
FROM LITERATURA TO CINEMA: THE MYTH AS A SUPPORT FOR EXPRESSIONISM IN *MALPERTUIS* (1971)

DA LITERATURA PARA O CINEMA: O MITO COMO SUPORTE
AO EXPRESSIONISMO EM *MALPERTUIS* (1971)

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ABSTRACT: Along the twentieth century, many were the movies that made use of the myth as a support for the themes they addressed. Mostly, the myth is taken as a form of allusion to the fantastic, which is strengthened as movies improve their technology and production of special effects. However, *Malpertuis* (1971), by Harry Kümel, based on the homonymous book of Jean Ray (1943), belongs to a select group of movies that, adapted from literature to cinema, succeeds in keeping itself close to its literary work reference, besides making a more profound use of the myth rather than merely fanciful. Such accomplishment, to a large extent, is related to the use the writer makes of the mythic theme as a support to his discussions about the expressionist esthetics, but, also, to the approach of the director, who, in a construction that transits among the fantasy, the oneiric and the terror, questions ongoing beliefs, bringing from the ancient classics more than only deities, but also the notorious opposition between human and divine aspects.

Keywords: Literature. Cinema. Expressionism. Myth.

RESUMO: Ao longo do século XX, muitos foram os filmes que fizeram uso do mito como suporte às temáticas abordadas. Em sua maioria, o mito é utilizado como uma forma de alusão ao fantástico, o que ganha maior força à medida em que os filmes aprimoram a tecnologia e podem ousar nas produções de efeitos especiais. No entanto, *Malpertuis* (1971), de Harry Kümel, baseado na obra homônima de Jean Ray (1943), pertence a um seletivo grupo de filmes que, ao ser adaptado da literatura para o cinema, consegue se manter muito próximo à obra literária, além de fazer uso do mito de forma mais profunda do que meramente fantasiosa. Esse feito, em grande parte, deve-se ao uso que o próprio escritor faz da temática mítica como suporte para suas discussões dentro da estética expressionista, mas, também, da abordagem do próprio diretor, que, em uma construção que transita entre a fantasia, o onírico e o terror, coloca em xeque as crenças vigentes, trazendo da Antiguidade Clássica mais do que apenas divindades, mas o famigerado embate entre os aspectos humanos e divinos.

Palavras-chave: Literatura. Cinema. Expressionismo. Mito.

INTRODUCTION

Since the studies of the cinematographic esthetics arose, several are the discussions about the traditional or non-traditional approaches of literature by cinema. According to Aumont (2008, p. 12), the focus was to move apart from the study of genres focusing on the story of the works. This way, aspects such as the image and the sound should provide innovative insertions and stablish

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a new dialogue with the spectator, besides a new reading of the work under discussion.

Among the elements that always attracted the attention of the spectator, the myth belongs to those that always served as a support to the cinematographic creations. As well stated by Winkler (2001, p. 3), the experiences of the Greek-roman world were regularly a staple of these productions, but they also reflect the fascination that the classic world still exerts in the society today.

Nevertheless, the myth is usually approached in a more pragmatic version, whose function is usually focused on entertainment, exploring as much as possible its fantastic characteristics rather than the richness of more profound and philosophical levels. Movies such as *Clash of the titans*, not only the version of 1981, but also the one of 2010, for example, explore mythology in its most literal character: they approach the myth as a form of creating imagetic, sonorous and dynamic adventures, which belong to the magical universe, and seldom tackle other questions (especially anthropological ones) the myth discussion could offer.

From another perspective, as it occurs with movies like *Troy* (2004), directed by Wolfgang Petersen, a reinterpretation attempt of Homer's work, *The Iliad*, more historically plausible, excluded all the relations with the mythic deities, peculiar characteristic of the epic literary genre. Regarding this, it is worth reminding ourselves that many were the critics, positive and negative ones, that the movie received when it was released. Mary Beard², by analyzing some of them, comments, among other aspects, that the movie directors make their free choices, but this also implies taking positions that not always will be ratified by the academia, both in relation to literature and to the reliability of the facts.

Still on the subject of *The Iliad*, the contrary was done with a recent version of *Troy*, produced by BBC One and displayed at the platform Netflix, named *Troy: Fall of a city*, directed by Mark Brozel, Owen Harris and John Strickland. It is a miniseries in eight episodes, which, with a lower budget and greater literary loyalty, invested in masterful scenes inspired in the work of Homer. As an example, even though such information, in ancient times, belongs to common-sense and is not part of the original work of the Greek author, the miniseries presents a mythic story, in a chronological order, including even Paris' judgement, the act which led him to conquer the love of Helen³ and caused a war crisis. In another scene, when the soldiers get organized in a battlefield, as seen in Canto II, by *The Iliad*, the heroes are consecrated by the goddesses, who move along like entities among them, signaling the importance of the myth and the deities in the construction of narrative, because this aspect contributes for the spectator to understand the motivations that bring Greeks and Trojans to the devotion to one or another entity.

However, if on the one hand the myth is left aside in favor of a more historical nuance, and, on the other hand, it is used as a narrative support to achieve fantastic levels, movies such as *Vaghe Stelle dell'Orsa* (*Of a Thousand Delights* in the UK), from 1965, directed by Luchino Visconti, explore

²In an article from April 30th, 2004, one day before the movie release, Mary Beard explains the possibilities of the movie, brings some references to other works that dialogue with the ancient classics, but, beyond that, the scholar proposes an interesting questioning, demonstrating that many intellectuals, who worked as consultants in famous Hollywood movies, already had problems with the productions due to authenticity matters in the movies. However, the author reinforces that, whether it is true or not, the movie *Troy* is important when it rescues the classic topics, promoting new studies and moving the academic world. Check: BEARD, M. The never-ending story. *The Guardian*, London, April 30th, 2004. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/apr/30/1>. Access: 10 jun. 2020.

³According to the mythic narrative, presented by Grimal (2005, p. 35), whose oldest reference is in Apollodoro (*Apollod.* III. 12, 5), when gods were together celebrating the wedding of Thetis and Peleus, Eris (the goddess of discord) threw an apple of gold in the middle of the gods, which should be given to the most beautiful goddess. Zeus, comprehending the goddess' strategy, in order to avoid problems with the other goddesses, asked Hermes to find a human that could make the judgement among Hera, Aphrodite and Pallas Athena. One by one, the goddesses presented their arguments, and, at the end, with the promise of marrying the most beautiful woman, Paris, also known as Alexander, a young pastor that would be recognized as part of the realness of Troy, chosen to judge the situation, ends up giving the victory to Aphrodite.

the myth as a form to establish a relation to the present, and as a support for the discussion of more humanistic problematics. In the movie, the main character, Sandra, is evidently Electra, the mythological daughter of Agamemnon, king of Argos, but, devoid of fantastic traits, Sandra is devoted to her father, nourishes personal hatred for her mother, and develops a relationship with her brother.

Thus, cinema shows that, as well as literature, other fields can be explored, with proper gains and losses. Stam (2005, p. 2) cites the movie *Adaptation* as an example of the research cinema proposes. If Charles Kaufman, character lived by Nicholas Cage, only made a loyal transcription of the book by Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep), there would be only a tedious movie on orchids, curiously paradoxical when compared to the prized book *The Orchid Thief*, written by the same author.

The measure between literature and cinema is always defined by several factors, such as the author's point of view, the director chosen and even the budget available for the movie produced. To this regard, apart from the brilliant story, the movie *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013), by the director John Lee Hancock, exposes the transposition processes from a literary work (in this case, *Mary Poppins*) to cinema, and the clashes with the book's author, budget matters and, also, the writer's motivations.

In *Malpertuis*, which this paper is connected to, there are other elements that make its cinematographic production even more intriguing, because the esthetics developed by Jean Ray, a Belgium expressionist writer, by connecting himself to mythological themes, could easily turn the movie into a filmic composition purely aligned to the works of the genres fantasy and horror, as many of them that come from the expressionist German cinema⁴. However, it is exactly the bond between myth and Expressionism that turn the work of Ray into a classic and, by the hands of Kümel, even though it is labeled as a movie of fantasy and horror, it turns out to be an intriguing piece of the cinema history.

For this reason, the present paper seeks to comprehend the approach of myths in *Malpertuis* as a support for the expressionist esthetics — myths which are transported from the book by Jean Ray to the screens with such macabre, provocative and uncomfortable brilliance only a few times seen in the cinema based on mythology.

BETWEEN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

Jean Ray, pseudonym of the Belgium Raymundus Joannes de Kremer (1887-1964), wrote *Malpertuis* in 1943, and the critics considered his book a macabre novel. The author stands by the side of Edgar Allan Poe and Julio Verne, as one of the pioneers of the fantastic literature. Although his literature is usually divided in three distinct phases (which allows, moreover, the writer to make use of different pseudonyms), it is in his second phase that the author approximates his work from the expressionist esthetics, and, it is exactly in this phase it is included the romance to which this work is dedicated to.

The definition of Bahr (1923, p. 34) for the painting of Edvard Munch, *The scream* (1983), representative of the expressionist esthetics, precisely defines Jean Ray's book:

Man screams from the profoundness of his soul, all the age becomes an isolated scream, piercing. Art also screams, inside its profound darkness, it screams for help, it screams through the spirit. This is Expressionism.⁵

The synthesis of an entire esthetics, in the words of Bahr, dialogues with the disturbing and

⁴ Regarding it, the work of Coates (1991) will point out exactly the fascination that the macabre theme, introspective, and the contrasts of light and darkness and sound and silence, influenced by the expressionist esthetics, marked the German cinema in the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁵ Our translation.

visceral sphere Expressionism deals with — topics related to the most intrinsic dramas of the human being. The aberrant and fearful face of the character in the center of Munch's painting, amid a disform landscape, is exactly what Ray transports to his text.

The book narrates the history of a rich lord who keeps home strange figures that, gradually, reveal they are mythological entities imprisoned in human bodies. Adapting it to cinema, the filmmaker, also Belgian, tried as much as possible to maintain the expressionist traits in the movie from 1971. The greatest challenge of Kümel was to represent an esthetics in which political, social, cultural and generational conflicts could dialogue with mythology in a way fantasy would not seem illogical. Hence, he proposes a movie in which the marvelous awakens the pathetic and the fantastic is the result of hallucinations.

Thus, the most evident expressionist esthetics, allied to the presence of the mythic theme, is intensely explored by the memorable presence of the contrast between sound and silence, what becomes patent when compared to the photography of the movie, since it has a tendency for more sober colors, creating dreary and poorly attractive environments. Coates (1991, p. 22), analyzing Expressionism in German cinema, is categorical in saying that one of the main characteristics of this new cinema is in the contrast between sound and silence. If, on the one side, silence made people take distinct ideological positions, on the other side, the bursting sounds of the modern cinema, which does not admit to return to the silent esthetics, turn the experience into something maddening and confusing. However, contrasting silence and sound emphasizes the disturb Expressionism tends to awaken.

The VHS tape version of *Malpertuis*, released by Globo Filmes, brings in its introduction the image of the painting *La Memoire* (1948), by the surrealist René Magritte. The Memory or the titaness Μνημοσύνη (Mnēmosýnē), for the Greeks, was the mom of the muses and her presence was not there by chance, for this divinity, since ancient times, is related to the origins of humanity. Torrano mentions that (1995, p. 22)

Muses have and maintain the domain of the revelation (to be) and the forgetfulness (not to be) and this domain is that of the originating root of all power and exercise of power. In the mythic expression of Hesiod, this is said: Muses are the daughters of Memory and Zeus.

The “to be” and the “not to be”, constituent traits in the identity of mortals, are remarkable aspects in the narrative of Ray. What is found, in the book and in its filmic version, is a profound questioning of human nature, reinforced by the surrealism of Magritte's painting, that, with the reddish coloration of the blood in the pale and serene face of the marble bust, provokes the peculiar discomfort of Expressionism.

It is worth mentioning, though, that there is a reason for Magritte's painting to be presented in the beginning of the movie in the VHS tape version, because, despite the fact that the movie interacts with the writings of Jean Ray, an expressionist author, the presence of Surrealism aspects in the work are undeniable, and the director, Harry Kümel, knew exactly which were the writer's influences. It is no wonder that, in many scenes, the grotesque, the disform, the discomfort, characteristics of Expressionism, open space to oneiric elements and montage sequences that challenge the logic of the situations, traits of Surrealism. For instance, there is a scene in which the main character, in front of a store, talks to a clerk, who has by his side an old diving suit. Such information could be overlooked and even seem little logical, but the clothes are just the same worn, in 1936, by Salvador Dalí, the greatest name in Surrealism, in an exhibition in London.

The same could be affirmed as to the mansion. Characterized as a confusing place, full of tight corridors, it acts in a very organic way, because it reacts with creaks and steep movements to the stimulus of those who live in it. These elements only contribute for the expressionist and surrealist esthetics to become more visible and properly explored inside the cinematographic universe.

From the statue's face, in Magritte's painting shown in the movie, a reddish stain leaks, which relates to blood, as representation of Memory marked by pain, whose value is highlighted by the

crimson cloth that contrasts to the calm of the background with clouds and sea that enter the infinite. The sphere and the leave also provide innumerable readings, but their images are evenly explored in the beginning of the movie, what suggests a contrast between the metallic form, polished and shaped by man, and the nature, some kind of human life's mark in relation to the divine one. The introduction finishes with Macbeth's quote: "it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". With the same reddish coloration, the name Malpertuis appears on the screens and drains like blood.

As to its most recent version, edited for DVD, and released by the distributor Magnus Opus, the introduction of the movie shows a dialogue of Alice in *Through the looking glass and what Alice found there*, in which the girl questions the difficulty of understanding certain things, yet they make her think of many others:

"It's pretty, but it's a bit difficult to understand."

There were lots of things Alice didn't understand, but she didn't admit it.

"Somehow it makes me think of all kinds of things, but I'm not sure exactly what..."

It is important to observe that, despite the change, the two introductions deal with human uncertainties, not only the "to be" and the "not to be", those which Torrano (1995, p. 22) refers to, but also Alice's questioning "innocence" and "non-innocence". They evoke the unknown, man's search, either memories that go through the reveries, a search for answers (many times unknown), or even those memories known and scarcely faced by man.

The movie narrates Jan's story (interpreted by Mathieu Carrière), a young and handsome sailor, who goes down his ship in a Belgium city, in the beginning of the twentieth century, and is followed by two individuals — Charles Dideloo (Michel Bouquet) and Mathias Crook (Daniel Pilon) — who observe him at a distance. He looks for his home and finds out it fell down, his parents passed away and his sister, Nancy, left the place. In the sequence, he spots a woman who looks like his sister and, following her, notices she is a prostitute and ends up in a brothel. When he enters the place, he gets involved in a fight provoked on purpose by Charles Dideloo and is beaten with a punch on his forehead. Days later, waking up in a room that resembles the rooms of a ship, Jan is supported by his sister, who informs him they are in Malpertuis, the house of his uncle Cassavius.

The photography of the movie until this moment is pretty vivid and full of colors. Despite the contrasts between the decadent city and the sailor's youth, the house in ruins and the colorful brothel were presented, it is inside the mansion that, gradually, the colors start to fade as the other rooms of the house are presented. This idea is related to the very name of the property, revealed by Nancy to her brother: Malpertuis. The French word refers to the black, humid, labyrinthic (and with limited aspect) hole where rodents usually live. There are moments in which the spectator can even forget it is a mansion, once many of its walls seem to belong to an underground construction. On the other side, in one of the entrances of the house, there is a store that resembles those antique apothecaries; it is full of small cabinets with doors where powder of several colors can be found, as if that space confined the beauty and the vivacity extracted from the house.

In the kitchen, the characters Elodia (Jenny Van Santvoort), Philaris (Charles Janssens), Mrs. Griboin (Fanny Winker), Mr. Griboin (Robert Lussac) and the priest (Hugo Dellas) get together and prepare the meal of Cassavius (Orson Welles), who is ranting about his hunger. The spectator goes, then, in a close-up, inside Malpertuis before getting in the bedroom of the local's owner, who is about to die and has around him his family waiting for the reading of his testament. It is read by Eisengott (Walter Rilla), a mysterious man responsible for making sure that the plans of Cassavius will be successful. Through a dialogue between Cassavius and Jan, it gets obvious that the destiny of the sailor is already traced: he needs to occupy the place of his uncle — place until then vaguely defined in the plot.

The photography of the scene impresses by the contrast between the bed, in crimson and live fabrics, and a centered framework with all the characters around it. Cassavius, in the center,

demonstrates the power of an entity, as if his employees, parents and friends worshipped him, although the characters show discomfort and a mix of suffering and satisfaction by the death of Malpertuis' owner.

Advised by his uncle, Jan goes to the ruins of the monastery in order to talk to the priest, who knows the secrets of the place. At the local, there is an old canoe with the name *Anankè* (ἄνάγκη), which had been conducted by Cassavius when he was young. According to Liddel and Scott (1996, p. 101), the word, in Homer and in the tragedians, defines the need, the desire, the luck and refers to the divine figure as Destiny⁶. However, the word can have its semantic field expanded and can denominate, for example, in Herodotus (*Hdt.* I.116), the violence, the strength and the torture. Jan searches for Malpertuis' secrets and, through doors and corridors, the suspense intensifies over the real existence of that strange place.

Progressively, characters are presented with their most remarkable features, proper of the Greek mythology. Jan does not take long to feel attracted to Euryale (also interpreted by Susan Hampshire), a mysterious character, close to his uncle Cassavius, who is always looking down, carrying her live hair and uncommon beauty. As the sphere of the movie intensifies with Jan's researches, his uneasiness questions the very existence of the characters at the place and, when the priest presents the character a possible escape from Malpertuis, the other inhabitants of the local already foresee as an only exit the death of the human beings, since they start to understand they are different and they are forgetting their origins.

When he manages to escape from all the dangers, Jan is caught now by Philaris, an expert taxidermist. However, Euryale saves him, in a scene that signalizes who she would be in the classical antiquity, and finally reveals all the secret Malpertuis hides. The uncle of Jan, Cassavius, had found those few Greek gods that did not disappear from the human thoughts, and they are now petrified and present at the table: Lampernisse is Prometheus, Mathias Crook is Apollo, Mrs. Griboin is Aphrodite, Mr. Griboin is Hephaestus, the three sisters are Erinyes (Alecto, Tisiphone and Megara), Sylvia Dideloo is Hecate and Charles Dideloo is Hermes.

When getting closer to Euryale in order to kiss her, Jan looks inside her eyes and a sharp sound of petrification hovers the scene, exposing that the mysterious woman is the gorgon Medusa. With a sudden change of scenes, Jan is in a hospital and is soon discharged by a doctor who admires the capacity of the young man to imagine stories, written down along the time he stayed in the hospital. Walking for the hospital's exit, one by one, the characters of Malpertuis reveal themselves as employees of the place and Jan sees himself imprisoned in the gloomy corridors of the house. His destiny was to be stuck in Malpertuis.

THE MYTH AS A SUPPORT FOR THE EXPRESSIONIST ESTHETICS

The construction of Harry Kùmel for the expressionist tone in the book of Jean Ray happens through peculiar resources to explore the memorable traits of the prevailing esthetics. If, on the one side, the macabre literature and the author's horror are employed in the grotesque traits of the characters and in the darkness of the environments, the same happens with the movie, that underlines the putrefying state of those who live in Malpertuis, and also the dim and ruinous condition of the mansion. Even Jan, the young hero, has, in many moments, a whitish aspect, almost phantasmagoric.

Nevertheless, the director's approach to mythological gods is given with great subtleness and the deities' features are shown to inspire the spectator to question if all the events are not mere fantastic illusion. The presence of the myth, this way, finds more space than the one usually occupied in modern literary works and in cinematographic productions.

In this regard, the words of Winkler (2001, p. 04) about the importance of myth in the mo-

⁶ There is an interesting reference to this topic in the tragedy *Alcestis*, by Euripides, in the verse 965. At the play, the divine presentation of Necessity is even above the law of the gods, keeping the balance of nature.

dern cinema can be revisited, because, for the author, its use imposes a connection between antiquity and modernity that, many times, is thought to be broken. Hence, he reflects:

Awareness of the importance of popular culture, both ancient and modern, for all of culture, society, and the arts helps us bridge the gap between antiquity and today. And not only that. If we approach our common cultural history in this way, we may throw new light on both the past and the present. We may illumine the present by revealing the influence of the past even where it may not have been suspected to exist, just as we may illumine the past by examining it from our modern vantage point.

In *Malpertuis*' case, the game between past and present becomes even more potent as some characteristics of the ancient gods are revealed. There are innumerable allusions to classic traits of the myth: some are more discrete, as the beauty and charm of Mathias Crook, who resembles the features of Apollo, the act of winding the yarn into a ball, clear allusion to Erinyes, mythic sisters that roll and weave the destiny of humans, and others more explicit, as is the case of Lampernisse (Jean-Pierre Cassel), a poor man that lives under the stairs, whose only preoccupation is to keep lit the flame of his candle, recalling the preoccupation of Prometheus with the fire of humanity, and so forth.

However, Lampernisse, although he is not a well-developed character, neither in the work of Ray nor in the movie of Kümel, represents an interesting role in the construction of expressionism in the movie. According to Coates (1991, p. 27), the game between light and dark, silence and sound, grotesque and delicate is a characteristic of expressionist esthetics in the cinema and it is a strong characteristic of the character. Lampernisse is the one who breaks the silence in many moments, breaks even the rampage to beg that darkness does not come and his light keeps on. His desperation dialogues with the desperation of the house itself, because as the scenes become more dynamic, the character becomes more unquiet. Besides that, his "cave", under the staircase, his cadaveric appearance and schizophrenia reinforce the grotesque of a place that experiments the permanent mutability between the splendor of certain environments, the perfection of some characters and the visible decadence of human life.

After all, even when characters start to recollect their past lives and attack humans, the symbolism of the situations marks the constant dialogue between divine and human realities, as can be seen when the priest is assassinated with a flame blow that comes from the mouth of Mr. Griboin, Hephaestus, mythological god of fire and of the arts with metals. In this scene, the priest lifts up a cross to protect himself and the image shows only the cross melting, as an allegory to the conflict between sacred and profane, current devotion and ancestral belief.

This way, the presence of mythological gods, along with the director Harry Kümel's vision, do not play only an allegorical role. Discussing the difficulties of courses on classical mythology in American universities, Rose (2001, p. 295) affirms that, for many students from other areas, the only contact with the classic universe takes place through mythology courses, which tend to attract a great and varied audience. Although she is specifically talking about the environment of the academia, Rose's ideas can be applied to cinema, because many only will have contact with the myth through the seventh art. For that reason, her words alert to an important aspect:

Thus, for me the liberating potential for students of an encounter with Greek civilization in general and with Greek myth in particular is first and foremost the possibility for engaging with the culturally Other. Not that there are no continuities or similarities available or worthy of study. But I see my first responsibility as challenging the belief of most of my students that anything different from what they know is either undesirable or unattainable. The profoundly ahistorical or antihistorical cast of most of what constitutes students' cultural experience—something that therefore deeply determines their own subjectivities, their own perceptions of their individual and collective life options—seems to me a major obstacle to the transformation of our society into one that is truly democratic and humanely decent.

To use myth aiming to say something beyond what is merely fantastic is of great importance and is already the support of tragic narratives written by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. To this respect, it is worth reading the words of Müller (1923, p. 357), valuable later to theorists such as Cassirer (1996), in relation to a profound connection between human existence and myth:

“Mythology [...] is inevitable, it is a need inherent to language, if we recognize in it the external form of thought: mythology is, in summary, an obscure shadow that the language projects over the thought, and that will not disappear while the language and the thought do not overlap completely: which is never going to be the case. Undoubtedly, mythology outbreaks with a greater strength in the most ancient times in the history of human thought, but it never disappears as a whole.⁷

When Müller mentions the intrinsic relation between myth and language and their ancestry, the scholar provides the elements that Cassirer will approach in his researches to reflect upon the origins of a mythic idea connected, since the early days, to human language. Hence, by bringing gods of another moment to Malpertuis, the commandant keeps alive an “irreal-reality”, that is, the mythic gods existed in another configuration of humanity, but the absence of their memory by orality or even the irrationality of man do not allow them to be observed at this exact moment, and, for this, they keep up so conflicting and paradoxical. Cassavius, as he himself affirms to his nephew Jan, detains the power of eternity in his hands, because he tries to break the notion of space-time that the language and the myth condition to man.

In this sense, the words of Dias (1999, p. 22) reinforce the tension existent inside the expressionist, the restlessness of man, the one who needs to overflow:

Expressionism reflects all the psychopathological atmosphere characterized by fervency, by history and intoxication, by the Dionysian frenzy, finally, for a surrender to extreme states of tension such as the desperation, the ecstasy, the hyperbolic sensations, the dilacerating scream.⁸

As a result, the hyperbolic sensations become even more bruising when metaphors mentioned along the movie started to fit in. The gods, by being exposed, by finding language, by being nominated, by understanding that the unquietness that they feel derive from the fact that they are not humans and that they are not in their world, realize again the fusion between myth and language, in what Cassirer (1996, p. 99) calls self-revelation. This “self-revelation”, that in the most archaic periods made possible for men to constitute all their cultural, social and religious practices, is here a discovery recall of the being itself, of a man craving to break the limits of his time.

Therefore, in the expressionist esthetics, the moral quandary of man, who tortures himself and tries to find the reason for his existence, is the key that becomes evident in the movie: myths are the support of the society in which they are inserted, the memory and the prestige of the gods were connected to the recognition that the Greeks had for them. In modern society, new myths find space and, consequently, the ancient Greek gods cannot fit in anymore. There is no more space for these Greek entities in the modern world; there are only the men in whom they were imprisoned, that is, a few mediocre bourgeois.

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⁷ Our translation.

⁸ Our translation.

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