

As a movie based on historical events, *Agora* has done a great deal of adaptations and fictionalizations while retaining the real historical figures. Some of these adaptations, in my opinion, are successful, such as the reintroduction of the Library of Alexandria, which was severely destroyed during Julius Caesar's occupation of Alexandria, as a symbol of knowledge and civilization, and the addition of Davus, a slave, as a representation of the mentality and behavior of the Christian underclass. However, as the two characters at the center of religion and politics in the Alexandria, Orestes and Cyril are significantly flattened and formatted compared with the historical documents. This treatment, perhaps to set off the personal pursuit and persistence of the protagonist Hypatia, presents too much bias and inaccuracy in a movie that focuses on religious conflict and leads to unnecessary social uproar.

Cyril, as the Patriarch of Alexandria, comes across in the movie as an extremely aggressive and xenophobic religious and political leader. He uses the fervent hatred of the long-oppressed and scorned underclass of Christians to provoke antagonisms and riots between Christians and Jews, as well as pagans, and thus to maintain and solidify the absolute position of Christianity in Alexandria. After knowing the correspondence between Orestes and Synesius, as two Christians at the heart of politics, and Hypatia, as a decidedly irreligious philosopher, he reads "the word of God" before the public: "Let the woman learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.", thereby constructing Hypatia as a public enemy of Christianity and forcing government officials, led by Orestes, to accept the oracle. He likewise takes advantage of the hatred and discontent of the Christian community sparked by the death of Ammonius to bring about the tragic end of Hypatia and gains complete control of the city of Alexandria. From these episodes, we may conclude that the director set Cyril as an one-sided character who does not believe in philosophy and truth, and who controls and purges non-Christians by cruel means.

However, some historical sources and reasonable speculation suggested that Cyril, despite his hostility to Jews and pagans and his efforts to convert them to Christianity, was unlikely to have made many of the statements mentioned above, and was probably not directly responsible for Hypatia's death. In Irene A. Artemi's *The historical inaccuracies of the movie "AGORA" by Alejandro Amenabar*, the author proposed that Cyril emphasized the importance of women in his works as the exalted Virgin and the new Eve. Therefore it is also highly likely that Cyril's public reading of Paul's epistle to Timothy about the inferiority of women to men was fictional. More importantly, Cyril was not an obscurantist apologist, but like many other Christians who had been taught by Hypatia, had studied the works of the ancient Greek philosophers represented by Plato (as can be seen in the opposition to Julian). Therefore, stereotyping him as a non-Christian persecutor is biased and would likely make the audience have a negative view of Christianity itself. Moreover, none of the historical sources explicitly point to Cyril's direct involvement in Hypatia's death. Socrates Scholasticus, a historian who lived at the same time as Cyril, states in his *Ecclesiastical History* that "This affair (the tragic death of Hypatia) brought not the least opprobrium, not only upon Cyril but also upon the whole Alexandrian church. And surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort." As the Christian Patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril should not have authorized such blasphemy. Hence, the character should be understood in a much more comprehensive way.

The same kind of character flattening occurs with Orestes, the prefect of Egypt. In the movie,

the director spends a lot of efforts describing Orestes' intense love for Hypatia and his loyal following. The scene that impressed me the most is Orestes' insistence on not kneeling in the face of Cyril's pressure to defend and guard Hypatia's freedom and safety. This romanticization of the film's plot design is indeed very appealing, but from the perspective of a historical film, the depiction of the causes of the major conflict between Orestes and Cyril and their relative policies during the time were almost blank, making the entire character's setting and behavior lack of a smooth logic pathway and rationality. (After seeing the movie, I interviewed several students who did not take the Ancient Empire course about their thoughts of Orestes. Dramatically, all they overwhelmingly remembered were Orestes' ignorance of philosophy and astronomy and his extremely devoted love and admiration for Hypatia.) In history, Orestes "steadfastly resisted Cyril's agenda of ecclesiastical encroachment into secular prerogatives". In Socrates' account, when a riot broke out between the Jews and Hierax, the man Cyril had sent to investigate the decree Orestes had issued concerning mime, Orestes ordered Hierax to be publicly tortured as a show of authority. These historical accounts present the political conflict and struggle between Orestes and Cyril, except for the factor of Hypatia. Orestes, unlike the dilemmatic and relatively tolerant decision-maker recounted in the film, held a steady hostility toward Cyril and took decisions accordingly until Hypatia's death led to his departure from Alexandria.

*Agora* is a success both as a work of art or a commercial product. From the design of the city of Alexandria to the style of costumes of the characters with different sects and classes, the imprint of the intermingling of religions and cultures can be seen immediately. However, as a grand historical movie, the director has flattened and formatted the narratives of the key characters, especially Orestes and Cyril, who have extremely high political status. The emphasis on Orestes' admiration for Hypatia and Cyril's xenophobic and cruel behavior leads the audience to be misled by this inaccurate and biased narrative, which triggers biased statements and arguments against Christianity. As a movie depicting history and religious conflicts, such a treatment of the characters, in my opinion, weakens the complexity of truth, freedom and religious beliefs during fifth century AD thus is not desirable at all.