

Rocky I-IV: An Odyssey of Muscular Thespianism

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As of January 1, 1986, the four "Rocky" movies have earned over 400 million dollars, and "Rocky IV" had the strongest financial opening for a non-summer movie in film history. Further, "Rocky" won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1976, half of the audiences were over 25 after the opening rush and nearly half were women. These statistics beg the question as to why the "Rocky" films have had so much appeal to an audience of such wide variety. The theme of this paper is that "Rocky" is appealing because he associates himself with mythic images that Americans know well, and that these images fit easily into the ideal of the sport hero.

Some of these myths permeate all of the "Rocky" films while others are inherent to the theme of the particular film. "Rocky", uses the myths of muscular Christianity, the rugged individual, the Horatio Alger story of rags to riches, the Great White Hope and the American juvenile athlete-hero to characterize Balboa. The second film can be viewed as an extension of the first with the additional characterization of Balboa as the "rube" in the city. In the third film Balboa represents the civilized man against the savage, protecting white women from the dreaded black rape. In "Rocky IV" Balboa fights to revenge the death of Apollo Creed, and fights for America against the threat of Soviet communism. He is once again the natural man fighting against the manufactured urban man as represented by the steroid injected Soviet automaton Ivan Drago. Throughout all of these films Rocky Balboa subscribes to American myths and their promises by defeating all of his foes.