

Document Citation

Title	The weight of history in an elliptical Odyssey
Author(s)	Michael Atkinson Michael Atkinson
Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	2005 Sep 14
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	C64
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Trilogia I: To livadi pou dakryzei (The weeping meadow), Angelopoulos, Theodoros, 2004

THE WEEPING MEADOW
Directed by Theo Angelopoulos
New Yorker, opens September 14
Lincoln Plaza

VV 9/14-9/20/05
p.c.64

The weight of history in an elliptical *Odyssey*

Shot length might someday be used as a kind of cultural palmistry: American filmmakers favor unambiguous brevity, but for a certain breed of cineaste in Western Europe the syntax of the long, spatially expressive tracking sequence is the way movie time should be constructed. For Mikhail Kalatozov, the whole world captured in a single motion meant our righteous empathies had nowhere else to look; for Miklós Jancsó, breadth and length were ways to understand war. Andrei Tarkovsky's moody setups were metaphysical questions, growing less answerable the longer they became. For Greek auteur Theo Angelopoulos, whose new film *The Weeping Meadow* is the first in a projected trilogy, his stock-in-trade mega-shot is a translation of history into visual experience. Time grows gargantuan, landscapes change, masses of people engage in epochal social phenomena. It's not a strategy dilettantes should entertain; Angelopoulos, one of Europe's most rigorous film artists, stands as the master of monumentalism.

The Weeping Meadow shares the awed sense of solemn apocalypse with his signature films, but it's lighter, more musical and folktale-ish. The story



New Yorker

The Weeping Meadow: Solemn apocalypse

is never fed to us pre-chewed, but instead occurs continuously on- and off-camera, passing before us like the steam engines that incessantly interrupt scenes. It's 1919, and a crowd of émigré Greeks returns from the nightmare of Odessa (walking from the edge of the sea toward the camera, in overcoats); among them, a family with one son brings a young orphan girl, Eleni. Years pass in an unceremonious cut; a near-comatose teenage Eleni is brought home after having given up illegitimate twins. Another cut and the young woman (Alexandra Aidini) is fleeing her own wedding—bride not to the grown son Alexis (Nikos Poursanidis), who loves her and helps her escape, but her old stepfather (Vassilis Kolovos). Eventually, the tale morphs from a romance to an arc of feminine subjugation.

Literally trailing after these scrambling souls as they follow each other into the crossfire of the

mid-century, Angelopoulos's hold-your-breath mise-en-scène and elliptical mode keep the mad tragic-Greek drama at a chilling, dreamy distance. You can read an ironic objectivity into this contrast, but Angelopoulos is extravagantly earnest, whether his lovers are boarding yet another boat after their village is swallowed by a flood or discovering a tree trimmed with lynched sheep carcasses. (As always with Angelopoulos, the semi-surreal visions are not post-production effects.) The ordinary construct of intimacy is swapped, profitably, for a sense of fluid anima, as in an uncut, nine-minute scene that begins with an impromptu beer-hall dance and climaxes with a death. It's Homeric filmmaking, uniquely worthy of the word. **MICHAEL ATKINSON**