

UR Ancient World In Cinema

the Course blog for University of Richmond's Classics 329: the Ancient World in Cinema

Menu



CATEGORY ARCHIVES: UNCATEGORIZED

An Honorable Death

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The notion of an “honorable death”, and what defines one, is broached in both the films *Gladiator* and *300*. Each of these films depicts a significant amount of violence, and consequently death. As a prominent theme in each movie, death must be defined in terms of how to perish both honorably and cowardly. Both *Gladiator* and *300* present an honorable death as one in which the victim dies bravely in the manner of a

soldier.

The film 300, directed by Zack Snyder, depicts the Battle of Thermopylae from the Spartan perspective. The Spartans, known for being a warrior society, define an honorable death as one that occurs on the battlefield against a worthy opponent. 300 begins with a young King Leonidas training to become a Spartan warrior. This opening sequence depicts him leaving home, learning to fight, and finally proving himself by surviving alone in the woods and killing an attacking wolf. Upon returning alive to Sparta, King Leonidas has officially proven himself as a Spartan man. These Spartan values of warfare present themselves early on and continue throughout the remainder of the film.

The Spartans train throughout the entirety of their youth to be impeccable warriors; therefore, their version of an honorable death is one that aligns with behaviors of proper warfare. Essentially, as Herodotus states, a true Spartan must either “prevail or perish” on the battlefield (Herodotus,480). As Leonidas leaves for The Battle of Thermopylae, he says goodbye to his wife and she tells him to come back either with his shield or on it. This interaction shows that for Spartan women, the important thing was not whether their husbands returned alive, but rather that they returned victorious to their wives. The Battle of Thermopylae was almost certain death for the Leonidas and his warriors; 300 Spartans faced countless Persians. However, the Spartans readily accepted this challenge as it offered the opportunity for an honorable death against what they deemed to be a worthy opponent. When fighting Spartans, according to Herodotus, you “need not ask as to their numbers in order to consider how they could possibly do this, for if there are 1,000 of them matching out, they will fight you, and if they number more or less than that — it makes no difference — they will fight you all the same” (Herodotus, 480). During the battle, the Spartans fought bravely, and for a time held their ground. However, eventually a secret route around the Spartans is revealed to Xerxes and the Spartan advantage is lost. When the Spartans received word that their upper hand had been lost, it became obvious that death was unavoidable. While other Greek soldiers retreated the Spartan soldiers stood their ground. As the Persians approached, the narrator of the film described every Spartan soldier as ready to die. According to Herodotus, Spartan law is the reason for their refusal to retreat as “it forbids them to flee from battle, and no matter how many men they are fighting, it orders them to remain in their tank and either prevail or perish” (Herodotus, 480). Essentially, for the Spartans in the movie 300, an

“honorable death” meant bravely facing death on a battlefield.



The film *Gladiator* also discusses the topic of an honorable death. At the beginning of the film, as stated by Cyrino, “Maximus encourages his troops to to fight bravely until the final moment, with promise of a peaceful and painless transition to the world beyond: ‘And if you ever find yourself alone, riding through green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled, for you are in Elysium, and you are already dead!’”(Cyrino, *Gladiator*). This prevail or perish mentality echoes the beliefs demonstrated in *300*. However, for the characters in *Gladiator*, an honorable death does not exclusively occur on a battlefield. Rather, it is a respectable death that would befit a soldier. The concept of a worthy soldier’s death outside a battlefield is first demonstrated when Commodus attempts to have Maximus killed, and Maximus requests that he at least be given a soldier’s death. Although the viewer is not directly told what a soldier’s death entails, we can assume it means a respectable death. This same concept is once again broached at the end of the movie after Maximus kills Commodus and then dies himself. When Maximus dies, Lucilla states that he was a soldier of Rome and should be honored as such, and consequently he is carried out of the amphitheater on the backs of others.



In both 300 and Gladiator, an honorable death is that which, either on or off the battlefield, involves behaving like a true soldier. What is a true soldier? In both Sparta and Rome, a “true soldier” appears to be one who looks fear in the eye and does not scare. A “true soldier” is one who is unafraid to die defending what he believes in, and he in turn receives an honorable death.

Source

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300 as Anti-Iranian Propoganda

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Based on Frank Miller's comic of the same name, *300*, directed by Zack Snyder, was released on March 9, 2007. Despite becoming a box office success in the United States, the film quickly became a point of contention for the Iranian people who saw it as deceptive and insulting. Iranians were so offended that a cultural advisor to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad went so far as to call it "American Psychological warfare against Iran."

The film is loosely based on the events that transpired at the Battle of Thermopylae between the Greek city-states and the Achaemenid or First Persian Empire. In a response article for Time.com, Iranian journalist and writer Azadeh Moaveni explained, "Iranians view the Achaemenid empire as a particularly noble page in their history and cannot understand why it has been singled out for such shoddy cinematic treatment, as the populace here perceives it, with the Persians in rags and its Great King practically naked." Additionally, the film dehumanizes the Persian soldiers by obscuring their faces with masks, beards, and dirt while simultaneously flooding the screen with a horde of invading troops.



Persian army as depicted in 300

The size of the Persian army presented in the film has been criticized for its inaccuracy, but looking at Herodotus' histories we see that his estimation was also in the millions of men. Herodotus estimated that, "five hundred and twenty-eight myriads three thousand two hundred and twenty was the number of men whom Xerxes son of Dareios led as far as Sepias and Thermopylae" ([Herodotus VII, 186](#))

As we discussed in class, much of the film itself falls victim to the typical trappings of Orientalism, presenting the Persian culture as distinctly different from and lesser than its western counterpart. The film makes a clear divide between the Spartans who value freedom and reason and the corrupt Persians and their hedonistic ways. However, this seems to be an oversimplification of both ancient cultures that were far more dynamic than presented on screen. In his CinemaBlend review of the film, Josh Tyler explains, "When King Leonidas shouts "For freedom!" he's not talking about truth,

justice, and the American way. It's mostly just jargon tossed into the trailers and the film for dim, easily manipulated people who get overly excited when they hear propaganda thrown around." This is where the real issue arises: is the film, which is supposed to be representing a historical event, a form of anti-Iranian propaganda?

After the films release an article in the Iranian newspaper, *The Reformist Daily*, ran a headline read "Hollywood declares war on Iranians." While this could just be a bold eye-catching headline the article then went on to argue that, "[the film] seeks to tell people that Iran, which is in the Axis of Evil now, has for long been the source of evil and modern Iranians's ancestors are the ugly murderous dumb savages you see in 300." Iranian filmmaker, Javad Shamaghdari, was quoted as saying, "American cultural officials thought they could get mental satisfaction by plundering Iran's historic past and insulting this civilization." These two were echoed by countless other Iranians who felt similarly disrespected and worried how the film could change American's perceptions of the country, its history, and its people.

While there is no clear evidence that there was any propagandist intent behind the film, by claiming to be based historical events the film certainly gets stuck in a gray area. Ultimately the film fails to give an unbiased depiction of the Battle of Thermopylae, giving instead representation that Josh Tyler of CinemaBlend described as, "the way the battle would have looked in the minds of the Greeks, as they tell the story of the 300's sacrifice." While the film is almost entirely based on source text of the graphic novel, there is no denying that the choice to make the film when they did was influenced by the political climate of the day. Therefore, whether intentional or not, the film and its barbaric and hedonistic depiction of the Persian Empire could be viewed as pro-war political propaganda against Iran and other middle eastern countries.

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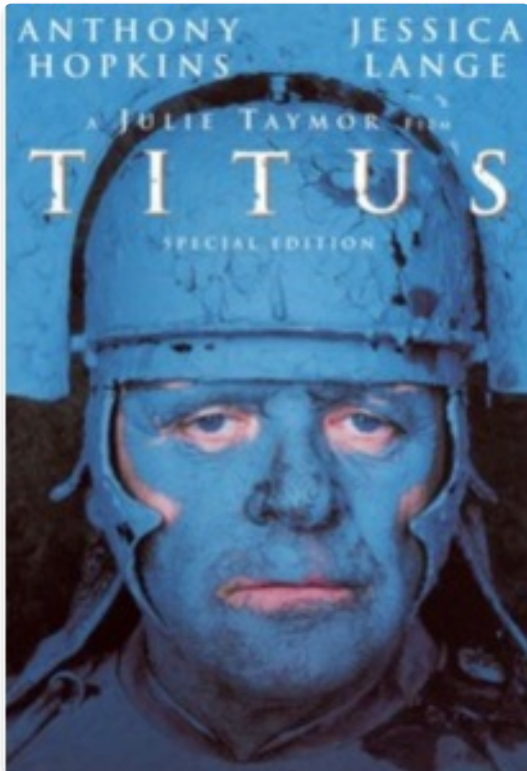
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Titus's Audience Disconnect

[2 Replies](#)

Every now and then, a movie is released that challenges the viewer to understand its meaning through just more than dialogue. The method acting employed by the actors, the representation of the stories themes on the screen, and the added visual effects combine to create a myriad of moments that the viewer can understand, enjoy, and fully appreciate. However hard Titus tries to be one of these films, it falls short in my opinion. The on screen portrayal of Shakespeare characters was over the top. Director Julie Taymor's attempt to convey gory and unsettling themes from the

story on the big screen make the viewer uncomfortable with the film; and finally the anachronisms in the film help to confuse the viewer, rather than aid in their understanding of the film. This postmodern version of Titus excels at one thing in particular: creating a disconnect between the film and the viewer.

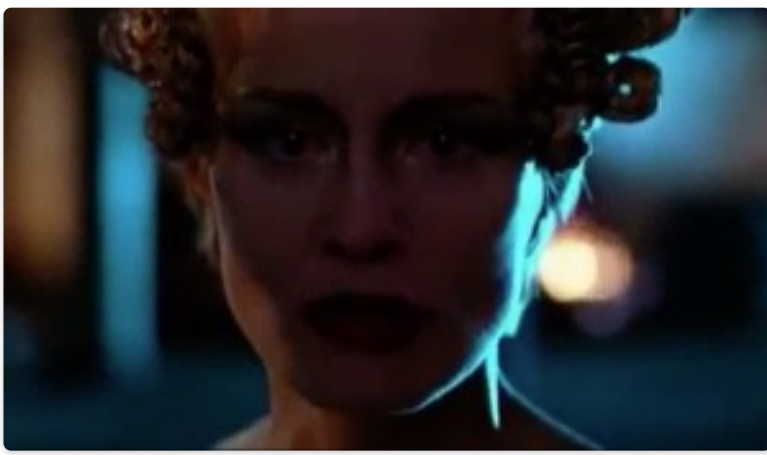


In theater, many actors are told to over embellish their character to convey to the viewer the character's inner feelings. This embellishment is the difference between seeing a character say "Oh woe is me" while walking across stage, and seeing them say "OH WOE IS ME" as they fall to the floor in crumpled mess, sobbing loudly to themselves. This is the "spectacle" of theater that connects the audience with the medium (Aristotle). In the first case, the character could either be emotionally tame, or being sarcastic about the situation. The second case however, the character is obviously upset; there is no mistaking the emotion the actor is employing and the audience understands. However useful over-embellishing is on the stage, on the screen it can make the viewing experience uncomfortable for the audience. The scene where Demetrius and Chiron are in their dungeon-esq game room is a perfect example of over-acting (well, basically any scene they are in) (Titus, 1:35:10). Chiron's sporadic and aggressive dancing does its job in conveying his immature and almost feral nature to the audience, but in a very unsettling way. When the camera focuses in on his face up against the cage in the room, it almost looks like an overdose scene from some sort of city drama movie. This over-acting makes the viewer uncomfortable, while also making the movie look like a joke. This may be the side

effect of “an immature script and a first time director” (Fredricks 206), but the over acting helps create a disconnect between the viewer and the film.

In addition to over acting creating a rift between the viewer and the movie, the content and themes of a film, and how they are presented to the audience, can completely take the viewer out of the moment. Taymor presents themes such as rape and revenge in a very barebones way to the viewer. She doesn't dance around references or visuals of rape, she shows the viewer exactly what's going on. For example, when Lavinia is taken into the woods by Demetrius and Chiron (Titus, 59:23), there is no attempt to dance around the event that would take place. Where traditional plays or greek tragedies would leave the rape up to the audience's imagination, or up to the chorus to tell the audience, Taymor lets the events take place in a crude montage of the decrepit event, making the viewer uncomfortable.

In addition to the stark representation of rape within this film, Taymor is also blunt when portraying the theme of revenge. When Tamora's eldest son is butchered and sacrificed by Titus, she swears her revenge against Titus, and the land, in an aside to the audience. Taymor kept this aside in the movie, to ensure the viewer knows the revenge plot. However, in motion pictures, the use of asides is almost useless when dialogue is combined with visuals. With visuals, the character's facial expressions and overall feelings towards the events on screen are apparent to the audience at all times. The use of an aside in theater is to convey the character's inner feelings to the audience so they follow the coming events. But, if the audience can infer these feelings from facial expressions, there is no need for the aside. The addition of this aside seems almost condescending to the viewer, almost as if Taymor wouldn't believe the audience would recognize the theme without the aside. As Bates points out in his review, Taymor has kept a large amount of the original script in her play, but by keeping some of the traditional stage effects, she creates a disconnect in the viewer.



In Aristotle's *Poetics*, Aristotle remarks that "a tragedy does not need to be performed to have an impact on the audience, as it can be read as a text". Here, Aristotle is talking about spectacle and how "all aspects of the tragedy contribute to its sensory effects" on the audience. By transforming this tragedy, and putting it on the big screen, Taymor has to deal with overloading her audience with visuals and dialogue. The mode by which the plot is performed conveyed by the audience is the spectacle (Aristotle). When too much is going on, the plot and themes are lost on the audience. For example, her use of anachronism in this film make a very poignant visual impact on the viewer, but not in a good way. By switching constantly from typical Roman sets, like an amphitheater, to almost a fascist-Nazi knock-off set, the audience cannot find their place in the film, and cannot fully connect to the movie (Lozito). These confusing anachronisms keep the audience confused and disconnected from the start of the movie, with the boy in the 1990's style home being brought into an amphitheater, until the end when the camera turns to reveal the audience sitting in the amphitheater. Not to mention the confusing costumes the characters wear. The blame (or praise) for the film's visual style, meanwhile, lay with Taymor and her history of avant-garde costume and set design for the theater (Fredrick 2006).

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Kalokagathia & '300'

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The film *300* has been criticized for its portrayal of the Spartan enemies as degenerate and physically deformed. Tom Holland notes in his review of the film, "In *300* not only can you tell a hero by his six-pack, but you can tell a villain by his deformities." (1) This idea closely follows the ancient Greek concept of kalokagathia (beauty and goodness). Kalokagathia expresses the idea that a person's inner character can be deduced from their outward appearance. Thus, a virtuous or 'good' person would be beautiful and a corrupt and dishonorable person would be physically ugly and/or deformed.

This concept is glaringly obvious in *300*'s portrayal of the Persians. Throughout the entirety of the film, the Persian king Xerxes is bald, giant-like and mostly nude save for a small gold speedo and thick chains and piercings.



Portrait of king Xerxes (left); depiction of king Xerxes in 300 (right) <https://iranunveiled.wordpress.com>

Likewise in this film the Persian Army is dehumanized and consists of exotic animals misshapen monsters, and 'millions' of masked and thus faceless slave-soldiers. It is often hard to tell if the soldiers are even human. The lighting surrounding the army is always darker and more sinister than other scenes.



The Immortals <http://www.awadallah.com/blog/wp->

Yet, the starkest reflection of kalokagathia is the scene in which Ephialtes enters the Persian camp. The scene opens with courtiers sporting animal heads playing traditional instruments, implying a primitive and subhuman atmosphere. The series of back and forth of shots of Ephialtes and shots of erotic dancing and deformed women covered in thick jewelry highlights the distorted morality and appearances of the characters. And the overall mise en scène is more suggestive of a brothel than a king's court. In Farahat's words, this scene depicts "Iranian women as deviant sexual teasers pimped out by their king Xerxes." (2)

This scene has important implications because as Sappho wrote, "he who is fair to look upon is good, and he who is good will soon be fair also." (3) It can be inferred that this also means, he who is ugly is also immoral. Plato further notes, "The beautiful is the friend," as the old proverb says. Beauty is certainly a soft, smooth, slippery thing, and therefore of a nature which easily permeates our souls. For I affirm that the good is beautiful." (4) This passage can be understood, as the notion that beauty cannot simply be in appearance or in character. If beauty exists either in appearance or character, it will spread to embody both aspects of a person.

These quotes make clear, due to their physical appearance; the Persians in *300* cannot possess either aspect of beauty or goodness. Thus, they are all corrupt. This is emphasized by Ephialtes, who is severely misshapen in *300* proves to be a traitor to his fellow Greeks and their worst antagonist. His actions lead to the death of all '300' of the Spartan warriors.

Furthermore, Kalokagathia can have intellectual implications also. Michael Squire notes, "Outward physical form incorporated an assumed inner intellectual ideal." (5) This is shown with the Spartan warriors, physically fit also hold important values of freedom, camaraderie and equality. All the intellectual ideals that the Spartans have serve to highlight all that the Persian army lacks.

The film's display of the idea of kalokagathia was expectedly quite unpopular. It was particularly upsetting because it seemed to directly target Persia (Iran). Farshad Farahat, an Iranian American noted in his review, the scope of the outrage this film produced. "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad bitterly denounced it (*300*), and

the Iranian Academy of the Arts filed a formal complaint through the United Nations that framed the movie as nothing less than an attack on the historical identity of a nation.” (6) Given the extent of criticism surround this concept it is curious as to why Snyder decided to incorporate this idea into his film. However, despite the extent of criticism and mixed reviews surrounding the film, *300* broke records in the box office.

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300’s Spartan Upbringing

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As an introduction to the protagonist Leonidas and the film's version of the Spartan warrior society, *300* opens with a sequence which portrays the Spartan practice of infanticide as well as the agoge, which was the harsh system of training all male Spartans endured as preparation for their eventual life of war (0:01-0:05 min.). The film's depictions of Spartan upbringing factor heavily into the messages which the film conveys regarding ideal masculinity, as well as the contrast which the film attempts to build up between freedom as a Spartan and slavery under the cartoonish and villainous Persians.

The film's agoge shows Spartan boys and young men, the Spartiates, reaching their full potential as masculine and valuable members of society only through being trained to fight and kill, and would seem to imply that violence, rather than diplomacy, as a solution to conflict is ideally masculine, at least from the view of Spartan society as conceived by the film. Also, though remedied through the later interactions among the Spartans at Thermopylae, the film's depiction of the agoge does not relate its purpose of building camaraderie and solidarity. The writer Plutarch, though he wrote long after the fall of Sparta as an independent political entity, discusses in his *Life of Lycurgus* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/lycurgus.html>) how the Spartan boys in the

agoge “all lived under the same order and discipline, doing their exercises and taking their play together.” In the film, the agoge as an institution serves only to condition the Spartiates to violence and death. Even before the Spartan boys reach the agoge, they are shown to be inspected shortly after birth for any deformities or perceived physical weaknesses, and are exposed to the wilderness if deemed to be unfit for eventual military training (0:01 min.). Though the film does not necessarily condone the Spartan practice of infanticide, it does not condemn it, and simply paints it as a reality of a society which so values strength and fighting prowess. The film does, however, glorify the results of the Spartan eugenics in producing such formidable fighters, especially since, as Peter Travers says in his mostly positive *Rolling Stone* review (<http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/300-20070309>), the Spartans “look gym-ready for battle in crotch-squeezing ensembles that expose as much flesh as an R rating will allow,” which he judges to be an enticing draw for audiences of all sorts.

Near the end of the sequence which covers Leonidas’ training as a boy and young man, his final test and rite of passage before becoming a Spartan warrior involves venturing alone into the wilderness to slay a wolf (0:03-0:05 min.). Such a scene is particularly notable due to what it, along with the rest of the film, excises from its vision of Sparta, which are the enslaved Helots from Messenia who carried out most of the work in the city-state, allowing for the elite class of Spartiates to focus all of its time and effort on training for and going to war. As Plutarch says in his description of the institutional Cryptia (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/lycurgus.html>), the Spartans would send “some of the ablest of the young men into the country, from time to time, armed only with their daggers,” so that in the night they “issued out into the highways, and killed all the Helots they could light upon.” If such an institution was intended, even if only partially, as a rite of passage for young Spartan men much in the same way as the film’s wolf hunt, then it is clear that *300* has replaced the sordid practice in order to further its own aims. Because the film wishes to portray the Persians as being decadent and villainous through their subjugation of all conquered peoples, and the Spartans as being similar to the film’s modern American and Western audiences, who are generally thought to value freedom, the film removed the Helots and the Cryptia from its depiction of the Spartans and their upbringing. Such a creative decision was made in order to strongly contrast the Persians with the Spartans, which the film could not have done if the Spartans had been accurately portrayed as slavers, especially of their fellow Greeks from Messenia.

The film's themes of ideal masculinity and the contrast between the enslaving Persians and the freedom-loving Spartans and Greeks are greatly evident in and illuminated through the opening sequence which portrays the harsh upbringing of the film's Spartans.

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Not Your Average Weak Woman

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Zack Snyder's *300* is a movie filled with offensive comments and brimming with controversy, yet it is the most refreshing sword and sandal film I have recently watched. It is not because of the blood, gore, or muscular men running around in black underwear and red capes. No, it is because this movie gave us Gorgo, Queen of the Spartans. Gorgo is not a standard weak woman who is isolated, glamorous, and on display (Mulvey, 753). She is "a loyal wife and Spartan patriot who fights the good fight on the home front" (Scott).

The movie begins with a Persian messenger requesting the submission of the Spartans to the Persian King Xerxes. During the diplomatic talk between the messenger and King Leonidas Gorgo intervenes by saying "Do not be coy or stupid, Persian, you can afford neither in Sparta" (9:35). Outraged, the messenger replies, "What makes this woman think she can speak among men?" (9:39). Misogyny was not uncommon in antiquity. In Hesiod's *Theogony* he writes that women are "a great

infestation among mortal men" (Hesiod, 596). He also believed that Zeus "made women as a curse for mortal men," calling women "evil conspirators" (Hesiod, 605-6). Needless to say the Persian messenger's reaction towards Gorgo's interjection is expected. But, instead of backing down or hiding behind her husband Gorgo gave a heated response, "Because only Spartan women give birth to real men" (9:42). The messenger was left speechless and wore a shocked face because a woman had the audacity to stand up to a man.

The next scene that solidified Gorgo as being an unconventional weak woman was during the departure of King Leonidas and the 300 men. In Zack Snyder's *300* Gorgo broke the traditional mold of having an emotional breakdown. In fact, her farewell was the exact opposite. "Spartan" she said, "Come back with your shield or on it" (25:35). That is it. No crying, no falling into a heap on the ground, nothing. Gorgo stood fast and represented a pillar of strength to Leonidas as she said farewell. With a handful of words Gorgo reminded Leonides of what he stood for and who he was as a Spartan.

The most monumental scene for Gorgo is her passionate speech to the Spartan council. Gorgo stood in front of a room filled with men without fear or uncertainty to plea for the council to send their army to aid Leonidas in the fight against King Xerxes. "Send the army for the preservation of liberty. Send it for justice. Send it for law and order. Send it for reason. But most importantly, send our army for hope — hope that a king and his men have not been wasted to the pages of history" (1:30:36). Gorgo did the unthinkable when she, a woman, infiltrated a place where only men were allowed to speak and decide the law. Yet, by going against what was acceptable and voluntarily putting herself in a vulnerable position she showed how strong she is as a woman and the lengths she would go to help her husband and protect her people.

Even though Gorgo exhibited great strength and fierceness, she is not exempt from being a weak woman. Gorgo had to gain the support of Theron, a councilman, in order for the council to agree to send the army to help King Leonidas against the Persians. Unfortunately, to receive his help Gorgo had to exchange her body. This scene shows how Gorgo is weak because as a woman she could not confront the council on her own she needed the support of a male benefactor. Then, she had to be raped to even get the support that she needed. Finally, she had to depend on Theron to uphold his end of the bargain which of course he did not. In response to Theron's betrayal Gorgo took the sword of a nearby guard and stabbed Theron killing him. Vincent Tomasso believes that Gorgo loses her authority as a strong woman when she kills Theron stating "her murder of Theron is a mirror as well as a foil to the Spartan masculine violence occurring simultaneously at Thermopylae" however I disagree (Tomasso, 122). Gorgo in front of the entire council is brave enough to kill Theron. She even repeated the words he said when he began to rape her. "This will not be over quickly. You will not enjoy this" (1:33:22). I believe in that scene Gorgo regained the authority that Theron took when he raped her.

Zack Snyder's Gorgo broke away from the traditional weak woman. She did not sit in her palace waiting for her husband to come home. She took an active role in trying to send reinforcements to aid King Leonidas on the battle field. She went against gender roles and evoked the sense of women empowerment (Tomasso, 113). She did not cry or back down when faced with adversity, instead she stood up and showed why she is not your average weak woman.

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The Unique Style of Postmodernism in Films

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Postmodernism is a term with many different definitions and applications. Postmodernism can be defined as parody, bricolage, intertextuality, or simply something different. Postmodernism as a style can be applied to paintings, photography, books, and many other forms of art, particularly films. Several of the

films that we have studied or will be studying this semester, including *300* (2006), *Titus* (1999), and *Fellini Satyricon* (1969), can be classified as postmodern films due to such things as the setting of certain scenes, the actions of the characters, or the style of the set, among other key characteristics.

In her book, *Postmodernism in the Cinema*, Cristina Degli-Esposti states that “postmodern cinema is made of and from the accumulation of information, that, through memory and quotation, presents a rereading and rewriting” (1998) of the overall story. Postmodern films “base their very existence on repetition with a difference, on recycling the past via the rereading of every story and every meaning” (Degli-Esposti, 1998). Thus, there is a strong presence of intertextuality in many postmodern films.

Postmodern films often do not have a clear message and so it may be ambiguous how the films are meant to be interpreted. Consequently, the audience is guided to create their own interpretation of the film’s events. The style of postmodernism also invites the audience to question reality and view situations from unique perspectives. This goal is achieved by the manipulation of time, the use of irony, and by breaking the fourth wall between the audience and the characters in the film. Because the films often involve multiple story lines, time becomes fragmented and overlapped as the film goes back-and-forth between each story line, and so the audience is left to untangle the sequence of events as they see fit. Furthermore, the traits of postmodern films often cause the audience to remain aware that they are watching something in which they are not actually an active participant. The audience remains aware of their role as spectators when the narrator speaks directly to them, or when a scene is shown within an amphitheater or arena with an audience within the film watching the scene. The audience is also reminded of their role as spectators by the simply grotesque and uncomfortable scenes that often occur in these films, because a division is created between the film’s events and the events of reality.

Zack Snyder’s film, *300*, is based off of a comic book written by Frank Miller based upon the events of the Battle of Thermopylae. *300* very closely follows the plot-line of Miller’s comic book, including many of the details and characters present in it. When comparing the two comic book and the film, we can see that certain scenes are portrayed exactly the same way in the film as they are in the comic book, including the same lighting and positions of the characters. One trait seen in both the comic book

and the film is the constant extreme violence and bloodshed. The inclusion of such violent scenes reminds the audience of their separation from the scenes and of their role as “viewer” of the story because these scenes differ so greatly from real life.

Additionally, in a review of the film in [USA Today](#), Claudia Puig states that the colors in the film were “manipulated and enhanced intriguingly on the sets” (Puig, 2007), further disrupting the sense of reality in the film.

Another example of a postmodern film is Julie Taymor’s *Titus*, based off of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. Many instances of intertextuality can be found throughout the film. One example is how *Titus* relates to *The Hunger Games* because, in both films, the characters are bedecked with extravagant costumes and make-up. A second example is the scene in which Titus is shown writing in the bathtub, which has intertextuality with the painting “Death of Marat” by Jacques-Louis David. Also,



multiple times during the film, the fourth wall is broken when Aaron the Moor directly addresses the audience. Additionally, several scenes in Taymor’s film are shown being acted out in an amphitheater and at the end of the film we are shown the audience sitting in the amphitheater watching the scenes play out before them. However, in the original version of the play, Shakespeare never mentions any kind of amphitheater, and there is especially no mention of people watching the scenes within the play (Shakespeare and Hughes, 2006). The inclusion of an amphitheater and an audience within it (who are not characters in the film itself) serves as one of the many reminders of the division between our reality and the characters’ reality because the audience remains aware of the fact that they are not truly part of the story.

One notably postmodern film by Italian screenwriter and director Federico Fellini is *Fellini Satyricon*. The entire film was shot on a soundstage in Rome (Burke and Waller, 2002). Thus, from the very beginning of the film, there is an awareness of the distinction between the role of the audience as spectators and the characters acting out the story. The set is designed in such a way that the pieces of the set appear to “tower over” (Dillard, 2015) the characters, emphasizing the distance of the events in the film from reality. Furthermore, the inclusion of grotesque and violent scenes

reinforces the division between the film's events and reality. The film also manipulates time due to how the events of the present overlap with the events of the past. A review in [Slant Magazine](#) states that *Fellini Satyricon* seems to be "a science fiction film projected into the past" (Dillard, 2015), as the film maintains historical accuracy, but sets the events in a completely different time period.

Postmodern films such as *300*, *Titus*, and *Fellini Satyricon* set themselves apart from other films by their method of quoting, but simultaneously rewriting, past events or stories. Postmodern films are also defined by their inclusion of intertextualities with other films or art forms and by their ability to heighten the audience's awareness of the division between fiction and reality, ultimately prompting the audience to question their own reality.

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