

Themes of *The Hymn to Aphrodite* and the Dog Star Sirius in  
Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*

*Rear Window* (1954) remains a beloved film of Hitchcock, in part because of the iconic acting performances of James Stewart (Jeff Jeffries) and Grace Kelly (Lisa Fremont). Its many production values combine to create the "the well-made film" (Falwell-2004). Though based on a detective novel of Cornell Woolrich, this paper locates the adaptation as coming to life as informed by Greek myth. The approach does so to address the question of Lisa's literary origins, a figure not included in Woolrich's non-romantic account. John Michael Hayes, the screenwriter, was well-read in translated classical literature (DeRosa-2001), and subconsciously or not he and Hitchcock drew upon two myth clusters to construct her persona. The structuring use of Greek tale to bend crime and psychological fare to romantic patterns defines a core dynamic of Hitchcock filmmaking (Brill-1988), and the approach of shifting Kelly's hitherto demurred persona into a sexually expressive one in this instance reflects a Pygmalion mindset. This deep dive into *Rear Window*'s mythic parallelisms usefully expands the register of myth identified hitherto in Hitchcock and in an important classic film.

The first mythic parallel is the *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, an archaic-period poem that may symbolize the completion of Zeus' ascendancy (Clay-1989). Here, Zeus commands the goddess to have sex with Anchises, a cowherd on Mt. Ida. Aphrodite, of higher status, focuses her seductive charms on the mortal and completes her assignment with flair. Fremont, a chic Upper East Side socialite and fashion store buyer, enters the private world of the paycheck-to-paycheck photojournalist Jeff, and uses her own wiles to try and consummate their relationship. In both accounts, and in contrast to the noir-pattern of the femme fatale that Hitchcock

eschewed, the seductress-protagonist demonstrates positive and even “heroic” behavior (Brillet-Dubois-2011, Lemire-2000). Numerous motifs may be explored in this parallelism of texts. For example, the “rear window” characters who play out the fears and desires of Jeff and Lisa link with Aphrodite’s telling of three stories to respond to Anchises’ anxieties.

Mythic rebar is secondly found in the film’s use of the well-attested behavioral impacts of Sirius, the dog star, whose appearance behind the rising sun at the apex of the summer’s heat signals the arrival of the new year. Sirius generates a range of perverse and baleful behavioral effects. In a tradition that ranges from Homer to imperial Rome, males can become either violent or sexually impotent, while females can demonstrate lasciviousness (Ceragioli-1992). In *Rear Window*, the story’s events take place during a New York City heat wave and are resolved in its abatement. For example, Jeff’s libido is stilted, even though, as in one scene, Lisa sits on his lap to enflame him. The murderous Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr), Jeff’s evil *doppelgänger*, murders his ill and “nagging” wife confined to their marital bed, a space he clearly now abhors. Lisa oddly requires immediate sexual gratification from the laid-up Jeff, even though he has almost recovered from an accident and his leg cast is scheduled to be removed in a matter of days. “Stella,” Jeff’s nurse, arrives in the morning. Halfway through the film, a dog is killed and publicly lamented. In Greece, dog sacrifices were conducted to abate Sirius’ impacts.

A final section of the analysis locates the integration of these two themes—Aphrodite’s seduction of Anchises and Sirius’ effects—in the mythic and ritual framework of the goddess’ relationship with Adonis and the youth’s memorialization in the Adonis cult. In line with views of the Adonia as centered in the socially positive aspects of Aphrodite’s cults, at least in Athens (Goff-2004, Rosenzeig-2004), Lisa’s goddess-inflected actions shift from a self-centered

expression into a palliative one. Lisa reverses Sirius' spell over Jeff, and the film at end validates Lisa's amatory *aristeia*.

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