ, AU). Directed by Jesse Warn (1), Rick Jacobson (2), Michael Hurst (3), Brendan Maher (4), Brent Fletcher (5), Steven DeKnight (6), Sam Raimi, and Joshua Donen, prod. by Starz Media; aired on Starz Network from January 21 to February 25, 2011.
**Genre & length**. A television miniseries, fantasized Roman history; 6 episodes, 52 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A prequel to the Starz *Spartacus* filmed during the interruption caused by the fatal illness of the main actor, Andy Whitfield. The miniseries was inspired by the video-games universe, focused on combat, gore, and sex. Dumont, 2013, 661: "Beaucoup de sang, peu d'Histoire. On est à des années lumière de Kubrick ou Freda." Ahl and Fau, (2011) 2016, 873: "un gigantesque défouloir sous perfusion de testostérone et ne prétend pas être plus."
**References**. In addition to Dumont and Ahl and Fau, Augoustakis and Cyrino, 2017; Magerstädt, 2019, 249–279; Hobden and Potter, 2020, 29–54.

**228.** ***The Eagle / The Eagle of the Ninth*** (UK, US). Directed by Kevin Macdonald, written by Jeremy Brock and Rosemary Sutcliff, prod. by Focus Features, Film4, Toledo Productions, and Twins Financing; released worldwide between February 9 and March 24, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fantasized Roman history, history of Roman Britain, an adaptation of a novel; 114 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The 9th Spanish Legion disappeared in Caledonia in 120 CE along with its Eagle standard. 20 years later, the son of the legion commander, Marcus Flavius Aquila, wants to exonerate his father's name. Eventually, after many complications, he manages to do it. Discharged from the army because of an injury, he goes over the Hadrian Wall

to investigate in the company of his Brigante slave Esca, whom he has saved from death in the arena. The pair travels disguised as an itinerant eye doctor with his assistant, and, finally, they find a Roman soldier living among the Celts. Through him, they come in contact with a tribe of Seal warriors. They find the Eagle, take it from the Seal warriors, and flee South, meeting on the way deserters from the 9th Legion who tell Marcus that his father died a hero. When they return to Roman Britain, Esca regains his freedom, the Eagle is back in Roman hands, and Marcus restores his father's honour. Adaptation of Rosemary Sutcliff's book *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954), or rather a movie remake of the British television series *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1977) for adolescents, based on Sutcliff. Arguably influenced by the HBO series *Rome* in the way it was filmed. Use of Gaelic for increased authenticity. An allusion to the present times: K. Macdonald shows the bravery of a Roman soldier adventuring into a deadly hostile terrain and his struggle with a cruel and completely different foe to an American soldier in Afghanistan.
**References**. Davies, 2019, 129–158; McGeough, 2022, 297–298.

**229.** ***Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa / The Malay Chronicles: Bloodlines / Clash of Empires: The Battle for Asia*** (MY). Directed and co-written by Yusry Abd Halim, co-written by Amir Hafizi, prod. by Norman and Edry Abdul Halim, Johan Lucas, and Amaludin Syukri for KRU Studios; released on March 10, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized history, an action movie – between peplum and kung fu, Roman history; 110 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An instance of Roman presence in the 2nd c. CE, as recounted by the sultan of Kedah, Mudzafar Shah, chronicler of the kingdom. Year 120: Marcus Carpenius, a noble Roman in Goa at a Roman trading post, saves the life of Merong, a Malaysian adventurer, who undertakes to escort him to his Chinese princess bride. The union will reinforce the relationship between China and Rome. On the way to Langkasuka, in Malaysia, Garuda pirates abduct the princess; there is a naval battle won with Chinese and Roman help, also thanks to Merong, who voluntarily sacrifices his life. Based on a 10th–11th-c. Malay chronicle describing the story of King Merong Mahawangsa, an alleged descendant of Alexander the Great and of the Kingdom of Kedah from its foundation to the conversion to Islam. Under Augustus, Romans opened a sea route through the Canal of the Pharaohs to India and China because Parthians had closed caravan trails.

**230.** **"My Heart Will Go On."** S06E17. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created by Eric Kripke, directed by Philip Sgriccia, written by Eric Charmelo and Nicole Snyder, prod. by Todd Aronauer for Kripke Enterprises, Wonderland Sound & Vision, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on April 15, 2011.
**Genre & length**. 121st episode of a fantasy television series of 15 seasons, 327 episodes, usually 38–45 min. per episode. This one runs 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Angels changed the past, averting the sinking of the Titanic. Moira Atropos is furious that destiny can be interfered with and tries to restore the past.

**231.** **2011–2019, *Game of Thrones*** (US). Created and exec. prod. by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, co-prod. by George R.R. Martin, Carolyn Strauss, et al. for HBO Entmt, Television 360, Grok! Television, Generator Entmt, Startling Television, and Bighead Littlehead; aired from April 17, 2011, to May 19, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Television series, an epic fantasy in a medieval palette; 8 seasons, 73 episodes, of various lengths between 50 and 82 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on *A Song of Ice and Fire* by G.R.R. Martin (b. 1948). 5 volumes were published in 1996–2011, with 2 more volumes expected (*The Winds of Winter*, *A Dream of Spring*) but repeatedly delayed. A prequel to *Game of Thrones*, *House of the Dragon*, premiered on HBO on August 21, 2022.
**References**. Gardner, 2022, 152–167; Potter, 2022, 217–232.

**232.** **"Venger César."** E01. "**Rêves d'empire."** E02. ***Le destin de Rome*** (FR). Directed by Fabrice Hourlier, co-written by F. Hourlier and Stéphanie Hauville, prod. by Sylvie Barbe for Arte France, Dockside Production, and Indigènes; aired on May 4, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Docudrama television miniseries, Roman history; 2 parts, 52 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Languages: French, Latin, Modern Greek. The time frame corresponds to the 2nd season of *Rome*. The usage of original languages additionally reinforces the historically accurate scenography, including the visuals of the battles of Philippi and Actium. An excellent ancient history teaching aid. The historical accuracy was made possible by a final budget of €1.3 mln. This was followed by another miniseries by F. Hourlier, S. Hauville, and S. Barbe: *Au nom d'Athènes* in 2012; see below, under the airing date.

**233.** **"The Curse of the Black Spot."** S06E03. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). Directed by Jeremy Webb, prod. by Marcus Wilson; aired on BBC One on May 7, 2011.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a television series, SF, fantasy, time travel; 45 min.
**Classical content**. A doctor from the future disguised as a siren who anaesthetizes sick sailors with music and transfers them to his spaceship sickbay for treatment.

**234.** ***Atlantis: End of a World, Birth of a Legend*** (UK, SA). Directed by Tony Mitchell, written by Rhidian Brook, prod. by BBC Northern Ireland, Moonlighting Atlantis Productions, Erste Weltweit Medien, Discovery Channel, France Télévisions, and ProSieben Entmt; aired on BBC One on May 8, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Television film, docudrama explaining an ancient natural disaster; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A team of historians and archaeologists assisted in producing the story of a massive volcanic eruption on Thera, which could have been the reason for the myth of Atlantis. It is presented as the story of a couple, Yisharu and Pinaruti. Heavily criticized for poor acting and dialogue, as well as the failed attempt to equal the 2003 BBC docudrama *Pompeii: The Last Day*.
**References**. Foka, 2018, 187–202.

**235.** ***Where Do We Go Now?*** / وهلّا لوين؟ (LB, FR, EG, IT). Directed and written by Nadine Labaki, prod. by Anne-Dominique Toussaint for Rotana Studios, Rotana TV, Pathé, and Les Films des Tournelles; released on May 16, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, dramedy, a modern paraphrase of an ancient comedy; 110 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Inspired by the universal theme of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* of women preventing and ending violence through non-violent means and appealing to the basic solidarity of women. In an isolated Lebanese village, Christians and Muslims, a church and a mosque, maintain a delicate balance despite the strife in the country at large. The women try to keep their menfolk unaware of what goes on outside the village. However, when one of them is killed in sectarian violence during a trip to a neighbouring town, violence may erupt despite the efforts of women, the priest, and the imam. The men are fed pastries with hashish, and when they sleep, the women remove their weapons. In the morning, Christian women greet their husbands dressed as Muslims and vice versa. The tension is released, and the men appreciate their women's efforts.
**References**. Maurice, 2017, 212.

**236.** ***Sinbad and the Minotaur*** (AU). Directed by Karl Zwicky, written by Jim Noble, prod. by Grant Bradley, Dana Dubovsky, and Mark L. Lester for Limelight International Media Entmt; released on May 21, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film (B), fantasy; 88 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Sinbad seeks an ivory scroll with the logs of Captain Minos indicating the way to the head of the Colossus of Rhodes, allegedly made out of gold and guarded

by the Minotaur. The sorcerer Al-Jibar, who has the scroll, also kidnaps Princess Tara. Sinbad steals from him both the scroll and Tara. Sinbad, pursued by Al-Jibar, arrives at the island where the head is hidden and finds an underground labyrinth guarded by the Minotaur.

**237.** ***La source des femmes / The Source*** (FR, BE, IT). Directed, written, and prod. by Radu Mihăileanu, co-written by Alain Michel Blanc, co-prod. by Luc Besson for Elzevir Films Oï Oï Oï Productions; released on May 21, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a paraphrase of an ancient comedy; 135 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern, free paraphrase of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The elements of the plot are similar to the 2008 *Absurdistan*. In an isolated North African village, women go on a sex strike against having to fetch water from a faraway well.
**References**. Maurice, 2017, 212.

**238.** **"Alexander the Great."** S02E04. ***Mystery Files*** (UK). Directed by Ben Mole, prod. by Joy Galane, Carl Hall, B. Mole, and Richard Sattin for Parthenon Entmt; aired on the National Geographic Channel on June 7–8, 2011.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a television series, docudrama, Greek history; 23 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Docudrama with anonymous actors playing Ptolemy, Diocletian, and Zenobia Septimia of Palmyre. Inquiry into the tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria, its disappearance or later destruction. One of the historians taking part in the episode was Andrew Michael Chugg (see Chugg, 2020, 65–74). The remaining episodes of season 2 did not deal with Classical Antiquity: the birth of Christ, Hitler, Marco Polo, Taj Mahal, Isaac Newton, Saladin, Captain Kidd, Pope Joan, Sitting Bull, the Virgin Queen, Zorro, Lawrence of Arabia.

**239.** ***Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*** (UK, US). Directed by David Yates, written by Steve Kloves, prod. by David Heyman, David Barron, and J.K. Rowling for Warner Bros. Pictures and Heyday Films; released on July 7, 2011.
**Genre & length**. 8th feature film in a cycle, an adaptation of a novel, fantasy, witch show, school story, hidden world; 130 min.
**Comment**. An adaptation of the 2nd half of J.K. Rowling's 2007 novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.
**References**. Hofmann, 2015, 163–175; Shafer, 2016; Alberti and Miller, 2018; Nisa and Sutrisno, 2018; Goldie, 2019; Cuny-Le Callet, 2022, 407–420.

**240.** ***Morituris*** (IT). Directed, written, and prod. by Raffaele Picchio, co-written by Gianluigi Perrone and Tiziano Martella, co-prod. by Vincenzo Manzo, G. Perrone, et al. for Fingerchop Movie Production; released on July 30, 2011; DVD released in 2013.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a fantasy/horror take on Roman history; 85 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Spartacus' army of gladiators, crucified by the Romans, comes to life in contemporary Rome in reaction to 2 women being gang-raped and beaten. As a result, almost all of the characters end up crucified. The critics called it a gorefest, but the creators tried to explain: "The tagline of the film is 'evil prevails.' So happens. We didn't mean to make a horror-comedy but a surreal metaphor about the realistic process of evil actions. When a nuclear bomb falls, everybody dies" (Miska, 2011). Initially inspired by the 1976 gang rape, torture, and murder – the Circeo massacre – which occurred in Circeo, 100 km south of Rome. It was the topic of a *poliziotesco* movie directed by Sergio Greco and Massimo Felizatti, *I violenti di Roma bene* (1976). *Morituris* was banned in Italy until 2013.

**241.** ***L'inconsolable*** (FR, CH). Directed by Jean-Marie Straub, written by Cesare Pavese, prod. for Les Fées Productions and Belva GmbH; released on August 5, 2011.
**Genre & length**. A short, philosophy/mythology; 15 min.

**Classical content & comments**. A continuation of reflections on the myth of Orpheus based on Cesare Pavese's *Dialoghi*. See also *Il ginocchio di Artemide / Le genou d'Artémide* in 2008.
**References**. Winkler, 2020b, 258.

**242.** ***The Legend of Awesomest Maximus / 301: The Legend of Awesomest Maximus Wallace Leonidas*** (US). Directed by Jeff Kanew, prod. by National Lampoon, Farah Films, Vision Entmt, and Velvet Steamroller; released on August 5, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a parody of peplum, Greek history; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Foldingus, the King of Troy, commanded obese and clueless General Superplus Maximus to push back Greeks below the walls of the city but allowed the entry of a giant wooden phallus constructed by the enemies – a vulgar and silly parody of peplum, especially targeting *300* by Zack Snyder.

**243.** ***Box Office 3D – Il film dei film / The Filmest of Films*** (IT). Directed, written, and prod. by Ezio Greggio, co-written by Fausto Brizzi, Marco Martani, Rudy De Luca, and Steve Haberman, for Mendips Productions, Mondo Home Entmt, Nimar Studios, and Talents Factory; released on August 30, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a parody of popular blockbusters; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A parody of box-office hits, including *Gladiator*, as segment 2. Other spoofs: *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Godfather*, *Twilight*, *Fast & Furious*, *Grease*, James Bond films, *Das Boot*, *Zorro*, *Avatar*, *Harry Potter* films, and *The Lord of the Rings*.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 541.

**244.** **"The God Complex."** S06E11. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). Directed by Nick Hurran, written by Toby Whithouse and Steven Moffat, prod. by S. Moffat, Piers Wenger, Beth Willis, et al. for BBC Cymru Wales; aired on BBC One, September 17, 2011.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a television series, time travel, fantasy, SF; 49 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The Doctor and his companions wander into a Labyrinth-like hotel, where a Minotaur is trapped. He feeds on people's strong convictions, and the lack of such beliefs starves him.
**References**. Potter, 2018j, 168–186.

**245.** **"Finding Atlantis."** S01E22. ***Expedition Week*** (CA, US). Directed and co-written by Graeme Ball, co-written by Charles E. Anderson, prod. by Kathryn Liptrott-Galligan and Javier Quintana for Associated Producers of Canada and National Geographic Canada; aired on the National Geographic Channel on November 9, 2011.
**Genre & length**. 22nd episode of a television documentary series; 60 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The documentary discusses Prof. Richard Freund's (Hartford University, CT) contention that Atlantis was located in Spain's Donaña National Park, north of Cadiz, and was destroyed by a tsunami. This claim has been dismissed as a misinterpretation of partial research results.

**246.** ***Immortals*** (US). Written by Vlas and Charley Parlapanides, directed by Tarsem Singh, prod. by Gianni Nunnari, Marc Canton, and Ryan Kavanaugh for Virgin Produced, Rogue, and Atmosphere Entmt; released on November 11, 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, mythological fantasy; 110 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A free paraphrase of known mythological motifs and heroes mashed with SF (e.g., the Epirus bow as an ultimate weapon of mass destruction). Titans are let out of Tartarus and want to destroy the Olympians. Details of the convoluted plot are difficult to grasp, which does not seem to matter anyway. Roger Ebert (2011), who already called T. Singh's

2006 film, *The Fall*, "the extravagant visual orgy, a free-fall from reality into uncharted realms," saw *Immortals* as its unexpected "twin."
**References**. Tomasso, 2015b, 154–155; Toscano, 2018, 113–115; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 157–180.

**247.** ***Psyche perspicua pulchritudine* / *Amour et Psyche*** (CH). Directed, written, and prod. by Claude Aubert, Lausanne, VD; released in 2011.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, presentation of a myth; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A retelling of the myth of the beautiful Psyche and the problems caused by Venus' jealousy. An amateur movie shot near Lausanne, Switzerland.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 136.

## 2012

**248.** ***Mia und der Minotaurus*** (DE). Directed and written by Florian Schnell, co-written by Jan Galli, prod. by Friedemann Goez and Christian Hergenröther for Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg; released on January 1, 2012.
**Genre & length**. A short feature film, elements of anime, mythological fantasy; 33 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An 8-year-old girl and her teenage brother mourn their father and go through the drama of addiction. Greek myths allow the girl to understand the situation of her addicted brother and the toxic role of his dealer. Ultimately, she is able to help her family recover. It won the Children Jury Golden Sparrow Award at the 2012 German Children's-Film and TV Festival in Erfurt.
**References**. Marciniak, 2020b, 25–26.

**249.** ***Thermae Romae*** (JP). Directed by Hideki Takeuchi, written by Mari Yamazaki and Shôgo Mutô, prod. by Fuji TV; aired from January 12 to January 26, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Anime television series, based on a time-travelling historical manga comedy; 6 episodes, 24 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. In 128 CE, a Roman designer and architect, Lucius Modestus, stressed by a commission loss, goes to a bathhouse and from there time-travels to 21st-c. Japan, where he visits modern bathhouses; after his return to Ancient Rome, he applies their solutions to Roman *thermae*. M. Yamazaki claims that the 2 cultures in the world "that have loved baths the most: [are] the Japanese and the Romans!" (Loo, 2011). Based on a 2009 manga by Yamazaki.
**References**. Kovacs and Marshall, 2016, xxvi–xxviii; Wang, 2018; Kawana, 2018, 259–286; Chang, 2023.

**250.** **"Time after Time."** S07E12. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created and written by Eric Kripke, directed by Philip Sgriccia, co-written by Robbie Thompson, prod. by Todd Aronauer for Kripke Enterprises, Wonderland Sound & Vision, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on January 13, 2012.
**Genre & length**. 138th episode of a television series of 15 seasons, fantasy with supernatural and mythological elements; 43 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Chronos, the god of time, is the monster of the week and is killed with a 1,000-year-old olive tree branch cut by the Vestals and covered in blood.

**251.** **"The Slice Girls."** S07E13. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created by Eric Kripke, directed by Jerry Wanek, written by Eugenie Ross-Leming and Brad Buckner, prod. by Todd Aronauer for Kripke Enterprises, Wonderland Sound & Vision, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on February 3, 2012.
**Genre & length**. 139th episode of a 15-season series, supernatural-mythological fantasy, horror; 42 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Amazons, daughters of Ares and Harmonia, made a deal with Harmonia and became monsters. Their gestation length was 36 hours, and their offspring matured almost immediately. As a right of passage, these new Amazons had to kill their fathers. Dean has a daughter with the Amazon Lydia. She is prevented from killing her father by Sam, who shoots her.

**252.** ***Cesare deve morire / Caesar Must Die*** (IT). Directed and written by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, prod. by Grazia Volpi for Rai Cinema, La Talee, and Stemal Entmt; released at the Berlin International Film Festival on February 19, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, docudrama; 76 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Inmates of the Rebibbia Penitentiary in Rome rehearse and stage Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in 2011. Using actual inmates as actors adds an emotional dimension to the movie. It is filmed mainly in black and white. The film highlights the humanity of prisoners serving long sentences for serious crimes. Golden Bear for the Best Film at the 2012 Berlin Festival.

**253.** ***Titans of Newark*** (US). Directed, written, and exec. prod. by Michael J. Marino, prod. by Raisa Machado for Chapman University (grad. diploma); released on March 12, 2012.
**Genre & length**. A short, comedy, mythologically inspired fantasy; 25 min.
**Classical content & comments**. On Mount Olympus, the Greek gods wonder whether their power over humans has waned. Zeus bets with Poseidon that he can still rule humans by selecting a man at random and making him a test subject. M.J. Marino won an award for Best Humor Film at the San Diego Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival in 2013.

**254.** ***The Hunger Games*** (US). Directed and co-written by Gary Ross, co-written by Suzanne Collins and Billy Ray, prod. by Nina Jacobson and Jon Kilik for Lionsgate and Color Force; released on March 12, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, dystopic SF, action movie, adaptation of a novel, the first film in a cycle of 4; 142 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Panem is a state composed of 12 districts. As an annual reminder of a failed uprising, each district must send 1 girl and 1 boy, aged 12–18, as a tribute to compete in games to the death of all but 1 survivor. Similar to the Athenian tribute paid to Minos, the King of Crete, the story we know from the myth of Theseus. 1st film in the 2012–2015 cycle under the same title. The movie was followed by *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013), *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay. Part 1* (2014), and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay. Part 2* (2015). See under years of release. Based on S. Collins's 2008 trilogy, *The Hunger Games*. The film cycle received 51 nominations and won 28 awards.
**References**. Henthorne, 2012; Pharr and Clark, 2012; Franko, 2013, 24–26; Harrisson, 2014, 321–338; Makins, 2014, 339–357, 2015, 280–306; Kaczmarek, 2016, 77–88; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 279–306; Janka and Stierstorfer, 2022.

**255.** ***Spartacus: Vengeance*** (US). Directed by Michael Hurst, written by Steven S. DeKnight, prod. by S.S. DeKnight, Sam Raimi, Rob Tapert, et al.; aired on Starz Network from January 27 to March 30, 2012.
**Genre & length**. 2nd season of a television series, fictionalized Roman history; 3 seasons, 10 episodes, 52 min. each.
**Comment**. See under the first part of the series aired in 2010 and its 2011 prequel, *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena*.
**References**. Magerstädt, 2019, 249–279.

**256.** ***Wrath of the Titans*** (US, ES). Story by Greg Berlanti, David Leslie Johnson, and Dan Mazeau, directed by Jonathan Liebesman, written by D. Mazeau and D.L. Johnson, based on characters by Beverley Cross, prod. by Basil Iwanyk and Polly Cohen Johnson for Legendary Pictures, Thunder Road Pictures, Cott Productions, and Furia de Titanes II A.I.E.; released on March 30, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fast action, mythological fantasy, a sequel; 99 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 10 years after the events of the 2010 *Clash of the Titans* and after his wife Io's death, Perseus lives in a fishing village along with their son Helios. Perseus, riding Pegasus, attempts to save Zeus, who is incarcerated in Tartarus. He asks Queen Andromeda for assistance, as well as Agenor, Poseidon's son, and Hephaestus. He fights the Cyclopes, is almost lost in the Minotaur's Labyrinth, attacks, and vanquishes Cronus with the spear of Triam (Zeus' thunderbolt combined with Poseidon's trident and Hades' pitchfork) he got in the previous movie. He then marries Andromeda, as he was supposed to 10 years earlier. *Wrath of the Titans* is a sequel to the 2010 film, *Clash of the Titans*.
**References**. Gloyn, 2013, 69–70; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 143–155; Maurice, 2019b, 62, 157; McGeough, 2022, 210.

**257.** ***Prometheus*** (UK, US). Directed by Ridley Scott, written by John Spaihts and Damon Lindelof, prod. by R. Scott, David Giler, and Walter Hill for Dune Entmt, Scott Free Productions, and Brandywine Productions; released on April 11, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, SF horror, action; 124 min.
**Classical content & comments**. R. Scott explains his choice of title: "It's the story of creation; the gods and the man who stood against them" (Bamigboye, 2011). According to the designers, Neville Page and Carlos Huante, the appearance of the Engineers, the race responsible for the existence of humans, was influenced by classical statues of Graeco-Roman gods, Joseph William Turner and William Blake, the Statue of Liberty, Michelangelo's David, and Elvis Presley. A prequel to R. Scott's 1979 movie *Alien*, which became a franchise producing films (8 films as of 2022) and 1 television series (*Alien*) announced to premiere in 2023 but delayed until 2025.
**References**. Nero, 2021; Ruiz, 2023.

**258.** ***Thermae Romae*** (JP). Created by Mari Yamazaki, directed by Hideki Takeuchi, written by Shôgo Mutô, prod. by Kaoru Matsuzaki, Miyoshi Kikuchi, and Naoto Inaba for Fuji TV; aired on April 28, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Television film, an adaptation of the anime television series; 108 min.
**Classical content & comments**. In 128 CE, a Roman designer and architect, Lucius Modestus, stressed by the loss of his job, goes to a bathhouse and from there time-travels to 21st-c. Japan, where he visits modern bathhouses and applies their solutions to Roman *thermae* once he is back in Ancient Rome. Live-action film adaptation of anime series *Thermae Romae*, and prequel to *Thermae Romae II*, produced in 2014.
**References**. Kovacs and Marshall, 2016, xxvi–xxviii; Cyrino, 2022b, 82–97.

**259.** **"Dipper vs. Manliness."** S01E06. ***Gravity Falls*** (US). Created by Alex Hirsch, creative director: Michael Rianda (season 1), prod. by Disney Television Animation; aired on Disney Channel on July 20, 2012.
**Genre & length**. 6th episode of an animated television series; 23:01 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A boy, Dipper, is not strong, which, for him, means that he is not a real man. He meets a Minotaur (called Manotaur) in the forest, who takes pity on him and helps him with his *mansformation* by passing trials like the other Manotaurs. His last task is to cut off one of the heads of Multi-Bear, which he almost does, but when the Multi-Bear asks to listen to a song before he dies, the 2 young people become friends. Dipper understands that

physical strength is not required in a man but rather inner strength to be who you are. An example of classical reception helping to change a monster into a positive creature.
**References**. Mik, 2019b.

**260.** ***Ruby Sparks*** (US). Directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, written by Zoe Kazan, prod. by Albert Berger and Ron Yerxa for Bona Fide Productions; released by Fox Searchlight Pictures on July 25, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, romantic comedy, fantasy, paraphrase of a myth; 104 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern paraphrase of the myths of Pygmalion and Narcissus. A female character, Ruby, created by a young writer, comes alive. At first, the writer gives her traits he considers desirable, adding them to the novel, but eventually, he releases her from his control. After she is gone, he writes a book entitled *The Girlfriend*. Later, he meets Ruby in the park. She is reading his novel. Although she has no memory of him, she enjoys the book.
**References**. Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 361–386; Winkler, 2020b, 178.

**261.** ***Argo*** (US). Directed, prod., and starred by Ben Affleck, written by Chris Terrio, co-prod. by George Clooney and Grant Heslov for GK Films, Smokehouse Productions, and Warner Bros. Pictures; released on August 31, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, spy story, action, recent history; 120 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A movie about the so-called Canadian Caper (1979–1980). The US-Canadian covert operation to extract 6 American diplomats from Iran used the cover of an alleged movie production – *Argo* – with the fleeing diplomats pretending to be the film crew. Based on Tony Mendez's *The Master of Disguise* (1999) and Joshuah Bearman's 2007 *Wire* article "The Great Escape: How the CIA Used a Fake Sci-Fi Flick to Rescue Americans from Tehran." The film was, in fact, previously planned as a SF/fantasy production by Barry Geller based on Roger Zelazny's 1967 novel *Lord of Light* but had to be abandoned because of financial irregularities. The title was changed for the operation to reinforce the idea of a mythological fantasy. The film won 3 Oscars in 2012: Best Film, Best Adapted Screen Play, and Best Film Editing.

**262.** ***Imperium, poder de vida y muerte*** (ES). Directed by Carlos Sedes and Jorge Torregrossa, prod. by Bambú Producciones and Antena 3; aired between September 5 and October 11, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Television series, the Iberian Peninsula in Roman times, Roman history; 1 season, 6 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Sued by Cato the Elder for having massacred the Lusitanian population, Servius Sulpicius Galba (Roman emperor in 68–69 CE) was supported by various corrupted senators. Quintus Servilius Caepio, a Roman praetor, ordered him to eliminate continuing resistance in the Celtiberian town of Numantia. He was defeated, his legions crashed, Roman support ended, and his family was dishonoured. He also lost his wife, Claudia, and their son, who both lived with his enemy, Quintus Servilius. Galba also had to face Cora de Capua, the daughter of senator Tiberius, jailed for having denounced the corruption of the oligarchs; she wanted revenge for her father but also the death of her mother and brother. In the end, Galba's son Fabius died, and his brother, Octavius, betrayed him by becoming a supporter of Quintus Servilius. It was a well-produced series, a sequel to the 2010 *Hispania, la leyenda*. Low ratings caused a reduction in the number of episodes from the planned 13 to only 6.

**263.** ***The Ship of Theseus*** (IN). Directed and written by Anand Gandhi, prod. by Sohum Shah for Recyclewala Films; released on September 6, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, contemporary drama about an ancient paradox applied to today's ethics; 143 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The title alludes to a famous paradox first related by Plutarch in the *Lives* (*Theseus*, 23.1): Theseus' voyage to Crete and back to Athens; if all the parts of his

decaying ship rot and are gradually replaced, when will the ship cease to be Theseus' ship? The last scene alludes to the Platonic cave – the ethics of organ transplants and similar procedures. The film won a couple of prizes for best film (Transilvania International Film Festival Award and 61st National Film Award) and other awards.
**References**. Toscano, 2018, 115–124.

**264.** **"What's Up, Tiger Mommy?"** S08E02. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created by Eric Kripke, written by Andrew Dabb and Daniel Loflin, directed by John F. Showalter, prod. by Todd Aronauer et al. for Wonderland Sound & Vision and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on October 10, 2012.
**Genre & length**. 151st episode of a 15-season series, SF fantasy, horror, supernatural and mythological elements; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The monster of the week is Plutus, the god of greed, who is auctioning a tablet with "the word of god," which can close the entry to Hell and keep all the demons inside. His assistant, Beau, an unknown minor deity, stabs him with a stake covered in blood and kills him. However, Sam kills Beau soon after with Thor's hammer, Mjölnir.

**265.** ***Astérix et Obélix. Au service de Sa Majesté / Asterix and Obelix: God Save Britannia*** (FR, ES, IT, HU). Co-written by Laurand Tirard and Grégoire Vigneron, directed by L. Tirard, prod. by Olivier Delbosc et Marc Missonnier for Fidélité Films; released on October 17, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, live action, comedy, Roman history, based on a comic book; 110 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A fictionalized, satirical history of Caesar's conquest of Britain. Adaptation of Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny's comic books: *Asterix in Britain* (1965) and *Asterix and the Normans* (1966).

**266.** ***Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome*** (US). Directed by Jonas Pete, written by Michael Taylor, David Eyck, Bradley Thompson, prod. by D. Eyck et al. for Canal+, David Eyck Productions, and Universal Cable Productions; aired November 9, 2012 (online); aired on SyFy on February 10, 2013.
**Genre & length**. Aired either as a web series of 10 short episodes or as 1 television film, military SF, space opera; 131 min.
**Classical content & comments**. In the 10th year of the 1st Cylon War, William Adama is assigned as a pilot to a freighter. The ship is transporting a scientist, Dr. Becca Kelly, but her destination changes en route, and they must fly into Cylon-controlled space. Dr. Kelly's secret mission is to upload a virus to the Cylon communication array, but wanting to end the war, she sends information about the fleet to the Cylons. She is shot by a member of the crew, and when the Cylons arrive, one of them breaks her neck. The ship returns to *Galactica*, where Adama learns that Commander Nash expected Kelly's betrayal and counted on the Cylons' absence to attack their defenceless bases. A prequel to the remake of the 1978 series *Battlestar Galactica*.
**References**. Bataille, 2014, 465–482; Garvey, 2014, 215–228; L'Allier, 2014, 285–297; Tomasso, 2015a, 243–259.

**267.** ***Au nom d'Athènes: 1. Vaincre à Marathon 2. Divine Salamine*** (FR). Directed by Fabrice Hourlier, prod. by Sylvie Barbe and Stéphanie Hauville for Docside Productions and Indigènes Productions; aired on Arte on November 24, 2012.
**Genre & length**. Educational docudrama miniseries, Greek history; 51 min. and 53 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Following F. Hourlier's *Le destin de Rome* (2011), 2 episodes of Greek history, Marathon and Salamina, were recreated with Greek and Persian actors speaking Ancient Greek and Persian (with subtitles) and appearances of a few experts – an educational movie, very well designed and produced.

**268.** ***Mitos & leyendas*** (ES). Directed by Eulogio Romero, created, written, and prod. by Nestor Hernandez and Eulogio Romero for Koncept Company; aired on RTVE in 2012.

**Genre & length**. Television series, a retelling of myths; 1 season of 14 episodes, 25 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. 1. "El destino." 2. "Edipo." 3. "Prometeo." 4. "Eneas." 5. "Perseo." 6. "Orfeo." 7. "Medea." 8. "Dedalo." 9. "El Triunfo de Hércules." 10. "Heracles." 11. "Electra." 12. "Ulises." 13. "Aquiles y la Guerra de Troya." 14. "Dioses y héroes." Excessive violence, gore, and brutality. Certainly not suitable for a young audience.

## 2013

**269.** ***Spartacus: War of the Damned*** (US). Directed by Michael Hurst, prod. by Rob Tapert and Chloe Smith; aired on Starz Network from January 25 to April 12, 2013.
**Genre & length**. 3rd season of a television series, fictionalized Roman history; 10 episodes, 52 min. each.
**Comment**. See listings for season 1, 2, and the 2011 prequel, *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena*.
**References**. Magerstädt 2019, 249–279, comparatively analyses and discusses the entire series as 1 of 8 case studies.

**270.** **"Remember the Titans."** S08E16. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created by Eric Kripke, directed by Steve Boyum, written by Daniel Loflin, prod. by Todd Aronauer for Wonderland Sound & Vision and Warner Bros. Films; aired on The CW on February 27, 2013.
**Genre & length**. 165th episode of a 15-season series, SF fantasy, supernatural-mythological elements, horror; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Prometheus is the first benevolent god in the series. Artemis, like Atropos, is one of the few not killed at the end of the episode. Cursed by Zeus, Prometheus dies every day and resurrects; the same curse afflicts his son from a union with a mortal woman. Sam and Dean try to summon Zeus to force him to lift the curse and set a Zeus' Trap according to the ritual used by an ancient hunter, Drakopoulos, involving the symbol of infinity and a stake carved from a tree struck by lightning. Artemis' arrows and her blade could also kill Zeus. In the end, Artemis, outraged by Zeus torturing Prometheus, shot an arrow at him, but Zeus pushes Prometheus in front to take the arrow instead. Prometheus forced the arrow through his chest and into Zeus. Both died. Zeus' death lifted the curse, ending the threat to Oliver.

**271.** **2013–2022,** ***Plebs*** (UK). Written by Sam Leifer and Tom Basden, directed by S. Leifer, prod. by T. Basden, Caroline Leddy, S. Leifer, and Teddy Leifer for Rise Films; aired on ITV2 from March 2, 2013 to November 11, 2019, a special aired on ITVX on December 8, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a sitcom; 5 seasons, 38 episodes, 25 min. each + 1 special of 85 min. Season 1: 2013, season 2: 2014, season 3: 2016, season 4: 2018, season 5: 2019, special: 2022.
**Classical content & comments**. Everyday life of young people from the provinces who came to the capital, i.e., Ancient Rome; themes recall contemporary issues. It is very amusing but occasionally excessively vulgar and gross. The title reflects the social status of the characters – no mythological inspiration. In the style of Talbot Roswell's *Up Pompeii!*, aired in 1969–1970, and Rory McGrath and Jimmy Mulville's *Chelmsford 123* (1988–1990). *Plebs* won the 2013 Best New Comedy Program at the British Comedy Awards, the 2014 Royal Television Society Award for Best Scripted Comedy, and was nominated for several other awards. The special (feature-length) *Plebs: Soldiers of Rome* functions as the show's finale and tells the story of the main characters joining the army hoping for various benefits but instead serving without distinction in far-away unsettled lands.

**272.** **2013–2017,** ***Orphan Black*** (CA, UK). Directed by John Fawcett, written by Graeme Manson, prod. by G. Manson, David Fortier, and Ivan Schneeberg for Temple Street Productions, BBC America, and Bell Media; aired on Space and BBC America between March 30, 2013, and August 12, 2017.

**Genre & length**. Television series, SF, thriller; 5 seasons, 50 episodes, 43 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Mythical allusions: Project Castor, Project Leda, Swan Man, Helena. Over 60 awards, 23 for the actress Tatyana Maslany, who plays the roles of all the clones.

**273.** **"The Deep End."** S01E15. ***Gravity Falls*** (US). Created by Alex Hirsch, creative director: Michael Rianda (season 1), prod. by Disney Animation Television; aired on Disney Channel on May 11, 2013.
**Genre & length**. 15th episode of an animated television series; 22:06 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Mermando the Merman, a descendant of Sirens – half human (Mexican), half Siren – was caught by a fisherman and almost sold to a bait shop. He was saved and lay in a public swimming pool. Mabel, a girl who falls in love with Mermando, helps him return to the ocean. He sings and plays the guitar and has no bad intentions towards people.
**References**. Mik, 2019c.

**274.** ***Odysseus. La vengeance d'Ulysse*** (FR, DE, IT, PT). Created and written by Frédéric Azémar, directed by Stéphane Giusti, co-written by Frédéric Krivine and Olivier Kohn, prod. by Christophe Valette, Stéphane Drouet, and Massimiliano La Pegna for GMT Productions, Makingprod, Sunflag, Moviheart, Arte F, RAI Fiction, RTP Radio and Portuguese Television, and TV5 Monde ; aired on Arte from June 13 to July 11, 2013.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a free retelling of the myth; 1 season, 12 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The budget for the series was €14 mln, equivalent to the cost of the pilot of the series *Rome*. Myth of Odysseus, as seen by Ithacans waiting 10 years for him during the Trojan War and 10 years of his return journey. Penelope is pressured to marry one of the suitors, who is to replace Odysseus on the throne. A shipwrecked Odysseus, accompanied by a young secretary named Homer, who writes down all the events, arrives secretly on the island. Telemachus and Nestor, trying to stall the suitors, spread a rumour that Odysseus has returned. The most aggressive suitor, Antinoos, usurps power. Odysseus' family is at the point of being executed when Menelaus, King of Sparta, arrives to save the queen and to bring back order and justice under Sparta's protection. Odysseus reveals himself, and suitors who refuse to swear allegiance to him are eliminated. To guarantee an alliance with the Pheacians, Odysseus wants Telemachus to marry Nausicaa, even though she loves the slave Clea. An unhinged Odysseus begins to see traitors everywhere. When Menelaus' fleet becomes a threat to Ithaca, Telemachus arrests Odysseus and takes command of the army. Odysseus comes to his senses and faces Menelaus in single combat in which they both die – the Spartans retreat. Telemachus becomes king and marries Clea. After the initial 5 slow-paced episodes, the action leads rapidly to the final climax, the dying Odysseus tells Telemachus how much he loves and admires him. Characters are well developed, and the plot is psychologically convincing even if mythical elements do not follow the sources; it is logically constructed and well told. Universal themes, e.g., absolute power vs democracy, lust for power, and relations between father and son.
**References**. Dumont, 2013, 656–657; Winkler, 2017, 361–363.

**275.** ***Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*** (US). Directed by Thor Freudenthal, written by Marc Guggenheim, prod. by Karen Rosenfelt and Michael Barnathan for Sunswept Entmt, 1492 Pictures, and TSG Entmt; released on August 7, 2013.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fantasy, adventure for teens; 106 min.
**Comment**. Adaptation of Rick Riordan's 2006 novel, *The Sea of Monsters*.
**References**. Paul, 2017, 231–242; MacNeill, 2019; Foster, 2020,181–198.

**276.** ***Hercules: The Brave and the Bold*** (US). Directed and written by David A. Malone, co-written by Tim Holmes, prod. by D.A. Malone, Denita Malone, and Bernard Malone for 3 Kings Productions and 5 Star Productions; released on August 13, 2013.

**Genre & length**. Feature film, revised mythology, comedy; 75 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Hades and Ares organized a failed attempt to attack Olympus and its main defender, Hercules, and take power from Zeus. Low production and performance values, lack of professionalism.

**277. "Troy Story."** S04E24. ***Phineas and Ferb*** (US). Directed by Robert F. Hughes, prod. for Disney Television Animation; aired on September 20, 2013.
**Genre & length**. An episode of an animated television series; episodes are 12 min. long.
**Classical content**. *Iliad*, Trojan War, Agamemnon, Helen, Paris, Trojan Horse.
**References**. Mik, 2020b.

**278. 2013–2015, *Atlantis*** (UK). Created and written by Johnny Capps, Julian Murphy, and Howard Overman, directed by Justin Molotnikov (8 episodes), Declan O'Dwyer (6), Alice Troughton (5), Lawrence Gough (3), Jeremy Webb (2), J. Murphy (1), prod. by Urban Myth Films, co-prod. with BBC America for BBC Cymru Wales; aired from September 28, 2013, to May 16, 2015; DVD released on May 25, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a mash-up of modified versions of the myths of Atlantis, Minotaur, Theseus, Medusa, and others; 2 seasons, 25 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Jason, a 21st-c. young man, looks for his missing father. He is magically transported to Crete/Atlantis during Minos' reign, and there plays the role of the mythological Theseus. After volunteering to die for a friend, he kills the Minotaur, who is revealed to have been an enchanted man. The romance between Jason and Ariadne leads to a conflict with Pasiphae, Ariadne's stepmother, who wants to marry her to her nephew. She is slowly poisoning Minos and wants to take power for herself. New versions of many myths evolve around Jason, in addition to the Cretan myth. Maenads, Medusa, baby Oedipus, Circe: love "potion" – song of the Sirens, Circe forces Jason to promise to kill Pasiphae; Furies, Pandora's Box – the girl Medusa becomes a Gorgon, Hecate – eating food sacrificed to her transforms Jason into a wolfish hound during the night, Pasiphae condemns Ariadne to death. Season 2: Minos is dead, Ariadne is queen but must fight Pasiphae. Palladium, the magical protection of Atlantis, is stolen. Pasiphae resurrects an army of zombies. The Gray Sisters tell Jason that only the blood of a living Gorgon can cure mortally wounded Ariadne. Pasiphae attempts to stop Jason and Ariadne's wedding; she catches Jason and will execute him for allegedly killing the Oracle, whom Medusa petrified. Hercules is jailed, too, but Ariadne helps both escape. The gods refuse to confirm Pasiphae as queen; she tortures Ariadne, hoping she will declare her the ruler. Medusa feels guilty and again opens Pandora's Box, turning into a Gorgon. Jason enters Atlantis carrying her cut-off head. He learns that Pasiphae is his mother; at the urging of his friends, he seeks his father, Aeson, in the leper colony. He is attacked by soldiers and miraculously saved by Medea. Back in Atlantis, he is a prisoner again, but Pasiphae, warned by Cassandra that the gods are against his execution, orders him to fight in the arena from where he is saved by his father, who, as a leper, removes bodies of fallen gladiators. Jason returns to save people oppressed by Pasiphae's rule – the only way is to kill the queen. Ariadne and Jason regain power. Medea returns to Colchis and sends a magical call to Jason – what saves him is the BBC's decision to axe the series.
**References**. Potter, 2018a, 125–140; Olechowska, 2020b.

**279. 2013–2014, *Witches of East End*** (US). Developed by Maggie Friedman, written by M. Friedman, Josh Reims, et al., directed by Mark Waters, Allan Arkush, et al., prod. by M. Friedman, Erwin Stoff, A. Arkush, et al. for 3 Arts Entmt, Curly-Girly Productions, and Fox 21; aired on Lifetime between October 6, 2013, and October 5, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, witch show, a hidden world; 2 seasons, 23 episodes, 44 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. Latin spells, Latin grimoire. S01E06: "Potentia Noctis." Based on Melissa de la Cruz's 2011 novel, *Witches of East End*.
**References**. Olechowska, 2016, 407–408.

**280.** ***The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*** (US). Directed by Francis Lawrence, screenplay by Simon Beaufoy and Michael deBruyn [Michael Arndt], prod. by Nina Jacobson and Jon Kilik for Lionsgate and Color Force; released on November 11, 2013.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, dystopian SF adventure; 146 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Classically sounding names: Plutarch Heavensbee, Romulus Thread, Claudius Templesmith, Brutus, Flavius, Octavia, Venia, Seneca Crane, Cinna, Caesar Flickerman, Messala, Castor and Pollux, Fulvia, Crassus Xanthos Snow, Coriolanus Snow, Darius. Based on Suzanne Collins's novel *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. 2nd movie in the cycle.
**References**. Harrisson, 2014, 321–338; Makins, 2014, 339–357, 2015, 280–306.

**281.** ***Gods Behaving Badly*** (US). Directed and prod. by Marc Turtletaub, written by Marie Phillips and Josh Goldfaden, co-prod. by Peter Saraf and Caroline Jaczbo for Big Beach Films and Red Hour Films; released on November 13, 2013.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comic mythological fantasy; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Marie Phillips's 2007 novel under the same title. Greek gods (Zeus, Hades, Demeter, Persephone, Aphrodite, Artemis, Apollo, Ares, Hermes, Dionysus, Eros), having lost all their believers, live in disgrace in New York. Apollo falls in love with their human cleaning lady, Alice, who already has a boyfriend, Neil, and all sorts of unfortunate events happen modelled on a version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Apollo tricks Zeus into killing Alice with his thunderbolt, and Neil embarks on a katabasis to bring her back to the world of the living.

**282.** ***Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). Directed by Aleksandra Hetmerová, prod. by Bára Příkaská for FAMU Productions; released in 2013.
**Genre & length**. Animated short, a revised version of ancient monsters; 11:36 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Cerberus, Chimera, Cyclops, Harpies, Medusa, Minotaur, Satyrs, Sirens, and Sphinx are integrated into everyday modern life.
**References**. Zarzycka, 2018a.

**283.** ***Artémis, cœur d'artichaut*** (FR). Written, directed, and prod. by Hubert Viel, music by H. Viel, for Artisans du films (II) and Cinéma 93; released in 2013; DVD released by Potemkine Films on April 1, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, fantasy adventure; 64 min.
**Classical content & comments**. It is an original story of the goddess Artemis, who appears in contemporary Caen as a student of literature. She is bored until she meets the nymph Kalie Steaux (*sic*!), and they become friends. It was lightly inspired by Callimachos' *Hymn to Artemis* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She maintains her divine qualities and powers, guards her solitude, and defends herself from unwanted male attention. She defends Kalie from 2 policemen. In black and white, influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague. The film received the 1st prize at the Festival du Moyen Métrage in Brive-la-Gaillarde. H. Viel, the writer, director, and producer, admitted to being influenced by Jean-Luc Godard, Éric Rohmer, Maurice Pialat, and Philippe Garrel, as well as by the Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki (Gautreau, 2014).

## 2014

**284.** ***The Legend of Hercules*** (US). Directed by Renny Harlin, written by Sean Hood and Daniel Giat, prod. by Danny Lerner et al. for Millennium Films, Nu Boyana Film Studios, and GEM Entmt KFT; released on January 10, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, mythological fantasy; 99 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The life of Hercules from birth to a happy end with Hebe, a Cretan princess, as his wife. His older brother, Iphicles, and Amphitryon, his alleged mortal father, try to kill him many times. After several dramatic twists in the plot, Hercules kills Amphitryon avenging his murdered mother, Alcmene, and marries Hebe; they have a child and live happily ever after.
**References**. Blanshard, 2018, 28–42; Curley, 2018, 185–187; Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell, 2020, 545–566; Gordon, 2020, 591–612; Janka, 2021, 241–243; McGeough, 2022, 223.

**285.** ***Pompeii*** (US, DE, CA). Directed and prod. by Paul W.S. Anderson, written by Janet Scott Batchler, Lee Batchler, Michael Robert Johnson, prod. for TreeStar Pictures, FilmDistrict, Constantin Film, etc.; released on February 18, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, historical fiction with a strong romantic element, disaster/action movie, Roman history; 102 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on the account of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE preserved in 2 of Pliny's letters to Tacitus, on archaeological excavations, and aerial photography. The story begins in Roman Britain and then moves to Rome and finally to Naples. The couple of protagonists, Cassia and Milo, were inspired by the famous cast of the so-called twin lovers from Pompeii. In 2017, archaeologists discovered that the 2 victims of the eruption were most probably both men. Pliny the Younger, in his letter to Tacitus (*Epist*. 6.16.11), describes the death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, who instead of fleeing from the vicinity of Mount Vesuvius, decided to join his friend at Stabiae and to the last moment refused to believe that a major eruption was indeed underway and instructed the ship's captain: "Fortune favours the bold; try to reach Pomponianus." Fortune did not favour him.
**References**. Hobden and Potter, 2020, 29–54.

**286.** ***300: Rise of an Empire*** (US). Directed by Noam Murro, written by Zack Snyder and Kurt Johnstad, prod. by Marty P. Ewing, Frank Miller, Z. Snyder, et al. for Warner Bros., Legendary Entmt, Cruel & Unusual Films, Atmosphere Entmt MM, Hollywood Gang Productions, and Nimar Studios; released on March 4, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fictionalized Greek history; 102 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 10 years after Darius died, ending the first Persian invasion of Greece, his son Xerxes attacked on land through Thermopylae and by sea under the command of a Greek commander, Artemisia. Themistocles asks Leonidas, King of Sparta, to fight the Persians on land, and he commands the Athenian navy against Artemisia, who admires his performance and proposes an alliance, which he refuses. Xerxes fights the defenders of Thermopylae for 3 days, kills them all (including Leonidas), and marches on Athens. Themistocles, on the other hand, wins the Battle of Salamina, and his alliance with the Spartans results in a definitive Persian retreat. Based on Frank Miller's graphic novel *Xerxes: The Fall of the House of Darius and the Rise of Alexander*, which was, in fact, published only in 2018. It serves as a prequel and a sequel to *300*.
**References**. Llewelyn-Jones, 2018, 191–205; McGeough, 2022, 278.

**287.** **"Blade Runners."** S09E16. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created by Eric Kripke, directed by Serge Ladouceur, written by Brad Buckner and Eugenie Ross-Leming, prod. by Todd Aronauer for Kripke Enterprises, Wonderland Sound & Vision, and Warner Bros. Films; aired on The CW on March 18, 2014.

**Genre & length**. 188th episode of a 15-season series, SF fantasy, horror, supernatural and mythological elements; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Medusa can only be killed by decapitation with a silver blade, and the Winchester brothers try to find such a blade. Peter Paul Rubens's painting of Medusa's severed head (Viennese Kunsthistorische Museum) is shown in the episode.

**288.** ***Thermae Romae II*** (JP). Created by Mari Yamazaki, directed by Hideki Takeuchi, written by Hiroshi Hashimoto, prod. by Miyoshi Kikuchi, Dominique Combe, Antonello Rubino, et al. for Fuji Television Network, Toei Company, Dentsu, Kadokawa, and Tea Time Film; released on April 26, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, time travel, SF, historical comedy; 112 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A sequel to the 2012 *Thermae Romae* live-action adaptation of M. Yamazaki's popular comic. 2nd part of the adventures of a 2nd-c. CE Roman designer and architect, Lucius Modestus, who time-travels to 21st-c. Japan and its bathhouses.
**References**. On the manga model, see Kovacs and Marshall, 2016, xxvi–xxviii.

**289.** ***Hercules Reborn*** (US). Directed by Nick Lyon, written by Jim Hemphill and Jose Montesinos, prod. by David Rimawi, David Michael Latt, et al. for The Asylum direct to DVD; released on July 15, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, action/adventure, mythological fantasy; 95 min.
**References**. Blanshard, 2018, 28–42; Alvares and Salzman-Mitchell, 2020, 545–566; Gordon, 2020, 591–612.

**290.** ***Boudicca: Warrior Queen of Ancient Britain*** (UK). Directed by Liam Dale, prod. by Wolfgang Fetten and Michelle Justice; released in July 2014.
**Genre & length**. Documentary, historical reconstruction; 86 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Celtic Queen of the Iceni heading the revolt against Rome – the woman behind the legend.

**291.** ***Hercules*** (US). Directed and prod. by Brett Ratner, written by Ryan J. Condal and Evan Spiliotopoulos, co-prod. by Barry Levine and Beau Flynn for Paramount Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Flynn Picture Company, Radical Studios, and Film 44; released on July 25, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, action movie, mythological fantasy; 98 min.
**Comment**. Based on the 2008 graphic novel *The Thracian Wars* by Steve Moore.
**References**. Blanshard, 2018, 28–42; Chiu, 2018, 60–73; Curley, 2018, 185–187; Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 103–128; Gordon, 2020, 591–612; Cyrino, 2020, 650–655; Janka, 2021, 241–243; McGeough, 2022, 223–224.

**292.** ***Amori e metamorphosi*** (IT, FR). Directed by Yanira Yariv and Natalie Dana, written by Ovid and Yanira Yariv, prod. by Marco Alessi and Vanessa Ramonbordes for Dugong Production and Acis Productions; released at the Locarno Film Festival on August 13, 2014; released in France on November 30, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an original view of myths; 88 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and performed by transgender people discussing their experiences.
**References**. Winkler, 2020b, 304.

**293.** ***Métamorphoses*** (FR). Directed and written by Christophe Honoré, prod. by Philippe Martin for France 3 Cinéma, Les Films Pelléas, and Le Pacte; released on August 26, 2014, at the Venice International Film Festival.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, an adaptation of an ancient narrative poem, mythological fantasy; 102 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* championed by Europe, a contemporary school girl who meets a young Jupiter. You must believe in myths or suffer gods' anger, explains Bacchus. Orpheus collects a group of ardent supporters and dies a tragic death. Europe witnesses all that happens.
**References**. Winkler, 2020b, 127–128, 164–165, 378–379.

**294. 2014–2018, *Star Wars: Rebels*** (US). Created by Simon Kinberg, Dave Filoni, Carrie Beck, prod. by D. Filoni et al. for Lucasfilm, distributed by Disney and ABC Television; aired from October 3, 2014, to March 5, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, 3D animation; 74 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Obvious classical influences in settings: buildings, military designs. Value of ancient heritage, classical names, Greek alphabet, slavery. Awards: Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films, USA (2017 and 2018), Best Animated Series or Film on Television.
**References**. Nevin, 2018b.

**295. "Fan Fiction."** S10E05. ***Supernatural*** (US). Directed by Phil Sgriccia, written by Robbie Thompson, prod. by Todd Aronauer for Kripke Enterprises and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on November 11, 2014.
**Genre & length**. 200th episode of a television series composed of 15 seasons, fantasy, horror, supernatural and mythological elements; 43 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The monster of the week is the Muse Calliope, called here the Goddess of Epic Poetry. She tries to interfere with the performance of a musical fan-fiction version of the show. Sam kills her with a Blessed Wooden Stake, preventing her from devouring the players and the author.

**296. "Nosh of the Titans"** in **"Calm Down and Think, Elmo."** S45E10. ***Sesame Street*** (US). Prod. by Sesame Workshop; released on November 17, 2014. Available on the *Sesame Street* YouTube channel.
**Genre & length**. 3rd segment of an episode of an animated television series, 26 min. This segment (5:17) is a spoof of a mythological feature film.
**Classical content & comments**. Cookie's Crumby Pictures presents "Nosh of the Titans," a spoof of *Clash of the Titans*. Cookie Monster as Furzius travels with Pegafish to meet his father, Zeus, at Mount Olympus Diner. A cow puppet, Moo-dusa, blocks his way and challenges him to guess which of 3 lids hides food for her snakes. Moo-dusa has the power to petrify, temporarily, whoever looks her in the eye. Furzius succeeds in answering her question after several attempts, thanks to being able to focus and remember. Moo-dusa petrifies herself by looking at her reflection in one of the shiny lids and leaves the road to Olympus open for Furzius, who joins Zeus at the diner. Zeus then commands: "Release the Cracker!" And a gigantic cookie appears. My thanks to Katarzyna Marciniak for showing me this episode.

**297. 2014–2015, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay. Parts 1–2*** (US). Directed by Francis Lawrence, screenplay by Danny Strong and Peter Craig, Part 2 adapted by Suzanne Collins, prod. by Nina Jacobson and Jon Kilik for Lionsgate, Studio Babelsberg AG, and Color Force; Part 1 was released on November 21, 2014, Part 2 on November 20, 2015.
**Genre & length**. A 2-part feature movie, dystopian SF adventure; Part 1: 123 min., Part 2: 137 min.
**Comment**. Based on Suzanne Collins's novel *Mockingjay*, the last in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. A 2-part sequel and finale in a movie cycle.
**References**. Makins, 2015, 280–306; Janka and Stierstorfer, 2022.

**298.** **"Atonement."** S04E10. ***Revenge*** (US). Created by Mike Kelley, directed by John Terlesky, written by Ted Sullivan, prod. by Mike Kelley, Sunil Nayar, et al. for Page Fright Productions, Temple Hill Productions, and ABC Studios; aired on ABC Television on December 7, 2014.
**Genre & length**. 76th episode of a television series, action, thriller; 4 seasons, 89 episodes, 43 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Momus, a personified god of blame, disliked and criticized everybody and was expelled from Olympus. Conrad: "So, do you remember the fable of Momus?" Daniel: "Yeah, the god of writers and poets. He criticized his fellow gods for their shortcomings." C.: "And how was he rewarded for his honesty?" D.: "They banished him from Olympus." The plot of the series is modelled on Alexandre Dumas's *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* (1844). The series aired from September 21, 2011, to May 10, 2015.
**References**. Bakogianni, 2017, 484–485: "contemporary mirror of the ancient Electra"; Curley, 2019.

**299.** **2014–2018, *The Librarians*** (US). Developed by John Rogers, exec. prod. by Dean Devlin, Mark Roskin, Noah Wyle, and J. Rogers for Kung Fu Monkey Productions and Electric Entmt; aired on TNT from December 7, 2014, to February 7, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy; 4 seasons, 42 episodes, 42–58 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Ancient mythological objects stored in the Library: the Golden Fleece, Medusa's head, King Midas, Pan's pipes, Pandora's Box, Poseidon's trident, Hades' cap of invisibility, Theseus' Labyrinth thread, Apple of Discord, Sirens, Cupid's bow, Aphrodite's magic girdle, the Trojan Horse, Aesop's lyre, the lantern of Diogenes of Sinope, and Homer's sandal. In antiquity, the entrance to the Library was located in the Library of Alexandria. A spin-off from David Titcher's movie franchise *The Librarian* (2004–2008).

**300.** ***Ex machina*** (US). Directed and written by Alex Garland, prod. by Andrew Macdonald and Allon Reich for Film and DNA Films; released on December 16, 2014.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, SF, paraphrase of a myth; 108 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A programmer who wants to save a female AI from the ill-intentioned project owner. She kills the owner and traps the programmer in the lab. She escapes outside and disappears.
**References**. Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 336.

**301.** ***Ронда-капрычыёза*** **[Rondo-Capriccioso]** (BY). Directed and written by Igor Volchek, music by Andrei Ledenev, prod. by Belarusfilm; released in 2014.
**Genre & length**. Animated short, paraphrase of a myth; 13 min.
**Classical content**. A paraphrase of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus placed in a rural setting in Belarus.
**References**. Paulouskaya, 2018.

## 2015

**302.** ***Athena: The Goddess of War*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Patrick Desmarattes, co-written by Kevin Jordan for Maiden Comics Studio; released on Maiden Network on January 1, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, mythological fantasy; 86 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Hades plans to forcibly integrate humans into his army to fight against Zeus. Zeus blocks the passage from the Underworld to protect the mortals, but Persephone has already been sent to find the key to open the passage and let Hades' Harbinger of Death attack. Athena, the Goddess of War, and her team of human heroes save the world.
**References**. Maurice, 2019b, 107–108.

**303.** **"Poor Unfortunate Soul."** S04E16. ***Once Upon a Time*** (US). Directed by Steve Pearlman, written by Andrew Chambliss and Dana Horgan, prod. by Adam Horovitz and Kathy Gilroy for ABC Studios and Kotsis/Horovitz; aired on ABC on March 22, 2015.
**Genre & length**. 81st episode of a 7-season television series, fantasy, fairy tale; 44 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Poseidon, the father of Ursula, the mermaid, lost his wife; a pirate killed her. To get revenge, he orders his daughter to lure pirate ships to their death. She lets the *Jolly Roger* escape and is banished by her father. She steals a magical bracelet and leaves the sea. Later, her father asks Hook to take away her voice, forcing her to remain at sea. Furious at Poseidon, Ursula becomes a sea witch more powerful than him. Based on several Disney films.

**304.** **2015–2018, *For the Love of Zeus*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Arlene Humm for Backlot Studios Production Company; aired from February 1, 2015, to June 7, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Television series, mythological fantasy, comedy; 3 seasons, 5 episodes, length unknown.
**Classical content & comments**. There are 2 series by A. Humm, one in 3 seasons and 5 episodes from 2015 to 2018 and one in a single season composed of 4 episodes aired during December 2018. There is also a film labelled as a pilot to the 2018 series entitled *For the Love of Persephone*, but it seems to be simply the 1st episode. I was unable to view any of the episodes. The general impression is of a semi-amateur, community production. The premise seems to be the return of the Olympic gods after a 3,000-year absence.
**References**. Maurice, 2019b, 73.

**305.** ***Jupiter Ascending*** (US, AU). Directed, written, and prod. by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, co-prod. by Grant Hill for Village Roadshow Pictures, RatPac-Dune Entmt, and Anarchos Productions; released on February 6, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, space opera, SF; 127 min.
**Classical content & comments**. According to Lana Wachowski, the main inspirations were the *Odyssey* and *The Wizard of Oz*. The plot of the film reverses the classical theme of the hero into a new form of female hero for the space-opera genre. Golden Raspberry Award for the Worst Supporting Actor for Eddie Redmayne.

**306.** ***Olympus*** (UK, CA). Created and written by Nick Willing, directed by N. Willing (4 episodes), Martin Wood (3), Amanda Tapping (4), Andy Mikita (2), prod. by N. Willing, Andrew Boswell, and Grant Rosenberg for Reunion Pictures, Great Point Media, and LipSync Production; aired from April 2, 2015, to July 2, 2015; DVD released on October 20, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a retelling of myths; 1 season, 13 episodes, 46 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A mash-up of Greek myths: Aegeus, Ariadne, Chronos, Circe, Cyclops, Daedalus, Dionysus, Gaia, Hades, Medea, and Minos. Mythical creatures, Nymphs, Olympian gods, Oracle of Gaia, oracles, Pandora, Pandora's tomb, Ring of the Magi, Zeus. The protagonist is called Hero, even though he is, in fact, Theseus.
**References**. Winkler, 2017, 92–94, 98; Olechowska, 2018b; Magerstädt, 2019, 287–288; Magerstädt, 2022, 119–134.

**307.** ***Lost Girl*** (CA). S05E09–16. Created by Michelle Lovretta, directed by Gail Harvey, Paolo Barzman, Bruce McDonald, et al., written by Sandra Chwiałkowska, Alexandra Zarowny, Michael Grassi, et al., prod. by Jay Firestone for Prodigy Pictures and Shaw Media; aired on Showcase from August 21 to October 25, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Episodes 69–77 of a television series, supernatural fantasy; 5 seasons, 77 episodes, 44 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. A hidden world of supernatural creatures: Fae, dark and light, werewolves, Walkyries, Ancient Fae = Greek gods called Zee, Heratio, Hades, Iris/Nyx. The series ran from 2010 to 2015.
**References**. Tresca, 2014, 64–81; Stuller, 2014, 31–44.

**308.** ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). S03E01–18. Created and prod. by Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, Len Wiseman, et al., directed by Peter Weller, Russel Fine, Kate Davies, et al. for Fox; aired from October 1, 2015, to April 8, 2016.
**Genre & length**. Season 3 of a television series, fantasized American history, supernatural; 4 seasons, 62 episodes, 41–43 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Pandora and her Box – called *píthos* by the god (the Hidden One), who was her lover and gave it to her along with divine powers – appear in the serial during the entire season 3 as the main evil force. Allegedly, at the beginning of time, the gods collaborated to collect all the powerful evils in a Box, and the Hidden One was tasked with guarding it. Pandora, originally a mortal, did not fully trust the Hidden One and gave the mortals a talisman against potential abuses of the god's divine power. However, they used it to put to sleep and imprison the Hidden One. Pandora was trying to revive her lover and succeeded after 4,000 years by using the evils in her Box. However, she soon realized that he cared only about his power. She then allied herself with humans to bring him down, but when she recovered divine powers, she became indifferent and even hostile to humans. In a combination of mythology and American folklore, she put the essence of the Headless Horseman from Sleepy Hollow into the Box, and then she used the Box to call up monsters to do her bidding. Ichabod Crane, an apprentice to Benjamin Franklin, who awoke from a supernatural sleep after 200 years, was a "witness of revelation" and, with another 21st-c. witness, coordinated the contemporary fight against evil.

**309.** **2015–2019, *The Deep*** (AU, CA). Created by Tom Taylor and James Brouwer, directed by Trent Carlson, prod. by Avrill Stark, Asaph Fipke, and Anne Loi for DHX Studios Vancouver, Technicolor S.A., and A Stark Production Company; aired on 7TWO and WildBrain TV between December 1, 2015, and March 15, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series; 3 seasons, 52 episodes, 22 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. A quest for a lost civilization, Atlantis? Mermaids, Minotaur, Nereus, Proteus, Sirens. An Australian-Canadian series based on comic books by T. Taylor, ill. by J. Brouwer, *The Deep: Here Be Dragons* and *The Deep: The Vanishing Island*.
**References**. Hale, 2018.

**310.** ***Chi-Raq*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Spike Lee, co-written by Kein Willmott, prod. by Amazon Studios and 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks; released on December 4, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, musical dramedy, a modern paraphrase of an ancient comedy; 127 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A modern version of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* set in South Chicago. The Spartans, led by the rapper Demetrius Dupree Chi-Raq, fight with the rival gang of Trojans led by Cyclops. The violence intensifies, resulting in the death of a child. Chi-Raq's girlfriend, Lysistrata, organizes women on both sides, convincing them to withhold sex until the violence stops: "No peace, no pussy." After 3 months of conflict, first the Trojans and then the Spartans lay down their guns. The film won the 2015 AAFCA Awards for Best Independent Film and Best Actress and the 2016 Black Reel Award for Best Actress.
**References**. Maurice, 2017, 212–213.

**311.** ***Auf den Spuren von Odysseus*** (CH). Written and presented by Nina Mavis Brunner, prod. by Corinne Eisenring for Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen; aired on December 16–18, 2015.
**Genre & length**. Television series, documentary; 6 episodes, 52 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. N.M. Brunner follows Odysseus' travels and visits Turkey, Tunisia, Italy, Spain, Gibraltar, and Greece, talking to people she meets on the way. The French version was produced in 2017 for Radio Télévision Suisse and was rebroadcast on TV5 Monde.
**References**. Hobden, 2022, 135–151.

**312. 2015, *Последний человек Атлантиды* / 2018, *Last Prince of Atlantis*** (RU). Directed and written by Vladlen Barbe, co-written and prod. by Igor Lapatonok, co-prod. by Jane Kapriss, Igor Kobzev, et al. for Grading Dimension Pictures; released in Russia in 2015, in the US on February 8, 2018. Available on YouTube.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a 3D animated fantasy with a mythological element, a love story; 84 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on the 1925 novel *Последний человек Атлантиды* [The Last Atlantean] by the Russian SF writer Aleksandr Belyaev (1884–1942). A contemporary story of the brutal treatment of an old pearl fisher by a powerful man who controls the police as well as organized crime. The pearl fisher is forced to sell his boat, and his daughter Adrianna is being courted aggressively by the tycoon. She is saved by a prince of Atlantis, who revives after thousands of years spent in a stone sarcophagus and promptly falls in love with her. The film was brought to my attention by Hanna Paulouskaya.

**313. 2015–2020, *The Magicians*** (US). Created by Sera Gamble and John McNamara, written by Chris Fisher, James L. Conway, et al., prod. by Mitch Engel for MacNamara Moving Company, Man Sewing Dinosaur, Groundswell Productions, Universal Cable Productions, and Universal Content Productions; aired on Syfy from December 16, 2015, to April 1, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Television series, an adaptation of a trilogy, fantasy with mythological elements, witch show, school story, hidden world; 6 seasons, 65 episodes, 41–52 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Lev Grossman's 2009 novel *The Magicians* and its 2 sequels, *The Magician King* (2011) and *The Magician's Land* (2014). Enrolled in a school of magic, a group of students undergo rigourous and dangerous training and realize that the land of magic they read about in their children's book exists in reality and can be entered at great risk. In season 5, Hades leaves the Underworld, grieving for Persephone. He says that if gods die, which is against their immortal nature, they have nowhere to go. Deicide as a theme. The show was nominated for 8 awards, but only Ava Telek won the Joy Award in Vancouver in 2017 for Best Recurring Principal or Guest Star Actress in a TV Series Age 10–12 Years.

## 2016

**314. 2016–2019, *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments*** (US). Developed by Ed Dexter, Todd Slavkin, and Darren Swimmer, prod. by T. Slavkin, D. Swimmer, et al. for Constantin Film; aired on Freeform from January 12, 2016, to May 6, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Television series, an adaptation of a cycle of novels, fantasy, witch show, hidden world; 3 seasons, 55 episodes, 42 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Next to the world of humans (the "mundanes"), there is a hidden world. The Nephilim – creatures with angelic blood; a biblical hell – Lilith; a hierarchy of devils; the *downworlders*: vampires, werewolves, and warlocks. Latin spells and phrases. Daedalus' Cretan loom. Lycaon and his daughter Psophis. Adaptation of a 6-book cycle of novels, *Shadowhunters*, published between 2007 and 2014 by Cassandra Clare (pseud. of Judith A. Lewis née Rumelt).

**315. 2016–2022, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Developed by Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim, Andrew Kreisberg, and Phil Klemmer, prod. by Berlanti Productions, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; aired from January 21, 2016, to March 2, 2022.

**Genre & length**. Television series, DC Comics, SF time travel; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A mixture of fairy tales and mythology straight from Disney movies. 3 episodes directly inspired by antiquity are listed under the year of broadcast (S03E01, S03E06, S03E18), as well as episodes S04E06, S04E14, S05E11, S06E01; inspirations also in S05E09. The series began in 2016 as a spin-off from *Arrow* and *The Flash*; like the 2 parent shows, *Legends of Tomorrow* is based on characters from DC Comics.
**References**. Olechowska, forthcoming a.

**316.** ***Hail, Caesar!*** (UK, US, JP). Directed, written, and prod. by Ethan and Joel Coen, co-prod. by Tim Beavan and Eric Fellner for Universal Pictures, Working Title Films, Dentsu, and Mike Zoss Productions; released on February 1, 2016.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy; 101 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A satirical look at the 1951 Hollywood studio system during the filming of one of the Roman epic extravaganzas of the period, hinting at Mervyn LeRoy's *Quo vadis* and Stanley Kubrick's 1960 *Spartacus*. The subtitle to *Hail, Caesar!*, the movie being filmed in the movie, is *A Tale of the Christ*, the actual subtitle to Lew Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur*.
**References**. Winkler, 2020a, 243–244; McGeough, 2022, 148–149.

**317.** ***Once Upon a Time*** (US). S05E12–22. Created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz; directed by Ralph Hemecker (E12), Billy Gierhart (E13), Alrick Riley (E14), Eagle Egilsson (E15), Steve Pearlman (E16), Romeo Tirone (E17, E19, E22), Eriq Lasalle (E18), Ron Underwood (E20), Craig Powell (E21); written by E. Kitsis and A. Horowitz (E12), Dana Horgan and Andrew Chambliss (E13), Jane Espenson (E14, E20), Jerome Schwartz and David H. Goodman (E15), Tze Chun and D. Horgan (E16), J. Schwartz (E17, E21), A. Chambliss and Bill Wolkoff (E18), D.H. Goodman and Brigitte Hales (E19), D.H. Goodman and A. Chambliss (E22); prod. by Kitsis/Horowitz for ABC Studios; aired from March 6 to May 15, 2016.
**Genre & length**. A 10-episode story arc in a television series, fantasy mixed with fairy tales and mythologies; 7 seasons, 155 episodes, 43 min. each. The entire series of 7 seasons aired from 2011 to 2018. DVD of season 5 was released: in Region 1 on August 16, 2016, and in Region 2 on October 18, 2016.
**Classical content & comments**. Intertextuality with Disney animations, including the 10 episodes with classical inspirations in season 5. Features characters and concepts such as Hercules, Hades, the Underworld, Cerberus, Orpheus and Eurydice, and deicide. The show concluded on May 18, 2018.
**References**. For the series from 2011 to 2012, see Hay and Baxter, 2014, 316–335; Schwabe, 2014, 294–315; Skowera, 2014, 168–188. For later seasons, see Olkusz, 2017, 81–113; Maurice, 2019b, 59–60; Olechowska, 2020c, 2021, 593–610; Bartsevich, 2022, 271–287.

**318.** ***Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*** (US). Directed by Zack Snyder, written by Chris Terrio and David S. Goyer, prod. by Charles Roven and Deborah Snyder for Warner Bros. Pictures, Rat-Pac-Dune Entmt, DC Entmt, Atlas Entmt, and Cruel and Unusual Films; released on March 19, 2016.
**Genre & length**. Superhero feature film, action, adventure, paraphrase of comic books; 152 min.
**Classical content**. Greek mythology, Amazons, Icarus, Prometheus, Zeus. Based on DC Comics characters.
**References**. Potter, 2019a.

**319.** ***Magi: Adventure of Sinbad*** / マギ シンドバッドの冒険 (JP). Directed by Shinichi Masaki, written by Taku Kishimoto and Yoshikazu Miyao, prod. by Lay-Duce Productions and Netflix; aired on BS-Tokyo Broadcasting System from April 23 to July 2, 2016.

**Genre & length**. Anime television series, a manga adaptation, action/adventure; 1 season of 13 episodes, 25 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Episodes 7 ("Sinbad the Merchant") and 8 ("Household Vessel") are part of the Reim Empire story arc. The empire strongly resembles the Roman Empire: the name is reminiscent of Rome; in the capital, there is an amphitheatre, a colosseum, and bathhouses; a laurel wreath is the emblem of the city. Additionally, the favourite entertainment is provided by gladiatorial games, and, like any empire, Reim relies on its army. Based on the 2013 manga by Shinobu Ohtaka and Yoshifumi Ohtera. Blu-ray and DVD were released on August 24, 2016. A sequel to *Magi: The Labyrinth of Magic*. Available on Netflix.
**References**. Gordon, 2018a.

**320.** ***Ben-Hur*** (US). Directed by Timur Bekmambetov, written by Keith Clarke and John Ridley, prod. by Sean Daniel, Joni Levin, and Duncan Henderson for Sean Daniel Company and Lightworkers Media; released on August 19, 2016; McGeough, 2022, 324–325.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, adaptation of a sensational historical romance novel; 125 min.
**Comment**. Based on Lew Wallace's 1880 novel *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. A box-office failure.
**References**. Solomon, 2016; McGeough, 2022, 324–325.

**321.** ***Prisoner Zero*** (AU). Created by Jason Haigh-Ellery and Austen Atkinson, directed by Sean Zwan, Christian Barkel, Josh Campbell, et al., written by Gary Russell, Scott Handcock, David Breen, et al., prod. by G. Russel and J. Campbell for Planet 55 Studios Telegael Teoranta Bramall Productions; aired on ABC 3 from September 19 to October 14, 2016.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, SF, time travel, alternative timelines, action/adventure; 1 season of 26 episodes, average length 24 min., for children aged 8–12.
**Classical content & comments**. Planet Arcadia, planet Tartarus (episode 18), space station Ouroboros. S05E01 of *Doctor Who*, "The Eleventh Hour," featured an extremely dangerous multiform shapeshifter called Prisoner Zero. G. Russell, one of the writers and producers of *Prisoner Zero*, has been involved in the *Doctor Who* show for a long time.
**References**. Gordon, 2018b.

**322.** ***Dieux et héros de la mythologie grecque***. S01E01–20. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR). Written and presented by François Busnel, co-written by Gilbert Sinoué, prod. by Sylvain Bergère, Gaëtan Chabanol, et al. for Arte France and Rosebud Production; aired on Arte from October 1 to December 3, 2016.
**Genre & length**. 1st season of a documentary television series, a retelling of myths; 20 episodes, 26 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on ancient sources, such as Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Diodorus Siculus; illustrated by famous art and animated silhouettes of figures from Greek vases. 1. "Zeus ou la conquête du pouvoir." 2. "Les amours de Zeus." 3. "Prométhée, le révolté de l'Olympe." 4. "Hadès, le roi malgré lui." 5. "Athéna, la sagesse armée." 6. "Apollon, l'ombre et la lumière." 7. "Aphrodite, sous la loi du désir." 8. "Dionysos, l'étranger dans la ville." 9. "Hermès, le messager indéchiffrable." 10. "Tartare, les damnés de la terre." 11. "Psyché, la belle et la bête." 12. "Persée, la mort dans les yeux." 13. "Orphée, l'amour impossible." 14. "Médée, l'amour assassin." 15. "Bellérophon, l'homme qui voulait être dieu." 16. "Thésée, les ravages de l'oubli." 17. "Dédale et Icare, le rêve éclaté." 18. "Héraclès, l'homme qui devint dieu." 19. "Œdipe, le déchiffreur d'énigmes." 20. "Antigone, celle qui a dit non."

**323.** **2016–2019, *Roman Empire*** (US, AU). Directed by Richard Lopez and John Ealer (seasons 2 and 3), written by Jeremiah Murphy, Peter Sherman, et al., prod. by Stephen David Entmt and Netflix; aired on Netflix, from November 11, 2016, to April 5, 2019.

**Genre & length**. Television anthology series, docudrama, fictionalized Roman history; 3 seasons, 15 episodes, 6 in season 1, 5 in season 2, and 4 in season 3; 48 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. Rome, in 3 different periods of history; episodes are not presented in chronological order. Season 1, *Commodus: Reign of Blood*, deals with the reign of Commodus (180–192 CE), son and successor of the philosopher emperor, Marcus Aurelius – the period covered in the 2000 *Gladiator*. Season 2, *Julius Caesar: Master of Rome*, is a biopic of Caesar (100–44 BCE), and season 3, *Caligula: The Mad Emperor*, tells the story of Caligula's reign (37–41 CE). The following scholars and writers appear in the series: Tom Holland, author of *Rubicon: The Last Years of the Roman Republic*; Mike Duncan, author of *The Storm before the Storm*; David Levene, Professor of Classics, New York University; Anthony Everitt, author of *The Rise of Rome*; Kathryn Tempest, Senior Lecturer in Classics, University of Roehampton; Barry Strauss, author of *The Death of Caesar*; Amanda Ruggeri, BBC Editor and Journalist; Adrian Murdoch, Fellow, Royal Historical Society; Corey Brennan, Associate Professor of Classics, Rutgers University; Caitlin Gillespie, Lecturer, Columbia University; Aaron Irvin, historian, Murray State University.

**324.** ***Soutaisei Riron: Cerberus*** (JP). Directed by Tagashi Yamaguchi, music by Soutaisei Riron; released in 2016.
**Genre & length**. Black-and-white animated short music video; 4 min. Available on YouTube.
**Classical content & comments**. The title is spelled in Greek characters: Κέρβερος. A cute 3-headed dog dances on the screen to a joyful tune. It plays with a ball, walks, runs, and at a later point runs so fast that its heads fall off, one by one, but they seem to grow back. No other characters. Some barely sketched scenery.

## 2017

**325.** **"Child's Play."** S04E09. ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). Directed by Michael Goi, written by Francisca X. Hu, prod. by Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, Len Wiseman, et al. for Mark Goffman Productions, Sketch Films, 20th Century Fox Television, etc.; aired on Fox on March 3, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 58th episode of a television series, supernatural, a fantasized version of American history; 4 seasons, 62 episodes, 41–43 min. each. This episode runs for 43 min. Available on Disney+.
**Classical content & comments**. An imaginary friend from Molly's childhood comes to life as a golem and tries to kill people he perceives as Molly's enemies. Jenny performs a ritual to vanquish the golem invoking in (Ancient?) Greek the Muses Clio, Euterpe, and Thalia. The ritual succeeds, but the incantations are garbled, except for the 3 names.

**326.** ***Before I Fall*** (US). Directed by Ry Russo-Young, written by Maria Maggenti and Gina Prince-Bythewood, prod. by Matthew Kaplan, Brian Robbins, and Jonathan Shestack for Awesomeness Films and Jon Shestack Productions. Released in theatres on March 3, 2017.
**Genre & length**. Feature teen drama film, adaptation of a novel, SF time-loop story; 99 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Lauren Oliver's novel *Before I Fall*. Samantha wakes up on Cupid's Day (February 12) and spends it with her friends, first at school, where they learn about Sisyphus, and later at a party. During the drive back from the party, they all die in a car crash. Next, Samantha wakes up again on the same day and it all happens again many times. She tries to prevent the tragedy and, at each loop, learns more about her friends and their problems. She ends the loop by saving them but dies herself. A surprisingly optimistic take on the hopeless repetitiveness of Sisyphus' punishment.
**References**. Bazylczyk, 2017.

**327. "Come voleva la prassi" / "As Per Procedure."** S11E02. ***Il commissario Montalbano* / *Inspector Montalbano*** (IT). Directed by Alberto Sironi, written by Francesco Bruni, Andrea Camilleri, and Salvatore de Mola, exec. prod. by Gianfranco Barbagallo for RAI Fiction and Palomar; aired on RAI on March 6, 2017.
**Genre & length**. An episode of a television series, adaptation of detective stories, ongoing since 1999; 14 seasons, 39 episodes, all above 90 min. This episode runs for 112 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Adaptation of novels and short stories by A. Camilleri. S11E02 is based on *Morte in mare aperto ed alter imagini del giovane Montalbano*, *Gli arancini di Montalbano*, and *Un meso con Montalbano*. Montalbano saved the life of a Mafia hitman from a car crash he accidentally witnessed. Sometime later, the hitman receives an order to kill Montalbano but only pretends to have done it for the benefit of his Mafia boss. Risking his own life, he spares Montalbano, whose girlfriend compares this situation to the story of Androkles and the lion in Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* 5.15. Montalbano finds that the story applies to his contacts with the hitman and tells it to his 2 colleagues.

**328. "Insatiable."** S04E10. ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). Directed by Steven A. Adelson, written by Keely McDonald, prod. by Clifton Campbell and Albert Kim for Fox Network etc.; aired on Fox on March 10, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 59th episode of a television series, fantasized American history, supernatural; 4 seasons, 62 episodes, 41–44 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A mysterious hunger demon is released by the demon Jobe. He kills people by starvation during an eating orgy. Ichabod Crane recalls a Greek mythological figure, Erysichthon of Thessaly, who was cursed with an insatiable hunger and thirst by Demeter and Dionysus. The food the unfortunate man ingested only fuelled the fire that consumed him.

**329. "The Way of the Gun."** S04E11. ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). Directed by Russell Lee Fine, written by Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman, and Phillip Iscove, prod. by Clifton Campbell and Albert Kim for Fox Network etc.; aired on Fox on March 17, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 60th episode of a television series, fantasized American history, supernatural; 4 seasons, 62 episodes, 41–44 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. An ultimate weapon – *arma mutata* – looking like a fancy gun, was allegedly "cast on the same anvil used by Ares [*sic*!] to forge his armour. It is said that the ironwork contains shards of legendary blades: Asi, Kusanagi-no Tsurugi, and Excalibur." "The Flame of the Eternals. Legend posits that this is an offshoot of the forge used by Hephaestus, the blacksmith of the gods, to hammer out his mythical weapons."

**330. "Freedom."** S04E13. ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). Directed by Russell Lee Fine, written by Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman, and Phillip Iscove, prod. by Clifton Campbell and Albert Kim for Fox Network etc.; aired on Fox on March 31, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 62nd and final episode of a television series, fantasized American history, supernatural; 4 seasons, 62 episodes, 41–44 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. An Atlantean spell crystal is used to call the demon Jobe: "Quasi per aquam!" Jobe's advice on how to kill an immortal: "Via ad Infernum" (Go to Hell). Katabasis. "Ostium apertum. Aditum ad Pueros… Flamma ignis." Hell looks like the battlefield at Valley Forge after the battle – the most terrible sight in the life of the traveller. Crane gets the Philosopher's Stone from the devil that will make the death of the immortal possible because it was instrumental in making him immortal in the first place. A siren was sighted close to the seashore. Crane: "Sirens, the daughters of Achelous, the sirens would lure sailors to their doom. […] a little wax in the ears, lashed to a mast, and we'll be home in time for supper. That is not a Siren. That is a Kraken. Are you sure?" Crane is sure it was not a Bakunawa or Scylla and Charybdis.

**331. "Sic transit imperium."** S02E09. ***Billions*** (US). Created and prod. by Brian Koppelman, David Levien, Andrew Ross Sorkin, et al., directed by Colin Bucksey, written by Wes Jones, prod. for Best Available! and TBTF Production Inc.; aired on April 16, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 21st episode of a television series; 7 seasons, 84 episodes, 54–60 min. each; this episode runs for 58 min.
**Classical content & comments**. *Sic transit gloria mundi* has been part of the rituals of papal coronations from 1409 to 1963, involving the burning of a flax tow as a symbol of the transitory nature of worldly power. Also, a quote from Thomas à Kempis, *De imitatione Christi*. "Wags" Wagner gives Axe a birthday present, a golden coin engraved with the motto *Sic transit imperium*, which he translates as "So passes the empire." It reserves a place on a survival capsule in case of a global apocalypse. Axe refuses the gift at the end of the episode. Available on VOD networks, such as HBO.

**332. 2017–2021, *American Gods*** (US). Developed and exec. prod. by Bryan Fuller and Michael Green (season 1), Jesse Alexander (season 2), and Charles H. Eglee (season 3), with the participation of Neil Gaiman et al., for Living Dead Guy/J.A. Green Construction Corp., The Blank Corp., Fremantle North America, Starz Originals, and United Bongo Drums; aired on Starz from April 30, 2017, to March 21, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Television series, SF fantasy with mythological elements, a creative adaptation of a novel; 3 seasons, 26 episodes, 52–63 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001). Conflict between the Old and the New Gods. 3 Old Gods from classical mythology: Vulcan (season 1), who builds arms and a magic sword for Odin and enjoys the worship of many followers, and Demeter (season 3), the Greek goddess of agriculture, harvest, and fertility. Argus Panoptes, the one with 100 eyes, joined the New Gods as the god of surveillance; none appear in the novel. The main role in the conflict is played by the Norse god Odin – Wotan. The Old Gods came to America with the immigrants, and if they returned to Europe, they would cease to exist. The New Gods embody technology and media; they want to eliminate the Old ones to keep all potential worshippers to themselves. The creators, including Gaiman, had prepared the season 4 scenario, but Starz cancelled the show: "*American Gods* will not return for a fourth season. Everyone at Starz is grateful to the dedicated cast and crew, and our partners at Fremantle who brought author and executive producer Neil Gaiman's ever-relevant story to life that speaks to the cultural climate of our country" (Starz's announcement, see Patten, 2021).
**References**. Besson, 2014, 497–508; Felton, 2015, 1; Zajko, 2020, 299–322; Olechowska and Pszczolińska, 2023, 131–147.

**333. *Wonder Woman*** (US). Directed by Patty Jenkins, written by Zack Snyder, Allan Heinberg, and Jason Fuchs, prod. by Charles Roven, Deborah and Z. Snyder for Warner Bros. Pictures, DC Comics, Atlas Entmt, and Cruel and Unusual Films; released on May 25, 2017.
**Genre & length**. Superhero feature film, action, strong romantic element, paraphrase of comic books; 141 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Wonder Woman, the daughter of Hippolyta, the Queen of Amazons, is forced by conflicts beyond her kingdom to leave her native paradise. The movie shows Wonder Woman's childhood and early training on the Amazons' island of Themyscira. A pilot whose plane crashes offshore is the reason for her participation in WW1, where she saves humanity from extinction by killing Ares (who took the form of Sir Patrick, a British general) as she was designed and fated to do by Zeus. The pilot, unfortunately, dies in a successful attempt to destroy a lethal gas. Based on DC Comics characters. It is the 2nd live-action film for the character of Wonder Woman after the 2016 *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, and a prequel to *Wonder Woman 1984*

released in 2020. It won the 2018 Hugo Award for the best dramatic presentation and many other prizes. A huge box-office success.
**References**. Potter, 2018i, 30–57, especially 17–54.

**334. 2017–2020, *Riviera*** (UK). Created and written by Neil Jordan, directed by Phillipp Kadelbach, Hans Herboth, Paul Norton Walker, et al., co-written by John Banville, Guy Bert, Gabbie Asher, et al., exec. prod. by N. Jordan, Liza Marshall, Kris Thykier, and Paul McGuinness for Archery Pictures and Primo Productions; aired on Sky Atlantic from June 15, 2017, to December 3, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a thriller; 3 seasons, 28 episodes, between 42 and 50 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on an idea by P. McGuinness. Recurring mentions of Greek mythology, mainly related to a painting of Juno confiding Io to the care of Argus, painted by Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) in 1660. S01E01: Constantine, a Greek billionaire and art collector, says about the painting: "Every myth has been painted a thousand times, but that's what makes them special; it's how the painter chooses to retell the story that makes it interesting." A rather blunt summary of the myth is also provided: "Argus and Io. Do you know the story? Some god fucked a maiden. Greek kind of thing. Jupiter fucked Io. His wife found out. Everyone fucked everyone then. Perhaps Jupiter thought that his wife would discover the truth. Perhaps he wanted her to." The show was nicknamed *Dynasty sur Mer* to highlight its similarity with American soaps about the lives of the super-rich. N. Jordan "disowned" the series, claiming he could not recognize his scripts.

**335. "The Eaters of Light."** S10E10. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). Directed by Charles Palmer, written by Rona Munro, prod. by Nikki Wilson for BBC One; aired on June 17, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 274th episode of a television series, SF fantasy, Roman Britain; 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The Doctor travels to 2nd-c. CE Britain to check what happened to the lost Legio IX Hispana and discovers that the legion sacrificed itself to stop alien light-eating locusts from escaping the portal situated in an old Pictish cairn.

**336. *Bromans*** (UK). Created by Shaun Parry, Natalie McArdle, Peter Howell, and Matt Marsh, prod. by Ben Kelly, Karl Warner, and Meredith Chambers for Electric Ray; aired on ITV 2 from September 13 to November 2, 2017.
**Genre & length**. A competitive reality show; 1 season, 8 episodes, 42 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. 8 young men live in a simulated Ancient Rome with their girlfriends and fight as gladiators preparing for the Emperor's Games. 1 participant wins £10,000; the others are gradually eliminated. Lots of near nudity; the "reality" element is achieved by showing vulgar and gross aspects of the excessive importance of fitness in young-adult contemporary culture.
**References**. Hobden and Potter, 2020, 29–54.

**337. 2017–2024, *Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Created by Bryan Fuller and Alex Kurtzman, prod. by Gretchen J. Berg, Aaron Harberts, et al. for Secret Hideout, Roddenberry Entmt, Living Dead Guy Productions, and CBS Studio; seasons 1–5 aired from September 24, 2017, to May 30, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Television series, military SF, space opera; 5 seasons, 65 episodes of varying lengths (37–65 min.).
**Classical content & comments**. Based on *Star Trek* by Gene Roddenberry. Titles of episodes. Quotation from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, trans. Edith Hamilton. Chronologically, it is a prequel to *Star Trek: The Original Series*. Episodes inspired by antiquity are listed under the year of release.

**338. "Aruba-Con."** S03E01. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Directed by Rob Seidenglanz, written by Phil Klemmer and Marc Guggenheim, prod. by Berlanti Productions, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on ABC on October 10, 2017.

**Genre & length**. 34th episode of a television series, SF, time travel, comic book superheroes; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. This episode is 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Julius Caesar, straight from his march from Gaul in 49 BCE, appears in 2017 on Aruba as an anachronism, steals a history book from the Legends, and as a result, avoids assassination on the Ides of March and conquers North America. Inspired by DC Comics' universe, a spin-off of the DC Comics shows *Arrow* and *Flash*.
**References**. Olechowska, forthcoming a.

**339.** ***Troy: The Odyssey*** (US). Directed by Tekin Girgin, written by Eric Forsberg, prod. by David Michael Latt for Benetone Films, Slightly Distorted Productions, and The Asylum; released on October 15, 2017.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, mythological epic; 90 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A retelling of the *Odyssey* with the end of the *Iliad* added as an intro. 1184 BCE: Priam curses Odysseus ordering the Kraken to follow him wherever he goes and to destroy Ithaca. Trojan warrior-woman Circe is taken for protection because the Kraken will not kill a Trojan. Odysseus is forced to take a route through the Underworld. Since the 1981 *Clash of the Titans*, reinforced by the 2010 *Clash*, the Kraken of Norse origin replaced a *bona fide* Greek mythological monster.

**340.** **"Lethe."** S01E06. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Directed by Douglas Aarniokoski, written by Joe Menosky and Ted Sullivan, prod. by Gretchen J. Berg, Aaron Harberts, et al.; aired on October 22, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 6th episode of a television series, military SF, time travel; 5 seasons, 65 episodes; this episode runs for 44 min.
**Classical content**. Lethe, the River of Oblivion, is one of the rivers in Hades.

**341.** **"Si vis pacem, para bellum."** S01E08. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Directed by John S. Scott, written by Kirsten Beyer, prod. by Gretchen J. Berg, Aaron Harberts, et al.; aired on CBS on November 5, 2017.
**Genre & length**. 8th episode of a television series, military SF, time travel; 5 seasons, 65 episodes; this episode runs for 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Originally, a quotation from Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus' *De re militari* (ca. 430 CE), Book 3, later used widely by politicians, the so-called doctrine of "peace through strength."

**342.** ***Justice League*** (US). Directed by Zack Snyder, by Joss Whedon in post-prod., written by Chris Terrio and J. Whedon, prod. by Charles Roven, Deborah Snyder, Jon Berg, and Geoff Jones for RatPac-Dune Entmt, DC Entmt, Atlas Entmt, and Cruel and Unusual Films, distr. by Warner Bros. Pictures; released on November 13, 2017.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, superhero film; 120 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Amazons, Artemis, Atlanteans, Greek mythology, Hestia, Zeus. Based on DC Comics characters. Sequel to *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice.* Called ironically "Josstice League" because of J. Whedon's involvement. Z. Snyder, unhappy with Whedon's version, produced a director's cut for HBO in 2021, including reshoots and other additions, which doubled the length – incredibly long and tedious to watch.
**References**. Potter, 2019b.

**343.** **"Helen Hunt."** S03E06. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Directed by David Geddes, written by Keto Shimizu and Ubah Mohamed, prod. by Berlanti Productions, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on ABC on November 14, 2017.

**Genre & length**. 39th episode of a television series, fantasy, SF, time travel, comic book superheroes; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. each. This one is 42 min. long.
**Classical content & comments**. Helen of Troy considers her beauty a curse as it incites men to war. Inspired by DC Comics' Arrowverse, it is a spin-off of the DC Comics shows *Arrow* and *Flash*.
**References**. Olechowska, forthcoming a.

**344. 2017–2020, *Dark*** (DE). Created by Baran bo Odar and Jantje Friese, directed by B. bo Odar, written by J. Friese, Ronny Schalk, Marc O. Seng, et al., prod. by Justyna Müsch, J. Friese, Quirin Berg, et al. for Wiedemann & Berg Television; aired on Netflix from December 1, 2017, to June 27, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Television series, SF thriller, tragedy; 3 seasons, 26 episodes, 44–77 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. It is a complex story of a family struck by tragedy. Themes and modes of presentation borrowed from Greek tragedy. A father tries to bring back to life his son and his family, who died tragically in an accident. He has invented and used a time-travelling machine that severs the world into 2 mirror-image worlds connected by tunnels allowing time travel – called Sic Mundus (*creatus est*) and Erit Lux. There is a struggle for the control and blocking of the tunnels. The main female character, Marta, is associated with the mythical Ariadne.
**References**. Teti, 2019; Curley, 2023, 8–17.

## 2018

**345. 2018–2021, *Britannia*** (UK, US). Created by Jez Butterworth, Tom Butterworth, and James Richardson, prod. by Rick McCallum et al. for Sky, Amazon Prime Video, Vertigo Films, and Neal Street Production; aired on Sky Atlantic from January 18, 2018, to October 12, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Television series, historical fantasy, Roman history, Roman Britain; 3 seasons, 27 episodes, 40–73 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A fictionalized history of the Roman conquest of Britain. English, Welsh, and some Latin spoken.

**346. *Troy: Fall of a City*** (UK). Directed by Owen Harris, Mark Brozel, and John Strickland, written by David Farr, Nancy Harris, Mika Watkins, and Joe Barton, prod. by D. Farr and Derek Wax for the BBC, Kudos, Wild Mercury, and Netflix; aired on BBC One and Netflix from February 17 to April 7, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, a retelling of a mythological epic; 8 episodes, 56 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on the *Iliad*, it is not a straightforward adaptation but rather a rearrangement of myths presenting the "whole" story, from the courting of Helen of Sparta to the early life of Paris and until after the sack of Troy.
**References**. Maurice, 2019b, passim (focusing on the gods in the series), 2022, 25–36; Magerstädt, 2022,119–134; Augoustakis and Cyrino, 2022; Curley, 2022a, 13–23; Cyrino, 2022a, 37–50; Safran, 2022b, 51–64; Stafford, 2022a, 65–75; Kennedy, 2022, 79–95; Day, 2022, 97–109; Jenkins, 2022, 111–125; Penrose, 2022, 127–139; Raucci, 2022, 141–152; Bakogianni, 2022, 155–168; Prince, 2022, 169–182; Norgard, 2022, 183–196; Burns, 2022, 197–210; Cooke, 2022, 211–221; D. Burton, 2022, 223–231; Olechowska, 2023; Hinds Scott and Paprocki, 2023, 32–33.

**347. *Akala's Odyssey*** (UK). Directed by John O'Rourke, written and starred by Akala, exec. prod. for the BBC by Nadine Marsh-Edwards and Amanda Jenks (Greenacre Films), co-prod. by Immovable Ltd.; aired on BBC Four on February 18, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Television documentary; 58 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Writer and hip-hop singer Akala, planning to compose his own reaction to Homer's *Odyssey* – *Blind Bard's Vision* – retraces Odysseus' steps, visiting Delphi, Mycenae, Greek colonies on Sicily, and Odysseus' kingdom of Ithaca. He also talks to various classicists, such as Katharine Earnshaw, who explains dactylic hexameter; John Bennet, who shows the so-called Mask of Agamemnon; and Nikos Xanthoulis, who talks about the role of music in the ancient epic; he also plays the beginning of the *Odyssey* on a phorminx.
**References**. Hobden, 2022, 135–151.

**348.** **2018–2021, *Harrow*** (AU). Created and written by Stephen M. Irwin and Leigh McGrath, directed by Tony Tilse, Peter Andrikidis, Grant Brown, et al., prod. by L. McGrath, Tracey Robertson, and Nathan Mayfield for Hoodlum Entmt and ABC Signature; aired on ABC from March 9, 2018, to April 11, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Television series, police-forensic procedural; 3 seasons, 30 episodes, 52 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The only "ancient" elements are Latin titles of all 30 episodes – some are aphorisms, others are legal formulas of Roman origin, e.g., "Actus reus," "Finis vitae sed non amoris," "Aurum potestas est," "Pia mater," "Peccata patris," "Lex talionis," "Mens rea," "Abo imo pectore," "Audere est facere," "Pater familias," "Tarde venientibus ossa," etc.

**349.** **"The Good, the Bad, and the Cuddly."** S03E18. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Directed by Dermott Downs, written by Phil Klemmer and Marc Guggenheim, prod. by Berlanti Productions, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on ABC on April 9, 2018.
**Genre & length**. 51st episode of a television series, SF, time travel, comic-book superheroes; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. each, but this one runs for 41 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 2 characters from Classical Antiquity. Helen of Troy and Julius Caesar, who already figured in the series as the so-called anachronisms, i.e., brought to the present due to time travel improperly activated by the Legends, come back to fight. Caesar, on the side of evil, and Helen, freshly trained in combat by the Amazons, on the side of the Legends. Inspired by DC Comics' Arrowverse, a spin-off of the DC Comics shows *Arrow* and *Flash*.
**References**. Olechowska, forthcoming a.

**350.** ***Troy: The Resurrection of Aeneas*** (US). Virgil's *Aeneid* was adapted, directed, and prod. by Aeneas Middleton for Burnin Rubber Music Publishing and Royal Middleton Publishing; released on May 11, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Animated film; 60 min.
**Comment**. See any of the 10 outraged reviews at IMDb (n.d. b).

**351.** **"The Riddle of the Sphinx."** S02E04. ***Westworld*** (US). Directed by Lisa Joy, written by Gina Atwater and Jonathan Nolan, prod. by Cherylanne Martin, Michael Polaire, Carly Wray, et al. for HBO Entertainment, Kilter Films, and Bad Robot Productions; aired on HBO on May 13, 2018.
**Genre & length**. 14th episode of a television series, SF dystopian fantasy; 4 seasons, 36 episodes, 48–91 min. per episode. This one is 71 min.
**Classical content & comments**. James Delos is an Oedipus figure who tries to avoid his fate but runs straight towards it.
**References**. Day, 2023, 18–28.

**352.** **"Vanishing Point."** S02E09. ***Westworld*** (US). Directed by Stephen Williams, written by Roberto Patino, prod. by Cherylanne Martin, Michael Polaire, Carly Wray, et al. for HBO Entertainment, Kilter Films, and Bad Robot Productions; aired on HBO on June 17, 2018.
**Genre & length**. 19th episode of a television series, SF dystopian fantasy; 4 seasons, 36 episodes, 48–91 min. per episode, this one runs for 59 min.

**Classical content & comments**. "William is identified with Oedipus, when his wife commits suicide after recognizing her husband's true nature, and William murders his own kin through a failure of recognition, while quotations from Plutarch and Plotinus highlight the issues of identity, fate, and self-knowledge that resound throughout the episode. […] In the end, much like its Sophoclean predecessor, *Westworld* works as an implicit criticism of unbridled ambition, patriarchal narcissism, and lack of self-awareness" (Day, 2023, 19).

**353. 2018–2022, *A Discovery of Witches*** (UK, US). Written by Kate Brooke, Tom Farrelly, Charlene James, and Sarah Dollard, directed by Juan Carlos Medina, Alice Troughton, and Sarah Walker, prod. by Edoardo Ferretti for Bad Wolf Sky UK and Sky Studios; 1st aired on Sky One from September 14, 2018, to January 7, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, magic, time travel, witch show, demons, vampires, witches, a hidden world, an adaptation of a novel; 3 seasons, 25 episodes, 45 min. each. Season 3 aired on Sky Max.
**Classical content & comments**. Artemis and her temple at Sept-Tours. Philippe de Clermont speaks Ancient Greek, Latin, and Old French. Strong connections to Classical Antiquity present in the novels are downplayed in the television series. Adaptation of the 2011 *All Souls Trilogy* by Deborah Harkness. All 3 seasons are currently (2024) available on HBO Max.

**354. 2018–2023, *Titans*** (US). Developed, written, and exec. prod. by Akiva Goldsman, Geoff Johns, and Greg Berlanti, directed by Brad Anderson, Carol Banker, Boris Mojsovski, et al. for Weed Road Pictures, Berlanti Productions, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; seasons 1 and 2 aired on DC Universe, seasons 3 and 4 on HBO Max from October 12, 2018, to May 11, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Television series, superhero action, adventure, SF; 4 seasons, 49 episodes, 40–50 min. each
**Classical content & comments**. The only openly mythological element is the Amazon girl. Otherwise, the title "Titans" refers to heroes with special powers; these heroes are the main link to Greek mythology. Comic books and mythology share this common characteristic. Based on the comic book (DC Comics) *Teen Titans* by Bob Haney and Bruno Premiani. B. Mojsovski won the 2019 award from the Canadian Society of Cinematographers for TV Drama Cinematography in the pilot.

**355. 2018–2022, *Charmed*** (US). Developed by showrunners and writers Jessica O'Toole, Amy Rardin, and Jennie Snyder Urman, directed by Brad Silberling, Vanessa Parise, et al., prod. by J. O'Toole, A. Rardin, et al. for Poppy Productions, Reveal Entmt, Still Married Productions (season 2), Propagate, CBS Studios, and CBS Media Ventures; aired on The CW from October 14, 2018, to June 10, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, witch show with some time travel; season 1 of 22 episodes, season 2 of 19, seasons 3 and 4 of 13 episodes each, 40–43 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. A remake of the 1998–2006 WB series by Constance M. Burge, allegedly more "feminist" and "ethnically diversified" – although seemingly for marketing reasons. The same showrunners and writers as *Jane the Virgin*. The motif of Tartarus, the deepest part of hell "where the worst incarcerate their worst," is one of the favourite classically inspired concepts occurring in audiovisual series of the 21st c. However, here, apart from the name, it bears no similarity to the Greek mythological Underworld. S01E15, "Switches and Stones": Medusa is a former witch who has changed into a demon from 800 BCE and petrifies those who avoid her gaze. A victim of rape who was unjustly punished and now wants people to see her and acknowledge her pain. S04E03: "Unlucky Charmed": the monster Lamia – only the name is classical. S04E09, "Truth or Cares": 3 Graiae at a party on campus were supposed to give good advice to the Charmed Ones about a prophecy in exchange for true confidences but they lied. Latin incantations and spells are

easy to understand in season 1, but sound garbled in later seasons. A "toga" party is considered here to be Greek, like in *DC's Legends of Tomorrow*.

**356. 2018–2022, *Legacies*** (US). Created, co-written, co-directed, and co-prod. by Julie Plec, co-directed by Chris Grismer, co-written, co-directed, and co-prod. by Brett Matthews et al. for My So-Called Company, Alloy Entmt, CBS Television Studios, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW from October 25, 2018, to June 16, 2022. Available on Netflix.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, school story, a hidden world of vampires, werewolves, witches, and the Greek gods; 4 seasons, 68 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Medusa (S01E14: Nia is a Gorgon, her dreads turn into snakes, 3 sounds of a bronze bell disrupt the power of the snakes); Cyclops (S02E02: looks like a troll and disintegrates into sparks); Minotaur (S02E05: is killed; a bracelet protects from his power), Sphinx (S02E07: is an oracle, asks riddles, cannot lie); Cupid (S02E11: turns out not to be Cupid but Pothos, one of the Erotes; Sphinx prophesied the return of 7 Erotes monsters); Charon, the ferryman (S03E08: he is a psychopomp); the Muse Cleo (S03E10: she has the gift of inspiration, uses Latin incantations); Pandora (S03E11: Project Pandora); Latin incantations (S03E12). Mythological creatures appear in atypical roles in seasons 1, 2, and 3. Still, several Olympic gods and 1 mythological hero arrive only in season 4, from episode 10 to 20, which ends the season and the series. Mythology with a twist: an eagle is not devouring Ben's (Prometheus), Zeus' bastard son, fast-regenerating liver. Instead, he is cursed with attracting monsters who almost kill him, but he recovers before the next attack. Jen (Hephaestus) also fears their father, Zeus, here called Ken. Jen locked all the gods in the sarcophagi of her invention to protect them from Malivore, an evil entity known from previous seasons, who threatened the gods that their worshippers would forget them. When Malivore was killed, Jen did not release the gods, because they were far from pleasant. Only Chronos was better than the others – he never forgot her birthday. With her school friends, she wants to find Chronos' sarcophagus to release him, but Ben, hoping that the grateful Ken would lift his curse, betrays them and opens all the sarcophagi. Ken demands that his daughter Jen be released to him, and she surrenders herself to avoid Ken's revenge on her friends. It is based, in part, on characters and settings from the *Vampire Diaries* novels by Lisa Jane Smith, published in 1991–1992 (1–4) and 2009–2014 (5–13). A final spin-off of the television series *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–2017) and *The Originals* (2013–2018), which are not listed in the Survey because the only ancient element they contain are occasional Latin incantations.

**357. 2018–2020, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (US). Developed by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, directed by Lee Toland Krieger et al., prod. by Archie Comics, Warner Bros. Television, Berlanti Productions, and Muckle Man Productions; aired on Netflix from October 26, 2018, to December 31, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Television series, supernatural satirical fantasy for teens, a witch show, school story; 2 seasons (in 4 parts), 36 episodes, 49–63 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on R. Aguirre-Sacasa and Robert Hack's comic book under the same title, a coming-of-age, dark satirical fantasy, featuring witchcraft, horror, and Latin incantations. Mythological characters and places: Circe, Hecate, Medusa, Pan, the Underworld.
**References**. Spanke and Parton, 2019, 104–105; Mik, 2020a; Borriello, 2020a, 2020b, 2022; Bravo, 2022, 109–119.

**358. *A Bread Factory, Part Two: Walk with Me a While*** (US). Written and directed by Patrick Wang, prod. by Matt Miller, Daryl Freimark, and P. Wang; released on October 26, 2018.
**Genre & length**. 2nd part of a feature film, stand-alone but closely connected to the 1st part, social comedy/musical; Part 1: 122 min., Part 2: 120 min.

**Classical content & comments**. The Bread Factory, an art centre in a small NY state town, is threatened with closure. Euripides' *Hecuba* is being rehearsed in a new translation, allegedly by someone local (in fact, by a classicist, Diane Arnson Svarlien). The fragments of the play show Hecuba's grief without motifs of rage and revenge. The fears of the characters in the play mirror those of the movie characters, which highlights the value and role of art in today's world combined with its precarious economic position. Inspired by Time & Space Limited, an arts centre in Hudson, NY. DVD contains a 23-minute featurette on *A Bread Factory*'s creation: *Filming Hecuba*.

**359. "Calypso."** S01E02. ***Star Trek: Short Treks*** (US). Directed by Olatunde Osunsanmi, written by Sean Cochran and Michael Chabon, prod. by Alex Kurtzman, Heather Kadin, Akiva Goldsman, et al. for Secret Hideout, Roddenberry Entertainment, and CBS Television Studios; aired on CBS All Access on November 8, 2018.
**Genre & length**. 2nd episode of an anthology, series of shorts, military SF; 17 min; a 2-season series related to *Star Trek: Discovery* aired between seasons 1 and 2 of that show.
**Classical content & comments**. USS *Discovery* has been abandoned by its crew and left under the command of its computer, Zora, to maintain its position for 1,000 years. During this time, Zora became sentient. She saves the life of a fugitive whose escape pod she retrieves when it passes by *Discovery*. Their relationship slowly develops into friendship and then becomes romantic, but when Zora realizes the meaning of love and learns that her companion misses his wife, she lets him depart to his planet on *Discovery*'s last shuttle – a parallel to Calypso's relationship with Odysseus.
**References**. DeBoer, 2023.

**360. "Tender Is the Nate."** S04E06. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Directed by Dean Choe, written by Phil Klemmer and Matthew Maala, prod. by Greg Berlanti, Phil Klemmer, et al.; aired on The CW on November 26, 2018.
**Genre & length**. 57th episode of a television series, SF, time travel, superheroes; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. This episode returns an anachronism to its time: a Minotaur, whom the Legends first fight and then put to sleep by playing music. The episode is inspired by DC Comics' Arrowverse, a spin-off of the DC Comics shows *Arrow* and *Flash*.

**361.** ***Aquaman*** (US). Directed by James Wan, written by Will Beall, prod. by Warner Bros. Pictures; released on November 26, 2018.
**Genre & length**. Feature superhero film; 143 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Atlanteans, Atlantis, Atlas, Critias, Plato, Poseidon, Poseidon's Trident, prophecy, Timaeus. Aquaman is a DC Comics character known from *Justice League*, although here he has empathy for people. A sequel, *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, was released in December 2023; see the listing for 2023. Chinese American Film Festival: the Most Popular US Film in China, 2019.
**References**. Maciejewska, 2020a.

**362.** ***L'Iliade***. S02E01–10. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR). Created, written, and presented by François Busnel, co-written by Gilbert Sinoué, Jean Charles Paugam, prod. by Sylvain Bergère, Nathalie Amsellem, et al. for Arte France, Rosebud Productions, and Musée du Louvre; released in 2018.
**Genre & length**. 2nd season of a documentary television series, a retelling of Homer; 10 episodes, 26 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A mix of storytelling, animation, and mythologically inspired art from various periods. 1. "La pomme de la discorde." 2. "L'heure des sacrifices." 3. "La colère d'Achille." 4. "Le sang de la déesse." 5. "Le glaive et la balance." 6. "La ruse d'Héra." 7. "Patrocle et les Myrmidons." 8. "La vengeance d'Achille." 9. "Vaincre ou mourir." 10. "Le cheval de Troie."

**363.** ***Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*** (US). Written and directed by Genndy Tartakovsky, co-written by Michael McCullers, prod. for Sony Pictures Animation; released in 2018.
**Genre & length**. 3rd installment in an animated feature film cycle, fantasy; 97 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Atlantis, Colosseum, Critias, Cyclops, Hydra, Kraken, Plato, Timaeus. The following, 4th installment in the cycle, ***Hotel Transylvania: Transformania*** or ***HT4***, was released on January 22, 2022, written by G. Tartakovsky but directed by Derek Drymon and Jennifer Kluska, produced by Alice Dewey Goldstone; it had not been in any way inspired by antiquity. Kids' Choice Awards (2019): Favourite Male Voice and Favorite Female Voice from an Animated Movie for Adam Sandler and Selena Gomez. Sequel to: ***Hotel Transylvania***, September 28, 2012; ***Hotel Transylvania 2***, September 25, 2015.
**References**. Maciejewska, 2020b.

## 2019

**364.** ***Io*** (US). Directed by Jonathan Helpert, written by Clay Jeter, Charles Spano, and Will Basanta, prod. by Jason Michael Berman and Laura Rister for Mandalay Pictures, Sunset Junction Entmt, Untitled Entmt, and Great Point Media; released on Netflix on January 18, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, post-apocalyptic SF; 98 min.
**Classical content & comments**. When Earth becomes toxic to human life, people find shelter on a space station orbiting Io, one of Jupiter's moons with high volcanic activity, which provides power for the station. A young researcher, Sam, continues her father's research into immunity to the toxic fog. She succeeds when the last transport leaves for Io. Earth will be renewed. The minimalistic format – 2 actors and a voice – relies on quotations from Plato, *Symposium*, from Aristophanes' speech about love and its origins, from William Butler Yeats's 1924 sonnet "Leda and the Swan" about how Helen, the cause of the Trojan War, was conceived, from T.S. Eliot's 1942 poem "Little Gidding" (the last of the *Four Quartets*) influenced by Dante, Yeats, and other non-ancient poets.
**References**. Bazylczyk, 2019.

**365.** ***Il primo re / Romulus v Remus: The First King*** (IT). Directed, co-written, and co-prod. by Matteo Rovere, co-written by Filippo Gravino and Francesca Manieri, co-prod. by Andrea Paris for Groenlandia, Gapbusters, and Rai Cinema; released on January 31, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, mytho-historical drama, Roman history; 127 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A retelling of Rome's mythical origin and the story of its legendary founders, Romulus and Remus. All dialogues in early Latin were reconstructed by Donatella Gentili and her team from Sapienza University in Rome. Nominated for multiple awards, won 10, the most important in 2019: BIFEST (Bari International Film Festival) Best Cinematography for Daniele Cipri, and at Busto Arsizio Film Festival – Best Film for M. Rovere.
**References**. Rodriguez-Mayorgas, 2010, 89–109.

**366.** **"An Obol for Charon."** S02E04. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Directed by Lee Rose, written by Jordon Nardino, Gretchen J. Berg, Aaron Harberts, Alan McElroy, Andrew Colville, prod. by G.J. Berg, A. Harberts, et al.; aired on February 7, 2019.
**Genre & length**. 19th episode of a television series, military SF; 51 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Price of the fare for the Styx ferry to the Underworld the dead need: an obol is placed in the mouth of the corpse. The title announces the episode's theme of the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

**367. "The Sound of Thunder."** S02E06. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Directed by Doug Aarniokoski, written by Bryan Fuller, Alex Kurtzman, et al., prod. by Gretchen J. Berg, Aaron Harberts, et al.; aired on CBS All Access on February 21, 2019.

**Genre & length**. 21st episode of a television series, military SF; 5 seasons, 65 episodes, 56 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. 23rd c. CE. Michael Burnham talks to Commander Saru at the end of the episode, in which his Kelpian nation is liberated from centuries of terrible oppression. She asks him if he knows Aeschylus and starts the quote, which he finishes: "He who learns must suffer, and even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart." The quote from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, 176–183 ("God, whose law it is that he who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despite, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God") became part of American popular culture when on April 4, 1968, after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, Robert F. Kennedy spoke to crowds in Indianapolis quoting Aeschylus: "In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." He knew the quote from Edith Hamilton's book *The Greek Way*, in which she cited Aeschylus twice ([1930] 1942, 61, 194). The quote is inscribed on R.F. Kennedy's memorial in Arlington.

**368. 2019–2020, *The Order*** (CA, US). Created by Dennis Heaton, directed by David von Ancken, Kristin Lehman, Leslie Hope, et al., written by D. von Ancken, Shelley Eriksen, Jennica Harper, et al., prod. by D. Heaton, S. Eriksen, et al. for Netflix and Nomadic Pictures Entmt; aired from March 7, 2019, to June 18, 2020.

**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, horror, magic, witch show, secret society, hidden world, coming-of-age/school story; 2 seasons, 20 episodes, 42–52 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. A hidden supernatural world full of witches, demons, werewolves, and various magical objects, such as Daedalus' loom. An elite American university prepares new leaders for the country. Their success is due to the activities of 2 secret societies, the Hermetic Order of the Blue Rose (witches and warlocks) and Knights of St. Christopher (werewolves guarding against the abuses of magic). The societies go through phases of collaboration and hostility. A 3rd organization, The Esoteric Sons of Prometheus, a cult group communicating telepathically, is another source of conflict. The first 2 groups must save the world from an apocalypse engineered by an outside group, Praxis, led by a witch/werewolf seeking revenge for the death of her father. Witches have a relatively good grasp of the Latin they use in the incantations. They even claim to distinguish between medieval Latin and "Hiberno" Latin, whatever that may be. The main character is studying mythology and can identify the daughter of Lycaon, who wants to cause a fatal Tartarus eruption.

**369. "Ouroboros."** S14E14. ***Supernatural*** (US). Created by Eric Kripke, directed by Amyn Kaderali, written and prod. by Steve Yockey for Wonderland Sound & Vision and Warner Bros. Television; aired on March 7, 2019.

**Genre & length**. 301st episode of a television series (2005–2020), fantasy, horror, mystery; 15 seasons, 327 episodes; this episode runs for 42 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Gorgon Medusa is also mentioned earlier in the series, for the 1st time in S08E16, "Remember the Titans" (2013); in the same episode, Oliver, the son of Prometheus, is also cursed by Zeus. S09E16, "Blade Runners" (2014) shows Medusa's portrait by Peter Paul Rubens; in S08E13, "The Scorpion and the Frog," a fossilized Gorgon's tooth of monstrous size is mentioned. In S14E14, "Ouroboros," the Gorgon is a creature modified in comparison with the ancient one. It is a human called Noah Opis, who paralyses his victims with his venom before cooking and eating them, which is shown in particularly gross detail. He can also predict the

future, and instead of snakes as hair, he has a snake named Felix. Noah is a half-god but is killed when his head is removed with a silver blade.

**370.** **"Project Daedalus."** S02E09. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Created by Bryan Fuller and Alex Kurtzman, directed by Jonathan Frakes, written by Michelle Paradise, prod. by April Nocifora, Thom J. Pretak, et al. for CBS All Access and Netflix; aired on March 14, 2019.
**Genre & length**. 24th episode of a television series, military SF; 5 seasons, 65 episodes, 51 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Mike and Gabrielle Burnham designed a suit that allowed the wearer to time-travel. Wings made it possible to fly in the air, like Daedalus. The suit was the main element of Project Daedalus. Long considered lost, it surfaced again as Gabrielle's costume of the Red Angel.

**371.** **"The Miracles of Sabrina Spellman."** S02E07. ***Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (US). Directed by Antonio Negret and written by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, Christianne Hedtke, et al.; aired on Netflix on April 5, 2019.
**Genre & length**. 18th episode of a television series, supernatural fantasy for teens, a satirical witch show, a hidden world of witches, demons, etc.; 57 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Sabrina tells the story of Pandora and her Box to Father Faustus Blackwood of the Church of Night to warn him of the risks of opposing her.

**372.** **"Nip/Stuck."** S04E14. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Directed by David Geddes, written by Ray Utarnachitt and Matthew Maala, prod. by Greg Berlanti and Phil Klemmer; aired on The CW on May 6, 2019.
**Genre & length**. 65th episode of a television series, SF, time travel, superheroes; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 41–45 min. each; this one is 41 min. long.
**Classical content & comments**. The year of the 1st Roman invasion of Britain and the destruction of the Roman fleet by storms engineered by King Kon-sten-tyn (*sic*!), a magical ancestor of the contemporary warlock Constantine. He used fear as the source of magic. This is a part of the DC Comics' Arrowverse, a spin-off of *Arrow* and *Flash*.

**373.** ***The Lighthouse*** (US). Written by Robert and Max Eggers, directed by R. Eggers, prod. by Rodrigo Teixeira, Jay Van Hoy, R. Eggers, Lourenço Sant'Anna, and Youree Henley for A24, Regency Ent., and RT Features; released on May 19, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a gothic horror; 109 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Ephraim sees Thomas as Proteus. Howard falls down the stairs of the lighthouse, and his corpse is picked out by seagulls, bringing to mind the myth of Prometheus. Thomas Wake is based on Proteus, a seer. He also resembles Albrecht Dürer's *Seamonster* (Zuckerman, 2019).

**374.** ***Boudicca: Rise of the Warrior Queen*** (UK). Directed and written by Zoe Morgan, co-written by Victor Mawer and David Shillitoe, prod. by D. Shillitoe and Olivia Bruford for Warrior Films; released on September 16, 2019.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, history of Roman Britain; 82 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Fictionalized story of Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni, and her revolt against Rome.

**375.** ***Wonder Woman: Bloodlines*** (US). Directed by Sam Liu and Justin Copeland, written by Mairghread Scott, prod. by S. Liu and Amy McKenna for Warner Bros. Animation and DC Entmt; released on October 5, 2019.
**Genre & length**. A direct-to-video animated superhero film, mythological SF fantasy; 79 min.

**Classical content & comments**. A Minotaur was enchanted to defend the memory-restoring fountain at Pasiphaë's temple. Diana drinks from the fountain and destroys it. By doing so, she frees the Minotaur, whom Steve nicknames Ferdinand, alluding to Munro Leaf's story or later movies based on it. Steve and Diana return to Themyscira and find the island under the attack of Villainy Inc., who brought a replicated Medusa as their weapon. However, they cannot control her, and she kills indiscriminately, forcing them to look into her eyes until Diana vanquishes her with the help of Vanessa, whom she liberated from the control of Villainy Inc. Based on the 1941–1942 comic book *Wonder Woman* by William Moulton Marston and Harry George Peter. Pasiphaë, the goddess of mazes (goddess of pacifiers – a joking suggestion of Steve).
**References**. For the nickname Ferdinand, see Marciniak, 2018, 247–262.

**376. 2019–2022, *His Dark Materials*** (UK). Written by Jack Thorne, directed by Tom Hooper, Jamie Childs, Leane Welham, Amit Gupta, et al., prod. by Laurie Borg, exec. prod. by Philip Pullman, Jane Tranter, Tom Emmerich, et al. for Bad Wolf, New Line Productions, and Scholastics; aired on BBC One and HBO between November 3, 2019, and December 5, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasy, coming of age, parallel worlds; 3 seasons, 23 episodes, 60 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Parallel worlds, witches, daemons – external souls in the form of an animal. The underworld is reached by crossing a river on a ferry, a strong similarity to Charon, who ferries the dead across the River Styx. Nameless harpies torment the dead, but Lyra makes a pact with them to guide the dead out of the Underworld in exchange for the true stories they would tell the harpies. She also names one of the harpies Gracious Wings. Based on P. Pullman's 1995–2000 trilogy under the same title.
**References**. Potter, 2022, 217–232; Olechowska, forthcoming b.

## 2020

**377. "Patty."** S04E12. ***The Good Place*** (US). Directed and prod. by Megan Amram, written by Morgan Sackett for Fremulon, 3 Arts Entmt, and Universal Television; aired on NBC on January 23, 2020.
**Genre & length**. 51st episode of a television series, fantasy, comedy; 4 seasons, 53 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Hypatia (ca. 360–415 CE), an Alexandrian astronomer, philosopher, and mathematician, here called Patty, resides in Heaven – the Good Place – one of the reasons is her stand against slavery. In the Good Place, there is only happiness, no conflict, and the absence of problems and complications, which leads to ennui. A door is opened through which people can leave and end their existence. The ennui dissipates as a feeling of appreciation for continuing existence returns. According to the 10th-c. CE *Suda*, Hypatia has always fascinated writers and artists. See the 2009 *Agora*.

**378. "The Gamblers."** S15E11. ***Supernatural*** (US). Directed by Charles Beeson, written by Davy Perez and Meredith Glynn, exec. prod. by Andrew Dabb and Robert Singer for Wonderland Sound & Vision and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on January 30, 2020.
**Genre & length**. 318th episode of a television series, fantasy, horror, mystery; 15 seasons, 327 episodes, 38–45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The Roman goddess Fortuna was allegedly created like other pagan deities by the first God because he wanted to have someone for humans to blame if things did not go the way they prayed for. She holds a grudge against him and runs a magic casino in Alaska with her demigod son called Pax. In the pool hall, she removes luck from people who play there. She used to admire and support true heroes like Hercules or Gilgamesh. She realizes

that the 2 main characters of the series are true heroes and lets the people whose luck she stole go. There are many supernatural beings in the 15 seasons of the series, but Fortuna and Mercury (2010, "Hammer of the Gods," S05E19) are the only Roman gods.
**References**. Rea, 2023, 39–48.

**379.** **"Freaks and Geeks."** S05E11. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Directed by Nico Sachse, written by Matthew Maala and Ubah Mohamed, prod. by Greg Berlanti, Phil Klemmer, Marc Guggenheim, et al. for Berlanti Productions, DC Entertainment, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on May 12, 2020.
**Genre & length**. 79th episode of a television series, SF, time travel, fantasy; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The Legends go to Nate's Alma Mater to get the Chalice of Dionysus because whoever drinks from it becomes a god for a day. The leader of the Sigmas is Dionysus, called Dion. He has not changed since Nate studied there. Students worship him without knowing he is a god; this worship gives him his divine status. He guesses that the Legends want the cup to immortalize one of them for a day and operate the Loom of Fate. Sara challenges Dion to a beer-pong game to win the cup. When Dion loses, his followers leave him. The title alludes to "Freaks & Greeks," a 2009 episode of the *Fairly OddParents* (S07E04b) animated series where Olympic gods are shown as bored, partying characters, irresponsible and indifferent to others. Like in the animated series, Sara calls a "toga party" Greek ("Listen Legends, better get your togas dry-cleaned because we are going Greek").

**380.** ***The Old Guard*** (US). Directed by Gina Maria Prince-Bythewood, written by Greg Rucka, prod. by David Ellison, Marc Evans, Charlize Theron, et al. for Skydance Media, Denver and Delilah Productions, and Marc Evans Productions; released on July 10, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, superhero action, adventure, fantasy, a free adaptation of a comic book; 125 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A group of immortals is led by Andromache, "the Scythian"; her Trojan origin and marriage to Hector are hinted at. "Andy" is an invincible warrior dedicated to fighting evil men and protecting the innocent (her name means: 'Battling with Men'). Based on a 2017 comic book, *The Old Guard*, by G. Rucka and Leandro Fernández. 2021 Hugo Award winner for Best Dramatic Presentation, NAACP Award for Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture, and Critics' Choice Super Awards for Best Superhero Movie. ***The Old Guard 2*** was scheduled to be released in 2024, but has been delayed.

**381.** **2020–2021,** ***Cleopatra in Space*** (US.) Prod. by Doug Langdale, Scott Kreamer, and Julia "Fitzy" Fitzmaurice for DreamWorks Animations; aired on Peacock streaming service from July 15, 2020, to January 14, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, SF, space adventure; 3 seasons, 26 episodes, 22 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A historical figure in a SF fantasy setting for teenage viewers. Based on Mike Maihack's cycle of graphic novels *Cleopatra in Space* featuring a teenage Cleopatra.

**382.** ***Brutus vs César*** (FR, BE). Directed and written by Kheiron (Nouchi), prod. by Simon Istolainen et al. for Paiva Films, Centaure, Umedia, etc., in association with Amazon Prime Video; released on Amazon Prime on September 18, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, comedy, fictionalized Roman history, action; 87 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Senators Rufus and Cassius plot to assassinate Caesar, the dictator, and invite his son to join them.

**383. 2020–2022, *Barbaren*** (DE). Written by Jan Martin Scharf, Arne Nolting, Andreas Heckmann, directed by Barbara Eder and Stephen St. Leger; prod. by and released on Neflix; season 1 on October 2, 2020, and season 2 on October 21, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, war drama, fictionalized Roman history; 2 seasons, 18 episodes, 41–51 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. The infamous Roman defeat in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE resulted in the loss of 3 entire legions vanquished by Germanic tribes; it ended Roman expansion beyond the Rhine. Various inaccuracies and a tendency to stress the moral superiority and humanity of the Germanic tribes oppressed by taxes and tributes over the merciless brutality of Rome. The title *Barbaren* seems to refer to Romans rather than the Germanic freedom fighters. Romans speak Italianized Latin, and the tribes modern German. Ancient sources: Strabo (63 BCE–23 CE), Tacitus' (56–120 CE) *Annales* and *Geographica*, Cassius Dio's (155–235 CE) *Historia Romana*. A German quasi-historical action-drama series with lots of violence, brutality, and gore.
**References**. Waddell, 2020, 151–161.

**384. 2020–, *Blood of Zeus*** (US). Created and written by Charley and Vlas Parlapanides, directed by Shaunt Nigoghossian, prod. for Netflix by Powerhouse Animation studio, animation by Mua Film and Hanho Heung-Up; 1st season released on October 27, 2020, 2nd on May 9–10, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Television series, adult animation; 2 seasons of 8 episodes each, 26–37 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Greek mythology outside the canon – new characters and stories. Heron, son of Zeus and Electra, the Queen of Corinth, is hidden by his father from Hera's revenge. He tries to save the world from demons (the Giants' souls were preserved in a cauldron made by Hephaestus and guarded by an automaton, Talos; their bodies were thrown into the ocean; people who found a Giant's corpse became demons after consuming some of the flesh) led by Seraphim, Heron's half-brother presumed murdered by his uncle Acrisius, who usurped the throne of Corinth. The conflict involves the gods and the demons and becomes very convoluted. Finally, the Giants are brought back to life; in a new version of deicide, Zeus is killed but then revived by Poseidon and, later in the conflict, killed again when trying to protect Hera. Seraphim is killed by Heron, who returns to Olympus to unite with his half-brothers. In the Underworld, Seraphim swears to serve Hades, who frees him from eternal punishment. 1st season: Rotten-Tomatoes Critics Consensus: "*Blood of Zeus* reforges Greek mythology into an epic battle royal with slick animation and sterling voice acting, earning it a spot on the Mount Olympus of action animation" (RottenTomatoes, n.d. a). Tentatively planned for 5 seasons.

**385. 2020–2022, *Romulus*** (IT). Created and directed by Matteo Rovere, co-directed by Michele Alhaique and Enrico Maria Artale, prod. by M. Rovere, Paolo Lucarini, et al. for Sky Italia, Groenlandia, and Cattleya, in collab. with ITV Studios; released on Sky Atlantic on November 6, 2020.
**Genre & length**. Television series, a retelling of a foundational Roman myth; 1 season of 10 episodes, 60 min. each. A 2nd season of 8 episodes was aired from October 21 to November 11, 2022.
**Classical content & comments**. The language used is reconstructed archaic Latin, but on Sky Atlantic, the 1st season was dubbed in Italian with the possibility to watch in the original Latin. The action begins earlier than M. Rovere's 2019 movie *Il primo re* and presents the imagined antecedents of Rome's foundational myth. Great care has been taken to reconstruct the 8th-c. BCE reality, with the assistance of eminent archaeologists, such as Andrea Carandini (*Roma. Il primo giorno*, 2007), Paolo Carafa (specialist in Ancient Roman topography), and Valentino Nizzo (Director of the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia). Winner of the 2021 Nastro d'Argento for Best Italian TV Series.

**386. *Wonder Woman 1984*** (US). Directed, co-written, and co-prod. by Patty Jenkins for Warner Bros. Pictures, DC Films, Atlas Entmt, and The Stone Quarry; released on December 16, 2020.

**Genre & length**. Feature superhero film, action, fantasy, mythological figures; 151 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A sequel to the 2017 movie *Wonder Woman*. An Amazon superheroine in 1984 US (Smithsonian Inst.); a "dreamstone" granting wishes: a monkey's paw expects a steep payment for whatever it gives. Based on characters from DC Comics.

## 2021

**387.** ***L'Odyssée.*** S03E01–10. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR). Created and written by Francois Busnel, co-written by Gilbert Sinoué, Jean Charles Paugam, prod. by Nathalie Amsellem, Sylvain Bergère, et al. for Arte France and Rosebud Productions; aired on Arte from February 7 to March 7, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Documentary television series, retelling of myths; season 3 of 10 episodes, 26 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. 1. "À la recherche d'Ulysse." 2. "L'homme qui défiait les dieux." 3. "La malédiction du Cyclope." 4. "Circé, la magicienne." 5. "Le voyage aux enfers." 6. "Le chant des sirènes." 7. "Le châtiment de Zeus." 8. "Cap sur Ithaque." 9. "La cicatrice du roi." 10. "Le crépuscule des dieux."

**388.** ***시지프스: the myth / Sisyphus: The Myth*** (SK). Directed by Jin Hyuk, written by Lee Je-in and Jeon Chan-ho, prod. by Park Joon-seo and Park Sang-eok for Drama House and JTBC Studios. Aired on JTBC from February 17 to April 8, 2021.
**Genre & length**. A time-travel SF fantasy television series; 1 season of 16 episodes, 70 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. In episode 8, a painting of Sisyphus created by the villain of the series is discovered, and the hero explains the hopeless and never-ending punishment of Sisyphus from Greek mythology, who repeatedly tries to roll a rock up a mountain; each attempt ends in failure, and Sisyphus must try again. After a nuclear disaster, the survivors time-travel to the past in order to prevent the catastrophe and change the future but their attempts have little chance of success. Elements of a vaguely suggested time-loop phenomenon recall the 2017 SF film *Before I Fall* paraphrasing the myth of Sisyphus. In a bizarre twist, the nuclear disaster is limited to the Korean Peninsula; it may reflect the fear of a nuclear conflict between North and South Korea.

**389.** ***This Little Love of Mine*** (AU). Directed by Christine Luby, written by Georgia Harrison, prod. by Lionel Hicks and Phil Hunt for The Steve Jaggi Company and McLaren House; released on April 6, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, romantic comedy; 91 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A hostess in a tropical resort shows the night sky to dinner guests at the hotel's restaurant. She explains: "Over to the east, we have the constellation of the beautiful maiden Andromeda. Legend has it she was rescued from a sea monster by the brave warrior Perseus, son of Zeus. After turning the monster to stone, they rode away on his white-winged horse, Pegasus, and lived happily ever after. And the gods placed them in the night sky as a reminder to all of us to follow our hearts." A later exchange between the romantically involved couple: "Andromeda, meet Pegasus! Are you Perseus, Zeus' son?"

**390.** **"Ground Control to Sara Lance."** S06E01. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Developed by Greg Berlanti, Marc Guggenheim, Andrew Kreisberg, and Phil Klemmer, written by James Eagan and Mark Bruner, directed by Kevin Mock, prod. by Berlanti Productions, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; aired on The CW on May 2, 2021.
**Genre & length**. 83rd episode of a television series, SF fantasy; 7 seasons, 110 episodes, 42–45 min. This episode runs for 42 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Time-travelling aliens abducted Sara Lance, the captain of the *Waverider*, as the "quintessential human." They also abducted other humans and stored them in cryo chambers on their ship. Among them was Spartacus, who thought he was the "quintessential human," but the aliens took him only as their food reserve. When Sara escaped from her chamber, she liberated Spartacus. He let out a monster from another pod, but while claiming to be undefeatable, he did not help Sara vanquish it. He told her that he did not want to tire himself because if she were killed, he would have to revenge her. He ignored Sara's warnings and was caught and devoured by the aliens. This highly unfavourable image of Spartacus may be a reaction, typical for the series, to the idealized stereotype of the tragic hero well-established in audiovisual culture.

**391.** ***Jupiter's Legacy*** (US). Developed by Steven DeKnight and Sang Kyu Kim, prod. for Millarwood, Di Bonaventura Pictures, and DeKnight Productions; released on Netflix on May 7, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Superhero television series based on a comic book; 1 season of 8 episodes, 35–56 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Mark Millar and Frank Quitely's 2013 comic book series *Jupiter's Legacy*. A superhero team known as the Union of Justice, composed of people gifted with superpowers, is led by the Utopian and functions according to the Utopian principles: do not kill, do not interfere in political matters. The next generation struggles with practising the Utopian's ideals. Mythological inspirations: the title reflects the superpower of the Utopian – he controls lightning and thunder.

**392.** **2021–2023,** ***Domina*** (IT, UK). Created, written, and exec. prod. by Simon Burke, directed by Claire McCarthy, David Evans, and Debs Paterson, prod. by John Phillips and Carmen Maloney for Fifty Fathoms, Tiger Aspect, Cattleya, Sky Italia, and Sky Studios; aired from May 14, 2021, to August 13, 2023, on Sky Atlantic (Italy and UK).
**Genre & length**. Television series, fictionalized Roman history, a biopic; 2 seasons of 8 episodes each, 48–55 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. Octavian's road to power and his 51-year-long marriage to Livia Drusilla, the most powerful woman in Roman history, can be seen from her perspective.
**References**. Holland, 2021.

**393.** ***Idéfix et les Irréductibles / Dogmatix and the Indomitables*** (FR). Directed by Charles Vaucelle, written by Olivier Serrano, Hervé Benedetti, Philippe Clerc, et al., prod. by Dionen Clauteaux and Céleste Surugue for GMT Productions, Les Editions Albert René, M6, etc.; aired on Okoo (France Televisions) from July 2, 2021, on France 4 from August 28, 2021, on Télé-Québec from January 23, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, humorous fantasy, fictional Roman history; 1 season of 52 episodes, 11 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny's series of comic books. Pseudo-historical fantasy, a prequel to the comic-book series *Asterix*. Gaul in 52 BCE. Defending Lutetia against the Romans, Dogmatix leads a resistance group, the Indomitables, composed of his animal friends. The first ever animated *Asterix* series centred on Dogmatix.

**394.** ***Medusa*** (BR). Directed and written by Anita Rocha da Silveira, prod. by Mayra Auad, Vânia Catani, and Fernanda Thuran for Bananeira Filmes and MyMama Entmt; released on July 12, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, urban horror, feminist; 129 min.
**Classical content & comments**. "Michele, Mariana, Melissa… I once read that girls' names that start with the letter 'M' are names of malicious women… Mary Magdalene… Messalina… Monsters." The director was inspired by the similarity to the myth of Medusa of several recent cases in Brazil of "Christian" girl gangs attacking at night girls deemed promiscuous – "she was punished because of her loss of purity. In one version I read, she was raped, and in another, she just had sex.

That got me thinking: How does a myth that has existed for thousands of years resonate with today's society? I decided to write this film to explore that" (A. Rocha da Silveira in Martin, 2022).

**395.** ***Centaurworld*** (US). Created, co-directed, and co-written by Megan Nicole Dong, co-written by Jen Bardekoff, Dominic Bisignano, et al., prod. by Megan Nicole Dong and Louis J. Cuck for Netflix Animation and Sketchshark Productions; released on Netflix from July 30 to December 7, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Animated television series, musical comedy; 2 seasons, 18 episodes, 25–73 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Someone riding a horse brings a magical object to the war zone but lands in Centaurworld, situated in a magical Centaur Valley; the horse gets separated from the rider and acquires the ability to speak. The horse asks the locals (singing Centaurs of many varieties) to help him find the rider, which leads to a series of fascinating adventures.

**396.** **"No Direction Home."** S05E12. ***Billions*** (US). Created and prod. by Brian Koppelman, David Levien, Andrew Ross Sorkin, et al., directed by Dan Attias, written by B. Koppelman and D. Levien, prod. for Best Available! and TBTF Production Inc.; aired on October 3, 2021.
**Genre & length**. 60th episode of a television series; 7 seasons, 84 episodes, 54–60 min. each. This episode: 58 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A mythological analogy to the high-stake business world. Chuck Rhoades says to Bobby Axelrod: "A Titan steals fire and gets his liver eaten every day for punishment. Another one picks the wrong side and has to hold the world on his shoulders for all time. A king tells a secret and has to push a rock up a hill for his trouble. Believe it if you will, or look for the metaphor in it; one thing's for sure. We don't know how to be happy." Michael Prince to Axelrod: "Roman soldiers on the campaign carried three days of rations and foraged. Going to ground with under a billion liquid is your equivalent of that."

**397.** **"The Siren."** S03E07. ***What We Do in the Shadows*** (US). Created by Jemaine Clement, directed by Yana Gorskaya, written by Shana Gohd, prod. by J. Clement et al. for FXP; aired on FX on October 7, 2021.
**Genre & length**. 27th episode in a docudrama television series, fantasy, supernatural; 25 min.
**Classical content & comments**. 4 vampires live together on Staten Island, NY. 2 vampires are lured by the voice of a siren called Sheila, who intends to eat them. One escapes, and the other falls in love with Sheila but is rescued by his friends anyway. The series runs on FX since March 27, 2019.

**398.** ***Eternals*** (US). Directed by Chloé Zhao, written by C. Zhao, Patrick Burleigh, Ryan and Kaz Firpo, prod. by Kevin Feige and Nate Moore for Marvel Studios; released on October 18, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, superheroes/ancient aliens, fantasy, action, adaptation of a comic book; 156 min.
**Classical content & comments**. An explanation of how Greek mythology came to be: ancient aliens (Eternals, who are AI: Ajak, Druig, Gilgamesh, Ikaris, Kingo, Makkari, Phastos, Sersi, Sprite, and Thena) are sent from space by a superior being to facilitate the birth of other such beings whose mission is to create and recreate solar systems and make the cosmos function properly. Sumer, Babylon, Greece: the Eternals defend humans against the Deviants (AI predators) and assist in human progress. All human mythologies originate from the presence of the Eternals on the planet. In the pre-credits, Stonehenge is shown, suggesting its connection to the Eternals. In post-credits, Sersi's human boyfriend is opening a wooden casket with an inscription: *Mors mihi lucrum*, holding a magic sword. Based on Jack Kirby's 1976 Marvel comic series under the same title.

**399.** ***Love Hard*** (US). Directed by Hernán Jiménez, written by Danny Mackey, and Rebecca Ewing, prod. by Joseph McGinty Nichol and Mary Viola for Wonderland Sound & Vision; released on Netflix on November 5, 2021.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, romantic comedy; 105 min.
**Classical content & comments**. To explain the romantic notion of soulmate and true love, the following story is told: "It's been said that according to Greek mythology, humans were originally created with four arms and four legs and a head with two faces. But fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning humans to spend the rest of their lives searching for their other half. And if that's the truth, then Zeus is an ass…" This story involving not only Zeus but also Apollo and Hephaestus is based on Aristophanes' speech on the nature of love in Plato's *Symposium*, 189d–193d.

**400.** **"All the Bells Say."** S03E09. ***Succession*** (US). Directed by Mark Mylod, written and created by Jesse Armstrong and Jamie Carragher, prod. by J. Armstrong, Scott Ferguson, Will Ferrell, et al. for HBO; aired on December 12, 2021.
**Genre & length**. 29th episode of a television series, satirical comedy-drama; 4 seasons, 39 episodes. This episode runs for 66 min.
**Classical content & comments**. One of the characters claims that in Ancient Rome, they wanted to make the slaves wear the same clothes so they could identify them. They decided not to because they realized that if all the slaves dressed the same, they would see how many of them there were, and they would rise up and kill their masters. J. Armstrong won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series. Season 4 was released on HBO Max on March 27, 2023, and ran until May 28, 2023.

**401.** ***The Matrix Resurrections*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Lana Wachowski, co-written by David Mitchell and Aleksandar Hemon, co-prod. by James McTeigue and Grant Hill for Warner Bros. Pictures, Village Roadshow Pictures, and Venus Castina Productions; released on December 22, 2021.
**Genre & length**. 4th feature film in a cycle, SF action; 148 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A sequel to the 2003 *The Matrix Revolutions*. Niobe, Morpheus, Persephone, the Oracle. For more details, see the 2003 *The Matrix Reloaded*.

## 2022

**402.** **"Cannonade."** S06E01. ***Billions*** (US). Created and prod. by Brian Koppelman, David Levien, Andrew Ross Sorkin, et al., directed by Joshua Marston, written by B. Koppelman, D. Levien, and A. Ross Sorkin, prod. for Best Available! and TBTF Production Inc.; aired on January 23, 2022.
**Genre & length**. 61st episode of a television series; 7 seasons, 84 episodes, 54–60 min. each. This one runs for 52 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Prince says about Chuck Rhoades: like Cincinnatus, leaving matters of state for the plough. Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (ca. 519–ca. 431 BCE), dictator in 458 and 439 BCE (Liv., *Hist*. 3.26.6–3.30). Rather like Manius Curius Dentatus (d. 270 BCE): "I see no glory in having money myself, but in commanding those that do." Rhoades answers him: "I'm less interested in speaking Latin than in speaking the truth." Cf. "It seemed to him that a better thing than having gold was ruling those who did" (Cic., *De sen*. 56: "non enim aurum habere praeclarum sibi videri dixit, sed eis qui haberent aurum imperare"; "Indeed he said that it seemed to him an excellent thing not to have gold, but to rule over those who have gold" – Cicero, 1923, trans. W.A. Falconer). Valerius Maximus (4.3.5a) rephrases the thought: "narrate Samnitibus M'. Curium malle locupletibus imperare quam ipsum fieri locupletem" ("tell the Samnites that M'.

Curius prefers to command the rich rather than to become rich himself" – Valerius Maximus, 2000, trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey).

**403.** **"Rubicon."** S04E09. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Directed by Andi Armaganian, written by Alan McElroy et al., prod. by Michelle Paradise et al. for Secret Hideout, Roddenberry Entertainment, Living Dead Guy Productions, and CBS Studios; aired on Paramount+ on February 17, 2022.
**Genre & length**. 51st episode of a television series, military SF; 5 seasons, 65 episodes, 45 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. As the title suggests, the episode deals with a point of no return: the destruction of the Dark Matter Anomaly. Based on *Star Trek*, created by Gene Roddenberry.

**404.** **"Hostis humani generis."** S06E06. ***Billions*** (US). Created and prod. by Brian Koppelman, David Levien, Andrew Ross Sorkin, et al., directed by Tara Nicole Weyr, written by Beth Schacter, prod. for Best Available! and TBTF Production Inc.; aired on February 27, 2022.
**Genre & length**. 66th episode of a television series; 7 seasons, 84 episodes, 50–60 min. each. This one runs for 50 min. Available on HBO Max.
**Classical content & comments**. "The original term for a pirate, 'Hostis humani generis.' 'Enemy of all mankind.' That's right. Beyond any legal protection and prosecutable by any and all." See Cic., *Off*. 3.29.107, *Verr*. 2.5.76.

**405.** **"Don't Get Attached."** S04E05. ***Killing Eve*** (UK). Directed by Emily Atef, written by Laura Neal and Georgia Lester, exec. prod. by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Lee Morris, Sandra Oh, et al. for Sid Gentle Films, Endeavor Content, and BBC America; aired on March 27, 2022.
**Genre & length**. 29th episode of a television series, spy thriller, black comedy, an adaptation of a novel; 4 seasons, 32 episodes, 40–43 min. each. This one runs for 42 min.
**Classical content & comments**. One of the former members of a group active since the Cold War investigated by Eve, Oliver Schubert, lectures about the myth of Cupid and Psyche and says that in popular culture it is associated with sweet romance and customs like Valentine's Day. In contrast, in the myth, Psyche did not necessarily remain gentle and good. Prof. Schubert asks what Psyche would be ready to do, having already endured incredible hardships, including a journey to the Underworld. The story resonates with Eve as it mirrors her relationship with the professional killer Villanelle. Based on Luke Jennings's 3 novellas from 2014–2016, put together in 2017 as *Codename Villanelle*.

**406.** ***Thermae Romae novae*** (JP, US). Directed by Tetsuya Tatamitan, written by Yūichirō Momose, prod. for Kabushiki-gaisha Nazu, licensed by Netflix; released on March 28, 2022.
**Genre & length**. An original net animation (ONA) series – called in Japan *web animation*, historical SF manga; 11 episodes, 27 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Ancient Rome, 128 BCE. Lucius Modestus, a Roman bathhouse architect, lacks inspiration. He time-travels to a modern Japanese bathhouse and tries to copy Japanese inventions at home. A long opening sequence with Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. 1. All baths lead to Rome ("Omnes thermae Romam dugunt" [*sic*!]). At the end of each episode, there is a segment about hot-spring baths in Japan presented by the manga author Mari Yamazaki. 2. Lucius rarely speaks in Japan, but if he does, it is always in Latin. A gently didactic show presenting similarities between Japanese and Ancient Roman culture, showcasing hot-spring baths in Japan. An adaptation of the 2012 TV anime series *Thermae Romae*, based on Yamazaki's manga.
**References**. Kovacs and Marshall, 2016, xxvi–xxviii. See the 2012 live-action movie adaptation and Cyrino, 2022b, 82–97.

**407.** **"Two of One."** S02E06. ***Star Trek: Picard*** (US). Directed by Jonathan Frakes, created by Akiva Goldsman, Michael Chabon, Alex Kurtzman, et al., written by Cindy Appel and Jane Maggs, prod.

by A. Goldsman, Terry Matalas, Douglas Aarniokoski, et al. for Roddenberry Entmt; released on Paramount+ on April 7, 2022.
**Genre & length**. 16th episode of a television series, military SF, fantasy, time travel; 3 seasons, 30 episodes, 41 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A mad scientist, Dr. Soong, produces a series of clones and gives them names from Greek mythology: Persephone, Despoina, Persephassa, Artemis, Thallia, Proserpina (pronounced Prosperina), and Kore.

**408.** ***My Love Affair with Marriage*** (LV, US, LU). Directed, written, animated, and prod. by Signe Baumane, co-prod. by Roberts Vinovskis, Sturgis Warner, and Raoul Nadalet for Studio Locomotive, The Marriage Project, and Antevita Films; released on June 11, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Adult animation film, musical comedy-drama; 108 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A semi-autobiographical quest for love by a young girl conditioned by societal values and aspirations. Mythical Sirens guide her in her choices and explain expectations. The urge to find her fated partner is explained in a simplified version of Aristophanes' story on the origin of love in Plato's *Symposium*. No attribution to Plato or Greek mythology, only a reference to non-specified "gods." Nominated for 28 awards, won 18.

**409.** **"First Kiss."** S01E01. ***First Kill*** (US). Created, co-written, and co-prod. by Victoria Schwab, directed by Amanda Tapping, Eriq la Salle, Jet Wilkinson, et al., prod. by Felicia D. Henderson, Matthew Matruski, Emma Roberts, et al. for WaterWalk Entmt and Belletrist Productions; released on Netflix on June 22, 2022.
**Genre & length**. 1st episode of a television series, fantasy, horror, coming of age, hidden world; 1 season, 8 episodes, 42–59 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. A budding teen romance between a Legacy vampire (ancient lineage) girl called Juliette and Calliope, a girl from an ancient family of monster slayers. Allusions to *Romeo and Juliet*. For centuries, the slayers were named after classical gods and heroes; Calliope's brothers are Apollo and Theseus. Their mother's name is Thalia. There is no classical inspiration apart from the names. Two rather grammatically unconvincing Latin incantations: *Intra lux tenebras relego* and *Puriati studentibus* (?). Based on an eponymous short story by V. Schwab. Netflix cancelled the series after the 1st season because of low ratings.

**410.** ***Thor: Love and Thunder*** (US). Directed and written by Taika Vaititi, co-written by Jennifer Kaitin Robinson, prod. by Kein Feige and Brad Winderbaum for Marvel Studios; theatrical release on June 23, 2022, released on Disney+ on September 8, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, superhero comedy, based on Marvel comics; 119 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Powerful gods from different mythologies (Gods of the Universe) live in Omnipotence City. The most powerful is Zeus, who fears the Necrosword wielded by Gorr the Butcher God. Zeus does not want to help Thor vanquish Gorr; he refuses to lend Thor his thunderbolt. Thor, with his friends, wounds Zeus and takes away the thunderbolt. There are 2 post-credits sequences; in the first, Zeus, with his son Hercules, plans revenge on Thor: "When did we become a joke? No, no more. They will fear us again when Thor Odinson falls from the sky. Do you understand me, Hercules? Do you understand me, my son? Yes, Father." The second sequence shows Valhalla, the Viking heaven. 4th film in the Marvel *Thor* cycle, a sequel to the 2017 *Thor: Ragnarok*.

**411.** ***Lost Treasures of Rome*** (US). Directed by Fabio Cerveira and Bianca Zamfira, prod. by Laura Oak, John Fothergill, Helen Hawken, Carlo Massarella, et al. for Argonon Group and Windfall Films; released on Disney+ and National Geographic Channel on June 24, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, documentary; 1 season, 6 episodes, 45 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. An international team of archaeologists discusses the latest finds at various excavation sites. 1. "Hidden Secrets of Pompeii." 2. "Rome's Sunken Secrets." 3. "Secrets of the Colosseum." 4. "Nero's Lost Palace." 5. "Secrets of Rome's Great Wall." 6. "Pompeii's Lost Twin: Herculaneum."

**412.** ***The Gray Man*** (US). Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, written by J. Russo, Christopher Markus, and Stephen McFeeley, prod. by A. and J. Russo, Mike Larocca, et al. for AGBO and Roth/Kirschenbaum Films; released on Netflix on July 22, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, action thriller, adaptation of a novel; 129 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The main character has "Sisyphos" tattooed on his arm in the Greek alphabet. "It's a guy's name in Greek. What guy? Just a guy. You know, trying to get a rock up a hill. Why? They made him. Who made him? The gods. Did they need a rock? They were just trying to punish him, I think. Did he deserve it? Probably. Did he like it? Probably not. So why'd he do it? You ask a lot of questions. […] Does he ever get to the top of the hill? I'll let you know." Based on Mark Greaney's 2009 novel *The Gray Man*, the 1st in a series now counting 10 more books, with an 11th (*Burner*) published in 2023.

**413.** ***The Sandman*** (US). Developed and exec. prod. by Neil Gaiman, David S. Goyer, and Allan Heinberg, directed by Mike Barker, Jamie Childs, et al., co-prod. by M. Barker for PurePop Inc., The Blank Corp., Phantom Four, DC Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; released on Netflix on August 5–20, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, dark fantasy, based on a graphic novel; 1 season, 10 episodes + a double bonus episode (see the entry below), 37–64 min. per episode. Season 2 announced.
**Classical content & comments**. A poignant, poetic adaptation of N. Gaiman's 1989–1996 graphic novel *The Sandman*. A dark fantasy bordering on horror. Morpheus, king of dreams, gets imprisoned for a century by a sorcerer. When he escapes, his kingdom is in ruins, and his powerful magic attributes (a bag of sand, a helmet, and a ruby) are gone. His subjects – dreams and nightmares – scattered in the world threaten to blur the difference between being awake and asleep. In his quest to rebuild his kingdom, Morpheus meets his dangerous siblings, Death and Desire.
**References**. Besson, 2014, 497–508; Pszczolińska, 2023.

**414.** **"A Dream of a Thousand Cats"** and **"Calliope."** S01E11. ***The Sandman*** (US). Developed and exec. prod. by Neil Gaiman, David S. Goyer and Allan Heinberg, directed by Hisko Hulsing (Part 1) and Louise Hooper (Part 2); released on Netflix on August 20, 2022.
**Genre & length**. A bonus double episode added to season 1 of a television series, fantasy, superhero; 1st part animation, 2nd live-action; runs for 64 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The world of cats. Calliope, the Muse, is imprisoned by a mediocre writer and brutally forced to inspire him.
**References**. Besson, 2014, 497–508; Pszczolińska, 2023; Olechowska and Pszczolińska, 2023, 137–144.

**415.** **2022–, *Erynie / Erinies*** (PL). Directed and written by Borys Lankosz, co-written by Igor Brejdygant and Magdalena Lankosz, prod. by Krystyna Świeca, Paweł Rzewuski, Marcin Kurek, et al. for Mediabrigade and Telewizja Polska; released on TVP VOD on October 25, 2022, and on Netflix on November 29, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Television series, an adaptation of a series of dark detective novels; 1 season of 12 episodes, 45 min. each. There will possibly be a 2nd season, but no date is available.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on a cycle of detective novels by Marek Krajewski (b. 1966), a classicist previously at the University of Wrocław, now a full-time writer (*Głowa Minotaura* [The Minotaur's Head; 2009], *Erynie* [Erinyes; 2010], *Liczby Charona* [Charon's Numbers; 2011], *Rzeki Hadesu* [Rivers of the Underworld; 2012]). Titles of the series and most of the episodes

allude to Greek mythology or are in Latin: 4. "Kokytos" [Cocytus]; 5. "Lete" [Lethe]; 6. "Alekto" [Alecto]; 7. "Megajra" [Megaera]; 8. "Tyzyfona" [Tisiphone]; 9. "Flegeton" [Phlegethon]; 10. "Subterra"; 11. "Patodycea" [Pathodicy]; 12. "Experimentum crucis." A police detective in Lviv in 1938 is fired, and to make some money until the police hire him again, he works as a Latin tutor. In episode 9, the action moves to Wrocław right after WW2.
**References**. Zieliński, 2016, 51–64.

**416.** ***Wednesday*** (US). Created, written, and co-exec. prod. by Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, co-written by April Blair, Ayla Alpert, and Matt Lambert, directed by Tim Burton, Gandja Monteiro, and James Marshall, prod. by Carmen Pepelea for MGM Television, Tim Burton Productions, and Toluca Pictures; released on Netflix on November 23, 2022.
**Genre & length**. Television series, supernatural horror comedy, coming of age; 1 season of 8 episodes, 46–57 min. each. Filming of season 2 began in May 2024.
**Classical content & comments**. 2 secondary characters, students at the Nevermore Academy attended by Wednesday Addams, display mythological powers: Ajax is a Gorgon able to petrify people temporarily, including himself. Bianca and her friends are Sirens with strangely luminous eyes and a compelling power of suggestion; underwater, they change into mermaids but do not sing. Latin incantations in the last episode revive a dead wizard. A sequel to 1991 *The Addams Family* and 1993 *The Addams Family Values*, movies based on macabre cartoon characters created by Charles S. Addams (1912–1988).

## 2023

**417.** ***Physical: 1000*** (KR). Directed by Jang Ho-gi and Lee Jong-il, created by J. Ho-gi, written by Kang Sook-kyung and Jo Geun-ae, prod. by Kim Hyun-gi, Yoon Kwon-soo, and Han Yul for MBC and Luvworks Media; released on Netflix from January 24 to February 21, 2023.
**Genre & length**. A survival reality show; 1 season of 9 episodes, 51–88 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. Inspired by the ancient Olympic Games, promoting the cult of a healthy and strong body. In Quest 4, five games are based on Greek mythology: 1. The Punishment of Atlas (holding up a 50 kg rock); 2. The Fire of Prometheus (an obstacle course to a flaming torch); 3. The Wings of Icarus (climbing a lowering rope); 4. The Tail of Ouroboros (chasing each other around an arena trying to tag the person running in front); 5. The Punishment of Sisyphus (pushing up a hill a 100 kg boulder). Praised for the participation of women contestants but criticized for occasional lack of transparency and favouritism, as well as for gender-related issues, alleged use of steroids, and negative character traits of some participants. High viewership figures for a non-English reality show. My thanks to Henry Stead for bringing this series to my attention.

**418.** ***Exceptional Beings*** (US). Directed by Njedeh Anthony and Christian Kazadi, written and prod. by N. Anthony, co-prod. by Justin Morgan for Gestalt Effect and FJ Morgan; released on January 31, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, SF fantasy action; 97 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A partial Greek Pantheon: Athena, Hermes, Apollo, and Poseidon. The action is set in the present; the gods meet a mortal woman who can see them, which should not be possible. They begin to question their divinity.

**419.** ***Astérix et Obélix. L'Empire du Milieu / Asterix and Obelix: The Middle Kingdom*** (FR). Directed by Guillaume Canet, written by Philippe Mechelen and Julien Hervé, prod. by Alain Attal and Yohan Baiada for Les Editions Albert Réné, Les Enfants Terribles, Pathé Films, and Les Productions des Trésor; released on February 1, 2023.

**Genre & length**. Feature film, live action, neo-peplum comedy, Roman Gaul; 111 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on Albert Uderzo and René Goscinny's characters and story but not on any specific album. 1st c. BCE: the daughter of a Chinese Emperor, Han Xuandi, fleeing a villainous prince, escapes to Gaul, hoping for assistance from Asterix and Obelix. Asterix and Obelix depart for China, as do Caesar and his army. The movie mainly received unfavourable reviews (dubbed *pathétix* by the RTBF Hugues Dayez, 2023).

**420.** ***Shazam! Fury of the Gods*** (US). Directed by David F. Sandberg, written by Henry Gayden and Chris Morgan, prod. by Peter Safran for New Line Cinema, DC Studios, The Safran Co.; released on March 17, 2023. Available on HBO Max from May 23, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, superhero fantasy, based on DC characters; 130 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A sequel to D.F. Sandberg's 2019 movie *Shazam!* and the 12th part of the DC Extended Universe. Hespera and Kalypso, daughters of the Titan Atlas, break into the museum on the Athenian Acropolis and steal Shazam, the wizard's staff, broken in half by Billy Batson in the 1st movie. Billy, in his superhero form, is "as wise as Solomon, as strong as Hercules, as resilient as Atlas, as powerful as Zeus, as brave as Achilles, and as fast as Mercury." The wizard Shazam, imprisoned in the Gods' Realm for killing Atlas and other gods, is forced to fix the staff; it becomes a weapon for Hespera and Kalypso, who want to heal their world by seeding the Golden Apple, saved from ruin. The wizard warns Billy about the sisters in a dream, and the Shazamily (composed of 6 foster siblings who transform into adult superheroes) gets ready. A 3rd daughter of Atlas, Anthea, befriends Freddy, one of the heroes, but the other 2 sisters interfere, take away Freddy's powers and imprison him in the same cell as the Wizard. While Hespera and Anthea do not want to harm humans, Kalypso is bloodthirsty and revengeful. She wounds Hespera and takes away Anthea's powers. After calling to her aid the dragon Ladon, the guardian of the Golden Apples, she plants the Apple in the grass of a baseball stadium, and a monstrous Tree of Life begins to grow. It begins the destruction of the Earth and brings in monsters, such as Chimeras, harpies, Minotaurs, and a one-horned Cyclops. Billy, the only hero left with powers, with the help of a wounded Hespera and a herd of wild unicorns tamed with rainbow-coloured Skittles, manages to destroy the Tree, Kalypso, Ladon and all the monsters, but at the cost of his life. Wonder Woman, the only divine power left alive, shows up at his funeral and resurrects him. The Shazamily is safe, reunited, and stronger because their parents now know about their superpowers. Only loosely inspired by mythology: the mythological Anthea is not Atlas' daughter; her name is the Roman version of Antheia; also, the name Mercury is used instead of Hermes; the non-mythological wild unicorns are feared by all mythological monsters who are unredeemable villains.

**421.** **"Vox."** S03E09. ***Star Trek: Picard*** (US). Directed by Terry Matalas, written by Sean Tretta and Kiley Rossetter, prod. by Akiva Goldsman, Alex Kurtzman, and Patrick Stewart for CBS Television Studios, Roddenberry Entmt, and Secret Hideout; released on CBS All Access, Amazon Prime Video, etc., on April 13, 2023.
**Genre & length**. 29th episode of a television series, military SF; 3 seasons, 30 episodes, 48 min.
**Classical content & comments**. The Borgh Queen greets Jack, Picard's son, who has inherited Borgh organic technology from his father, saying that she considered for him the name Regenerati (*sic*!) or Puer Dei, but decided on Vox. Picard was Locutus, the one who speaks, and Jack is the voice itself. Jack comments on the Queen's "fondness for Latin."

**422.** ***Knights of the Zodiac*** (US, JP). Directed by Tomek Bagiński, written by Josh Campbell, Matt Stuecken, and Kiel Murray, prod. by Yoshi Ikezawa, Joseph Chou, and Tim Kwok for Stage 6 Films and Toei Company; released on April 28, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Fantasy action film; duration 112 min.

**Classical content & comments**. Based on the manga *Saint Seiya* by Masami Kurumada. The adopted daughter of Seiya, the main character, is called Sienna. She seems to develop strange powers. It is revealed that she is a reincarnation of the goddess Athena, who progressively transforms into an unconscious power that may eventually destroy the world. Apart from names of figures such as Athena, whose defenders are called Knights of Pegasus, there is no visible connection to antiquity. The convoluted plot is difficult to follow. A box-office disaster.

**423.** ***Queen Cleopatra.*** S02. ***African Queens*** (UK). Directed by Tina Gharavi and Victoria Adeola Thomas, written by NneNne Iwuji (episodes 3 and 4) and prod. by Jada Pinkett Smith, Ben Goold, et al. for Nutopia and Westbrook Studios; released on Netflix on May 10, 2023.
**Genre & length**. A 2-season docudrama audiovisual miniseries, a *vie romancée* biopic; 4 episodes per season, 45 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. Season 1: *Njinga* (1583–1663; Queen of Ndongo and Matamba). Re-enactments and statements by class B experts, one of whom claims Octavian (Augustus and Princeps Senatus) was proclaimed emperor by the Roman Senate. The simplistic recreation of dialogues and lack of scholarly rigour produce the impression of a show for high-school viewers. The Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt strongly protested against casting a Black actress in the role of Cleopatra and called it an Afrocentric falsification of their national history. They considered blocking the Netflix release in Egypt and announced the production of an authentic series on the Queen. The accusations of forced Afrocentrism and historical incompetence multiplied on social media, especially from Greek and Egyptian Internet users, even before the release of the series. The controversial casting and the resulting heated debate ensured free global publicity for the series – whether positive or critical. In 2010, the Council also protested against a falsified representation of Cleopatra in the Ramadan 30-episode Egyptian-Syrian series *Klioubatra*.

**424.** ***Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*** (US). Directed and co-written by James Mangold, written by Jez Butterworth, John-Henry Butterworth, and David Koepp, prod. by Kathleen Kennedy, Frank Marshall, and Simon Emanuel for Walt Disney Pictures and Lucasfilm Ltd.; released on May 18, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Action fantasy movie which completes a 5-part cycle; time travel to ancient Syracuse; 154 min.
**Classical content & comments**. Based on characters by George Lucas and Philip Kaufman, it is the 5th and final installment in the *Indiana Jones* film series and a sequel to *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). Indiana Jones time-travels to 212 BCE Syracuse (when the city was at war with the Roman Republic) using Archimedes' Dial of Destiny, an imagined version of Antikythera designed to locate fissures in the fabric of time. The original mechanism was discovered by sponge divers in 1900, off the isolated island of Antikythera, located in the Aegean Sea, between Crete and the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It was used to predict the movements of the Sun, Moon, and planets, as well as dates of future Olympics.
**References**. Solly, 2023.

**425.** ***Clone High*** (US). S02–S03. Created, written, and prod. by Bill Lawrence, Phil Lord, Christopher Miller, et al. for 20th Television, Lord Miller, Atomic Cartoons, etc.; season 2 aired on HBO Max from May 23 to June 22, 2023; the entire season 3 released on February 1, 2024.
**Genre & length**. An adult animated television series revived after a 2-decade break: season 1 aired in 2002; see the listing in the Survey. Seasons 2 and 3 ran for 10 episodes each, 25–27 min. per episode.
**Classical content & comments**. Among the students attending Clone High are the clones of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra.

**426. 2023–, *Krapopolis*** (US). Created and exec. prod. by Dan Harmon, co-exec. prod. by Jordan Young (the showrunner for the 1st season) and Steve Levy for Harmonious Claptrap, Fox Entmt Studios, and Bentobox Entmt, aired on Fox from September 24, 2023.
**Genre & length**. An adult animated mythological heroic sitcom, fantasy, comedy; 1 season of 23 episodes, 33 min. each; renewed for seasons 2–3 with Alex Rubens as showrunner.
**Classical content & comments**. A wide selection of Olympic gods, Titans, mythological heroes, and monsters, including new hybrids, as well as Atlanteans and humans. My thanks to Jakub Ozimek, the Commissioning Editor, for bringing the series to my attention. I'm only signalling it here, as I was unable to watch and analyse it.

**427. *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*** (US). Directed by James Wan, written by David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick, prod. by Zack and Deborah Snyder, Peter Safran, et al. for Warner Bros. Pictures; released on December 20, 2023.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, superhero action, fantasy, SF; 124 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A sequel to J. Wan's 2018 *Aquaman*; see the listing under the year of release. According to the *Aquaman* plot, Atlantis was a federation of 6 kingdoms, but apparently a 7th, called Necrus, had been sealed deep in the ocean floor in Antarctica and erased from memory and all records. Its captive king, Kordax, who transformed himself and his subjects into monsters trying to take the Atlantean throne from his brother, Atlan, is attempting to break free by manipulating David Kane (Black Manta) through the cursed black trident. Kane wants revenge for the death of his father killed by Aquaman, the King of Atlantis. He is wrecking the Earth's climate by burning the reserves of orichalcum, a metal that the Atlanteans had stopped using and stored centuries earlier when they realized it was polluting the planet with greenhouse gases. Working together with his half-brother, Orm, and later with the help of joint Atlantean armies, King Aquaman manages to vanquish Manta, liberate Kordax, and stop the ecological disaster. He reveals the existence of Atlantis to the human world and asks the United Nations to accept Atlantis as a new member so that they can repair and stabilize the endangered environment together.

**428. *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). Directed by James Bobin (pilot), Anders Engström (episodes 3 and 4), Jet Wilkinson (5 and 6), written by Rick Riordan, Jonathan E. Steinberg, Monica Owusu-Green, et al., prod. by J.E. Steinberg, R. Riordan, Dan Shotz, et al. for Disney Branded Television, 20th Television, and the Gotham Group; season 1 released on Disney+ from December 20, 2023, to January 30, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Television series, mythological fantasy, adaptation of R. Riordan's cycle of novels; 1st season of 8 episodes (33–44 min.) adapts *The Lightning Thief*; the following seasons are planned 1 per novel.
**Classical content & comments**. In the 2 previous movie adaptations (2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* and 2013 *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*) Riordan had no influence on the production. The series is being produced with the writer's active participation. Contrary to the 2 film adaptations, in the series, the main characters are much younger, the same age as in the novels.

## Productions Released or to Be Released in 2024

**429. *Kaos*** (UK). Created and written by Charlie Covell, directed by Georgi Banks-Davies and Runyararo Mapfumo (2nd block), prod. by C. Covell, Chris Fry, G. Banks-Davies, et al. for Sister, All3Media, and Brightstar; released on Netflix on August 29, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Television series, dark comedy, mythological fantasy; 1 season of 8 episodes, 60 min. each.

**Classical content & comments**. Prometheus, still hanging from a boulder and having his liver devoured by an eagle, cheers on contemporary humans, with names and roles of mythological heroes, as they fulfil an ancient prophecy announcing the end of the psychopathic King and Queen of Olympus' rule. Zeus fears the loss of his power and becomes paranoid. Hera, Poseidon, Hades and Persephone, and Dionysus are also featured in the story, as well as humans – the president of Crete, Minos, Poseidon's puppet, Minos' daughter Ariadne (Ari), the Minotaur, who is, in fact, Ari's brother Glaucus kept in the Labyrinth built by Minos' prisoner Daedalus. There are even some Trojans (including Cassandra) treated as second-class citizens on Crete. Eurydice (Riddy), the wife of Orpheus, a rock star, wants to leave him but dies in an accident. Orpheus goes to the Underworld to retrieve her with the help of Dionysus and later of Medusa and Persephone, who are against exploiting dead humans by the gods. Zeus tries to kill the 3 Fates but cannot change the prophecy. This dark comedy has good actors and production values, even though it occassionally serves excessive vulgarity, gore, and horror.

**430.** ***Circe*** (US). Written by Madeline Miller, Rick Jaffa, and Amanda Silver, prod. by R. Jaffa, A. Silver, and John Cameron for Chernin Entmt and Endeavor Content; to be released on HBO Max in 2024, which is unlikely, as of October 22, 2024, there was still no news even on casting.
**Genre & length**. Television miniseries, adaptation of a novel, mythological fantasy; 8 episodes.
**Comment**. Based on the celebrated 2018 novel *Circe* by M. Miller.

**431.** ***Gladiator II*** (US). Directed by Ridley Scott, written by David Scarpa, prod. by R. Scott, David Franzoni, Douglas Wick, et al. for Parkes/MacDonald Image Nation, Red Wagon Films, and Scott Free Enterprises; released in the US on November 22, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, fantasized Roman history.
**Classical content & comments**. A continuation of *Gladiator*, ca. 30 years after the death of Maximus. The main character is Lucius, Commodus' nephew and son of his sister, Lucilla. Maximus saved Lucius' life. However, we know from ancient sources that Lucilla's son died in childhood.
**References**. Kidd, 2024.

**432.** ***Those About to Die*** (US, CN). Directed by Roland Emmerich and Marco J. Kreuzpaintner, written by Robert Rodat, prod. by Harald Kloser, R. Emmerich, R. Rodat, et al. for Centropolis Entmt, Er Dong Pictures, High End Productions, etc.; to be released on Peacock in the US and on Prime Video in Europe on July 19, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Television series, fantasized Roman history, a gladiatorial epic; season 1 of 10 episodes.
**Comment**. Inspired by Daniel P. Mannix's 1958 non-fiction book under the same title. Gladiators under Vespasian.
**References**. Kidd, 2024.

**433.** ***The Return*** (IT, UK). Directed, co-written, and co-prod. by Uberto Pasolini, co-written by John Collee, and Edward Bond, co-prod. by Roberto Sesso, Giorgos Karnavas, et al. for Bleecker Street, Red Wave Films, HanWay Films, etc. Shown at Toronto International Film Festival on September 7, 2024; released in the US on December 6, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Feature film, a new take on the end of Homer's *Odyssey*; 116 min.
**Classical content & comments**. A grim, modern, anti-war stance. While based on Homer, there are no gods, no magic, no mythology – just a weary, aged soldier returning home from a decade-long war, followed by another decade of cursed wanderings in which all his companions perish. He has had his fill of violence and bloodshed, yet must resort to both once more in a desperate attempt to save his wife, his son, and his island.

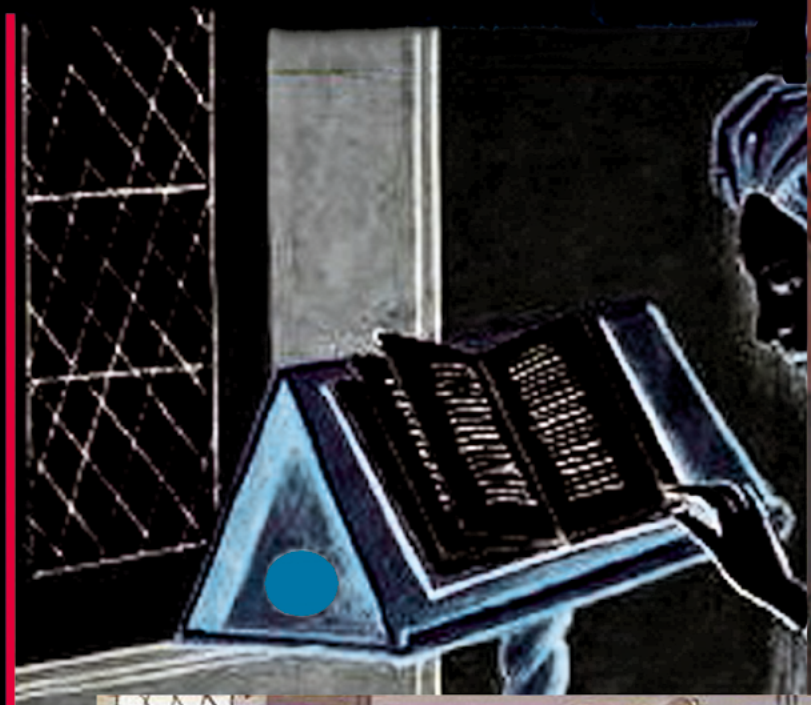
## Planned for 2025/2026

**434.** ***Asterix and the Big Fight*** (FR, US). Directed by Alain Chabat, prod. by Alain Goldman for Netflix and Hachette's Les Editions Albert René; the series will begin streaming in 2025.
**Genre & length**. 3D animated television series, a fantasized Roman Gaul; 5 episodes, 30 min. each.
**Classical content & comments**. Adapted from *Asterix and the Big Fight*, where the Romans, trying to get even with Asterix and his people, instigate a fight between several chiefs and manipulate the results by abducting a druid and stealing the famous magic potion.

**435.** ***Harry Potter Series*** (UK, US). Showrunner, writer, and exec. prod. Francesca Gardiner, exec. prod. J.K. Rowling. Based on J.K. Rowling's novels. Prod. for Warner Bros. Discovery, Warner Bros. Entmt, and Warner Bros. Television; launch of the series tentatively scheduled for 2026 on Max; no other names of the members of the production team or cast were known as of July 7, 2024.
**Genre & length**. Television series, adaptation of a cycle of 7 novels, fantasy with mythological elements. It is planned to be broadcast over a period of 10 years.
**Comment**. See entries on the film cycle with consecutive productions released in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011.
**References**. Armstrong, 2024.

CHAPTER 3

# HANDLING THE DATA







Zbigniew Karaszewski's artwork, based on a detail from Giovanni Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris*, 1488–1496, BnF Français 599, f. 18v, depicting Eriphila. Illumination by Robinet Testard. Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:De_mulieribus_claris_(BnF_Fran%C3%A7ais_599)_f.18v_-_Eriphila.jpeg; user: Shakko (2020).

Chapter 3

# HANDLING THE DATA

## A Personal Perspective

As the first step in this exercise, I would like to return to what I briefly mentioned in the Introduction about issues facing a scholar born and educated in Central Europe who studies predominantly the audiovisual reception of antiquity in English. Such a scholar necessarily views American, British, and Western European audiovisual series from a perspective fashioned by a national culture for almost half a century of existence enclosed in a totalitarian system. While Soviet communism collapsed three decades ago and the formerly communist European countries almost overnight became emerging free-market democracies, what was labelled in Cold War speak as the East and the West did not jointly transform into a single, self-regulating system of connecting vessels. Attitudes to universal issues such as equality, social justice, tolerance, and the free exercise of all fundamental human rights still vary, reflecting diverse experiences. Rights hypocritically written into communist constitutions were, in reality, consistently and brutally violated, generating an understandable mistrust of noble principles used as slogans and propaganda tools. My own reasoning and research methods, intended to be impartial, may be seen by others as coloured by my cultural background. I see no reason to apologize for this unavoidable fact of life but prefer to caution the readers that mine are the eyes and voice of an outsider.

The series discussed in this book are easily accessible in all English-speaking markets and beyond. Yet, they were produced primarily for local, although substantial (US, UK), audiences and reflect their locally relevant concerns. Intensive international programming sales and – most importantly – streaming services ensure the globalization of the content subtitled or dubbed in other languages. Outside audiences perceive the series' message through the lens of a potentially remote reality from the one they were created in. The sociocultural issues of North American, British, or Australian audiences are not the

same as those faced by people in formerly communist countries, and while some of them are genuinely universal and, to a basic degree, shared, others may have been quite different.

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the best way to handle the data collected in the Chronological Survey. First, I would like to identify the areas that reception scholars, mostly insiders, choose to study in the classically inspired audiovisual narratives, and which themes and trends they choose to highlight and interpret. Second, I need to determine whether an outsider's approach could add something valuable to the already impressive but still fragmentary and not definitive analysis, and if so, what tools could be used to achieve a more comprehensive grasp of the over two-decades-long story of audiovisual creativity. One chapter does not offer enough room to manoeuvre in this vast material, and, *nolens volens*, I had to resort to three space-saving tactics if I wanted to produce a review of the entire scholarly literature dedicated to audiovisual classical reception. I began by focusing my attention on publications that appeared in book form, with only occasional mentions of articles published in journals. Then, I continued by zeroing in on the contents, and finally, I limited myself to a rapid and summary treatment. These shortcuts, I believe, should not impair the desired outcome, which is a general awareness of what audiovisual reception scholars have covered and achieved until now.

## The Status of Audiovisual Reception Scholarship: Overviews

The status of the research into classical reception has been briefly discussed in the Introduction; it has also been mirrored in the Chronological Survey (Chapter 2), where each entry ends with a list of references to scholars who wrote about the creation featured there. In the present chapter, I review the previous scholarship as seen from the 2023 perspective defined by the motivation of my book, expressing awe and respect for the pioneers but offering a clinical look at what was accomplished and how it informed my purpose and approach. Regretfully, as mentioned in the preceding section, it would be impractical to discuss this entire body of scholarly effort in the detail it deserves, given the overwhelming volume of publications on audiovisual classical reception accumulated since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Therefore, my review, while necessarily subjective and, as a rule, summary, focuses on the titles that influenced my understanding of the discipline.

The present study investigates television series. However, film was the original medium of the audiovisual reception of antiquity and has been naturally attracting the lion's share (if not all) of scholarly attention. Hence, my review must start with what research there is on films before widening its scope to include television.[1]

It opens with Jon Solomon's 1978 *The Ancient World in the Cinema* (2001a),[2] as suggested by the chronological order of publications. The "ancient world" of the title includes Classical Antiquity, the Old and New Testaments, Babylon, Ancient (pre-Hellenistic) Egypt, and Persia. "Cinema" covers the entire history of the medium[3] – from the silent beginnings to the end of the twentieth century (Solomon updated the second edition of 2001).[4] The total number of films set in the ancient world[5] produced since the beginning of the medium is assessed at 400, and that seems to include films created during the twenty-odd years between the first and the second edition; some television series of the last quarter of the twentieth century are mentioned but not discussed in any detail. The book is an admirable attempt to examine movies inspired by antiquity as a distinct area of cinematic history. It is particularly worthy of respect since the required research was conducted when digital access to films was non-existent and even word processors and personal computers were no more than ideas on the horizon. The approach is content oriented, and audiovisual productions are presented in large thematic groups: history, mythology, the Bible, and other

[1] See the 2023 special issue of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* entitled *Antiquity Now: The Ancient Classical World on Television*, especially Sylvie Magerstädt and Monica Silveira Cyrino's "Introduction: The Ancient Classical World from Film to Television" (2023, 2–7). I'll return to that publication at the end of this section; it came to my attention only in the post-review stage of my study.

[2] I am using the second, revised, and expanded edition from 2001. This important and useful book fell victim to sloppy proofreading (how annoying for the author!): the only Latin motto among many others in English, placed before Chapter 1 (p. xx), taken from Cic., *Brut*. 11, was ruined by an absurd typo: *ali**z**uid* instead of *ali**q**uid*.

[3] For well over two decades since the 1978 edition, television as a classical reception medium was practically ignored by scholars.

[4] The logic behind the titles and the order of chapters, called "Musaic" by the author, in the preface to the second edition (Solomon, 2001a, xvi), is not explained. While the title of the first chapter, "Mnemosyne: A Survey of the Genre," makes obvious sense, some titles of the following chapters named after Mnemosyne's daughters, the Olympian Muses, do not. E.g., why should Polyhymnia sponsor "the Old Testament," Erato the "New Testament and Tales of the Christ," or Euterpe "Babylon, Egypt, Persia, and the Ancient Orient"?

[5] N.B. These films are not only inspired by the ancient world but their action is situated in antiquity.

relevant antiquities, followed by a switch from themes to genres – adaptations of ancient theatre with one Roman satirical romance added for good measure.[6]

Here are the details. After a general survey, Solomon tackles historical films (of which he counted 110), first about Ancient Greece and then Rome. In a storytelling mode, he discusses which historical events and figures were chosen as subjects more often and why, adding details and anecdotes about filmmakers and actors, quoting the dialogues, and describing scenes of special interest. The Italian peplum movies of the early 1960s are mentioned very briefly and are summarily condemned as having no historical or artistic value (Solomon, 2001a, 98–99).[7]

Next comes the topic of films about Greek and Roman mythology (Solomon found ca. eighty of those), based mainly on Homer and the Trojan War cycle, Jason and the Argonauts with Medea and the Golden Fleece, Perseus and Medusa, Orpheus and Eurydice, Minos with the Minotaur, Ariadne and Theseus, and, finally, Hercules in his many manifestations including several end-of-the-century television films and series. Movies based on Roman mythology favour Aeneas, who escapes from the ruins of Troy, Romulus and Remus, and the abduction of Sabine women. Solomon concludes that only the two films set in modern times, Jean Cocteau's 1949 *Orphée* and Marcel Camus's 1959 *Orfeu Negro*, are actual artistic achievements; the remaining seventy-eight or so films are considered sources of simpler entertainment.

The following two chapters (4 and 5) deal with movies based on the Bible, first the Old, then the New Testament. The next chapter (6) discusses Ancient Egypt and the Orient. In the following chapters, Solomon includes adaptations *sensu stricto* and modern paraphrases and re-workings of ancient texts. He devotes Chapter 7 to adaptations of ancient tragedies by Sophocles (*Oedipus* and *Antigone*), and Euripides (*Electra*, *Troades*, *Iphigenia*, *Hippolytus*, *Bacchae*, *Medea*) and to Petronius' parody of ancient romance, *Satirica*. Some of these adaptations, created by artists such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Jules Dassin, Michael Cacoyannis, and Federico Fellini, are highly praised and discussed in greater detail. Chapter 8 deals with adaptations of Greek and Roman comedies – Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, filmed six times, Plautus' *Amphitryon*, *Pseudolus*, *Miles gloriosus* – as well as contemporary farcical comedies with pseudo-ancient elements and

[6] For an obscure reason (a brief mention of a movie based on Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* hardly constitutes a rationale), Petronius appears at the end of the chapter on tragedy when the next one, on comedy, would seem a more appropriate place.

[7] The author comes back to peplum in the chapter on mythology, as most of these films featured superheroes. See also Aziza, 2009.

a modernized *vis comica*. The last chapter, aptly named "The Muscleman Epics," revisits peplum, its popularity in the United States, and its later descendants. There is also an interesting index listing films according to a mythological and historical chronology and highlighting the most frequent topics, such as Cleopatra and the reign of Nero. The principal methodology practised by Solomon relies on consistent care in ensuring a comprehensive picture combined with a thematic approach applied to the organization of the gathered data.

Between Solomon's 1978 and 2001 editions, no other overviews of the audiovisual reception of Classics were undertaken, except for Martin M. Winkler's 1991 volume of twelve essays (authored by him and eleven other scholars) proudly entitled *Classics and Cinema*, Gary Allen Smith's 1991 *Epic Films: Casts, Credits and Commentary on over 250 Historical Spectacle Movies*,[8] and Maria Wyke's 1997 monograph *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History*, which focuses on films about Roman history as seen in movies made in Italy and the United States. However, these three exceptions are not true overviews. Smith limits himself to epic films and Wyke to Rome in Italian and American productions.

Winkler's volume provides a set of papers discussing only a few films whose relationship to Classics corresponds to the definition of "classically inspired" adopted in the present book. The topics are: the use of films such as *Clash of the Titans* and *Jason and the Argonauts* in teaching audiovisual reception of mythology; the presence of gods in four selected films, including the two quoted in the first essay; *kata-* and *anabasis* in films otherwise not inspired by Greek mythology; the stereotypes of good and bad Amazons in the same kind of film; the similarity of Sergei Eisenstein's principles to Aristotle's *De poetica*; Michael Cacoyannis's *Iphigenia* with an interview with him and Irene Papas; the Aristotelian tragic hero in the 1956 memorable western *The Searchers*; classical elements in 1974 *Chinatown*; 1980's *Nine to Five* as an Aristophanic comedy; the successful adaptation of *Satirica* in Fellini's 1969 film; and finally, a chapter written by Solomon on issues with reconstructing ancient music and using it in movies. Taken separately, all these studies have merit and contribute to classical reception scholarship, but their value as a collection is not convincing. The editor of the volume must have also felt a certain discontent if, a decade later, he published a revised and more coherent version that dropped two essays and took on three more, including a second one by himself; in a confusing move,

[8] This edition was updated in 2004 and the title modified to *…over 350 Historical Spectacle Movies.*

he also changed the title to *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*.[9] Even in his revised 2001 edition, Winkler treats film as the only audiovisual medium. Television programmes are mentioned in a single footnote to Solomon's chapter about film scores (2001b, 333).

Smith published a second edition of his 1991 book well over a decade later, in 2004, adding 133 new or previously not included films. His definition of "epic film" – being about "monumental events and larger-than-life characters, [which] covers the period from the Creation to the A.D. 1200s" – means that not all of the listed titles are inspired by antiquity. The book presents 355 numbered entries in the alphabetical order of titles in English, which is not an intuitive principle and may hinder consultation.[10] Many excellent black-and-white photographs are a welcome addition to the entries and a pleasant contrast to recent less successful attempts at using poor-quality stills as illustrations in classical reception studies.[11] The Hollywood sword-and-sandal, Italian peplum, and biblical stories constitute the bulk of the material included in the volume. Among the few more recent movies identified and presented by Smith and listed in the Chronological Survey of the present study are the 2000 *Gladiator*, the 2001 *Druids*, the 2003 miniseries *Julius Caesar*, and the 2004 film *Troy*.

On the other hand, Wyke steadily follows her purpose of studying why and how American and Italian filmmakers repeatedly projected and interpreted Roman history from the beginnings of *il cinema muto* to Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1963 *Cleopatra*. The author bases her analysis on case studies of three important historical figures and one natural disaster: Spartacus, Cleopatra, Nero, and the destruction of Pompeii caused by the eruption of Vesuvius. Chronologically,

[9] Another misleading element is the cover showing a colour still of Claudette Colbert as Cleopatra in Cecil B. DeMille's 1934 black-and-white film, which is not discussed in the book, apart from a brief mention in Solomon's chapter, "The Sounds of Cinematic Antiquity" (2001b, 325–326, 335), where he only describes the musical score.

[10] The same organizing principle was used in Nils C. Ahl and Benjamin Fau's *Dictionnaire des series télévisées* (2016), presenting 900 more listings than the first edition of 2011. Only series aired in France are listed. The entries are in the alphabetical order of titles under which they were broadcast in France. At the end of the volume, there is an index of original titles facilitating identification, which is a solution less user-friendly to people outside of France. An earlier book, *Les séries télé*, is an international repertory but also for the French market, published by Martin Winckler (not to be confused with Martin M. Winkler) and Christophe Petit as a Larousse "Guide Totem" in 1999. It presents 50 *grandes séries* first, 39 of them American and none inspired by antiquity; 450 remaining entries are also in alphabetical order of French titles but with the original titles provided next to the French.

[11] I refer here, e.g., to the 2022 volume edited by Antony Augoustakis and Monica Silveira Cyrino, *Screening Love and War in* Troy: Fall of a City; see my review in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (Olechowska, 2023).

these cases belong to the last century of the Roman Republic and the first of the Empire, a rather brief although significant slice of the long history of Roma Aeterna, the 200 years during which some of the most dramatic political and cultural changes took place. Wyke (1997, 70–72) shows how various aspects of the four cases she discusses were used by the production teams, the audience, and the press to promote their occasionally opposite ideological and political agendas, like in the case of the 1960 *Spartacus*, whose hero was considered by one pole of the public opinion as a symbolic, quasi-communist fighter for freedom and against tyranny, and by the other as a Cold War warrior against Soviet domination.

Karl Marx called Spartacus (in a letter to Friedrich Engels) "the most capital fellow in the whole history of antiquity" and a "real representative of the proletariat of ancient times."[12] Soviet books about the hero, as a rule, crudely propagandistic novels for children, were enthusiastically and repeatedly published in the USSR and in all people's democracies, each of which could boast of at least one such home-grown masterpiece.[13] Curiously, Stanley Kubrick and Kirk Douglas's 1960 *Spartacus* could be seen as strongly anti-totalitarian and was praised as such by the US right-wing press (discussed in Wyke, 1997, 71–72). Those living under totalitarian rule in Central and Eastern Europe saw very few full-colour Hollywood blockbusters and perceived the 1960 version of the story of Spartacus as a cunning strike against Soviet oppressors, one that the generally despised communist censors never saw coming.

A 2001 volume of essays following in the footsteps of Wyke and, with her participation, entitled *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular*

[12] Quoted from Marx and Engels's *Collected Works* (vol. 41, p. 265) after Oleksii Rudenko (2022, 69–99). See also Wyke, 1997, 47–48.

[13] Participation in international research projects, e.g., the 2009–2019 *Gnôthi seauton! Classics and Communism*, allowed me to work closely with classicists from Central and Eastern Europe and conclude that Spartacus was a constant, although marginal, ideological ingredient in the region's experiences with communism. The image of Spartacus was permanently deformed for me during my childhood, not only by the poorly written propaganda peddling stories encouraged by communist cultural policies but also because his tragic expression increased the emotional overload caused by stories about the legion of Polish tragic heroes who died in successive failed uprisings against foreign powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in World War One, and the recently ended World War Two. The Resistance heroes who survived the horrors of Hitler had to flee abroad, go into hiding, or languish in Polish prisons or Siberian camps, their many names added to my family's evening prayers. Only much later, as an adult and a classicist, I could dissociate Spartacus from my childhood trauma. On the other hand, children in Bulgaria are still (as late as 2020) being told in novels, comic books, and graphic novels that Spartacus was originally their compatriot and, as such, a reason for national pride. See Dimitrova, 2022, 101–124; see also Joanna Paul's insightful analysis of Spartacus as an epic hero and a man for all noble causes (2013a, 186–212).

*Culture*, was edited by Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire, Jr. The essays are authored by six American and four British scholars and discuss how various realities of the Roman Empire spoke to people living in what could be termed modern empires, American and British. Popular culture is presented in the volume in a broad sense and encompasses films,[14] popular novels,[15] and even the brand of classical reception available at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Television is rarely mentioned, except in Joshel's essay on the BBC *I, Claudius* series of 1976.

Robert Graves's novels, *I, Claudius* and *Claudius and Messalina*, adapted by the BBC for that series, were published in Polish in 1938[16] and quickly became popular. The first post-World War Two edition appeared only after the October 1956 Thaw, in 1957, and since then has been repeatedly reprinted – the last time as recently as 2022. *I, Claudius* was aired for the first time in Poland on the only television station in the country, the communist government-funded and controlled Telewizja Polska (TVP) in 1979, for a second time in 1985, for the third – already after the collapse of the regime – in 1998; in 2007, it was broadcast by the commercial station TV Puls, and in 2014–2015 by TVP Historia. These reruns indicate a continued interest of Polish viewers in this fascinating fictionalized history of the Principate and the early Roman Empire. Audiences outside the United Kingdom and the United States, and especially those in Central and Eastern Europe before 1989, obviously watched the series from a different perspective and without the same points of reference as Joshel uses in her insightful 2001 analysis of this "high-gloss soap opera" (Joshel, 2001, 137).[17]

Another mention of television in the 2001 volume occurs in a short discussion of the 1969–1970 series *Up Pompeii!* by Nicholas Cull following his excellent analysis of British camp comedies. This sub-genre reflected British social and cultural realities using an imagined Roman reality flavoured with echoes of Plautus (Cull, 2001, 180–183). Cull also mentions *Chelmsford 123*, a two-season

[14] Thirty-one titles produced between 1917 and 1979 are listed in the filmography; the 2000 *Gladiator* is the only more recent title mentioned.

[15] Colleen McCullough (1937–2015) has been harshly ridiculed for her claim to serious research but even more for her "essential conservatism" (Malamud, 2001, 213) – i.e., her unsympathetic portrayal of women and gays going beyond the care for historical authenticity, and her insistence on the importance of aristocratic bloodlines. Luckily for McCullough, the millions of fans of her storytelling were not as discerning.

[16] Published in Polish as *Ja, Klaudiusz* and *Klaudiusz i Messalina*, in Stefan Essmanowski's translation.

[17] The phrase "high-gloss soap opera" is quoted by Joshel after Gerald Clarke in *Time*.

series (1989–1992), as an example of the same "Rothwellian mode,"[18] without going into any details (2001, 185).[19]

A conference on the ancient world in film held in Mannheim in early 2005 resulted in a volume of eight essays edited the same year by Martin Lindner and entitled *Drehbuch Geschichte. Die antike Welt im Film*. Margot Berghaus, in her introductory essay, discusses the value of film as a source of knowledge about ancient history for a mass audience and the risk that cinematic treatment of history may impress more by its fictional than by its factual message. The chapter "Mythos Alexander" by Ruth Lindner reviews ancient texts at the source of the highly mythologized stories about Alexander the Great. She analyses Oliver Stone's 2004 *Alexander* compared to Robert Rossen's 1956 *Alexander the Great* in particular. In his essay, "Zwischen Anspruch und Legitimation. Legitimationsstrategien des Antikfilms," Martin Lindner discusses various strategies filmmakers use to increase the credibility of the version of history they choose to present. Ulrich Kittstein explains the differences in narrative structure between Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo vadis* and its 1951 Mervyn LeRoy film adaptation[20] by referring to the different creative motivations of the novel and the movie. In her chapter, Diana Wenzel investigates the evolution of the image of Cleopatra VII Philopator in films from 1899 to Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra*, released in 1963. In the last essay, Anja Wieber compares Wolfgang Petersen's 2004 *Troy* to previous movies based on the *Iliad*.

In the same year, 2005, Monica Silveira Cyrino published *Big Screen Rome*, exploring her nine favourite feature films (1951–2000) about Rome, including the unavoidable *Gladiator*. The other titles, two of them the same as in Lindner's volume, are *Quo vadis* (1951),[21] *The Robe* (1953), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960), *Cleopatra* (1963), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966), *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), and *History of the World, Part I:*

[18] Talbot Rothwell (1916–1981), the British screenwriter who wrote scripts for the series of comedies *Carry On…*, as well as *Up Pompeii!*

[19] We will come back to the series when discussing twenty-first-century comedies.

[20] Regrettably, Kittstein disregarded Jerzy Kawalerowicz's 2001 *Quo vadis*, which would have offered him an opportunity for an interesting comparison between a nineteenth-century Polish novel and a twenty-first-century Polish film and television series. This topic, only in respect to the film, was insightfully discussed by Elżbieta Ostrowska (2020, 282–300).

[21] Cyrino's discussion (2005, loc. 266–283) of Sienkiewicz's novel and its meaning for nineteenth-century Polish public shows a perhaps unavoidable lack of sensitivity and familiarity with Polish history and the Polish historical prose of that period. Still, who am I to criticize shortcomings that I am undoubtedly guilty of regarding the intricacies of the English-speaking world's history and culture?

*The Roman Empire Sequence* (1981). Cyrino's book provides a welcome contribution to the interpretations proposed by previous scholars.

Another overview of classically inspired movies, this time focusing on the reception of Greek heritage, was produced by Gideon Nisbet in 2006 and entitled *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture*.[22] It is an easy-to-read, engaging book highlighting the importance of comic books, graphic novels, and fan fiction for understanding the mechanism of contemporary reception. Its openly subjective approach and a certain lack of scholarly ἀκρίβεια (*akrîbeia*, 'rigour') may have appealed to students but did not overwhelm reviewers, who treated the author with various degrees of tolerance (see, for example, Paul, 2008, and Solomon, 2008a, 510–514).

Roger Woodard's *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (2007) includes a chapter by Martin M. Winkler entitled "Greek Myth on the Screen." The title remains an empty promise that is quickly withdrawn: "to provide a comprehensive overview of films of Greek myth in this chapter is impossible. It is also unnecessary, for several surveys already exist" (Winkler, 2007a, 453). The first question here is: why use a misleading title? The second: why quote surveys (Solomon, 2001a; Elley, 1984; De España 1998) that do not offer "a comprehensive overview of films of Greek myth" either? The "screen" in the title refers to the cinema. However, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* are mentioned as a product of television, the medium called here, at least more neutrally, the "offspring" of cinema, not "a bastard child," like in Derek Elley's 1984 book, *The Epic Film: Myth and History* (2). Unfortunately, Winkler discusses mainly peplum, its stereotypic formulas, and its favourite hero, Hercules, as well as Ray Harryhausen's contributions to mythological films, Pasolini's 1967 version of the Sophoclean *Oedipus*, various descents into the Underworld, including Cocteau's 1949 *Orphée*, but not much else.

A Blackwell *Companion to the Classical Tradition* also appeared in 2007 and was edited by Craig W. Kallendorf in collaboration with Ward Briggs, Julia Gaisser, and Charles Martindale. The last chapter of the volume, "Film," is placed in the section entitled "Contemporary Themes" – almost as an afterthought; it was contributed by Karl Galinsky, who sketched an overview of films inspired by antiquity along with a review of existing scholarship, both offering relatively well-known information and comments generalized almost to the point of vagueness. Galinsky mentions the BBC *I, Claudius*, and later the first season of BBC–HBO *Rome*, the latter only to deplore that it fell short of the excellence

[22] I am using the 2008 updated edition of the book.

of other HBO productions. Otherwise, television is absent from the volume, even as a "contemporary theme." It will remain, if not taboo, certainly a phenomenon undeserving of classicists' attention for almost two more years.

In 2008, the year of Nisbet's second, updated (but not significantly improved) edition, another look at Ancient Greece on screen was provided in a collective volume, *Hellas on Screen: Cinematic Receptions of Ancient History, Literature and Myth*, edited and well structured by Irene Berti and Marta García Morcillo, as well as solidly researched by its fourteen authors. The book includes one of the earliest contributions to classical reception in children's culture. It is authored by Martin Lindner and is discussed below (p. 260) in the section about antiquity for children and younger adults. The other essays discuss a variety of peplum films, Pasolini's adaptations of Greek tragedy, Stone's 2004 *Alexander* and its comparison with Rossen's 1956 *Alexander the Great*, the figure of Odysseus featured or alluded to in films produced since the launch of the medium to the early twenty-first century,[23] and some aspects related to the theme of the audiovisual reception of Greece.

Classical reception scholars did not neglect Rome during the first decade of the twenty-first century: the same Martin Lindner who studied mythological cartoons for children in 2008 discussed films about the Roman emperors in his 2007 *Rom und seine Kaiser im Historienfilm*, based on his PhD dissertation defended at the University of Oldenburg. An interesting companion volume to Nisbet's book, Elena Theodorakopoulos's *Ancient Rome at the Cinema: Story and Spectacle in Hollywood and Rome* was issued in the same series, "Greece and Rome Live," four years later and focused not on the whole history of Rome but on the Roman Empire and, in particular, on six successful movies about that period, namely *Ben-Hur* (1959), *Spartacus* (1960), *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), *Titus* (1999), and *Gladiator* (2000). The author demonstrated that in these films the story and the spectacle are in sync and reinforce each other, whether the image of Rome shown there is convincing or not.

In 2008, another companion to classical reception was published, edited by Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray; it includes three papers on the reception

[23] At the end of the chapter on Odysseus, its author, Herbert Verreth, says: "Though he has been commended for his love for Penelope, it did not prevent him from sharing his bed with Kirke and Kalypso. Moreover, killing Penelope's suitors, **who have not – in fact – done anything wrong**, is hardly indicative of great mercy or compassion" (2008, 73, emphasis added). While the bloody revenge on the suitors is clearly unacceptable by today's moral standards, I find the highlighted comment remarkably insensitive.

in cinema. Joanna Paul talks about two methodologies of researching classical reception. One that she rather disparagingly calls "the cataloguing approach" and "something of a reception study cul-de-sac." The second methodology – one that she clearly favours – requires focusing on one (or more than one) film inspired by antiquity and exploring what the fact of this inspiration may tell us about not only the creators' understanding of antiquity but also their reality. Additionally, and quite importantly, how may it refresh and energize our appreciation of the ancient source (Paul, [2008] 2011, 306–307)?

Well, what's not to like about this admirable methodology? I fully endorse it for case studies, but where does it lead us if we abandon the quest for the big picture by conducting piece-by-piece exemplary inquiries? Would it become the case of not seeing the forest for the trees? Another question is why the first methodology should result in a "dry catalogue" short on scholarly analysis whose only value lies in documenting "the wealth of material that exists for the scholar of cinematic reception of Antiquity" (Paul, [2008] 2011, 306)? I dare to hope that my methodology will help me avoid the pitfalls described by Paul, leaving the dreaded *culs-de-sac* by the wayside and enabling me to produce a comprehensive overview of the twenty-first-century audiovisual reception of antiquity, highlighting tendencies, motivations, and themes favoured during that time.

Of the other two chapters in Part VI, "Film," in Hardwick and Stray's collection, one (by Hanna M. Roisman, [2008] 2011) compares Mario Camerini's 1954 *Ulysses* and Andrei Konchalovsky's television miniseries *The Odyssey*, aired on NBC in 1997. The other (by Marianne McDonald, [2008] 2011) discusses the use of film "as a teaching tool for the classics." The remaining thirty-two chapters, and even, most surprisingly, the last one, on the prospects of reception studies, do not mention television or even film as valid and promising media of classical reception.

A year later, in 2009, film, television, and even video games were acknowledged as carriers of reception. Still, their lower rank is clearly reflected in the title *Classics for All: Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture*. Dunstan Lowe and Kim Shahabudin, the editors of the volume, are joined by ten other contributors, among them the one (Joanna Paul) who produced a methodological chapter for the meagre film section of Hardwick and Stray's *Companion to Classical Receptions*, discussed above. In the 2009 volume, she discusses the current American use of references to Pompeii as a synonym for disaster. Other contributions deal with antiquity for television viewers, the myth of the Argonauts repurposed for reading by children, "classical" BBC radio broadcasts written by the Irish poet Louis MacNeice, forty-nine and more video games about antiquity, Joss

Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel*, nude male bodies in Zack Snyder's *300*, Rome as "pornotopia [pornographic utopia]," the so-called Pompeian brothel, Hercules and peplum movies, and the audience's reaction to Furies in *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Charmed*. As interesting and refreshing as these chapters are, one cannot help but wonder how to define "mass culture" based on the volume's contents.

An interesting Polish book appeared in 2009 about the degradation of myth when it combined with fantasy. Bogdan Trocha's study deals with literature, not the audiovisual. However, his conclusions apply to such occurrences in film and television series. The so-called mythological fantasy treats myth without much respect for the transmitted ancient matter, mainly as a source of free and occasionally unexpected inspiration (Trocha, 2009). Also in 2009, Martin M. Winkler published *Cinema and Classical Texts: Apollo's New Light*,[24] where he promoted a new scholarly discipline, film philology, which would treat films as visual texts, an approach to classical texts *à la manière de* classical philology. He discusses mainly twentieth-century films inspired by antiquity, using very few examples, such as the 2003 miniseries *Helen of Troy*[25] and Petersen's 2004 *Troy*.

Hervé Dumont's monumental opus *L'Antiquité au cinema. Vérités, légendes et manipulations*, which I discuss in more detail in the Introduction (p. 34), was published as a book in 2009 and updated online in 2013. Despite the title, both film and television productions are listed and discussed there. Surprisingly, British and American scholars, for the most part, have completely ignored this precious and one-of-a-kind Swiss contribution to classical reception scholarship.

The 2011 *Classics on Screen: Ancient Greece and Rome on Film* by Alastair J.L. Blanshard and Kim Shahabudin is limited to the big-screen productions only but offers ten exemplary case studies featuring chronologically: *Cleopatra* (1934), *Quo vadis* (1951), *Hercules* (1958), *Spartacus* (1960), *The 300 Spartans* (1962), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), *Hercules* (1997), and *Gladiator* (2000).

[24] Despite the title, Winkler also discusses Franco Rossi's eight-episode miniseries *Odissea*, calling it "the supreme adaptation of Homer to screen" (2009a, 295); however, he calls it a six-hour-long film co-produced for Italian, German, and French public television stations. In fact, the Yugoslav Radio Television state broadcaster, dissolved in 1992, was another co-producer. One-hour-long episodes were aired on RAI from March 24 to May 5, 1968.

[25] While inconclusively mentioning "prime-time television" and later "television screens," Winkler calls the miniseries a film and a Hollywood adaptation of Helen's story (2009a, 236–237, 242). The production company Fireworks Entertainment was based in Canada, and John Kent Harrison, director of the miniseries, is Canadian. USA Networks, which originally aired the miniseries, belonged to the French Vivendi Universal at the time.

The selection was made to show diversity in "genre, production technique, and narrative form" (Blanshard and Shahabudin, [2011] 2013, 12). Each case study ends with short descriptions of similar productions.

Until 2013, there was no monograph on silent movies inspired by antiquity. This gap was filled by Pantelis Michelakis and Maria Wyke, who edited a lavishly illustrated volume, *The Ancient World in Silent Cinema*, published by Cambridge University Press. Eighteen scholars contributed to the study, discussing over 170 silent films produced since 1896. Some of the problems facing researchers interested in the beginnings of cinema are caused by the fact that proper archiving started in 1914, and many early productions may be lost forever or until a copy is discovered on a forgotten shelf.

Also in 2013, an overview of film and television inspired by antiquity specifically targeting issues of gender and politics finally ended the reluctance of classical studies to accept interdisciplinary collaboration for a better understanding of classical reception based on a broader spectrum of the audiovisual corresponding to the technological social and intellectual reality of the second and third decades of the twenty-first century. *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics*, edited by Almut-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon, has a somewhat confused structure: it is divided into "ancients" – productions set in antiquity, whether historical or mythological – and "thematics," which are set in today's reality but display various links to antiquity. Issues of portraying male and female heroes and their image today are discussed in the case of historical events in combination with their political background and relevance to contemporary politics. Solomon credits the popular success of *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Gladiator* (2000) to the consensus between filmmakers' and audiences' attitudes to the heroes and their need for revolutionary change; he explains this consensus by delving deep into early American history. Thomas Späth and Margrit Trohler discuss the figure of Spartacus based on Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960) in conjunction with earlier and later productions featuring the hero.

Snyder's *300*, the adaptation of Frank Miller's graphic novel about the last stand of the Spartans at Thermopylae, is the subject of three chapters. The first compares Leonidas' and his wife's, Gorgo's, heroism in Snyder's film to their version in Rudolph Maté's 1962 *The 300 Spartans*. The second shows the Spartans and the Persians in Snyder's *300* on opposite ends of the "gender scale." The story is told by Dilios, a Spartan soldier whom Leonidas has asked to save himself to let the Greeks know what happened at Thermopylae and to encourage them to fight the degenerate Asian enemies. The third chapter completes the discussion of *300* by presenting its two spoofs, Andy Signore's short film *United*

*300* (2007) and Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer's *Meet the Spartans* (2008). The author of the chapter, Ralph J. Poole, discusses the second film as a parody of American mass culture and of Snyder's *300*, the first as a spoof of *300* and *United 93* (2006). In conclusion, Poole suggests that the spoofs make "serious fun of the politics of heteronormativity by queering the celebrated legend of the three hundred Spartans. As satiric parody, the 'just cause' of the war on terrorism is thus disclosed as an absurd battle against all that seems other, foreign, treacherous, barbarous, and perverse" (Poole, 2013, 120). All who saw these movies would probably agree that as convincing as this interpretation sounds, it would not be easy to find viewers sufficiently committed to carefully watch the original films and their parodies, reflect, and arrive at the same conclusion.

The last historical figure is Cleopatra, discussed in the volume in two chapters. The first focuses on Mark Antony's evolution in season 2 of *Rome* from a womanizer to a partner more sensitive to women's feelings. The second chapter deals with film stars playing the Egyptian Queen in twentieth-century movies.

The section "Mythological Ancients" begins with two essays on Petersen's *Troy* (2004). The first targets a certain lack of clarity, letting the viewers take their pick and consider the relations between Achilles and Patroclus as male friendship or homosexual love. The second reflects upon Achilles and Hector as models of masculinity. The next Homeric hero in the volume is Odysseus, as shown in Camerini's 1954 *Ulysses*, Jean-Luc Godard's *Le mépris* (1963), and Franco Rossi's eight-part television miniseries *Odissea* from 1968. Pasolini's 1969 *Medea*, based on Euripides' play, is the subject of Lada Stevanović's chapter, where in the shocking myth of infanticide as revenge for being abandoned for another woman, she highlights "the issue of power and the problem of the Other" (2013, 215). Xenia Zeiler writes about the contested use of the Hindu god Krishna in an episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (S04E16), "The Way," which allegedly failed to recognize Krishna's status in the Hindu religion.

The final four chapters are grouped under a rather cryptic title, "Mythological and Historical Thematics," and deal with, generally speaking, ancient cults and rituals connected to women. Meriting special attention is an interesting Greek comedy with Aristophanic motifs, Olga Malea's *Loukoumades me meli* [Doughnuts with Honey], released in 2005. Another analysis of interest concerns Albert Lewin's *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951), a story combining the myth of Pandora and a Dutch legend with added surrealist accents.

The same year that Renger and Solomon published their *Gender and Politics*, Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos edited a volume entitled *Ancient Greek Women in Film*, a product of collaboration between classical reception studies and

gender studies. The authors discuss mythological women first: Robert Wise's *Helen of Troy* (1956), Cacoyannis's *The Trojan Women* (1971), the uninspiring Helen in Petersen's *Troy* (2004), a passive Medea in Don Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), Pasolini's *Medea* (1969), Lars von Trier's television movie *Medea* (1988), gender roles in Camerini's *Ulisse* (1954) with Silvana Mangano playing both Penelope and Circe, an emotionless Penelope in Konchalovsky's television miniseries *The Odyssey* (1997), and, finally, women who accompany Hercules in Italian peplum films. Then, it is the turn of historical figures: Gorgo, Leonidas' wife in Maté's film *The 300 Spartans* (1962), domesticated as was required for Cold War tastes and Snyder's emancipated woman in *300* (2006); Olympias in Rossen's *Alexander the Great* (1956) compared to Stone's Olympias in *Alexander* (2004); Cleopatra in Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934) matched to that in Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963).

Another conference volume published by a scholar whose name figures repeatedly in classical reception bibliographies as an author and an editor, Monica Silveira Cyrino, supplements and broadens the scope of Renger and Solomon's and Nikoloutsos's books of the same year. Entitled *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World*, it applies the same (but less confusing) logical separation between productions inspired by mythology and history as Renger and Solomon. Cyrino explains in her introduction:

> Along with ancient historical accounts, the narratives and motifs of classical mythology and literature have also provided a wide range of thematic material for filmmakers and television producers to engage with topics of love and sexuality, gender and power, erotic desire and jealousy, loss and reunion. (Cyrino, 2013, 2)

No wonder there is some overlap of discussed titles between the three 2013 volumes. Here, too, we read about Snyder's *300*, Stone's *Alexander*, Mark Antony in the HBO series *Rome*, and various versions of Spartacus. Cyrino's volume also contains analyses of older movies, like the 1929 silent *Die Büchse der Pandora* directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst; the 1954 musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* based on Stephen Vincent Benét's 1938 story inspired by the abduction of the Sabines, "The Sobbin' Women," and directed by Stanley Donen; Robert Aldrich's 1955 film noir, *Kiss Me Deadly*, an elaborate allusion to the myth of Pandora and Prometheus; Chaffey's 1967 *The Viking Queen* about the revolt against Rome led by Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni; or Philip and Belinda Haas's 1996 *Angels & Insects*, based on A.S. Byatt's 1992 novella (*Morpho Eugenia*),

paraphrasing the Phaeacian episode in the *Odyssey*. The Alexandrian Hypatia's 2009 biopic (*Agora*), directed by Alejandro Amenábar, is analysed by Joanna Paul. Hypatia's death at the hands of Christian fanatic bigots is presented as due to their inability to condone a female intellectual being free to acquire and share knowledge and refuse to play the traditional women's role.

The authors judge some other movies interpreted in the book to show specific associations with antiquity; for instance, Pedro Almodóvar's 2006 *Volver* may be seen as a *nostos* occasionally similar to that theme in the *Odyssey*; Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005), according to Seán Easton, alludes to Homer, Virgil, and Sappho. Several chapters deal with specific themes recurring in more than one production, for example, Kirsten Day's essay about possession in antiquity and on screen; Stacie Raucci reviews instances and style of presentation of Roman orgies in film and television.

*L'Antiquité dans l'imaginaire contemporain. Fantasy, science-fiction, fantastique*, published in 2014 by Mélanie Bost-Fiévet and Sandra Provini, a fascinating volume covering for the most part classical reception in literature, contains three chapters on the ancient influences in the 2004–2009 television series *Battlestar Galactica*: Tom Garvey discusses Hesiod, Louis L'Allier Xenophon's *Anabasis*, and Sylvaine Bataille examines what links the series to the classical legacy. Eric Del Chrol (2014, 253–270) also contributed an analysis of classical reception in George Lucas's *Star Wars*.

The following year, Monica Silveira Cyrino and Meredith E. Safran edited the volume *Classical Myth on Screen* written by seventeen scholars and focusing strictly on films from various periods (1927–2014), with the exception of Arya Stark from *Game of Thrones*, at the time still unfinished, discussed as one of the three girls empowered through the Amazonian archetype, the other two being Merida of Pixar and Disney's 2012 animation *Brave* and Katniss Everdeen from the 2012 *Hunger Games* (Graf, 2015, 73–82). The stated purpose of the volume: to answer "the question of how screen texts in our contemporary media landscape embrace, refute and reinvent the cultural heritage of classical antiquity" (Safran and Cyrino, 2015, 5), does not fully correspond to the content of the volume as several films it analyses were produced decades before what we can call "contemporary media landscape" in 2015. While the authors discuss patently important themes, the topics of the relatively short contributions appear randomly selected, and the volume feels incomplete.

The same year, Filippo Carlà and Irene Berti edited an interesting volume of sixteen essays, *Ancient Magic and the Supernatural in the Modern Visual and Performing Arts*. Ironically, and through nobody's fault, the timing was not

ideal, as quite a few series that could have been potentially included in the volume only started to be aired at its publication. Still, my subjective regret does not change the fact that many other well-chosen research topics make the book a welcome introduction to themes previously rarely discussed. Well within the purview of the research group "Imagines," whose third conference in Mainz in 2012 was at the origin of the 2015 volume, the content includes ancient attitudes to magic discussed by the editors; rituals attested by tablets with *defixiones* in Anna Perenna's nymphaeum in Rome by Jürgen Blänsdorf; as well as Lorna Hardwick's case study of magic in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Martin Crimp's 2004 play *Cruel and Tender*. The relationship between magic and religion and the importance of women in ancient magic is discussed in several contributions; *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic*, *Agora*, *Centurion*, and *Harry Potter* movie adaptations are presented from the viewpoint of magical elements. There are also a few marginal mentions of *Wrath of the Titans*, *Immortals*, and *Jason and the Argonauts*.

In 2016, a more general take on the influence of antiquity on popular culture was presented by a dynamic group of Polish scholars in a volume resulting from a 2014 conference at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Dominas, Wesołowska, and Trocha, 2016). Both the conference and the book were entitled *Antiquity in Popular Literature and Culture*. Martin M. Winkler, a classical reception scholar from George Mason University, highly appreciated in the discipline and frequently referred to in the present study, wrote an introduction for the book. Nineteen chapters comprising the volume are grouped into three parts; the first is devoted to antiquity in popular literature, the second – under the banner of "popular culture" – deals with a variety of non-literary and non-audiovisual reception works, and the third one, even if entitled "Antiquity in the Cinema," discusses selected television series as well as films and for that reason is especially interesting for our purpose here.

Two chapters discuss Roman themes in *Doctor Who*: Aleksandra Klęczar analyses two 2010 episodes, "The Pandorica Opens" and "The Big Bang"; Maria Gierszewska reviews the use of antiquity in five episodes aired between 2008 and 2012: S04E02, "The Fires of Pompeii" (2008); S04E08, "Silence in the Library" (2008); S05E12, "The Pandorica Opens" (2010); S06E13, "The Wedding of River Song" (2011); and S07E02, "Dinosaurs on a Spaceship" (2012). Mateusz Stróżyński investigates the influence of the myth of Oedipus on two science-fiction films, *Minority Report* (Stephen Spielberg, 2002) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 2003), and on the police-procedural/psychological-horror series *Dexter* created by James Manos, Jr., 2006–2013

(none of these productions are listed in the Chronological Survey). The topic of the use of Latin in films is discussed in a general, systematic manner by Ewa Skwara and, with a focus on horror movies, by Radosław Piętka (see also Casta, 2014, 360–374). Skwara, using a variety of films and serials, including Polish productions, concludes that Latin is used as a determinant of time and/or place of action, when and where the language was actually spoken (Skwara, 2016, 227–229); of unreality – use of magic, presence of vampires, and other supernatural elements (229); of professions, such as lawyers or Latin teachers (230), and of thorough education and status (231–234).

Piętka, on the other hand, analyses specific horror films and series: *The Cabin in the Woods* (Drew Goddard, 2011), *Fright Night* (Craig Gillespie, 2011), *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013), *American Horror Story: Coven* (Brad Falchuk and Ryan Murphy, 2013–2014), and *Dracula* (Cole Haddon, 2013–2014). He reasons that contrary to Françoise Waquet's famous 1998 prediction, Latin is far from dead; while it is used most often incorrectly in horror films by shady priests, exorcists, demons, vampires, witches, and such, it acquires a new secret and presumably powerful magical identity.

Antiquity in science fiction and fantasy was discussed at length in three volumes edited by Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Eldon Stevens and published in rapid succession: *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction* (2015), *Classical Traditions in Modern Fantasy* (2017), and *Once and Future Antiquities in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2019). The trilogy is composed of a total of forty-four contributions. In a paper about the series, I suggested that television was treated as an orphan by the authors because *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–2009) was the only twenty-first-century series discussed in any detail in the three books (Olechowska, 2019, 155–160). In contrast, the Chronological Survey lists many science-fiction productions to varying degrees inspired by antiquity; there are, in fact, well over eighty such entries.

The year 2017 proved to be particularly fruitful for audiovisual classical reception scholarship as it yielded three general treatments of the field, two large Wiley-Blackwell volumes of essays of the type of "companion" and "handbook," the latter targeting specifically mythology, the former a Cambridge University Press monograph with an intriguing subtitle, *Affinities of Imagination*.

The first book, *A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen*, edited by Arthur J. Pomeroy, presents chapters by over twenty scholars. Part I deals with silent films (Maria Wyke, Irmbert Schenk), early epics and post-World War Two Hollywood (Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos, Fiona Radford), and peplum (Pomeroy). Part II discusses drama (Anastasia Bakogianni, Meredith E.

Safran), comedy (Lisa Maurice), and adaptation (Pomeroy), including a review of the historical epic since *Gladiator* (Jerry Benjamin Pierce), and three historical television series (Juliette Harrisson, Monica Silveira Cyrino). Part III covers a comparison of 1925 and 1959 *Ben-Hur* (Stephan Prock), scenography and costumes (Alejandro Valverde García), and history of film against the political, social, and cultural background (Harriet Margolis). Part IV focuses on themes such as Ancient Greece in popular culture (Alastair J.L. Blanshard), antiquity in science-fiction fantasy with four television series (Otta Wenskus), contemporary paraphrases of classical tragedy (Bakogianni), documentaries about the ancient world (Fiona Hobden), and mythology for younger and crossover audiences (Martin Lindner).[26] Some of these topics have already been investigated in the past and the essays bring few new perspectives or treatments. A fact which, while somewhat disappointing, on the whole, does not detract from the usefulness of the otherwise impressive volume.

The second 2017 Wiley-Blackwell volume, *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, was edited by Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle. It is composed of thirty-two chapters, with only one analysing a television film – the 1988 Danish Euripidean *Medea* directed by von Trier (Hjort, 2017, 447–461) – and another examining classical myths in science fiction and mentioning a few television franchises (Keen, 2017, 311–321), such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Doctor Who*. Regrettably, there is no mention in the introduction to this solidly researched and innovative book of any other instances of audiovisual reception of classical mythology or the reasons why they were ignored.

Martin M. Winkler's *Classical Literature on Screen: Affinities of Imagination* is the third significant study of 2017, a personal reflection on a variety of links between films and antiquity and the essential visuality of ancient texts, such as those of Homer. He supports his reasoning with a mosaic of quotations from ancient authors, modern novelists, and filmmakers, discussing, at length, Horace's view of the conflict between commitment to tradition and the need for innovation. Winkler includes in his reflection great filmmakers of the twentieth century fascinated by classical myth, Cocteau and Pasolini, and their visions of Orpheus, Oedipus, and Medea. The use and interpretations of myth by other directors are analysed and compared, including Dassin, Satoshi Miyagi, von Trier,

[26] Mythology for children and its affiliation to the function of fairy tales is discussed by Martin Lindner (2017, 515–534), a welcome *novum* in classical reception scholarship. Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts provided the literary side of the coin, reviewing myth collections for children in Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle's *Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology* of the same year (2017, 87–103).

and the most recent, Natalia Kuznetsova, and her 2009 "rhythmodrama" based on Seneca's *Medea*.

In 2018, Oxford University Press published *Classical Myth and Film in the New Millennium* in a textbook format for students.[27] Its authors, Patricia Salzman-Mitchell and Jean Alvares, excluded television films and series from their interpretation of audiovisual reception of classical myth in the twenty-first century but did not provide any reason for this decision. They analyse thirteen feature films they judge "quite representative" (Salzman-Mitchell and Alvares, 2018, 8) without clearly explaining how and why these were selected and what, if anything, made the "new millennium" worthy of separate treatment. From the point of view of the timeline of production, the selection seems fairly random: Arturo Ripstein's *Such Is Life* (2000), the Coen brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), Chris Columbus's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), Petersen's *Troy* (2004), Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), Gillespie's *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), Louis Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* (2010), Columbus's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010), Tarsem Singh's *Immortals* (2011), Jonathan Liebesman's *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), Gary Ross's *The Hunger Games* (2012), Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris's *Ruby Sparks* (2012), and Brett Ratner's *Hercules* (2014). On the other hand, myths that inspired these films provided reasonably promising material for discussion: the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Perseus, Andromeda and Medusa, Theseus and the Labyrinth, Medea, the hero's journey, Pygmalion, Galatea, and Narcissus.

In the same year, 2018, Fiona Hobden and Amanda Wrigley edited a volume of essays, *Ancient Greece on British Television*. It presents a review of important British television shows, including several fascinating chapters on documentaries about Greece,[28] three on adaptations of Greek tragedies for schools and for the general public, two television series for children about Odysseus – one Franco-Japanese, one British – and a study on the use of Greek myth in *Doctor Who*. The volume also includes a chapter on war propaganda on BBC Radio during World War Two.

Meredith E. Safran published in 2019 a collection of fourteen papers under a somewhat enigmatic title – *Screening the Golden Ages of the Classical*

[27] The volume has a beautiful cover featuring Uma Thurman as Medusa in the first *Percy Jackson* movie.

[28] There is some overlap between Hobden's chapter here and her "Ancient World Documentaries" (2017, 491–514) published a year earlier in Pomeroy's *Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen*.

*Tradition*. Even a careful reading of Safran's introduction does not elucidate the theme of the volume; each chapter seems to present its own take on the concept of the golden age and the other side of the coin, today's age, usually not involving any metal whatsoever. In any case, some productions selected for analysis have little in common with Classical Antiquity: the science-fiction series *The 100* (2014–2020), Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011), the fantasy "disco" film *Xanadu* (1980), season 4 of *The Walking Dead* (2010–2022), Whedon's science-fiction series *Firefly* (2002–2003) and the accompanying film *Serenity* (2005). Others have a better claim for inclusion within the golden age of superhero movies while also drawing on the golden age of Greece: *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, episode "Once a Hero" (1996), Joel and Ethan Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), Snyder's *300* (2006), *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), Dassin's *Phaedra* (1962). John Milius, William J. MacDonald, and Bruno Heller's series *Rome* (2005–2007) obviously relates to the golden age of Rome; David Benioff and D.B. Weiss's *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) allows a comparison between Agrippina the Younger and Cersei Lannister; Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) and Carmine Gallone's *Scipione l'Africano* (1937) allude to the continuous stand of Rome against the barbarians; Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) paints a multiethnic and multicultural image of Rome; Terry Jones's *Life of Brian* (1979) highlights the positive achievements of Rome. Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000), Doug Lefler's *The Last Legion* (2007), Kevin Macdonald's *The Eagle* (2011), and Neil Marshall's *Centurion* (2010) provide ample reasons for the characters to feel nostalgic for the good old times.

When I saw the title of Sylvie Magerstädt's 2019 book (*TV Antiquity: Swords, Sandals, Blood and Sand*), parts of my study were already done, and the rest was well advanced. I thought the research gap the present study was meant to fill had just disappeared. However, once I read Magerstädt's book, I breathed a sigh of relief realizing that because of my strict focus on the twenty-first century, *TV Antiquity* from Part I to and including Part IV provides an exemplary interpretation of shows broadcast in the twentieth century and, by the same token, a perfect foundation to my assessment of what was produced since. While Part V discusses the "postmillennial revival of the genre" (Magerstädt, 2019, 209), it presents two case studies: HBO–BBC *Rome* (2005–2007) and Starz *Spartacus* (2010–2013). Both series recount Roman history and provide a precious complement to my project, which targets mythological inspiration and refers to historical films and shows only to provide context. The author includes a good review of the literature and explains that she aims at:

> outlining a representation of antiquity quite distinct from cinema. Rather than being simply a cheaper alternative, I hope to demonstrate that TV antiquity can encourage a way of storytelling that at times is much more akin to the ways in which myth and history was originally told. (Magerstädt, 2019, 35)

The author excluded the so-called biblical productions[29] from her book, first, for reasons of space, and, second, because:

> in many cases the production of biblical television dramas is driven not only by cultural considerations, but often aimed at a particular religious broadcasting market, particularly in the US. This makes those shows and their respective success somewhat difficult to compare to other television dramas. (Magerstädt, 2019, 35)

In 2022, Kevin M. McGeough, an archaeologist at the University of Lethbridge, published the book *Representations of Antiquity in Film: From Griffith to Grindhouse*, in which he reflects on how cinema – from the silent film era to the present day – has been shaping the general audience's understanding of the ancient past, not limited to Graeco-Roman antiquity but also encompassing the ancient Near East, Egypt, and the Maya. He discusses films of all genres provided they reflect the ancient past, only occasionally venturing into television, like in the case of the 1995–2001 *Xena: Warrior Princess* or the 2010–2013 Starz series on Spartacus. As an archaeologist, McGeough is particularly interested in filmmakers' use of historically appropriate sets, costumes, and material culture in general. The book's main focus is the well-known and widely accepted theme of the role of contemporary challenges and issues underlying and guiding the creators' choices.

The 2023 special issue of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* is entitled *Antiquity Now: The Ancient Classical World on Television*[30] and begins with Magerstädt and Cyrino's "Introduction: The Ancient Classical World from Film to Television" and continues with four more papers. The first, by Dan Curley, deals with the German time-travel series *Dark*, exhibiting characteristics typical

[29] N.B. These productions, whether film or television series, are not included in the present study because of my focus on mythology and Graeco-Roman antiquity in general.

[30] Many thanks to Dan Curley for sending me his paper and confirming information about the group "Antiquity in Media Studies," which held its third conference, entitled *From Mirror of Antiquity to Antiquities on Screens*, in November 2023. Having access to pre-conference videos, I was able to include the ones relevant for my purpose in the Chronological Survey and in the bibliography.

of Greek tragedy. Produced for Wiedemann & Berg Television in 2017–2020, it is set in the German town of Winden. The second – by Kirsten Day – discusses the links of the science-fiction series *Westworld* to Sophocles' *Oedipus rex* in S02E04, "The Riddle of the Sphinx," and S02E09, "Vanishing Point." Aimee Hinds Scott and Maciej Paprocki, in the third article of the issue, reflect on the casting of Black actors in the roles of Greek deities and heroes and the offensive and pointless protests against it. Jennifer Ann Rea wrote the last paper in the issue about S15E11 of *Supernatural* entitled "The Gamblers," and specifically about the Roman goddess of luck, Fortuna, who runs a pool hall in Alaska, where she punishes greedy, compulsive players unable to stop gambling when they are still ahead. The myths of the frontier and American exceptionalism, foundational for the series, are entangled here with Roman mythology and a Roman goddess who appreciates and admires the morality of the two main characters, American heroes endowed with ancient virtues.

## Genres, Heroes and Heroines, Monsters, Specific Ancient Authors and Shows

### Epic

Another important kind of synopsis of audiovisual reception has been genre oriented, in particular, epic and, to a smaller degree, tragedy, which both produced masterpieces in antiquity, rarely, if ever, equalled in later periods. Before it is used in an audiovisual context, the term epic requires a non-ancient description, as it displays only some characteristics shared with the ancient epos. Derek Elley attempted to produce a working definition in his 1984 *The Epic Film: Myth and History*,[31] covering both Testaments, before and after Classical Antiquity, and early Middle Ages; Gary Allen Smith then refined it in his 1991 and 2004 repertories of epic films.

James Russell, in his 2007 *Historical Epic and Contemporary Hollywood: From* Dances with Wolves *to* Gladiator, applies the term "Hollywood epic" to any and all films that target "a decisive historical event" and are "defined by a grandeur of thematic focus and production," typically cost a lot, may be quite long, and, preferably, use some newfangled technological inventions (Russell, 2007, 10), that is, only some of them may have something to do with antiquity. Russell

[31] In his Introduction, Elley calls television film's "bastard child" (1984, 1).

mentions *en passant* the 1951 *Quo vadis*, 1960 *Spartacus*, 1963 *Cleopatra*, Petersen's 2004 *Troy*, and Stone's *Alexander*. Still, the only film he discusses in more detail is the 2000 *Gladiator* (Russell, 2007, 156–186), as announced already in the book's title. Russell's analysis emphasizes the situation of the Hollywood marketplace and the importance of the risk of failure in the case of outrageously expensive productions. He concludes that *Gladiator*'s success proved that "historical epic films are [not] perilous investments" (Russell, 2007, 181).

Four years later, Robert Burgoyne published a volume of sixteen essays, *The Epic Film in World Culture*, and tagged his label onto the genre of the epic film, calling it "an international, global narrative apparatus not bound by nation or ethnicity" (Burgoyne, 2011c, 2). The "epic" debate was resumed within two years by Joanna Paul[32] in her impressive monograph *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition*. Analyses of film versions of Homer, *Argonautica*, 1964 *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2000 *Gladiator*, Spartacus as an epic hero, 1959 *Ben-Hur*, and the two parodies of epic films, 1964 *Carry On Cleo* and 1979 *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, led Paul to recognize the epic's "potential as a heuristic tool" useful in "examining how certain aspects of the classical epic tradition keep on making their presence felt in cinema" (Paul, 2013a, 306).

In 2014, Andrew B.R. Elliott edited a volume of essays by eleven scholars optimistically entitled *The Return of the Epic Film: Genre, Aesthetics and History in the 21st Century*, published by Edinburgh University Press. In the first chapter, Jeffrey Richards discusses the 2000 *Gladiator* as one of three Ridley Scott films, along with *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) and *Robin Hood* (2010), that frequently depart from historical accuracy but have contemporary political agendas. Kevin J. Harty follows with a review of cinematic similarities between the late Roman Empire and the United States from World War Two to the 1960s. Post-*Gladiator* films and their assessment by American film critics are the focus of Mark Jancovich's chapter, where he highlights the wrongs computer-generated imagery (CGI) did to historical and mythological movies: *Alexander* (2004), *King Arthur* (2004), *Troy* (2004), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). In the case of the *Clash of the Titans* (2010), the negative view of CGI was forgotten because 3D technology became the main target of critics. The film *300* (2006) was ferociously criticized in particular for a stereotyped rendering of the Persian army, an overload of male muscle, and an abuse of CGI. In the next chapter, Robert Stowe compares the historical accuracy of *Gladiator* to that of Marshall's 2010 *Centurion*, a movie

[32] For a historical overview of the debate, see Paul's Chapter 1: "Surveying the Epic Tradition in Literature and Film" (2013a, 1–34).

about the mysterious fate of the Legio IX Hispana lost somewhere in Britain in the early second century CE. He concludes that the public expects absorbing, action-packed plots that do not require strict adherence to historical facts.

Chris Davies tackles many of the same films in his 2019 book *Blockbusters and the Ancient World: Allegory and Warfare in Contemporary Hollywood*, re-heating the longstanding issue of the definition of epic film (11–12). The author discusses *Gladiator* (2000), *Troy* (2004), *Alexander* (2004), *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), *King Arthur* (2004), *300* (2006), *The Last Legion* (2007), *Agora* (2009), *Centurion* (2010), and *The Eagle* (2011), reconfirming the oft-repeated view that a historical epic reflects the reality in which it was produced as much if not more than the reality of the presented period (Davies, 2019, 1, and, for example, J. Richards, 2008, 1). However, Davies emphasizes that it is a rather simplified view and his book's purpose is to gauge:

> the extent to which recent ancient world epics engage with their present or else embody recurrent themes in history and the genre itself. In so doing, it explores how the films released after *Gladiator* (2000) have evolved, with particular emphasis on their relationship to the mid-twentieth-century epic cycle and the role of warfare [9/11 attacks, the War on Terror, and the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan] in facilitating change. (Davies, 2019, 1)

Almost a decade after the publication of Elliott's *The Return of the Epic Film*, in 2022, Amanda Potter and Hunter Gardner published a volume of essays, *Ancient Epic in Film and Television*, in which the book's fourteen authors explore why and how twenty-first-century television series show more epic qualities than the films of the same period considered epic.[33] It goes without saying that I fully endorse this recognition of the dominance of the television series. However, as has been the case in such volumes, the title promises much more than can be delivered. First, the analysis is limited to films and television shows produced during the first two decades of the twenty-first century – nothing wrong with that, of course, but why not say so in the title – and, second, the focus is on only a fraction of the 100 titles recorded in a single alphabetical list in the filmography, which does not distinguish between films and television shows. The usefulness and ease of consultation of such a filmography are diminished

[33] For a more detailed assessment of the volume, see my review in *Eos* (2022, 281–287). I will only mention Jon Solomon's admirable chapter on allusions to Homer in films from 1984 to 2019, as I found its approach particularly appealing (Solomon, 2022, 33–48).

as the reader must also go to the index to find out where the productions are discussed in the book.

While only a handful of films and television shows are discussed in any detail and serve as the basis to achieve the book's stated purpose (Petersen's 2004 *Troy*, Amenábar's 2009 *Agora*, the three 2014 movies about Heracles – Renny Harlin's *The Legend of Hercules*, Ratner's *Hercules*, and Nick Lyon's *Hercules Reborn* – Bong Joon-ho's 2013 *Snowpiercer*, Hideki Takeuchi's *Thermae Romae*, Nick Willing's 2015 *Olympus*, and David Farr's 2018 *Troy: Fall of a City*), each paper provides a valuable contribution to the study of these productions.

## Tragedy

Two larger overviews of the presence of Greek tragedy in films were published in the 1980s. The first, written by Marianne McDonald (1983), focused on celebrated cinematic adaptations of Euripides, those by Pasolini, Cacoyannis, and Dassin. The second, by Kenneth MacKinnon, discussed films based on all three Greek tragic playwrights and, despite the title (*Greek Tragedy into Film*), also on Aristophanes' *The Acharnians* and *Lysistrata*; it also includes an appendix, "Ancient Greek Comedy into Film" (MacKinnon, 1986, 247). At the beginning of his book, MacKinnon reviews the difficulties in filming a theatrical play, especially an Ancient Greek play, and wonders whether and how it should be modernized. His analysis of films is divided into three chapters: 1. Actual stage performances filmed live (theatrical mode) between 1927 and 1972, based on six examples. 2. Plays filmed partly on stage, beyond the stage, and even in the greater outdoors (realistic mode), based on five movies, 1961–1976. 3. Four films in "filmic" mode, or modern reinterpretations of myths. A fourth category, called "meta-tragedy" by MacKinnon, includes Pasolini's *Oedipus rex*, *Medea*, and his *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana*, as well as Dassin's *A Dream of Passion* (*Κραυγή Γυναικών*).[34]

Pantelis Michelakis produced a monograph entitled *Greek Tragedy on Screen*[35] in the Oxford University series "Classical Presences" in 2013. He begins by discussing the same early movies as MacKinnon, adding material about *The Legend of Oedipus* (1913), directed by Gaston Roudès[36] and now lost. Other

[34] The Greek title (meaning 'cry of women') was inspired by Euripides' *Medea* 131–133; the English phrase ("a dream of passion") was borrowed from Shakespeare's Hamlet Act 2, sc. 2.

[35] Lorna Hardwick, in her 2003 *Reception Studies* (80–82), discusses Michelakis's earlier papers on film adaptation of tragedy, as well as MacKinnon's 1986 book, *Greek Tragedy into Film*.

[36] Michelakis previously wrote about the 1913 film (2008, 205–209).

films analysed in the book include Cacoyannis's *Electra* (1962) and Pasolini's *Oedipus rex* (1967), von Trier's *Medea* (1988), Dassin's *A Dream of Passion* (1978), Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Antigone* (1992), *The Illiac Passion* (1967) of Gregory Markopoulos, and Miklós Jancsó's *Electra, My Love*[37] (1974). Michelakis also discusses the relationship of films with dance, theatre, and television, beginning with Dimitris Gaziadis's *Prometheus Bound* (1927) and continuing with Werner Herzog's *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done* (2009) and Dassin's *A Dream of Passion* (1978), Woody Allen's parody *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995), and Cacoyannis's *Iphigenia* (1977), a melodrama combined with a western. Next, three politically motivated films are analysed. Theodoros Angelopoulos's *The Travelling Players* (1975), where World War Two and postwar years are shown in an anti-junta paraphrase of the *Oresteia*. Written by the Nobel Laureate Heinrich Böll and directed by Volker Schlöndorff, *The Postponed Antigone* is a segment of the 1978 semi-documentary *Germany in Autumn*, a film about the abductions and killings carried out by the extreme-left Baader-Meinhof terrorist group, and the accompanying chaos and hysteria in the fall of 1977. The third movie, Tony Harrison's film poem *Prometheus* (1998),[38] is a vision of the fall of the working class in Great Britain and in Soviet-dominated countries, such as Poland, with Zeus and Hermes as the villains trying to manipulate workers into renouncing Prometheus and his gift.

## Comedy

*Festschriften*, as a scholarly genre, easily escape strict editorial control. The 2013 *Ancient Comedy and Reception: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Henderson* is no exception. Fifty multilingual contributions of various quality, without an introduction or conclusion pulling this scholarly diversity together, must have presented a serious challenge for the editor. Douglas S. Olson, who accepted this task after the initiator of the volume, Wolfgang Haase, had to withdraw, succeeded in providing a logical structure according to chronology: comic playwrights and their ancient reception, followed by medieval, Renaissance, early modern, modern, and contemporary reception. Of particular interest for our purpose is the chapter by Amanda Wrigley on ancient comedy on BBC radio in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as on *Lysistrata, or Women on Strike*, produced by BBC television

[37] Based on László Gyurkó's paraphrase of the myth of Electra staged in Budapest in 1968.

[38] See the particularly insightful analysis by Edith Hall (2002, 129–140) and Lorna Hardwick's discussion of Harrison (2003, 82–85).

in 1964 (no recording of the production survived); the second highly relevant chapter was written by Martin M. Winkler on Aristophanes' reception in film, also focusing on *Lysistrata*. Winkler also wrote about *Lysistrata* in film in his *Classical Literature on Screen: Affinities of Imagination* (2017, 119–175).

The research into the audiovisual reception of this play, as well as comedy in general, was resumed by Lisa Maurice in her chapter "Greece and Rome on the Comic Screen" in Arthur J. Pomeroy's 2017 *Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen* (Maurice, 2017, 209–232), mentioned in the section on overviews. Maurice discusses film versions of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the most frequently adapted or paraphrased ancient comedy (seventeen times, five of which in the twenty-first century),[39] various humourous manifestations of Hercules, whether animated or acted, and productions set in Rome and in Roman times presented across the whole cinematic gamut from silent movies to television series, in Europe, in the United States, and finally in the United Kingdom, highlighting the difference between the last two.

Maurice also discusses (2017, 224–227) two sitcoms aired more than two decades apart, Channel 4's *Chelmsford 123* (1998–1990) and ITV's *Plebs* (2013–2022), which continued for another five years after Pomeroy's *Companion* was published. The former, set in Roman Britain of 123 CE, displays stereotypical characters and places, smart Britons that run circles around the stupid Romans who speak Latin in Rome and modern English in Britain. The latter series is set in Rome: two young provincials with their slave Grumio (the name straight from Plautus' *Mostellaria*, Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, and *Cambridge Latin Course* textbooks)[40] have to deal with problems very similar to those encountered in today's London and become entangled in the same kind of troubles as young people today. Plenty of comic situations provide ample opportunity to introduce basic and unrefined (read: gross) humour resembling that used in ancient comedy.

## Heroes

The epic heroes as a specific category were discussed in the volume *Epic Heroes on Screen*, edited by Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci in 2018 with contributions from fourteen more scholars. Part I is filled with papers on Hercules

[39] Two more are listed in the Chronological Survey, produced in 2003: *Manfast* and *A Miami Tail*.

[40] Another slave, Lurcio, is the main character in the 1969–1970 television comedy series *Up Pompeii!*; his name was borrowed from Plautus' *Miles gloriosus*.

(for example, Stafford, 2018, 43–59). Additionally, there are chapters on Russell Crowe repeating his performance of Maximus in the role of Noah, on Theseus, on the relatable and humanized ancient heroes of the BBC 2015 *Atlantis*, on Xena as an empowered heroine in several different variants, on heroes in films about Roman Britain, post-9/11 American anti-heroes, and heroes honoured in biopics.

In 2011, Michael G. Cornelius, in his collection *Of Muscles and Men: Essays on the Sword and Sandal Film*, gives a lengthy and rather pointless explanation of the genre and what he calls its four waves: the silent peplum, the Italian peplum of the 1960s, the peplum renamed "sword and sandal" in the 1980s, and a return to favour in 2000 with *Gladiator* followed by Petersen's *Troy* (2004), Stone's *Alexander* (2004), and Snyder's *300* (2006).[41] The twelve essays reflect on various aspects of the heroic strongman appearing in all consecutive waves of the genre. His usually bare, perfectly muscled body is capable of great feats. It represents male excellence and proud masculinity, especially valued by conservative ideology for its usefulness as a weapon against whatever monstrous danger must be eradicated at all costs.

Two great mythological heroes became topics of significant scholarly monographs in the twenty-first century. In 2008, Edith Hall wrote her influential book *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's* Odyssey. In 2020, Alastair J.L. Blanshard and Emma Stafford edited *The Modern Hercules: Images of the Hero from the Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Century*, written by over thirty contributors. It is the third Brill publication of the impressive *Hercules Project*, of which the fourth and last volume, *Hercules Performed*, is scheduled to appear on July 25, 2024. The entire project covers the reception of the mythological hero from antiquity through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and up to the twenty-first century. The audiovisual reception of Hercules is discussed in the second part of *The Modern Hercules*. Leading up to the twenty-first-century film and television productions, it features Ron Clements and John Musker's 1997 *Hercules* (Lisa Maurice, Sam Summers) and the 1995–1999 *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (Jon Solomon). Next are analysed once again Disney's 1997 *Hercules*, Roger Young's 2005 television miniseries *Hercules*, Ratner's 2014 *Hercules* (Jean Alvares and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell), Hercules in video games (Alix Beaumont), and three 2014 movies: Harlin's *The Legend of Hercules*, again Ratner's *Hercules*, and Lyon's *Hercules Reborn* (Joel Gordon).[42]

[41] Does *peplum* not suggest Greek mythology, sword-and-sandal Roman history, or any other non-Greek ancient setting? In any case, *genres* do not care what we call them.

[42] Unfortunately, the illuminating volume *Classical Heroes in the 21st Century*, edited by Martin Lindner and Nils Steffensen in 2023, appeared too late to be included in this chapter.

## Heroines

In 2004, Sherrie A. Inness edited *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*. In this publication, ten authors reflect on new, strong female figures, some straight from comic books. Sharon Ross discusses the friendship and heroism embodied by Xena and Gabrielle in the *Xena: Warrior Princess* series and the character of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and her girlfriends from the Scooby Gang.

As previously mentioned, Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos edited a volume of thirteen essays entitled *Ancient Greek Women in Film* in 2013. It includes chapters on mythological figures (Helen, Medea, Penelope, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, Iole, Deianira, Omphale, Io, and the Nereides), as well as three historical queens (Gorgo, Olympias, and Cleopatra VII Philopator).

*Heroines of Film and Television: Portrayals in Popular Culture* was edited in 2014 by Norma Jones, Maja Bajac-Carter, and Bob Batchelor, with eighteen scholars contributing. It is not explicitly concerned with classical heroines but includes some that have undeniable links to antiquity, such as Bo Denis, a daughter of Hades and saviour of the world from *Lost Girl*; Xena – a cross between a mythological and quasi-historical character; and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a mythical coming-of-age teen saviour of the world, who seduced more than one generation of viewers, right before Harry Potter performed the same feat on a larger scale due to his combined literary, cinematic, and gaming presence.[43]

In 2021 Maria Tatar published *The Heroine with 1,001 Faces* offering the long overdue successful challenge to Joseph Campbell's male-centred template of heroic storytelling, scholarly questionable and obsolete but still used in popular practice.[44]

## Heroes and Heroines *ad usum Delphini*

Classical myths and their heroes, including major and minor gods, present stories that may be judged inappropriate for children. Children's writers and audiovisual creators tend to sanitize or discard narratives containing excessive horror or offending traditional morality and family values to alleviate parental didactic and psychological concerns. To quote a few, Hercules' murdering rage, Medea's

[43] HBO Max has started producing a series faithfully rendering J.K. Rowling's novels. Another example of the ascending power of audiovisual series. The first episodes are expected to air in 2026. The series is planned to conclude a decade later.

[44] See my comments in Chapter 4, p. 326.

inexpiable deeds – the dismembering of Apsyrtus and her dreadful revenge on Jason – Zeus' and other gods' extramarital affairs, especially those that did not include the partner's consent. These stories are all notoriously difficult to present to children without detriment. There are several variants of the death of Apsyrtus in the ancient sources for the quest for the Golden Fleece; Ovid transmitted the one most damning to Medea in *Heroides* 6.129–130 and 12.113–116 and *Tristia* 3.9.26–29. Helen Lovatt's 2021 monograph *In Search of the Argonauts: The Remarkable History of Jason and the Golden Fleece* provides an excellent discussion of the reception of Ovid's variant, along with the others in audiovisual productions and literature, including literature for children (171–180).

Lisa Maurice edited her volume, *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature*: *Heroes and Eagles*, in 2015, collecting thirteen contributions and venturing into non-English speaking countries, as in, for example, Katarzyna Marciniak's chapter on the role played by Polish retellings of Greek myths for children prior to World War Two, assisting today's children in understanding the past and providing coping mechanisms for current problems.

The problem of the suitability of myth for children and specifically for girls in the nineteenth century is discussed by Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts in their seminal 2018 monograph *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*; one highlighted example is the omission of Apsyrtus' death in Barthold Georg Niebuhr's collection of myths for children published in English in 1843 (Murnaghan and Roberts, 2018, 14–22). Another book on classical reception in children's literature, a volume of essays edited by Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome, and Childhood Transformation*, was also published in 2018. Despite the title, the scope of the volume is limited to children's literature in English.[45]

## Antiquity for Children and Younger Adults

Martin Lindner's chapter in the previously mentioned 2008 volume by Irene Berti and Marta García Morcillo (see above, p. 239) is entitled "Colourful Heroes: Ancient Greece and the Children's Animation Film," and features eleven such productions; six of them are movies about Hercules, two about the *Odyssey*, one is a collection of myths (Daedalus and Icarus, Orpheus and Eurydice, Perseus

[45] The editors include in the bibliography their own chapters and Elizabeth Hale's on the New Zealand writers Margaret Mahy and Maurice Gee, published in the first *Our Mythical Childhood* volume of 2016.

and the Gorgon, and Theseus and the Minotaur), yet another is an animated movie about the hidden city of Atlantis, and the last one consists of a television series of thirteen 23-minute episodes of an unfinished story of two time-travelling teenagers who encounter features borrowed from various mythologies, including the Sphinx and her riddle, Midas, a Cyclops, and the city of Atlantis (Lindner, 2008, 39–55).

Research into classical reception not only in literature but in a broadly understood children's and young adults' culture stepped up due to Katarzyna Marciniak's international project hosted at the University of Warsaw and financed by a European Research Council Consolidation Grant, mentioned already in the Introduction to the present book (see p. 28). *Our Mythical Childhood* (2016–2022)[46] evolved into a series of conferences surrounded by initiatives reaching high-school Classics teachers, students, and local communities in the participating countries. This collaboration resulted in additional joint events, publications, and the development of an academic network strengthened by interuniversity clusters. A number of significant scholarly books which present the research conducted within and in connection to the project were published in open access (as will be the present volume), and several more are still expected to appear at the University of Warsaw Press in 2025.

The first volume (Marciniak, 2016) was still centred on Classics in children's literature, but its pioneering character is revealed through the unusually diverse provenance of the analysed children's stories: not only the usual British and American children's books were discussed, but also African, Australian, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Russian, and Slovenian.

The following year, Martin Lindner contributed a chapter to the volume of essays edited in 2017 by Arthur J. Pomeroy. It reviews mythological stories for children produced in audiovisual format, mainly animations but also live-action films, television series (for example, 1998–1999 *Young Hercules*, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, and *Xena*), and videos, mostly dating from the 1990s with a few released in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The target audience of these productions are the "young at heart," as the title of the chapter suggests, that is, children and the adults who watch with them. Still, the live-action series the author refers to are suitable for teens and young adults, just like the BBC series *Atlantis* or the military science-fiction series *Stargate Atlantis*

[46] As a member of the *Our Mythical Childhood* team, I am able to provide a more detailed description of the project and its unprecedented scope, which is gaining more recognition among reception scholars with each published volume.

(2013–2015). Lindner identifies and discusses themes favoured by productions for children, including mythological heroes, such as Hercules and Odysseus, and the city of Atlantis narratives.

The 2020 volume of the *Our Mythical Childhood* project focused on mythical monsters; it is briefly mentioned below in the "Mythological Monsters and Creatures" section. A year later, a large collection of essays edited, like the whole series, by Katarzyna Marciniak, appeared under the title *Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*. Audiovisual productions are discussed there by several contributors. Nick J. Lowe, in his chapter, "How to Become a Hero," provides an insightful analysis of the 1998–1999 *Young Hercules* and *Hercules: The Animated Series*, as well as *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1994–2000) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) (Lowe, 2021, 193–209). Markus Janka also wrote about Hercules, and more precisely about various uses of the hero in literature and film, in particular about two 2014 films, Harlin's *Legend of Hercules* and its distance from the Herculean sources and Ratner's *Hercules* and its departures from tradition (Janka, 2021, 241–243). Hanna Paulouskaya provided a fascinating and knowledgeable review of Soviet films for children inspired by antiquity, entitled "Turning to Myth: The Soviet School Film Growing Up" (Paulouskaya, 2021, 387–412). Anna Mik discussed Walt Disney's 1940 animation *Fantasia* and its glaring racial overtones frequent in the period (Mik, 2021b, 577–592). My own paper centred on the theme of hope versus destiny in the television series *Once Upon a Time*, S05E12–22, aired in 2016 (Olechowska, 2021, 593–610). Katarzyna Marciniak closed the volume with "'I Found Hope Again That Night…': The Orphean Quest of Beauty and the Beast," a strong and beautifully written analysis of Ron Koslov's cult 1987–1990 series *Beauty and the Beast* (Marciniak, 2021, 669–720).

Two *Our Mythical Childhood* volumes, expected to be published in 2025 (Marciniak, forthcoming b, forthcoming c), focus on (1) ancient history and the classical heritage, and (2) classically inspired nature and environmental issues in children's and young adults' culture.

## Mythological Monsters and Creatures

Mythological heroes, many of whom are monster slayers, could not exist without the monsters. Technologies, such as CGI, allow the displaying of imaginary creatures of any size and horror that special effects teams can design. Three recent scholarly books on mythological monsters investigate their appearances

in popular culture. The first one was published in 2020 by Liz Gloyn, who starts by reviewing "monstrosity" from several points of view – theoretical, historical, psychoanalytical, Michel Foucault's *Abnormal*, and finally, feminist. The first part of the book is filled with monsters of the Harryhausen era, the *Lord of the Rings* style of CGI, and… the return of live stunts. The second part discusses individual shows and their treatment of monsters: *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and *Doctor Who*. After that, come variously reimagined versions of Medusa and the Minotaur. A brief and simple conclusion from the well-constructed reasoning presented by Gloyn is that the heroes are not so perfect and the monsters are not so bad, and that is how the twenty-first century looks at the long-lived, if not eternal, dichotomy between good and evil beings.

A special place among terrifying mythological creatures belongs to Medusa, who through no fault of her own – although ancient sources do not agree on that – was transformed into a monster by a possibly jealous and certainly offended goddess and eventually became a contemporary symbol for the suffering and vilification of the survivors of rape/sexual assault. Many classicists and non-classicists wrote about this tragic creature. Before Liz Gloyn's chapter on Medusa, where she reviewed the reception of the figure and the related scholarship, including Hélène Cixous's 1975 seminal feminist essay "Le rire de la Méduse," Stephen R. Wilk published his 2000 book *Medusa: Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon*. It offers a well-informed and refreshing outsider's view of the myth and its reception.

The second book in Katarzyna Marciniak's *Our Mythical Childhood* project appeared in 2020. Entitled *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, it is composed of thirty chapters written by an international team of scholars (including Liz Gloyn), three of whom discuss the classical reception of the audiovisual kind. These contributions are grouped in the last segment, entitled "And the Chase Goes On: The Monsters of Visual Culture." Greek mythology in Soviet animation of the 1970s is presented by Hanna Paulouskaya; classical monsters on BBC Children's television in *Doctor Who*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, and *Atlantis* by Amanda Potter; and Classical Antiquity in Jim Henson's *The Muppet Show* by Katarzyna Marciniak, the editor of the volume.

In 2022, Anna Mik, member of the *Our Mythical Childhood* team, published a monograph on classical monsters in children's and young adults' culture. Additionally to literature, she investigated animations produced by Disney (the 1997 *Hercules* and shorts) and two television shows (2010–2019 *My Little Pony* and

2012–2016 *Gravity Falls*) to demonstrate how mythological creatures featured there embody the phenomena of otherness and exclusion in the areas of discrimination based on gender, disability, race, and any departure from the physical or moral "norm," which may and, as a rule, does vary from culture to culture.

An excellent overview of the concept of monstrosity from antiquity to today was also produced in 2022 as a Kubaba Association conference volume edited by Étienne Wolff.[47] With few direct references to the audiovisual, the collection examines the diversity of the idea of monstrosity across the history and geography of human culture.

## Ancient Authors and Their Versions of Myths

Marianne McDonald's 1983 *Euripides in Cinema: The Heart Made Visible* has already been mentioned in the section on tragedy (see p. 255). Paula James published a book in 2011 on films featuring the Ovidian Pygmalion, *Ovid's Myth of Pygmalion on Screen: In Pursuit of the Perfect Woman*. Pygmalion is a mythological character, not heroic at all. As far as I could establish, no films or television series render his story as we know it from Ovid. However, the motif of a creative make-over of a woman and an artificial woman becoming alive has been used frequently enough by filmmakers potentially inspired by Pygmalion's myth. James discusses Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 *Vertigo*, George Cukor's glorious 1964 musical *My Fair Lady*, Lewis Gilbert's 1983 *Educating Rita*, Garry Marshall's 1990 *Pretty Woman*, Woody Allen's 1995 *Mighty Aphrodite*, Robert Iscove's 1999 *She's All That*, and Donald Petrie's 2000 *Miss Congeniality*. Among television series, James singled out for analysis Whedon's 2001 episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* called "I Was Made to Love You." It featured April, a lovely robot whose batteries lasted longer than the interest of her owner. None of the discussed movies involved a miracle or divine intervention essential in the myth.

A more recent study took up the audiovisual reception of Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* remain one of our richest sources for classical mythology: Martin M. Winkler published his *Ovid on Screen* in 2020. Undoubtedly, he not only knows the subject but also truly admires Ovid and loves the ease with which Ovid's poetry transforms into an audiovisual text. What a pleasure to read for a change a classical reception study written by someone who feels no need

[47] Actes du Colloque "Monstres et monstruosités," Université Paris Nanterre et École Normale Supérieure, May 11–12, 2018.

to justify being, at the same time, a fan of classical literature and its presence on screen. The author provides beautifully summarized contents of many well- and less-known films that, according to him, display affinities with Ovid. Not all of them are instantly obvious, but they are related with brio and enthusiasm, encouraging reflection.

## Monographs on Individual Shows

Classical reception scholars judged four twenty-first-century films and four television shows sufficiently important to warrant individual volumes of essays. It is a special talent to perform the tasks of an editor well, as multiauthor collections require not only knowledge of the topic and editorial skills but also leadership abilities, including patience and resilience to deal with fellow scholars and the publisher's representatives.

In the particular case of monographs interpreting a single title, relatively few people have been in the position to assume the role of editor; the scope of their successes is truly admirable, especially since editing volumes is not the core activity for any scholar. Two distinguished names come to mind: Martin M. Winkler and Monica Silveira Cyrino. Winkler edited five monographs (on *Gladiator* in 2004; on Kubrick and Douglas's 1960 *Spartacus* in 2007; twice on Petersen's *Troy* – in 2007 and 2015;[48] and in 2009 on an earlier film, the 1964 *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, which covers roughly the same period as *Gladiator*). Cyrino edited two volumes on her own (on *Rome*, season 1, in 2008 and on *Rome*, season 2, in 2015) and two with Antony Augoustakis (on the Starz *Spartacus* in 2017 and on *Troy*: *Fall of a City* in 2022). In 2010, Paul Cartledge and Fiona Rose Greenland edited a monograph on Stone's *Alexander* with the participation of ten other scholars.

Why were these specific films and television series selected for a detailed collective treatment? Frequently, volumes of essays begin with a grant or a project, often combined with conferences, and result in publications of the proceedings. As far as I could establish, none of these books originated in a conference,

[48] The stated reason for publishing a second monograph on the same film – the appearance of a director's cut – seems unconvincing. Still, new elements, such as an interview with the director and a report, "Live From *Troy*: Embedded in the Trojan War," by his son Daniel, who functioned as his production assistant during the filming, are certainly part of the motivation to revisit an already over-analysed movie; see literature quoted at the end of the entry in the Chronological Survey, under the year of release. The editor also revisits repetitive justifications for the study of popular culture.

which explains their coherent structure and well-organized content. A likely reason for making these productions attractive to scholars is their popularity and, more importantly, their cultural prominence. All of them feature the greatest stories and heroes of all time, whether based on classical mythology or ancient history: the Trojan War, Spartacus, Alexander the Great, and the excesses of the Roman Empire. These themes are seen through the prism of the main basic concerns of our own polarized and divisive time, such as morality in a situation of war, responsibilities of leaders, social justice and new forms of slavery, respect for human rights, gender, race, and ethnic equality – a methodological approach and frame of mind shared by the creators, the audience, and its particularly aware and responsive members, classical reception scholars.

## Conclusion

This unavoidably hasty review of the classical reception scholarship demonstrates how much significant research has already been done in the area, especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, while films inspired by antiquity have been investigated in great numbers, some of them repeatedly, television series, as an entirely legitimate field of study, attracted the attention of scholars only by the end of the twenty-first century's first decade. The reason given for this interest has been the increase in production values of the genre and its alleged achievement of a level of quality not only approaching that of cinema but even surpassing it and claiming a dominant status in the zone of excellence. Still, films and television shows are intended (and hope) for mass audiences and belong to popular culture, just like ancient tragedies and comedies did in their time. The obvious and unquestionable fact that both deserve to be studied from that perspective by classical reception scholars does not require any justification, especially since concerns about it have been sufficiently discussed recently. A number of papers on the television series linked to antiquity have already been published but are dispersed in various collections of essays. To my knowledge, no monograph targeting the now leading genre exists, and to date, no attempt has been made to explore the phenomenon and its evolution.

To tie up the last loose ends of the review of scholarship, I will briefly come back to a publication that, on the face of it, focuses on television series, to see whether it suggests an approach I should consider in dealing with data generated by the Chronological Survey. *Ancient Greece on British Television*

(discussed earlier in the chapter – see p. 249), issued in 2018, explicitly declares television as its field of study but also includes radio as a platform for World War Two propaganda. It is not supposed to venture outside of British television, but it includes a discussion of the Franco-Japanese 1981–1982 animated series *Ulysse 31*.[49] Most importantly, its strict limitation to Greece results in a misleading picture of why British television became internationally famous for its classical reception: the hugely successful flag series, Philip Mackie and Derek Bennett's 1968 *The Caesars*, and Jack Pulman's 1976 *I, Claudius*. Why not include these achievements in the analysis as more than mere footnotes? On the other hand, what the book does discuss, quite expertly, I should add, are other high points of British television: documentaries, adaptations of Greek theatre for school, and *Doctor Who*. It is a valuable publication but not a model suitable for my needs and purpose.

Two recent publications with a focus on television – clearly, a growing area of scholarly interest – Sylvie Magerstädt's 2019 *TV Antiquity: Swords, Sandals, Blood and Sand* and the 2023 issue of the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* entitled *Antiquity Now: The Ancient Classical World on Television* edited by Magerstädt and Monica Silveira Cyrino (both discussed earlier in the chapter, see pp. 250–252), demonstrate that case studies are an excellent way to closely investigate individual shows, but they (especially the former) provide only series-by-series, case-by-case, random understanding, and do not sufficiently illuminate the situation of the entire genre. A different approach seems required to identify, trace, and interpret trends of serialized reception of Classics in the twenty-first century.

The Chronological Survey, even if potentially incomplete, delivers reasonably comprehensive data on all productions inspired by antiquity and may be used to sketch a statistically transparent audiovisual landscape, allowing us to finally grasp what is truly going on with the genre of storytelling rapidly becoming dominant. Once a variety of filters, such as the number of productions, production over time, countries of production, formal and thematic diversity, ancient and contemporary sources, classical content, time of action, etc., are applied to the data, it will illuminate the reality of the genre and facilitate further research. To use a classical metaphor, the dice are there, waiting to be rolled. We will carefully observe how they fall. Obviously, applying statistical tools to classical reception will not replace case studies and a close analysis of each series

[49] I am being unnecessarily critical here, as the series, while not British, was indeed aired on British television.

or film necessary to improve our understanding. In any case, I must strongly emphasize that the generated numbers are not cast in stone and deliver only *suggested*, not *definitive*, answers; they increase our awareness of the scale and prominence of classically inspired audiovisuality, showing it as a contemporary manifestation of the phenomenon of evolving timeless passion for storytelling.

Before actually crunching the numbers, we need to look at what has been happening on the audiovisual scene during the decade before the period under scrutiny, as the presence of antiquity on screen was at that time hardly a *tabula rasa*.

CHAPTER 4

# CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AUDIOVISUAL SERIES: AN OVERVIEW IN NUMBERS (AND WORDS)











Zbigniew Karaszewski's artwork, based on (top to bottom):

- The Gorgoneion on the tondo of an Ancient Greek Attic black-figure cup by the Chiusi Painter, end of sixth century BCE, Cabinet des médailles de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv. 320 (= 1785). Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gorgoneion_Cdm_Paris_320.jpg#mw-jump-to-license; user: Bibi Saint-Pol (2007).
- The Minotaur on the tondo of an Attic bilingual kylix, ca. 515 BCE, Museo Arqueológico Nacional de España, inv. 1999/99/80. Photograph by Marie-Lan Nguyen. Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic (CC BY 2.5), accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tondo_Minotaur_London_E4_MAN.jpg; user: Jastrow (2008).
- Jacopo Zucchi, *The Assembly of the Gods*, 1575, oil on copper, Web Gallery of Art. Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4984081; user: Mattes (2008).
- Detail of the ancient mosaic from the Roman villa of La Olmeda in Pedrosa de la Vega, Spain, depicting Odysseus, fourth–fifth centuries CE. Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY SA 3.0), accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Villa_Romana_de_La_Olmeda_Mosaicos_romanos_001_Ulises.jpg; user Valdavia (2011).

Chapter 4

# CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AUDIOVISUAL SERIES: AN OVERVIEW IN NUMBERS (AND WORDS)

## Leading Up to the Twenty-First Century

While the twenty-first century remains the focus of the present study, the process of reception of antiquity in audiovisual culture began naturally at the time when the invention of recording images and sound launched this new sphere of human creativity, with the first "talkies" taking off roughly a century ago. Films became the subject of serious research for classical reception scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, and, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, there has been no shortage of reception studies targeting films from different perspectives since then. Despite gaining ground rapidly in produced volume, values, and viewership ratings, television series received a more sporadic and fragmentary treatment from classical reception scholars. We concluded, in Chapter 3, that to be able to adequately handle data about classically inspired audiovisuality collected in the Chronological Survey and to understand the exposure to and awareness of antiquity among various audience demographics in the time range under investigation here, it is crucial to review first what happened in the area of audiovisual reception in the late twentieth century. The last decade of the century witnessed an explosion of productions inspired in various manners by classical mythology, occasionally combined with mythologized versions of ancient history. Some of these popular series premiering in the 1990s wound down before the start of the new millennium. Some continued into the 2000s.

Endlessly repeated, Ridley Scott's 2000 *Gladiator* gave a decisive impetus to a hike in audiovisual productions about antiquity.[1] As Gideon Nisbet suggests in his 2008 book[2] *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture*:

[1] See, e.g., Joshel, Malamud, and Wyke, 2001, 1–2; Winkler, 2004a, xi; Augoustakis and Raucci, 2018, 1–2; Solomon, 2018, 23–24; Gloyn, 2020, 61, and other references provided in the Chronological Survey at the end of *Gladiator*'s entry (2000).

[2] Published first in 2006, reissued and updated two years later.

> In the wake of the Roman box-office smash *Gladiator* (2000), famous-name directors fell over themselves to find new treatments of previously filmed stories from antiquity. Sidestepping the time-worn pieties of Hollywood's classic Roman narratives, they turned to Greek myth and history for their inspiration: the ten-year siege of Troy, the campaigns of Alexander the Great, the self-sacrifice of the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae. (Nisbet, [2006] 2008, 6)

The film, undoubtedly very successful, generated wide interest in the subject and brought high cinematic and entertainment values to the long-defunct genre of *toga* or its successors scorned by critics. In particular, it rekindled the allure of Roman history, even more precisely, of the deadly and repulsive Roman version of today's combat sports, the gladiator games.[3] Still, considering the audiences' interest in mythology, the viewers did not need the arrival of the unknown general Maximus Decimus Meridius, because they already had the hero for all seasons, Hercules.[4] The familiarity and longstanding exposure to this mythical character appear obvious from the number of productions featuring Hercules and filmed both for big and small screens well before the 2000 *Gladiator* and in particular only years in advance of the new millennium. The last quinquennium or so of the century seems packed with mythological themes, a situation unusual enough in its influence on popular culture to merit scholarly attention (see Solomon, 2018, 18–23, 2020, 506–523; Olechowska, 2021, 595–597), especially because the impact spread to other areas. Still, as children progress from fairy tales to history, viewers brought up on the adventures of the mythically heroic Hercules enthusiastically espoused a real-life hero, the allegedly historical noble general. Lisa Maurice concludes, in her essay on half a century of literary retellings of myths involving Hercules, that films and series

[3] For a comprehensive discussion of the film focusing on its rendering of antiquity, ancient history, and how it resonates today, see the volume of essays edited by Martin M. Winkler in 2004.

[4] In her chapter on audiovisual renderings of Hercules' myth, Emma Stafford suggests that the hero has not yet received a just treatment on screen and, despite the plethora of films and television shows about him, is still waiting for "a multi-part series, employing all the potential of modern CGI for representing monsters, gods and exotic locations. It would also not shirk the issue of Herakles'-Hercules' own divinity: the hero's ultimate apotheosis was central to the myth in antiquity and provides a happy ending to counterbalance the many tribulations of his life" (Stafford, 2022b, 63), according to the fifteenth *Homeric Hymn*: "he both performed and endured many violent deeds. / But now he lives happily in the fine seat of snowy Olympos, / and has fair-ankled Hebe as his wife" (quoted after Stafford, 2022b, 63). Such a perfect happy-ever-after ending should be enough to inspire any of the main streaming services except Disney+ for obvious reasons.

produced during that time, in combination with earlier cinematic phenomena, had a transformative effect on mythological literature for children:

> By the end of the twentieth century, however, a change was occurring, as a result of the screen adaptations of Hercules that had popularized the hero, leading, in the United States, to a resurgence in books about him. Although the phenomenon did not feature in exactly the same way in the United Kingdom, where Hercules became a suitable subject for early readers in the form of reading scheme books, nevertheless a change of attitude can be seen within these books, with Hercules treated humorously and with far less deference than before. Writers began to exploit the figure for comic potential, as the hero descended from the ivory tower in which he had been placed and captured the imagination of authors and readers alike. (Maurice, 2019a, 97)

Indeed, viewers enchanted by mythological stories became more interested in reading mythology books. On the creative side of the equation, the authors obliged in unprecedented numbers. Alan Cameron, while deploring the simultaneous lack of scholarly studies on mythography, said in his 2004 *Greek Mythography in the Roman World*: "Books on mythology have been appearing at an alarming rate in most modern languages" (Cameron, 2004, vii). Yet, what was truly alarming was the average quality of these books produced in response to the increased market demand, written "by numbers" rather than out of irresistible creative impulse.

We may begin looking at the details of the 1990s audiovisual offering in 1994 when five television movies premiered in quick succession: *Hercules and the Amazon Women* (April 25), *Hercules and the Lost Kingdom* (May 2), *Hercules and the Circle of Fire* (October 31), *Hercules in the Underworld* (November 7), and *Hercules in the Maze of the Minotaur* (November 14). They were a sort of elaborate pilot designed to test waters before the 1995–1999 US–New Zealand series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* composed of six seasons and 111 episodes,[5] parallelled by the six seasons and 124 episodes of the spin-off *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001). As *Xena* progressed into the twenty-first century, it reached even more fantastic flights of mythological fancy. It earned unprecedented popularity for creating a new superheroine who was joined valiantly by Buffy the Vampire Slayer, an extraordinary figure much less

[5] See a case study of the series by Sylvie Magerstädt (2019, 188–208).

dependent on classical mythology (see, for instance, Ross, 2004, 231–255; Tigges, 2007, 2010, 441–455).

Following the 1994 series of "pilots" featuring Hercules, a Japanese-American 50-minute anime based on the same hero's adventures and labours, entitled *Hercules: The Classic Tale of a Famous Greek Hero*, was directed by Toshiyuki Hiruma Takashi for Jetlag Productions. It was released on video in early 1995. Next year, Richard Slapczynski directed another 50-minute animated video about Hercules for Australia's Burbank Animation Studios. Neither of the two videos met with much success.[6]

The late twentieth century, while continuing to be obsessed with Hercules, branched out into the high adventure wing of the Homeric epic, the *Odyssey*, with the assistance of Andrei Konchalovsky,[7] who wrote (with Christopher Solimine) and directed the 1997 television miniseries aired on NBC on May 18 and 19. Konchalovsky was awarded a Prime Time Emmy for Outstanding Directing for a Miniseries. However, his Soviet-style sanitized rewriting of Homer met with merciless scorn not only from classicists unable to find the Homeric spirit in this Hallmark Entertainment version of the *Odyssey*. The reviewers concluded that what was wrong with the miniseries originated in Hallmark's obsession with "family values" and providing entertainment suitable to children.[8] Konchalovsky's *Odyssey* brings back less than sweet childhood memories to anybody brought up on regime-compliant Soviet-era movies, intent on being invisible to censors and moralizing children and adults by modelling inauthentic characters and relationships unlikely to generate official disapproval.

In 1997, Disney released the animated feature film *Hercules*; the same year, audiences were offered another cartoon, *The Amazing Feats of Young Hercules*; a year later, a direct-to-video *Hercules and Xena: The Animated Movie. The Battle for Mount Olympus*. Between 1998 and 1999, fifty episodes of a single

[6] See a brief description of the contents in M. Lindner, 2017, 518.

[7] Son of the Soviet writer Sergey Mikhalkov and an older brother of the equally well-known film director Nikita Mikhalkov, notorious for his political involvement and vocal support for Vladimir Putin and his war against Ukraine. Konchalovsky took his mother's name early in his career, not wanting to be confused with his brother (see Żebrowska, 2003). Both brothers were generously garlanded by both Soviet and post-Soviet regimes. Their artistic talents not withstanding, they knew how to navigate their reality. Even if Konchalovsky had no control over the disastrous casting, he was the script's author along with another Soviet-born screenwriter, and he directed the movie.

[8] See the reviews by Peter Green (1998, 145–154) and Camille Paglia (1997, 170–181), as well as Edith Hall ([2008] 2012, 191), who comments on both reviews and is not impressed by Konchalovsky either, although for some reason she views his production as a feature film, not a television miniseries.

season of *Young Hercules*, this time around with live actors, were aired on Fox Kids Network; at the same time, the 1997 Disney *Hercules* was serialized by Walt Disney Television and sixty-seven episodes in two seasons hit the ever-patient small screens. The year 1999 brought another direct-to-video production by Walt Disney Television, *Hercules: Zero to Hero*, whose plot was a sequel to the events narrated in the 1997 *Hercules*.

The switch from classical mythology known from ancient sources to fantasy inspired by a vague idea of antiquity involved – like in the case of *Xena: Warrior Princess* – the introduction of alternate universes, virgin birth, repeated resurrections, deicide, as well as mythological motifs from other cultures. This last tendency became visible in the new generation of military science-fiction series, *Stargate SG-1*. *Xena* aspires to reflect the reality of Ancient Greece of a quasi-mythological past, occasionally taking place in the first century BCE; historical figures mingle freely with fictional and mythological characters. Real events are adapted as required by the fantastic plot. My favourite example of such a bold reinterpretation of ancient history is Xena as the commander of the pirates who kidnapped Caesar for ransom in 75 BCE (Plut., *Caes*. 1.8–2.7; Suet., *Iul*. 4; *Xena*, S02E12); she was subsequently crucified for this deed, but it was not yet her time to die. I discussed Xena's crucifixion and its triple display in S02E12 (1997), S04E21 (1999), and S06E18 (2001) in my chapter in Katarzyna Marciniak's forthcoming *Our Mythical History: Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to the Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome*. In the third instance of Xena's horrific ordeal, an episode entitled "When Fates Collide" (2001), Caesar captured the three Parcae, took over their loom, and rearranged reality by creating a parallel universe where he ruled as Emperor with Xena as his wife and co-ruler. Caesar's luck abandons him when Gabrielle appears in this new world as a playwright and gradually brings Xena to her senses. After trying to poison Caesar, Xena is back on the cross, but Gabrielle saves her by destroying the loom of the Fates and the parallel universe it created. Instead of ending neatly there, the series continues for four more episodes, the last two filled with evil Japanese Samurai ghosts, fights to the death and beyond, based on another convoluted scenario from Xena's past coming to haunt her and resulting in her ultimate sacrifice to save thousands of enslaved souls. Gabrielle departs alone for Egypt, where "they need a girl with a Chakram,"[9] Xena's trademark weapon.

The pre-2000 productions systematically saturated audiences of all ages with a variety of more or less fantasized or mashed-up Greek myths, sprinkled

[9] The last scene in *Xena: Warrior Princess*, S06E22.

with just as frivolously treated ancient history and an assorted brand of the supernatural. Still, there were other more traditional mythological productions in the late twentieth century, for instance, *Mythic Warriors: Guardians of the Legend*, an animated series of twenty-four half-hour episodes launched in 1998 and ending in January 2000, with two episodes aired in the new millennium, "King Midas: The Golden Touch" and "Hercules and the Titans." The series was based on Laura Geringer Bass's eight-volume cycle of novels "Myth Men: Guardians of the Legend" (1994–1997), possibly one of the mythological books that alarmed Alan Cameron (2004, vii).

A Lithuanian animated film about the adventures of Odysseus (1998) was reformatted by an American producer into a four-part miniseries, dubbed in English and aired on HBO in January 2000; it displays clunky, dated, and predictable Soviet-style aesthetics nobody would want to watch if there were something else available. There must be an interesting story behind this incongruous resurrection, one I was unable to unravel. To complete the list of retellings of Greek myths aired in 2000, we should add Nick Willing's slightly paraphrased version of Jason and the Argonauts produced as a miniseries. On the fictionalized history side, we have one television film produced in the cycle of adaptations of "The Royal Diaries" novels, featuring the adventures of a teenage Cleopatra (based on *Daughter of the Nile* by Kristiana Gregory).

Several popular series showing mythological inspirations, like the already mentioned teen opus *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, began airing during the last years of the twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first. In "Restless" (S04E22), the fourth season's finale of *Buffy*, aired on May 23, 2000, the main characters plan to relax together watching videos but fall asleep and experience strange visions in their dreams. Willow's dream is shown first. It begins with her painting on her friend Tara's back, in large, easily legible letters, Sappho's famous love poem in Ancient Greek, resembling an incantation.[10] Because the network's restrictions did not allow at the time an open treatment of homosexual love (see Jenkins, 2015, 1–8), the director and writer, Joss Whedon, used the poem as a discrete way to introduce the romantic side of the relationship between the two witches.

Military science-fiction sagas, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, and *Stargate SG-1*, occasionally include classically inspired episodes. The *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* S07E16 episode, "Inter arma enim silent leges," broadcast in the United States on March 3, 1999, and in Europe on January 8,

[10] See the entry in the Chronological Survey and the section "Quotes," further in this chapter.

2000, quotes in the title Cicero's *Pro Milone* 4.11. One of the characters (a doctor with a genetically enhanced brain…) correctly attributes the phrase. The name of a starship (USS *Bellerophon*) and a planet (Romulus) are two additional allusions to antiquity in the episode.

Before 2000 (from 1996 to 1999), the ten episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* – which, as a whole, is in fact a νόστος (*nóstos*, an epic hero's return home) as Odyssean as they come, including a series of truly epic obstacles the crew of the starship face on their journey from the remote Delta quadrant[11] back to Earth – were to varying degrees inspired by antiquity.[12] A few months after the last of these, already in 2000, another *Voyager* episode brought a striking example of classical inspiration: "Muse," S06E22 (April 26, 2000), is set on a planet with cultural similarities to Ancient Greece of the Homeric era. A local playwright and his troupe stage for their patron, a minor ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν (*ánax andrõn*, leader of men), an epic drama in an open-air theatre. The set-up mirrors the Ancient Greek society's fascination with theatre and the use of plays about the supernatural guiding mortals in real life and advising the ruler. In this society, people believe in superior beings they call Eternals. Naturally, the smart crew of the *Voyager* manages to influence the locals reinforcing the values of cooperative and peaceful existence without breaking the prime directive of non-interference in technologically less developed cultures, though using their religious beliefs to mask the *Voyager*'s existence.[13] "Life Line," S06E24, aired on May 10, 2000, shows a simple reference to antiquity including a classically suggestive name – the Trojan Horse Project – a holographic infiltration technique intended to deceive the enemy.[14] These science-fiction series occasionally displaying

[11] Astronomers identify the quadrants of the spiral Milky Way galaxy with Roman numerals; using letters of the Greek alphabet to distinguish the quadrants is specific to *Star Trek*. There are also other differences in the mapping of the galaxy, such as the perpendicular axis running through the centre and not through the Sun, as is done in astronomy. See Fazekas, 2016, 10–11.

[12] "Lifesigns," S02E19, February 26, 1996; "Darkling," S03E18, February 19, 1997; "Favorite Son," S03E20, March 19, 1997; "Concerning Flight," S04E11, November 26, 1997; "Message in a Bottle," S04E14, January 21, 1998; "Latent Image," S05E11, January 20, 1999; "11:59," S05E23, May 5, 1999; "Barge of the Dead," S06E03, October 6, 1999; "Dragon's Teeth," S06E07, November 10, 1999; and "Pathfinder," S06E10, December 1, 1999.

[13] See the entry for this episode in the Chronological Survey and also Meyer, 2009, 46–77, mentioned there.

[14] Today, two decades later, it brings to mind the highly controversial Pegasus spyware labelled "a flying Trojan Horse." The spyware has been widely discussed in the press; see, e.g., Ronan Farrow's article in *The New Yorker* (2022). Naming a product with a reference to mythology is a typical example of the symbolic use of antiquity, like naming starships in military science fiction or using Latin phrases as titles of episodes.

classical flavours are joined by a very successful witch show, *Charmed*, which was launched in 1998 but started using mythological elements only in its fourth season, in October 2000.

*Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007), where Ancient Egyptian and Greek gods are revealed as a powerful evil parasitic race, Goa'ulds, who travel the universe via a network of stargates and have been for centuries stealing advanced technology allowing conquest and enslavement of humans. Some of the Goa'ulds come from Greek mythology: in the first seasons, aired still in the twentieth century, Cronus, Ares, Nerus, Athena, Pelops, and Thanatos appear or are spoken of. Norse gods, the good guys according to the series, are a very ancient, highly advanced, and benevolent race called the Asgards. The themes of slavery and the heroic fight to end it are central to the series: the Goa'ulds enslave the Jaffa, who carry their infant symbiotes to maturity and form the military instrument of their power and lust for conquest. They also enslave humans, whom they force to become hosts to the adult symbiotes. Later on, the theme returns with the Ori, the evil branch of the ascended benevolent Ancients; contrary to the Ancients, the Ori force humans to worship them as gods. The Ori, like Goa'ulds in the earlier seasons of *Stargate SG-1*, rule their subjects by extreme violence, fear, and threat of horrific death, taking away their physical and ideological freedom. In return for total obedience, they make a false promise of ascension.

On the 2000 scenery, far from deserted by classical themes, land two major big-screen productions: the already mentioned *Gladiator* by Ridley Scott, inspired by Daniel P. Mannix's *Those About to Die* (1958),[15] a non-fiction book, and Joel and Ethan Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, an entirely different kind of classical inspiration, a paraphrase of Homer's *Odyssey* set in 1937 Mississippi during the Great Depression. The latter's popularity has been attested to by a reference in the iconic American animated sitcom *The Simpsons*, in a March 2002 three-segment episode, "Tales from the Public Domain" (S13E14).[16] The

[15] Re-published posthumously in 2001 to benefit from the film's popularity, under the title *The Way of the Gladiator*. Daniel P. Mannix (1911–1997), a prolific author and animal trainer, was fascinated by wild animals and their participation in the *ludi*. He made it the main focus of his book, in which he paints a depressing picture of Rome gradually sinking into a mass addiction to increasingly brutal, sadistic, and degenerate spectacles until Honorius ended the games in 404 CE (Mannix, [1958] 2014, 138–139).

[16] The second segment, "Hot Child in the City," is about Joan of Arc, and the third, "Do the Bard, Man," is about Hamlet. Another classically inspired episode of the series, "Lemon of Troy" (S06E24), was aired in May 1995. The strategy of a Trojan Horse (an RV instead of a wooden horse) was used in the conflict between Springfield and the neighbouring city of Shelbyville to recover Springfield's lemon tree.

first segment, entitled "D'oh, Brother Where Art Thou?," presents a uniquely absurd and funny version of the sack of Troy and the return of Odysseus to Ithaca.

It may be argued that *Gladiator*'s success created interest not so much in antiquity in general but rather in Roman history as indicated by productions aired starting in 2003, which constitutes a logical delay for ideas to develop, be pitched, financed, filmed, and released. During that year alone, there were seven productions about Roman history, most of them biopics: the German-US-Italian miniseries *Julius Caesar*, the story of his entire career; a British-Romanian television film presenting a fictionalized story of Boudicca, the Iceni Queen; the BBC docudrama *Colosseum: Rome's Arena of Death* about the gladiator Verus, a historical figure mentioned in Martial's *De spectaculis* 29, who fought to the death against his friend Priscus at the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheatre in 80 CE (in a unique turn of events, they were both declared winners and graciously given freedom by Titus). Then comes an episode of a five-part docudrama series on historical warrior-women narrated by Lucy Lawless (also known as Xena) featuring Boudicca as one such figure; followed by another docudrama, the BBC's *Pompeii: The Last Day*; the British comedy *Gladiatress* about Caesar's attempt to conquer Britain thwarted by three Celtic warrior-sisters with comical names Aristophanes would have liked (Smirgut, Dwyfuc, and Worthaboutapig), filmed with costumes and weaponry used for the *Gladiator* and meant as a parody of Scott's movie; and finally, the British-Italian-Spanish 2003 television film *Imperium: Augustus*, a biopic, the first in a series of five productions presenting Nero (2004), St Peter (2005), the destruction of Pompeii (2007), and St Augustine (2010).

Whether the renewed enthusiasm for antiquity in film and television was due to the end-of-the-century accumulation of classically inspired audiovisuality or to *Gladiator*'s triumph, the cold data provided in the Chronological Survey highlight the years 2003–2006 as the most fertile in classical inspiration during the entire twenty-first century: thirty-one productions in 2003 and 2004, twenty-six in 2005 and 2006. After that date, the annual figure fluctuates downward, plummeting to seventeen in 2009 and 2013, descending to the all-time low of fourteen in 2016, but otherwise regularly exceeding twenty (2011, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022), with a high of twenty-eight reached in 2018, as shown in Chart 1.

With this chart begins the draft of the "statistical picture combined with an interpretation of themes and main concepts" announced in the Introduction to this book and in the previous chapter as a novel attempt at understanding how antiquity inspired the twenty-first-century creators of audiovisuality.

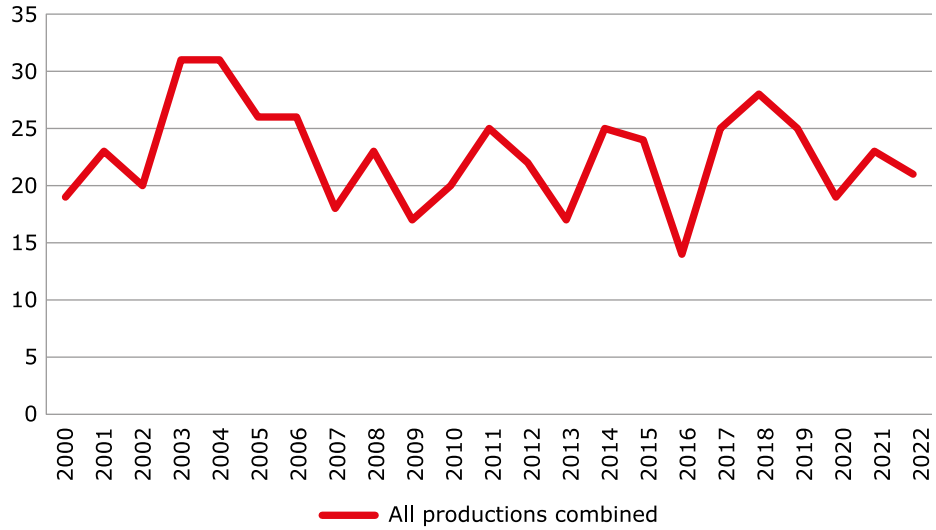



**Chart 1:** All productions inspired by antiquity (2000–2022).[17]

The approach is hardly surprising in the era of digital humanities. Still, to my knowledge, it has never been applied in classical reception. As such, it requires, in addition to what was said in Chapter 3, a clear rationale from the point of view of both cultural and statistical validity.[17]

The obvious reservation a statistician may formulate is the probability (mentioned already in the Introduction) that the list of classically inspired productions on which the data are based may be incomplete. In its present version, it relies heavily on material in English (dubbing included) displaying a clear connection to antiquity.[18] I expect most of the *lacunae* belong to the category of classical allusions as they crop up in the most unlikely places, for instance, Hernán Jiménez's 2021 Christmas movie *Love Hard* (see under the year of release). The use of allusions indicates a certain familiarity with antiquity and an intention to add prestige or a cachet of classical education to characters.

[17] While the Chronological Survey presents also the most recent productions aired or released in 2023 and 2024, the list of these entries is certainly far from complete and for that reason the years 2023 and 2024 are not included in the charts. 2023 and 2024 will eventually be updated after the publication of the volume, once the Chronological Survey is posted on the *Our Mythical Childhood* website.

[18] As discussed in the Introduction (see in particular footnote 30), productions that, in the process of scholarly interpretation, could be compared to some aspects of Greek or Roman literature but whose affinity with antiquity is not specifically referred to in the works themselves or suggested by their creators, are not listed in the Survey as they do not meet the criteria adopted in the book.

The considerable formal diversity of the entries could be another source of contention and a potential charge of bundling together apples and oranges. Feature films, television films, television series, miniseries, single inspired episodes, shorts (live-actor or animated), retellings of single myths or collections, within and outside the canon, adaptations, paraphrases, mash-ups, various kinds of allusions, have all been given the same numerical value. Each entry counts as one.[19] However, as the only required constants are, first, audiovisuality, and, second, a connection to antiquity, the diversity of the shows does not obscure the general picture. It is reflected in charts generated using specific filters.

Most audiovisual productions listed in the Survey were created in the United States[20] (49%; see Chart 2) and the United Kingdom (less than one-third of the US number, or 13%). Still, the gathered data show a much more nuanced picture, including many other countries producing independently or in partnerships.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| US | 209 | DE | 10 | GR | 4 | BY | 1 |
| UK | 56 | IT | 9 | CH | 3 | DK | 1 |
| US, CA | 17 | JP | 6 | PL | 3 | IE | 1 |
| US, UK | 15 | ES | 6 | BR | 2 | IN | 1 |
| UK, CA | 4 | CU | 5 | CZ | 2 | MY | 1 |
| Other co-prod. | 48 | CA | 5 | MX | 2 | RO | 1 |
| FR | 13 | KR | 5 | BR | 1 | RU | 1 |

**Chart 2:** Number of productions by country.

Co-productions constitute almost one-fourth of all titles. The most frequent partners in these are US companies, often along with British or Canadian ones. The remaining countries are from the Mediterranean basin and from among those whose affinity index with antiquity is high, for example, former Roman provinces. Among the partners in the other co-productions are (in the order of frequency) France, Spain, Italy, Australia, Germany, Belgium, Romania,

[19] There is one exception to this rule: in charts reflecting production over time, series produced over a number of years get a value of one for each year of the first broadcast, that is, a series premiering in 2013–2015 is counted as one in 2013, 2014, and 2015, provided that in each of these years there were episodes inspired by antiquity. If only specific episodes were classically inspired and are listed separately, each counts as one.

[20] To simplify the presentation of the chart, instead of full names, the universally known two-letter abbreviations of the names of countries are used.

Japan, the Netherlands, Egypt, Armenia, Belarus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Syria.

The numbers gleaned from the Chronological Survey may be interpreted in various ways, but once we have seen how many productions were made over time (Chart 1) and by which countries (Chart 2), it may be useful to chart what the data tell us about the audiovisual categories inspired by antiquity.

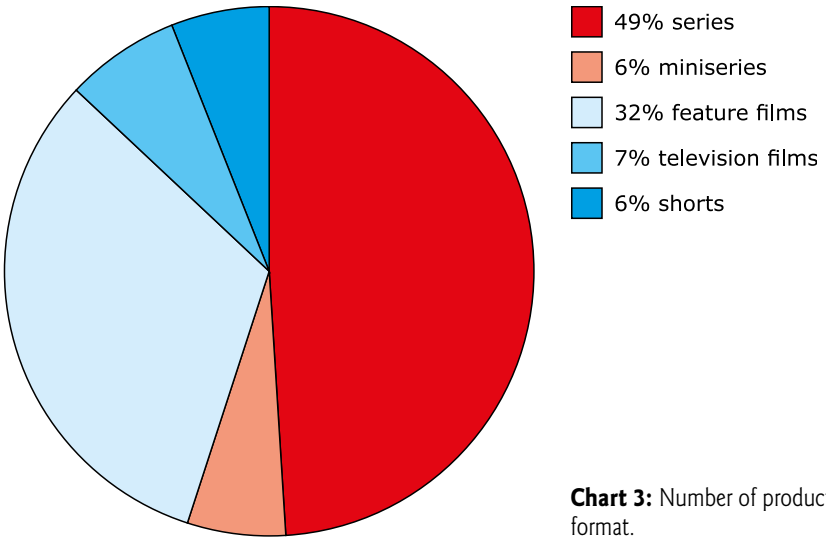



**Chart 3:** Number of productions by format.

Chart 3 covers all entries and demonstrates how they break down into series and miniseries, feature films, television films, and shorts. By far, the most frequently produced category was audiovisual series; if we add the number of miniseries here, the total share will reach 55%. Next are feature films (well over half of the combined number for the series), with television films (7%) coming just before shorts (6%).[21] N.B. All these proportions are not exclusive

[21] Two comments. I noticed a rather curious fact about television films inspired by antiquity: they almost disappeared after 2015. As to the category of shorts appearing rather randomly, I could identify only twenty-one examples produced during the two decades under study. The myth of Orpheus was the theme of three shorts (2002, 2005, 2007), Narcissus and Echo, and Daedalus and Icarus figured in one short each (respectively, 2008–2009 and 2014), mythological monsters in various rather humorous configurations were presented in four shorts (2010, 2012, 2013, 2016), one production paraphrased Euripides' *Trojan Women* (2008), one spoofed the 2006 *United 93* and *300* (2007), one showed Olympic gods trying to assert their dominion in today's America (2012), and finally, two dealt with important moments in Caesar's life – *Rubicon* and *Et tu* about his violent death (both 2002).

to productions influenced by antiquity; they are relatively similar to the breakdown of all audiovisual productions into these categories regardless of their content.[22]

Chart 4 indicates the proportion of animated production and reveals a preference for live actors – there were over five times as many productions of the latter kind. The main apparent reasons are that not all content is suitable for animation, that animation costs more and takes more time to produce, and that, on the other hand, highly popular actors command large audiences. Also, illustrations in children's books, especially fairy tales, animal stories, and mythological narratives, were precursors of comic strips, the so-called funnies, and comic books. Following the advent of audiovisuality, cartoons slowly widened the scope of the genre, "growing up" in their use of language and themes. Adult comic books have their audiovisual equivalent in adult cartoons.

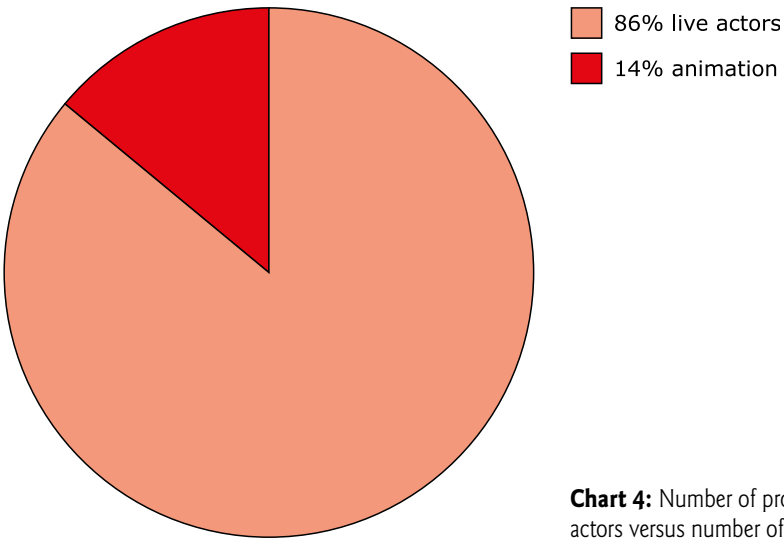



**Chart 4:** Number of productions with live actors versus number of animations.

Chart 5 shows how the animation slice of the audiovisual pie breaks down into various formats. Among all animated productions, 66% were series and 4% miniseries, 20% – feature films, and 10% – shorts.

[22] As the entire audiovisual production is not the focus of this study, I leave the relevant data and their interpretation to specialized organizations and data analysts. For global productions, see, e.g., Internet Movie Database (https://imdb.com) in its various national manifestations; for European productions, see the databases published by the European Audiovisual Observatory (https://www.obs.coe.int/); for an impressive approach to interpreting data, see Stephen Follows's many publications at https://stephenfollows.com/.

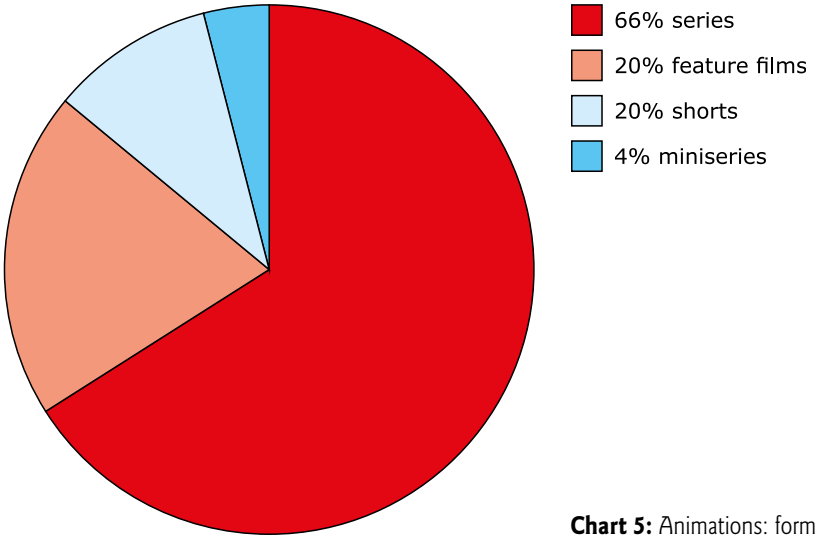



**Chart 5:** Animations: format breakdown.

Moving on to content categories, it seems obvious that not all productions inspired by antiquity or, specifically, mythology, can be labelled fiction, for instance, documentaries tracing the geography of a myth or providing the science behind myths, etc. On the other hand, historical documentaries often contain segments of re-enactments of events from long ago. They are necessarily coloured to various degrees by the producers' imagination or intentions; they must be classified as docudramas. We will first chart the general divide between fiction and non-fiction, the latter composed of both documentaries and docudramas (Chart 6).

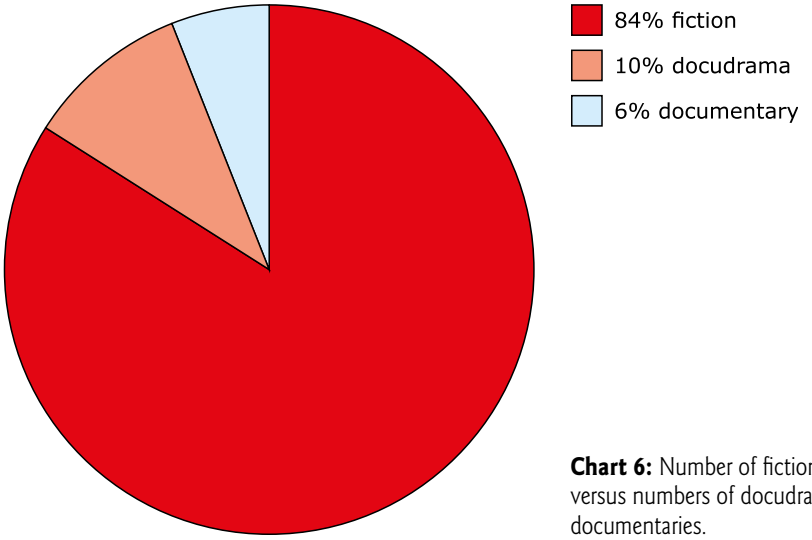



**Chart 6:** Number of fictional productions versus numbers of docudramas and documentaries.

Documentaries, whether they take the form of a classic documentary with photographic documentation and expert opinion or veer towards re-enactment and docudrama, are probably underrepresented in the Survey; while they are certainly of scholarly interest, they are outside the scope of the present study if they are not connected to specific myths or ancient texts. In any case, there is a significant shortage of scholarly analysis of documentaries about Classical Antiquity, and this gap in research certainly merits more attention from reception scholars.[23] 84% of all audiovisual productions inspired by antiquity and listed in the Survey tell fictional stories; documentaries constitute the remaining 16%, split into 10% of docudramas and 6% of straight documents.

The other content parameters worthy of charting are those related to the distinction between mythology and history and within the proportion of the main format categories: series, miniseries, feature films, television films, shorts, as well as single episodes in series otherwise not inspired by antiquity. The source of classical inspiration, generally speaking, may be either mythology or ancient history. Chart 7 indicates that the figures are 66% for the former and 34% for the latter – almost twice as often creators looked for inspiration to mythology. Why this preference? Simply put, using mythology as a source of content requires a good imagination and access to at least secondary sources; ancient history, on the other hand, is grounded on knowledge and needs a reputable expert or two. With mythology, you can take any liberty you wish. History is less forgiving, and the rationale for messing with it should be convincing. Still, there are ancient historical figures that every now and then make a screen comeback causing a more or less serious uproar, whether they are treated seriously or not: Alexander the Great, Spartacus, Julius Caesar, Cleopatra, Boudicca, and some others much less prominently, for instance, Leonidas.[24]

A careful look at the data can also reveal whether specific formal categories of audiovisual productions are more likely than others to be influenced by mythology: series, miniseries, feature films, television films, shorts, or single episodes in series otherwise not inspired by antiquity. Chart 8 shows that over one-third of mythological productions belong to that last category, and a similar number is reached by feature films; series combined with miniseries account

[23] See Fiona Hobden, who discusses documentaries about antiquity on British television, and twenty-first-century documentaries about the *Odyssey* and Odysseus (respectively, 2018a, 24–43, 2018b, 203–223; and 2022, 135–151).

[24] The most recent example is Cleopatra: the 2023 *Queen Cleopatra* caused a strong protest from the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities; see the Chronological Survey under the year of release.

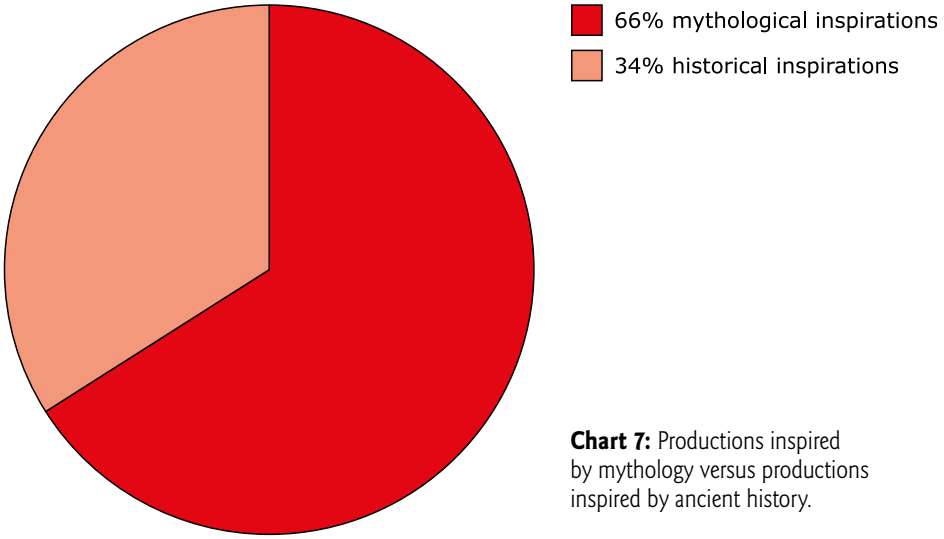



**Chart 7:** Productions inspired by mythology versus productions inspired by ancient history.

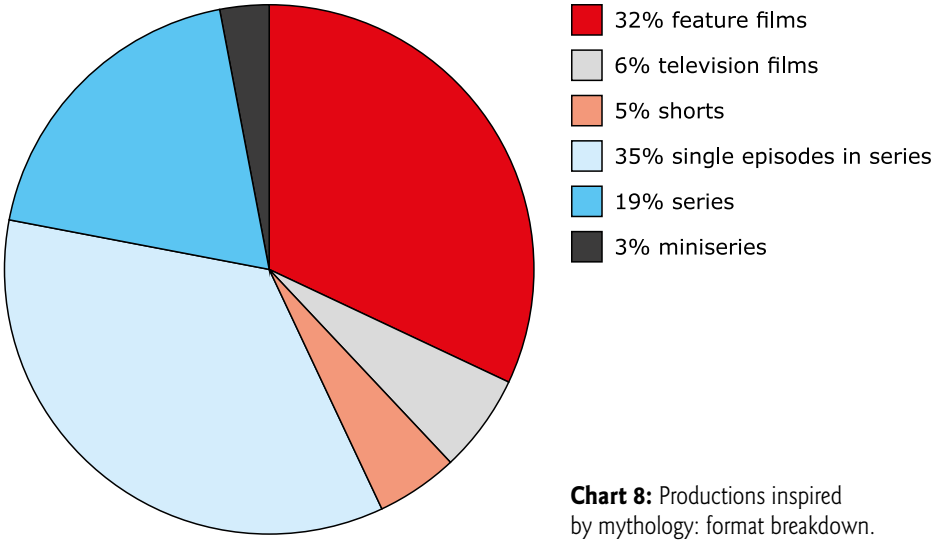



**Chart 8:** Productions inspired by mythology: format breakdown.

for one-fifth; the series reaches more dominant levels – well over half of all productions – if we also add to the series single episodes inspired by mythology.

To complete the picture and make comparison easy, the next diagram charts the breakdown of productions inspired by ancient history according to the same formats (Chart 9). The proportions are significantly different. Television films represent one-fifth of all productions as opposed to only 6% for such productions inspired by mythology. There are three times as many miniseries but the

number of series is roughly the same, with 12 percentage points fewer single episodes in series otherwise not inspired by antiquity. On the other hand, the proportion of feature films inspired by history is 10 percentage points smaller than those inspired by mythology. Shorts represent only 3% of productions, compared to 5% in the previous chart. Let me offer some possible reasons for these differences. Feature films are equally suitable for both mythology and history. However, television films and miniseries (currently called "limited series") are better suited to presenting historical events and biopics, at least to some degree, based on literary, archaeological, epigraphical, and iconographical materials. Historical themes also have a beginning and end known in advance, and they cannot be extended in the same way mythological stories often are. Most famous myths are interconnected and rarely come to a final closure as their plots continue in other directions as soon as one reaches a natural break in the story. The target audience is also not the same, despite obvious overlaps among the interested public. The educational function of audiovisual productions dealing with history is more pronounced than mythological cinema and television's significantly more entertainment-oriented role.

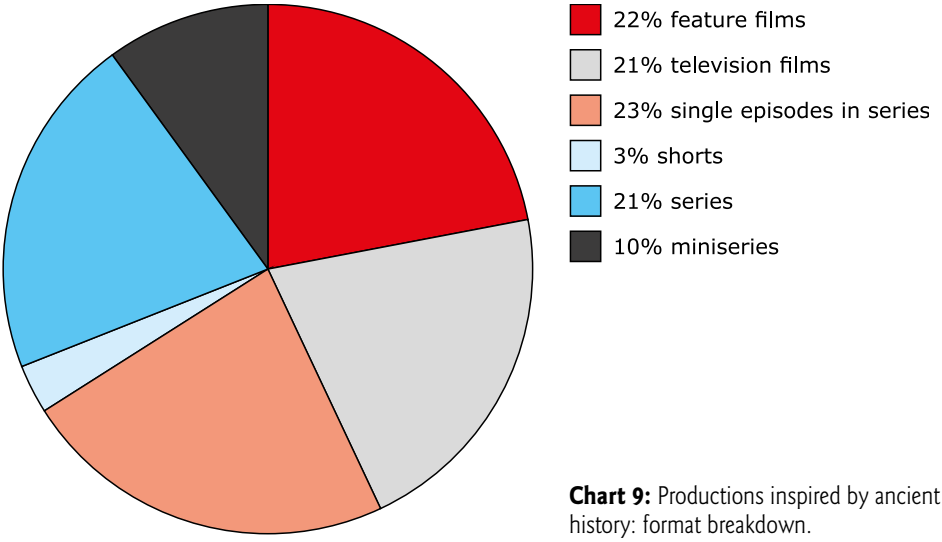



**Chart 9:** Productions inspired by ancient history: format breakdown.

The next chart (Chart 10) reflects the content of productions inspired by ancient history and shows the proportion between Roman and Greek history. No surprise there. Gideon Nisbet devoted a whole book to what he considered the predilection of film and television producers for Ancient Rome to the detriment of Greece (Nisbet, [2006] 2008). However, he did not really distinguish between

history and mythology. For him, there is just Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome as sources of inspiration, which is a perfectly reasonable position if your focus is not specifically mythology.

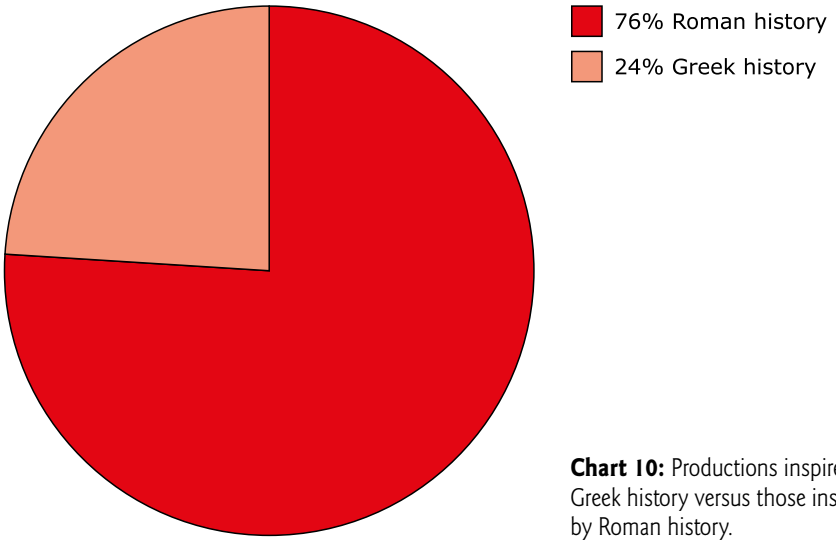



**Chart 10:** Productions inspired by Greek history versus those inspired by Roman history.

Obviously, boundaries between history and mythology may occasionally seem blurred because mythology also reflects the past although a more remote one, the so-called prehistory, which we do not consider entirely fabulous or imaginary but surely uncertain because not fully documented. As Plutarch said when venturing from history into myth: "beyond here are monsters, the stuff of tragedy, a land inhabited by poets and storytellers, untrustworthy traditions, apparent only in vague outline" (*Thes*. 1.1).[25] The war of Troy was not invented by Homer, at least not entirely, as the archaeological excavations of the mound of Husarlik tell us. Still, there is a quasi-infinite number of mythological stories, whose connection to a past for which we may claim some sort of evidence, remains forever obscure. On the other hand, whatever happened aeons ago – when the Greek gods presumably walked the Earth – does not register in our imagination in the same way as documented history. In the present study, ancient history and mythology are treated as related but separate themes.

When we look at mythological themes in audiovisual productions in the twenty-first century, we see an ocean of Greek mythology with hardly a Roman sail on the horizon. There were literally only three productions inspired by Roman

[25] Translation quoted from Hawes, 2014, 149.

mythology during the decades in question: the first one was a 2019 feature film – *Il primo re* by Matteo Rovere – and the second was a television series, *Romulus*, launched by the same director in 2020. The third was a 2020 episode of the American series *Supernatural*, entitled "The Gamblers," featuring Fortuna, the Roman goddess of luck. At the same time, in films and series in the English language, the Greek hero Heracles is called by his Romanized name, Hercules, which happens to be the standard (outside of classical scholarship), as opposed to the French usage, where Héraclès is well established, and Hercule is used in children's books and cartoons, and as a first name, currently rather dated.[26]

The sources of content can be charted based on the data on the adaptation of ancient authors, the two Homeric epic poems, several tragedies of Greek playwrights, one of Seneca, Ovid as a source for myths, or Virgil for Aeneas, the Trojan ancestor of Rome. Even the scarce Roman sources deliver material for Greek mythology; when all is said and done, Aeneas is a Homeric hero. When contemporary writers provide mythological stories and plots, they belong to a later level of reception. Since the beginning of audiovisuality, traditional novels, and for a long time comic books and graphic novels, were being adapted to serve as scripts for films and television series. They are also financially a less risky source of content for audiovisual productions because the public is already familiar with the stories and, in some cases, may even eagerly await seeing them on screen. Even more importantly, they reflect their contemporary authors' take on the still not entirely resolved ancient injustices – slavery and misogyny – and relate them to how these issues are perceived today.

The process of selection of candidates for adaptation, on the other hand, is a mechanism well established in the industry. The purchase of film rights to novels is not at all a guarantee that the book will be made into a film or television series and a considerable amount of time may pass before production begins or the idea is abandoned. It is, however, not only a source of income for the author but also an obvious sign of a book's popularity. Writers who excel at the "visual" style, like J.K. Rowling or George R.R. Martin, are favourites of the audiovisual industry.

[26] My first association of the name Hercule is with Agatha Christie's Poirot; Google suggests the same. Not mythological at all. The US Social Security Administration, the government agency tracking data on first names given to newborns in the United States, recorded a sharp increase in the use of the name Hercules between 2010 (rank 28381) and 2018 (rank 9138), a slight dip in 2019 (16535) and an almost full recovery in 2021 (9884). Without going into full statistical correlations, we may assume that the films and series featuring Hercules during that time had something to do with the naming trend and that it was not limited to American parents of Greek origin.

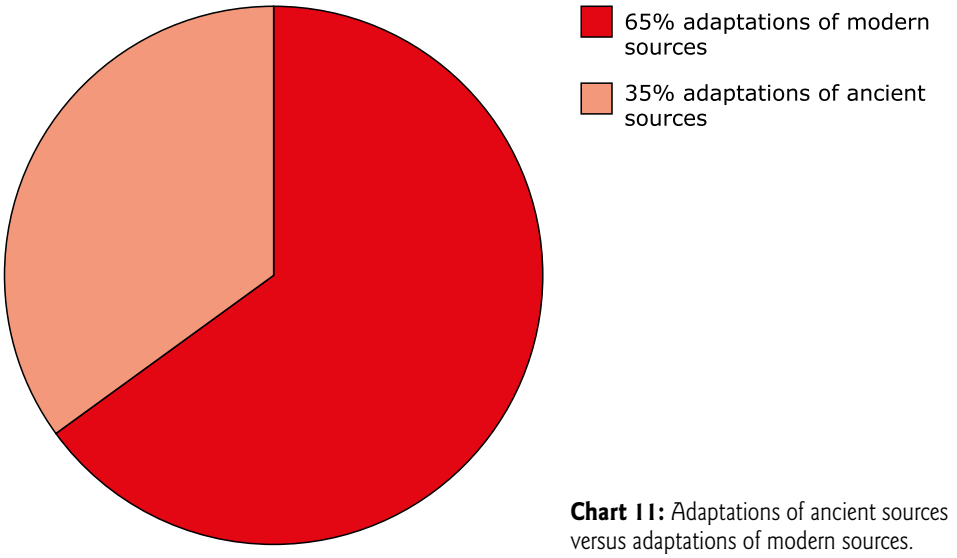



**Chart 11:** Adaptations of ancient sources versus adaptations of modern sources.

Adaptations *sensu stricto* of ancient texts occur less frequently, possibly because reaching for Classics may be a daunting challenge and it requires at least some level of familiarity with previous such attempts, as well as a convincing rationale as to why and how a new version should score with contemporary audiences, their tastes, and needs. More frequent is the retelling of myths based on not always obvious ancient sources, later mythographers, or more recent collections of myths. Chart 11 shows the breakdown of sources adapted in audiovisual productions. Almost two-fifths of adaptations were based directly or indirectly on ancient texts[27] and over three-fifths on modern sources, such as novels, comic books, and graphic novels; there were also several spoofs of audiovisual productions counted as adaptations of modern sources.

Among adaptations of ancient sources, there are distinct categories, such as productions of ancient plays, usually made into feature films, adaptations of Homeric epics often supplemented by other ancient texts, and adaptations of Homeric mythology produced as films or series centred on specific characters. They are discussed in greater detail below, in the section "Mapping Mythological Content." Adaptations of novels and comic books also merit attention as they represent the reception of contemporary literature inspired by antiquity but far removed from it. Chart 12 shows that 66% of all adaptations of modern

[27] Modern paraphrases of ancient texts are excluded from the count of adaptations *sensu stricto*.

literature are based on novels, over 20% on comic books and manga, and only 13% on graphic novels.[28]

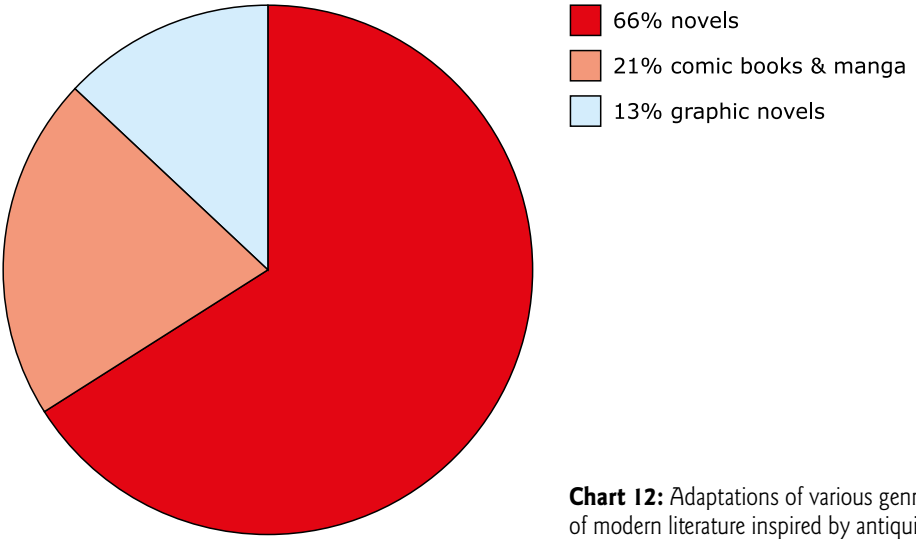



**Chart 12:** Adaptations of various genres of modern literature inspired by antiquity.

The impressive scholarship on the classical influence on comic books discussed in Chapter 3, "Handling the Data," did not analyse audiovisual adaptations of comics, manga, or graphic novels. As the kinship between comics and audiovisual series is an undisputed fact and stereotyped superheroes of comic books often include characters borrowed from antiquity or are similar to ancient heroes, it may be of interest here to briefly touch upon the history of this genre considered, often and with reason, a literary-visual medium, the popularity of which has not been developing in the same way in all areas of the world. The difference is especially striking between America and Western Europe and what was published in communist Central and Eastern Europe. In Poland, for instance, before World War Two, the German comic *Max und Moritz*, the French *Bécassine*, and the Belgian *Les aventures de Tintin* gained ground. While the first local comics appeared in 1918 when the country recovered its sovereignty, they were very few and mostly belonged to what was called, in French, *bande déssinée d'auteur*. Some were stories for children and some for adults, the latter often intensely coloured by political propaganda of various kinds.

[28] Video games also inspire audiovisual productions and are part of this broad category. Regrettably, I cannot claim expertise in that area. Instead, I suggest consulting three excellent monographs on the subject: André, 2016; Clare, 2021; Draycott and Cook, 2022.

Among the comic albums for children, the most popular (still in print in 2023) is *Przygody Koziołka Matołka* [The Adventures of Matołek the Billy-Goat] in four books (1932–1935; see Misiora, 2010) by a well-known pre-war duo, Kornel Makuszyński (1884–1953) and Marian Walentynowicz (1896–1967).[29] The communist regime imposed in 1945 as a result of the Allied victory was not inclined to spend money on publishing stories criticizing their achievements, like the 1929 *Tintin au pays des Soviets*, *Koziołek Matołek*, which was considered harmful to the development of communist youth, or any of the famous American comics viewed as fruit of *the rotten imperialism*. For that reason, the generation born at the end or soon after World War Two during their childhood had little or no exposure to comic books and strips flourishing in America and later elsewhere in the West, including France and Belgium, unless they came into contact with some of the comic books published before the war which survived in places not razed to the ground like Warsaw. As a representative of that generation, I was not brought up on comics and, for many decades, knew only *Koziołek Matołek* and what I heard from older members of my family who spoke fondly of *Max und Moritz* and *Bécassine*. Only studying classical reception made me read (and hugely enjoy) my first modern comic book, Joann Sfar and Christophe Blain's *Socrate le demi-chien* (see Olechowska, 2020d, 473–495). Already the next generation was more fortunate in this respect because starting in the late 1950s and 1960s, the communist authorities relented. Recognizing the ideological and commercial potential of comics, they allowed the publication of "illustrated stories" for children, as they were officially called despite the general use of the Polish neologism *komiks*. It was done to distance the new comics from the despised American popular culture. While many of these later comics were indeed promoting communist priorities, many were not, and some were even inspired by Classical Antiquity, for example, Books 15 and 19 of *Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek* by Henryk Jerzy Chmielewski (see Pszczolińska 2019; Gąsior and Pszczolińska 2020).

Chart 13 tracks the number of productions in various audiovisual categories inspired by antiquity between 2000 and 2022. In spite of presenting a rather entangled picture, the Chart indicates the dominance of the series among fluctuations in various other formats over the two decades. When we combine the numbers for single episodes in audiovisual series with the numbers for series, as it is logically a cognate category, the dominance is strongly reinforced (see Chart 14).

[29] For the pre-World War Two history of Polish comics, see Rusek, 2001.

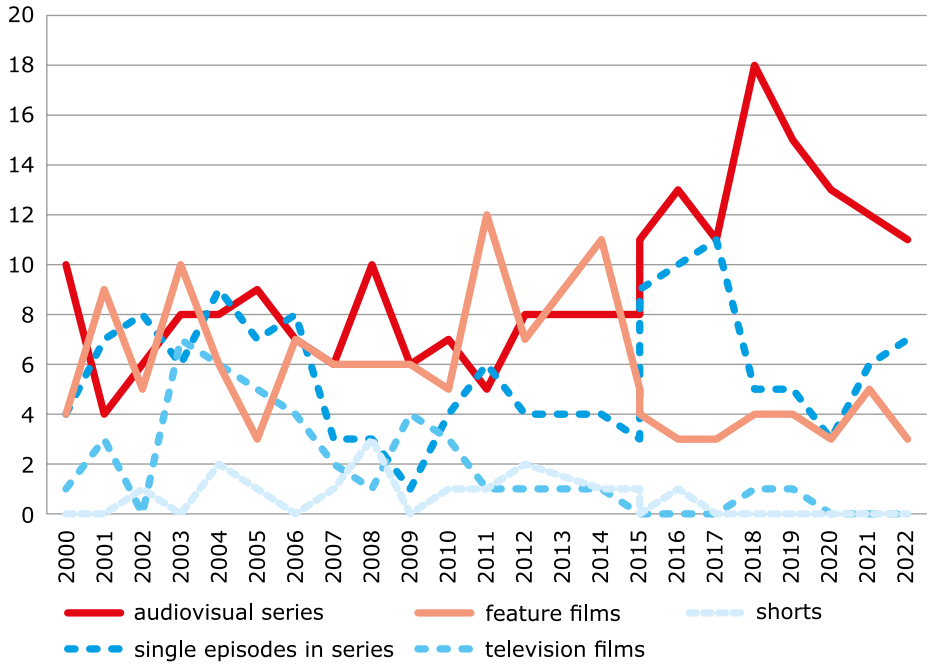



**Chart 13:** Audiovisual productions over time.

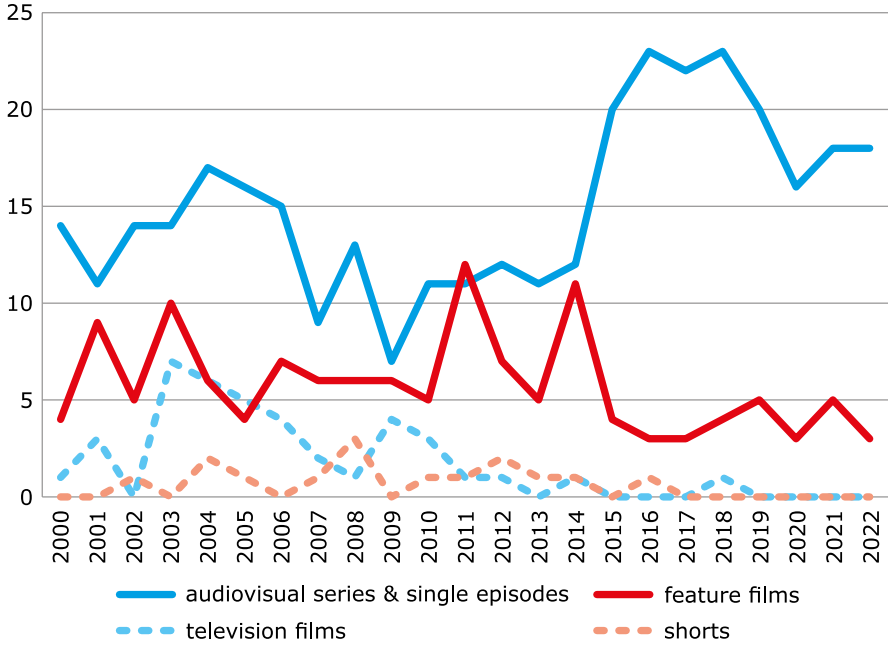



**Chart 14:** Audiovisual productions over time, simplified.

Notes concerning Chart 14:

1. An audiovisual series is counted as one for each continuing year of its first airing, regardless of the actual number of episodes broadcast during that year.
2. An audiovisual series could be an animated or a live-actor production.
3. In this chart, documentary series are counted in the category of "audiovisual series."
4. A single episode denotes an episode inspired by antiquity when the series to which it belongs is not, or if it is an anthology also including stories unrelated to antiquity.
5. Television film is a category including both documentaries and fictional stories.

The chart shows the growth of the audiovisual series, a downward trend of feature films, and an even more pronounced dip in the number of television movies inspired by antiquity. In fact, since 2015, the number of films, television films, and shorts has not exceeded five per year.

While partial data for 2023 are available, they are not reflected either in Chart 13 or 14, as providing incomplete data could only be misleading. Already announced production of new audiovisual series – Madeline Miller's *Circe*, Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, Alain Chabat's *Asterix and the Big Fight*, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* – indicates that the recognition and growth of the genre continues.

## Mapping Mythological Content

Classical mythology can be viewed as an enormous genealogical tree growing out of its roots, the powerful world-origin stories, into a trunk divided at the outset into separate but still connected branches, getting unavoidably entangled as they grow longer, branch out, and finally, flower brilliantly through various cases of later reception. Evidently, Boccaccio's characteristic leafy diagrams (see Fig. 1) in the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* would have been the first impulse for this image, even though they appear today more like illustrations than research instruments.

The classical reception scholarship, otherwise impressive but in this case less effective, has not yet produced a convincing big picture of the mythological content of audiovisuality in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The present study attempts to formulate the elusive overall view based on data extracted from the Chronological Survey. It requires a rigorous approach




**Figure 1:** Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, University of Chicago Library Codex Ms 100, p. 62. With the kind permission of the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center. This manuscript was produced for Coluccio Salutati (1332–1406), the celebrated Chancellor of Florence whose Latin letters earned him the name of "Scimmia di Cicerone." Illuminations attributed to Don Simone Camaldolese (active 1378–1405, at the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence) also called Don Simone da Siena.

to the audiovisual material, with the categories properly defined, starting with the basics. A prominent distinctive aspect of any audiovisual production is the time of action. The decision behind the choice of a modern or future setting, as opposed to an ancient or mythological one, shapes from the outset the mode of classical reception. As nearly two-thirds of the titles listed in the Survey are not set in antiquity, it is reason enough to discuss their mythological content and reflect on the motivations behind the choices made by the creators.

## Collections of Myths

However, before embarking on this discussion, it would be helpful to dispense with one category which, as a rule, is set in antiquity, that is, a collection of myths often resembling an anthology and a late descendant of generations of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance mythographers; this category is still vibrant in today's literature.[30] It is designed to present Greek mythology, myth after myth. To my knowledge,[31] only six audiovisual collections were produced in the twenty-first century. Two are American, with one each from South Korea, Ireland, Spain, and France. The relative rarity of such productions seems understandable since they have a solid educational aspect, cater to national audiences, and are not purely commercial enterprises.

**1998–2000**, ***Mythic Warriors: Guardians of the Legend*** (US). "Persephone and the Winter Seeds," "Daedalus and Icarus," "Atalanta, the Wild Girl," "Prometheus and Pandora's Box," "Bellerophon and Pegasus," "Psyche and Eros," "Cadmus and Europa," "Castor and Pollux," "The Hounds of Acteon," "Phaeton," "Jason and Medea," "Damon and Pythias," "Androcles and the Lion," "Ulysses and Circe," "King Midas," and "Hercules and the Titans." An American adaptation of a recent cycle of short mythological novels.

**2002–2003**, 올림포스 가디언 / ***Olympus Guardian*** (KR). A South Korean animated series retelling Greek myths in 39 episodes: "Gods of Olympus," "Fire of Prometheus," "Pandora's Box," "Love & Soul" (in 2 parts), "Who Is the Most Beautiful Goddess?," "Athena and Arachne," "Story of Hermes," "Story of Atalanta," "Daphne Turned into a Laurel," "Baucis and Philemon," "Bellerophon and Pegasus," "Adventures of Perseus" (in 2 parts), "Wings of Icarus," "Zeus and Io," "Cadmus and Dragon

[30] An excellent example of contemporary mythography in English is Stephen Fry's 2017 *Mythos*, 2018 *Heroes*, and 2020 *Troy*; in Polish, Katarzyna Marciniak's (2010) 2018 *Mitologia grecka i rzymska. Spotkania ponad czasem* [Greek and Roman Mythology: Encounters Outside of Time] and (2013–2016) 2020–2021 *Moja pierwsza mitologia. Księgi I–II* [My First Mythology: Books I–II], the latter addressed to younger readers. Mythology for children is a separate and highly developed branch of mythography; it is well represented in the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* at http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey, listing (as of September 1, 2023) 1,079 such publications.

[31] There were probably mythology series produced in other languages. Logically, at least a Greek, Italian, German, and British audiovisual collection of myths. Regretfully, if there were, they eluded me.

of Ares," "Echo and Narcissus," "Midas, Hand of Gold," "Phrixus and Helle," "Orpheus and Eurydice," "Love of Hades," "Birth of Hercules," "Twelve Labours of Hercules," "Resurrection of Hercules," "Love of Artemis," "Argonauts – 50 Heroes," "Argonauts – Finding the Golden Sheep" (*sic*!), "Theseus and Minotaurus," "Phaeton's Golden Chariot," "Adventures of Odysseus" (in 3 parts), "The Story of Achilles," "Trojan Horse," "Eos and Tithonus," "An Unspoken Story – Flowers," "An Unspoken Story – Monster," "An Unspoken Story – Constellation."

**2009, *Clash of the Gods*** (US). Includes Zeus, Hercules, Hades, the Minotaur, Medusa, and Odysseus. Ten 1-hour episodes (on the last, 3rd disc: Beowulf, Tolkien's monsters, and Thor). Presented in a documentary style, providing common points with actual historical events and other traditions, such as the Bible and other mythologies. History Channel.

**2010–2011, *I'm a Monster*** (IE). Myths about monsters. 11 episodes presenting Cyclops, Medusa, Basilisk, Echidna, Furies, Kraken, Minotaur, Centaur, Charybdis, Sirens, and Hydra. An Irish 1-season (52 episodes) series for children.

**2012, *Mitos & leyendas*** (ES). Fate, Oedipus and Jocasta, Prometheus, Aeneas, Perseus, Orpheus, Medea, Daedalus, Hercules, Electra, Ulysses, Achilles and the Trojan War, gods and heroes. A Spanish 1-season series of 13 episodes and 2 additional ones. No special care has been taken to adapt the content for younger viewers.

**2016, *Dieux et héros de la mythologie grecque*.** S01E01–20. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR). Designed as a mix of spoken word, animation, and examples of art inspired by mythology, it is an impressive French documentary series created by François Busnel and aired on Arte. The 1st season of 20 episodes, 26 minutes each, featuring in sequence: Zeus, Prometheus, Hades, Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite, Dionysus, Hermes, Tartarus, Psyche, Perseus, Orpheus, Medea, Bellerophon, Theseus, Daedalus and Icarus, Hercules, Oedipus, and Antigone. The 2 following seasons focus exclusively on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* proudly completing the corpus of *grands mythes*.

## Mythology in the Present[32]

The uneven split between classically inspired productions set in today's reality and those that take us back to the ancient "lands of myth and the time of magic"[33] demonstrates the modern preference for importing antiquity to the present over venturing into the ancient past. One of the underlying practical reasons may be the reluctance to embark on the costly paraphernalia of producing a "period piece," especially if the sets must be built from scratch. Using the leftovers from previous productions or quasi-permanent constructions at production centres like the Cinecittà and filming in the original-looking landscapes is not always an option. The steady stream of the Italian peplum in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Aknin, 2009; Lafont-Couturier, 2012) reveals what

[32] The split between present and past settings was used as the basis for a typological dichotomy of "Ancients" and "Thematics" by Almut-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon in their 2013 volume, *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television*. See Renger and Solomon, 2013, 5, for a detailed explanation of their not intuitively obvious typology. See also my comments in the review of classical reception scholarship in Chapter 3 (pp. 242–243).

[33] The phrase repeatedly used in the opening sequence of the 2008–2012 BBC *Merlin* put at least this viewer in the right mood to watch each episode.

happens when it is. As audiovisual classical reception scholars have repeatedly demonstrated, productions inspired by antiquity reflect, purposefully and unavoidably, the reality in which they were created just as much, if not more, than they do antiquity itself (see, for instance, Hardwick, 2003, 4). Ancient history has provided several themes in the audiovisual reception significantly relevant to crucial contemporary issues,[34] and the choice of mythological content influencing the time of action is dictated to a large extent by the main cultural and social concerns of the twenty-first century, along with artistic and philosophical inclinations.

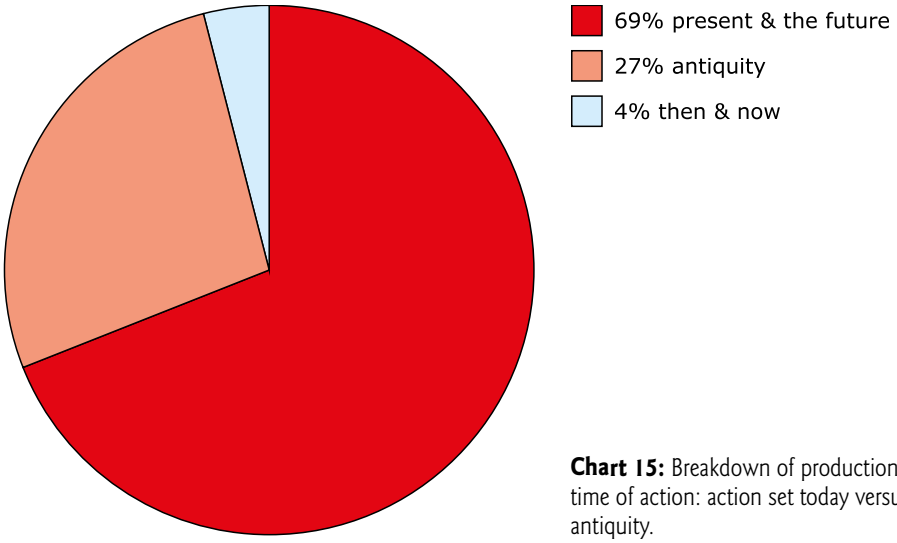



**Chart 15:** Breakdown of productions by time of action: action set today versus in antiquity.

Chart 15 illustrates the extent of the split: around two-thirds of all productions inspired by mythology (historical films and series, as well as documentaries, are excluded from the Chart) have the present or the future as the time of action. This category consists of paraphrases, the use of mythological themes, figures, and objects, or it may contain classical allusions, quotes, and anecdotes while being otherwise unrelated to antiquity. Predictably enough, the productions set in the future are science-fiction/fantasy shows. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, over one-quarter of the productions, inspired to any degree by Classical Antiquity, were traditional mythological stories, such as

[34] See studies discussed in Chapter 3, such as Maria Wyke's *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (1997); *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* (2001) by Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire, Jr.; Irene Berti and Marta García Morcillo's *Hellas on Screen: Cinematic Receptions of Ancient History, Literature and Myth* (2008).

adaptations and various retellings of myths. This relatively low proportion may very well be due to the surfeit of such productions in the last five years of the twentieth century, as discussed at the beginning of the chapter in the section "Leading Up to the Twenty-First Century" (p. 271). Still another reason may be the need to reach and impress the viewer with a more obviously relevant message inspired and enriched by the immemorial truth of mythology but originating in contemporary reality, that of the viewers and creators.

The following diagram (Chart 16) adds a dynamic dimension to the image, displaying how shows of both kinds fared over time. There is no correlation between increases and decreases in both categories of production, which occasionally fluctuate in parallel but mostly out of sync.

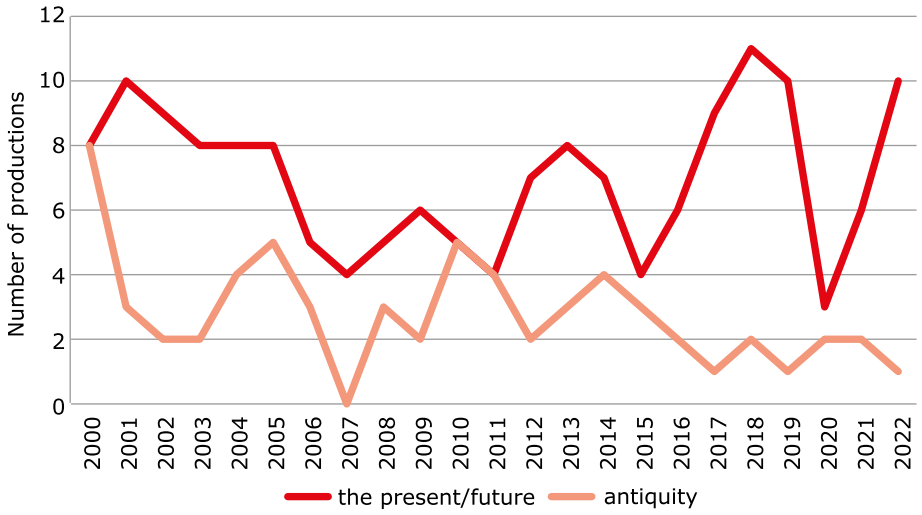



**Chart 16:** Ancient setting versus present setting over time.

**From the point of view of genre**, productions set in the present and referring to classical mythology include paraphrases or new versions of myths, spoofs of films inspired by antiquity, films and shows alluding to mythological stories through the use of quotes from ancient authors, classical names, or languages.[35]

[35] The use of Latin or Greek occurs most frequently in incantations and spells in witch shows and is briefly discussed in the section on these productions. There are also Greek spells in the 2006 *Class of the Titans* S01E08, "See You at the Cross Roads," and the 2017 *Sleepy Hollow* S04E09, "Child's Play" (see p. 356).

## Paraphrases

**2000, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*** (US). Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. A dark comedy-drama loosely paraphrasing Homer's *Odyssey* set in rural Mississippi in 1937 during the Great Depression. Against a scenery of generalized poverty leading to petty crime, 3 escaped convicts led by the con artist Everett Ulysses McGill try to find a treasure and a better life but encounter a series of more or less fatal obstacles.

**2000, *Así es la vida…* / *Such Is Life*** (MX). Directed by Arturo Ripstein. A modern paraphrase of Seneca's *Medea* set in a seedy quarter of Mexico City. A husband who abandons his wife and children, and the wife's horrific revenge, are shown against the background of poverty and lack of hope for any improvement. A chorus of 3 is used to emphasize what is going on.

**2001, "I Was Made to Love You."** S05E15. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). The story of a robot girlfriend, programmed with an obsessive "affection" for her irresponsible owner-lover; it paraphrases and alludes to the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. The robot doggedly searches for her master, assaulting and injuring people she considers obstacles to fulfilling her programmed mission. She has to be forcibly deactivated. By pointing to the responsibility of the "creator" towards the "creation," the episode provides an interesting take on potentially toxic relationships, especially in a high-school environment.

**2002, *Orpheus and the Underworld: I Love You to Bits*** (AU). Directed by Nathan Jurevicius. An animated short recounting the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as an emo couple. It includes the basic elements of the myth: Orpheus, who is an emocore singer, enchants people and animals listening to his music; when Eurydice dies of a snake bite, he drives in his pink-red van through strange tunnels to the Underworld and descends to Tartarus on an elevator. He puts Cerberus to sleep and charms Hades and Persephone, who allow him to retrieve Eurydice. Predictably, he turns to look at her, and she disappears. In his despair, his body falls to bits and also disappears – a retelling of the myth in the language of emo subculture.

**2002, *Simone*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Andrew Niccol. It is a comedy presenting a modern paraphrase of the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. A star abandons a film director in mid-production. The director uses a computer to generate a virtual actress, and she replaces the one who left. He calls her Simone, abbreviated from Simulation One. He does not reveal her true identity and casts her in other films because of her considerable success with the critics and the public. His various attempts at discrediting her fail. When he infects her programme with a virus and throws out the files, announcing her death to the public, he is accused of murder, and only her "resurrection" from the corrupted files saves him from prosecution. The hoax becomes more and more elaborate and continues without the public ever realizing what is happening.

**2003, *A Miami Tail*** (US). Directed by Melvin James. A paraphrase of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* set in a neighbourhood of Miami controlled by gangs. Girlfriends of young gangsters from rival factions decide to refuse to have sex until the violence stops.

**2003, *Manfast*** (US). Directed and written by Tara Judelle. Loosely inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. 4 girlfriends who live together experience financial problems with the publication of their zine, *Biotch*. A student writing her MA thesis proposes that if the 4 girlfriends allow her to use their household for her research, she will gift them her grant money under the condition that they refrain from any physical contact with men for 100 days. Media attention is brought to this unusual situation, especially after the father of one of the girls promises a million-dollar award to the man who breaks their resolve.

**2005, *Medea*** (NL). A television miniseries directed by Theo van Gogh. A modern paraphrase of Euripides' *Medea* set in contemporary Dutch politics against the background of construction fraud. Medea, the daughter of the Speaker of the Dutch Senate, who is implicated in a building scandal, associates with a real-estate businessman, Jason, to extricate her father. She falls in love with Jason and assists him

in his political ambitions; they marry, but while she is expecting a baby, he cheats on her, interested only in his career. Their union fails, and she takes revenge.

**2005, *Orpheus*** (US). Written and directed by Joel Rose. A paraphrase of the myth set in modern times: Orpheus, an arrogant rock star, is flirting with Persephone. His wife, Eurydice, dies because she desires to be with Hades, which makes Orpheus remember his love for her. He goes to the Underworld to bring her back.

**2007, *Médée miracle*** (FR, IT). Directed and produced by Tonino De Bernardi. A modern paraphrase of the myth of Medea. Irene, a foreigner, is married to Jason, a Frenchman. They live in Paris and have 2 daughters. Jason leaves her for a French girl, and this betrayal destabilizes Irene.

**2007, *Lars and the Real Girl*** (US). Directed by Craig Gillespie. A modern paraphrase of the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. A psychologically fragile young man orders a silicon doll to be his girlfriend. His family plays along and accepts her as real. After some time, he announces that she is fatally ill. He grieves her demise but is then able to begin a relationship with his colleague from work.

**2008, *Cassandra*** (MX, US). A contemporary reinterpretation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*: on the Mexican side of the border with the US, there is a shady bar frequented by American soldiers, Las Mujeres de Troya, owned by Doña Hecuba. General Agamemnon demands the company of Hecuba's innocent daughter, Cassandra. She agrees to his request over her mother's protestations because she wants to cross the border to the US.

**2008, *Absurdistan*** (DE, FR). Directed, written and prod. by Veit Helmer. Loosely inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. Water shortage in an isolated village incites women to force men to repair the system by refusing to have sex with them until they do what the women ask. A young couple in love feels threatened by this strike, and the young man decides to do everything he can to make the required repairs.

**2009, *Cupid*** (US). Created by Rob Thomas. A paraphrase of the myth of Eros and Psyche. A young man convinced that he is Eros is diagnosed as posing no danger to the public. He was allegedly sent to New York by the gods with the mission of uniting 100 couples without using his usual magical aids. It was a punishment for the previous poor performance of his divine duties. He does not remember the myth of Eros and Psyche but gives certain, perhaps unconscious, clues to his shrink, who may be Psyche. A revival by Rob Thomas and ABC of their 1998–1999 series *Cupid*.

**2009, *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done*** (US, DE). A crime movie directed and co-written by Werner Herzog. A paraphrase of Euripides' *Orestes* inspired by a true story of matricide committed by a disturbed young man cast as Orestes in a production of the play and influenced by the tragedy to the point of identification with the role.

**2009, *Little Hercules in 3D*** (US). Directed by Mohamed Khashoggi and Robert Boris. A young Hercules lives on Mount Olympus with his father, Zeus, and stepmother, Hera. He wants to visit mortals on Earth. Zeus forbids this visit, but in the confusion of Marduk's arrival from Babylon, Hercules manages to descend to Earth with the help of Hera. He meets new friends and attends a school in Burbank, where he wins a track and field competition for the school despite Marduk's interference. He returns to Mount Olympus with his father, who is very proud of him. He decides to return to life as a human. Very low production values contribute to a poor viewing experience.

**2011, *Where Do We Go Now?* / وهلّأ لوين؟** (LB, FR, EG, IT). Directed and written by Nadine Labaki and inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. Christian and Muslim women in an isolated Lebanese village stop their men from fighting by forcing them to understand that there is little difference and much similarity between neighbours of the 2 faiths.

**2011, *La source des femmes / The Source*** (FR, BE, IT). Directed, written, and prod. by Radu Mihăileanu. Loosely inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The elements of the plot are similar to the 2008 *Absurdistan*. In an isolated North African village, women go on a sex strike, protesting against being forced to fetch water from a faraway well.

**2012, *Ruby Sparks*** (US). Directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris. A modern paraphrase of the myths of Pygmalion and Narcissus. A young writer unexpectedly brings to life a female character he was writing about. He controls her by writing the traits he wants her to have in the novel. Finally, he lets her go. She disappears, and he writes a novel, *The Girlfriend*. One day, he meets Ruby in the park, reading his novel. She does not remember him but likes the book.

**2012–2015, *The Hunger Games*** (US). A cycle of dystopian science fiction featuring teenagers as a spearhead of the fight against oppression. The theme of the tribute of young people destined to die, known from the myth of Theseus, is paraphrased here. In the myth, the youngsters are highly trained to elude and fight the monstrous Minotaur. The horrific twist of the ancient theme in the futuristic scenario requires that the teenage tributes, trained to fight to the death in the Games, die fighting each other until only 1 victor remains. The Games are designed to deter the population from rebelling against the central government and its tyrannical leader, a devious and ruthless monster much more terrifying than the Minotaur in the myth.

**2013, "Troy Story."** S04E24. ***Phineas and Ferb*** (US). When an older sister tries to read the *Iliad*, her brothers, Phineas and Ferb, remember and discuss parts of the plot with their friends. They decide to re-enact the Trojan War by building Trojan walls around the house and splitting into 2 armies, Greek and Trojan. Instead of a Trojan Horse, they constructed a T-Rex for the Greeks to hide in. The children also sing a rock song, *Troy*.[36]

**2013, *Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). A new perspective on the world of mythological creatures. A short animation featuring mythical monsters: Cerberus, Chimera, Cyclops, Harpies, Medusa, Minotaur, Satyrs, Sirens, and Sphinx. A single mother (Medusa) tries to properly care for her small son (Minotaur), who has a 3-headed pet hamster (Cerberus). She is looking – without much success – for a partner who could become a father figure in their small family. The mythological creatures lead a normal life as good, bad, or average members of society, representing true human types whom the struggling single mother encounters in her daily existence.

**2013, *Artémis, cœur d'artichaut*** (FR). A contemporary paraphrase of Callimachos' *Hymn to Artemis* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Artemis studies literature in contemporary Caen without much enthusiasm. She is bored until she meets the nymph Kalie Steaux (*sic*!) and they become friends.

**2014, *Ex machina*** (US). Directed and written by Alex Garland. A modern paraphrase of the myth of Galatea and Pygmalion. Helping a female AI become independent ends badly for a programmer who wants to save her from the ill-intentioned owner of the project. Indifferent to the owner and the helpful programmer, she kills the former and leaves the latter trapped in a lab. She flees to the outside world and disappears.

**2014, *Ронда-капрычыёза* [Rondo-Capriccioso]** (BY). Directed and written by Igor Volchek. A modern paraphrase of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus inspired by a famous painting by Pieter Bruegel. Antos lives in the Belarusian countryside. He studies Leonardo da Vinci's drawings and tries to make technical improvements in the village. His wife does not appreciate his lack of focus on family chores. He works on a secret project, and when spring comes, he tries it out. It is a flying contraption that works, but his angry wife yells at him, he falls, and the scene becomes the Bruegel painting.

[36] The lyrics are one of the more refreshing juvenile takes on the Trojan War I have ever encountered: "There was a hottie named Helen and she launched a thousand ships with her face / Paris took her home to Troy, and to the Greeks this was a slap in the face / The Trojans stole Helen! Agamemnon got mad 'cause that just wasn't right / He said, 'Hold your Trojan horses, now we're having a fight! / And I haven't sacked or pillaged since at least last Saturday night.' / And for ten years they were all slamming! And jamming! And clashing! And gashing! And brawling! And mauling! And trashing! And smashing! / When they finally figured out they couldn't take 'em by force, the Greeks all got together, and they hid in a horse! Troy, Troy, Troy" (see Mik, 2020b).

**2015, *Chi-Raq*** (US). Directed, written, and prod. by Spike Lee. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is set in contemporary South Chicago. The gang of Spartans led by the rapper Demetrius Dupree Chi-Raq conducts a war with the rival gang of Trojans commanded by Cyclops. The violence intensifies, resulting in the death of a child. Chi-Raq's girlfriend, Lysistrata, follows a Liberian precedent and organizes women on both sides of the war to withhold sex until the violence stops: "No peace, no pussy." The action spreads across the city; the women take over the armoury. After 3 months of conflict, the gangs lay down their arms, first the Trojans, then the Spartans.

**2017, *Before I Fall*** (US). A teenage girl repeatedly relives the last day of her life in a time loop, like Sisyphus, who tries again and again to place a rock on the top of a mountain, fails and attempts the same the next day. The girl uses each loop to improve her relations with her friends and to prevent their unhappiness and, ultimately, their death in a car crash. She ends the loop by sacrificing herself and saving the others. The South Korean 2021 television series *Sisyphus: The Myth* may have been influenced by this film, as it mentions the myth as a parallel to its fantasy SF plot.

**2017, "Helen Hunt."** S03E06. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Helen of Troy is transported to Hollywood in 1937 from Troy in the 5th year of the siege. She refuses to return to Troy and is happy to go to Themiscyra instead, the island of the Amazons, where there are no men to fight over her, and she can train to become a warrior – a new look at Helen as a victim and survivor.

**2018, *A Bread Factory, Part Two: Walk with Me a While*** (US). Euripides' *Hecuba* is being rehearsed in a new translation at a community theatre hard-pressed for funds and threatened with closure. A critical view of the lack of support for easy access to art in today's world and the precarious economic situation of cultural institutions serving communities.

**2021, *Medusa*** (BR). A paraphrase of the myth highlighting the cruel injustice of condemning and punishing a victim of rape.

## Spoofs[37]

**2001,** "**Never Look a Trojan in the Gift Horse."** S01E01b. ***Time Squad*** (US). This is not a parody but a humourous, new version of the end of the Trojan War. It is a frame story about a team – the eponymous Time Squad composed of Otto Osworth, Buck Tuddrussel, and a robot named Larry 3000 – who live in the distant future (100,000,000 CE) on a satellite of Earth they refer to as a harmonious utopia. They travel through time to various interesting places and meet important historical figures who need their guidance. In this episode of the animated series, the Squad travels to Troy on the day of the King's birthday. The Greeks bring a gift – a Trojan Horse filled with sweets and a wooden giraffe full of chocolate soldiers. When the King does not like the gifts, the Greeks build a giant wooden soldier, and inside the structure hide wild horses that ruin the city.

**2002, "Tales from the Public Domain: D'oh, Brother Where Art Thou?"** S13E14. ***The Simpsons*** (US). It is a spoof of the *Odyssey*, with the title taken from the 2000 Coen brothers movie; it does not otherwise refer to this film. In the episode, Homer Simpson is Odysseus, who provides the King of Troy with a Trojan Horse and proceeds to kill all Trojans, winning the war. However, he fails to thank the gods by sacrificing a sheep. Zeus, Poseidon, and Dionysus are strongly offended. Dionysus shoots a lightning bolt at him but misses, destroying Atlantis instead. Poseidon ensures that Odysseus, with his crew, encounters the Sirens before he reaches the island of Circe. There, his companions are turned into pigs whose meat he unknowingly consumes. Alone, he travels to Ithaca via the Underworld and, on his arrival home, promptly deals with all the suitors, making Penelope

[37] There are also audiovisual parodies of productions inspired by Ancient Greek and Roman history, e.g., the 2008 movie *Meet the Spartans*, written, directed, and produced by Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer. This section deals only with mythological inspirations.

happy. He does not stay with her but looks for his chum, Moe, having forgotten what happened on Circe's island.

**2004, "Minutes."** S06E05. ***French & Saunders*** (UK). A brief parody of the 2004 *Troy*. A British comedy duo, famous for their spoofs of various current movies, makes fun of the film. Jennifer Saunders plays Brad Pitt (Achilles) and Dawn French – Diana Kruger (Helen). The sketch also shows Thetis promising fame to Achilles, whose name she mistakes once for Alexander and once for Troy.

**2014, "Nosh of the Titans"** in **"Calm Down and Think, Elmo."** S45E10. ***Sesame Street*** (US). A spoof of *Clash of the Titans*, with a cow puppet, Moo-dusa, playing the main role. See also "Individual Myths," "Medusa," later in the chapter (p. 318).

## Mythological Allusions

This is a catch-all category: it encompasses a variety of references to antiquity used with a more or less evident purpose and may include monsters, classical names, titles, echoes of myths, objects of material culture and mythological significance. Latin or Greek expressions and names are also often used as titles of episodes in military science fiction to signal their content, even if there is no other visible classical inspiration. Similarly, the names of starships are also borrowed from mythology. Occasionally, the language of an ancient race appears to have a connection to Latin, like in *Stargate SG-1*, where the culture and the Latinate language of the Ancients predate pre-pharaonic Egypt.

**2005, "Ex deus machina."** S09E07. ***Stargate SG-1*** (US). A pun on the stage expression *deus ex machina*.

**2006, "Morpheus."** S10E02. ***Stargate SG-1*** (US). The title alludes to Teal'c remaining in a trance-like dream. Erebus is the name of a planet under Ba'al's control, where minerals required to construct a Goa'uld mothership are being mined.

**2006, "The Pegasus Project."** S10E03. ***Stargate SG-1*** (US). Pegasus galaxy, the alleged location of Atlantis, could only be Pegasus Dwarf Irregular Galaxy – not to be confused with Pegasus Constellation, one of the patterns of stars in the sky visible from Earth and catalogued by Ptolemy (100–170 BCE). Since the invention of the hacking spyware Pegasus in 2016 and its almost global spread in the 2020s, its mythological reference has waned.

**2007, "Dominion."** S10E19. ***Stargate SG-1*** (US). Starship *Odyssey*, Clava Thessara Infinitas (Ancient for 'Key to Infinite Treasure'). Two Goa'ulds, Athena and Quetesh (Vala), tried to find this treasure, named after one of them, Athena's treasury. However, it was neither recovered nor proven to be a hoax.

**2009–2014, *Warehouse 13*** (US). Magical artefacts from various periods of history, including ancient and mythological ones, are held at a warehouse: Pandora's Box; the arrow of Achilles; the Minoan Trident – able to cause earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; Spartan armour shrapnel; Nero's lyre; wings of Daedalus; Pliny the Elder's scroll from *Natural History* (37.11) describing the original liquid nature of amber[38] – its magical property consists in immobilizing the target by encasing it in solid amber; Pompeii amphora whose owner survived the 79 BCE eruption of Vesuvius – when the lid is open, the amphora spouts an unending stream of hot lava; Spartacus' *retiarius* net – the person covered by the net turns to stone; threshold of Limentinus (Roman god of the threshold) – a wooden threshold

[38] See Martial's epigrams on insects enclosed in amber: 4.32 and 4.59, and 6.15.

that opens a passage when put next to the base of a wall; the torch of Thanatos – unseen, only mentioned, causes living death as do 2 other artefacts.

**2012–2015,** ***The Hunger Games*** (US). Classically sounding names of characters: Plutarch Heavensbee, Romulus Thread, Claudius Templesmith, Brutus, Flavius, Octavia, Venia, Seneca Crane, Cinna, Caesar Flickerman, Messala, Castor and Pollux, Fulvia, Crassus Xanthos Snow, Coriolanus Snow, Darius.

**2013–2017,** ***Orphan Black*** (CA). The main issue in the series is cloning humans, its consequences, and its ramifications. Project Castor, Project Leda, Swan Man, Helena.

**2014–2018,** ***Star Wars Rebels*** (US). Obvious classical influences in the setting: buildings and military designs. Value of ancient heritage, classical names, Greek alphabet, slavery.

**2014–2018,** ***The Librarians*** (US). The mission of the Librarians is to protect the world from abuses of magic. Some of the characters and artefacts they encounter originated in Classical Antiquity. Among these artefacts and characters are: the Delphic Oracle, the Golden Fleece, Medusa's head, descendants of the Minoan dynasty, Pan's pipes, Pandora's Box, Poseidon's Trident, Hades' cap of invisibility, the bolt of Zeus, Theseus' ball of thread, Apple of Discord, Sirens, Cupid's bow, Aphrodite's magic girdle, the Trojan Horse, Aesop's lyre, the lantern of Diogenes of Sinope, Homer's sandal, the Roman goddess Fortuna, and spear of destiny. In antiquity, the entrance to the Library was located in the Library of Alexandria; since the 19th c. it has been in New York, at the Metropolitan Public Library, and in 2014, a Library Annex was created in Portland, Oregon.

**2016,** ***Prisoner Zero*** (AU). An animated children's SF series. Space station Ouroboros (from Greek οὐροβόρος, symbol of a never-ending cycle) (E01); Planet Arcadia, planet Tartarus (E18).

**2017, "Lethe."**[39] S01E06. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Lethe, daughter of Eris, is the personification of oblivion and the name of one of the rivers in Hades, the River of Oblivion. When water from the river is drunk, it makes souls forget their past.[40]

**2017, "Si vis pacem, para bellum."** S01E08. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Originally, a quotation from Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus' *De re militari* (ca. 430 CE), Book 3, later used widely by politicians, the so-called doctrine of peace through strength.

**2018,** ***Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*** (US). Atlantis, Colosseum, Critias, Cyclops, Hydra, Kraken, Plato, Timaeus.

**2018, "The Riddle of the Sphinx."** S02E04. ***Westworld*** (US). Directed by Lisa Joy and written by Gina Atwater and Jonathan Nolan. Allusions to Sophocles' *Oedipus rex*.

**2018, "Vanishing Point."** S02E09. ***Westworld*** (US). Directed by Stephen Williams and written by Roberto Patino. Allusions to Sophocles' *Oedipus rex*.

**2019,** ***Io*** (US). A young researcher, Sam, continues her father's quest for immunity to a toxic fog. She succeeds when the last transport leaves for Io. Earth will be renewed. The minimalistic format – 2 actors and a voice – relies on quotations from Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes' speech about love and its origins; also from William Butler Yeats's 1924 sonnet "Leda and the Swan" about how Helen, the cause of the Trojan War, was conceived.

**2019, "An Obol for Charon."** S02E04. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). The price of the fare for the ferry across the Styx to the Underworld, an obol, is placed in the mouth of the dead person. The title announces the episode's theme: the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

**2020, "Terra firma."** S03E09–10. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). The Latin title alludes to Philippa Georgiou's return to her Mirror Universe after changes in time and dimension caused a progressive decay

[39] Curiously, among the versions I could access in other European languages, only in the Polish version on Netflix, the title "Lethe" was translated as "Oblivion" (*niepamięć*), eliminating the classical reference. Did the translator assume that Polish viewers would not get the reference?

[40] The same motif is present in the 2016 S05E12–22 of *Once Upon a Time*.

of her molecular structure. She is sent to a time of greater alignment between the Prime and Mirror Universes conducive to her recovery.

**2022, "Rubicon."** S04E09. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). As the title suggests, the episode deals with a point of no return: the destruction of the Dark Matter Anomaly.

**2022, "Two of One."** S02E06. ***Star Trek: Picard*** (US). A mad scientist, Doctor Soong, engineers a series of clones and gives them names from Greek mythology: Persephone, Despoina, Persephassa, Artemis, Thalia, Proserpina (in the episode pronounced as Prosperina), and Kore.

**2022, "First Kiss."** S01E01. ***First Kill*** (US). Created, co-written, and co-prod. by Victoria Schwab. A 1-season supernatural drama for teens. Juliet, a girl from an old vampire family, falls in love with Calliope, a girl from a monster-hunter family. The girls are intentionally presented as star-crossed lovers, like Romeo and Juliet. The only classical inspiration is how family members were named after Greek gods, Muses, and heroes for hundreds of years: the mother of Calliope and her brothers, Theseus and Apollo, is called Thalia.

**2023, "Vox."** S03E09. ***Star Trek: Picard*** (US). The Borg Queen, "fond of Latin," calls Jack Crusher, son of the Picard Locutus (she translates the name as – 'the one who speaks'),[41] Vox, the voice itself.

## Quotes

**2000, "Restless."** S04E22. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). Sappho's *Hymn to Aphrodite* in Ancient Greek.[42]

**2003, "Oh My Goddess."** S05E23. ***Charmed*** (US). A famous quote by Archimedes. Paige, who is temporarily the goddess of war, says: "'Give me one firm spot on which to stand and I will move the earth.'[43] Archimedes said that. A great warrior." Later she quotes: "Reason and judgement are the qualities of a leader," attributing it to "Tacitus, 100 AD."

**2006, "Flesh & Blood."** S10E01. ***Stargate SG-1*** (US). An unattributed quotation from Ovid, *Met*. 1.85–86, is used as a prophecy recited in the language of the Ancients/Ori which for some unexplained reason and according to the archaeologist/linguist of the series, Daniel Jackson, is close to medieval Latin: "Calium videre eessit, et eraos ad sidera tollere vultus" instead of the original Ovidian "caelumque videre / iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus" (see Olechowska, 2016, 408–409).

**2019, "The Sound of Thunder."** S02E06. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). A quote from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 2.175–183 ("God, whose law it is that he who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despite, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God"),[44] which became part of American popular culture when on April 4, 1968, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy spoke to crowds in Indianapolis quoting his own version of Aeschylus.

**2022, "Hostis humani generis."** S06E06. ***Billions*** (US). "[T]he original term for a pirate, 'Hostis humani generis.' 'Enemy of all mankind.' That's right. Beyond any legal protection and prosecutable by any and all." See Cic., *De off*. 3.29.107; *In Ver*. 2.5.76.

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[41] I would translate the name as 'the one who has spoken,' but what do I know about Borg Latin?

[42] The only complete surviving Sappho poem quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *De compositione verborum* 23 (see the London 1910 edition by W. Rhys Roberts, 238–240). See also Thomas E. Jenkins in his introduction to *Antiquity Now* (2015, 1–9).

[43] Quoted in *Pappi Alexandrini collectionis quae supersunt* (1878, 1060).

[44] As mentioned in the entry for the episode in the Chronological Survey, Kennedy knew the quotation from Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* ([1930] 1942, 61 and 194). He actually slightly changed it by saying "despair" instead of the less obvious "despite."

## Anecdotal Versions of Myths

Another manner of acknowledging the ancient past and showing familiarity with the classical culture is the use of mythological stories which can be applied to the meaning or to an aspect of a non-mythological audiovisual series.

**2014, "Atonement."** S04E10. ***Revenge*** (US). Momus, a Greek god personifying blame, disliked and criticized everybody and was expelled from Olympus. Conrad: "So, do you remember the fable of Momus?" Daniel: "Yeah, the god of writers and poets. He criticized his fellow gods for their shortcomings." C.: "And how was he rewarded for his honesty?" D.: "They banished him from Olympus."

**2017, "Come voleva la prassi" / "As Per Procedure."** S11E02. ***Il commissario Montalbano / Inspector Montalbano*** (IT). The policeman saved the life of a Mafia hitman, having accidentally witnessed his car crash. Sometime later, the hitman receives an order to kill Montalbano but for the benefit of his Mafia boss he only pretends to have done it. Risking his own life, he spares Montalbano, whose girlfriend compares this situation to the story of Androcles and the lion in Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* 5.15. Montalbano considers the story an analogy to his contacts with the hitman and shares it with his 2 colleagues.

**2017, "Sic transit imperium."** S02E09. ***Billions*** (US). A paraphrase not of classical but of medieval Latin, *Sic transit gloria mundi*, part of the rituals of papal coronations from 1409 to 1963, involving the burning of a flax tow as a symbol of the transitory nature of worldly power.[45] "Wags" Wagner, Axe's right hand, tempts Axe on his birthday to accept a golden token with the inscribed episode title and translates it as "So passes the empire." It is a ticket to a post-apocalyptic survival ark, which Axe refuses to accept.

**2017–2020, *Riviera*** (US). Recurring mentions of Greek mythology, mainly related to a picture of Juno confiding Io to the care of Argus, painted by Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) in 1660. "Every myth has been painted a thousand times, but that's what makes them special; it's how the painter chooses to retell the story that makes it interesting." "Villa Carmella," S01E01: "Argus and Io. Do you know the story? Some god fucked a maiden. Greek kind of thing. Jupiter fucked Io. His wife found out. Everyone fucked everyone then. Perhaps Jupiter thought that his wife would discover the truth. Perhaps he wanted her to."

**2021, "No Direction Home."** S05E12. ***Billions*** (US). A mythological analogy to the high-stake world of business: a US Attorney, Chuck Rhoades, speaking to a hedge-fund manager, Bobby Axelrod, says: "A Titan steals fire and gets his liver eaten every day for punishment. Another one picks the wrong side and has to hold the world on his shoulders for all time. A king tells a secret and has to push a rock up a hill for his trouble. Believe it if you will, or look for the metaphor in it; one thing's for sure. We don't know how to be happy." Michael Prince, a businessman/philanthropist, speaking to his vanquished rival Axelrod says: "Roman soldiers on the campaign carried three days of rations and foraged. Going to ground with under a billion liquid is your equivalent of that." Rhoades using references to Greek mythology without mentioning the names of the 3 characters not only shows his own familiarity with the myths of Prometheus, Atlas, and Sisyphus but also shows that he clearly expects Axelrod to understand the reference, just as the scriptwriter must have counted on the viewers getting it right. Prince, on the other hand, a master strategist, is inspired by Roman history but he does not

[45] The phrase gained wide circulation because of its use by Thomas à Kempis, a German-Dutch Augustinian Canon Regular (Brother of the Common Life) at the priory of the Mount St Agnes, in *De imitatione Christi* 3.6 (written ca. 1420), after the Bible, the most translated and published Christian religious text (see Creasy, [1989] 2017, 1–23).

assume Axelrod's familiarity and explains what he means. He quotes an episode of Roman history at the beginning of the next season aired the following year ("Cannonade").

**2021, *Love Hard*** (US). To explain the romantic notions of soulmate and true love, the following story, based on Aristophanes' speech about love in Plato's *Symposium* (189d–193d), is told at the beginning of the movie, by the main character/narrator: "It's been said that according to Greek mythology, humans were originally created with four arms and four legs and a head with two faces. But fearing their power, Zeus split them into two separate parts, condemning humans to spend the rest of their lives searching for their other half, their soul's equal. And if that's the truth, then Zeus is an ass…" This unusually ambitious opening to an otherwise run-of-the-mill Christmas movie is the only classical reference there.

**2021, *Sisyphus: The Myth*** (SK). Using time travel, survivors of a nuclear disaster repeatedly try to avert the catastrophe and change the future with as little probability of success as Sisyphus, who attempts to push a rock up a mountain and fails.

**2021, *This Little Love of Mine*** (US). The constellation of Andromeda is visible in the night sky of a tropical island. A hotel manager explains to her guests the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, mentioning that they turned a sea monster to stone and rode away on Pegasus. There is no mention of Medusa. The main character says to his now grown-up childhood sweetheart, bringing her a horse: "Andromeda, meet Pegasus!" and she answers, "Are you Perseus, Zeus' son?"

**2022, "Cannonade."** S06E01. ***Billions*** (US). Prince about Chuck Rhoades, who abandoned the big city: "like Cincinnatus, leaving matters of state for the plough."[46] Or rather like Manius Curius Dentatus (d. 270 BCE), who received a Samnite delegation roasting turnips at his hearth and refused their gold, saying: "I see no glory in having money myself, but in commanding those that do." Rhoades rejects the classical comparison: "I'm less interested in speaking Latin than in speaking the truth."[47]

**2022, *The Gray Man*** (US). Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo. The main character has "Sisyphos" tattooed on his arm in the Greek alphabet. A girl asks him about it and they have a short conversation. "It's a guy's name in Greek. What guy? Just a guy. You know, trying to get a rock up a hill. Why? They made him. Who made him? The gods. Did they need a rock? They were just trying to punish him, I think. Did he deserve it? Probably. Did he like it? Probably not. So why'd he do it? You ask a lot of questions. […] Does he ever get to the top of the hill? I'll let you know."

## Parallels and Allusions to Specific Ancient Authors and Myths

These cases may gain additional clarity if displayed one after another, first, productions set in the present and then, those with the action in the mythological past. We will start with Homer, followed by other authors, and then review instances of inspiration from individual myths as well as selected concepts.

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[46] Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (ca. 519–ca. 431 BCE), dictator in 458 and 439 BCE (Liv., *Hist*. 3.26.6–3.30).

[47] Cic., *Sen*. 16.55: "non enim aurum habere praeclarum sibi videri dixit, sed eis qui haberent aurum imperare" ("'for,' said he, 'it seems to me that the glory is not in having the gold, but in ruling those who have it'" – Cicero, 1923, trans. W.A. Falconer). Valerius Maximus, 4.3.5a: "narrate Samnitibus M'. Curium malle locupletibus imperare quam ipsum fieri locupletem" ("tell the Samnites that M'. Curius had rather give orders to the rich than be rich himself" – Valerius Maximus, 2000, trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey).

## Individual Authors

### Homer's *Iliad*

#### In the Present

**2001, "Never Look a Trojan in the Gift Horse."** S01E01b. ***Time Squad*** (US). An animated parody of the story of the Trojan Horse.

**2002, "Tales from the Public Domain: D'oh, Brother Where Art Thou?"** S13E14. ***The Simpsons*** (US). An animated parody of the *Odyssey* and of the Coen brothers' 2000 satirical comedy loosely inspired by the *Odyssey*.

**2004, "Minutes."** S06E05. ***French & Saunders*** (UK). It is a hilarious spoof of the 2004 *Troy* by a British comedy duo.

**2013, "Troy Story."** S04E24. ***Phineas and Ferb*** (US). Animated series. Children recreate the Trojan War, while a soldier and his horse sing a rock song about the war, and an older sister reads the *Iliad*.

**2017, "Helen Hunt."** S03E06. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Helen of Troy considers her beauty a curse because men start fighting over her the moment they set eyes on her. She is transported to 1937 Hollywood from Troy in the 5th year of the siege. She agrees to go back to her time but to live on the Amazons' island. Her absence in Troy has no impact on the outcome of the war there.

#### In the Mythological Past

**2003, *Helen of Troy*** (US). This miniseries includes earlier events, such as Paris' childhood and Helen being kidnapped by Theseus at the wedding of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. The story is told from Helen's point of view.

**2004, *Troy*** (US). Based on the *Iliad* and post-Homerica of Quintus of Smyrna, this retelling of the myth treats casually both sources.

**2018, *Troy: Fall of a City*** (UK). This television series is not a straightforward adaptation of the *Iliad* but rather a rearrangement of myths presenting the "whole" story, from the courting of Helen of Sparta and the early life of Paris, to after the sack of Troy.

**2018, *L'Iliade*.** S02E01–10. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR). This is a documentary retelling of the myth, season 2 of a larger series; see under "Collections."

### Homer's *Odyssey*

#### In the Present

**2003, *Big Fish*** (US). Strong affinity with the *Odyssey*, an absent father fighting monsters during his magical travels, an unresolved conflict between father and son.

**2006, "Greeks Bearing Gifts."** S01E07. ***Torchwood*** (UK). An allusion to Philoctetes' episode from the Trojan War.

**2007, "Off the Grid."** S09E16. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). The USS *Odyssey* is a Daedalus class battle-cruiser present also in several other episodes: **"Dominion"** (S10E19), the series finale, **"Unending"** (S10E20), as well as in the sequel series, ***Stargate Atlantis***.

**2008, *The Reader*** (US, DE). After the war, an illiterate former Nazi concentration camp guard asks her young lover, who is unaware of her sinister past, to read her scenes from Homer's *Odyssey* in Greek.

**2010, *Gods and Monsters: Homer's* Odyssey** (UK). A British poet traces the travels of Odysseus.

**2015, *Jupiter Ascending*** (US, AU). Inspired by the *Odyssey* and *The Wizard of Oz*, the film does not feature a classical hero but a new protagonist, a heroine corresponding to the space-opera genre.

**2015,** ***Auf den Spuren von Odysseus*** (CH). Nina Mavis Brunner follows Odysseus' travels and visits Turkey, Tunisia, Italy, Spain, Gibraltar, and Greece, talking to people she meets there.
**2018,** ***Akala's Odyssey*** (UK). Writer and hip-hop singer Akala, planning to compose his own reaction to Homer's *Odyssey – Blind Bard's Vision*, retraces Odysseus' steps.

### In the Mythological Past

**2000,** ***The Animated*** **Odyssey** (US, LT). An animated Soviet-style Lithuanian miniseries (4 episodes), badly dubbed in English and remastered by HBO.
**2003,** ***L'Odyssée*** (CA). Live television, transmission from a repertory theatre in Montreal.
**2003, "Adventures of Odysseus."** E31–33. 올림포스 가디언 / ***Olympus Guardian*** (KR). 3 episodes about Odysseus in a South Korean animated series retelling Greek myths.
**2004, "The Odyssey."** E02. ***Greek Gods and Goddesses*** (UK). In this documentary miniseries, an Olympic athlete, Jonathan Edwards, follows Odysseus fighting in the Trojan War and during his return voyage to Ithaca.
**2008,** ***Odysseus and the Isle of the Mists*** (UK, CA, RO). Homer writes another, horror *Odyssey*. Vampire-like creatures, children of a villainous version of Hades and Persephone, kill humans and drink their blood. They can be killed only if a wooden stake is driven through their heart.
**2013,** ***Odysseus. La vengeance d'Ulysse*** (FR, DE, IT, PT). The myth of Odysseus from the viewpoint of Ithacans waiting for his return for 2 decades. Includes universal themes, such as absolute power vs democracy, lust for power, and relations between father and son.
**2017,** ***Troy: The Odyssey*** (US). A retelling of the *Odyssey* from the end of the *Iliad*. 1184 BCE. Priam curses Odysseus, ordering Kraken (?!) to follow him wherever he goes and to destroy Ithaca. The hero takes with him a Trojan warrior woman, Circe, for protection because the Kraken would not kill a Trojan.
**2021,** ***L'Odyssée*****.** S03E1–10. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR). 3rd season of the French documentary series.

## Aeschylus

### In the Present or Future

**2004, "Prometheus Unbound."** S08E12. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Title of Aeschylus' play reflecting the situation on the USS *Prometheus*.
**2019, "The Sound of Thunder."** S02E06. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). Michael Burnham and Commander Saru, at the end of the episode, quote Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. See above in the "Quotes" section.

## Euripides

### In the Present

**2005,** ***Medea*** (NL). This is a modern paraphrase of Euripides' *Medea* applied to contemporary Dutch politics; see "Paraphrases."
**2008,** ***Cassandra*** (MX, US). A contemporary paraphrase of *Trojan Women*; see "Paraphrases."
**2018,** ***A Bread Factory, Part Two: Walk with Me a While*** (US). Euripides' *Hecuba* is being rehearsed in a new translation at a community theatre.

### In the Mythological Past

**2004,** ***Ecuba*** (IT). Directed by Giuliana Berlinguer and Irene Papas; in Salvatore Quasimodo's translation of Euripides' play.
**2004,** ***The Trojan Women*** (US). Directed and staged at the LA Whitefire Theater by Brad Mays.
**2006,** ***The Women of Troy*** (UK). A school film.

## Sophocles

### In the Present

**2003, *Oldboy*** (KR). Directed and co-written by Park Chan-wook. Inspired by *Oedipus rex*.
**2018, "The Riddle of the Sphinx."** S02E04. ***Westworld*** (US). Allusions to Sophocles' *Oedipus rex*.

## Aristophanes

### In the Present

**2003, *A Miami Tail*** (US).
**2003, *Manfast*** (US).
**2008, *Absurdistan*** (DE, FR).
**2011, *Where Do We Go Now?* / وهلّا لوين؟** (LB, FR, EG, IT).
**2011, *La source des femmes* / *The Source*** (FR, BE, IT). The plot is similar to the 2008 *Absurdistan*.
**2014, *Chi-Raq*** (US). The action is set in the contemporary gang reality of South Chicago.

All these movies paraphrase *Lysistrata* and reflect contemporary concerns about women confronted to various degrees with poverty, war, refugee crises, urban violence, discrimination, and gender oppression. See the section "Paraphrases."

## Seneca

### In the Present

**2000, *Así es la vida…* / *Such Is Life*** (MX). Modern Mexican paraphrase of Seneca's *Medea*.

### In the Mythological Past

**2006, *Medea 2*** (ES). Medea's revenge on the faithless Jason according to Seneca.
**2009, *Медея* / *Medea*** (RU). A Russian rhythmodrama.

## Ovid

### In the Present

**2006, "Flesh & Blood."** S10E01. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). An unattributed quotation from Ov., *Met*. 1.85–86 and Verg., *Aen*. 2.65–66. See the section "Quotes."
**2013, *Artémis, cœur d'artichaut*** (FR). A contemporary paraphrase of Callimachos' *Hymn to Artemis* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. See the section "Paraphrases."
**2014, *Amori e metamorphosi*** (IT, FR). Inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and performed by transgender people discussing their experiences.
**2014, *Métamorphoses*** (FR). 3 myths transported to the present: Europe and Jupiter, Bacchus, and Orpheus. Europe learns about life and the world through her and others' experiences.

### In the Mythological Past

**2008–2009, *Resonabilis echo. La légende d'Echo et de Narcisse*** (CH). The myth of Narcissus and Echo, according to Ov., *Met*. 3.358–401.

### Virgil

#### In the Present

**2016–2019, *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments*** (US). A coming-of-age show about a hidden supernatural world. A number of Latin maxims, 2 of which are borrowed from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 6.126: "descensus Averno facilis," and 7.312: "Acheronta movebo."

#### In the Mythological Past

**2005, *Dido and Aeneas*** (DE). Henry Purcell's opera, directed by Peter Schönhofer and choreographed by Sasha Waltz.

**2018, *Troy: The Resurrection of Aeneas***. Virgil's *Aeneid* was adapted and directed by Aeneas Middleton.

## Individual Myths

### The Amazons

#### In the Present

**2009, *Wonder Woman*** (US). Based on a comic book of the same name, a fantasy inspired by mythology, with Wonder Woman in modern-day America fighting the god of war, Ares, who escaped from the Amazonian jail.

**2012, "The Slice Girls."** S07E13. ***Supernatural*** (US). Amazons, daughters of Ares and Harmonia, made a deal with Harmonia and became monsters. Their female offspring mature almost instantly and are required to kill their fathers.

**2016, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*** (US). Greek mythology, Amazons, Icarus, Prometheus, Zeus. Based on DC Comics characters.

**2017, *Wonder Woman*** (US). Wonder Woman, daughter of Hippolyta, Queen of Amazons, is forced by conflicts beyond the kingdom to leave her native paradise and save humanity from extinction in WW1.

**2017, *Justice League*** (US). Amazons, Artemis, Atlanteans, Greek mythology, Hestia, Zeus. Based on DC Comics characters. Sequel to ***Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice***.

**2017, "Helen Hunt."** S03E06. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). Helen, transported from Hollywood to Themyscira by the Legends, becomes an Amazon.

**2018–2023, *Titans*** (US). The only openly mythological element is the Amazon girl. The title "Titans" refers to heroes with special powers, not to the Titans from Greek mythology.

**2020, *Wonder Woman 1984*** (US). A sequel to the 2017 movie *Wonder Woman*. An Amazon superheroine in 1984 US.

#### In the Mythological Past

**2001, *Xena: Warrior Princess*** (US).

### The Argonauts

#### In the Present

**2008, *The Spirit*** (US). A contemporary quest ends in finding the Golden Fleece.

**2013, *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*** (US). The demi-gods of Camp Half-Blood seek the Golden Fleece to restore the powerful protective barrier around the Camp.

### In the Mythological Past

**2000, *Jason and the Argonauts*** (US). An unusual happy-end for the myth of the Argonauts in the mini-series by Nick Willing.
**2001–2002, *Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR).
**2003, *The Real Jason and the Argonauts*** (UK). Documentary.
**2004, "Jason and the Argonauts."** E01. ***Greek Gods and Goddesses*** (UK). Jupiter gives a 12-year-old Jason Orion's belt upon climbing Mount Olympus and fulfilling a prophecy. Some of the other Argonauts are featured as well.
**2005, "Jason and the Golden Fleece."** S01E04. ***In Search of Myths and Heroes*** (UK).
**2013–2015, *Atlantis*** (UK). The series begins in the 21st c. but goes back to mythological times. Jason takes on Theseus' role, kills the Minotaur, and falls in love with Ariadne. Then, following Jason's story, he becomes romantically involved with Medea. The series was cancelled before he could go to Colchis.

## Atlantis

### In the Present

**2001, *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*** (US). An animated SF set in 1914.
**2004–2009, *Stargate Atlantis*** (CA, US). A spin-off of the military SF *Stargate SG-1*. Atlantis, a former home of the race of the Ancients, is situated in the Pegasus galaxy.
**2018, *Aquaman*** (US). A DC Comics character known from the *Justice League* is an Atlantean prince. Although the kingdom of Atlantis is hidden from the human world, internal strife and various problems are very similar.
**2023, *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*** (US). A sequel to the 2018 film. A strongly ecological take on the myth.

### In the Mythological Past

**2011, *Atlantis: End of a World, Birth of a Legend*** (UK, SA). A potential scientific origin of the myth is presented as the story of a Bronze Age couple caught in the natural disaster that destroyed Atlantis.
**2013–2015, *Atlantis*** (UK). This is a mash-up of the myths of Theseus, Jason, and Atlantis identified here with the island of Crete.
**2015–2019, *The Deep*** (AU, CA). Antaeus, Atlantis, Mermaids, Minotaur, Nereus, Proteus, Sirens, Thetis. Lost civilization, lost treasures.

## Centaurs

### In the Present

**2010, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). The Centaur Chiron is Percy's Latin teacher and his protector at Camp Half-Blood.
**2010, *Swimming Pool*** (CZ). Two strangers sneak into a closed public pool at night and swim together performing a romantic dance. They are revealed to be a Centaur and a Mermaid.
**2017, "The Flying Forest."** S02E04. ***The Magicians*** (US). A medically advanced hospital run by Centaur physicians.

**2023–2024, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). S01. Corresponds to Riordan's 1st novel in the cycle and to the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

### In the Mythological Past

**2000, *Sheep in the Big City*** (US). A sheep time-travels to Ancient Greece (the ancestor of the Big City) and meets unusual "tribrid" Centaurs – created from humans, horses, and sheep.

**2010–2011, *I'm a Monster*** (IE). An animated series featuring a Centaur among other Greek mythological creatures.

**2021, *Centaurworld*** (US). A horse rider finds himself in a magical Centaur Valley and loses his horse; the horse acquires the ability to speak and asks the locals (singing Centaurs of many varieties) to help him find the rider.

## Cerberus

### In the Present

**2001, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*** (UK, US). Hagrid bought the 3-headed Fluffy from a "Greek chappie" to guard the descent to where the stone was hidden.

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). A 3-headed dog with a snake-headed tail guards the exit from the Underworld.

**2013, *Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). An animated short, featuring 9 mythological creatures as members of contemporary society, including the Minotaur's pet, Cerberus, a 3-headed hamster.

**2016, *Soutaisei Riron: Cerberus*** (JP). The name is spelled in Greek characters: Κέρβερος. A cute 3-headed dog dances on the screen to a joyful little tune; it plays with a ball, walks, and runs.

**2016, *Once Upon a Time*** (US). S05E12–22.[48] Herc(ules) failed in his alleged task of killing (instead of kidnapping) Cerberus. With Snow White and her friends' assistance, he kills the monster and goes with Meg(ara) to "a better place," Olympus.

### In the Mythological Past

**2002, *Orpheus and the Underworld: I Love You to Bits*** (AU). Cerberus falls asleep influenced by Orpheus' music.

## Chimera

### In the Present

**2004, "Chimera."** S07E15. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). The title alludes to the double and dangerous nature of a Goa'uld composed of a powerful parasite symbiote and its human host deprived of agency.

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). The Chimera is a "tribrid": a lion, a goat, and a cobra.

**2013, *Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). One of the 9 mythological characters in the animated short is a Chimera.

[48] Claudia Schwabe's interesting paper (2014) on the magic realism of *Once Upon a Time* was written before season 5 of the series was aired. It does not cover mythological themes and their treatment. It is a good example of the risk involved in publishing research into an unfinished series.

### In the Mythological Past

**2012,** ***Wrath of the Titans*** (US, ES). A sequel to the 2010 ***Clash of the Titans***. After the fall of the walls of Tartarus, monsters are released, among them, a 2-headed Chimera, who is killed by Perseus in his village.

## Cyclops

### In the Present

**2013,** ***Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*** (US). Tyson, Percy's younger half-brother (son of Poseidon), is a Cyclops. A concealment charm makes him look human.

**2013,** ***Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). A Cyclops is among a larger group of mythical creatures living as members of today's society.

**2018,** ***Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*** (US). Atlantis, Colosseum, Critias, Cyclops, Hydra, Kraken, Plato, Timaeus.

**2019, "This Year Will Be Different."** S02E02. ***Legacies*** (US). A troll-like Cyclops disintegrates into sparks during a fight.

### In the Mythological Past

**2000,** ***The Animated*** **Odyssey** (US, LT). Cyclops appears in Part 2 of the series in the well-known incident.

**2001–2002,** ***Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR). Assisted by Mercury and his friends, Jason is able to face many dangers and monsters, among them, a Cyclops.

**2004,** ***The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*** (US). A mermaid helps the hero win a fight with a Cyclops.

**2008,** ***Cyclops*** (US). Rome, 1st c. CE. Tiberius' general Marcus Romulus captures a Cyclops ravaging the countryside; the cruel emperor sends both to the Colosseum to fight but they unite forces with revolted slaves and want to depose him.

**2010–2011,** ***I'm a Monster*** (IE). Episode 6 features a Cyclops.

**2015,** ***Olympus*** (UK, CA). A mash-up of Greek myths and creatures, including a Cyclops (who must open his mouth in order to see because his single eye, most originally, is there and not on his forehead).

**2021, "La malédiction du Cyclope."** S03E03. ***L'Odyssée.*** S03E01–10. ***Les grands mythes*** (FR).

## Daedalus

### In the Present

**1997–2007,** ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). Name of a starship.

**2004–2009,** ***Stargate Atlantis*** (CA, US). Name of a starship.

**2005, "Daedalus."** S04E10. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). A direct reference to the myth: a son dies testing his father's invention.

**2010, "Reset."** S02E12. ***Warehouse 13*** (US). Icarus' white-feathered wings (when folded, they can be carried like backpacks) are among the magical objects stored in the Warehouse.

**2014,** ***Ронда-капрычыёза*** **[Rondo-Capriccioso]** (BY). A paraphrase of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus placed in a contemporary rural setting in Belarus.

**2016–2019,** ***Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments*** (US). Cretan loom built by Daedalus – a weapon of mass destruction.

**2019, "Project Daedalus."** S02E09. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). A high-tech suit allows the wearer to time-travel.
**2019–2020, *The Order*** (CA, US). Another appearance of the Cretan loom allegedly built by Daedalus – a weapon of mass destruction.

### In the Mythological Past

**2013–2015, *Atlantis*** (UK). Daedalus and Icarus are important characters – Atlantis is identified with Crete.
**2015, *Olympus*** (UK, CA). Daedalus, the inventor, is one of the protagonists.

## Eros and Psyche

### In the Present

**2009, *Cupid*** (US). A paraphrase of the myth. A young man, under the illusion of being Eros, is treated by a therapist who may be Psyche.
**2014–2018, *The Librarians*** (US). Cupid's bow is one of the magical objects stored in the Library.
**2020, "What Cupid Problem?"** S02E11. ***Legacies*** (US). In this episode, the visitor from mythology turns out to be Pothos, one of the Erotes, not Cupid.
**2022, "Don't Get Attached."** S04E05. ***Killing Eve*** (UK). In a lecture about the myth of Cupid and Psyche, a professor says that while in popular culture it is associated with sweet romance and customs like Valentine's Day, in the myth, Psyche did not remain gentle and good.

### In the Mythological Past

**2011, *Psyche perspicua pulchritudine / Amour et Psyche*** (CH). A retelling of the myth and the problems caused by Venus being envious of Psyche's beauty.

## Erinyes/Eumenides/Furies

### In the Present

**2001, "Hell Hath No Fury."** S04E03. ***Charmed*** (US). 3 nameless demonic Furies pursue and kill all murderers.
**2010, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). Alecto, a Fury, pretends to be an English teacher at Percy's school and attacks him during a museum field trip.
**2023–2024, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). S01. Corresponds to Riordan's 1st novel in the cycle and to the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

### In the Mythological Past

**2010–2011, *I'm a Monster*** (IE). In this collection of myths about monsters, Furies are also featured.
**2010, *Clash of the Titans*** (US, UK). Furies commanded by Hades kill soldiers of Argos, the city that dared to offend the gods and shatter the statue of Zeus.

## Harpies

### In the Present

**2001,** ***Voyage of the Unicorn*** (US, CA). Travellers meet creatures from several cultures, among them classical, such as Sphinx, Harpies, Minotaur, a Dryad, Medusa, a unicorn, and mermaids-sirens.

**2013,** ***Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). Harpies are among the 9 species of mythological creatures in the animated movie.

**2022,** ***His Dark Materials*** (UK). S03E04–07. In the world of the dead, Harpies torment the inhabitants by forcing them to dwell on their hopeless existence. When treated respectfully, they become the guides who lead the dead out of the Underworld.

### In the Mythological Past

**2001–2002,** ***Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR). Harpies attack Mount Olympus, commanded by the wicked Dracchus, who seeks Orion's belt given to the 12-year-old Jason by Jupiter.

## Hercules

### In the Present

**2008,** ***The Spirit*** (US). A contemporary, complex treasure hunt for the blood of Hercules, an ingredient needed to obtain immortality, results first in finding the Golden Fleece.

**2008–2009,** ***Valentine*** (US). Olympic gods live in Los Angeles, implementing their mission to bring soulmates together. The Titan Phoebe is attracted to the barman Leo (Hercules).

**2016,** ***Once Upon a Time*** (US). S05E12–22. A young Herc, killed by Cerberus, remains in purgatory until Snow, his former protégée, and her friends join forces with him and help him complete his unfinished business.

**2022,** ***Thor: Love and Thunder*** (US). Zeus does not help the heroic Thor in his fight with Gorr, the Butcher God. Thor wounds Zeus and takes his thunderbolt. Zeus and his son Hercules may be planning revenge (in a potential sequel).

### In the Mythological Past

**2000, "Hercules and the Titans."** S02E12. ***Mythic Warriors: Guardians of the Legend*** (US).

**2001–2002,** ***Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR). By mistake, Minos locks Hercules and Venus in the Labyrinth, where the Minotaur hunts them.

**2003, "Birth of Hercules."** E24. **"Twelve Labours of Hercules."** E25. **"Resurrection of Hercules."** E23. 올림포스 가디언 / ***Olympus Guardian*** (KR). A collection of myths produced in South Korea.

**2005,** ***Hercules*** (US). A clash between the worship of Hera and the worship of Zeus.

**2009,** ***Clash of the Gods*** (US). Episodes about Greek mythology feature in separate instalments. Zeus, Hercules, Hades, Minotaur, Medusa, and, in 2 episodes, Odysseus.

**2013,** ***Hercules: The Brave and the Bold*** (US). Hercules, the principal defender of Olympus, is attacked by Hades and Ares, who want to wrestle power from Zeus.

**2013–2015,** ***Atlantis*** (UK). Hercules is a middle-aged wrestler past his prime, a friend of Jason and Pythagoras. Despite his unprepossessing appearance, he is a brave and devoted friend, ready to sacrifice himself for the woman he loves.

**2014,** ***The Legend of Hercules*** (US). Hercules' atypical biopic culminates in a happy end, his marriage to Hebe, a Cretan princess.
**2014,** ***Hercules Reborn*** (US). An exiled Hercules fights to help recover a kidnapped bride and regain his status.
**2014,** ***Hercules*** (US). Now a mercenary, Hercules trains the Thracian army and vanquishes its evil king, Cotys.

## Medea

### In the Present

**2000,** ***Así es la vida*****…** **/** ***Such Is Life*** (MX). Modern Mexican paraphrase of Seneca's *Medea*.
**2005,** ***Medea*** (NL). A modern paraphrase of Euripides' *Medea* applied to contemporary Dutch politics.
**2007,** ***Médée miracle*** (FR, IT). A paraphrase. Irene, a foreign cabaret singer, is married to Jason, a Parisian bar owner who leaves her for a French girl and takes away their 2 daughters. Irene becomes unbalanced.

### In the Mythological Past

**2006,** ***Medea 2*** (ES). Medea's revenge on the faithless Jason according to Seneca.
**2009,** ***Медея / Medea*** (RU). A Russian rhythmodrama based on Seneca.
**2014–2015,** ***Atlantis*** (UK). Season 2: Medea as a young woman, Pasiphae's niece and magical apprentice, before the expedition for the Golden Fleece.
**2015,** ***Olympus*** (UK, CA). Medea meets her murdered children in the Underworld. The younger one cannot forgive her.

## Medusa

### In the Present

**2001,** ***Voyage of the Unicorn*** (US, CA). Medusa is one of the 7 species of mythical creatures encountered by the crew of the *Unicorn*.
**2005–2008,** ***Class of the Titans*** (CA). All 3 Gorgons. Very unpleasant and deadly.
**2007, "The Eye of the Gorgon."** S01E03–04. ***The Sarah Jane Adventures*** (UK). Rationalization of the myth of the Gorgons as extra-terrestrials.
**2010,** ***Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). On his quest for Persephone's pearls, Percy decapitates Medusa. Her still-functioning head later petrifies his brutal human stepdad.
**2013,** ***Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). The single mother featured in this animation is a Medusa whose small son is a Minotaur.
**2014, "Nosh of the Titans"** in **"Calm Down and Think, Elmo."** S45E10. ***Sesame Street*** (US). A cow puppet, Moo-dusa, blocks the way to Zeus, like the Sphinx challenging the Cookie Monster Furzius to solve a riddle.
**2014, "Blade Runners."** S09E16. ***Supernatural*** (US). Medusa's portrait by Peter Paul Rubens.
**2014–2018,** ***The Librarians*** (US). Medusa's head is one of the ancient objects stored in the Library.
**2017, "And the Wrath of Chaos."** S03E10. ***The Librarians*** (US). A government agent uses Medusa's head to petrify the immortal caretaker of the Annex.

**2019, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (US). Nagaina[49]/Medusa is a snake charmer at Pan's carnival. She turns 2 of Sabrina's friends into stone, but Sabrina revives them, and they attack Nagaina. Roz cuts off her head using Prudence Blackwood's sword.

**2019, "Let's Just Finish the Dance."** S01E14. ***Legacies*** (US). Nia, a student, is a Gorgon; her dreads turn into snakes, but 3 rings of a bronze bell disrupt the power of the snakes.

**2019, "Switches and Stones."** S01E15. ***Charmed*** (US). A witch named Medusa, raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, was punished by the goddess, who transformed her into a Gorgon. Medusa wants people to acknowledge her tragedy, and she turns into stone only those who avert their eyes.

**2019, "Ouroboros."** S14E14. ***Supernatural*** (US). Medusa is a man named Noah Ophis, who paralyses his victims with venom before cooking and eating them.

**2019, *Wonder Woman: Bloodlines*** (US). Villainy Inc. replicated a giant Medusa to attack the Amazons on Themyscira. She becomes uncontrollable and until Diana vanquishes her, she indiscriminately kills all present.

**2021, *Medusa*** (BR). A paraphrase inspired by the similarity of the myth to several recent cases in Brazil of "Christian" girl gangs attacking at night girls deemed promiscuous and punishing them for their loss of purity.

**2022, *Wednesday*** (US). Ajax Petropolus, a student of presumably Greek ancestry at the Nevermore Academy, also attended by Wednesday Addams, is a Gorgon able to petrify people temporarily, including himself.

**2023–2024, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). S01. Corresponds to Riordan's 1st novel in the cycle and to the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

### In the Mythological Past

**2000, *Sheep in the Big City*** (US). Lady Medusington is an evil person who hates sheep and uses them as sacrifices. See also under "Centaurs."

**2001–2002, *Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR). A young Jason faces many dangers and monsters, such as Medusa. See also under "Harpies."

**2009, *Clash of the Gods*** (US). See also under "Hercules."

**2010, *Clash of the Titans*** (US, UK). Medusa is a gigantic serpent with a human upper body and a beautiful face; she moves much more gracefully than in the 1981 *Clash*.

**2013–2015, *Atlantis*** (UK). A young Atlantean girl, Medusa, inadvertently opens Pandora's Box and is transformed into a Gorgon. Turned back into a human by her lover, Hercules, she sacrifices herself to help him and her other friends.

## Minotaur

### In the Present

**2001, "The Minotaur."** S01E01. ***Mythquest*** (CA). A computer game allows players to embody mythical characters. 2 teenagers are looking for their father, who disappeared inside the programme. One of them plays Theseus fighting the Minotaur in episode 1.

**2001, *Voyage of the Unicorn*** (US, CA). One of the encountered mythological creatures is a Minotaur.

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[49] Compare Nagini, Voldemort's snake, and an earlier literary character, Nagini, in Rudyard Kipling's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, a black cobra intent on murdering a family living in the snake's habitat. The pet mongoose kills Nagini. In the Hindu religion, Naga (fem. Nagini) are semi-divine beings, half snake, half human. They live in Naga-lok, the lowest level of the Hindu Underworld, Patala (Dowson, [1879] 2004, 213; G.M. Williams, [2003] 2008, 217).

**2005, "The God Complex."** S06E11. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). The Doctor and his companions wander into a Labyrinth-like hotel, where a Minotaur is trapped. He feeds on people's strong convictions, and the lack of such beliefs starves him.

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). 7 modern teen heroes, descendants of Greek mythological heroes, save the world from Cronus, who escapes from Tartarus. They fight various monsters, including the Minotaur.

**2010, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US).

**2012, "Dipper vs. Manliness."** S01E06. ***Gravity Falls*** (US). A Minotaur (called Manotaur) becomes a helpful friend, transforming from a villain to a hero.

**2013, *Mitópolis / Mythopolis*** (CZ). A boy, Mino, the son of a single mother, Medusa, is a Minotaur.

**2014, "And the Horns of a Dilemma."** S01E03. ***The Librarians*** (US). The Librarians neutralize ancient artefacts used by descendants of the Minoan dynasty who are building a Labyrinth. The Librarians let a Minotaur held in captivity by the Minoans get revenge.

**2017, "The Maze."** S02E09. ***The Deep*** (AU, CA). An animated series about a family looking underwater for a lost civilization. They encounter 2 underwater Minotaurs in a maze, who are provisioned in seaweed by dolphins.

**2018, "Tender Is the Nate."** S04E06. ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (US). The Legends fight a Minotaur and put it to sleep by playing music.

**2019, "Screw Endgame."** S02E05. ***Legacies*** (US). A Minotaur is trapped in a magic game with his keeper, whom he cannot kill because of a magic bracelet she wears. The keeper traps 2 girls from Salvatore School to liberate herself from the game by forcing one of them to take her place. The girls end the game by taking the bracelet, letting the Minotaur kill the keeper, and then killing the Minotaur, a mindless monster with no redeeming features.

**2019, *Wonder Woman: Bloodlines*** (US). A Minotaur was enchanted to defend the memory-restoring fountain at Pasiphae's temple. Diana drinks from the fountain, destroys it, and by doing so, lifts the enchantment and frees the Minotaur.

**2023–2024, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). S01. Corresponds to Riordan's 1st novel in the cycle and to the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief.*

### In the Mythological Past

**2001–2002, *Jason et les héros de l'Olympe / Jason and the Heroes of Mount Olympus*** (FR). See under "Hercules."

**2006, *The Minotaur: Curse the God, Slay the Beast*** (UK, LU, FR, DE, ES, IT, US). Loosely based on the myth.

**2009, *Clash of the Gods*** (US). See under "Hercules."

**2010–2011, *I'm a Monster*** (IE). See under "Cyclops."

**2011, *Sinbad and the Minotaur*** (AU). A Minotaur guards a Labyrinth with a treasure hidden in the middle.

**2012, *Wrath of the Titans*** (US, ES). 10 years after the events of the 2010 *Clash of the Titans*, Perseus attempts to save Zeus, who is incarcerated in Tartarus. He fights the Cyclopes, gets almost lost in the Minotaur's Labyrinth, attacks, and vanquishes Kronos with the Spear of the Trium (Zeus' thunderbolt, Poseidon's trident, and Hades' pitchfork combined) he got in the previous movie.

**2013, "The Earth Bull."** S01E01. ***Atlantis*** (UK). Jason volunteers to face the Minotaur, taking the place of his friend, and kills the creature, who is revealed to have been an enchanted man.

## Morpheus

### In the Present

**2006, "Morpheus."** S10E02. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). The so-called curse of Morgan Le Fay infected the planet Varus Gen Bree ('land of royal truth' in Ancient) after a visit from King Arthur and his Knights. It was, in reality, a sleep parasite feeding on serotonin and melatonin that wiped out the planet's population. The SG-1 team is able to eliminate the parasite. The episode was novelized as *The Morpheus Factor*.

**2022, *The Sandman*** (US). Morpheus/Oneiros, king of dreams, escapes after a century of captivity in mortal hands and tries to rebuild his devastated kingdom.

## Muses

### In the Present

**2000, "Muse."** S06E22. ***Star Trek: Voyager*** (US). Voyager's chief engineer, B'Elanna Torres, becomes an inspiration to a playwright on a planet resembling Homeric Greece.

**2001, "Muse to My Ears."** S04E09. ***Charmed*** (US). The Charmed Ones are trying to stop daemonic warlocks from enslaving the Muses and making their inspiration work for the forces of evil.

**2014, "Fan Fiction."** S10E05. ***Supernatural*** (US). Calliope (called the Goddess of Epic Poetry) interferes in a school play, and Sam kills her with a Blessed Wooden Stake to prevent a massacre. See under "Deicide."

**2017, "Child's Play."** S04E09. ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). One of the main characters deactivates a golem by performing a ritual with an incantation appealing to Clio, Euterpe, and Thalia.

**2021, "All's Well That Ends Well."** S03E10. ***Legacies*** (US). Cleo, one of the students at the Salvatore School for the Young and Gifted, is revealed to be a 15th-c. Muse. She is not the daughter of Zeus but a special witch – a 7th daughter of a 7th daughter; she has already helped students deal with their problems.

**2022, "A Dream of a Thousand Cats"** and **"Calliope."** S01E11. ***The Sandman*** (US). Morpheus (Oneiros); Calliope, the Muse kept in captivity and brutally forced to inspire unscrupulous writers.

## Orpheus

### In the Present

**2001, *Moulin Rouge!*** (US). According to the director, the movie was inspired by the myth of Orpheus.

**2003, "Orpheus."** S07E04. ***Stargate SG-1*** (CA, US). With the help of SG-1, Teal'c saves his son, Ray'c, and his mentor, Bra'tac, from slave labour on a planet called Erebus. According to Dr. Jackson, Erebus is a place in Greek mythology where the souls of the condemned go. In fact, it could be another name for Tartarus, the darkest part of Hades, or for the entire Underworld.

**2005, "Demons."** S04E20. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Race purity fanatics operate an Orpheus Mining Facility in their secret headquarters evoking the Underworld.

**2005, *Orpheus*** (US). This musical short paraphrases the myth, setting it in modern times: Orpheus is a rock star who flirts with Persephone, and Eurydice dies desiring to join Hades. Orpheus then remembers his love for his wife and travels to the Underworld to reclaim her.

**2016, "Delaware."** S03E17. ***Sleepy Hollow*** (US). An entry to the Underworld allegedly used by Orpheus.

**2016,** ***Once Upon a Time*** (US). S05E12–22. Hades reveals that Orpheus and Eurydice succeeded in leaving the Underworld because they ate from the ambrosia tree. Hades "killed" the tree to avoid a reoccurrence of such events in the future.

### In the Mythological Past

**2000,** ***Orpheus & Eurydice*** (GR). A modified retelling of the myth.
**2001, "Orpheus."** S01E04. ***Mythquest*** (CA). 2 teenagers, Alex and Cleo, wander around a digital museum looking for their father and, at the same time, step into the shoes of various mythological characters. A variation of SF time travel. In this episode, Alex becomes Orpheus.
**2002,** ***Orpheus and the Underworld: I Love You to Bits*** (AU). An animated short retelling of the myth and Orpheus' journey to and through the Underworld.
**2008,** ***Il ginocchio di Artemide / Le genou d'Artémide*** (FR, IT). Orpheus and Demeter as mythological symbols.

## Pan

### In the Present

**2006,** ***Labyrinth of Pan / El laberinto del fauno*** (ES, MX). In fact, only in the English translation of the title the Roman Faunus became the Greek god Pan.
**2020, "Heavy Is the Crown."** S03E23. **"The Hare Moon."** S03E24. **"The Devil Within."** S03E25. **"The Judas Kiss."** S03E27. **"Sabrina Is Legend."** S03E28. ***Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (US). Pan, whose special power is inducing madness, leads a pagan cult intent on destroying the World. The members of the cult include Medusa and Circe.

### In the Mythological Past

**2007,** ***Sa Majesté Minor / His Majesty Minor*** (FR, ES). Pan's fun and games.

## Pandora

### In the Present

**2003,** ***Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. The Cradle of Life*** (US). Pandora's Box floats on acid in a cave in Africa guarded by a devoted tribe and a regiment of shapeshifting giants. It is sought by an insane billionaire who wants to use it as a means to control the size of the human population.
**2005, "Little Box of Horrors."** S07E18. ***Charmed*** (US). A girl called Hope is the guardian of Pandora's Box, but she is unaware of her destiny. A demon, Katya, threatens her friend to force Hope to open the Box. With the help of the Charmed Ones, she accepts her destiny and returns the evils to the Box because it transpires that the original Pandora, after releasing the evils, was moved to believe in herself and was able to hem in the evils in the Box again.
**2010, "The Pandorica Opens."** S05E12. **"The Big Bang."** S05E13. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). An unknown Vincent van Gogh painting called *The Pandorica Opens* shows Roman-era Stonehenge housing Pandorica, a prison where the most dangerous creature in the universe, the Doctor, is being held. The name alludes to Pandora's Box.
**2012, "A New Hope."** S04E01. ***Warehouse 13*** (US). In the destruction of the Warehouse, Pandora's *píthos* stored there is damaged and Elpis, the spirit of hope, escapes causing an economic crash, global panic, riots, and suicides. Artie, the Warehouse's current supervisor, goes back in time using Magellan's

astrolabe (another magical artefact), brings back the *píthos*, reverses the effects of Elpis' escape, and securely stores the *píthos* in the Warehouse.

**2013, "Pandora's Box."** S01E09. ***Atlantis*** (UK). Jason and Hercules are forced by moneylender Kyros, who kidnapped Hercules' girlfriend, Medusa, to recover a mysterious box from Tartarus. Medusa, released by the kidnappers, is curious and opens the box. Because it is revealed to be Pandora's Box, her curiosity comes at a horrible price. She is transformed into a Gorgon.

**2015, *Olympus*** (UK, CA). Hero and Ariadne travel to Olympus and, on the way, find Pandora's tomb. Hero opens it against Medea's advice, releasing a freezing mist that kills Ariadne and starts spreading everywhere.

**2015–2016, *Sleepy Hollow*** (US). S03E01–18. Pandora is a former mortal born in early Sumer, predating Greek mythology, who was given divine powers and a box filled with evils. In season 3 of *Sleepy Hollow*, Pandora is the evil force threatening the survival of the planet. She is an entirely self-centred villain and despises humans, partnering with them only when it suits her needs. A combination of mythology, American revolutionary history, and the famous short story by Washington Irving becomes the basis for the plot where Pandora and Ichabod Crane, Washington's intelligence officer and an apprentice to Benjamin Franklin, began a fight that lasted 18 episodes.

**2019, "The Miracles of Sabrina Spellman."** S02E07. ***Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (US). Sabrina compares her new skills to the content of Pandora's Box.

**2021, "This Is What It Takes."** S03E05. **"Do All Malivore Monsters Provide This Level of Emotional Insight?"** S03E09. S03E11–13. ***Legacies*** (US). Project Pandora relates to an enchanted artefact that, when opened, grants any wish. It was made by Leonardo da Vinci inspired by the Witch/Muse Cleo, who was imprisoned in it for centuries and is now part of the Salvatore School for the Young and Gifted. Blueprints for the artefact were discovered in a file called *Project Pandora*, but the file self-destructed.

## Persephone

### In the Present

**2010, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). Percy's team finds Persephone's pearls, which make it possible to go to the Underworld and then return to the world of the living.

**2015, "Like Hell."** S05E02, Part 2. **"Like Father, Like Daughter."** S05E10. ***Lost Girl*** (CA). Persephone, who can take the form of a bird or a human, tricks Bo into promising her to light a magic candle once she leaves Tartarus, allegedly to let her mother, Demeter, know that she is fine, but, in fact, the flame of the candle allows the banished gods (Zee, Hera, and Iris) to return to the world of the living. When Bo released Hades from the Underworld, Persephone was also set free.

**2016–2019, *The Magicians*** (US). Persephone, Our Lady Underground, appears in 6 episodes of the series' first 4 seasons. While she is a very powerful deity, she dies killed by her protégée, Julia, who is at the time possessed by the twin sister of the evil Nameless created by the Old Gods in a failed experiment.

**2023–2024, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). S01. Corresponds to Riordan's 1st novel in the cycle and to the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

### In the Mythological Past

**2002, "Persephone: A Tale from Greece."** S02E13. ***Animated Tales of the World*** (US). A short retelling of the myth.

## Perseus

### In the Present

**2010,** ***Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). Percy Jackson, an American teenager, is the son of Poseidon, not of Zeus. He goes on a quest to recover Zeus' stolen lightning bolt and repair the strained relations between his father and uncle.

**2013,** ***Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*** (US). To bring back the supernatural protection to the Camp Half-Blood, Percy, Annabeth, and Tyson (a young Cyclops and Percy's half-brother) travel to the Sea of Monsters (Bermuda Triangle) to find the Golden Fleece needed for its miraculous healing properties to revive Thalia's tree and restore the protective barrier surrounding the Camp.

**2023–2024,** ***Percy Jackson and the Olympians*** (US). S01. Corresponds to Riordan's 1st novel in the cycle and to the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief.*

### In the Mythological Past

**2010,** ***Clash of the Titans*** (US, UK). This is a remake of Ray Harryhausen's 1981 *Clash of the Titans*, featuring a similar version of the myth with Kraken under Hades' control. After killing Medusa and vanquishing Kraken, Perseus marries Io, who is brought back to life as a mortal woman.

**2012,** ***Wrath of the Titans*** (US, ES). A sequel to the 2010 *Clash of the Titans*. 10 years later, a widowed Perseus saves Zeus, who was incarcerated in Tartarus, with the help of Queen Andromeda and others. After vanquishing Kronos, he can finally marry Andromeda.

## Prometheus

### In the Present

**2012,** ***Prometheus*** (UK, US). Ridley Scott explains his choice of the title: "It's the story of creation; the gods and the man who stood against them" (Bamigboye, 2011). The appearance of the Engineers, the race responsible for the existence of humans, was influenced to an extent by classical statues of Graeco-Roman gods.

**2013, "Remember the Titans."** S08E16. ***Supernatural*** (US). To force Zeus to lift the curse put on Prometheus and his son, Oliver, Sam and Dean trap Zeus, but it backfires. Shocked by the torture her father inflicts on Prometheus, Artemis shoots him with a deadly arrow, which pierces Prometheus and Zeus and kills them both, lifting the curse. See under "Deicide."

**2018, "Will You Play with Me."** S03E13. ***The Magicians*** (US). Prometheus, with the help of his lover, Calypso, constructed a back door to magic in the form of a fountain, in case the Old Gods ever denied access to the wellspring. He created a quest for those who wanted to find the door, sacrificing all his power to produce 7 golden keys independent of the source of magic. Weakened by this sacrifice, he could not withstand his enemies and was killed.

**2019,** ***The Lighthouse*** (US). Howard falls down the stairs of the lighthouse and his corpse is picked at by seagulls, bringing to mind the myth of Prometheus.

**2021, "Tears of the Wrath-Bearing Tree."** S03E10. ***American Gods*** (US). Mr. World (Loki) reveals that Technical Boy was once Prometheus, who gave fire to mankind; as science and technology evolved, he did too and became one of the new gods.

**2022, "The Story of My Life."** S04E10. ***Legacies*** (US). Greek mythology with a twist: an eagle is not devouring Ben's (Prometheus') liver. He is cursed instead to attract monsters that almost kill him, but he always recovers before the next attack. Ben is not a Titan but a demigod, Ken's (Zeus') bastard son, with fast regenerative powers. He is guilty of giving humans magic, not fire. A point resembling

Prometheus' sacrifice in ***The Magicians*** (2018), giving humans access to magic should the Old Gods ever remove it from the world.

## Pygmalion and Galatea

### In the Present

**2001, "I Was Made to Love You."** S05E15. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). April, a robot designed to love its creator, is abandoned, with her batteries expected to become soon depleted. It tries to find the creator and take the place of his current girlfriend but becomes uncontrollably violent and must be disabled by Buffy.

**2002, *Simone*** (US). A paraphrase. A robot replaces a difficult movie star, becoming a bigger celebrity than the director.

**2007, *Lars and the Real Girl*** (US). Lars orders a silicon doll and eventually introduces it to his family as his girlfriend. The family plays along and is advised to do so by a psychotherapist. Finally, Lars tells them that the doll is dying. Everybody mourns her, and Lars is able to attempt a relationship with a girl from his work.

**2012, *Ruby Sparks*** (US). A writer unknowingly brings to life one of his characters, Ruby. She behaves according to what he writes about her. He uses this power to control her. Finally, he writes that now she is free and may do what she wants. She disappears, and he writes a new novel, *The Girlfriend*. When he meets her later, she does not remember him but is reading his book with interest. There is hope for a future relationship.

**2014, *Ex machina*** (US). A programmer is assessing a female AI. While things are not what they seem, he ends up helping the AI become independent, which results in the death of the lab's owner and in himself being trapped there. The AI becomes a potential threat to humanity.

**2021, "I Was Made to Love You."** S03E12. ***Legacies*** (US). Clio, the Renaissance Muse/oracle/Fury, creates a golem of Landon, Hope's beloved, to prevent her from trying to rescue him from the Prison World. When Hope realizes this Landon is a golem enchanted to love her, she poisons him with her "tribrid" blood, and he disintegrates. See the identical title in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* S05E15.

## Romulus and Remus

### In the Mythological Past

**2019, *Il primo re* / *Romulus v Remus: The First King*** (IT). A retelling of Rome's mythical origin and the story of its legendary founders, Romulus and Remus. Dialogues are in reconstructed early Latin.

**2020–2022, *Romulus*** (IT). The action begins earlier than in Matteo Rovere's 2019 movie *Il primo re* and presents the imagined antecedents of Rome's foundational myth.

## Sirens/Mermaids

### In the Present

**2001, *Voyage of the Unicorn*** (US, CA). The crew of the *Unicorn*, among other mythical creatures, encounter Sirens.

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). 3 beautiful young women lured young men to their deaths with their songs. In fact, their beauty is an illusion; they are monsters, part birds and part snakes.

**2006–2010, *$H_2O$: Just Add Water*** (AU). 3 girls discover that they become mermaids in the ocean. They try to hide it, as well as their special powers over water, with varying results. (Not in the Survey).
**2010, *Swimming Pool*** (CZ). A Mermaid and a Centaur dance in a swimming pool deserted at night.
**2011, "The Curse of the Black Spot."** S06E03. ***Doctor Who*** (UK). A doctor from the future, disguised as a siren, anesthetizes sick sailors with music and transfers them to his spaceship sickbay for treatment.
**2013, "The Deep End."** S01E15. ***Gravity Falls*** (US). Mermando, the Merman, half human, half Siren, is caught by a fisherman. He sings and plays the guitar and has no bad intentions towards humans. Mabel, a girl who falls in love with Mermando, helps him leave the public swimming pool where he was placed and return to the ocean.
**2015–2019, *The Deep*** (AU, CA). It is an animated series about a family looking for a lost civilization, presumably Atlantis, but called Lemuria. S01E20, **"The Song of the Siren"**: an alleged Siren proves to be a singing whale the family saves. S02E03, **"Mermaids"**: one member of the family teases another, pretending to be a mermaid.
**2021, "The Siren."** S03E07. ***What We Do in the Shadows*** (US). A Siren called Sheila lures 2 vampires who live together on Staten Island, NY, intending to eat them. Both escape but one falls in love with Sheila.
**2022, *Wednesday*** (US). A group of highly persuasive Sirens with mesmerizing blue eyes attend the Nevermore Academy.

### In the Mythological Past

**2004, *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*** (US). A mermaid helps a mythical hero on a quest to prevent a hostile takeover of the world and to recover King Neptune's stolen crown to win his battle with a Cyclops.

Before discussing examples of superheroes and superheroines, I should comment briefly on Joseph Campbell's, still ubiquitous although well over-septuagenarian, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), its summary drawn up by Christopher Vogler under the title *The Practical Guide to* The Hero with a Thousand Faces, begging to be downloaded at every online corner, and his 1992 book, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Vogler's *Guide* and his book became instrumental in teaching film and television producers what to include in their stories despite the rigidity of Campbell's archetypes and his systematic neglect and misunderstanding of the scope and depth of the role of women not only in mythology but in culture in general. Considering myself unqualified to dismantle Campbell's Jung-inspired construction instrumental in reducing the phenomenon of creative narrative to a simplified template, I chose to ignore him rather than embark on what seemed more like a hopeless crusade against a celebrity than a debate with a scholar. Being primarily a classicist and not an anthropologist or comparative mythographer, I felt justified in my decision, even if not entirely comfortable. To my delight, in 2020, Vogler's book was indirectly but quite decisively challenged by an unusual *New York Times* bestselling author, Gail Carriger, who identified the heroine's journey as a separate narrative structure, "not derivative of, not sourced in, the Hero's journey" (see Carriger,

2020, xi). The following year, Maria Tatar, a Harvard authority on fairy tales and folklore, published *The Heroine with 1,001 Faces* – the title alludes to *The Thousand and One Nights* more than to *The Hero* – and restored a crucial balance healing my longstanding discontent with Campbell's hold over storytelling (see Tatar, 2021, 1–6, 16–24, et passim).[50]

## New Mythological Superheroes and Superheroines

### In the Present

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). 7 descendants of ancient characters: Jason, Artemis, Hercules, Achilles, Theseus, Odysseus, and Narcissus, save the world from another assault by Cronus.

**2009, *Wonder Woman*** (US). In modern-day America, Wonder Woman fights the god of war, Ares, who escaped the Amazons' prison.

**2016, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*** (US). Greek mythology, Amazons, Icarus, Prometheus, Zeus. Based on DC Comics characters.

**2017, *Wonder Woman*** (US). Wonder Woman, the daughter of Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons, saves humanity from extinction by killing Ares in WWI, as she was designed and fated to do by Zeus.

**2017, *Justice League*** (US). Amazons, Artemis, Atlanteans, Greek mythology, Hestia, Zeus. Based on DC Comics characters.

**2018–2023, *Titans*** (US). An Amazonian girl works with "Titans," heroes with special powers not directly linked to Greek mythology.

**2018, *Aquaman*** (US). Atlantis, Atlanteans, Atlas, Critias, Plato, Poseidon, Poseidon's Trident, prophecy, Timaeus. Aquaman is a DC Comics character, known from *Justice League*, who in this movie became a truly empathetic leader.

**2020, *The Old Guard*** (US). A group of immortals is led by Andromache "the Scythian" (called "Andy"); her Trojan origin and marriage to Hector are hinted at. She is dedicated to protecting the innocent. ***The Old Guard 2*** is scheduled to premiere in 2024.

**2020, *Wonder Woman 1984*** (US). A sequel to the 2017 movie *Wonder Woman*. An Amazon superheroine continues to assist humanity in 1984.

**2021, *Jupiter's Legacy*** (US). A superhero team known as the Union of Justice act according to principles: do not kill and do not interfere in political matters. The title reflects the superpower of their leader, the Utopian, who controls lightning and thunder.

**2023, *Shazam! Fury of the Gods*** (US). When the daughters of Atlas threaten the survival of the world, the superhero Shazam saves humanity.

**2023, *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*** (US). A sequel to James Wan's 2018 *Aquaman*. A heroic Atlantean prince unknown in ancient times who brings the hidden world of Atlantis into cooperation and friendship with humans.

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[50] There were of course earlier critical assessments of Campbell targeting his less than scholarly practices, such as selective use of folklore evidence, lack of expertise in folklore studies, weak command of Sanskrit, to cite only a few. He has been much more a figure of popular culture than a recognized scholar. His role in the development of comparative mythology appears to be his one generally accepted achievement. Maureen Murdock's 1990 *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* as a self-help book written as a complement to Campbell's *Hero* by his former student and practising psychotherapist is well beyond the purpose of my book.

### In the Mythological Past

**2020–**, ***Blood of Zeus*** (US). Greek mythology outside what was transmitted in the ancient sources – new characters and stories.

**2021, *Eternals*** (US). An explanation of how Greek mythology came to be: ancient aliens (AI – Eternals) are sent from space by a superior being to facilitate the birth of other such beings whose mission is to create and recreate solar systems and make the cosmos function properly. Sumer, Babylon, Greece: Eternals defend humans against Deviants (AI predators) and assist in human progress. All human mythologies originate from the presence of Eternals on the planet.

## Theseus

### In the Present

**2011, *Immortals*** (US). Theseus, trained by Zeus, fights against King Hyperion, who kills his mother and sends him to salt mines. After escaping, he buries his mother and finds the Epirus bow.

**2012, *The Hunger Games*** (US). Similar to the Athenian tribute paid to Minos, the King of Crete, the story we know from the myth of Theseus.

**2012, *The Ship of Theseus*** (IN). The film's title refers to a famous paradox first related by Plutarch in the *Vitae parallelae* (*Thes*. 23.1). The last scene alludes to the Platonic cave.

### In the Mythological Past

**2015, *Olympus*** (UK, CA). It is a mash-up of Greek myths: the protagonist is called Hero, even though he is, in fact, Theseus.

## The Titans

### In the Present

**2003, "Oh My Goddess."** S05E22–23. ***Charmed*** (US). The 3 Charmed Ones become goddesses of love, war, and nature due to the powers the Elders grant them to fight the Titans. Olympic gods were mortals who received the same powers in the remote past but once they vanquished the Titans, they refused to return their powers and settled on Olympus. The Charmed Ones, on the other hand, have no such ambitions, and once they are done with the Titans, they go back to being witches.

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). The title alludes to the 1981 *Clash of the Titans*. Cronus escapes Tartarus during an alignment of planets and 7 teenage descendants of Greek heroes vanquish him, as was prophesied.

### In the Mythological Past

**2010, *Clash of the Titans*** (US, UK).

**2011, *Immortals*** (US). A free paraphrase of known mythological motifs and heroes, mashed-up with SF. The Titans are let out of Tartarus and want to destroy the Olympians.

**2012, *Wrath of the Titans*** (US, ES). This is a sequel to the 2010 ***Clash of the Titans***. The walls of Tartarus fall releasing Cronus and various monsters into the world.

## The Underworld

### In the Present and the Future

**2000, "Doomed."** S04E11. ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*** (US). Hellmouth (called by Spanish settlers Boca del Infierno) located below Sunnydale High School Library is a passage to the dimensions of Hell through which various demons and monsters travel.

**2005, "Demons."** S04E20. ***Star Trek: Enterprise*** (US). Reference: Orpheus Mining Facility.

**2005–2008, *Class of the Titans*** (CA). Elysium is part of the Underworld, where heroes go after they die. It is closed to the living, but the young heroes find an entrance through Persephone's apartments.

**2010, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*** (US). Percy descends to the Underworld to save his mother, kidnapped on Hades' orders.

**2015, *Lost Girl*** (CA). The Norse Valhalla with Valkyries acting as psychopomps and an elevator going down to Tartarus, where Hades and Persephone live.

**2015–2016, *Sleepy Hollow*** (US). S03E01–18. In the contemporary US, the Underworld or Purgatory (the Catacombs) may be entered on a boat on the Delaware River, which under specific conditions transforms into the River Styx. This entry was allegedly used by Orpheus when he went to Hades trying to recover Eurydice. Time passes there many times faster than in the world above.

**2015–2020, *The Magicians*** (US). The Underworld has several levels reachable by an elevator. Some of the levels are populated by the dead. After the death of Persephone, Hades leaves the Underworld and grieves in the world of the living. When the gods die, they have nowhere to go. Hades leaves the entry to the Underworld open, and the dead may come back to the surface. The magicians prevent that from happening.

**2016, *Once Upon a Time*** (US). S05E12–22. The god Hades is an unredeemable villain who bans hope from his realm. The upper level of the Underworld is a purgatory for souls with unfinished business. Lower levels are reached by an elevator. Cerberus guards dungeons; there are the Underworld rivers of Greek mythology, and a path to "a better place" that appears only to deserving souls. Hades mentions Orpheus and Eurydice as the only people who managed to return to the world of the living by eating the fruit of the ambrosia tree, which he later destroyed to prevent similar mishaps.

**2018–2022, *Charmed*** (US). The motif of Tartarus, the deepest part of hell "where the worst incarcerate their worst," is one of the favourite classically inspired concepts occurring in audiovisual series of the 21st c.

**2019, "An Obol for Charon."** S02E04. ***Star Trek: Discovery*** (US). A sentient planetoid organism encountered by *Discovery* is close to death but insists on transferring its vast knowledge and experience as a final offering. Saru is affected by the planetoid light and enters the final stage of his life, but instead of dying, he survives as a new Kelpian liberated from fear.

**2022, *His Dark Materials*** (UK). S03. Lyra and Will descend to the Underworld, which may be reached by crossing the River Styx, but their souls (daemons) are refused entry. They make an agreement with the harpies, who are the evil guardians of the dead, and the harpies help lead the dead to the outside world, where they disperse among the particles of the living universe, making hell irrelevant.

### In the Mythological Past

**2001, "God Fearing Child."** S05E12. ***Xena: Warrior Princess*** (US). Zeus tries to thwart the prophecy about Xena's child being a fatal danger to the gods' survival and orders her death. In their attempt to prevent his plan, Gabrielle and Xena descend to Tartarus seeking Hades' helmet of invisibility.

**2002, *Orpheus and the Underworld: I Love You to Bits*** (AU).

**2009, *Hellhounds*** (CA). Theron, who is secretly in love with Demetria, Kleitos' bride, poisons her wine. When a witch tells Kleitos that Demetria is being forced to marry Hades, Kleitos descends to the

Underworld with his companions through a volcano. They drink an elixir protecting them from the fire they must traverse. After leaving Demetria's corpse outside the entrance, they pass through a maze patrolled by demonic hounds. Theron dies and wakes up in Hell. Hades promises him a longer life if he delivers Demetria to him, but Theron does not succeed and must return to Hell.

**2013, "Pandora's Box."** S01E09. ***Atlantis*** (UK). Jason and Hercules descend to the Underworld to recover Pandora's Box from Tartarus.

**2015**, ***Athena: The Goddess of War*** (US). Zeus blocks the passage from the Underworld to protect the mortals in his war with Hades. Athena and her team of heroes save the world.

## Immortals? "We Can Be Killed if You Try Hard Enough"[51]

When a narrative includes gods, the need for suspense and conflict and their solution occasionally brings up the theme of deicide. How do you kill an immortal being? Well, in Greek mythology Cronus castrated his father, Uranus, and, later, afraid of a prophecy, tried to kill his children by swallowing them. He was overthrown by his youngest son, Zeus, and imprisoned in Tartarus. It was virtually impossible in Greek mythology to kill a god,[52] but not in the audiovisual reality of the twenty-first century, whether the action is set in the present or the mythological past. The divine body count may occasionally become staggering; for instance, in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (see also Tomasso, 2015b, 151–153), where a knife made from Cronus' rib is used to kill Zeus, Hades' bolt turned aside kills Poseidon, Hephaestus dies with his hammer plunged in his chest, Artemis from her own deflected arrow. In productions set in the present, the motif of a special god-killing weapon occurs several times, in particular in the 2005–2020 series *Supernatural* featuring a 1,000-year-old bloody olive branch, a bloody stake, Thor's hammer, Mjölnir, a stake carved from a tree struck by lightning, Artemis' arrows and blade, and a Blessed Wooden Stake. In *The Magicians*, it is possible to commit deicide with powerful magic and kill gods of all origins, including those from classical mythology. The evil Nameless twins are the only ones whom no amount of magic, not even a god-killing bullet, can kill, and they have to be neutralized by being sent to the Antiverse forever. In *Legacies*, Zeus is killed by a Fury with the God Spear fashioned by Hephaestus with God Magic from the cinders of the Red Oak.

[51] Says the 1,500-year-old vampire Matthew de Clermont in *A Discovery of Witches*, S01E03, but it applies to almost any immortal in an audiovisual series.

[52] Vincent Tomasso brings up the existence of some texts suggesting the opposite but acknowledges that they did not influence modern collections of myths readily available to filmmakers (2015b, 148).

## Deicide[53]

### In the Present

**2012, "Time after Time."** S07E12. ***Supernatural*** (US). Chronos, the god of time, is the monster of the week and is killed with a 1,000-year-old olive tree branch cut by the Vestals and covered in blood.

**2012, "What's Up, Tiger Mommy?"** S08E02. ***Supernatural*** (US). Plutus, the god of greed, is killed with a bloody stake by his assistant during an auction of a dangerous artefact. Sam kills the assistant, a god named Beau, with Thor's hammer, Mjölnir.

**2013, "Remember the Titans."** S08E16. ***Supernatural*** (US). Sam and Dean summon Zeus to force him to lift the curse from Prometheus and his son, Oliver, using Zeus' Trap, involving the symbol of infinity and a stake carved from a tree struck by lightning. Artemis, revolted by Zeus torturing Prometheus, turns against him and shoots him with an arrow. Zeus uses Prometheus as a shield, but the Titan forces the arrow through his chest into Zeus' body behind him. They both die, and the curse is lifted, releasing Oliver.

**2014, "Fan Fiction."** S10E05. ***Supernatural*** (US). The Muse Calliope, irritated by the performance of a school play presenting the same plot as the series, attempts to kill all the actors, but Sam kills her with a Blessed Wooden Stake before she hurts anyone.

**2016, "Last Rites."** S05E21. ***Once Upon a Time*** (US). When Zelena learns about Hades' lies, she kills him with the Olympian Crystal he used to kill his father, Cronus. The Crystal does not simply kill the body but completely erases the victim's existence. This was what happened to Robin, Regina's lover, who took the shot Hades aimed at her.

**2018–2020, *The Magicians*** (US). Prometheus is killed by his enemies after sacrificing his powers to create golden keys, opening access to the source of magic. The evil twin, Nameless, one of the Old Gods' monstrous experiments, is shot with a god-killing bullet by Elliot. However, his immortal essence endures and enters Alice, escaping from prison in S03E13, **"Will You Play with Me?"** In season 4, Bacchus is drugged with a margarita containing deadly ambrosia and then killed by Nameless, who tears out his stone heart in **"The Bad News Bear,"** S04E03, aired in 2019; in **"The Secret Sea,"** S04E12, the Nameless's female twin, who possessed Julia, breaks Persephone's neck with a flick of her fingers.

**2022, "This Can Only End in Blood."** S04E19. ***Legacies*** (US). Zeus (Ken) is killed by Cleo, the Muse who transformed into an avenging Fury. Cleo uses the God Spear forged by Hephaestus (Jen) with God Magic out of the burned remains of the Red Oak.

### In the Mythological Past

**2001, "God Fearing Child."** S05E12. ***Xena: Warrior Princess*** (US). Hercules uses a knife made from Cronus' rib to kill Zeus. In **"Motherhood,"** S05E22, Xena becomes Slayer of Gods, protecting her daughter, Eve: Poseidon dies, hit by Hades' bolt turned aside by Xena; Discord has her head cut off when she rushes at Xena; Hephaestus throws his hammer, and Xena deflects it with her *chakram*, plunging it in his chest; she also kills Hades. Artemis' death is caused by her own arrow deflected by Xena. Athena stabs Xena but is stabbed back and also dies. Ares, who loves Xena, gives up his immortality to save Eve's and Gabrielle's lives and survives.

**2010, *Clash of the Titans*** (US, UK). Hades attempts to weaken Zeus by taking over his worshippers, but the gods only begin to die in the sequel, the **2012 *Wrath of the Titans***, when Poseidon is fatally wounded during Hades and Ares' assault on Zeus, whose power is drained to bring back Cronus. Hephaestus sacrifices himself crushed by the moving walls of the Labyrinth to let Perseus, Andromeda,

[53] For a discussion of deicide in audiovisual productions set in antiquity, see Tomasso, 2015b, 147–157, and Maurice, 2019b, 193–195.

and Poseidon's son, Agenor, enter Tartarus. Hades reconciles with Zeus and shares with him his energy, but once Perseus kills Ares and Cronus (with the Spear of Trivium), Zeus dies, and Hades loses his powers. The wholesale slaughter of the gods does not abate in the **2011** ***Immortals***. Zeus kills Ares for disobeying his order not to interfere in human affairs, but later in the fight with the Titans, Athena, Heracles, Apollo, and the other gods perish, except Poseidon, who is only gravely wounded.

Comparing the deicide and twilight of the gods in productions set in antiquity with how it is shown when the action happens today, the theme of the gods' dependence on the worship they receive is more frequent and more prominent in the stories set in the present. The dwindling numbers of worshippers correspond to the plummeting degree of relevance the gods enjoy and an inexorable march into myth and fantasy, beautiful and enchanting perhaps, but only as an element of the past and tradition, not as a real power to be reckoned with.

## Which Gods and Where?

Of special interest here is the relatively frequent ease in introducing Greek gods (and angels and demons) into fully contemporary fantasy shows for young adults. Greek gods featured in audiovisual productions set in the mythological past are a standard and natural occurrence. However, when they appear today (or in the science-fiction future), it proves the creators felt the need for their presence. Even before the last decade, the most fertile in this respect was a witch show, *Charmed*, in its fifth season (2003–). It featured Aphrodite, Ares, and Demeter, or rather goddesses of love, war, and nature, whose identities and powers the witches were granted to vanquish the escaped Titans. Once they prevailed, the witches renounced their divine powers and went back to being witches because divinity did not scramble their brains, and they retained their humanity. Allegedly, when the Titans revolted for the first time, the Elders gave the power to defeat them to a group of mortals who liked being gods so much that they dived deep into their powers, losing their humanity, and became the Olympians we know from mythology.

It seems that when a plot, even a witch-show narrative, requires a higher power, the screenwriters are reluctant to invent an entirely new image of heaven and prefer to fall back on the familiar Greek mythology, Norse mythology, or Judeo-Christian beliefs in divine power and some sort of afterlife. There is little consensus about the Greek gods' moral prestige; on the contrary, there is a prevailing sense of censure concerning their behaviour, often deemed unbecoming to such supreme beings. The mysterious Elders in *Charmed*, decimated by powerful demons, are again willing to endow their mortal champions with

powers to defend them, hoping that this time they will not turn into power-hungry Olympians, forgetting where they came from. Despite being a total fabrication with no basis in mythology and mythography, it is as neat an explanation of the origin of Greek gods as any I have ever encountered. On the other hand, the Elders are a little-known manifestation of higher beings but follow a rather strict set of moral rules. Still, they may fall into error, and it would be incorrect to call them flawless or infallible. Their immortality is uncertain; killing them does not look particularly difficult. The lead message of the show is not about the Elders but about the young girls whose mother was murdered and who have to fend for themselves using *the power of three* – the tripled strength of siblings loving each other and working together to defend the innocent. The Elders and deities of any kind are a minor concern in the series; they provide only the background of a "higher power" usually necessary in a witch show.

Three instalments of a very popular science-fiction series rebooted after over twenty years included gods modelled on the Olympians. Here, we probably deal with the need to ground all this fantasy in some familiar concept, hence the number and character of gods. In the 2003 ***Battlestar Galactica*** miniseries, the Lords of Kobol correspond approximately to the Greek pantheon with added Roman and Norse elements. These gods are more clearly defined here than in the original 1978 and 1980 series by Glen A. Larson. The 2004–2009 ***Battlestar Galactica*** is a sequel produced after the phenomenal success of the 2003 miniseries, which, in fact, served as a pilot, and a 2010 spin-off prequel to the 2004–2009 series, entitled ***Caprica*** (Ancient and Modern Greek are the languages of the Taurons in *Caprica*), followed by the 2012 ***Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome***.

It was, however, specifically the last decade that brought the Greek gods to the audiovisual fantasy as part of today's supernatural reality hidden from humans. It happens sporadically in witch shows: a selection of gods and other mythological characters come to the rescue of a supernatural plot, like in the 2005–2020 ***Supernatural*** (Atropos, Chronos, Plutus, Amazons [daughters of Ares and Harmonia], Prometheus, Artemis, Zeus, Calliope, Mercury, and Fortuna), 2015–2020 ***The Magicians*** (Bacchus, Calypso, Hades, Iris, Persephone, Prometheus, and Zeus), 2016 ***Once Upon a Time***, season 5 (Hades, his nephew Hercules, and the monster Cerberus), 2018–2020 ***Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (Circe, Hecate, and Pan), and the 2018–2022 ***Legacies*** (Cronus, Hephaestus, Prometheus, and Zeus).

Still, witch shows are not the only genre visited by the classical gods. Quite a few of them find their way to fantasy and fantasy/science-fiction productions.

For instance, the 2005–2008 ***Class of the Titans*** presents descendants of seven mythological characters, who fight Cronus, an escapee from Tartarus. The cast of characters also includes a full contingent of other Greek divinities: Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, Eris, Eros, Fortuna, Hades, Harmony, Hecate, Hephaestus, Hera, Hercules, Hermes, Morpheus, Nemesis, Pan, Persephone, Poseidon, Psyche, Thanatos, Zeus, Charon, King Minos; and monsters: Campe, Cerberus, Chimera, Giants, Gorgon, Minotaur, Sphinx, Sirens, Sybaris, Typhoeus. The action takes place in Aeolia, Atlantis, Crete, the Garden of the Hesperides, Greece, Lerna, Mount Caucasus, Nemea, New Olympia – the Canadian (*sic*!) abode of the gods, Ogygia, Plains of Asphodel, and the Underworld. The 2008–2009 series ***Valentine*** features Aphrodite, Ares, Circe, Eros, Hephaestus, Hercules, and the Titan Phoebe. In the 2010 ***Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief***, the Olympians live on the 600th floor of the Empire State Building; in the 2013 ***Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters***, next to all the teenage demigods, we meet Dionysus and Hermes. The 2010–2015 ***Lost Girl*** (particularly in Part 2 of its fifth season aired in 2014–2015) features Hades, Persephone, Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Nyx, and Iris;[54] the 2016–2022 ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** screens Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, and Dionysus, to say nothing of Helen of Troy. The 2017–2021 ***American Gods*** series co-opts Hephaestus and Demeter from the Greek Pantheon. The 2022 ***Thor: Love and Thunder*** (admittedly, not a series but a movie in a cycle) adds Zeus and his son Hercules coexisting with Norse mythology, and the 2022–? ***Sandman*** features not only Morpheus but also Calliope (this time not a monster but a cruelly mistreated, *bona fide* Muse of epic poetry). The new adaptation of Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, launched in December 2023, corresponds in its first season to the 2010 movie *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

In the twenty-first century, gods allegedly weaken and disappear if they are not worshipped. This theme, non-existent in Greek and Roman literature, has been repeatedly used in audiovisual productions. It has also been repeatedly discussed by scholars, for example, Vincent Tomasso (2015b, 147–157) and Lisa Maurice (2019b, 185–199). The theme of humanity outgrowing the belief in gods and their increasing irrelevance also occurs in the 2008–2009 ***Valentine***, featuring Aphrodite's family living in New York, with a mission to unite soulmates. If they fail and prove irrelevant, they will become mortal. The same theme makes an appearance also in the 2010 ***Clash of the Titans*** and in the last two seasons of ***Stargate SG-1*** (2005–2007), where it relates to the evil

[54] See Chapter 5, "In the Guise of a Conclusion" (p. 341).

branch of the ascended Ancients, the Ori, who use their incredibly advanced technology to make people believe they are divine and force humans to worship them under threat of annihilation.

The shows featuring Greek gods in the present reflect other prominent factors that contributed to how religion and faith were experienced during the studied period. On the one hand, the laicization of contemporary society and, on the other, the shrinking of organized religion manifesting itself in worship becoming more of a private affair than a massively attended public ceremony have been colouring the audiences' and the creators' attitude towards gods and their twilight in audiovisual narratives.

In the 2017–2021 ***American Gods***, the twilight of the gods is accompanied by a struggle between the Old Gods, who arrived on the American shores with the European immigrants and now have nowhere to go back to, and the New Gods of technological progress and media, who are getting stronger and take over worshippers. The show provides a highly suggestive image of contemporary American society. It mirrors the country's various social problems, from religious tensions to racial and ethnic issues, rural and urban poverty, the iniquities of healthcare, gun control and crime, and the ambiguous role of the media.

As mentioned above, among the old and highly multicultural group of American gods (Norse, Egyptian, Greek, African, Christian, pre-Islamic, Celtic, Slavonic, and German), there were two Olympians not featured in the novel: Hephaestus/Vulcan, who became the "god of guns" in America, and Demeter, the goddess of harvest. Hephaestus at first helped but then betrayed the Old Gods led by Odin. Demeter's life is tragic. Appealed to by a mother who cannot feed her family, she comes to rural Pennsylvania and ensures a fantastic crop but then marries Odin. When she miscarries their baby, he cannot cope with the stress and abandons her. She ends up committed to a psychiatric hospital. Fortunately, she finds peace and contentment there because the patients believe in her divinity and worship her. One of the new gods, Technical Boy, proves to be Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire for the mortals; the leader of the New Gods, Mr. World, is in fact the protagonist's (Shadow Moon's) former cellmate, Low-Key Lyesmith, that is, Loki.[55] We do not know how the series was supposed to end, whether in the same way or differently than the novel, because the show was cancelled after the third out of five seasons planned by Gaiman. Unfinished stories are a fact of life for scholars studying television series. While classicists are familiar with incomplete texts, the hope for a new papyrus coming to light

[55] My thanks to Anna Olechowski, who helped me with Mr. World's identification.

seems almost more likely than a revival of a cancelled series, especially now as the charred scrolls of Herculaneum may soon be open for business.[56]

In **"Freaks and Geeks,"** S05E11 of ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (2020), the resourceful god of wine and revelry, Dionysus, found an ideal niche for himself in today's America – the constantly partying college fraternities were able to provide him with worship necessary for his continued divinity. His chalice[57] gives one day of immortality to whoever drinks from it. The Legends need three immortals (even as temporary as one day) to operate the Loom of Fate, and for that reason, Sara challenges Dion (as he is called at the college) to a game of beer-pong and wins the cup. In addition to Dionysus, the three Moirai, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, are important characters in the series; Clotho the Spinner is even one of the Legends herself.

The fifteen-season-long and often quite revolting horror fantasy series ***Supernatural*** focuses rather on demons, devils, fallen angels, monsters, and a creator God, who is a real monster and should be removed as a threat. The show aired for fifteen years (2005–2020) but only several times included a classical deity. In the 2010 "Hammer of the Gods," S05E19, the Roman god Mercury, acting as a front-desk clerk at the Elysian Fields Hotel, sells out his guests, called in the series Pagan Gods (who all like eating human flesh), to Lucifer, a fallen angel. He kills almost all of them, including Mercury himself. In 2012, the Greek god of wealth, Plutus, was downgraded to the god of greed after losing his worshippers and ran an auction selling magical objects. He was killed by his assistant, unhappy with his boss. Chronos, the god of time, is the second divine casualty in the same year. In 2013, Artemis killed Prometheus and Zeus.

In the 2020 episode "The Gamblers," Fortuna, the Roman goddess of luck, runs a pool hall in Alaska. She is disgusted with compulsive gamblers and takes away their luck when their obsessive greed prevents them from leaving the game when they are ahead. The players whose luck she skimmed are bound to remain in the hall forever. The Winchester brothers try to play with Fortuna for the freedom of the gamblers, but they lose. However, the goddess relents on her own, seeing that the brothers are like ancient superheroes, a species she thought extinct.

[56] See Rhys Blakely's article "How Biggest Cash Prize in Archaeology Is Unlocking Ancient Scrolls," in *The Times* (2023).

[57] The chalice of Dionysus has already figured as one of the artefacts in *Warehouse 13*, Jane Espenson and D. Brent Mote's fantasy serial aired on Syfy in 2009–2014. The cup's powers are quite different in *Warehouse 13*; it changes water to wine, and drinking from it makes people drunk immediately, while smelling the bouquet causes hallucinations. On the topic of the waning power of the gods, Clotho says in the *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* episode: "The Olympians fed off devotions. Once they lost their followers, they just died off. And their enchanted objects… lost to time."

When Fortuna learns that the creator God cursed them, she tells them that after creating the universe, he added lesser gods like her and other mythological deities only because he needed someone to take the blame in case anything went wrong. Well, you cannot get a more anthropomorphic view of divinity than that, and it somehow feels even nastier than in the occasionally exceedingly brutal Greek mythology. The whole series expresses disappointment and disgust with the divine, seen as an irresponsible, immoral, self-centred force. Having created humans, god affords them neither protection nor respect and is entirely indifferent to their suffering. They must fend for themselves, hence the idea of "hunters" such as the Winchesters, devoted to neutralizing supernatural excesses. The concept is akin to monster-slaying ancient heroes; it occurs in a number of television series, for example, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, *Grimm*, *Shadowhunters*, or *First Kill*.

In a 2022 episode of the series ***Legacies*** (S04E10), **"The Story of My Life,"** a new student at the Salvatore School, Ben, is attracting monsters. He is revealed to be Prometheus, who, when his father Zeus refused to heal his lover, Ashur, stole magic from the gods. However, as he brought it too late to save Ashur, he left it to the people in his village. After millennia, he is no longer condemned to have his liver devoured and regrown daily. Instead, he is assaulted and brought to the point of death by monsters. Another student, Jen, is, in fact, the god Hephaestus. She hides at school feeling guilty for not releasing her father, Ken (Zeus), and the other Olympians from the sarcophagi she locked them in to counteract the evil Malivore's threat of rendering the gods irrelevant through the lack of worshippers. When Malivore's death ended the threat, Jen did not want to release anybody but Cronus (who seems to be combined with Chronos) because she despised and feared the others, especially her father, Zeus. However, Prometheus betrays his school friends and lets the gods out, hoping that his curse will be lifted. Jen, who wants to prevent Ken's/Zeus' revenge on her friends, surrenders willingly. As for Charlie Covell's 2024 one-season series *Kaos*, the publishing deadline allows only the briefest of comments: it presents the Olympians as a dysfunctional family of more or less psychopatic rulers, most of whom despise humans and exploit them for their own selfish benefit.

## Comparing It All

Chart 17, the last one of the chapter, presents a numerical summary of our discussion of the multiple ways in which audiovisual productions of the first two decades of this century refer to antiquity, and the specific myths and themes they feature.

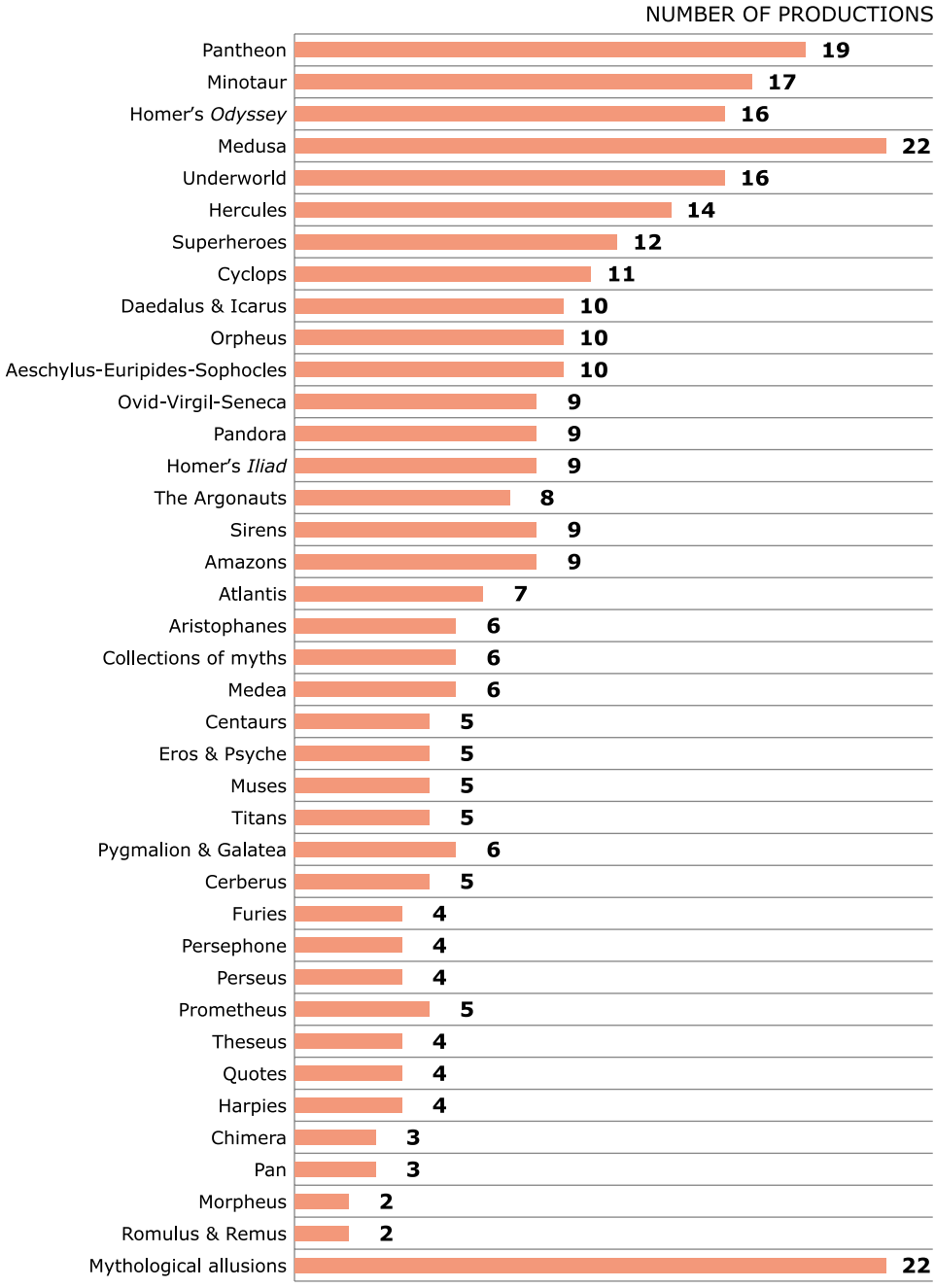



**Chart 17:** Mythology in audiovisual productions inspired by antiquity (2000–2022).

According to the chart (and in full agreement with intuitive common sense), mythological allusions of all kinds constitute the most frequent links to Classical Antiquity in audiovisual productions. On the other hand, the most frequently featured mythological character during the period in question was Medusa,[58] who, as we saw in the chapter "Handling the Data" (p. 263), has also garnered the lion's share of scholarly interest – perfectly understandable given Medusa is now firmly established as a symbol of women victims of sexual violence and oppression, as demonstrated, for instance, in the latest paraphrase of the myth, the Brazilian 2021 film ***Medusa***. Re-examination and a kinder view of characters established as monsters and villains is a frequent tendency in modern interpretations of archetypes. Medusa is one whose image evolved probably the most, as shown by such extreme makeovers of the Gorgon as a cow puppet acting as Moo-dusa in the 2014 "Nosh of the Titans," S45E10 of *Sesame Street*, and Ajax Petropolus, a male student at the Nevermore Academy who covers his snakes in a large woolen slinky hat in the 2022 series *Wednesday*. In an amusing twist, both (Miss Piggy and Ajax) can inadvertently petrify themselves, but only temporarily. An interesting variant of the petrifying power of Medusa is introduced in *Charmed*, S01E15, "Switches and Stones," where she turns to stone only those who are reluctant to recognize her tragedy and do not look at her, because she wants people to acknowledge how badly she was wronged.

In early antiquity, Medusa was mainly represented in apotropaic amulets and mosaics featuring her cut-off head as a terrifying death mask[59] meant to protect against danger when worn as a pendant or to guard the entry to a dwelling. In audiovisual productions, especially the more recent ones, Medusa is a lovely young woman – played by Kira Clavell (2001), Natalia Vodanova (2010), Uma Thurman (2010), Morgan Taylor Campbell (2019), Joy Simone (2019), Vanessa Rubio (2020) – all unquestionable beauties. The two male Gorgons are played by Philippe Bowgen (2019) and Georgie Bleu Farmer (2022), both good-looking actors. The re-imagined Medusa remains a monster today, but her monstrosity is seen as an acquired power born from a highly unjust and cruel punishment meant not for the crime's perpetrator but its victim. Commercial artists inspired by Medusa as a symbol of women victims of violence produce a variety of related works, such as a popular design for computer covers, showing a girl kept safe

[58] The frequency figures recorded in the chart are identical for mythical allusions and Medusa. Still, there is no need to draw any other conclusions from this coincidental similarity because these statistics draw only an approximate general picture.

[59] Stephen R. Wilk compares it to a rotting corpse (2000, 183–191); see also Olechowska, 2020a, 58–59.

under the protection of her snakes based on a painting by the Canadian artist Camilla d'Errico (Eyes on Walls, n.d.).

Liz Gloyn, in her stimulating chapter "Thoroughly Modern Medusa" (2020), focuses on Medusa in contemporary literature but also compares the treatment of the character in three films, the 1981 *Clash of the Titans*, its 2010 remake, and the 2010 *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. Gloyn convincingly stresses the obvious evolution from the silent and clearly feral monster, mistress in her lair, to a semi-divine, fully aware warrior trying to outwit her opponents in a dangerous and labyrinthine environment, and finally, to a cold and evil beauty whose contempt for the young intruders becomes her undoing (Gloyn, 2020, 144–149).

The next mythological figure most popular in audiovisual productions is the Minotaur, occasionally brought down to a helpless human level, like in the 2013 *Mythopolis*, where he is a small boy cared for by his mother, Medusa, or an ordinary man transformed by a curse in the 2015 *Atlantis* – indeed, a far cry from Poseidon's cruel punishment of Minos' *hybris* of which his wife, Pasiphae, was an unwilling instrument and innocent victim.[60]

The presence of the Greek pantheon[61] in full or partial contingent is even slightly more frequent than that of the Minotaur.[62] Hercules, *l'enfant chéri* of scholars, who have studied the hero from all angles and in all configurations,[63] is next in line after the Minotaur – the fact explained perhaps by the hero's excessive presence during the years leading up to the new century. Among the most often-used mythological themes are those connected to the *Odyssey* and the Underworld. Cyclops, the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, Orpheus and Eurydice, and Pandora are featured roughly at the same frequency. The remaining myths are treated occasionally; collections of myths include the best-known and well-established stories that are presumably part of our collective awareness.

A further attempt at concluding remarks is made in Chapter 5.

[60] Luc Ferry, in his 2016 analysis of the myth of the Minotaur, considers Poseidon's punishment as fitting Minos' crime according to the Ancient Greek reckoning: "Minos a trompé par le taureau, il sera trompé par lui" (289–290). Nobody seems to care about the suffering of Pasiphae, who had no part in Minos' crime but a huge one in his punishment.

[61] For the details of the presence of the gods, see the section "Which Gods and Where?," preceding Chart 17 (p. 332).

[62] See the section "Minotaur" in this chapter (p. 319).

[63] See the review of literature on Hercules in Chapter 3, section "Heroes" (p. 257).

CHAPTER 5

# IN THE GUISE OF A CONCLUSION



Zbigniew Karaszewski's artwork, based on a relief of triplicate Hekate, NG v Praze, palác Kinských, Czech Republic. Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (CC BY SA 3.0), accessed December 16, 2024, at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Relief_triplicate_Hekate_marble,_Hadrian_clasicism,_Prague_Kinsky,_NM-H10_4742,_151724.jpg; user: Zde (2014).

Chapter 5

# *IN THE GUISE OF A CONCLUSION*

Universally popular cycles of films and audiovisual series influenced by antiquity but set in today's world, like *Harry Potter* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, have attracted the attention of classical reception scholars and generated quite a few studies, if not whole branches of scholarship. Many other fascinating series for teens and young adults inspired by Graeco-Roman mythology and massively watched by people even outside their target audiences have been practically ignored by academics. The reasons for the silent treatment may include the fact that at least some of these series are very recent (and the time to study them has not yet come)[1] combined with the still lingering remnants of a lack of enthusiasm for popular culture, outrage at the frivolous manipulation of ancient material by the creators of these series, a perceived (with or without reason) low intellectual and artistic quality of anything on television, or even a simple lack of familiarity with this kind of audiovisual fare. Few *bona fide* classicists, even ones committed to studying reception, are inclined – or can afford – to spend hours upon hours watching traces of antiquity cropping up in contemporary teen stories.

I must stress that I do not intend to criticize such scholars; on the contrary, I respect their choices and look forward to continuing to enjoy and admire what they write and publish. It is in this spirit of understanding and appreciation that I dedicate this last section of my book to classicists who have not watched *Supernatural*, *Lost Girl*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Shadowhunters*, *The Magicians*, *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, *A Discovery of Witches*, *The Order*, or *Legacies*,[2] or even *American Gods*, a somewhat different case, with the hope of communicating my conviction that these may be the most tender, green leaves of the storytelling

[1] See, e.g., the 1998–2006 original series *Charmed*, analysed already a dozen times compared with the 2018–2020 reboot, which still – to my knowledge – has not attracted scholarly attention.

[2] The recent and ongoing 2022 show *Wednesday*, the latest instalment of the Addams Family adventures, has already been approved for season 2. It is another coming-of-age, school-of-magic witch show. It is listed in the Chronological Survey, but it still remains to be seen whether the extent of classical inspiration in the show increases.

tree and as such the newest favourite genre for quenching human thirst for narration.

Creators of supernatural and fantasy shows, when looking for inspiration, usually consider mythology, unprotected by any copyright, fair game. They may be tempted to use any mythology, often even a mix of two or more from different cultures. Greek mythology combined with Norse is a favourite: on a superficial level and to a certain extent, both are universally (but often rather vaguely) familiar to viewers and, for that reason, attractive to producers. To add a distinctive mark to their show, creators may introduce a new, surprising layer of the supernatural. A closer look at some of these series will serve as an illustration of this narrative device, which merges and often rationalizes mythological traditions, treating them as different mirrors reflecting the same elements of human culture, and which simultaneously grounds them in today's universal concerns, such as coming of age, access to education adapted to individual needs, the rights of women, discrimination against the Other, the divide between haves and have-nots, modern forms of slavery and its consequences, and various curtailments of freedoms, that is, all current cultural, social, and economic pressures bearing on the audiences and creators.

Productions inspired by classical mythology whose action is set in the present include several varieties of fantasy shows featuring old families of witches, schools of magic, and, in general, supernatural worlds whose existence is unknown to humans; there, next to the witches, you may most often meet vampires, werewolves, demons, mythological creatures, monsters, and, finally, gods and goddesses. The plots occasionally include a trip to the Underworld, the realm of the dead, which appears to be related to a certain extent to Hades. Additionally, most of the witch shows use some form of Latin in incantations and spells.[3] The primary target of these productions are teens and young adults, with some crossover viewers from other age categories. Having already discussed productions visited by Greek gods in the previous chapter, I would like to single out these shows, discuss how they fare in the twenty-first century, and explore the themes that tie them to Classical Antiquity.

[3] Homeric Greek is used in incantations spoken by Merlin as dragon lord in the BBC's 2008–2012 *Merlin*, an enchanting and somewhat precipitously cancelled show set in early Arthurian England. Katarzyna Marciniak transcribed Merlin's incantations from the soundtrack, and then verified the texts with Nicholas Ostler, who originally wrote them for the BBC (Marciniak, forthcoming a).

## Classically Inspired Witch Shows[4]

They began airing in the late twentieth century with the eight-season 1998–2006 *Charmed* (followed two decades later by a reboot of the original series broadcast in four seasons between 2018 and 2022 – under the same title – *Charmed*). The popularity of witch shows during the first two decades of the century and beyond, undoubtedly also fuelled by the global *Harry Potter* phenomenon, has been only partially due to classically inspired productions, which appear to constitute a minority among the genre – a fact that needs to be acknowledged at the outset.[5]

The series ***Charmed*** (1998–2006) only introduces mythological aspects in season 4 (2001–2002). After their mother's violent death, three young girls, direct descendants of a powerful magical family, learn they are exceptional witches, primarily when they work together as a trio. They help save innocents attacked by demons and other evil forces, some of which hail from antiquity, for example, Furies, Nymphs, Sirens, Muses, and Titans, including Cronus. To be able to fight the Titans, the Elders give the three witches divine powers and make them become new versions of Aphrodite, Ares, and Demeter (the goddesses of love, war, and nature). Contrary to what the "original" Olympians did, after defeating the Titans, the Charmed Ones return their powers to the Elders and quietly go back to being good witches. Ordinary people have no clue about the struggles within the supernatural world and the protection ensured by the Charmed Ones.

In ***Witches of East End*** (2013–2014), an ancient family of witches, goddesses of Norse mythology, live in today's world but are prohibited by Asgard from using their magical powers. The witches prevent a global disaster planned

[4] As all these shows are listed in the Chronological Survey and then discussed in Chapter 4, in the section "Mapping Mythological Content," there may be some overlap with the data provided here.

[5] Among the popular shows unrelated to classical mythology are, e.g., the following series: *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1996–2003); *Hex* (2004–2005); *Eastwick* (2009); *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–2017); *The Secret Circle* (2011–2012); *Switch* (2012); *Coven* (2013), the third instalment of *American Horror Story*; *The Originals* (2013–2018); *Penny Dreadful* (2014–2016); *Salem* (2014–2017); *The Worst Witch* (2017–2020); *Midnight Texas* (2017–2018); *Light as a Feather* (2018–2019); *The Bureau of Magical Things* (2018–2021); *Always a Witch* / *Siempre Bruja* (2019–2020); *The Witcher* (2019–2024?); *Cursed* (2020); *Motherland: Fort Salem* (2020–2022); *The Nevers* (2021–2023); *WandaVision* (2021); *Scaredy Cats* (2021); *Fate: The Winx Saga* (2021–2022); *Shadow and Bone* (2021–2023); *Mayfair Witches* (2023–2025). These witch series may also focus on vampires, gentle or brutal magic, horror, school and coming-of-age stories, angelic/satanic themes, other supernatural creatures, and science-fiction fantasy, including time travel. Most of the shows target young adults, but some are obviously meant for children and younger teens.

by other Asgard deities. There is no Greek mythological inspiration, but for some strange reason the show features Latin spells and a Latin grimoire instead of an Old Norse one written with runes. Still, the irresponsible behaviour of some of the Asgard gods and their contempt for the mortals make them seem closely related to the Olympians.

***The Magicians*** (2015–2020) is a fantasy series in which sorcerers, trained at a school of magic, are secretly playing an active part in today's society, which is unaware of their existence. This coming-of-age story is about exceptionally talented and psychologically complex youngsters shown against the background of a separate, not easily accessible magical world with its gods. Classical elements include the Underworld, Hades and Persephone, Dionysus, and Centaurs, who (probably as the only truly wise mythological creatures) run a scientifically advanced medical facility. The magical world coexists with the human world and contributes to its economy and safety but remains hidden even in moments of grave danger. The young protagonists, naturally, save the world from a rather sinister end and do it heroically, some of them dying in the process.

In ***Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments*** (2016–2019), humans (called "mundanes") are unaware of the complex hidden world composed of Shadowhunters with angelic blood (the Nephilim), "downworlders" (vampires, werewolves, warlocks, and Fair Folk, such as Seelies, who have their own queen and a separate realm), powerful demons, and other creatures from Hell. A quest for the Mortal Cup, which controls demons and can create new Shadowhunters, drives the plot, already naturally complicated by several romances. Descent to a cross between biblical and medieval Hell becomes necessary at some point. Shadowhunters and downworlders use Latin spells and phrases. Exceptional courage, skills, and heart-rending personal sacrifice of the protagonists thwart the intricate design to take control of the world by millennia-old quasi-biblical forces of Hell.

***A Discovery of Witches*** (2018–2022) is a fantasy involving old families of witches, vampires, and demons. Time travel allows us to observe Elizabethan England, France, and even the Habsburg Empire. Remains of Artemis' temple at Sept-Tours in Auvergne (France) retain ancient powers and favour practising so-called higher magics. The goddess herself actively assists witches who are able to appeal to her. Philippe de Clermont and other ancient vampires speak Ancient Greek, Latin, and Old French. A masque performed at the Habsburg court retells the myth of Selene and Endymion. Strong connections to Classical Antiquity in the three novels adapted in the series are downplayed or eliminated (see the section on *A Discovery of Witches*, later in this chapter, p. 360).

The 2018–2022 ***Charmed*** is a reboot of the 1998–2006 series with some differences. The motif of Tartarus, the deepest part of Hell, "where the worst incarcerate their worst," is one of the favourite classically inspired concepts occurring in audiovisual series of the twenty-first century. Some mythological monsters, Medusa and Lamia, appear but are vanquished by the trio of witches who use Latin incantations and spells when required. However, their grimoire (called the Book of Shadows) seems to be written in English.

The series ***Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*** (2018–2020) features an enchanting mosaic composed of an old family of witches, a school of magic, coming of age, dark satirical fantasy, witchcraft, horror, and Latin incantations. Some of the characters and places are inspired by mythology, namely Circe, Hecate, Medusa, Pan, and the Underworld.

***Legacies*** (2018–2022)[6] is a witch-show/school-of-magic/coming-of-age story, with vampires, hybrids and "tribrids," monsters, and many other elements borrowed from Greek mythology, including a Muse, the Sphinx, Prometheus, and the Olympic gods. A hidden world of mythical creatures and old families with supernatural abilities and a long history of conflict and struggle for dominance. Against that uneasy background, a highly diverse new generation of magic beings is being trained at the Salvatore Boarding School for the Young and Gifted.

In ***The Order*** (2019–2020), an old and powerful secret society of magicians within a small elite university teaches magic to specially recruited students and prepares them for leading roles in society at large. It often interacts violently with other secret movements dealing with magic and is prone to corruption and abuse. It is a witch/werewolf/school-of-magic show with solid horror overtones. Mythological elements: Lycaon and his daughter Psophis, the existence of magical objects, such as the Cretan loom built by Daedalus. There are many Latin incantations, which are less sloppy than the usual fare in witch shows.

***Wednesday*** (2022–) is set at Nevermore Academy, a school for special-abilities students founded by the Addams Family several generations ago. Wednesday Addams, a girl of unusual gifts and character, is brought there by her parents after being expelled from her previous school for rather mercilessly dealing with her younger brother's school bullies. At the Academy, she uncovers a horrific supernatural plot against all specially gifted people like her and prevents a disaster. Students at Nevermore Academy include a male Gorgon, a group of Sirens, and werewolves. Among the teachers are powerful good

[6] This is the final spin-off of *The Vampire Diaries* following *The Originals* and *The Originals: Awakening*, and the only one with mythological themes.

witches and a single evil one. We shall have to wait for season 2 to see what happens next.

## Classically Inspired Quests

A quest usually takes the basic form of a journey to find an important hidden object.[7] It is part of the plot in several popular fantasy television series, ***Grimm*** (2011–2017),[8] ***The Magicians*** (2015–2020), the time-travelling ***DC's Legends of Tomorrow*** (2016–2022),[9] and ***Shadowhunters*** (2016–2019), as well as, of course, in ***The Librarian: Quest for the Spear***, a television movie aired on TNT, on December 5, 2004, or in the 2006 blockbuster ***The Da Vinci Code***, based on Dan Brown's 2004 novel. *The Librarian* tells the story of the attempted theft of one of three pieces of the Spear of Destiny – otherwise known as the Holy Lance or Lance of Longinus, the centurion who pierced Christ's side to check if death occurred – which must be recovered before the villains find the other two sections and gain control over the fate of the world.

*Grimm*'s seasons 5–6 include a similar variant of the quest, which involves a piece of a wooden rod hidden by the Knights Templar after the 1204 sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade. The principal character, Nick the Grimm, recovers the "stick" – as he calls it – from the catacombs of an old church in the Black Forest. It has dramatic healing powers, and its story is revealed in the series finale (S06E13). When all the pieces are reassembled, the rod can resurrect the dead. It is suggested that it belonged to Moses or his brother, Aaron, and was a much older piece of wood than Longinus' spear.

In S03E01 of *The Magicians*, "The Tale of the Seven Keys," after Quentin Coldwater killed Ember, one of the two gods of the magical realm of Fillory, the power of wielding magic was withdrawn by the Old Gods. However, a possibility to redeem the deicide was offered in the form of a sea-voyage quest seeking the seven magical keys created in the past by Prometheus to bring magic back

[7] Contrary to Campbell's hero's journey template, the shows discussed here all feature strong female protagonists.

[8] Based on stories from the Brothers Grimm collection of fairy stories, the series is a fantasy/horror police procedural that could just as well have been entitled *Grimm the Monster Slayer*, as the premise of a supernatural mission genetically transmitted to a human is very similar to the concept and mission of a vampire slayer in the *Buffy* series.

[9] This and the following series are included in the Chronological Survey because of the use of several mythological motifs. *Grimm* and *The Da Vinci Code*, inspired by post-classical themes, are not listed in the Survey.

in case it was ever taken away. The restoration of magic is finalized only in the last episode of the season, "Will You Play with Me?," S03E13.

*DC's Legends of Tomorrow* S02E08 introduced the quest for the Spear of Destiny as one of its narrative arcs and endowed the object with the power to rewrite reality. The artefact was divided into four parts, and the fragments were hidden at various locations and periods of history – travelling in the time-ship *Waverider* makes such schemes feasible. One piece was hidden in King Arthur's England (507 CE), where Stargirl, a member of the 1942 Justice Society of America and protector of the Spear of Destiny, takes on the name and the role of Merlin, Arthur's wise magician advisor. The legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table is presented as an implementation of Stargirl's ideals. The crew of the *Waverider* convinces Merlin/Stargirl to surrender the fragment of the Spear (S02E12, "Camelot/3000"). When they leave for their own time (2017), Stargirl stays in Camelot as King Arthur's consort.

Another quest featured in *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* is the quest for the three pieces of the Loom of Fate enchanted to look like rings. The Loom was used by the three Fates to determine people's destinies. Clotho, judging the Loom to be an object too powerful and detrimental to humans' free will, split it into three parts, gave them the appearance of rings, and dispersed them in time. The Legends, including Clotho, participate in the quest to recover the Loom, competing with Lachesis and Atropos. The Loom is incredibly powerful: it can change reality, bring back the dead, manipulate time, and give eternal life. It can be operated only by immortals, and the Legends have to hoodwink it by drinking from Dionysus' chalice, which grants immortality for one day (see Chapter 4, section "Which Gods and Where?," p. 332). After an extensive (seasons 5 and early 6) and eventful quest, the Legends manage to explode the finally reassembled Loom and render the Fates mortal, preventing them from future interference. The potential consequences for the world of such a reversal, which could, in fact, render moot the power of Ananke, are not explored in the series.

It is not the only version of a loom endowed with powerful magic in twenty-first-century audiovisual series; already in the 2001 episode "When Fates Collide," S06E18 of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Julius Caesar was using the loom of the Fates to change reality, making him rule Rome with Xena. Gabrielle exploded the loom, forcing the alternate world's erasure and a return to normality. In the 2019–2020 *The Order*, we encounter a mysterious Cretan[10] loom that can open

[10] Daedalus built it and placed it in the Labyrinth as a precaution in case he could not find his way out. It is spelt "Cretian" in the English subtitles.

portals to anywhere. The Sons of Prometheus bring it to negotiations with the Order of the Blue Rose. Vera, the Grand Magus of the Order, uses it to cause and later seal a Tartarus eruption.

*Shadowhunters*' principal narrative driver is the quest for a powerful object called the Mortal Cup, one of three items the Angel Raziel gave to the Nephilim (Shadowhunters are the Angel's descendants, having inherited his blood in various degrees of purity). The other two are a sword and a mirror, both preserved at the Nephilim's secret headquarters in Idris (Clare, 2007, 238). The Mortal Cup grants the holder complete power over demons. It may transform "mundanes," regular humans, into Shadowhunters able to see the other supernatural beings and acquire runes, providing them with unique skills.

The common characteristic of any quest is the dramatic suspense it generates through featuring a race between good and evil; if evil wins, the world as we know it ends. The quest motif is used in another witch show, the delightfully funny 2018–2020 *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, where classical elements mingle freely with Christian or Wiccan imaginings of Hell. In Part 3 of the series, this unusual combination produces a quest for the "unholy regalia" or the crown of King Herod, the bowl in which Pontius Pilate washed his hands, and the silver coins Judas was paid for betraying Jesus. The successful finder will rule Hell, with Sabrina as the contender able to control its inhabitants. Lucifer is overthrown, and Sabrina eventually takes on the mantle of a modern Queen of Hell. The danger to the world is not limited to pseudo-Christian imagery: a coven of powerful mythological beings – Pan, Medusa, and Circe – attempt to bring back "the Green God," the essential power of Nature, a force unaffiliated with the Greek pantheon, who would destroy all human beings, and restore the world to its original wilderness. Unsurprisingly, Sabrina and her friends manage to prevent this apocalypse.

Circe makes an effective move by turning Sabrina's aunt into a spider, and human football players into (what else?) pigs. Members of Sabrina's coven who lost their powers vanquishing Lucifer finally grasp that only the Greek goddess Hecate could be their protector and switch their allegiance to her. As a last resort, they appeal in Latin to Hecate, asking her to assist them in overpowering the mythological coven. An Italian classicist from Bologna, Alessia Borriello, studied the relationship of their magic formulas to classical Latin and concluded that they are:

> pastiches created from distorted Latin expressions and usages of non-literary Latin, coloured by loanwords from poetic memory, as well as from

> the Bible. This traditional material is also filtered through modern tools available on the internet, such as e-books of Wiccan Latin spells or translation platforms, through which modern language speakers produce approximate translations from and into Latin. It being understood that the genre of the magical writing of the *defixiones* was characterized in principle by a distorted application of Latin morphology and syntax, Sabrina's spells add mistakes due to "translationism," semantic diffraction, and grammar mistakes influenced by the usage of modern English. (Borriello, 2022; see also 2020a; 2020b)

Borriello's assessment, supported by her solid grammatical analysis, applies not only to the use of Latin in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* but to most of the witch shows produced in the twenty-first century.

The Chronological Survey provides information on the use of classical languages in audiovisual productions: twenty productions use some form of Latin, whether correct, classical, or any other kind, including two cases of reconstructed archaic Latin featured in productions set in Roman mythology/prehistory, and one case of classical Latin sounding slightly Italian, spoken[11] by Romans (played by Italian actors) in the 2020–2022 series *Barbaren*, where Germanic tribes speak modern German.

## More about a Few Selected Classically Inspired Shows

Basic data on shows discussed here are provided in the Chronological Survey, as well as in the Chapter 4 section "Mapping Mythological Content" (p. 294), and in this chapter, in sections "Classically Inspired Witch Shows" and "Classically Inspired Quests" (pp. 345, 348, respectively). It seems helpful to provide more data on classical inspirations discernible in these productions and reflect on what they are and how and why they have been introduced.

[11] An interesting and accurate commentary on the Latin dialogue in the first episode by Luke Ranieri can be found on the polýMATHY channel on YouTube (2020).

## *Supernatural* (2005–2020)[12]

This American small-town "slayer" roadshow is a cross between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Grimm*, *Shadowhunters*, and even the short-lived 2022 teen vampire horror *First Kill*. Two brothers trained by their father to fight supernatural creatures drive across the country trying to find the killers of their mother and, at the same time, explore the urban legends of provincial America. They fight and kill evil supernatural creatures who bring horror and death to families of ordinary people.

During the fifteen seasons of the series, a host of angels and demons are introduced to be killed or otherwise disposed of. The main antagonist of the brothers and a disdainful enemy of all creation is a rather mean primordial God, who assumes human form to manipulate the brothers for his amusement. Several Greek and two Roman deities interspersed in the extended plot were already mentioned in Chapter 4, section "Which Gods and Where?" (p. 333), but a mythological monster, Medusa (called Gorgon), is featured too (S14E14, "Ouroboros," 2019), as well as Atropos (S06E17, "My Heart Will Go On," 2011), who did not like it when angels interfered with the past and saved RMS *Titanic* from its watery doom. Horror is a vital element of the show, hence the recurring template of the monster of the week. Horror in *Supernatural* occasionally proves excessively revolting, like in the case of a monstrous race of Amazons, who seduce mortals and almost instantly produce fast-maturing female offspring who promptly kill their fathers. Calliope (S10E05, "Fan Fiction," 2014), upgraded here from a Muse to a Goddess of Epic Poetry, is, in fact, a monster who kidnaps participants in a musical performance of a fan-fiction version of *Supernatural* to devour them along with the author at the end of the play. She is killed before she is able to implement her nasty plan.

The roadshow of the Winchester brothers ends when they finally neutralize the primordial God they see as a force of evil and the greatest threat to the world. They render him mortal and let him live out his remaining years as a man. The only supernatural beings that they would not try to vanquish are, as far as I can tell, Prometheus, Artemis, and Fortuna, who all cared for humans and their world to various degrees. The classical aspect of the show remains an obvious but minor trait from the perspective of its extremely convoluted, fifteen-season-long narrative no viewer could claim to have fully grasped and remembered.

[12] The short-lived, one-season prequel entitled *Winchesters* (2022–2023) features various monsters but no Greek mythological inspirations.

## *Lost Girl* (2010–2015)

The series displays a magical world of supernatural beings and monsters coexisting with humans but hidden from them. Its structure and hierarchy reflect the division between good and evil. The population of the hidden world is composed of two kinds of competing supernatural creatures called light and dark Fae, each trying to get the upper hand. Among both kinds, there are beings known from various mythologies and folklore. The protagonist, Bo Dennis, was brought up by humans and only learned about being a Fae (a Succubus) after she accidentally killed her boyfriend by absorbing his life force in a kiss. The series is a classic hero's journey during which Bo leaves her human family to enter the world of the Fae. She gradually (not before the beginning of the fifth season) becomes conscious of her true identity and lineage and ends up revealed – believe it or not – to be the daughter of Hades.

In *Lost Girl*, the new supernatural layer is provided by the existence of the Fae; the Greek gods are explained away as the most potent ancient Fae family. To make things even more eclectic, the Underworld is the Norse Valhalla ruled by Freya, the strict Mistress of Valkyries. Valkyries are psychopomps accompanying the souls of the deceased to the Underworld. However, as often happens with fantasy shows (for example, *Supernatural*), the plot of *Lost Girl* gets so convoluted that only an obsessive viewer (or a weirdly motivated researcher), who watches the series more than once, can avoid getting confused. I will attempt here to collect various bits of information dispersed all along the five seasons (but especially in season 5) and reduce them to a basic but still reasonably detailed storyline to determine in what way the Greek pantheon functions in *Lost Girl* and whether it is comparable to what is happening in other series.

Here goes. In the far-away mythological era, the three divine brothers, Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon, were drawing lots to determine the scope of their dominions; Hades drew the short straw for the Underworld on purpose: he wanted his preparations for a future bid for all three realms to remain hidden. Hades' plans for global domination required more supernatural power and no interference from his divine family. Unfortunately, his movements were restricted to his kingdom, Tartarus, the darker part of the Underworld. Once in Valhalla, the upper part of the Underworld, Tartarus can be reached by an elevator. However, to leave Tartarus, Hades could not just take the same elevator up to the surface. The series does not provide a clear timeline for his actions, but we know that at some point he was able to banish the other gods from the world of the living and deprive them of their ability to take physical form. Their existence as rather helpless (but not mindless) spirits prevented their active interference

for a while. Hades' attempt to gain more power relied on fathering a child with a powerful but not ancient Fae. Once the child, with whom Hades would retain a supernatural connection, grew up, he would be able to use the child as a conduit and eventually guide it to release him from Tartarus and join his plans to annihilate all life in preparation for creating an entirely new world under his dominion. A version of this motif (destruction of the existing world, making room for a new one) also occurs in the 2013–2017 *Sleepy Hollow* and in the 2018–2020 *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*.

Hades' wife, Persephone, who had to stay in the Underworld for 6,000 years (?), was given a magic Artemis candle by Demeter to light her way back. She conspired with the spirits of Zeus (Zee), Hera (Heratio), and their daughter, Iris/Nyx, and gave the candle to an unsuspecting and naive Bo during her visit to the Underworld, asking her to light the candle upon her return to the world of the living. When Bo lights the candle, the flame allows the divine spirits to possess the bodies of three randomly selected humans. They start wreaking havoc in the Fae and human worlds but cannot steal the adamantine music box Hades gave to Bo. With the box, Bo can release him from Tartarus and trap any other divine spirit inside.

The box comes in handy when Bo has to deal with Iris/Nyx. Iris' parents (Zeus and Hera) twinned her with Nyx, the primordial source of evil, but made her wear a bracelet that blocked Nyx's power. The human she possesses is a volatile teenager, who casually removes the bracelet and turns whatever she touches to ashes. Bo traps Nyx in the music box; unfortunately, Iris does not survive the separation from her twin. Hephaestus (called Hepha) makes Bo a weapon from adamantine and gold in the shape of a horseshoe, which she uses to great effect in her fight with Hera and Zeus. With the help of a Siren, Bo banishes Zeus, together with Hera, to Myth, a limbo for the gods, where they become powerless has-beens.

Hades continues his bid for domination and, as a precaution and guarantee for the future, takes the form of Bo to seduce Tamsin, who, as a Valkyrie, promptly gives birth to a fast-growing daughter and dies. In the final battle with Hades, Bo uses the life force of all the people around her and burns out her father's power, who then seems to disintegrate. It is hinted that he may try using his new weapon again: Dagny, the daughter he has with Tamsin. Despite this handy pretext, it is unlikely that a continuation of the series would now be undertaken, over seven years after the final episode was aired.[13]

[13] However, stranger things have occurred in the history of audiovisual series, e.g., season 4 of Rob Thomas's *Veronica Mars* aired in 2019, twelve years after the finale of season 3, with the

Again, like in the other shows set in the present, the writers of *Lost Girl* seem convinced that Greek mythology, other world mythologies, and various manifestations of folklore are an obvious and natural part of the hidden, supernatural world in which their plot develops. They identify and use the mythological elements that may explain how their fantastic stories remain quasi-realistic and almost believable within the logic of the supernatural. Nothing is more natural than to call, when needed, on well-established themes and characters, embroidering on that millennia-old canvas with a thin thread of original fantasy instead of inventing (and convincingly explaining) something entirely new.

The series' audiovisual reception of the gods is not particularly gentle to their image. Hades is the one whose image suffered the most of all the Olympians. While in ancient sources he ruled the Underworld without harbouring any resentments against Zeus and the world of the living, he soon began to be confused with Satan. He arrived on the twenty-first-century audiovisual scene as a power-hungry megalomaniac, expert manipulator, and ruthless narcissist (see Maurice, 2019b, 57–65).

## *Sleepy Hollow* (2013–2017)

A supernatural historical spy story cum police procedural combines American history, the Headless Horseman of Washington Irving's 1820 short story with a variant of Sumerian and Greek mythology, the Bible, and contemporary American reality. President Washington's spy, Ichabod Crane, wakes up from over 200 years of enchanted sleep in 2013. He teams up with his fellow Witness of Revelation, police officer Abigail Mills, and fights supernatural forces in seven biblical stages called tribulations. After Abigail dies in the fight with Pandora and the Sumerian Hidden God, Ichabod discovers her successor, a young girl named Molly, daughter of Diana Thomas from Homeland Security. Protecting the girl, who is too young to participate in the struggle, Ichabod and Diana successfully go through the unfolding trials and even save the President, who gratefully grants Ichabod the American citizenship he seemed not to have acquired during his enchanted sleep.

Pandora's narrative fills the entire season 3 of the series. Its details are discussed in Chapter 4, section "Pandora" (p. 322). The episode "Delaware"

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same actors playing the main roles. Other notable examples include, e.g., the animated *Clone High* (2002 and 2023) and live-action *Twin Peaks* (1990 and 2017) – this last title was suggested by Ewa Balcerzyk-Atys.

(S03E17) mentions an entry to the Underworld allegedly used by Orpheus. Other classical inspirations occur in the final season 4: episodes 9, 10, 11, and 13. The first of these episodes ("Child's Play") features Molly's imaginary friend from childhood, brought to life as a golem whose mission is to kill Molly's enemies. Unfortunately, his powers of perception are rudimentary and he cannot distinguish enemies from friends. Muses Clio, Euterpe, and Thalia are invoked (in Greek) and manage to vanquish the golem, which, given the Judaic origins of the creature, is surprising. It may indicate that the writers saw Greek mythology as more familiar to the audience. In the next episode ("Insatiable"), people are thrown into an orgy of eating, resulting in their death by spontaneous combustion. Ichabod Crane compares it to the curse of a Greek mythological figure, Erysichthon of Thessaly, punished by insatiable hunger by Demeter, whose trees he dared to cut down. He wasted all his possessions on food and died eating his flesh (Ov., *Met*. 8.738–884). The demon who causes the death by gluttony was trapped and defeated by exposure to concentrated gold, an effective manoeuvre suggested by Ichabod.

In episode 11, "The Way of the Gun," the magical *arma mutata* was made in the same forge as Ares' armour, containing pieces of famous blades, including Excalibur. The only way to destroy it was to chant: "Promethean flame, by the hand of your master Vulcan, I call you forth. Weapon of war, return to the conflagration that shaped you. Solis flamma!" It is unclear whether Excalibur was forged long before Arthur came around or if Ichabod is unsure of the chronology. In the final episode 13, "Freedom," the demon Jobe explains in a rather cryptic demonic Latin how to kill an immortal: "You have to go to Hell and get the philosopher's stone, which will allow you to kill an immortal."

## *The Magicians* (2015–2020)

This very successful adaptation of Lev Grossman's fabulous trilogy, *The Magicians* (2009), *The Magician King* (2011), and *The Magician's Land* (2014), features Persephone in six episodes (S01E11–13, S02E12, S03E05, and S04E12), Bacchus in three (S03E01, S04E02, and S04E03), and Hades in two (in 2018 in S03E10, "The Art of the Deal", and in 2020 in S05E10, "Purgatory"). The basic reality of magic in the world of humans kept in blissful ignorance of anything supernatural is transformed by the existence of another hidden realm (Fillory) with gods and kings who are seemingly only described in children's books but, in fact, are quite real for those who can enter this realm. This state of affairs is called the multiverse, and it was created by the "Old Gods," who also created

the mythological gods. The motif of the Olympians being a secondary wave of divinities created by a primeval power is also used in *Supernatural* and *Sleepy Hollow*.

Immortal beings known from classical mythology featured in the series include Prometheus, who created a set of seven powerful magical keys that magicians can use to open portals and continue the quest for the rest of the keys. Another Greek deity is Persephone, called Our Lady Underground; despite her great power, she is killed by the twin sister of the Nameless god. The Old Gods mistakenly created the twins, and because they had many magical powers and were the only deities impossible to kill, they had to be and were imprisoned for a long time. Hades then ruled the Underworld together with his Queen Persephone. When she is murdered, Hades hides in despair, devastated by his wife's death and her uncertain existence because there is no place to go for killed immortal gods. *The Magicians* offer a rare representation of Hades as a "humanized" and relatable god, not a villain and a Satan doppelganger.

Bacchus, the god of revelry and excess, is killed by Nameless, who tears out and devours his stone heart, the source of Bacchus' power. Iris was originally a human magician. She became a goddess by taking away magical power from Nameless's twin sister. She was then able to create new worlds. All these new versions of ancient gods have no regard for humans and usually treat them as toys.

The first season of *The Magicians* is a school/coming-of-age story describing the secret Brakebills University for Magical Pedagogy, where the main characters learn to use magic. The remaining seasons present the adventures of the young magicians after graduation from Brakebills, leading up to preventing an apocalypse.

## *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* (2016–2019)

The Clave (from Latin *clavis*) is a general assembly of all Shadowhunters in their secret home of Idris, securely protected against demons and other creatures from Hell by a system of sentinel towers. The Council and its executive head, the Consul, serve as government and highest authority over all Shadowhunters, wherever they are stationed. In capital cities of all the largest countries in the world, there are Shadowhunters' missions called Institutes.

Latin maxims are repeated by Shadowhunters in specific situations and reinforced with their English translations. When a Shadowhunter dies, his friends say: *Ave atque vale* ("Hail and farewell!"). Curiously, werewolves also honour

their fallen in Latin and English: *Beati bellicosi!* ("Blessed are the warriors"). Shadowhunters live under a military set of rules. Occasionally, the far-away Clave seems like an indifferent and ill-informed administration, making them use the saying *Dura lex sed lex* ("The law is hard but it is the law"). When they feel rebellious and misunderstood, they may say: *Lex mala lex nulla* ("A bad law is no law"). In some rituals, they quote Horace (*Carm*. 4.7): *Pulvis et umbra sumus* ("We are but dust and shadows"; the only quotation from Horace in the whole corpus of twenty-first-century series). Two quotations from Virgil's *Aeneid* are also well known: at the entrance to the City of Bones, where Shadowhunters' highest moral authority, the Silent Brothers, reside, there is a sign, *Nephilim descensus Averno facilis est* ("To the Nephilim, the descent into hell is easy"; *Aen*. 6.126). To confirm that they would do what they must even if it is impossibly difficult, the Shadowhunters may quote *Aeneid* 7.312: *Acheronta movebo*. Which they translate as: "I will raise hell."

Among some other Latin phrases, there is a motto on the Lightwood family necklace used to lure the warlock Magnus Bane, who hundreds of years earlier gave it to his then-lover, the vampire Camille: *Amor verus numquam moritur* ("True love never dies"). The Iron Sisters are members of a monastic congregation (similar to the Silent Brothers in the City of Bones) situated at the Adamant Citadel on the volcanic plain. They are long-lived, celibate, and non-fighting craftswomen, who forge weapons for Shadowhunters from the heavenly metal Adamas, and they produce all the other angelic gear needed for fighting demons. They lead a strictly sequestered life. Their motto is *Ignis aurum probat*, translated as "Fire tests gold." In cases of extreme necessity, they lend to Shadowhunters a mysterious angelic weapon called *aegis* (a shield).

## *American Gods* (2017–2021)

The audiovisual adaptation of Neil Gaiman's 2001 remarkable fantasy novel presents his vision of a face-off between the beliefs immigrants brought to America from their respective homelands and the priorities and social forces of the new world they helped to build. These old beliefs and powerful new factors are embodied in divine figures from classical, Egyptian, African, Norse, Slavonic, and other mythologies, in conflict with the contemporary reality of technology, media, and the modern American psyche fighting the Old Gods for supremacy, that is, for worshippers without whom gods of any origins fade away. The rich diversity of mythologies participating in this imaginative saga mirrors the ethnic and cultural diversity of American society.

Three Ancient Greek mythological figures play important roles in the series. First, Hephaestus or Vulcan invents and manufactures arms. Then, Demeter, goddess of the harvest, responds to an individual plea and later remains in America. In mythology, the goddess is a tragic figure of a mother whose daughter has been kidnapped and whose despair stops the natural progression of seasons. Gaiman translates her tragedy into contemporary terms making it more relatable to twenty-first-century audiences. In the series, Demeter eventually marries Odin (Mr. Wednesday), who abandons her after she has a miscarriage, an archetypal egotistic male predictably unable of compassion and unwilling to deal with his wife's sorrow. When she tries to publicly reveal her identity, a judge commits her to a psychiatric facility where, surprisingly, she thrives surrounded by patients who recognize her divinity and worship her. Odin, needing her help in the war with the New Gods, returns and convinces her to leave the hospital, but once she does, she disappears, refusing to work with someone who had deserted her in a moment of great need.

The third classical figure is Argus Panoptes, still able to perform his "all-seeing" function from Greek mythology. Absent in the novel and featured only in the series, like the previous two, he is the god of surveillance working for the New Gods. Contrary to *A Discovery of Witches*, discussed next, the classical inspirations represented by divinities of the Greek pantheon play a direct role in the series. Whether they were added by Gaiman or by the show's writers with his agreement, they are crucial in properly presenting the all-inclusive melting pot of American culture. Despite this purposeful addition of classical gods, Gaiman's frequent references in the novel to Herodotus, including the so-called Solon's maxim, "Call no man happy until he is dead,"[14] were eliminated in the series. Shadow Moon, the protagonist of the story, confirms in the first episode that he read hundreds of mainly historical books in prison but does not mention either *Histories* or Herodotus.

In another departure from the novel, there are fewer New Gods in the series; in sync with various social changes and technological advances which took place between 2001, the year when the novel was published, and 2017, when the series was launched, the New Gods' powers and fields of expertise have changed enough for a potential multiplication of gods responsible for the new inventions, but instead the gods themselves underwent a succession of metamorphoses and their number shrank, a move that could have been caused

[14] The name of the Greek historian is mentioned eleven times in the book; the phrase "Call no man happy" appears there three times. See also Felton, 2015, 1.

by the practical need to limit the number of actors. The fourth and fifth seasons that Gaiman counted on never materialized, leaving the viewers and the creators without a satisfying finale, an unfortunate result of a cancellation before the show reaches its natural conclusion.[15]

## *A Discovery of Witches* (2018–2022)

Deborah Harkness's 2011–2014 *All Souls Trilogy* is a well-written and absorbing novel for people who are not allergic to imaginative blends of recognizable history and fantasy. Diana Bishop, a powerful witch and a Yale professor of history of science with a special interest in alchemy, fell in love, against all odds and taboos, with a 1,500-year-old vampire and Oxford scientist, Matthew de Claremont. When Diana saw for the first time her future father-in-law, Philippe de Claremont, a thousands-year-old vampire, she found herself "gazing into the tawny eyes of a Greek god… He was, quite simply, the most breathtaking creature [she] had ever seen" (Harkness, 2014, loc. 682). When the books were adapted into a three-season television series and released on HBO Max, the mythological references present in the three novels were at best only hinted at but, as a rule, almost entirely excised from the plot. Philippe's resemblance to a Greek god is among the latter, as are: Philippe's real name, which he uses in his prayer to Artemis, the song he sings about Peleus and Thetis, and his son's explanation of the origin of the concept of the *paterfamilias*. Here is one of the relevant passages from the novel, with the changed words in bold and their substitution in the series in square brackets:

> Artemis Agroterê, renowned huntress, **Alcides Leontothymos beseeches** [I beseech] you to hold this child Diana in your hand. Artemis Lykeiê, lady of the wolves, protect her in every way. Artemis Patrôia, goddess of my ancestors, bless her with children so that my lineage continues. […] Artemis Phôsphoros, bring the light of your wisdom when she is in darkness. Artemis Upis, watch over your namesake during her journey in this **world** [Earth]. (Harkness, 2014, loc. 740–741)

[15] For a deeper analysis of the series *American Gods*, see Olechowska and Pszczolińska, 2023, 131–147.

While Philippe's Latin was not as perfect as his ancient origin implied,[16] he seems to be freely conversant in Greek, Old French, and completely modern English. In the novel, at his son's nuptials, he sings about the wedding of Peleus and Thetis in English, accompanying himself on an ancient string instrument, like a true ἀοιδός (*aoidós*, a singer of epic poetry).

> And just like all men, heroes fall in love. […] A hero with dark hair and green eyes named Peleus left his home to seek his fortune. It was a place much like Saint-Lucien, hidden in the mountains, but Peleus had long dreamed of the sea and the adventures he might have in foreign lands. He gathered his friends together, and they voyaged through the oceans of the world. One day they arrived at an island famed for its beautiful women and the powerful magic that they had at their command… Far happier then were the times for men… You heroes, so bred of gods in those silver days, favor me as I call you now with my magic song… There Peleus first saw Thetis, daughter of Nereus, the god of the sea who told no lies and saw the future. From her father, Thetis had the gift of prophecy and could twist her shape from moving water to living fire to the very air itself. Though Thetis was beautiful, no one would take her for a wife, for an oracle foretold that her son would be more powerful than his father. Peleus loved Thetis in spite of the prophecy. But to marry such a woman, he had to be brave enough to hold Thetis while she changed from one element into another. Peleus took Thetis from the island and clasped her to his heart while she transformed herself from water to fire to serpent to lioness. When Thetis became a woman once more, he took her to his home and the two were wed. (Harkness, 2014, loc. 744–745)

Only in the novel does Matthew evoke the concept of the *paterfamilias* and gives his version of its origin saying:

> "The paterfamilias. A fascinating tradition." […] "Imagine giving one man the power of life and death over his wife, his children, his servants, anyone he adopted into his family, and even his close relatives who lacked a strong father of their own." […] "You know who came up with the paterfamilias, of course […] it was Philippe […]. Philippe thought Roman society could benefit from a healthy dose of vampire family discipline, and a reminder of the father's importance." (Harkness, 2014, loc. 1380–1381)

[16] E.g., with total disregard for Latin grammar, he says to Diana: "Dicunt mihi vos est philologus" (Harkness, 2014, loc. 693).

And again, only in the novel, when Matthew and Diana arrive at the court of Rudolf Habsburg seeking the *Book of Life*, does Diana chat with the emperor about a future entertainment based on a Greek myth:

> "A masque?" Rudolf took a sip of his wine and stared at me. "If so, the theme should be Diana and Actaeon." […] "Perhaps we might do Demeter and Persephone instead. It is more fitting for the season." "Or the story of Odysseus," […]. "Frau Roydon could play Circe and turn us into piglets." "Interesting, Ottavio," Rudolf said […]. "I might enjoy playing Odysseus." Not on your life, I thought. Not with the requisite bedroom scene and Odysseus making Circe promise not to forcibly take his manhood. "If I might offer a suggestion," I said, eager to stave off disaster. […] "The story I have in mind requires someone to take the role of Zeus, the king of the gods" […]. "I would be a convincing Zeus," he said eagerly, a smile lighting his face. "And you will play Callisto?" […] "No, Your Majesty. If you insist that I take part in the entertainment, I will play the goddess of the moon […]." "And to atone for his earlier remark, Matthew will play Endymion." "Endymion?" Rudolf's smile wavered. […] "Endymion, Your Majesty […] the beautiful youth who is cast into enchanted sleep so as to preserve his immortality and Diana's chastity." (Harkness, 2014, loc. 992)

The fact that a Greek- and Latin-speaking ancient vampire, Matthaios (as his father called him) de Claremont, Emperor Rudolf Habsburg, and his classically educated courtiers were at ease with the intricacies of Greek mythology is perfectly acceptable. A bit less obvious is the detailed familiarity with myths displayed by the young twenty-first-century historian of science from Yale, whose Greek is non-existent and Latin rather sketchy. Then again, she comes from a long line of powerful witches, weavers, and time-spinners…

The writers of the series adapted the elaborate plot, simplifying it to the requirements of a viewing as opposed to a reading public and introduced in the script a number of other changes; additionally eliminating some of the connections to mythology, they also diverged from the nature of the vampires as described in the book. It concerns the parents of the main male character, Matthew de Claremont. While he looks like a thirty-eight-year-old, that is, the same age he was when he was reborn as a vampire, his mother, in the novel a young and beautiful woman, in the series is ancient, though remarkably good-looking; his father, Philippe, compared to a Greek god in the book, is certainly attractive in the series but appears entirely human. Presumably, these changes met with the approval of the author of the trilogy, as she is credited as one of the series' executive producers.

The phrase *Omni fine initium novum* ("In every ending, there is a new beginning") (Harkness, 2014, loc. 1116) is used once in Book 2 of the trilogy but repeatedly in the television series (only in English) as a motto / general comment on history favoured by Philippe de Claremont. Judging by comments online, some considered it to be a quote borrowed from Lucius Annaeus Seneca but without providing a precise attribution.

In contrast with most of the twenty-first-century witch shows, spells and incantations used in the series are not in Latin but in English, much more convincing than the broken Latinate shreds so often heard in other shows. They are phrased in an artless rhyme and repetitive simplicity based on what looks like authentic old English spells. If they indeed are, I was unable to identify their exact provenance and I quote them here after Harkness (2014):

> With knot of one, the spell's begun. […]
> With knot of two, the spell be true. […]
> With knot of three, the spell is free. […]
> With knot of four, the power is stored. […]
> With knot of five, this spell will thrive. […]
> With knot of six, this spell I fix. (loc. 1641)
>
> With knot of seven, the spell will waken. […]
> With knot of eight, the spell will wait. […]
> With knot of nine, the spell is mine. (loc. 1642)
>
> With knot of ten, it begins again. (loc. 1645)

The use of English in spells by British witches at the end of the sixteenth century and later is logical, as some of them may have been "long-lived," but none was born in antiquity or fluent in Latin like the immortal vampires, who in any case do not cast spells. However, they think nothing of conversing in Ancient Greek.

## *The Order* (2019–2020)

Dark magic is forbidden but secretly practised in a hidden supernatural world with witches and werewolves. A vaguely biblical hell populated by demons of many hues can be accessed magically through high-risk summoning spells. The series is a kind of school/coming-of-age story comparable to *The Magicians*. Students with magical aptitudes are secretly recruited to a society active at a small elite university. It is a school of magic for young adults run on the principles of strict

hierarchy and unquestionable obedience. There are three active clandestine organizations. The first one, the Hermetic Order of the Blue Rose, is a centuries-old secret society functioning in an elaborate hierarchical structure; it recruits new members from among the students and produces powerful political leaders. The second organization, the Knights of St. Christopher, is a group of six werewolves selected as temporary champions of six "eternal" Hides, enchanted wolf skins which have the power to transform humans they deem worthy into werewolves; they fight against corruption and the use of dark magic by the Order of the Blue Rose. The two societies once worked together, then split, and eventually began to collaborate under the banner of the Blue Rose. Members of the third organization, the Esoteric Sons of Prometheus, live in a rural commune and are telepathically connected through a collective mind, Egregore. It is nourished by former members whose bodies are transformed and integrated with magical trees. This whole story arc contains scenes of crude and revolting horror.

Outside of the three societies, there is also an anarchist group, Praxis, led by a crypto-werewolf, Salvador Grant, whose father, Grafton Davis, was previously a member of the Knights. Jack, the main protagonist, studies Greek mythology and identifies Davis as the ancient Lycaon,[17] and Salvador as his daughter Psophis,[18] who intends to avenge her father's death and renew the corrupt world by destroying it first. Praxis is trying to teach magic to the masses without requiring them "to pay the price" of a few drops of the spell caster's blood. A significant accumulation of poorly performed "unpaid for" magic is bound to cause a Tartarus Eruption, an apocalyptic event, like the 79 CE Vesuvius disaster. Fortunately, the three secret societies join together against Praxis to prevent the end of the world.

While there is a Greek mythology course at Belgrave University, nobody there seems to study Latin, which is used by the members of the Order of the Blue Rose abundantly and without hesitation – pointing to familiarity and good command of the language.[19] Salvador Grant also uses Irish Gaelic in-

[17] The reason why Zeus changed Lycaon into a wolf – a heinous crime committed to test the scope of Zeus' power – must have been omitted in Jack's textbook, rather conveniently for the show's writers and viewers.

[18] There are four mythological characters named Psophis mentioned by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* (8.24.1–3), but none is identified as the daughter of Lycaon. Stephanus of Byzantium (ca. 530 CE), in his *Ethnica*, s.v. "Psophis / Ψωφίς," calls Psophis a *son* of Lycaon or a daughter of Eryx (*Stephani Byzantini Ethnica*, 2017, 132).

[19] A fact well established at Hogwarts, even though Hogwarts incantations are much simpler than those used at Belgrave, a university, not a secondary school.

cantations in S02E09, "New World Order, Part 1."[20] In the same episode, there is a mention of the "Sworn Book of Honorius [Liber Iuratus Honorii]," an early fourteenth-century grimoire used by Doctor John Dee (1527–1608), who, with the help of his scryer assistant, Edward Kelley (1555–1598), allegedly in communication with the Angels, was hoping to solve all mysteries. Doctor Dee produced a version of *Sigillum Dei Aemeth*, which, along with its author and his assistant, are featured in two 2021 episodes (S2E03 and 07) of *A Discovery of Witches*. Coming back to the subject of classical references in *The Order*, there is a minor but amusing requirement for brewing vital magical potions in S02E02, "Free Radicals, Part 2": to ensure success, the cauldron must be sterilized in Acheron. Fortunately, there is no need to descend to the Underworld to rinse the dish in the lamenting flows of the river because such equipment is stored in the Blue Rose's vault and may be borrowed more or less legally.

## *Legacies* (2018–2022)

The Chronological Survey indicates that the series is a spin-off of Julie Plec's 2009–2017 *The Vampire Diaries* and 2013–2018 *The Originals*. While all series of the vampireverse are full of witches, werewolves, and supernatural forces, *Legacies* is the only one with Greek mythological figures and Olympic gods.

[20] For those interested, here is a list of Latin spells and incantations used in *The Order* lifted from the streaming service, many of them with obvious mistakes irrelevant to our purpose: S01E08, "Undeclared, Part 2": "Inveniatur carpio, Aperiatur, Ligemur, sanetur, sanetur. Inflammetur"; S01E09, "Finals, Part 1": "tibi anima mea. Et a quattuor angulis terrae atque quattuor plagis maris… Ipsa liberetur"; S01E10, "Finals, Part 2": "Poeniatur flagellis, Detorqueantur intus, Deleatur. Dormitum dimittatur," "Restituatur," "Protegatur locus hic," "Sanguinem do ut des potentiam," "Pulveris memoriae"; S02E02, "Free Radicals, Part 2": "Purgetur; adepti," "Conserentur cogitationes meas," "Desiste quod facias," "Flos conspice," "Mihi transferat sanguis meus tuas laminas acuit," "Redi ad ista inferna in quorum genitus es. Prodatum quod visum est, obliviscere," "Flos abi"; S02E04, "Fear Itself, Part 2": "Anaplerosi," "Emerge et praesta ten obis," "Membra huius beluae obtorpescantur," "Ad hunc locum planumque ligaris," "Et pestem usque ad cineres ardeat," "Hanc magiam relinquo! Carmen finiatur"; S02E05, "The Commons, Part 1": "Haec animae ligentur ligeturque haec caro," "Oculi veteres forma nova," "Praxis Obstruatur"; S02E06, "The Commons, Part 2': "Appareat symbolus magicus. Omnus sugilli magici abaet. Exi ex modest ate erudam. Miseriam sempiternam! Exsolvatur!"; S02E07, "Spring Outbreak, Part 1": "Inveniatur carmen Foley. Invocare. Avolentur"; S02E08, "Spring Outbreak, Part 2": "Notas argenteas! Secreta revelentur Sapite! Quidquid requiritur, fiat. Homunculi sanguis. Oculi veteres forma nova aeternum"; S02E09, "New World Order, Part 1": "Qui fractus sanetur. Porta rescindatur ut vis fluat. Transitum ad laminam calicemque nobis permitatur. Obcidione caedo (annihilation). Fors factoram," "Haec forma et omnia quae noto plicentur"; S02E10, "New World Order, Part 2": "Inflamatur. Excursus inter duo regna formatur. Excursus apertus est."

[21] See the *editio princeps* of this text by Gösta Hedegård (2002).

It is a witch show enriched with themes of coming of age, school for witches, and a variety of supernatural creatures. First, it features random mythological monsters, such as a Gorgon, a Cyclops, a Minotaur, and a Sphinx offended that nobody knows he is, in fact, an oracle (contrary to Greek mythology, he is male, not female, and he dies and resurrects in quite a few episodes); Pothos, one of the Erotes; a Muse/Oracle/Fury; and a version of Pandora's Box. In season 4, we see Prometheus, Hephaestus, and Zeus. Cleo the Muse turns into a Fury and kills Zeus with a spear forged using god magic by Hephaestus – who is also a woman – out of the ashes of the magical Red Oak, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in sections "Deicide" and "Which Gods and Where?" (pp. 331, 332).

## Final Thoughts

To avoid leaving the readers with the intriguing and potentially astonishing idea that the twenty-first-century shows for young adults inspired by classical mythology feature predominantly witches, magic, and a wealth of mythological and supernatural creatures, I would like to bring their attention to the number of audiovisual productions retelling the great classical myths in collections of stories[22] or more or less free adaptations of ancient sources, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as many others discussed in Chapter 4.[23] The classical exists now not only in the hybrid imaginary of supernatural worlds hidden from mortals, but it has adopted them as a novel niche to explore its contemporary relevance.[24]

Having reaffirmed the continuing classical presence in the traditional subgenres of the audiovisual productions of the twenty-first century, we can return to the dozen or so shows discussed in more detail in this chapter and pull together the resulting picture of the episodic audiovisual antiquity. Straightaway, we cannot help but realize that Graeco-Roman mythology served its creators as a treasury of ideas and an open bazaar of motifs, themes, characters, and narrative solutions to any imaginable plot, whether reflecting the little changing

[22] See Chapter 4, section "Collections of Myths," p. 296; and section "Parallels and Allusions to Specific Ancient Authors and Myths," p. 308.

[23] A dozen adaptations of Homer, half a dozen retellings of the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, a dozen productions about Hercules, almost twice as many about Medusa, frequent returns of the Minotaur, etc. See Chapter 4, section "Parallels and Allusions to Specific Ancient Authors and Myths," p. 308.

[24] My thanks to Henry Stead, whose comments convinced me of the need for such a reminder.

human nature or endless supernatural prospects, both feeding the human need to be entertained, moved to laughter or to tears, and to feel as one with our millennia-long, deep-rooted, and inter-connected culture. Enriching this capital of creative assets with ideas from other mythologies,[25] traditions, and folklores to complement, explore potential contrasts, and highlight what is universal comes as a natural writing strategy in a reality where a solid classical education and firsthand experience of Greek and Roman literature fade to a rarity among audiences and creators alike. As Gaiman put it in 2001 in an interview about his novel *American Gods*, which sixteen years later would be adapted as an audiovisual series:

> I do not see why every single weapon in the arsenal of the imagination can't be mine. The lovely thing about being an auto-didact (as all writers to some extent are), is you learn very quickly how to teach yourself cool stuff, learn cool stuff, read cool stuff, and get the meat of something out of it. And give the impression that you know so much more about it than you really do. (Dornemann and Everding, 2001)

Issues still unresolved in today's society, those relating to equality, gender, diversity, race, poverty, power, and politics (and the list goes on), are tackled in these and other similar shows in a variety of ways, just as it was happening in the successive series of *Star Trek* since the mid-twentieth century (Littleton, 2010, loc. 640–795; Lancioni, 2010, 131–155; Pearson and Messenger Davies, 2014). This globally beloved science-fiction *opus* has been responding to the slow social development of American television by taking on the role of an optimistic champion of tolerance and reaching milestones, such as not only international but also interplanetary, efficient, and beneficial collaboration; a future without money, poverty, and disease; racial and ethnic diversity; women top scientists and women in positions of authority; single fathers; the famous first inter-racial kiss; and much later (*Star Trek: Discovery*, 2017) the first Starfleet gay couple, breaking network-imposed taboos along the way and advancing well ahead of social prejudices and "safely" conservative norms of popular culture.

[25] One of the early and best-known such borrowings from Norse mythology was the Kraken "released" by Zeus in the 1981 *Clash of the Titans* and by Hades in the 2010 remake of the film. Since then, Kraken has become part of Greek mythological monstrosity and crops up occasionally in audiovisual productions, e.g., *Class of the Titans*, *I'm a Monster*, "Freedom" (S04E13, *Sleepy Hollow*), *Troy: The Odyssey*, or *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation*. Another recent example of a clash between Greek and Norse mythologies is Gaiman's *American Gods*. Its audiovisual adaptation includes an original story of Demeter marrying Odin, a doomed union clearly not made in heaven.

The long-standing mission of harmonious diversity in one of the best-known American television shows must have badly irked Polish communist censors, the same way it must have affected their colleagues in the entire Soviet block for whom the USSR had the monopoly on this vision of "a radiant future." *Star Trek* was never shown on Polish state television, although in 1988, one year before the collapse of the regime, the movie *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* found its way to Polish movie theatres. After 1990, the former state station aired the first season of *The Next Generation*; in 1997, the new commercial station TVN ran almost the entire series, but full access to all *Star Trek* series and films was granted to Polish viewers only in 2016 and not by public media, which in the meantime returned to government control, but by the purely commercial Netflix.

My acquaintance with *Star Trek* dates back to the early 1970s, when I lived in Geneva, but I started watching it more regularly only in the late 1970s in Canada. The communist ban became even more understandable when in 2017 I read in a Polish weekly that during the Cold War, the awkward, aggressive, combative, and quarrelsome Klingons were designed as caricatures of Russians (Zwierzykowski, 2017). However, I admit, until then, this idea never crossed my mind. The Central European stereotype of the Big Brother on the Eastern border was quite different; still, the series was not created for that audience but for Americans. The 2017 *Star Trek: Discovery* example shows how things may change: there is nothing funny anymore about the new Klingons. According to one of the series showrunners, Aaron Herberts, they portray internally divided Americans willing to elect Donald Trump for President. Herberts compares the 2017 Klingon slogan "Remain Klingon" to Trump's "Make America great again."[26] We are provided here with another instance of the *Star Trek* phenomenon's deep entanglement in the fabric of contemporary American society, one that is not immediately visible to an outsider.

Returning to the present from the science-fictional utopian future only occasionally or superficially inspired by or referring to antiquity, we find ourselves more frequently among *bona fide* magical and mythological characters than just among paraphrases, allusions, or anecdotes. As blurred as the line between ancient history and mythology often appears – remember our discussion in the previous chapter – the focus of this study is mythology, which, as we saw in the charts, is three times as likely as ancient history to inspire creators of audiovisual productions (see Chart 7, p. 286). My concluding thoughts are specifically

[26] Quoted at Darren Mooney's *The M0vie Blog* (2017). Here, I also confess that as an outsider, I would not have noticed this similarity alone.

targeting the reception of mythology, which is potentially a less evident mirror of contemporary society than the reception of ancient history; the latter, while coloured by accumulated legends, deals with facts, events, and real people.

All of the series I singled out in this final chapter show the modern "Western" society[27] as irrevocably split between people of ancient lineage, genetically (or mystically) equipped with magical abilities, and "normal" people, who are human through and through and not only have no special powers but are also completely unaware of the existence of the other, hidden part of society. The "normal" majority consider the supernatural to be pure fantasy and superstition. This duality reflects, in a certain sense, the division of contemporary society into those with access to privilege and resources of all kinds and those without.

The use of well-known mythological characters and creatures, including gods, adds a certain genealogical cachet to this version of the world, where mythology has not been debunked but went quietly into hiding. From there, it continues to rule the world with the occasional involvement of a higher authority, a primeval god of sorts who mysteriously lords it over not only the Olympians but also gods from all other known mythologies. The idea of "Old Gods," a god-creator above and before the mythological gods, is alluded to more or less openly. Occasionally, it is presented as a power that is conscious of the world's imperfections and plans to destroy it to create something new and free from previous faults.

The presence of Greek mythological deities in today's audiovisual culture significantly varies from the one we know from ancient sources. The attitude of the protagonists in twenty-first-century productions is generally negative towards the gods; not only do they display many unpleasant human traits, but they are also contemptuous and disdainful towards humans, indifferent to human suffering, and lacking compassion. Today's mortals do not trust the gods; they are afraid of their power and try to ensure their benevolence, usually in vain. However, contrary to their ancient models, the gods in the audiovisual series need worshippers to retain power and immortality. They are not fussy about how to get them because, without worshippers, they would dwindle and fade. In *American Gods*, supernatural creatures, including gods brought to the New World by countless generations of immigrants, have lost most of their worshippers. Now, they are fighting a hopeless war against the New Gods engendered by technology, media, and a basic mistrust of those in power compounded by fear of conspiracies.

[27] In fact, the action takes place in English-speaking America and the United Kingdom with some time travel also to other European countries.

The mythological gods in audiovisual series, set in the present, resemble modern politicians, who need the voters to elect them but forget their electoral promises once victorious. Like the gods, they symbolize power holding on to itself and being prone to corruption. Fortunately, politicians are not immortal. Gods' immortality is why deicide plays an important role in audiovisual series; the heroes seek to neutralize the gods who exhibit toxic behaviour. However, they may spare and sympathize with divinities who display better or simply human qualities, like Hades, who grieves for Persephone in *The Magicians*, or Fortuna, who admires true heroic virtues and assists the protagonists in their fight against the ruthless primeval God in *Supernatural*. Demeter in *American Gods* helps mortals who appeal to her; she suffers a very human depression after her daughter is stillborn, and her husband (another god) cowardly abandons her in this moment of great emotional need.

The example of Pandora in *Sleepy Hollow* shows the corruptive influence of immortal power. When her divinity is taken away by the Hidden God, who has no intention of sharing his victory even with his only champion, she remembers her mortal origin and allies herself with humans against the god. Once they prevail together and she regains immortality, the alliance shatters, bringing back Pandora the Goddess, a furious and lethal enemy of humans whom she now despises and hates instead of being grateful for what they did.

The theme of torture is connected in Greek mythology to Prometheus, although it does occur in stories about severe punishment meted out, as a rule eternally, to humans guilty of deeds particularly offensive to gods, like Tantalus or Sisyphus. The traditionally heroic and generous Prometheus is less so in *Legacies*. When Zeus refused to heal his lover, Ashur, Prometheus, fully aware of potential consequences, dared to steal magic from the gods to save Ashur. Unfortunately, he was too late, and his lover died. Devastated, he left the magic to his village. Zeus punished Prometheus for the theft (rather than for passing on the magic he did not need to humans) by millennia of fatal assaults by monsters ending in daily resurrections – which eventually broke him. When Salvatore School students worked together with Hephaestus to keep the gods permanently imprisoned in their stasis pods, Prometheus opened the pods in the (vain) hope that Zeus would reward him by calling off the monsters. That is how the shining figure of Prometheus, who suffered for his love for mortals, has been decoupled from the details and the meaning of the myth. The creators of *Legacies*, in their *de facto* refusal to acknowledge the positive qualities of mythological figures they invited to their story, choose to ignore Prometheus' liberation from his punishment by Hercules, undoubtedly because it was done with Zeus' tacit

permission – οὐκ ἀέκητι Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου ὑψιμέδοντος ("not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high").[28] In the series, Zeus treats humans like ants he may stamp out with impunity, and the screenwriters grant him no redeeming features. In any case, they treat the whole body of world mythology as a *smörgåsbord*. Confronting their new and improved versions of myths with Hesiod would have been a useless complication.

Gender equality and gender diversity are increasingly important themes of the twenty-first-century popular audiovisual culture. One of the manifestations of these themes' prominence in the shows inspired by classical mythology is the change of gender of well-known mythological figures and creatures. In *Legacies*, Hephaestus, the technological genius and inventor, becomes a college-aged girl called Jen; Zeus' spirit in *Lost Girl* takes over the body of a woman and is named Zee, while Hera's spirit enters a male body and calls herself Heratio. Mythological creatures also occasionally abandon their traditional genders; for instance, Medusa, from an individual creature becomes a species whose representatives are not necessarily female: in *Supernatural*, a particularly gross male Gorgon called Noah Ophis, before devouring his victims, paralyses them with a venom; in *Wednesday*, among the students, there is a male Gorgon, Ajax Petropolus, who in order to function normally has to hide his snakes in a large hat. Contrary to the Greek tradition (and grammar), the Sphinx in *Legacies* is male.

The Ancient Greek attitude towards sexuality devoid of homophobia has been a separate theme in audiovisual series and reception scholarship.[29] Among the first cases alluding to the romantic power of homosexual love in the twenty-first century were two series launched still in the twentieth century, *Xena: Warrior Princess* with the romantic friendship between Xena and Gabrielle, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with Sappho's prayer to Aphrodite painted in a dream in Ancient Greek by Willow on Tara's back.

Prometheus, in *Legacies*, defies Zeus for the love of Ashur, the boy he could not heal. The 2018–2022 remake of *Charmed* presents an interesting case of increased ethnic, racial, and gender diversity introduced to bolster the appeal of the series: the new Charmed Ones are of Latina, Afro-American,

[28] Hesiod clearly states in *Theogony*, 526–532: "That bird [the long-winged eagle] Herakles, the valiant son of shapely-ankled Alkmene, slew; and delivered the son of Iapetos from the cruel plague, and released him from his affliction – not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high, that the glory of Herakles the Theban-born might be yet greater than it was before over the plenteous earth" (Hesiod, 2014; trans. by Hugh G. Evelyn-White).

[29] See, e.g., the seventeen essays and accompanying bibliography published in the 2013 volume edited by Monica Silveira Cyrino, *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World*.

and Caucasian origin, and one of them is a lesbian activist; the sisters' cousin featured in seasons 3 and 4 is a transgender woman. Aggressively marketed as more enlightened than the original series, the remake was popular but never reached the same ratings and lasted for only half as many seasons. The fact that diversity in audiovisual series is considered an effective marketing tool speaks for itself, even if the effectiveness proved questionable in this case.

The primary target audiences for these series are young Americans and a natural massive extension of that public, united by the shared language and called, for lack of a better word, the Anglosphere. It represents a multiracial, multiethnic, and multi-faith viewership with access to electronic communication, the Internet, digital media, and social media. However, especially through global streaming services offering translated subtitles, these series reach audiences well outside the Anglosphere and bring images of American (and generally speaking "Western") diversity to cultures where these values may still be waiting for wider social acceptance.

Using again the point of view from outside the Anglosphere, I see what a significant role these images play in formerly communist countries, like Poland, where until the last decade of the twentieth century, true gender equality was a purely theoretical concept. An *ex officio* atheist state eliminated religion from school curricula making it an exclusive domain of the Catholic Church, the only legal face of the anti-communist opposition and the ideological support for the spontaneously formed free trade unions, which did not resemble in the least the communist caricature of the idea. When communism collapsed over three decades ago, the ideological pendulum swung to the other side; in recognition of the crucial role of the Church, especially during the period of the Solidarity movement and the martial law imposed to squash it, religious instruction returned to schools, and gradually Catholic principles related to family and sexuality were being reinforced by legal means. While political transformation was achieved, international exchanges and travel became the norm, and society seemed receptive to changes, consecutive governments were unable or unwilling to provide a solid legal basis for a new social justice ensuring equality of chances and freedom of choice to all citizens. The social rights that were restricted or abolished under communism, theoretically, should have been restored automatically along with democracy. In totalitarian regimes, where all areas of life are strictly and predictably controlled, people tend to idealize democracy. When the system changes, they only gradually realize that no rights are acquired automatically, and to function properly, they need the conscious and sustained effort of the whole society. Lech Wałęsa's famous dictum about

the role of free trade unions dating from the 1970s, "Worker, if you do not defend yourself, those in power will not defend you!" (see, for example, Rakowski-Kłos, 2023), still applies.

As incongruous as it may seem, the reality presented in the shows coming from the Anglosphere, some of which otherwise could be considered frivolous, affects the *mores* of Poles of all ages, emphasizing the freedom of choice over dogma. The latest national census conducted in Poland in 2021 and published in late September 2023 reveals an almost 25% decrease in the number of declared Catholics compared to 95.3% in 1988. On the other hand, over 20% of people refused to answer questions about religion, indicating a significant lack of trust in the government agency conducting the census, a 13% increase since 2011.[30] Even given the decreasing number of practising members and the Vatican's growing tendency to relax the rules on women's role in the Church and same-sex unions (see Vatican News, 2023), part of the Polish episcopate and clergy attempt to bolster their inflexible positions seeking support from hard-line conservative politicians. This short-sighted stand can only lead to a long-term loss of social credibility.

In the fascinating and very recently ended American hedge-fund drama *Billions* (2016–2023), whose writers allude to Greek mythology and ancient history in several episodes (S02E09, S05E12, S06E01, and S06E06), we see the first non-binary main character in American television (played by an actor who identifies as non-binary). To avoid any misunderstandings, let me stress that it is unrelated to the classical allusions in the series but instead included as an accepted element of today's gender reality in America and, as such, may influence its understanding by the Polish audience.

The shows for young adults discussed in this concluding chapter are not the only manifestations of classical mythology in the contemporary audiovisual landscape, as reiterated at the beginning of the section "Final Thoughts." However, they bring to mind an imaginary chessboard on which pieces from various mythologies, having fully or partially lost the meaning of their myths of origin, play the narrative game invented by their creators, with few, if any,

[30] The first time a question about religion was asked in a national census in Poland was in 2011. Figures related to 1918–1990 can be found in Adamczuk and Zdaniewicz, 1991, 19. The results of the 2021 national census, published September 28, 2023, indicated that only 71.3% of the population identified as Roman Catholic, a decrease compared to the previous 2011 national census, which indicated 87.58% as Roman Catholic, and 2.41% of people identifying as practising no religion and 7.10% refusing to answer questions related to their faith. In 2021, 6.8% of people declared practising no religion, and 20.53% declined to answer the question. See Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2023.

rules to abide by. These shows' multicultural and indeed global audiences are tempted with a large array of delicacies among which they are bound to find at least some familiar tastes.

The focus of this book, as announced in the "Prequel" (p. 42), has been on the classically inspired "narratives that have delighted, absorbed, and entertained their recipients." The delight, absorption, and entertainment achieved by an audiovisual production stimulate imagination, encourage interest in mythology, and often lead to the acquisition of knowledge, to say nothing about a fuller understanding of the present when seen from a past perspective. In the twenty-first century, mythology, displayed on any screen, rarely stems from a thorough classical education or even from a second-hand familiarity with the masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature. Yet, mythology inspires storytelling continuously and in unexpected ways. Being what it is, the process often starts with half-remembered childhood readings reinforced by various animated images recalled from films and series watched long ago. It may continue in high school through readings of national literature providing historical examples of classical reception and be followed by random literary and cinematic choices. There are no recipes but rather *accidents de parcours* creating opportunities for seeing an ancient idea in a new and sharper light – which is the essence of true classical reception.

In conclusion, I would like to express my hope that the story presented in this book has been at least in part as enjoyable and instructive for the reader as it was for the writer, especially when it demonstrated that the classically inspired popular series catering to the human need for storytelling reveal also significant cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions.

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Each chapter is thoughtfully organized, and the author provides detailed explanations and interpretations that allow readers to grasp the intricacies of classical reception in a quintessentially modern medium. […] The publication will be useful not only for academics, but for students and PhD students at universities in the fields of classical studies, mythology, and media studies. Furthermore, its academic thoroughness combined with erudite and lively style will likely be of interest to educators and teachers of classical mythology or related subjects, offering them new perspectives and ideas for incorporating audiovisual series into their teaching methods. Further audiences might include fans of audiovisual series with mythological themes, as the book provides a scholarly examination of how these series engage with classical mythology. Last but not least, libraries and academic institutions focusing on humanities, media studies, or related subjects may consider adding this book to their collections to provide a resource for students, researchers, and faculty members interested in the intersection of classical mythology and contemporary audiovisual media. […] Even more, with its interdisciplinary approach, engaging writing style, and thorough research, the book successfully bridges the gap between academia and popular culture. […] this book's insightful analysis and thought-provoking discussions make it a recommended read for those seeking a deeper understanding of the enduring appeal of classical mythology in contemporary media.

Brane Senegačnik, University of Ljubljana
From the editorial review



In this book, the reader feels "well looked after" and at all times aware of what the author is up to. The prequel is a fabulous resource, delivered with style. I also especially appreciate the declaration of the book being written from an "outsider's" point of view, drawing attention to the cultural and scholarly consequences of the Cold War. This observation will help readers reflect on this important dimension […]. It provides the opportunity for reflection on "Western" predilections, research interests, perceived/received wisdoms, etc. […] Given the data set feeding the volume, it is likely that the book will (in practice) act as a reference and starting place for students embarking on their own reception case studies. It will be very useful for this. […] That said, it will also be a key resource for postgraduate students and reception scholars.

Henry Stead, University of St Andrews
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