

Oliver Stone's *Alexander* (2004) constituted, even before its release, the target of a polemic associated with the director's choice to portray an archetypal military figure as a man who led an unparalleled expedition into Asia and defied not only cultural and geographical but also sexual boundaries. This paper focuses on five different scenes (8, 12, 19, 23, and 35 from the 2-Disc Widescreen Special Edition DVD) and aims to show that, although the film overlooks the politics of writing history in antiquity and, as a result, overemphasizes the erotic element in Alexander's relationship with Hephaestion, Stone's attempt to homoeroticize the epic genre at its rebirth cannot be fully explained if we see it solely as a symptom of an era of increased media attention to, and public acceptance of, sexual difference. While it is constructed as an amalgam of ancient and modern attitudes to homosexuality and becomes a tool through which the film explores the idea of transgression only to glorify a return to the norm, the bond between Alexander and Hephaestion is also shaped by, and operates as a vehicle for the expression of, bitemporal moral and political concerns. For the intimate moments between these two characters occur, I shall argue, at liminal time and space to highlight Alexander's own precarious position both as a male and ruler.

In scene 12, the identification of Alexander and Hephaestion with Achilles and Patroclus carries both military and erotic connotations and finds parallels in Arrian (*Anab.* 1.12.1-5) and Aelian (*VH* 12.7). Arrian reports that, when the Macedonian army reached Troy, Alexander and Hephaestion respectively laid a wreath upon what was known as the tombs of Achilles and Patroclus. Aelian adds that the latter did so "implying that he himself was the *erômenos* of Alexander, just as Patroclus was of Achilles." Whereas several scholars have taken these accounts at face value (Ogden 1996.122; Reames-Zimmerman 1999.90; Percy 2005.44), Bosworth (1980.104) has demonstrated that Arrian includes this rumor in his narrative because it suits his historiographical ambitions and goals. Hephaestion's gesture, as commented upon by Aelian, constitutes an appropriation of the past whose political motives become clearer once we examine the liminal time and space within which it takes place. By allowing Alexander to appear as the *erastês*, Hephaestion sets, at the very beginning of the expedition, the example of submissiveness and loyalty to the leader that the rest of the officers will have to follow in order for the Macedonian army to conquer the Persian Empire. Within the context of liminality, the public acceptance by an adult man of the passive role of the *erômenos*—an act that would otherwise be condemnatory—seems commendatory.

Stone's biopic provokes and then withholds: it denies Alexander and Hephaestion an explicit manifestation of homoerotic desire (e.g., a kiss or sex, as is the case with Bagoas and Roxane) on screen, but, having already titillated the spectator's imagination verbally and visually, it exploits the appeal of such a possibility off screen. Despite this ambiguous representational strategy, the film does not present the viewer with a bond that is full of sexual innuendos and empty of moral and political content. As my selection of scenes illustrates, Hephaestion is promoted to the narrative at liminal phases of the expedition to emphasize Alexander's perceived image as an incoherent subject, a man who strives to achieve unity and wholeness under the auspices of various contradictory cultural signifiers and stereotypes, such as duty, power, limits, family, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. Stone, I shall conclude, made a remarkable intrusion into the epic genre not so much by discussing a taboo issue, that of homosexuality in classical antiquity, but merely by challenging modern perceptions of men from antiquity as avatars of trouble-free masculinity.