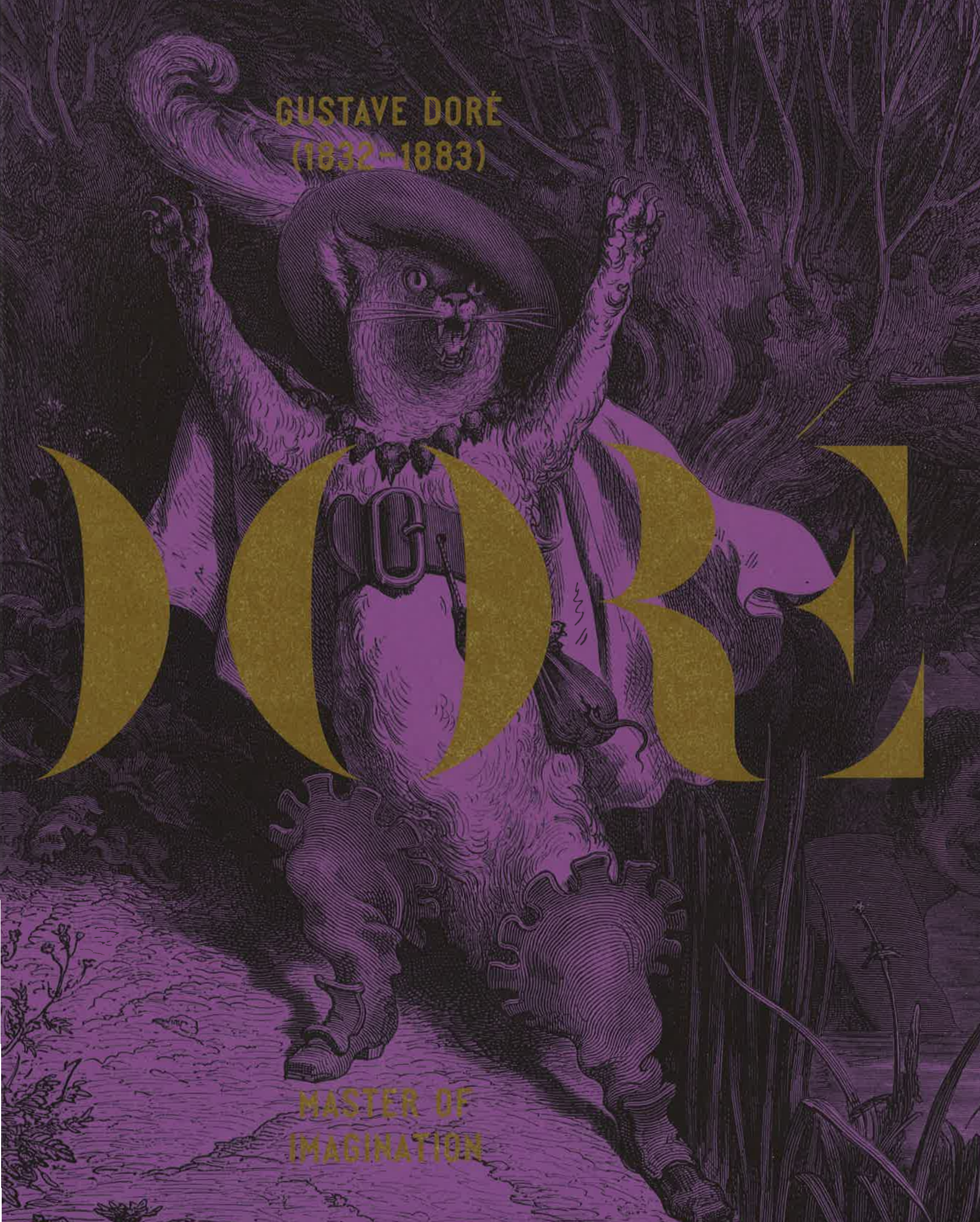


GUSTAVE DORÉ
(1832-1883)

DOG

MASTER OF
IMAGINATION



DORÉ

MASTER OF IMAGINATION

Edited by Philippe Kaenel

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Cinema and the Work of Doré

VALENTINE ROBERT

248 (p. 284) *Voyage to the Moon* 1862
Published in *Les Aventures du baron Münchhausen*
[The Adventures of Baron Munchausen],
by Rudolph Eric Raspe
Wood engraving
Paris, Furne; folio

Gustave Doré died over a decade before the emergence of cinema.¹ Fond of saying that he had “plenty of collodion in his head,”² the artist took little interest in technological advances in the realm of film and photography, and scarcely used photography in his own work. But there has nevertheless been an encounter between Doré and the cinema. Filmmakers of all types and from every era have drawn inspiration from the illustrator, recognizing his “cinemascope view”³ and “cinematic eye.”⁴ The history of cinema has *engraved* Doré in the twentieth-century imagination.

The connection goes back to the very beginnings of film. A key and canonic example from early cinema, *The Life and Passion of Christ* (Pathé, 1902, fig. 250), includes a number of scenes that recreate Doré’s Bible illustrations almost exactly: his *Marriage at Cana*, for example, is reproduced down to cracks in the walls and folds in the draperies (fig. 251). The scale and positioning of the various elements were adapted to fit the screen, and the action was set in motion – but at a pace sedate enough to preserve the dramatic impact of the picture.⁵ The reason Doré’s illustrations served as such a vital source of inspiration for the cinema is that he actually approached them like a director, creating a *mise en scène*: his images were renowned as a form of “drama expressed visually.”⁶ The artist even made a speciality of creating *tableaux vivants*, transforming studio poses into staged spectacles, “realizing”⁷ paintings (either reconstructing existing works or inventing new ones) that featured players drawn from society’s highest ranks positioned and forced into immobility by Doré (even the Emperor allowed himself to be framed).⁸ They brought his work to life, foreshadowing the destiny of Doréan iconography to be reanimated through film. The early cinematographic transposition of these *tableaux* is hardly surprising, for even before the advent of film the public had become used to seeing Doré’s images projected onto a big screen, supplemented by a spoken commentary and musical accompaniment. Lectures illustrated with still projections were extremely popular in the late nineteenth century, and Doré’s pictures were omnipresent on lists of magic lantern slides. As cinema developed, lectures – especially those devoted to religious subjects – would frequently present a mix of slide and film projections, presenting Doré’s imagery as they switched between the still and the moving, the drawn and the personified.⁹

If Doré’s propulsion onto the screen, his shift from page to plate to film, seems to have been an almost inevitable process, it is because the illustrator’s work, based from the outset on technical reproducibility, was originally intended for transposition via different mediums (wood, paper, glass) into different formats (large-scale and deluxe or modest and widely accessible). Well aware of the need for visibility and dissemination, the artist – who critics of the time were constantly singling out (not always positively) for his essentially popular talent and his capacity to “read in pictures”¹⁰ – bequeathed an imagery that

249 (p. 286) Louis Sargent, after Gustave Doré
“It was reached via the remains of one of these
monuments of whose origin we know nothing” 1863
Published in *Atala*, by François René de Chateaubriand
Wood engraving
Hachette, Paris; folio
Private collection

was designed to be consumed by every kind of audience and that was thus ideally suited to the cinema, the quintessential medium of mass culture.

THE SCREEN AS BLANK PAGE: DORÉ AS THE BASIS FOR A COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION

From the start, then, cinema eagerly embraced Doré’s iconography. One of his engravings for *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* is even said to have been the inspiration behind an iconic image of early filmmaking (figs. 252, 253) – the shot from Georges Méliès’ 1902 film *A Trip to the Moon* that shows a proto-rocket ship buried in one of the Man in the Moon’s huge eyes¹¹ and that has come to symbolize the impact of the new medium on the representational and visual systems of the period. Méliès, considered the first person to have seen film as the space of fantasy and fairytale,¹² used Doré to fuel his humour and imagination. Doré was obviously not the only source of the visual universe imagined by Méliès, but he did inspire the father of cinematographic special effects to produce some of his very “finest decorative exploits.”¹³

Doré would remain a key reference for most animators and creators of special effects, for whom the screen is a little like a blank page. One of the first essays on the subject makes his influence very clear: “If there is one man’s work that can be taken as the cinematographer’s text, it is that of Doré.”¹⁴ The prime example of this connection is undoubtedly *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933): this famous film owes much to Doré’s engravings, not only in its graphic content – special effects technician Willis O’Brien modelled his miniature jungle

— 1 This essay is an abridged version of an article being published in 1895: *Revue d’histoire du cinéma* (forthcoming). 2 Blanchard Jerrold, *Life of Gustave Doré* (London: W.H. Allen & Co 1891), p. 153. For more on Doré’s relationship with photography and the “recording of reality,” see Philippe Kaenel, “Gustave Doré à l’œuvre: vision photographique, imitation et originalité,” *Textimage: Le Conférencier*, no. 1 (October 2012), www.revue-textimage.com/conferencier/01_image_repetee/kaenel1.html. 3 David Kunzle, “Some Supplementary Notes” to Francis Lacassin, “The Comic Strip and Film Language,” *Film Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (autumn 1972), pp. 21–22. 4 Ray Harryhausen, in Ray Harryhausen and Tony Dalton, *The Art of Ray Harryhausen* (London: Aurum Press, 2005), p. 19. 5 Alain Boillat and Valentine Robert, “Vie et Passion de Jésus-Christ (Pathé, 1902–1905): hétérogénéité des ‘tableaux’, déclinaison des motifs,” 1895: *Revue d’histoire du cinéma*, no. 60 (spring 2010), pp. 32–63. 6 Edward Gordon Craig, *Henry Irving* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1930), p. 123. 7 The link between early cinema and the “realization” of painting – defined by Martin Meisel and epitomized by the *tableau vivant* – is the subject of my doctoral dissertation: *Entre tableau et plan, le cinéma des premiers temps en tableau vivant* (currently underway at the Université de Lausanne and the Université de Montréal under the direction of François Albera, with financial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation). 8 Blanche Roosevelt, *Life and Reminiscences of Gustave Doré* (New York: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1885), pp. 251–252. 9 See Valentine Robert, “Performing Painting: Projected Images as Living Pictures,” in Frank Gray, et al., *Performing New Media, 1890–1915* (London: John Libbey, 2014) pp. 282–292. 10 *Magazine of Art* (February 1883) quoted in Dan Malan, *Gustave Doré: Adrift on Dreams of Splendor* (St. Louis: Malan Classical Enterprises, 1995) p. 197. 11 Jean-Pierre Berthomé, “Georges Méliès, l’éternel retour,” *Positif*, no. 612 (February 2012), p. 57. 12 Norman McLaren, “Hommage à Georges Méliès,” in David Shepard, ed., *Georges Méliès, le premier magicien du cinéma (1896–1913): index des films* (Paris: Lobster Films, 2009), p. 3. 13 Alain Masson, “Le cinéma des incomparables: sur Georges Méliès,” *Positif*, no. 290 (April 1985), p. 31. 14 Lewis W. Physioc, “Cinematography an Art Form,” in Hal W. Hall, ed., *Cinematographic Annual 1930* (New York: Arno Press/New York Times, 1930), vol. 1, p. 25.

directly on Doré's wildly imaginative backdrops¹⁵ – but above all in its illustrative style. By working on the animation frame by frame, the technical team created a stylized, unrealistic effect that gave the film a deliberately dreamlike (or nightmarish) quality very similar to the one that emanates from Doré drawings.¹⁶ Ray Harryhausen, who studied under O'Brien, would earn his reputation as a “stop-motion wizard” by taking full advantage of the Doré legacy, drawing for virtually all of his Hollywood creations upon the artist's gothic imagination and replicating the tripartite division of his compositions, which combine a dark foreground, a medium-toned middle register, and a bright background featuring mist or fog (fig. 249).¹⁷ Doré's impact on the fabricated cinematographic world is reconfirmed in the way various *Star Wars* characters “uncannily resemble” some of the figures engraved for Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*.¹⁸ Drawn animation has also turned frequently to this same iconographical wellspring. Robin Allan has revealed just how often Walt Disney productions have drawn inspiration from Doré – his fairies, his bewitched trees, his oneiric chiaroscuros and dramatic perspectives. The reason “Doré's technically brilliant, often vulgar and melodramatic work appealed to Disney”¹⁹ is that they were both aiming their characters and stylized settings at the same “mass” audience.²⁰ But, paradoxically, in fabricating a collective imagination, inventing creatures that haunt every generation and every social class, and establishing the conventions for spaces that were taken as models by the very earliest cinema design manuals,²¹ Doré became simultaneously famous and anonymous, and the references to his work unconscious, vague and elusive.

DORÉ'S "ADAPTATIONS": FROM *INFERNO* TO *FAIRY TALES*, FROM *LONDON* TO *MUNCHAUSEN*

There have nonetheless been film productions that were conceived explicitly as adaptations of Doré's book illustrations, which have explored in depth the worlds they describe. Jean Mistler went so far as to identify Doré as the “precursor of film adaptations”²² on the strength of a “phantasmagoria” – a magic lantern show full of animation effects – based on the illustrations for Dante's *Inferno* that was put on as early as 1863. The projectionist of this “devilish” spectacle even wrote to Doré's publisher, Hachette, in the hope of convincing the firm to sponsor the event – an inverted foreshadowing of the whole film rights issue.²³ Although the show did not set any legal precedents, it did presage the cinematographic destiny

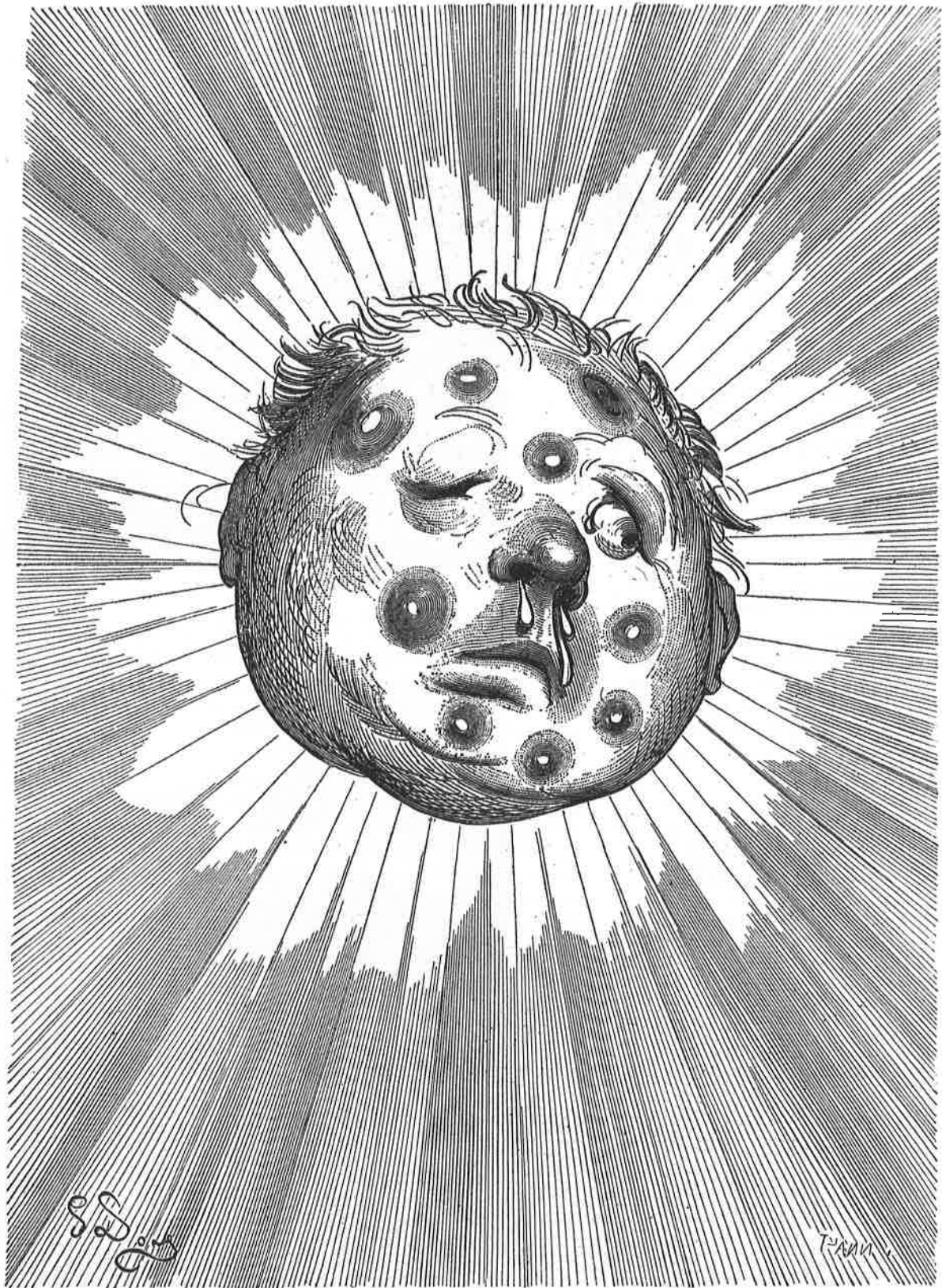
— 15 Among the enthusiasts' blogs that draw interesting parallels, see especially: <http://monsterkidclassichorrorforum.yuku.com/topic/32507/Gustave-Dore-and-the-Spider-Pit> and <http://21essays.blogspot.ch/2012/03/king-kong-in-dore-land.html>. 16 Ray Harryhausen, commentary to a recent box-set DVD edition that includes the original film: *The King Kong Collection* (Warner Home Video, 2005). 17 Alain Garsault and Hubert Niogret, “Entretien avec Ray Harryhausen,” *Positif*, no. 249 (December 1981), p. 6. 18 Malan, op. cit., p. 211. 19 Robin Allan, *Walt Disney and Europe* (London: John Libbey, 1999), p. 23. 20 Jean-Loup Bourget, “Il était une fois Walt Disney,” *Positif*, no. 550 (December 2006), p. 75. 21 Edward Carrick, *Designing for Moving Pictures* (New York: Studio Publications, 1941), p. 20. 22 Jean Mistler, *La Librairie Hachette de 1826 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1964), p. 154. 23 The letter, signed by someone called “Robin” and dated 17 July 1863, is quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 154–155.



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of Doré's hell, epitomized in the first Italian full-length feature (*L'Inferno*, Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe de Liguoro and Adolfo Padovan, 1911). This film reproduced almost all of Doré's scenes in *tableaux vivants*, combining skilful staging with techniques like multiple exposure and special effects to evoke the hordes of the damned and conjure headless bodies (figs. 256, 257).

While the *Inferno* continued to haunt horror film visions, another Doréan world, almost as hellish, has also had a profound influence on film production: this is the one evoked by Doré's pictures of London, published in 1872 under the title *London: A Pilgrimage*. The most explicit cinematic borrowing from this series is the Roman Polanski version of *Oliver Twist* (2005), whose opening image features one of its engravings. This scene, which immediately sets the Doré-inspired tone, comes gradually to life during the opening titles and is followed by sequences showing Oliver exploring the city that Polanski shot with the *London* volume in his hand, constantly adjusting the lighting and the positioning of the extras against the prints for accuracy.²⁴ From start to finish the film is an adaptation, both literary and pictorial, that combines the inventions of Dickens' pen and Doré's burin. Although the two creators never actually collaborated, cinema has often brought them together, notably in earlier adaptations of *Oliver Twist* by David Lean and Carol Reed, which borrowed from Doré to offer pictures of London that "recaptured all the dark, surreal tones of Dickens' descriptions."²⁵

Doré's phantasmagorical interpretations of such visionary heroes as Baron Munchausen and Don Quixote have been the object of remarkable filmic adaptations by such influential animator-directors as Karel Zeman (*The Fabulous Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, 1961) and Terry Gilliam. The latter has said that it is his "mission in life" to "make Doré come alive,"²⁶ and it is arguably with his *Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1988) that he has come closest to achieving this aim. The film's prologue can be read as a statement on the Doréan legacy: the opening shots show an equestrian statue of the baron after an engraving by Doré, but with the head blown off by a cannonball – a kind of declaration of the filmmaker's intention to besiege, depose and hijack the illustrator's imagery. Gilliam pursued his quest (still not fulfilled), his ultimate dream, also pursued by Orson Welles: an adaptation of *Don Quixote* inspired by Doré's illustrations.²⁷ It is an ambition that other directors have achieved.²⁸

— 24 Patrick Fahy, "Seeing Mud," *Sight and Sound* 15, no. 10 (October 2005), p. 25. 25 Francesco Cattaneo, "L'innocenza nel cieco impero del fato," *Cineforum* 45, no. 10 (December 2005), p. 14. 26 Ian Christie, ed., *Gilliam on Gilliam* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 152. 27 The shooting of *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, begun in 2000 but abandoned, was recorded in the "non-making-of" *Lost in La Mancha* (Fulton and Pepe, 2002). 28 It will be interesting to see to what extent Johnny Depp and Disney make use of Doréan iconography in their coproduction (currently in production). 29 Henri Alekan, quoted by Emmanuel Carrère in "Entretien avec Henri Alekan," *Positif*, no. 286 (December 1984), pp. 24, 25. 30 Jean Cocteau, *Beauty and the Beast: Diary of a Film* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), p. 90. 31 *Ibid.*, p. 109. 32 Millicent Rose, "Introduction to the Dover Edition," in *The Doré Bible Illustrations* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), p. IX. 33 See Valentine Robert, "Le verbe en intertitre, l'icône en photogramme: Citations canoniques dans le cinéma muet," in Claire Clivaz, ed., *Écritures et réécritures* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 532–533.



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Doré's fairy-filled visions of traditional tales permeate the countless adaptations of Perrault. Links to the engravings are most evident, however, in Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1945, fig. 255). Cocteau's aim was not to "copy" Doré but to reproduce his "visual thinking," to take instruction from his "distribution of light, with its gleams, its shadows, its penumbras, its balance of light and dark (fig. 254)."²⁹ The film's director of photography, Henri Alekan, drew inspiration from the engravings to create what cinema history has acknowledged as a paradigm of black-and-white cinematography. Cocteau made a clear reference to the influence on his directorial approach of Gustave Doré and his "magnificent bad taste"³⁰ by including a bronze sculpture by the artist of *Perseus and Andromeda* (fig. 215) as part of the décor for Belle's bedroom: "It's this object which is at the bottom of this film. It summarizes and explains it. It's incredible how much a work of art can influence you subconsciously."³¹

THE BIBLE GALLERY ONSCREEN: DORÉ'S DREAM FULFILLED

The Doré work that has received the widest diffusion via the big screen is his *Bible Gallery*. There seems to be scarcely a single religious film that does not evoke his "Babylonian backgrounds, winged beasts or monumental crowd scenes."³² Certain films assert the connection unequivocally in their intertitles or final credits³³ – sometimes even in their posters.



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254 "If you were to open the door,
I should be very angry" 1862
Illustration for *Barbe-Bleue* [Blue Beard]
Published in *Contes* [Fairy Tales], by Charles Perrault
Wood engraving, Hetzel, Paris; folio
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

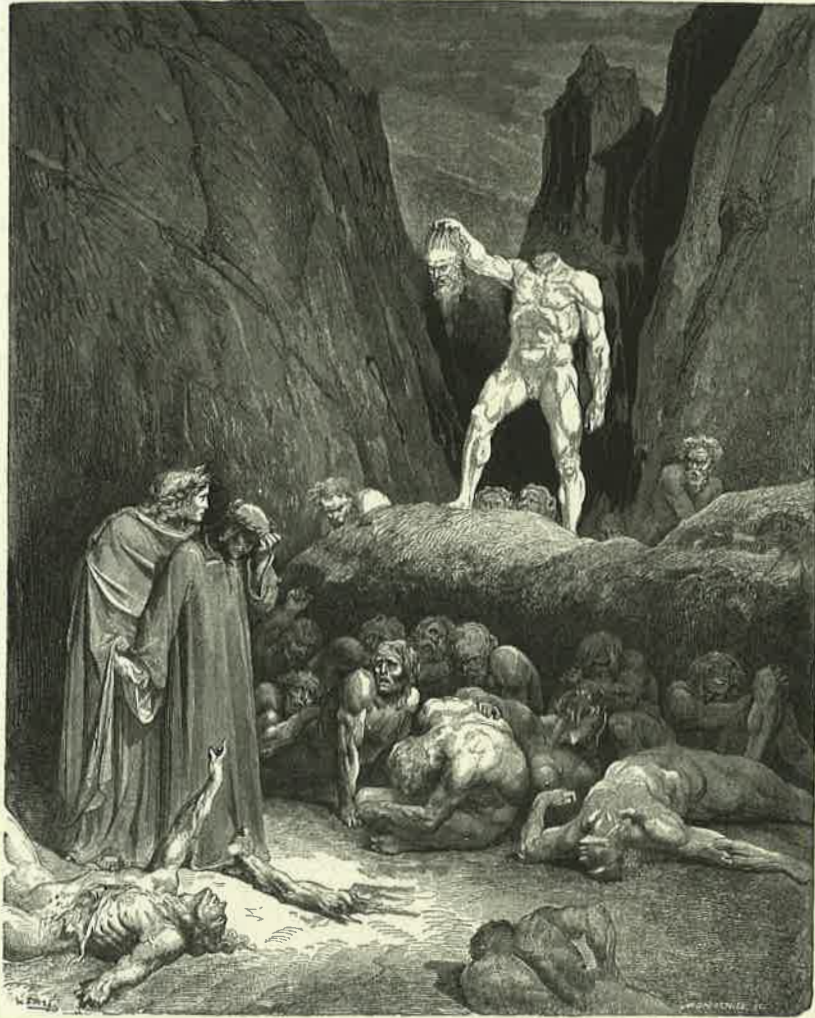
255 Jean Cocteau (dir.)
La Belle et la Bête
[Beauty and the Beast] 1945
Film still



256 "By the hair / it bore the sever'd member, lantern-wise, / Pendent in hand, which look'd at us, and said / 'Woe's me!'" 1861
Illustration for canto 28 of *L'Enfer* [Inferno], by Dante Alighieri
Wood engraving; Librairie Hachette, Paris; folio
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

257 Francesco Bertolini, Giuseppe de Liguoro and Adolfo Padovan (dirs.)
L'Inferno [Inferno] 1911
Film still

258 "Some, standing in a circle, sang choruses of inexpressible beauty" 1862
Published in *Aventures du baron de Münchhausen* [The Adventures of Baron Munchausen] by Rudolf Eric Raspe
Wood engraving
Furne, Paris; quarto
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris



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The Doréan references are so explicit in Michael Curtiz's *Noah's Ark* (1928), for example – especially the first shots depicting the ark and the tower of Babel – that the film's poster integrated into its brash Hollywoodian advertising style a line-for-line copy of Doré's ark.

But the filmmaker who took greatest advantage of the Doré legacy, and with the greatest success, was unquestionably Cecil B. DeMille. Fascinated by *The Doré Bible Gallery* since the age of ten,³⁴ creator of half a dozen cinematic blockbusters based on narratives inspired by the Old and New Testaments, DeMille effectively codified for the screen the "most salient characteristics of *The Doré Bible* – realism, Orientalism, and theatricalization."³⁵ DeMille recognized Doré as the model of a producer of successful images, the founder of collective artistic consumerism and of the "sensationalism that appeals to all classes of society."³⁶ He would perpetuate and accentuate the reference from one film to the next, to the point that the 1956 remake of his own *Ten Commandments* would be nothing less than a celebration of "Gustave Doré in Technicolor."³⁷ One aspect of DeMille's huge influence as a film producer would in fact be the infiltration of the Doréan "look" into the Hollywood aesthetic at large. It has even been suggested that what has been known in the history of film (and in cameraman training programs) as "Rembrandt lighting" should actually be called "Doré lighting," since DeMille – who was largely responsible for the widespread use in Hollywood of such painting-inspired chiaroscuro effects – took his models not from Rembrandt but from the artist of the Holy Bible.³⁸ As a result of the parallel between the worldwide dissemination of Doré's illustrated Bible and the system governing the distribution and screening of films, some of the first people to grasp the vast cultural impact inherent in the new medium of film were men of the church. They approached the motion picture and its potential for visual inculcation via the Doréan paradigm, and hailed film as the new Doré Gallery, its modern extension, the "next industrial age evolution in bringing Christianity to the masses."³⁹ One thing is sure: in giving Doré's *Bible Gallery* – and his entire oeuvre – a cinematic existence, filmmakers realized an aspiration the artist had himself made plain when two Americans showed interest in his *Paris* series. Their plan was to purchase the whole group of paintings and present them as a "travelling panorama," a kind of "circus . . . announced by ringing of bells and beating of drums."⁴⁰ Doré imagined that "all America would rush to see his new work, of which he had already made an idol and set upon an altar of his own imagining." "Famous in a day," he would have achieved "the height of his ambition."⁴¹ In the end, it was cinema that fulfilled the dream.

— 34 Malan, op. cit., p. 201. 35 Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 192. 36 *Chicago Evening Journal*, 5 October 1986, quoted in Malan, op. cit., p. 205. 37 Hervé Dumont, *L'Antiquité au cinéma. Vérités, légendes et manipulations* (Paris: Nouveau Monde; Lausanne: Cinémathèque suisse, 2009), p. 50. 38 Simon Louvish, *DeMille and the Golden Calf* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 220. 39 Kevin Lewis, "Rev. Herbert Jump and the Motion Picture," *Film History* 14, no. 2 (2002), p. 213. 40 Paul Lacroix, quoted in Roosevelt, op. cit., p. 171. 41 Ibid.



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