

Classical Myth and Fantasy in 1970s Animation: *Allegro Non Troppo*, *Metamorphoses* and
Fantasia

The late 1960s and early 1970s are known as the end of what film historians term the “Golden Age of American Animation.” It was during this period that the newer medium of television animation, which was produced with less expense and in a more simplistic style, increased in popularity over theatrical animated shorts. It was also at about this time that a sustained engagement with themes and stories from classical mythology and, to a lesser extent, with philosophical allegory began to appear in animated productions.

This paper will focus on two feature-length animated productions from this era in particular: Italian director Bruno Bozzetto’s anthology film *Allegro Non Troppo* (1976) and Japanese director Takashi’s Ovidian homage, *Metamorphoses* (1978). Both films take as their inspiration the narrative and imagery of Greco-Roman myth, but they also share another important point of influence: Disney’s musical masterpiece *Fantasia* (1940), and in particular its vignette set to Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*, which features colorful centaurs and “centaurettes,” cupids, fauns and other mythological figures, as well as memorable representations of the gods Bacchus and Zeus.

After a brief survey of these films, I will turn to some of the broader questions that this animated turn toward Greco-Roman mythology engenders. First, what cultural trends contributed to the production of these two *Fantasia*-inspired films at about the same time? And why was the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome such a rich creative source for artists and animators in the 1970s? I will propose that there are two related causes for this turn and that *Fantasia* is central to both of them. First is the increased experimentation in different artistic genres,

animation included, which accompanied the transformative social movements of this era. Second is the emergence and popularity of the fantasy genre in literature, which was ushered in by the publication in paperback of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* in 1965 in the United States.

Both of these developments shared a preoccupation with freedom, with expanding limits and with representing the irrational or impossible, and both embraced an ethos of escapism, often into other worlds with features from the mythical past. Not surprisingly, the stories of Greek gods and heroes, with their foregrounding of magic and the supernatural, and their focus on eroticism, adventure and transformation, proved a rich and refreshing source for those producing fantasy-themed animation in this period. The stories and characters of ancient mythology, like those of *Fantasia*, were also familiar to the audiences of these productions. This familiarity lent Bozzetto and Takashi's offbeat experimental films mainstream appeal even as they remained on the fringe of popular culture.