Hanna Paulouskaya, "Entry on: Phaethon, the Son of the Sun [Фаэтон – сын Солнца (Faėton – syn Solntsa)] by Vasily Livanov", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/798. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Vasily Livanov

Phaethon, the Son of the Sun [Фаэтон – сын Солнца (Faėton – syn Solntsa)]

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1972)

TAGS: Helios Jupiter Phaethon Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Phaethon, the Son of the Sun [Фаэтон – сын Солнца (Faėton – syn Solntsa)]
Studio/Production Company	Soyuzmultfilm
Country of the First Edition	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
Country/countries of popularity	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Original Language	Russian
First Edition Date	1972
First Edition Details	*Фаэтон – сын Солнца* [Phaethon, the Son of the Sun (Faėton – syn Solntsa)]. Directed by Vasily Livanov. Script by V. Ankor and Vasily Livanov. Composer Gennady Gladkov. Moscow: Soyuzmultfilm, 1972, 17 min 36 sec.
Running time	17 min 36 sec
Genre	Animated films, Hand-drawn animation (traditional animation)*, Instructional and educational works, Short films
Target Audience	Crossover (Youth 6+)
Author of the Entry	Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Portrait of Vasily Livanov — courtesy of the web-site kino-teatr.ru (accessed: July 16, 2019).

Vasily Livanov , b. 1935
(Director, Scriptwriter)

Vasily Livanov (Василий Ливанов) (born 1935) is a Russian actor, screen-writer, and animated film director. He is most famous for playing the role of Sherlock Holmes in the Soviet TV series *Приключения Шерклока Холмса и доктора Ватсона* (The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, 1979–86).

Livanov was born in Moscow into a famous acting family. He studied at the Shchukin Theatrical School (1958), and at the Supreme School of Directing at Goskino USSR, Faculty of the Animation Film Direction (1966). He directed and wrote scripts for a few outstanding animations. For example, *Бременские музыканты* (The Bremen Town Musicians, 1969) produced after his script became a musical and an animation hit.

Livanov has been awarded many prizes and orders, including the Order of the British Empire of the second degree (2006) for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes.

Sources:

Profile at animator.ru (accessed June 16, 2019)

Profile at imdb.com (accessed June 16, 2019)

Profile at kino-teatr.ru (accessed June 16, 2019)

Bio prepared by Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Summary

This animated film is made as a science-fiction “hypothesis” film that includes a mythical story in its narration. It starts with a scientific meeting at a planetarium. The scientist says: “This secret has been worrying astronomers from ancient times. Back in the 17th* century, scientists noticed a mathematical pattern in the distance between the planets and the sun.”** The researcher presents to the audience the Titius-Bode law about a hypothetical planet that existed between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter – Phaethon. The proof of the existence of this planet would be a large cluster of asteroids, located in the assumed orbit of the planet. Together with the audience in the lecture we see pictures in the planetarium.

Afterwards, we hear an announcement that the preparations for the launch of the Phaethon-1 spacecraft have been completed. The spaceship will be exploring the asteroid belt. “Attention! Attention! […] Today all mankind will follow with excitement the launch of the spacecraft Phaethon-1.” We see a presentation of the astronauts on futuristic screens. The astronauts speak like enthusiastic scientists who themselves participate in constructing the theory about the planet. They speak with passion and excitement, interrupting each other in a very natural way. They say that after observing many asteroids, they will land on the largest of them, Ceres.

Asked about the name of the spacecraft, the astronauts tell the ancient myth about Phaethon, which according to them might have originated in the legendary Atlantis. The scenery and style of drawing changes and we see Helios looking like an Egyptian pharaoh sitting on a cosmic throne, and a young man – his son Phaethon – asking him to ride his chariot (Ovid. *Met*. 2.32–366). The father lets him use the chariot, warning to hold the reins tight. The music and the picture changes. On the black background, we see a yellow, red and blue chariot with four horses. Scared by the Leo-constellation, the horses bolt, and Phaethon loses his reins. The chariot is dangerously approaching the Earth sending fire to it. At this point we hear the voice of Gaia, the Earth, who asks Zeus to save the planet. And Zeus kills Phaethon with his lightening. The picture changes, and we see successful lunching of the spacecraft.

Returning to the planetarium, we see the continuation of the lecture:

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.

"The first steps of man in space suddenly brought the past closer, made him look at the history of all mankind in a new way. People were increasingly thinking about the possible connection between the events – earthly and cosmic. Let's look at the myth of Phaethon. Some researchers tend to consider this myth as one of the ancient poetic evidences of real events – the death of the planet Phaethon as a result of a space disaster."

During the lecture, we see the Phaistos Disc, and other ancient monuments in the background (moai, pyramids, cave paintings, Wettersfeld fish etc.). The lecturer continues with the theory of communication between the ancients and the aliens.

In the next episode, Phaethon-1 passes through an asteroid area. The flight control from the Earth helps them to hold the course.

The astronauts discuss the possibility of the existence of the planet and the cause of its destruction. Maybe it was a war? Another astronaut says that it is impossible. "We, humans have been able to prevent the madness of destruction. […] A high mind is not compatible with war." They look for some natural causes – meeting with a comet or the attraction of the giant Jupiter. At this point, the astronaut recalls the myth about Zeus/Jupiter hitting the young man.

They believe in high civilization on Phaethon and in their visits to Earth in ancient times. The film shows the Phaethonians who came to the ancient people who lived in a cave and are now depicted in a cave painting.

The author concludes, that we live in times when the biggest mysteries of the universe are to be solved. "And our contemporary hypotheses may become reality tomorrow."

---

* Actually Johann Elert Bode and Johann Daniel Titius have come up with their law in the 18th century (1772).

** All translations from Russian by the author of the entry.

Analysis

The film connects science-fiction to mythology, emphasizing that

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

ancient texts may be helpful to solve contemporary (or even future) scientific problems. The authors use the myth of Phaethon described by Ovid to present a hypothesis about the existence of one more planet in the Solar system. The combination of the two narratives makes the film more diverse and interesting.

Interestingly, this 1972 film precedes the real-life Soviet missions to Ceres (Soviet Vesta Mission) planned since the 1980s.* Soviet space scientists dr B. Belotserkovsky and O. Chembrovsky highly praised the film in their article in 1973.** They emphasized the possibilities of animation in presenting space to the public.

The futuristic part of the movie is made in a positive mood, typical for Soviet science-fiction, called the “reign of love” by Isaac Asimov in his introduction to an American edition of Soviet science fiction.*** We see no conflicts in the future reality, and the protagonists even deny its possibility in the past. When we see pictures of war as a possible reason for the destruction of the planet in the mythical times, one of the disputants interrupts arguing about the impossibility of aggression among rational beings. It is interesting that at this point the characters return to the myth version and explain the punishment of Zeus as a collision with the planet Jupiter.

The myth is depicted in a very vivid and colourful way. It differs from the other parts of the story and attracts attention. It is strange, that Helios is shown as a bronze figure of a pharaoh. Perhaps the authors wanted to refer to Akhenaten and his religious reforms connected to monotheistic worship of the god of Sun Aten (or Ra).

The language of the narration of this episode also differs from the other parts. The authors use poetic, elevated language similar to poetic translation of classical texts or that used by Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaia in her animations .

Contrary to Ovid, Phaethon is not looking for confirmation from Helios that he is his son, nor Helios warns of weakness of the mortal young man. The aspect of divinity or mortality is omitted. The father acts rather like Daedalus, appealing to his son to be moderate and to keep his way.

Presenting the Lion constellation as an animal highlights metaphorical understanding of the whole story.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw.

Traditionally for Soviet culture, the film emphasizes importance of ancient Greece for the development of science. However, for the first time, the authors rely on ancient mythology and use it in a science fiction film about the future.

* The first space mission to Ceres – a space probe Dawn – was launched by NATO only in 2007, its first images received in 2015. In the 2020s, another mission for Ceres is planned by the Chinese Space Agency.

** Belotserkovsky, B., and O. Chembrovsky [Белоцерковский, Б., и О. Чембровский], "Фаэтон сын Солнца: Новое явление в кинематографии 'живого рисунка'" ["Phaethon, a Son of the Sun: A New Phenomenon in the Cinematography of 'Live Pictures'" ("Faėton syn Solntsa: Novoe iavleniie kinematografii 'zhivogo risunka'")], *Техника молодежи* [Techniques for Youth (Tekhnika molodëzhi)] 6 (1973): 14–15.

*** Isaac Asimov, *Introduction, More Soviet Science Fiction*, ed. Isaac Asimov, New York, 1962, 13.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Helios Jupiter Phaethon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Future Knowledge Past Science Success and failure
Further Reading	Belotserkovsky, B., and O. Chembrovsky [Белоцерковский, Б., и О. Чембровский], "Фаэтон сын Солнца: Новое явление в кинематографии 'живого рисунка'" ["Phaethon, a Son of the Sun: A New Phenomenon in the Cinematography of 'Live Pictures'" ("Faėton

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

syn Solntsa: Novoe iavleniie kinematografii 'zhivogo risunka'")], *Техника молодежи* [Techniques for Youth (Tekhnika molodëzhi)] 6 (1973): 14–15; fandom.ru (accessed July 16, 2019).

Isaac Asimov, "Introduction," in *More Soviet Science Fiction*, ed. Isaac Asimov. New York, 1962, 7–13.

Information about the film in movie databases:

animator.ru (accessed July 16, 2019).

kino-teatr.ru (accessed July 16, 2019) .

kinopoisk.ru (accessed July, 2019).

Addenda

Cinematography:

Mikhail Dryian

Artist:

Maks Zherebchevsky

Animators:

Anatoly Abarenov; Nikolai Kukolev; Iosif Kuroian; Valentin Kushnerev; Mikhail Pershin;

Composer:

Gennady Gladkov

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.