

“But You’re Keeping the Outfit, Right?”: Iliadic Allusion in *Captain America: The First Avenger*

With the extensive references to ancient myth within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) movies, from the use of mythic names in Marvel’s *Eternals* to the domestic lives of Norse gods in *Thor*, fans of the reception of the ancient world have a multitude of motifs to enjoy. That said, much of the reception of ancient culture in the MCU franchise remains at the surface level. I argue that the most extensive reception of a work of ancient Greek literature in the MCU occurs in an unlikely place, namely, the film *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), which at first glance does not have either an ancient setting or characters taken explicitly from mythology. In my paper, I show how the relationship between the major characters Steve Rogers (the titular Captain America) and Bucky Barnes adapts and reworks the camaraderie between Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*.

Although there has been extensive analysis of the relationship of each pair of heroes (for Achilles and Patroclus, see especially Fantuzzi 2012; for Rogers and Barnes, see Weiner 2009, Markus and McFeely 2016), the resemblance between the two has been overlooked. While the film teems with Homeric parallels, I place particular emphasis on how Barnes replays the role of Patroclus in *Iliad* 16: in a critical battle, he takes up the shield of Captain America and is killed in action. Rogers’s subsequent grief is then integral in shifting his approach to violence and vengeance, which renders him all the more comparable to Achilles in the later books of the *Iliad*.

After explaining these parallels, I conclude by offering some thoughts on the wider significance of this moment of reception, by way of psychology. As other scholars have demonstrated (Bennett 1978, Shay 1995, DuBose 2009), both of these narratives reflect the

effects of trauma and PTSD on the characters and their relationships: I combine these scholars' insights and suggest them as a reason for the enduring popularity of this narrative pattern.

Bibliography

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