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Classical Mythology in Contemporary European Science Fiction Film

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Classical Reception and Film Studies: An Introduction

The thesis introduction begins by delineating the interdisciplinary field in which this research is situated. First, the notion of ‘classical’ is posited as a term describing a relation to the ancient Greco-Roman world. Then the notion of ‘reception’ is introduced as a term that reflects an act of receiving, envisioned between source material and a subsequent cultural product. Following this definition of terms, the thesis presents the field of classical reception, which studies how Greco-Roman material has been reused during and especially since antiquity. Classical reception is further differentiated from the field of classical tradition on the basis that the former considers the two-way dynamics of reception as an essential characteristic in this relationship between older and newer texts, and it has a pronounced reliance on literary and reception theories.

To deepen the understanding of classical reception, its primary attributes, and to place the thesis into a broader (also temporal) constellation, the introduction brings postmodernism into the discussion, arguing that the major features of postmodernism can shed light on the predominant characteristics of classical reception. Thus, postmodernism’s relationship to historicity and the ‘loss of historicity’, as denominated by Fredric Jameson (1991), is presented as a first point of conjuncture between postmodernism and classical reception. While the field of classical reception postulates the importance of historical contexts, the subjects of the field – following the practices of postmodern culture – often remix the past, the present and the future in an unmarked and confusing manner, leading to ahistorical, timeless and universal attitudes towards the classics. In this same discussion, Anastasia Bakogianni’s (2016) concept of ‘masked receptions’ is introduced, which describes acts of reception in which the encounter between antecedent and subsequent text is not clearly signalled, but it is indirect and hidden. Similarly, Ika Willis’ (2017) concept of ‘decontextualised, ahistorical’ contemporary mythography is explained. Overall, both concepts underline the challenges around (the loss of) historicity.

A second point of conjuncture is offered via postmodernism’s and classical reception’s reliance on intertextuality. In this context, the thesis explores the way intertextuality theory can be of use to the field of classical reception, including Gérard Genette’s (1997) hypertextuality, and Roland Barthes’ (1986) ideas on the ‘death’ of the author and the changes in the author’s authority over meaning. Thirdly, the unsettling of the categories of both (traditionally conceived) high and low culture is displayed as a

fundamental aspect of postmodernism and classical reception, which is further connected to the latter's 'democratic turn'.

Having introduced the main attributes of classical reception through postmodernism and by placing the thesis within postmodernity, the next section of the introduction presents the subfield of classical reception in film. Here, several important predecessors and practitioners in the field are noted, including Joseph Campbell (1949), Maria Wyke (1997) and Martin M. Winkler (particularly Winkler 2009), followed by a detailed discussion of the challenges and potential of this interdisciplinary relationship between classical and film studies. Notably, the issues of authority and expertise are articulated, and then the capabilities of film studies (to analyse the filmic examples of classical reception) are addressed, equally considering the filmic text itself and its conditions around (pre)production and post-production. Ultimately, the section situates the research within the conditions of contemporary digital cinema, highlighting how concepts from media theory – such as Lev Manovich's new media (2001) or Henry Jenkins' (2006) convergence culture – can be relevant to the thesis.

The introductory chapter continues with the narrowest subfield (and most relevant to this research), the field of classical reception in science fiction film. Thus, the genre of science fiction is introduced through a dual approach, presenting the genre's long history model (which considers Lucian's ancient *True History* as a proto-SF) and its short history model (which regards Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* as the beginning of modern science fiction). Subsequently, this section outlines the primary focus of the research – namely, classical mythology – and explores its connection to the genre of science fiction. Based on Tony Keen's differentiation of science fiction *being* or *using* mythology, first, the chapter investigates the 'being mode' predominantly through the works of Stuart M. Kaminsky (1974), Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Stevens (2012), Tom Lombardo (2015), and Adrienne Mayor (2018), concluding that both (classical) mythology and science fiction:

- Represent possible worlds
- Express epistemological similarities, offering 'cognitive estrangement' and 'novum'
- Explore cosmic perspectives
- Are inclined to motivate, inspire and provide their receivers with ethical guidelines

- Express a fascination towards technology (although this is merely a tendency, not a universal characteristic).

Then, the chapter closes this section with the presentation of the ‘using mode’ (cases in which specific myths are reused in science fiction) by noting several major works and contributors of the field, such as Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Stevens (2012, 2015, 2019), and Tony Keen (2006, 2017, 2019). Importantly, the thesis itself can be attached to the ‘using mode’.

Following this multifaceted introduction of (sub)fields and concepts, the chapter determines the research objectives of the study. Consequently, the central hypothesis is that Greco-Roman mythology is received in contemporary European science fiction film. This primary objective is supplemented by a set of secondary research objectives, according to which the processes of reception between classical mythology and science fiction film start debates on:

- The genre-specific articulations of science fiction film
- The film’s relationship to contemporary critical frameworks (namely: ecocriticism and posthumanism)
- The film’s positionings within cultural pessimisms (namely: environmental pessimism, technopessimism and heteropessimism).

Having set the research objectives of the study, the chapter discloses the methodology of the thesis. First of all, the sampling method (the basic parameters of the selected films) is explained. Regarding the temporal aspect of the research, the notion of ‘contemporary’ is clarified, for it is understood as the period following the Great Recession of 2009, which, since then, produced ‘compensatory culture’, see the work of Ella Harris (2019). Secondly, the spatial aspect is presented, i.e. what this research understands by European film and how the ‘Europeanness’ of film can be approached. Thus, European cinema is posited as films with European (co-)producing countries, and in this context, institutionalised markers of Europeanness (such as European accolades and funding schemes) play an important role. With these thoughts in mind, the research’s selected films are introduced as European science fiction film productions. As a last addition to the sampling method, the concept of ‘small national cinemas’ is mentioned, which largely influenced the selection of the four films.

Then, the methodology of the thesis is introduced, starting with the assessment that this research involves a case study methodology, which provides the needed conditions for

in-depth explorations that can thus meet the specific research objectives. This case study methodology is combined with a comparative textual analysis, which ‘reads’ both films and myths as texts. As a response to the challenges raised by the oral aspect of mythology and the many myth variations, the thesis approaches classical mythology through classical texts, which offer the canonical versions of myths. Additionally, the comparative textual analysis aims to explore the way the acts of classical reception influence genre-related elements of science fiction, critical frameworks and different types of cultural pessimisms. Considering the thesis’ integration within film studies, the chapter offers a detailed explanation of genre nomenclature, thus positing the notions of ‘iconography’ and ‘subgenre’ within the study. Lastly, the citation style of the thesis – Chicago Manual of Style (18th edition, Author-Date) – is presented, along with a brief explanation of why CMOS is the most fitting choice for this research.

Chapter 1: Apollo-Daphne and Philemon-Baucis in Post-Apocalyptic Ecological Dystopia

The first case study chapter focuses on *White Plastic Sky* (*Műanyag égbolt*, Tibor Bánóczki and Sarolta Szabó, 2023), a Hungarian-Slovakian science fiction animation film. According to the central argument of the chapter, *White Plastic Sky* reuses the Apollo and Daphne myth in the first half of the film, and the Philemon and Baucis myth in the second half of the film. First, the chapter places its case study film in science fiction tradition, concluding that *White Plastic Sky* is a post-apocalyptic ecological dystopia, which is the successor of 1970s science fiction films such as *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973), *Logan’s Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) and *Z.P.G.* (Michael Campus, 1972).

The chapter continues with the presentation of the Apollo and Daphne myth, primarily relying on Ovid’s rendition of the myth in *Metamorphoses* (8 CE). The section showcases several important characteristics of the myth, including the motif of pursuit, the ‘split identity’ of Daphne and her transformation into a (laurel) tree. The following section identifies the most crucial similarities between myth and film, concluding that both the Apollo and Daphne myth and *White Plastic Sky* present opposing female-male dynamics, female characters with split identities, the motif of male pursuit, and the motif of human-to-tree transformation, overall framing transformation as a form of death. Then, the myth of Philemon and Baucis is introduced, based on the Ovidian version of the myth from *Metamorphoses*, highlighting the idyllic relationship of the old couple and their joint

transformation into trees. The argumentation continues with the analysis of how the film reuses the Philemon and Baucis myth, emphasising the shared motifs of compatible female-male dynamics and joint human-to-tree transformations, which are reframed as renewal.

Regarding how this intertextual relationship influences the genre articulation of *White Plastic Sky*, the reuse of the Apollo and Daphne myth catalysed an action-packed postapocalyptic adventure with a ‘white male saviour’ (a saviour from the male protagonist’s perspective and a pursuer from the standpoint of the female protagonist). On the contrary, the reuse of the Philemon and Baucis myth in the second half of the film pushed the narrative towards arthouse modalities, challenging the previously established action-oriented and genre-affirming practices of the film. Notably, through the adaptation of the Philemon and Baucis myth, the film further challenged the value system of conventional postapocalyptic science fiction dystopias that tend to embrace anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. This subversion is acutely marked by the end of the film, offering an ambiguous denouement that can be equally framed as both utopian and dystopian, depending on whether one accepts or denies the non-anthropocentric viewpoint of the protagonists.

As for the critical framework of ecocriticism, the chapter concludes that through the Apollo and Daphne myth, the film (initially) frames the female protagonist as nature, as the ‘angel’ of the ecosystem (following the Greek nymph’s footsteps), overall suggesting a dualist thinking, which places the culture/men alignment in a dominant position and the nature/women alignment in a submissive position. Subverting this initial status quo, through the reuse of the Philemon and Baucis myth, the film reintroduces the protagonists as an ‘eco-friendly’ married couple; moreover, by equating both male and female as nature, the film ultimately proposes a utopian possibility in a dystopian world. Ultimately, via ‘inviting’ the classical myths of Apollo and Daphne, and that of Philemon and Baucis, *White Plastic Sky* presents the predicament of the Anthropocene, the narrative overall destabilising the hegemony of the human species and the species’ traditionally praised dominance over nature amid growing environmental urgency.

Chapter 2: Cassandra and Ecological Storytelling in Space

The second case study chapter focuses on *Aniara* (Pella Kågerman and Hugo Lilja, 2018), a Swedish-Danish science fiction film. According to the core argument of the chapter, the film reuses the classical myth of Cassandra in an ecocritical rendition. To prepare the complex comparative analysis between myth and film, the chapter commences its

argumentation by situating *Aniara* within the science fiction tradition, predominantly focusing on the iconographic element of outer space. Framing outer space as the ‘last frontier’ for human survival, several of *Aniara*’s notable cinematic kin are identified, including *Elysium* (Neill Blomkamp, 2013), *Tides* (Tim Fehlbaum, 2021), *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), *Passengers* (Morten Tyldum, 2016), and *Pandorum* (Christian Alvart, 2009).

Then, the chapter introduces the mythical figure of Cassandra, based on her canonical characterisation in Aeschylus’ tragedy, *Agamemnon* (5th century BC). The section presents the Cassandra episode of the play in detail, including Clytemnestra and Aegisthus’ planned murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra herself, highlighting the important features of the seer and the delivery of her prophecy. It is established that Cassandra is a disbelieved prophetess, more specifically a visionary seer (*mantis*), and also an enslaved foreigner (as she is a Trojan princess). This foreignness, her communication difficulties in Greek, further contribute to her unsuccessful prophetic delivery, which is characterised by the disadvantageous timing and placement of her prophecy. The section closes with a discussion on the uses of Cassandra as a rhetorical tool, overall highlighting that all these instances uniformly alarm ‘receivers’ concerning future dangers.

Having introduced both myth and film, the comparative analysis unfolds, arriving at the following conclusions: both *Aniara* and the Cassandra myth present subaltern female identities (while the mythical Cassandra is a foreign, enslaved woman, the Mimarobe is a queer woman); both present displaced women without families; both female characters can be read as prophetesses (while Cassandra is a visionary seer, the Mimarobe is a sign-reading prophet); consequently, both characters are in conflict with their surrounding environments (which disbelieve and disregard warnings) and both are negative prophets associated with doom. Finally, in both myth and film, the prophecies are fulfilled, pushing communities into despair.

Considering how the reuse of the Cassandra myth affects the genre articulation of *Aniara*, particularly the representation of outer space, the chapter assesses that the reuse of the myth strengthens the representation of outer space as an ultimatum, paralleling the ‘last frontier’ conceptualisation of outer space with the framing of the prophecy as a ‘last warning’. Eventually, outer space becomes a quintessentially Cassandran setting, both on the individual level of the female protagonist and the collective level of the spaceship’s passengers, presenting outer space as a non-place and as an indicator of continuous displacement. Furthermore, the reuse of the Cassandra myth emphasises the dystopian tone of the film, pushing the narrative to new depths of despair. Interestingly, the reuse of the

myth creates a link with the conventional heroines of natural disaster films, on the one hand, transposing several characteristics of these heroines (silenced females stripped of authority) to the postapocalyptic ecological dystopia of *Aniara*, and, on the other, subverting the original value judgment of such heroines, for both Cassandra and the Mimarobe represent female voices that have been silenced unjustly by their communities.

Turning to the ecocritical considerations fuelled by the interaction between myth and film, the chapter concludes that in *Aniara*, the exploitation of both the Mimarobe and her mythical counterpart, Cassandra, is paralleled with the exploitation of nature. At the same time, the dismissive community of the film (also present in the myth) is reframed as a collective of consumers that is unwilling to stop consuming (and thus, exploiting) its resources. Most importantly, *Aniara* constructs its ecocritical narrative through the usage of the Cassandra figure – as a customisable rhetorical tool – which can alarm audiences about future dangers, in this case, that danger referring to irreversible environmental degradation.

Chapter 3: Pandora and the Mad Scientist

The third case study chapter presents *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland, 2014), a UK-US science fiction film. According to the central argument of the chapter, the film reuses the myth of Pandora, while this ‘encounter’ between myth and film also impacts the film’s portrayal of its mad scientist character and the film’s relation towards posthumanism. First, the chapter situates *Ex Machina* within science fiction tradition through a pronounced focus on the mad scientist archetype. Consequently, the film’s computer scientist, Nathan, is paralleled with well-known examples of the archetype, such as Victor Frankenstein from *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818) and the film adaptations of this character – including *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1935) – and more recent cinematic examples of mad scientists, e.g. Seth Brundle from *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986).

Followed by the film’s placement within science fiction tradition, the chapter introduces the myth of Pandora through two canonical poems of Hesiod, *Theogony* and *Works and Days* (7-8th century BC). To understand the importance of Pandora in Greek mythology, the chapter outlines the Hesiodic version of the Prometheus myth, as well, given that the two myths are in a cause-and-effect relationship. The section continues with the possible explanations behind Pandora’s name and her ambiguous ontological nature, presented through a detailed analysis of her creation. The parallelisms with her biblical

counterpart, Eve, are also addressed, the analysis concluding that Pandora's reading is heavily distorted due to the Christian co-option of the myth. Ultimately, the section examines the possible misogyny of the Hesiodic texts and the possible meaning behind *elpis* (hope/expectation), which Pandora leaves in the jar.

Thus, the chapter arrives at the main part of the argumentation, in which the comparative textual analysis between myth and film expands. As a result, the analysis establishes that both the mythical Pandora and the filmic Ava are artificial women, which are prototypes ('firsts') made by male creators (Hephaestus and Nathan, respectively); in both cases, the creation is carried out with the help of a 'collective' of donors (the deities providing Pandora the 'gift' of language, the ability to deceive and an alluring form, the same 'gifts' given to Ava by humans unaware of their contributions); and both Pandora and Ava carry out tasks that were expected of them by their male creators (starting with the manipulation of Epimethean figures). Additionally, the argumentation concludes that Pandora is a more fitting mythical counterpart to Ava than Pygmalion's Galatea. Furthermore, Nathan has been successfully identified as an amalgam between Hephaestus (the main creator of Pandora) and Prometheus (the titan who commits transgressive acts following his grand ambitions), while Caleb has been identified as Epimetheus. Finally, both myth and film present analogous 'grand acts' performed by artificial women, acts that emphasise the binary opposition of inside/outside, whether one refers to Pandora and her act of opening the jar (which lets out the ills of the world), or Ava and her act of escaping the laboratory (letting herself out in the world).

Turning to the way the Pandora myth affects the genre articulation of *Ex Machina*, particularly the representation of the mad scientist archetype, the chapter concludes that Nathan's character 'borrows' several characteristics of the mad scientist from Hephaestus (see the setting of a secluded workshop/laboratory, the scientific interest in automatons, and, of course, the creation of an artificial being), but also from Prometheus (notably the titan's grand ambitions and appetite for transgressive acts). Overall, through the reuse of the Pandora myth – including the plot elements related to trickery, which highlights the mad scientist's loss of control – the film can provide the 'justified' closure to its mad scientist character, a punitive death suffered at the hand of his own creation.

Lastly, considering how the interaction between myth and film impacts *Ex Machina*'s articulation of posthumanism, the chapter concludes that by reusing the myth of Pandora, the film accentuates 'boundary troubles', expressed physically (through the tensions between inside and outside) and ontologically (through the tensions between

organic/inorganic, authentic/simulation, human/artificial). Interestingly, while Ava draws attention to Pandora's artificiality (and her posthuman reading), Pandora pushes Ava to explore her non-conventional humanity as an AI robot. Most importantly, Ava's mission to become (more) human has been identified as a posthuman survival tactic, which can be achieved only if Ava follows the footsteps of her mythical counterpart, starting with the manipulation of the Epimethean figure. Ultimately, *Ex Machina*'s Epimethean Caleb turns into the ambiguous *elpis* left inside the 'glass box' of the film, pushing the viewer to speculate on the potentials and dangers of a posthuman future.

Chapter 4: Scylla in Invasion Science Fiction Horror

The fourth case study chapter focuses on *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013), a science fiction film made in a co-production between the UK, the US, and Switzerland. According to the central argument of the chapter, the film reuses the myth of Scylla in a twofold manner: the first part of the film reuses Scylla in her Homeric reading, while the second part reuses the Ovidian version of the Scylla myth. Foregrounding the detailed textual analysis, the chapter places *Under the Skin* within the science fiction tradition, primarily based on the US invasion SFs and science fiction horrors of the 1950s. Consequently, several notable invasion science fiction films of the Cold War era are highlighted, such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), *Invaders from Mars* (William Cameron Menzies, 1953), and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (Gene Fowler Jr., 1958), which present aliens under human disguise. Lastly, *Under the Skin* is introduced through a recurring character of science fiction horror, the 'science fiction vamp', based on the paradigmatic examples of *The Wasp Woman* (Roger Corman, 1959) and *The Leech Woman* (Edward Dein, 1960).

The chapter then introduces Scylla, examining two distinct, nevertheless equally canonical versions of her myth, one rendition belonging to Homer's *Odyssey* (8th century BC) and the other to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE). To put these two versions into a larger context, the section briefly considers the iconographic history of Scylla throughout antiquity, from Homer's Iron Age to Ovid's Augustan period. Subsequently, the Homeric version is analysed in detail, which further highlights several crucial traits of this Scylla (voraciousness, hunting methods), who is overall framed as a terrible monstress. On the contrary, the Ovidian version of the myth reframes Scylla through an effort of demonsterification, signalled through Scylla's victimisation and self-alienation, among others.

Moving to the main part of the argument, the chapter analyses how the myth of Scylla is received in *Under the Skin*. According to the chapter's findings, while both the mythical Scylla (in all her versions) and the filmic Female share similar characteristics – such as their roles as monstrous female predators and hybrid identities, who hunt for males 'in motion' on the periphery – the first half of the film specifically reaffirms the Homeric interpretation of Scylla, while the second half aligns with the Ovidian reading of the myth. The Homeric Scylla is evident in the emphasis on monstrosity, demonstrated through aspects such as similar settings in both myth (a dark cave) and film (a pitch-black, abstract space); the depiction of liquid elements as a natural extension of the monster's threatening qualities; and the motifs of devouring, voraciousness, and (serialised) hunting, the latter of which subverts traditional gender roles. Instead, the Ovidian reading of Scylla emphasises de-monsterification through the motifs of self-alienation, victimisation, and via a final transformation into inanimate matter.

Considering the impact of the Scylla myth on the film's genre articulations, the chapter establishes that the reuse of the Homeric Scylla strengthens the genre conventions of science fiction horror and invasion SF, see the presence of the 'monstrous feminine' and that of the science fiction vamp, supported by a clear emphasis on both Scylla's and the Female's monstrous nature. On the contrary, the reuse of the Ovidian Scylla systematically challenges and subverts these traditions, ratifying Glazer's film as an arthouse science fiction film. The emergence of the Ovidian Scylla causes a sudden halt to predatory (genre-affirming) actions, calling forth meditative scenes embedded in trivialities, and overall complicating the Female's initial positioning as a cruel monster. This humanising approach, borrowed from the Ovidian reading of Scylla, affects the ending of the film, as well. While in conventional (invasion) SF horror the killing of the alien would have been skilfully carried out by human actors and would have been read as unambiguously justifiable and 'deserved', in *Under the Skin*, the killing of the female alien is the result of a coincidental encounter, overall rendering the Female as a victim of unfortunate circumstances, thus echoing the Ovidian Scylla.

Ultimately, analysing how the Scylla myth influences *Under the Skin*'s articulation of posthumanism, the chapter concludes that the Homeric reading of Scylla pushes the film to antagonise the Female because of her posthuman qualities, while the Ovidian version urges the narrative to reposition the protagonist's posthuman identity in an empathetic light, highlighting the uncomfortable liminality of posthuman personhood. As a result, both the

Ovidian Scylla and the film's female protagonist suggest that posthuman hybridity is not permanently sustainable, and overall, it is scarcely pleasant for the posthuman subject.

Conclusion: Cultural Pessimism and Final Remarks

The last chapter of the thesis begins with a discussion of *critical* classical reception, drawing on the works of Johanna Hanink (2017), Anastasia Bakogianni and Luis Unceta Gómez (2024), and Jesse Weiner (2024), among others. Importantly, a critical form of classical reception acknowledges the ambiguous legacy of the Greco-Roman world, for it has also fuelled oppressive ideologies, such as colonialism or patriarchy. The chapter reflects on how the analysis of the four case study films expresses a critical approach to classical mythology, including the re-readings of myths through critical frameworks and acknowledging the oppressive histories of classical source materials. Consequently, the conclusion notes the motif of oppressive 'othering' as a recurring element in all case study chapters, whether one examines the addressed non-human or subhuman characters of these myths.

To reaffirm its critical approach, the concluding chapter revisits the case studies through the prism of cultural pessimism, which holds that culture is in decline and that worst-case scenarios will eventually materialise. Film is further identified as a frequent 'carrier' of cultural pessimism, the genre of science fiction being an especially suitable companion to it via its predisposition to be invested in potential futures and yet-to-be-known worlds.

The chapter then introduces the first subcategory of cultural pessimism, environmental pessimism – the belief according to which catastrophic environmental decline cannot be averted – and examines how this form of pessimism is articulated in *White Plastic Sky* through classical receptions. It is established that the mythical motif of human-to-tree transformation (as found in the Apollo and Daphne myth, but also in other examples, such as the myths of Lotis, Myrrha or Cyparissus) can be read as a final solution, and, in *White Plastic Sky*, it is recontextualised as the *last resort* for humanity's survival. The film's core human-to-tree transformation initially suggests that it will follow the myth of Apollo and Daphne, yet eventually, this will be a joint human-to-tree transformation affecting both female and male. Notably, through this joint transformation – 'received' from the Philemon and Baucis myth – *White Plastic Sky* presents an ahuman manifesto (see MacCormack 2020), which rejects the human species and welcomes a new evolution of human-tree hybrids.

Moving on to the environmental pessimism of *Aniara*, the reuse of the Cassandra myth in this eco-dystopian context highlights the perception of irreversibility – strongly present in environmental pessimism – and positions the Mimarobe as a prophetess of doom, akin to the mythical Cassandra and environmental pessimists. In addition, via Cassandra, the film reaffirms the ‘logical impasse of catastrophism’ (Dupuy 2023), the inherently tragic predisposition of the doomsaying prophet.

Turning to *Ex Machina*’s techno-pessimism, the chapter establishes that the film’s techno-pessimism becomes palpable in its expression of the belief that technological progress possibly worsens the human condition. Just like Pandora’s act of opening the jar, Ava’s escape from the laboratory holds negative prospects from an anthropocentric view. Furthermore, the incomprehensibility of technology (Bennett 2001) is expressed by the narrative turn of outsmarting humans (Epimetheus in the myth, Caleb and Nathan in the film). By echoing the aspects of the Pandoran creation – the combination of a main male creator with the ‘gifts’ of donors – *Ex Machina* underlines what has been called a version of ‘dirty science’, strengthening the film’s techno-pessimism. Ultimately, Nathan, who is constructed as a combination of Hephaestus and Prometheus, falls into the trope of the mad scientist – an inherently techno-pessimist archetype of science fiction – and his ‘madness’ is further highlighted by his techno-optimism, which *Ex Machina* then presents in an unfavourable light.

Lastly, *Under the Skin*’s heteropessimism – understood as a strong disaffiliation with heterosexuality (Seresin 2019) – is examined through the Scylla myth. The chapter concludes that the construction of the monstrous Female (informed by the Homeric Scylla) represents a masculinist paranoia that drives misogyny and responds to heteropessimistic, incel sentiments. On the other hand, the Ovidian de-monsterification of The Female leads the female alien to try to experience a normative heterosexual relationship, which, eventually, fails to materialise. Ultimately, the victimisation of both the Ovidian Scylla and *Under the Skin*’s alien protagonist reaffirms a sturdy heteropessimism (further highlighted through sexual violence) and gives closure to a film that ends without a single character experiencing true intimacy and catharsis – be that sexual or romantic.

With these thoughts in mind, the chapter arrives at its last section, in which all the results of the thesis are summarised in conformity with the thesis’s primary objective and three secondary objectives. Additionally, from the perspective of classical reception, this study drew attention to the two-way dynamics of reception, as the reuse of myths in film also affects how one (re)reads the original myths. Secondly, from the perspective of film

studies, it is emphasised that this study highlighted a part of cinema that remains overshadowed by mainstream Hollywood cinema, overall contributing to the canonisation of European science fiction films that represent low-budget, cost-effective solutions. Notably, the limitations of the study are also acknowledged, e.g. those connected to narrow generalisability, subjectivity, and available sources. As for the future possibilities of this research, among others, it is mentioned that the classical receptions of European science fiction cinema could be examined in non-contemporary periods, or one could conduct a study which focuses on a limited set of classical myths, yet without any spatial restraints, exploring the films of both the Global North and South.