

Bestial Rape from Greek Myth to Jim Carrey: Comedian Comedies and the Heroic Rapist

Isaac Gustafsson-Wood
University of Southampton

When the beast stalks and rapes, its' villainy can be assumed, yet there are tales told from Ancient Greece to contemporary cinema that paint the rapist as the hero of the story. Animal instincts permeate through society, underlying certain aspects of our living as intrinsic, making claims to what is natural. When these claims speak for sexual aggression, desire for power, revenge and punishment, the natural state of such desire is reaffirmed. This article aims to expose these desires as part of a narrative which helps to shape a problematic view of the purpose and justification of rape.

While transformed into eagle, bull, ram, swan and dolphin, animal guises have been used by gods to capture and rape young women and boys in the Greek myths. Similarly, characters played by Jim Carrey have used their control of the narrative in film to rape men with a gorilla, monkey, and a chicken. Connecting beast and rapist disassociates rape from the human body while simultaneously linking rape to animals and by association, to nature. This is problematic because these stories represent, then, an innate desire to rape as a natural occurrence. The myths of Europa, Asteria, and Ganymede all have Zeus as the rapist in an animal guise. Zeus abducts them with the intention to rape, and though all renditions of myths are not the same, the intentions of Zeus are undisputed; he is possessed with lust. The animals in the Jim Carrey films *Bruce Almighty*, *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls*, and *Me, Myself and Irene*¹ penetrate men to punish their antagonistic behaviour. The motivation is of justice through humiliation in these films, to allow the protagonist (Carrey) to become a hero. The narrative models of heroic rapist and comic hero overlap through bestial rape in these films. When animals are used to rape, male sexual aggression is naturalised; be that in terms of uncontrollable lust, or when used for punishment and power.

In the myths, it is mostly women that are raped but in the comedy films mentioned earlier, it is men who are penetrated by animals. This is significantly gendered because of the time frame of the films and the social understanding of what motivates rape. Since Susan Brownmiller's seminal work, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, was published in 1975, the social perception of rape has altered, from rape being understood

¹ Tom Shadyak, *Bruce Almighty* (Universal Pictures, 2003). Steve Oedekerk, *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* (Morgan Creek Productions, 1995). Bobby Farrelly and Peter Farrelly, *Me, Myself and Irene* (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2000).

as a violent form of sex, to a sexual form of violence². That rape is about violence, not sex, is not compatible with Zeus's narrative of lust. When rape is understood to be about power, however, it makes it a perfect narrative battleground for men to take vengeance on one another.

Zeus as Heroic Rapist

The heroic rapist model is one that permeates through culture "as when man conquers the world, so too he conquers the female"³. In Brownmiller's words, the male telling of history glorifies rapists, even to godly beings. Greek gods, such as Zeus, were the creators and keepers of social order, their stories told to shape ritual and everyday life⁴. James Robson argues that stories of bestial rape were similar to coming of age rituals in ancient Greece⁵. The learning of acceptable sexuality in a culture is also the learning of certain moralities related to the structure of socio-sexual relationships. Boys were taught that their sexuality was closely linked with the gods, while girls were taught that their sexuality was more like an animal's⁶. This complemented the framework that women needed to be 'tamed', controlled by a patriarchal structure where men asserted themselves sexually for the continuation of civilized society. Linking women's sexuality to the sexuality of animals in this way debases women's ability to control themselves and creates a need for external control, that of the male dominated society.

The myths of Zeus and Europa, and Zeus and Asteria include Zeus as bull and eagle respectively, kidnapping and attempting to rape the girls. Europa passively accepts her fate, while Asteria flees his clutches, resulting in two very different endings. Europa is rewarded for her compliance by birthing three heroic sons and marrying a king, while Asteria is reluctant to submit and is metamorphosed into the desolate and rocky island of Delos. Because Asteria could not fulfil the submission necessary for her to be accepted she is banished from society completely. These options of integration or exile play a key part in the morality of the story and women's place in Greek society because only in submission and passivity can a woman avoid being scorned by the gods. This narrative can also be seen in the myth of Philyra, who was turned into a linden tree for not fulfilling

² Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 15.

³ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 289.

⁴ Froma Zeitlin, 'Configurations of Rape in Greek Myth' in *Rape*, eds. Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986), 123

⁵ James Robson 'Bestiality and Bestial Rape in Greek Myth', in *Rape in Antiquity: Sexual Violence in Greek and Roman Worlds*, eds. Susan Deacy and Karen F. Pierce, (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1997), 69

⁶ James Robson 'Bestiality and Bestial Rape in Greek Myth', in *Rape in Antiquity: Sexual Violence in Greek and Roman Worlds*, eds. Susan Deacy and Karen F. Pierce, (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., 1997), 75

her motherly duties following a rape from Kronos in the shape of a stallion. The female social role is the focal point that requires control by these narratives.

An important distinction between Ganymede and the other rape victims of Zeus, is that Ganymede is male. Ganymede is abducted by Zeus in the form of an eagle and taken to Mount Olympus, where he is given eternal youth and immortality as a reward for his servitude. This relationship has been interpreted as a significant early representation of how Ancient Greeks viewed and expressed homosexuality, without prejudice, and sometimes is seen to represent sympathy for homosexual love and pederasty⁷. This story of rape being interpreted as a story about homosexual love points out the irrelevance of consent in the myths and in the interpretation of them; just as 'seduction' was often how rape narratives were framed. Consent is the only barrier we have to differentiate sex and rape and is arguable in its definition⁸. In myth, consent was never mentioned, but was assumed irrelevant. There was also an assumption of uncontrollable lust and male sexual aggression. Though Ganymede is male, he is mortal, and Zeus is a god. Andrew Calimach argues that this god/man relationship mirrored class-related man-boy relationships of Ancient Greece. Through his submission, Ganymede is given the gift of immortality, like the boys of Cretan society, who enter the world of illustrious men, gaining a legacy⁹. The morality, then, is consistent in the myths of Europa, Asteria and Ganymede, as submission to those with more power and status than oneself is advantageous.

Jim Carrey's Animal Phallus

All the myths agree that Zeus was possessed with lust. The beauty of Europa, Asteria and Ganymede were the qualities that made them irresistible. The motivation behind the characters of Jim Carrey, however, is based upon punishment. Muriel Andrin talks of the popularity of slapstick comedy partly coming from our repressed desire to humiliate others¹⁰. Humiliating others to justify one's own superiority can be seen in the narratives of films such as *Bruce Almighty*, *Ace Ventura*, and *Me, Myself and Irene*, where a brutal rape is celebrated as heroic retribution.

Mikhail Bakhtin is hugely influential on comedy theory, in *Rabelais and His World* he interprets the undermining and mocking of social norms as a liberating and subversive expression of excess and freedom¹¹. The point of transgression, according to Bakhtin, is

⁷ Andrew Calimach, 'The Exquisite Corpse of Ganymede: A cursory Overview of an Ancient Gender Studies Discourse', *Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies* 1:2 (Fall 2007): 117-137

⁸ See Catherine MacKinnon, 'Rape: On Coercion and Consent', in *Sex, Morality and The Law*, eds. Lori Gruen and George E. Panichas, (London: Routledge, 1997), 419-427

⁹ Andrew Calimach, 'The Exquisite Corpse of Ganymede: A cursory Overview of an Ancient Gender Studies Discourse', *Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies* 1:2 (Fall 2007): 123

¹⁰ Muriel Andrin, 'Back to the "Slap": Slapstick's Hyperbolic Gesture and the Rhetoric of Violence', in *Slapstick Comedy*, eds. Tom Paulus and Rob King, (London: Routledge, 2010), 227

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 166

that of subversion, duality, excess and freedom from official truth. Having the freedom to get close to a natural state by abandoning civility and social order is at the core of this argument¹². In essence this is the carnivalesque; the liberation from the dominant social order through humour. Jim Carrey is a performer who embodies the carnivalesque by using his body as a platform for transgression which refuses polite society by acting outside of it. The liberation and freedom Bakhtin saw in the carnivalesque, however, has a moralistic shadow in these films. In the rapes in Ancient Greek myth and the carnivalesque world Jim Carrey creates in his films, transgression is not akin to subversion. William Paul argues that animal comedy represents a transgression from human repression to what is instinctual, unchanging and innate¹³. He uses the term 'animality' to describe actions that are free from human inhibitions and repression, especially of sexuality. Unfortunately, this assumes an unequivocal knowledge of what is natural; and that is the problematic commonality which is at the crux of the discourse; manmade claims to nature.

In *Bruce Almighty*, Bruce (Carrey) is a man who is given God's powers after scorning God for feeling his life is unfair. When he is mortal a gang bully him and he is physically unable to defend himself. But when Bruce acquires God's powers, he comes across them and decides to take revenge for his previous attack. Part of this scene involves Bruce materializing a monkey from the gang leader's anus. After scaring the rest of the gang away with a swarm of bees from his mouth, Bruce uses his (almost telekinetic) powers to force the monkey back into the man's anus. Though the man is running away and screaming in fear and pain the scene is played from the joyous perspective of Bruce, who is delighting in his power. The monkey in this scene is an extension of Bruce's own body, being used to do humiliating physical harm. In a sense, the monkey is his representational phallus, as he uses it to anally penetrate the gang leader as an act of power and violence. For the purposes of this paper I am not limiting myself to the UK legal definition of rape, which only allows the penetrative object to be a penis. When all the world's objects are in the control of one man, like in *Bruce Almighty*, anything can become his representational phallus.

In *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* there is an implicit rape scene, where the antagonist Vincent Cadby (Simon Callow) is taken by a smirking gorilla behind a bush, which then shakes, to imply copulation. It is clear that Cadby does not consent to this from his fearful expression when the gorilla directs flirtatious glances towards him. In this scene the gorilla seems to be quite self-contained, acting upon his own urges, which differs from the commanded monkey in *Bruce Almighty*. However, the gorilla acts, in

¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19

¹³ William Paul, *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy*, (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994), 77

narrative form at least, on behalf of the protagonist Ace Ventura (Carrey). Most of the animals in the film, like this gorilla, are just an extension of Ace's eccentricity, representing his interests and impulses, desires and plot development. The gorilla in this scene has the protagonist's narrative interests at heart and is in the story to dispense justice. The gorilla becomes Ace's representational phallus here because the gorilla can act out the rape without seeming to deviate from his instinctual nature.

The third example is from *Me, Myself and Irene*, where Charlie's (Carrey) sons force a live chicken's head into a policeman's anus. It is visually graphic as the close up shot shows a man's buttocks with a clucking chicken flapping its wings, the head unseen and apparently inside the man. The officer is one of many trying to apprehend Charlie but becomes representative of all Charlie's adversaries when he is found handcuffed to a tree shouting "will somebody get this goddamn chicken out of my ass please!". In all three of these films, these men are raped because they are a representation of an antagonistic world that tries to contain the exuberance of the protagonist. The policeman attempting to put Charlie (Carrey) in prison, Vincent Cadby from *Ace Ventura* who pays off corrupt cops to financially benefit himself by destroying the jungle Ace tries to save, and the gang leader from *Bruce Almighty* all actively try to limit the protagonist's goals and aims. In Greek myth women are raped to reinforce a social hierarchy, which places the male dominated social order above female agency, whereas in these Jim Carrey films, it is the establishment that is punished. The restrictive social order that this one character, played by Jim Carrey, feels excluded from is the source of his misery, and rape becomes a metaphor for corrective justice.

Following their rapes all the men are cast from the narrative, never heard from or seen again, as they have served their purpose. They created amusement, showed the unparalleled power of the protagonist, and are forgotten as the carnival continues. Like Asteria's removal from humanity by being turned into an island, these characters no longer have a place in the world of the story. The limited social order they represent is dismissed in favour of the world created by Jim Carrey.

Nature and the Comic Hero Rapist

When rape is seen to be about violence and power instead of lust, men can be raped and it be seen as a plot device; in these films it is for dispensing social justice. It is even more effective to remove the penetrative organ from the human male body, and use an animal's body. This is because the human body represents civility much more than the animal, whose body exemplifies instinct and nature. Viewing explicit animal mating is universally acceptable whereas explicit human sex is pornography and carries an age limit. However, associating the penetrations with violence distances it from sexuality, therefore allowing the potential of comedy to surface. Male rape can be represented as

comedic because the rapist does not need sexual desire for another man, therefore certain sexual identities, importantly homosexuality, do not have to come into play.

The animal body can express more sexuality on screen than the human body precisely because it is seen to be so close to nature. Discourse of nature and instinct permeates through both ancient and contemporary texts. In relation to rape in Greek myth, Froma Zeitlin says Greek myths “lay claim to some privileged kind of truth about human nature... [Greek myths] invoke the prestigious authority of their entire culture to try to persuade us of the way things are and have always been”¹⁴. These tales are said to speak for a higher power, so when people speak for the gods, things like a gendered hierarchy are reaffirmed, justified and naturalised.

In *Bruce Almighty*, *Ace Ventura*, and *Me, Myself and Irene*, Jim Carrey plays a character of great exuberance with slapstick qualities of indestructibility, excessive and unrealistic movement, and imaginative freedom. These are also the qualities that put his characters at odds with everyday rules that regulate society. This is what makes him a comic hero; he manifests himself in opposition to the antagonistic world he belongs to. Frank Krutnik explains the genre of ‘comedian comedy’ as having “a strong inter-relationship between the comic spectacle of physical otherness and forms of social or cultural otherness”¹⁵. Carrey’s slapstick persona and movements make him an outcast in a world he does not understand and which does not understand him. He is carnivalesque because he represents that transgression from authority and traditional social hierarchy. The rapes, then, can come to represent a deviation from an oppressive social order, as they are justified acts done toward antagonists. The rapes in myths represent the *dangers* of diverting from social convention; the carnivalesque exuberance exerted by Jim Carrey represents the *freedom* of diverting from social convention.

Animals are thought to rely on their instincts as sexual beings, whereas humans are bound by civility. Therefore animals are used to represent an instinctive and untamed sexuality and are the perfect vehicles to carry claims of what is natural. Both in Greek mythology and contemporary comedy, stories of rape are used as a mechanism of social control. Whether the rape is used to enforce the existing social order, like in the myths, or to demonize the existing social order, like in comedian comedies, rape representation naturalises male sexual aggression and reinforces the acceptability of rape in each society.

¹⁴ Froma Zeitlin, ‘Configurations of Rape in Greek Myth’ in *Rape*, eds. Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986), 123

¹⁵ Frank Krutnik, *Hollywood Comedians: The Film Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 16

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