Millennial Mythmaking

Essays on the Power of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, Films and Games

Edited by John Perlich and David Whitt
Contemporary myths, particularly science fiction and fantasy texts, can provide commentary on who we are as a culture, what we have created, and where we are going. These nine essays from a variety of disciplines expand upon the writings of Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey. Modern examples of myths from various sources such as Planet of the Apes, Wicked, Pan's Labyrinth, and Spirited Away; the Harry Potter series; and Second Life are analyzed as creative mythology and a representation of contemporary culture and emerging technology.

JOHN PERLICH is a professor of communication studies at Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska.

DAVID WHITT is an associate professor of communication studies at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln.

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Polysemous Myth: Incongruity in Planet of the Apes

Richard Besel and Renée Smith Besel

In the late 1960s—an era of free love, race riots, political assassinations, growing environmental concern and war—a film emerged as a mythic symbol of American values. It highlighted the very controversies with which Americans themselves were struggling, but it did so with dazzling costumes and make-up, ingenious set designs and musical score, and memorable casting and humor. This unlikely iconic film was Planet of the Apes (1968), starring Charlton Heston.

The original Apes movie is now a story with which generations of film-watchers are familiar: Four astronauts—George Taylor (Charlton Heston), Dodge (Jeff Burton), Landon (Robert Gunner) and Stewart (Dianne Stanley)—depart Cape Kennedy in the twentieth century to embark on an intergalactic journey that takes them forward in space and time. Awakening from a deep-space hibernation, Taylor, Dodge and Landon discover their female companion did not survive the journey and that their ship is crashing into a body of water. With barely enough time to read their instruments and discern that they have arrived on a planet in the constellation Orion 2,000 years in the future, the trio escapes to dry land with a few rations and basic survival equipment. After traversing barren land for days, the three stumble across a race of primitive, nomadic, mute humans who are trying to avoid capture from Ape soldiers on horseback. Taylor and Landon are injured, while Dodge is killed during the slave-hunt. Reversing the role of human dominion over apes in contemporary society, Sterling’s Apes confine the humans to cages for use in zoos or medical experiments. Trying to communicate with Ape animal psychologist Dr. Zira (Kim Hunter), Taylor reveals he can understand the Apes
as well as read and write. Dr. Zira encourages Taylor to tell his unique story, much to the dismay of Dr. Zaius (Maurice Evans), Minister of Science and Keeper of the Faith, who pronounces Taylor's tale of far-off planets and spacecrafts absurd. When Taylor discloses that he can also speak, Dr. Zaius puts Taylor, Dr. Zira and Dr. Zira's fiancé, Cornelius (Roddy McDowall) all on trial for crimes against the faith, for the inferiority of humans is integral to the Apes' religion. Realizing the only way to salvage their careers and their lives is to prove the truth, Dr. Zira concocts a plan to free Taylor and escape to an archeological site in the Forbidden Zone, where Cornelius reveals several artifacts that pre-date the Apes' sacred religious scrolls, including a talking human doll. The group concludes that Apes evolved from humans, and humans were, at one point, the dominant race. Taylor and a nomad he has fallen in love with, Nova (Linda Harrison), escape on horseback, when Taylor sees a familiar sight—the Statue of Liberty—almost entirely buried in sand. He realizes then that he has been on Earth all along and that humans destroyed both their planet and their race.

Despite Heston's fame and a screenplay by Twilight Zone creator Rod Sterling, critical reviews of the film were mixed. Renata Adler of the New York Times, wrote, "It is no good at all, but fun, at moments, to watch" (1968a, p. 55) and, "The serious moral message... is a complete failure, as are the suspense on which the plot depends and an ending that is repeated a number of times in case any anthropoid in the audience may have missed it" (Adler, 1968b, d1). Roger Ebert (1968) of the Chicago Sun-Times noted that the film "is not great" (§ 6) but that it "seems to have found its audience" (§ 3) and called the film "quickly paced" (§ 9) and "completely entertaining" (§ 9). Meanwhile, Variety magazine said, "Planet of the Apes is an amazing film. A political-sociological allegory, cast in the mold of futuristic science-fiction, it is an intriguing blend of chilling satire, a sometimes ludicrous juxtaposition of human and apes more, optimism, and pessimism" (1968, p. A1).

With such reviews and a largely unknown cast, no one, not even producer Arthur P. Jacobs, was prepared for the commercial success they had on their hands (Berardinelli, 2001a). Yet Planet of the Apes emerged as the first science fiction/fantasy film to truly launch a franchise. Not only did Planet of the Apes spawn four theatrical sequels, it was the basis for a short-lived 1970s television series, a Saturday morning TV cartoon, countless books, comic books, and other spin-off material—not to mention the "action figures," costumes, lunch boxes, and various other paraphernalia that are now mandatory to the success of any would-be blockbuster (Berardinelli, 2001b). In addition, Planet of the Apes, directed by Franklin Schaffner, was nominated for two Academy Awards (Best Costume Design and Best Original Score), while makeup designer John Chambers won an Oscar for his work in the movie (Booker, 2006). Yet, there was more to this movie than just outstanding visual effects. It donned a political voice with implications for the very issues Americans were debating upon the film's release in 1968.

Given the way the movie engaged issues such as race relations, animal rights, nuclear war and class conflict, Planet of the Apes came to be recognized as a modern-day myth, a fable used to "resolve contradictions of some sort or address important questions which a culture is asking about itself" (McGuire, 1977, p. 3). In other words, the film helped audiences face their uncomfortable cultural anxieties. As Greene (1998) noted about the 1968 movie and its 1970s sequels:

The makers of the Apes films created fictional spaces whose social tensions resembled those then dominating the United States. They inserted characters in those spaces whose ideologies, passions, and fears duplicated the ideologies, passions, and fears of generations of Americans.... The films were attempts to explore the meanings of those cleavages and understand what they said about the character of the society and its people both as US Citizens and as human beings [p. 9].

However, issues of social importance are rarely short-lived. As cultural controversies linger or resurface, societies often turn to myths of the past. As mythic critic David Sutton (1997) explains, "In times of crisis people turn to their mythos for comfort and guidance. One must consider, however, that these narrativs are not carved in metaphorical stone. They are malleable as the situation dictates" (p. 213). Given the tendency of societies to turn toward their cultural narratives, it is not surprising that the Apes mythology reappeared some thirty years later.

In 2001, director Tim Burton (Batman, Edward Scissorhands, Batman Returns, Sleepy Hollow, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Sweeney Todd) reimagined Planet of the Apes, but did not meet with as much success. In this dark, action-packed, technologically stunning film, U.S. Air Force astronaut and primate trainer Leo Davidson (Mark Wahlberg) is among the many aboard the space station Oberon. When an electromagnetic storm approaches, Pericles, a trained chimpanzee, is sent to pilot a space pod equipped with a probe into the storm. Communication with Pericles is lost and Davidson steals a pod to search for his friend. He survives the storm only to crash land into a swamp on a tropical new world 1,000 years in the future. As his ship sinks, he comes across a tribe of humans fleeing a squadron of military Apes. Most of the humans— including Davidson— are captured and taken back to the Apes' city to be sold. Ari (Helena Bonham Carter), a female chimpanzee, arrives at the auction house to protest the treatment of the humans and chooses to buy Davidson and Daena (Estella Warren) to work as "house humans," an assignment made possible since humans, in this version of the film, can speak. Determined to escape, Davidson breaks out of his cage and frees Daena and her family, who quickly decide to accompany him. Davidson also persuades Ari to help them find their way out of the city. However, General Thade (Tim Roth), who wants to marry Ari, witnesses the escape and sends his top Colonel, Attar (Michael Clarke Duncan), to rescue Ari and kill the humans. Believing that he has re-established contact with his home space station, the Oberon, Davidson leads the groups of fugitives to Calima, the supposed birth-
place of the apes, only to discover that Calima is, in fact, the OBERON, which crashed 1,000 years earlier in pursuit of Davidson's lost pod. Old space logs reveal that the race of English-speaking apes on this strange planet are all descendents of Semos, a genetically enhanced ape onboard the Oberon who led a violent coup against the humans. As Attar approaches, hundreds of humans show up to fight against the apes. In the thick of the battle, a pod from the Oberon gracefully descends to the planet and opens to reveal Pericles, the trained chimpanzee whose mission was to investigate a storm started Davidson's journey and the race of superior apes. Thade follows Davidson and Pericles into the Oberon, where Davidson traps him in the bulletproof command room. Leaving Pericles in Ari's capable hands, Davidson uses Pericles' pod to return to his home planet, Earth, in his own time, 2029. What he finds when he lands in Washington, D.C., however, is a monument of Thade in place of the Lincoln Memorial, and an advanced civilization of apes. The movie closes with a baffled Davidson struggling to make sense of this new twenty-first century Earth.

Burton's reimagining shared several characteristics with the 1968 film. In both movies, a masculine mythic hero fights his way through trials and tribulations to escape the domineering apes, who are intelligent, articulate and prejudiced creatures. In addition, many of the moral lessons at the heart of the stories remain largely unchanged. What was different, however, was the reaction of the public and critics. The 1968 version, as we have seen, met with popular (albeit not necessarily critical) success, and the 2001 film met with mild critical acclaim but was essentially a flop. Although the 2001 Apes won several industry accolades for make-up, costume and music, it also earned its share of Golden Raspberry Awards for Worst Remake or Sequel, Worst Supporting Actor (Charlton Heston), and Worst Supporting Actress (Estella Warren) (IMDB, n.d.). Critics noted that although "Burton's version is a gorgeous film that looks much better than the original in all sorts of ways," it is also "almost entirely lacking in the emotional power and political commentary of the original" (Booker, 2006, pp. 98–9).

This chapter explores why these similar myths generated such very different reactions. We advance two central arguments: First, although both versions of the myth relied on what American literary theorist and rhetoric scholar Kenneth Burke calls "perspective by incongruity," we contend that the 1968 version of Planet of the Apes was critically and commercially more successful than the 2001 film because the original text addressed a richer and wider variety of social and political tensions that were pertinent to the audiences of the time. Second, we illustrate how previous treatments of Planet of the Apes read the texts from one perspective, preventing a reading that addresses the polysemous, or multi-faceted, nature of the original movie.

We will begin by turning to Kenneth Burke's notions of "perspective by incongruity" and "piety" and Leah Cvearelli's notion of polysemous texts to inform our analytical framework. By combining these concepts and using them to guide our analysis of the 1968 and 2001 films, we are able to offer insight into the successes and failures of the Apes movies as well as offer implications for mediated myths as a whole.

PERSPECTIVE BY INCONGRUITY, PIETY AND POLYSEMY

We argue that the Planet of the Apes movies made use of what Kenneth Burke calls perspective by incongruity. According to Burke, each of us has an expectation — an orientation — of "how things were, how they are, and how they may be" (Burke, 1984, p. 14). When our expectations are violated through a juxtaposition of things that to do not fit together, an incongruity, our perspective on how things were, are, and will be, changes. Words and ideas that do not go together are brought together just as words and ideas that do go together are separated. Burke provides us with an example: "Were we finally to accommodate ourselves, for instance, to placing lion in the cat family, a poet might metaphorically enlighten us and startle us by speaking of 'that big dog, the lion' — or were we completely inured to thinking of man [sic] as an ape, we might get a sudden flash, a perspective, from a reference to man [sic] as the 'ape-God'"" (Burke, 1984, p. 90). Both Planet of the Apes movies go so far as to suggest the sapiens "ape-Gods" could be replaced by the simian "human-Gods." Perspective by incongruity serves as a "opening wedge" that fractures our sense of how the world does and ought to function" (Whedbee, 2001, p. 48). When Taylor, encounters the "upsidown" world where apes dominate humans in the 1968 movie, audiences are invited to experience perspective by incongruity: by understanding how the simian society functions, audiences are better able to understand their own. The same can be said for Leo Davidson's discovery in the 2001 movie. Burke (1984) offers a rather lengthy and instructive passage that is surprisingly similar to what audiences experience in the Apes movies:

Or let us even deliberately deprive ourselves of available knowledge in the search for new knowledge — as for instance: Imagine that you had long studied some busy and ingenious race of organisms, in the attempt to decide for yourself, from the observing of their ways, that inducements led them to act as they did; imagine next that, after long research with this race which you had thought speechless, you suddenly discovered that they had a vast communicative network, a remarkably complex arrangement of signs; imagine next learning all this race's motives and purposes as this race itself concerned them. Would you not be exultant? Would you not feel that your efforts had been rewarded to their fullest? Imagine, then, setting out to study mankind, with whose system of speech you are largely familiar. Imagine beginning your course of study precisely by depriving yourself of this familiarity, attempting to understand motives and purposes by avoiding as much as possible the clues handed you readily made in the texture of the language itself. In this you will have deliberately discarded available data in the interests of a fresh point of view, the heuristic or perspective value of a planned incongruity [p. 121].
Although the Apes movies never ask viewers to completely discard information in the interest of a fresh point of view, audiences can, nonetheless, temporarily suspend their disbelief until they have absorbed the planned incongruity. However, to fully understand Burke's notion of perspective by incongruity, that is, how expectations can be violated to enact change, one must also explore what Burke means by "piety," the very perspective being challenged.

Inspired by Spanish poet and philosopher George Santayana, Burke (1984) sees piety as "the sense of what properly goes with what" (p. 74). Despite the religious connotation of the word "piety," for Burke, it is not limited to the religious sphere. Instead, "where you discern the symptoms of great devotion to any kind of endeavor, you are in the realm of piety" (p. 83). Perspective by incongruity, then, is impious "insofar as it attacks the kinds of linkage already established" (p. 87). This is precisely what makes perspective by incongruity such a potent rhetorical tool. According to Naomi R. Rockler (2002), "Perspective by incongruity is powerful because, if successful, it jars people into new perceptions about the way reality can be constructed and may encourage people to question their pieties" (p. 38). Pieties, then, are beliefs and values people have come to accept and expect in everyday life. Rockler offers an example of a carnivore confronted with a suggestion that her eating habits might be destroying the rain forest. The meat-eater's piety is that food sustains life—it does not destroy it—while the suggestion itself is the impious text.

That Burkean notions can be used to understand mediated myths seems fitting given the similarities between Burke's definition of piety and the function of myths. As Joseph Campbell told Bill Moyers, myths function by "supporting and validating a certain social order" (Campbell and Moyers, 1988, p. 31). Thus, myths can be pious or impious texts, depending on whether or not the perspective in question is already embedded in a given culture. According to Wayne McMullen (1996), "Central to the application of a mythic perspective to film is viewing the film as a dialectic between competing value systems" (p. 18). Indeed, a clash between pious and impious positions is necessary for a myth to survive, for as Stone (1993) explains, "Myths are thought to depend so fully on the tension between competing value systems that, without such tension, the essence of the narratives behind the myth dissolve" (p. 491). Myths teach us about what pieties we should cling to and which pieties we should abandon.

Burke's perspective by incongruity as a rhetorical strategy does not have to have a single piety as its target. The notion of polysemy can further guide our analysis of mediated myths. Planet of the Apes can be seen to function against multiple pieties. However, audiences in different historical positions will not weigh all of the perspectives in similar fashions. According to Doty (2000, p. 151),

'...few mythic or ritualistic elements remain unchanged for very long, and the ways one "believes" in a myth element or ritual moment may vary considerably during one's lifetime or across a society's historical development. Even the ways mythic materials are recounted may vary according to what the raconteur surmises about the particular interests of the listeners, his or her socioeconomic position, or according to the particular storyteller's skills, politics, and affiliations (what folklorists refer to as compromising the text, texture, and context of the material).

In light of Doty's observation, we agree with Meyer (2003) that, "Polysemic interpretations of myth are essential to our understanding of complex narrative forms, particularly in mediated contexts through which narratives reach a global audience" (p. 527).

According to Leah Ceccarelli (1998), scholars have used the term polysemy in at least three ways: polysemy defined as resistive reading, strategic ambiguity, and hermeneutic depth. In the resistive reading camp, scholars have argued audiences bring their own interpretations to the text and actively deny the initial meaning intended by the message's sender. These interpretations offer room for resistance against the hegemonic coding given by a text's creator. However, a resistive reading does not necessarily claim the hegemonic coding is not present in the text; it could simply result in a reading that disagrees with the creator's coding. Strategic ambiguity is a polysemic strategy used by rhetors to intentionally destabilize meaning in a text, often resulting in differing parties accepting the text. Unlike resistive reading's grounding in the audience, this understanding of polysemy is rooted in the text. The text is ambiguous enough to contain multiple meanings. Finally, hermeneutic depth refers to how a text should be read. According to Ceccarelli, this view of polysemy as asks audiences not to simply resist texts, or understand ambiguous texts from one of many potential perspectives, but instead, asks audiences to realize the range of possible interpretations simultaneously "to appreciate the text's deeper significance" (p. 408). The 1968 Planet of the Apes finds its significance in the way it constituted a text with hermeneutic depth. Following Ceccarelli, we argue the 1968 movie enjoyed success not just because of its use of perspective by incongruity, but also in the way the text contained such a range of possible interpretations. In other words, there were perspectives by incongruity, and no single perspective alone could explain the movie's lasting social influence. The movie addressed race relations, nuclear proliferation, class struggle, religious zealotry, and animal rights. By doing so, audiences encountered a rich, mediated myth with hermeneutic depth that offered lessons and advice about how the world was, is, and should be.

Piety and Perspectives by Incongruity in Planet of the Apes (1968)

Turning to previous analyses of the 1968 version of Planet of the Apes, we observe that scholarly attention circulates around two major pieties and a host
of minor pieties that are challenged in the original movie. Some commentators have argued the success of the original Planet of the Apes could be explained because it "tapped a deep vein of symbolism in American national mythology: the symbolism of race difference and race conflict" (Slotkin, 1998, p. vii). According to these observers, the piety being fractured is a commitment to racial inequality. At first glance, there is compelling textual and historical evidence to support this interpretation: the simians take humans as "slaves" who can be used and disposed of, and the United States does have a long history of dominance over non-white groups and of comparing them to animals. Eric Greene's (1998) book Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture is perhaps the most developed reading of the movie from a racial perspective. Others concur with Greene's assessment and see the movie as an "obvious allegory of interracial relations" (Rankin, 2007, p. 1019; McHugh, 2000). M. Keith Booker (2006) has even argued the shift in perspective that takes place in the movie is one of the key devices used in this racial opening wedge:

The sudden shift in perspective that makes humans the object of race hatred on the part of animals (and, by extension, whites the despised Others of blacks) provides precisely the sort of cognitive jolt that provides all the best science fiction with its principal power. This jolt asks audiences to see racism with fresh eyes... [p. 99].

Given the movie's civil rights-era backdrop, it is easy to interpret the movie as a text that uses a perspective jolt to awaken American audiences from their racial slumber.

Other observers have attempted to explain the success of the 1968 Planet of the Apes by noting the way it challenges a different societal piety. Rather than seeing a racialized myth with lessons for proper conduct between blacks and whites, they have chosen to see the film as a statement against nuclear weapons. Jonathan Kirshner (2001) and Stephen O'Leary (1988) have made strong arguments in favor of this view. As with the racial reading, there are strong textual and historical reasons to adopt this interpretation. The movie opens with Taylor daydreaming about the world he has supposedly left behind: "I wonder if Man, that marvel of the universe, that glorious paradox who has sent me to the unknown... still makes war against his brother and lets his neighbor's children starve." A late 1960s audience aware of the Cold War climate and conditions in Vietnam could have easily believed that man indeed still wages war. The movie's final scene of Taylor finding the Statue of Liberty and realizing that he was on a post-nuclear catastrophe Earth certainly strengthens the view that this movie offers lessons against war. In one of the most dramatic moments of the movie, and one of the most recognized movie endings in film history, Taylor drops to his knees and proclaims, "Oh my God. I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was... We finally really did it. You maniacs! You blew it up! Ah, damn you! God damn you all to hell." Heston's dramatic delivery on the beach punctuates the movie's anti-nuclear message. This is what Burke (1959) would call a kind of symbolic "atom cracking" (p. 308), wherein the films takes the atom or symbol (i.e., the Statue of Liberty) that typically has a specific cultural meaning (i.e., freedom, hope and possibility) and shatters it (i.e., forcing the Statue to represent slavery, hopelessness and nuclear annihilation).

Although we have touched on the two dominant readings, these are not, by far, the only two mentioned by those we have cited. The movie's anti-religious tones have also been observed in the way faith-protecting apes wished to stop the advancement of science (Booker, 2006; Kirschner, 2001). In one of the movie's more comical scenes that is representative of the 1925 Scopes Monkey trial, Dr. Zaius, as part of a three-organutan tribunal, charges Taylor with heresy. As Cornelius and Zira attempt to reason with the tribunal using their scientific findings, the three orangutans pose with one covering his eyes, another covering his ears, and the final his mouth. Indeed, the text illustrates the dangers to be found in religious zealotry.

Scholars also hint at the problematized class relations between orangutans, chimps, and gorillas, respectively, as they are placed into a class hierarchy (Booker, 2006, p. 102; Rankin, 2007). This observation is not lost on Taylor:

Dr. Zaius: Tell me, why are all apes created equal?
Taylor: Some apes, it seems, are more equal than others.

Gorillas, as the invisible working class, have few lines in the original movie while orangutans clearly rule the society as protectors of the faith with chimps placed between the two groups. Although there is evidence the text also addresses class relations, this is usually treated as a minor theme by observers as the racial and anti-nuclear perspectives dominate the commentaries.

With the variety of pieties already mentioned, it seems as though scholars have offered a rather fractured reading of the movie with some scholars contending the movie's success can be attributed to the way, to use Burke's terms, perspective by incongruity is used to challenge a particular piety. However, we contend there is also an obvious, yet often overlooked animal rights perspective in the movie. References to vegetarians in the beginning of the movie, an active anti-vivisection society protesting the potential gelding of Taylor, human placement in zoos and human experimentation in place of animal experimentation clearly lends textual support to this reading. Landon, one of the astronauts who arrive with Taylor, is lobotomized in an animal experiment aimed at improving the surgical practices to be used on apes. The third astronaut who survives the crash, Dodge, is eventually stuffed and put on display in a museum. Although we can make the argument that previous treatments of the movie have been anthropocentric, or human-centered, our purpose is not to privilege and elevate a reading that features only one piety. We view all of the previously mentioned interpretations as necessary to a critical understanding of how Planet of the Apes functions as a mediated myth with pertinent lessons for today's society. In other words, the original Planet of the Apes movie is a mediated myth that benefits from the potential of polysemic readings.
PIETY AND PERSPECTIVE BY INCONGRUITY  
IN PLANET OF THE APES (2001)

Although the 2001 version of *Planet of the Apes* is different from the first movie in some respects, it nonetheless stays committed to using the same rhetorical devices. Director Tim Burton, when asked whether or not he would take on the project, explained his attraction to the idea, claiming the “mythology has this circular kind of quality.” He goes on by stating, “I started to think, well, this is what I like about movies: seeing life from a different angle. *Planet of the Apes* was like a reversal. You’re seeing things, but it’s reversed, so it throws you off a little bit and puts you into another place, looking at things from a different way” (Wartofsky, 2001, p. G01). The reversal Burton observed in the first movie, what Burke would call perspective by incongruity, is precisely what motivated him to shoot the second telling of the myth. Of course, Burton’s version was updated for the era and adjusted to fit his particular, darker style.

Much like the 1968 film, Burton’s vision offered an impious myth that stood against racial injustice. However, Burton’s reimagining contained textual elements that made the statement much more obvious to audiences. For example, in the 2001 *Apes* movie, human slaves are used at the service of apes. In one scene where Davidson, Ari, and Gunnar attempt to flee the city, they encounter two human slaves who are the house servants of a powerful ape family. Gunnar immediately comments that they are “house humans” and expresses his hesitancy in taking them beyond the city walls. It is implied that the house humans could potentially foil the escape attempt. The allusion to America’s history of slavery is unmistakable.

The 2001 version certainly emphasizes the racial point more than the original, but this did not lead to a successful critical reception of the text. According to the *New York Times* film critic Elvis Mitchell, “the picture states its social points so bluntly that it becomes slow-witted and condescending; it treats the audience as pets” (Mitchell, 2001, p. E1). During one scene, Limbo even parrots the words of Rodney King, “Can’t we all just get along?” Jay Carr of the *Boston Globe* noted, “the new film equates the humans in their loin-cloths much too overtly to African-American slaves. The more lightweight 1968 version limned the racist theme more deftly” (Carr, 2001, p. D1). The 2001 *Apes* features house humans who can speak, while the 1968 version does not. The 1968 version even explains that humans could not be used as slaves because the apes believed humans could not be tamed. However, the point becomes complicated when taking some of Burton’s other choices into consideration.

The racial equality element of the movie borders on being a performative contradiction. On the one hand, Burton was able to recreate many of the perceived tensions between house slaves and field slaves in his text. On the other hand, some choices weakened the audience’s view of the apes as representative of dominant slave-owning whites and the humans as enslaved minorities. This is especially true for the ape side of the dynamic. For example, the apes in the 2001 film are clearly physically superior to the humans. They are stronger and capable of leaping great distances. In the 1968 film the apes are much closer in their appearance and movements to human beings. Although this change makes the newer *Apes* movie visually exciting, it detracts from what Burke (1969) would call the process of identification. Real audiences and the apes on screen are no longer symbolically similar in the more recent version. Who in the audience could leap the way the apes in the movie had? Although the racial equality reading of the 2001 text is certainly valid, how it is framed to work on audiences is complicated.

One key way the 2001 version differs from the 1968 film in terms of piety has to do with the anti-nuclear element. The 2001 *Apes* removes the surprise ending of the first film. A nuclear holocaust is no longer responsible for the rise of the simians. Instead, genetic manipulation of space apes by humans is introduced as a causal factor. As Davidson and the escape party arrive at Calima, they discover that it was Davidson’s ship and an escaped chimp named Semos that was responsible for the apes. However, despite the irony, genetic engineering itself is never seriously treated as a piety that needs to be seen from a different perspective. Audiences may have actually used support for genetic engineering to resist the text, one of the many possible responses to polysemy outlined by Ceccarelli. In addition, upon discovering his crashed mothership, Davidson does not react with the same level of passion as Taylor did when reacting to the Statue of Liberty in the first movie. The difference is striking. While the 1968 audience would have likely reacted to the idea of a nuclear holocaust with dread, the 2001 audience would not have had the same kind of visceral reaction to genetic engineering.

With the anti-nuclear element absent in the newer movie, a new ending was needed. Burton decided to turn to the original Pierre Boulle (1963) novel for his inspiration. After Pericles interrupts the final battle between humans and apes toward the end of the movie and Davidson cages Thade, Davidson takes Pericles’ pod and begins his journey back to Earth. Upon arriving, Davidson finds that the Earth has been taken over by Apes; this is similar to Boulle’s ending. However, critics and audience members were unforgiving in their assessment of the finale. Mitchell thought audiences would “be muttering, ‘what happened’” (Mitchell, 2001, p. E1)? And he was right. In a *USA Today* poll of people who saw the 2001 movie, “48% admit they did not get the finale.” And those claiming to understand it give various explanations of what it means” (Soiano, 2001, p. 6D). The final scene did not give a thorough sense of closure and explanation to the events of the film on nearly the same level as the 1968 original had done.

As for the minor pieties in the first text, they remained minor themes in the newer text. The movie’s depictions of the dangers to be found in blind religious faith are clear throughout the movie. In an early scene, Attar acts as
an enforcer of the faith when he commands attendees of a dinner to bow their heads to give thanks to Semos. Later, Attar questions his religious beliefs after seeing Pericles land the pod. Being exposed to a secular, scientific, and technological explanation for his species' origins, Attar sees the truth. Yet, all of these scenes are secondary to the explicit racial overtones of the movie.

Although the impious stance against religious dogma is still apparent, the second *Apes* movie encounters problems in its depiction of class struggle. The 2001 movie appears to contain a greater range of classes, but eliminates the element of class segregation between apes. General Thade and his father Zaius, played by Heston in a cameo appearance, are powerful and respected chimpanzees. This would not have been a logical decision in the first movie because chimpanzees were not in the ruling class and did not rise to positions of military or political power. The class divisions, although present to some degree in the newer text, are harder to observe.

The final minor piety addressed by the 2001 movie relates to the treatment of animals. This is still clearly present in the newer version. The animal psychologist from the first movie, Zira, is replaced as defender of the humans by the "human rights" activist Ari. Although one could see Ari as an abolitionist as much as an animal rights character, later scenes in the movie confirm the impious nature of the movie. For example, in one scene Thade takes his niece to buy a human child to take home as a pet. In other scenes humans replace animals as beasts of burden. However, just as the physical superiority of apes could cause identification problems for audience members in terms of racial inequality, the same problem exists for the animal rights issue. The apes are so different from the humans in the newer version that it becomes difficult to relate to the animals as though they are like human beings. The movie could be seen as a text that reinforces tendencies to see animals as unworthy of fair treatment. As with the racial inequality perspective, the animal rights dimension functions in a number of potentially contradictory ways.

When compared to its predecessor, the 2001 *Planet of the Apes* still functions as a polysemeous myth that operates primarily through a use of perspective by incongruity. However, the text has lost a degree of its hermeneutic depth. Racial inequality was certainly addressed, but in such a forced fashion that some audience members and critics reacted negatively to its message. Some stylistic elements could even be viewed as a performative contradiction. The anti-nuclear discourse of the first movie is absent in the second and is never replaced by an impious stance toward genetic engineering. In terms of minor plots, only the stance against religious zealotry can be seen as unproblematic in its presentation. Burton's movie was visually stunning, but lacking in terms of depth. Perhaps this is why some critics have noticed that the 2001 *Apes* was "spectacular but empty" and, therefore, that "Burton and his screenwriters never capture the grand sense of myth that made the earlier film exciting" (Denby, 2001, p. 88).

Although our analysis has proceeded by noting what observations about pieties could be found in the scholarly literature and critical commentaries related to the two movies, Burke (1966) also reminds us that every selection is also a deflection. In this sense, we are left to speculate about what was not mentioned in the readings of the movies. What was being deflected? We find it odd that in discussions of race and class that gender did not receive more attention. Looking back at the texts, we conclude that most scholars and commentators not only suffered from a human-centered bias, but they also virtually ignored questions of gender inequality. As it turns out, the highly impious 1968 movie and the moderately impious 2001 movie were both pious texts in regards to unfair treatment of women. For example, in the 1968 movie the astronaut Stewart is sent along with the three male astronauts to act as a new Adam. As Taylor notes in the movie, she was to give birth to the new colony of humans with the "hot and eager help" of the three men. (Why there were three men and one woman to populate an entire new race of humans is not explained in the text.) In addition, Stewart, whom we can assume would have been the only intelligent, free-spirited woman on the new planet, is killed off before she utters her first word. Similarly, in the 2001 movie, Ari is an unemployed rabble rouser who escapes punishment for her heretical defense of humans because of her powerful father. Ari and Daena's roles are saturated with flirtatious attempts to win the affections of Davidson, who only seems motivated by a desire to abandon the two on the foreign planet. Of course, there is also the argument that Zira is an empowered doctor in the first movie. Our point is not that the text supports or resists patriarchy, but that gender has been ignored and what appear to be largely impious texts in their selection are also pious texts in their deflection. Future analyses of the *Apes* myth should certainly offer a far more detailed reading of gender issues in these polysemous texts.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined why the 1968 version of *Planet of the Apes* met with more critical and popular success than its later 2001 retelling. Drawing on Kenneth Burke's articulation of perspective by incongruity and piety, in combination with an understanding of polysemy, we conclude that the 1968 film achieved a level of hermeneutic depth that the second film did not. In terms of being an impious text, the 1968 original used perspective by incongruity to challenge contemporary pieties about racial inequality, nuclear war, religious dogma, class struggle, and animal rights. Although the 2001 version also used perspective by incongruity to challenge some of the same pieties, including racial inequality and religious zealotry, the text's style and content did not offer consistent messages for identification when addressing class issues and animal rights. When introducing a new origination explanation for the events in the film, genetic engineering, the movie actually transformed into a pious text that did little to challenge the technological storyline.
The later version also omitted commentary on nuclear war. For these reasons, the 1968 version of the Planet of the Apes was able to achieve a greater success than its 2001 counterpart.

Additionally, based on our reading of the Apes myth as it changed over time, we have attempted to advance an approach to criticism that combines the ideas of Burke and Cacciarelli to analyze mediated myths. Although we have only examined one myth, the approach we have adopted here can nonetheless be repeated in examinations of other mediated myths that also use juxtaposition and challenges to societal pieties. For, as Janice Hocker Rushing (1986) notes, “Every culture, then, has its supply of myths which defines its identity and dictates its moral vision” (p. 265). Of course, as critics we must be ever mindful of the multiple (im)pieties and perspectives that are constantly present in potent myths.

We wish to end this chapter with a few words from Slotkin (1998), who notes that “the images and myths we take for granted as part of the world of entertainment often have deep historical roots and evoke powerful, ideological traditions. Only by examining that history, and subjecting those myths to critical analysis, can we move beyond the moral and conceptual limitations of our mythic traditions” (p. ix). It is our hope that we can use this chapter as an opening wedge for new readings of old myths that are steeped in history and tradition. And it seems scholars will soon have another opportunity to examine the Planet of the Apes myths. Twentieth Century–Fox, the film studio that released both the 1968 and the 2001 movie, is developing a new film in the Apes tradition. As writer/director Scott Frank tells CHUD.com, Caesar “will not feature talking monkeys, and it will not end with chimpanzees running wild in the streets” (Faraci, 2008). It also will not be a remake—not of the original and not of Conquest of the Planet of the Apes, the 1972 film whose main character was named Caesar. What CHUD.com reports Caesar will have in common with its predecessors, however, is its exploration of multiple cultural pieties and impieties, and that means the next installment of the Apes myth will be fertile ground for scholars to examine how new myths are reapropiated in different cultural contexts (Faraci, 2008).

REFERENCES


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