

Franco Rossi's *Odissea*: The Greatest Screen Adaptation of Homer
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Many modern adaptations of ancient texts are primarily retellings of canonical and revered works in a commercially viable manner and take considerable liberty with the originals. Only rarely does a film version do equal justice to its literary source and to the artistic demands of its own medium. This paper introduces and provides a brief appreciation of the most faithful and most accomplished adaptation of Homer ever put on film: Franco Rossi's six-hour *Odissea* (1968). Since it is a work produced in Italy for public European television, it is virtually unknown outside Europe today.

Filmed in color, on ravishing Mediterranean locations, and with an international cast, this *Odissea* stands out for its director's cinematic sense and for its faithful adherence to Homer despite some necessary changes, omissions, and minor simplifications. Rossi translates an ancient text into modern visual terms in a manner that fully captures the spirit of Homer's epic. An off-screen narrator guides viewers through the entire film, often quoting lines from the *Odyssey* and even keeping Homer's epithets and formulaic language. The vexed problem of how to portray the gods and the supernatural on screen Rossi solves in intriguing ways. His sophisticated use of film technology well before the age of computerized special effects is particularly powerful in Odysseus' meeting with the shade of his mother. And the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope expresses not only the independent spirit of Penelope as played by Irene Papas that modern scholarship has emphasized but also the spouses' deep love for each other. The film furthermore delivers the action, suspense, and thrills expected from an epic story about a famous hero. The Polyphemus episode, for instance, is the longest, eeriest, and most effective ever filmed—small wonder, for Italian horror specialist Mario Bava took over the direction of this sequence. The ending of the film is remarkable for the location Rossi chose. He shows the columns of the Parthenon, the most familiar visual expression of the greatness of classical Greece, to represent the beauty and serenity of Olympus while the narrator quotes the corresponding lines from Homer (*Od.* 6.42-45). Rossi's is the most appropriate way to close an intellectually satisfying and emotionally moving film.