

Ward BRIGGS

### Codes of Manliness in Walter Hill's *The Warriors*

American conceptions of manliness often derive from the conduct of the military. In *The Warriors* (1979) Walter Hill explicitly follows the narrative of Xenophon's *Anabasis* as a pattern for the story of the Warriors, a New York City gang making their own "desperate forced march" to their home by the sea in Coney Island following a disastrous meeting of gang representatives in the upper Bronx. The opening montage portrays an illuminated account of the Battle of Cunaxa after which Xenophon had to assume co-leadership of his group of what remained of the original 10,000 Greek mercenaries hired to help Cyrus supplant Artaxerxes II. In the movie, a charismatic character named Cyrus tries to unite the gangs of New York to help him depose the city's governing bodies. Both Cyruses die early in the respective narratives. Swan, second-in-command of the Warriors, assumes control of his nine men after the death of Ajax, as Xenophon assumed control of the remnants of the original 10,000 Greek mercenaries hired by Cyrus, and both men lead their troops through hostile territory to the sea.

Hill borrows Xenophon's reliance on event and action over dialogue and detail to emphasize that manliness and virtue are accomplished by deeds, not words. The manliness of the gang members is seen, as in the *Anabasis* in terms of following a military code: Cleon, the Warriors' leader at the beginning of the film, tells his men to "soldier." After Cleon's death, the two rivals, Swan and Ajax, contend for leadership, while The Fox, Swan's adviser meets an early end. Swan even projects his manliness in subtle ways. When four teens dressed for a prom eye Swan and his girlfriend Mercy disdainfully, Swan defends himself and Mercy with a steely glare that withers the contemptuous couples.

The lack of manliness is also defined by another gang, the Orhpans, a third-rate group not even invited to the assembly. Mercy was originally one of them, but after they break their deal with Swan by attacking the Warriors and being routed, Mercy abandons them for Swan, the weaker gang for the Warriors.

In ancient fashion, the movie ends with a (short) monomachia on Coney Island between Swan and the leader of the Gramercy Riffs, Luther, the thug who had killed Cyrus.

Rarely have we seen ancient values and indeed an ancient work of literature, so faithfully translated to a modern setting by a film.