

CLASSICAL PRESENCES

GENERAL EDITORS

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The texts, ideas, images, and material culture of ancient Greece and Rome have always been crucial to attempts to appropriate the past in order to authenticate the present. They underlie the mapping of change and the assertion and challenging of values and identities, old and new. *Classical Presences* brings the latest scholarship to bear on the contexts, theory, and practice of such use, and abuse, of the classical past.

Why is it that some films are called epics? Audiences know that such films will be large-scale, spectacular productions, but does the term have deeper cultural significance?

In *Film and the Classical Epic Tradition*, Joanna Paul explores the relationship between films set in the ancient world and the classical epic tradition, arguing that there is a meaningful connection between the literary and cinematic genres. Films which adapt classical epic texts for the screen, such as *Ulysses*, *Troy*, *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, and *Jason and the Argonauts*, share the epic tradition's interest in heroism and *kleos*, the depiction of the gods, and narrative structure. A series of case-studies of Hollywood historical epics then explore further ways in which cinema engages with the themes of classical epic. The relationship between *Gladiator* and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* demonstrates the importance of tradition, while the archetypal epic themes of heroism and spectacle are considered through *Spartacus* and *Ben-Hur*. The concluding chapters look at common tropes surrounding epic, especially focusing on the performance of epic in the ancient and modern worlds, its perceived social role, and the widespread parody of epic in both literature and cinema.

Through this careful consideration of how epic can manifest itself in different periods and cultures, we learn how cinema makes a powerful claim to be a modern vehicle for a very ancient tradition.

Jacket photograph: Niall MacGinnis and Honor Blackman as Zeus and Hera in *Jason and the Argonauts*, © 1963, renewed 1991 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

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