

In a review of four recent biographies of Alexander the Great (*The Guardian*, January 8, 2005), the writer Rory Stewart laments the undermining of the heroic legend, particularly among academics who stress the king's destructiveness and egotism. Not so classical writers who 'grasped that Alexander's love of glory was a reflection of his Hellenic background and an essential part of his heroism'. The Macedonian 'gave his life with a social fiction called "honour" for a fantasy called "heroism"'. Modern man, however, is half-hearted in his fantasies, unwilling to pursue 'an idea which we suspect is not only impossible, but also ridiculous.'

Recent cinematic treatments of the ancient world clearly show the difficulties in portraying public displays of machismo. Maximus in *Gladiator* is acceptable only because he is an outsider pursuing not only his own just vengeance (the theme of countless westerns), but because his revenge offers the possibility of political progress for Rome as well. *Troy's* Achilles has a power in battle which sets him above the better socialised Hector, but he also dooms him to the role of killer of men, welcoming death as a release. Honour by itself is insufficient.

Alexander is even harder to portray as a modern sympathetic hero. He is no underdog and his pursuit of empire without great concern for his subjects suggests the role of anti-hero. In Rossen's 1956 movie, Alexander can be seen as a man who learns to expand his horizons from Macedonian glory to concern for Hellenic ideals and then to the whole of mankind, thwarted by premature death. In the 2004 version, Oliver Stone's hero may seek the world, but he cannot break free from the more powerful demands of those around him (Olympias, Philip, Hephaestion, and Roxanne). However brave he may be, he is a man controlled by his destiny, not a free agent.

This paper focuses on an alternative, non-western vision of Alexander. The television series *Reign: the Conqueror* (Japanese original version: *Arekusanda Senki*, 1999) shows the king as fated to be the great destroyer. While this leads to increasing dread among those around him, Alexander is at ease with his personal ability to combine speed with opportunity. With destruction becomes the prospect of recreation – as the modern history of Japan has well shown. Yet the willingness of society as a whole to embrace self-sacrifice to achieve a greater goal is itself problematic. As with Alexander and his troops on the edge of the world in the last episode of *Reign*, the viewer may be caught in the *Trap of Mirabilia*, forced to acknowledge the limits of political fantasy.