Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Clash of the Titans by Beverley Cross, Desmond Davis, Ray Harryhausen, Charles H. Schneer", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1245. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Beverley Cross , Desmond Davis , Ray Harryhausen , Charles H. Schneer

Clash of the Titans

United Kingdom (1981)

TAGS: Aphrodite Athena Hephaestus Hera Medusa Metamorphosis Pegasus Perseus Poseidon Tethys Underworld Zeus





Poster (fragment), uploaded by Hutson Hayward. Retrieved from flickr.com, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 (accessed: February 2, 2022).

General information	
Title of the work	Clash of the Titans
Studio/Production Company	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/ Titan Productions
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1981
Running time	113 min
Format	VHS, DVD
Genre	Fantasy films
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Aimee Hinds, University of Roehampton, hindsa@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Beverley Cross , 1931 - 1998
(Screenwriter)

Beverley Cross was a British screenwriter and playwright. Cross was born in London and began writing children's plays in the 1950s, finding success immediately with his first play *One More River* which premiered in 1958. Cross wrote and directed successful plays throughout the 1960s, as well as writing opera librettos for composers Nicholas Maw and Richard Rodney Bennett. He was nominated for two Tony Awards in 1965 for *Half a Sixpence* which opened in 1963 and was adapted from a H.G. Wells novel. Cross is well known for his screenplays, most of which are historical adventure films, including *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *The Long Ships* (1964), *Genghis Khan* (1965), and *Clash of the Titans* (1981). He died in 1998, shortly before his 67th birthday.

Sources:

Wikipedia (accessed: September 3, 2020),

IMDb (accessed: September 3, 2020).

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Desmond Davis , b. 1926
(Director)

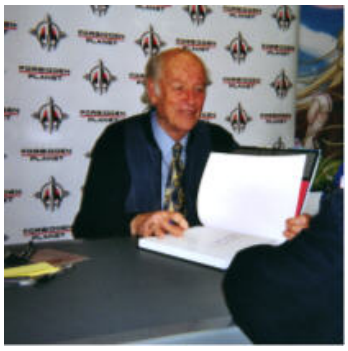
Desmond Davis is a British director and writer. Davis began his career as an apprentice clapper boy in the 1940s, working his way up to focus puller through the 1950s and then to camera operator from the mid-1950s until the early 1960s. Davis made his directorial debut in 1964, winning the Best Director award from the US National Board of Review for *Girl with Green Eyes*. He won another award, The Golden Seashell award at the San Sebastien International Film Festival in 1966 for *I was Happy Here*. Through the 1970s Davis directed largely for television, including episodes of the *New Avengers* and a TV adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1979). Davis is best known for *Clash of the Titans* (1981).

Sources:

Wikipedia (accessed September 3, 2020),

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Ray Harryhausen , 1920 - 2013
(Producer)

Ray Harryhausen was an American visual effects creator, designer, artist, writer, and producer. Born in California, Harryhausen moved to the UK and lived in London from 1960 until his death. Harryhausen became interested in stop-motion animation after seeing *King Kong* (1933) at thirteen; the animator for this film, Willis O'Brien, would

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Ray Harryhausen by Danie Ware. Retrieved from flickr.com, licensed under CC BY 2.0 (accessed: February 2, 2022).

become his mentor. His first film was *Mighty Joe Young* (1949), which he worked on as an assistant animator, after which he was in charge of technical effects on *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). Harryhausen's most famous achievement is the skeleton battle scene in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963); amongst others, this and *Clash of the Titans* (1981) are considered some of his best works. In 1992 Harryhausen was granted an honorary Oscar. He died in 2013. Harryhausen's work is extremely influential, inspiring filmmakers including Steven Spielberg, Peter Jackson, Guillermo del Toro, Wes Anderson, Tim Burton, and J. J. Abrams.

Sources:

Wikipedia (accessed: September 3, 2020),

IMDb(accessed: Sept. 3, 2020).

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Charles H. Schneer by Hans Peters / ANeFo, 1974. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed

Charles H. Schneer , 1920 - 2009
(Producer)

Charles H. Schneer was an American film producer. Born in Virginia, he began working in film at Columbia in 1939 as an assistant, before producing training films for the US Army Signal Corps Photographic Unit as part of his wartime service. He then returned to Columbia as a producer. Schneer is best known as a long-time collaborator of Ray Harryhausen; their first film together was *It Came From Beneath the Sea* in 1955. In the late 1950s, Schneer co-founded and became the president of Morningside Productions, through which he produced several films with Harryhausen, including *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Schneer retired in the 1980s due to the rise of computer-generated special effects. He died in 2009.

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Additional information

Casting	Harry Hamlin – Perseus, Judi Bowker – Andromeda, Laurence Olivier – Zeus, Maggie Smith – Thetis, Claire Bloom – Athena, Ursula Andress – Aphrodite, Jack Gwillim – Poseidon, Neil McCarthy – Calibos.
Adaptations	Remade in 2010 under the same name.
Summary	The film loosely follows ancient versions of the myth of Perseus and Medusa. The film opens with king Acrisius of Argos throwing his daughter Danaë and her infant son Perseus into the sea in a casket. After the credits, the scene cuts to the gods on Olympus, where Zeus swears to punish Acrisius and has Poseidon release a monster, a titan called the Kraken to destroy Argos. It is revealed that Perseus is the child of Zeus. Danaë and Perseus drift safely to the island of Seriphos, where Perseus grows up under the watchful eyes of the gods. When Perseus is grown, Zeus praises him, prompting Thetis to ask for mercy for her own son, Calibos, who has offended Zeus by killing all but one of his flying horses, amongst other offences. Zeus curses Calibos and makes him monstrous. Thetis laments that he was supposed to marry Andromeda, the princess of Joppa. Jealous of Perseus' favour with Zeus, Thetis curses Andromeda so that no one else can marry her, and transports Perseus from his beach in Seriphos to the amphitheatre in Joppa.

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In Joppa, Perseus is greeted by a poet, Ammon, who tells Perseus that he is the rightful king of Argos. Perseus decides to claim his throne and is given gifts by the gods, including a helmet of invisibility. Making his way to Joppa, Perseus finds out about the curse on Andromeda, as her most recent suitor is being executed having answered a riddle incorrectly. Breaking into her room at night, he witnesses a giant vulture that carries off a ghostly Andromeda. Following on Pegasus, Perseus is led to Calibos' swamp, who is responsible for the riddles. Perseus, although wearing his invisibility helmet, is caught by Calibos and fights him.

In Joppa, Andromeda's mother Cassiopeia asks for a new suitor for Andromeda. Perseus steps forward answers the riddle and produces the hand of Calibos. Perseus reveals that he has spared Calibos' life and forced him to lift the curse. While Perseus and Andromeda prepare to be married, Calibos appears at Thetis' temple and prays to his mother for revenge, asking that Poseidon use the Kraken to destroy Joppa, as Perseus is protected by Zeus and cannot be punished. Later, Andromeda and Perseus are married in the temple and Cassiopeia declares her daughter more beautiful than Thetis; the head falls from Thetis' statue and Thetis speaks through it, declaring that the virginal Andromeda must be sacrificed to the Kraken in thirty days or else the Kraken will destroy Joppa.

Perseus and Ammon try to figure out an answer, and Ammon suggests that they visit the Stygian witches. Perseus, Ammon, Andromeda and some soldiers head off to find the witches. Meanwhile, Calibos steals Pegasus. Perseus' helmet having been lost during his earlier fight with Calibos, Zeus demands Athena hand over her owl, Bubo. Athena refuses but has Hephaestus fashion a mechanical one that she sends to Perseus.

Perseus' group reach the Stygian witches, who have one eye between them. The witches tell them they must retrieve the head of Medusa to kill the kraken. Leaving Ammon and Andromeda behind, the rest of the party set out for Medusa’s lair in the Underworld, and are ferried across the Styx by Charon. Inside the lair, several of the men are killed by a two-headed dog or Medusa. Perseus hides and waits for Medusa to pass him before cutting off her head. Having left the lair and returned to his soldier companion and Bubo, Perseus wraps the head in his cloak and hangs it from a tree. Calibos pierces the unattended head, causing drops of blood to fall from it that become giant scorpions. While the men fight the scorpions, Calibos lets loose

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their horses. Calibos is eventually killed by Perseus, who sends Bubo to free Pegasus from Calibos' swamp.

In Joppa, Andromeda is prepared for sacrifice in the morning. Perseus arrives at the amphitheatre on Pegasus and passes out from exhaustion. On Olympus, Zeus is forced to give the order to release the Kraken. In the morning, Andromeda is chained to a rock as the Kraken appears. Perseus, flying on Pegasus, destroys the Kraken using Medusa's head. On Olympus, Zeus praises Perseus and commands that there should be no revenge against him. Perseus and Andromeda are revealed to have been married, had three sons and been made into constellations along with Pegasus and Cassiopeia.

Analysis

There are a lot of elements to this film, many of which are innovations to ancient mythology. While the story is not entirely true to ancient sources, there are many nods to other myths and ancient motifs. For example, Acrisius' palace is decorated with Minoan-style frescoes; the city of Joppa is guarded by a lamassu and a sphinx (in a possible nod to Andromeda's riddles, which are linked with the sphinx through the myth of Oedipus); the men who enter Medusa's lair are confronted by a two-headed dog, similar to Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the Underworld. Andromeda's nightly excursions to Calibos have echoes of the story of Helen and Paris, both in the idea of a phantom twin (as in Euripides' classical Athenian tragedy the *Helen*, in which Helen herself has never been to Troy, only her eidolon [phantom]) and in Perseus' uninvited intrusion into her private room. Andromeda is carried to Calibos by a roc, a giant bird in Arabian folklore. When Perseus first meets Ammon, Ammon exclaims "call no man happy who is not dead", a saying famously attributed to Solon in Herodotus' *Histories* (1.30). The narrative is also turned around - in ancient myth, Perseus has already fetched the head when he comes across Andromeda about to be sacrificed to a sea monster, and so he rescues her as he is able to use Medusa's head as a weapon. In *Clash of the Titans*, the head is being fetched specifically for the purpose of killing the sea monster. However, this flexibility is not restricted to modern retellings as ancient versions vary in the details.

The involvement of Thetis is not original to any ancient versions of this myth. The film uses Thetis and her son Calibos as the main antagonists, in place of the king of Seriphos, Polydectes, for whom Perseus is required to fetch Medusa's head and who is absent in the

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film. Throughout the film, Thetis is found discussing Zeus' infidelities with Hera and the other goddesses, and it is she who tells Hera that Zeus begat Perseus with Danaë in the form of a golden shower. Zeus' infidelities and "seductions" are joked about by the goddesses, through which it is made clear that such behaviour forms a large part of the mythology surrounding Zeus. Rape is never explicitly mentioned but his behaviour is neither excused or condoned by the goddesses (this is unsurprising as the film is a family favourite; however, its certification has been changed several times since its release in the UK, where it has gone from A [appropriate for over 8 years], to 15 [re-rated in 1987], to 12 [re-rated in 2006] [IMDb]). As well as Danaë's rape by Zeus, Medusa's rape by Poseidon is also mentioned as Perseus and his party prepare to retrieve her head, but it is explained as seduction in Aphrodite's (rather than Athena's) temple, punished by Aphrodite due to jealousy of Medusa's beauty. This slightly changed explanation of Medusa's monstrousness is a little more suitable for family audiences than the most well-known ancient mythological versions, in which Medusa is a victim of sexual violence (not a consensual union as hinted in the film), and her punishment by Athena - who, as a virgin goddess, is offended by the display of female sexuality - is effectively victim blaming. In the filmic version, the shift to Aphrodite and her jealousy as the reason for punishment makes sense in terms of Aphrodite's attributes as a goddess of beauty, and as a result it is Medusa's beauty directly that is being punished (in a parallel to the punishment of Andromeda for her mother's boast about her beauty), rather than an apparent sexual transgression. Medusa's transformation in the film is total: this is the first place she is shown with a snake's tail, as well as snake hair (Gloyn, 2020: 54).

Calibos is an interesting figure who is not found in myth at all (in mythology, Thetis is famously the mother of Achilles). He appears to be strongly influenced by the character of Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a figure who shares similarities with Calibos as a monstrous exile, but also with Perseus as an island dwelling son of an exiled mother. The presentation of the transformed Calibos in Clash of the Titans is racist: he is thick-lipped, dark-skinned, animalistic, violent and lustful. The character's representation fits with other elements of this film and similar fantasy-adventure films of the time, such as Sinbad, where Orientalist elements are liberally used. Orientalism is also used in the presentation of Joppa - when Perseus first arrives, it is to a soundtrack of "Eastern" music and all the inhabitants are dressed in vaguely Middle-Eastern costume, with most

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resembling ethnic Middle-Easterners. However, this does not stretch to main characters - the royal family and a few soldiers - who are all white and mostly speak with British accents (this is common in films of this type and is still perpetuated today; see "The Queen's Latin" trope).

The role of the gods is as creators and masters of humankind. Humans are shown as small models that can be physically manipulated - literal play-things - on shelves in Olympus, which is how many events in the film are driven, such as Perseus' sudden removal from Seriphos to Joppa. While the gods are not perfect (they are petty and prone to all-too-human desires such as revenge and lust), they are shown to be generally good and to look after humans, while wilful human disrespect of the gods is swiftly punished. The gods' depictions are influenced by ancient depictions, notably sculpture; a statue of Thetis is superimposed by her moving face, a common device for depicting the gods on screen that creates a direct link with cult statues (Maurice, 2019, pp. 23–24). The human models that the gods use to manipulate the action illustrates the huge physical size of the gods in comparison to humans, emphasising their divine status and also echoing Greek visual culture (Maurice, 2019, pp. 25–26). Apart from their size, the gods are not especially marked out from mortal people. They are all dressed similarly, in white robes, compared to the colourful dress of the mortal characters. The goddesses are clearly powerful and above mortals: Hera is dismissive of mortal problems; Athena provides the owl, Bubo, to Perseus and his party; Thetis threatens Perseus' quest, and Athena is revealed to have punished Medusa. The only other gods depicted apart from Zeus, are Hephaestus, and Poseidon, who is also shown largely following Zeus' commands. Unlike the other gods, Olivier's Zeus is identifiable with divinity in Christian and Jewish tradition (Maurice, 2019, p. 41), possibly to help the audience recognise Zeus as the king of the gods and as an omnipotent figure; the other divinities are all deferential to him accordingly. The gods therefore mirror the gender stereotyping of the mortal world, with Zeus in place of the patriarch, with the goddesses submissive to him. This is reinforced by Zeus' refusal to pardon Calibos despite Thetis' pleas, as well as Hera's indifferent attitude towards Zeus' infidelities.

Ultimately, the film is driven by Perseus' quest to retrieve his birthright, the throne of Argos. His rescue of Andromeda feeds this traditional narrative, as she will be his queen; there is little room for nuance in the characters, with good characters being wholly good and

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bad characters being wholly bad (perhaps only with the exception of Thetis, perhaps reflecting her position as an intermediary or liminal figure in ancient literature), and patriarchy and religious hierarchy constantly kept in working order. Hamlin's portrayal of Perseus deviates from many earlier sword-and-sandal features in that he is not a hyper-masculine figure, although his masculinity is still constructed and defined by the femininity of the women around him, most notably Andromeda, but also his mother Danae. Raucci (2015, p. 165) notes that in much of the marketing material for the film, Perseus is not the focal point, but shares space with Andromeda; this reflects the family audience of the film and the re-framing of the story as an adventure love-story rather than a straightforward epic adventure. Stereotypical gender norms are constantly reaffirmed throughout the film, and transgressions of expected gendered behaviour are consistently punished. Thus, Andromeda is rescued by the hero Perseus and they are married, while Calibos and Medusa are doubly punished, their monstrousness pushing over into extreme gendered behaviours (Calibos becomes ultra-masculine while Medusa, punished for a contravention of feminine behaviour, is also masculinised and identified with the Amazons through her practice of archery, an innovation of the film). The events of the film from start to finish build towards a reinstating of the status quo, the upset of which is placed firmly on humans with the actions of Acrisius. Although Acrisius attempts to execute Danaë because of her sexual transgression, in mythology this is due to a prophecy that declares Acrisius' grandson will kill him; in this film there is no such prophecy, possibly due to the potential for confusion with a similar storyline in the earlier film *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Again, the film is clearly aimed at family audiences and is still relatively popular today, being shown fairly regularly on terrestrial television in the UK. The easy to understand narrative has been updated largely to bring it into line with contemporary social values, aimed at all ages including children, who are especially catered for through comedic elements such as Bubo, Athena's owl.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aphrodite Athena Hephaestus Hera Medusa Metamorphosis Pegasus Perseus Poseidon Tethys Underworld Zeus

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adventure Appearances Coming of age Gaining understanding Gender Gender expectations/construction Good vs evil Heritage Heroism Identity Journeys Justice Love Princes and princesses Race Rape Transformation Witch

Further Reading

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