Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Isle of Her by Klaxons ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1047. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Klaxons

Isle of Her

United Kingdom (2007)

TAGS: Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Homer Odyssey





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Isle of Her
Title of the Album(s)	Myths of the Near Future
Studio/Production Company	Polydor / James Ford
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, Europe
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2007
First Edition Details	Klaxons, *Myths of the Near Future: Isle of Her*. Polydor / James Ford, 2007, 3:53 min.
Running time	3.53 min
Format	CD / MP3 / Vinyl / streaming platforms
Awards	2007 – Mercury Prize
Genre	Narrative songs
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



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Klaxons (Music Band)

Klaxons were a British indie-rock band who formed in London in 2005, originally of members singer and bassist Jamie Reynolds (b. 1980), guitarist Simon Taylor-Davis (b. 1982) and singer and keyboardist James Righton (b. 1983). In 2007 they were joined by drummer Steffan Halperin (b. 1985). Reynolds and Taylor-Davis were the songwriters for the band.

Reynolds grew up in Bournemouth and Southampton, and studied Philosophy at Greenwich University. After dropping out of university and then being made redundant from his job, Reynolds purchased a studio kit, allowing the group to perform and record under their original name of 'Klaxons (Not Centaurs)'. Taylor-Davis and Righton grew up together in Stratford-Upon-Avon, during which time Righton taught Taylor-Davis to play the guitar. Taylor-Davis went on to study Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University, while Righton studied History and became a teacher. The three eventually met in London, with Halperin joining later in 2006, replacing their original live drummer Finnigan Kidd.

They produced three albums: *Myths of the Near Future* in 2007, *Surfing the Void* in 2010 and *Love Frequency* in 2014. They split in 2015. Their music draws extensively on a large variety of texts and ephemera, including the work of J. G. Ballard (after whose novel the album *Myths of the Near Future* is named), Alfred Jarry (whose work is referenced in *Isle of Her*) and Thomas Pynchon (whose novel *Gravity's Rainbow* is the name of another song on *Myths of the Near Future*).

Sources:

Profile at Discogs (accessed: August 4, 2020);

Profile at The Independent (accessed: August 4, 2020);

Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: August 4, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

The song is inspired by an episode in the novel *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician* by French absurdist and Symbolist Alfred Jarry, entitled "Concerning the Isle of Her, the Cyclops, and the Great Swan which is of Crystal", which is made clear in the lyrics, some of which are drawn directly from this passage.

The song describes a journey to the "Isle of Her", with a choral refrain of "Row! There's only seven more miles to go" being repeated throughout the song. The Isle of Her is described in fantastical terms taken directly from Jarry: they expect to "find the peacock's tail", "eat the dancing girls", and "ride the crystal swan". The island also apparently houses a cyclops, who is to be found "gazing alone/ facing mirrors that show/ the reflection, his own/ face to face".

Analysis

The song can potentially be read as a narration of Odysseus' journey to Circe's island, although in referencing the cyclops it is clearly a wider ranging reception. The description of the cyclops potentially makes the reference intertextual in that it seems to refer to Theocritus' *Idyll XI* (in which the cyclops Polyphemus pines for the nymph Galatea) rather than the vengeful Polyphemus of Homer's *Odyssey* (who is blinded by Odysseus after eating some of Odysseus' men, and calls upon his father Poseidon to punish him). Given the multiple layers of allusion, it is likely that these references are not intentional, but the description of the cyclops calls to mind Symbolist artistic receptions such as *The Cyclops* by Odilon Redon or Gustave Moreau's *Galatea*. In Moreau's painting, the cyclops gazes wistfully at the reclining Galatea, and in Redon's he gazes directly at the viewer, thus being reflected by those gazing back at him. While perhaps not directly intentional, the connection with these paintings is not entirely accidental, given that Klaxons were inspired by Futurism, a movement of which Symbolism was a precursor, and that Jarry himself was part of the Symbolist movement.

The relevant episode in *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician* is a short passage that forms the basis of how the *Odyssey* is received in this song. Jarry's novel is not itself a part of children's literature. It draws extensively upon classical literature within the novel as a whole; one section has an extended quotation of

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selections from Plato in Greek; one short passage – 'Concerning the Chosen Few' – recalls the catalogue of ships (a list of the Greek contingents that sailed to Troy) in Book 2 of the *Iliad*; and the bulk of the novel involves a long circular journey by sea, directly echoing Odysseus' travels in the *Odyssey*. Within the passage "Concerning the Isle of Her, the Cyclops, and the Great Swan which is of Crystal", Jarry directly references Odysseus, with one character noting that the presence of the cyclops does not require them to "imitate the stratagems of Ulysses" (1996: 50). In this episode, it is explained that the island's name is a derivation of the word "herm", making the reference to a "her" purely linguistic, although this does not undermine the potential of the song as a direct reception of Odysseus' encounters with Circe or Calypso.

Throughout the song there are repeated refrains of "Row, there's only seven more miles to go" and "A hand on each of the oars, we're seven miles from shore, just keep on going", which reflect the desperation of Odysseus and his men to reach shore. Both the action of rowing towards the island and the distance of seven miles are unique to the song, and not drawn from Jarry's novel, strengthening the straightforward reception of the *Odyssey*. However, this element reflects the language of the poem *The Lotos-Eaters* by Alfred Tennyson, in which Odysseus' men have disembarked upon the island of the Lotus Eaters, and which begins, like *Isle of Her*, with an exhortation to hurry towards the shore. Like the song, the poem linguistically presents a fantastical land, and, while the repetitive nature of the song is a direct reference to the circular nature of Faustroll's journey in Jarry's novel, it can also be read as a nod to the episode of the Lotus Eaters in the *Odyssey*, in which some of Odysseus' men are given lotus flowers to eat that make them forget about home.

The idea of actually reaching the island and interacting with it: 'we'll steal the single jewel', 'we'll eat the dancing girls' are distinct from Jarry and suggest a direct engagement with the *Odyssey*; the idea of eating the dancing girls suggests a link with Circe through the almost cannibalistic idea of her turning Odysseus' sailors into pigs. The allusions to an ambiguous 'Her' become blended with the Odyssean Cyclops, while the Cyclops' mirrored eye further blurs the lines of exactly which myth is being referred to, partly due to the layers of reception. Although there are other musical receptions of the *Odyssey*, this one is perhaps unusual for its self-conscious engagement with the mythology through the lens of other receptions.

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Despite the heavy treatment of myth (even if it is not exactly clear *which* myth), it is not necessary for the listener to know any of the layers this song engages with. The listener can enjoy engaging with any particular layer they may recognise, but otherwise the song works well as a song within its genre (nu rave/electropop), in which the circular, repetitive lyrics support the atmosphere created by the music, intended to be a revival of the euphoric soundscapes of rave music (the band described their own music as 'psychedelic', again inviting comparison with the Lotus Eaters). In an interview for *JamBase*, Taylor-Davis and Reynolds discuss the role of fantasy in their music, with Taylor-Davis noting that 'we wanted to make a record about somewhere that you couldn't see or touch or have heard of or know about or have an understanding about'. With this in mind, it is clear that understanding of the lyrics is irrelevant in terms of the band's intentions. For younger listeners who are especially unlikely to pick up the more esoteric references, the song is an accessible piece of classical reception which requires no prior knowledge for enjoyment in its intended form.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Homer Odyssey

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Adventure Intertextuality Magic

Further Reading

Jarry, Alfred; *Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician* (1898), trans. Simon Watson Taylor, 1996. (ed. pr. 1965).

Pacifico, Chris, "Get Lifted with London's Klaxons", *JamBase,* 7th Aug 2007, available at jambase.com (accessed July 20, 2020).

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- In Pitchfork by Marc Hogan (accessed: June 16, 2020).

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