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Review by Juliette Harrison

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ONCE AND FUTURE ANTIQUITIES IN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY (2019) EDITED BY BRETT M. ROGERS AND BENJAMIN ELDON STEVENS

Review by Juliette Harrisson

Rogers, Brett M., and Benjamin Eldon Stevens, editors. *Once and Future Antiquities in Science Fiction and Fantasy*. 2019. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 233 pp.

Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Stevens have been at the forefront of the fast-growing area of reception studies in Fantastika fiction, previously editing the first major English-language volume on Science Fiction and the ancient world (*Classical Traditions in Science Fiction*, 2015), as well as a volume on Fantasy and the ancient world (*Classical Traditions in Modern Fantasy*, 2017). This new volume brings together articles on a wide range of Fantastika fiction, gathered around the theme of “displacement.” A brief Introduction (“Introduction: Displacing Antiquities in Science Fiction and Fantasy”) from Rogers and Stevens explains how the term is to be understood throughout the volume as a reference to “the many senses of distance and difference” receivers may experience in responding to both the ancient world and the worlds of Science Fiction and Fantasy (2). Four main sections follow which explore elements of Classical reception that are orientated around displacements of origin points, space, time, and genre, with a following Epilogue by Catherynne M. Valente.

The first chapter, “More “T” Vicar? Revisiting Models and Methodologies for Classical Receptions in Science Fiction” by Tony Keen, provides a reflection on theories and methodologies for Classical Reception studies, particularly within Science Fiction. This article revisits and revises Keen’s influential 2006 blog post “The “T” stands for Tiberius: Models and Methodologies of Classical Reception in Science Fiction” (published on his [Memorabilia Antonina](#) blog) and considers current thinking on how to theorise Classical Reception studies in Science Fiction in light of the significant amount of work done in the area over the last decade and more. Keen sets out a vocabulary for discussing various types of reception in Science Fiction and Fantasy, directly comparing his own schema with a 2016 model developed by C. W. Marshall. He also makes a passionate argument for the need for Classical Reception scholars to be Science Fiction scholars as much as they are Classicists. This chapter will be especially helpful for anyone working in the field, whether new to reception studies in Fantastika or not, as a template for thinking about how we engage with the field and how labelling different types of reception may affect the conclusions we draw.

The rest of the volume offers a series of case studies. Most explore examples of direct reception, in which incidents, characters, or sources from the ancient world are reworked and incorporated into Science Fiction and Fantasy worlds. Jennifer C. Ranck's "Finding Cassandra in Science Fiction: The Seer of *Agamemnon* and the Time-Travelling Protector of *Continuum*," however, explores an example of a 'parallel' between two similar characters rather than a direct reception. Ranck compares Kiera Cameron, the protagonist of the television series *Continuum* (2012-15), with the character of Cassandra as presented in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. As the article explains, there is no evidence of "direct or intentional reception of the Cassandra figure" here, and the two characters play significantly different roles in different worlds (136-7). However, Ranck adopts Paula James' term "cultural companion" to produce a "comparative dialogue" in which the analysis of each character enriches the study of the others (135). Similarities are drawn between the two as "recipients and revealers of unseen or unknown truth or facts," finding that both present empowered but suffering female characters who attract the attention of "male or divine power players" (137, 143).

Laura Zientek explores a more deliberate parallel, and one particular to Fantastika fiction, in "Monuments and Tradition in Jack McDevitt's *The Engines of God*." The text under consideration is a story of the study of an ancient alien civilization that deliberately parallels ancient Greece and Rome, both in their own history and mythology alongside the history of their discovery or excavation by famous figures, such as Heinrich Schliemann. As in other modern franchises including *Stargate* (1994), *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008), and *Prometheus* (2012), she finds the "ancient astronaut myth" combined with "the fantastic archaeological quest" follow familiar narrative patterns that can be "grand and monolithic" (57). The focus on a trope so specific to Fantastika fiction makes this a compelling and welcome addition to the volume.

One of the strengths of the book is that it covers a relatively broad range of Science Fiction and Fantasy media. Two chapters exploring the role of Classical reception in tabletop role-playing games are especially welcome. C. W. Marshall's "Classical Reception and the Half-Elf Cleric" offers a starting-point for the study of Greek and Roman reception in *Dungeons and Dragons* (*D&D*, 1974), suggesting a methodology focused largely on published materials by offering a study of Classical monsters across *D&D* manuals since the 1970s. Alex McAuley, meanwhile, looks at the reception of Virgil's *Aeneid* in the *Warhammer 40K* universe ("The Divine Emperor in Virgil's *Aeneid* and the *Warhammer 40K* Universe"), finding echoes of the ancient text in the novels, which were written to expand the universe of the tabletop game. They also explore the background of the writers, including how and why they may have been influenced by Virgil (which involves communications with some of the writers themselves). McAuley suggests methodologies and approaches for moving forwards with similar material – in this case, as an expanded universe prominently featuring a series of novels, recommending that his methods could in future be applied to the study of similar materials such as the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* franchises.

Claire Kenward compares a television and comic book serial in "Time Travel and Self-Reflexivity in Receptions of Homer's *Iliad*," looking at the lost 1965 *Doctor Who* serial "The Myth Makers" (using audio recordings and images taken on set, alongside contemporary descriptions and

reviews, as records of the lost episodes) and Marvel's 1979 comic series *Thor Annual #8: Thunder Over Troy*. She argues that Science Fiction interactions with the Classical past are inherently also "an engagement with fantasy," due to the presence of "a strain of fantasy" in ancient Classical texts (45). Stephen B. Moses and Brett M. Rogers, meanwhile, offer a fascinating look at receptions of Atlas in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) – "Dynamic Tensions: The Figure(s) of Atlas in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*" – both directly and via the figure of bodybuilder Charles Atlas, to explore the role (or lack thereof) of suffering in receptions of the ancient figure. They suggest that *Rocky Horror's* "science-fictive figure of Charles Atlas" is, like his classical counterpart, suffering under a weight, as queer masculinity and sexuality have been oppressed by historical forces (120).

Suzanne Lye's "Displacing Nostos and the Ancient Greek Hero in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*" is one of two examinations of 'displaced' Odysseus narratives in which facets of the trickster hero are incorporated into the character of a young girl embarking on a dangerous journey; the other is Ortwin Knorr's "Lyra's Odyssey in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy." Lye suggests that the appeal of *Spirited Away* (2001) "is rooted to a large extent in its incorporation of Greek myths" while Knorr suggests that in responding to Homer's *Odyssey* as well as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) is "even more complex and multi-layered than scholars have realized so far" (87, 74). How compelling readers find these arguments will depend largely on how convinced they are that the texts are genuinely rooted in the *Odyssey*, consciously or unconsciously. It is always possible that knowledge of familiar texts has seeped in to the creation of other stories, but when the links are less obvious or the author has not discussed the issue, such conclusions will always be open to interpretation. The *Odyssey* and the concerns of young girls are also central to the work studied in Frances Foster's "Drinking Blood and Talking Ghosts in Diana Wynne Jones's *The Time of the Ghost*." Foster offers a fascinating example of a subtly different form of reception, in which characters in Jones' story (1981) imperfectly remember a Classical text – one with which, of course, the author is entirely familiar. This produces two levels of Classical reception, as the new story reworks elements of the original, while the attitudes of the characters towards the source represent popular attitudes towards, and hazy memories of, Classical works.

The Fantastika fiction examined throughout the volume also covers a wide range in terms of date, style, and focus. Two chapters focus on Children's and Young Adult literature (Knorr and Foster) and one on graphic literature (Kenward). The volume includes older works from the early twentieth century (Jesse Weiner's "*Saxa loquuntur?* Archaeological Fantasies in Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*," focusing on a novel from 1903) through to current ongoing series (Marshall and McAuley) and currently working authors. Benjamin Eldon Stevens additionally offers an overview of Classical reception in the works of Helen Oyeyemi ("The Nearest Technically Impossible Thing': Classical Receptions in Helen Oyeyemi"). Receptions from across this period of more than a hundred years are found to embrace the many possibilities of fantastical literature that engages with the Classical world. Weiner argues that *Gradiva* (1902) "suggests fantasy as a path for exploring the voids of history," while Stevens suggests that Oyeyemi's novels "vividly illustrate the politically and ideologically liberating potential of classical receptions" (29; 100).

One theme which recurs throughout the volume is the nature of fantasy – not just the genre of Fantasy but also the reception of the ancient fantastical in modern works. This is touched on by, among others, Weiner, Kenward, and Stevens. Particularly interesting is Vincent Tomasso's discussion of the use of the gods in Fantastika fiction in his chapter "The Gods Problem in Gene Wolfe's *Soldier of the Mist*." Tomasso identifies two primary modes of reception of the ancient gods, the "rationalizing" of Historical Fiction and the "mythologizing" of Fantasy, and examines an example of reception that falls somewhere between the two, as Wolfe's gods are both "mythologized" and, to an extent, "rationalized." The relationship between ancient literature, with its very different formulations of genre, and modern generic expectations, is always a fruitful one and it is well explored here.

The volume concludes with an Epilogue, "Just Your Average Tuesday-Morning Minotaur," written by Catherynne M. Valente, in which she talks about her own love of Classics and some of the ways it has been incorporated into her work. The chapter itself is a beautifully written tribute to the abiding power and appeal of the ancient world and Valente's passion for ancient languages and ancient poetry shines through. It is also rewarding to see authors and their voices represented in the volume (McAuley's article also features authors' contributions via emails). While it is impossible to talk to the authors we study from the ancient world, contemporary Fantastika fiction is a living, breathing form of fiction that is constantly changing and evolving, so it is satisfying to see academics communicating with the authors of the material they study.

The volume is clearly written throughout with each author explaining both the works under study and their Classical sources for non-specialists, and terms or quotations from ancient Greek and Latin are translated. As such, the volume should appeal to scholars of both Classical Reception studies and Science Fiction and Fantasy; indeed, Keen's opening chapter emphasises the importance of communication between both areas of research in work of this kind. Research in this area has been steadily growing over the past twenty years, but it is still relatively new and the emphasis on theory, method, and approach in several chapters here will be very useful moving forwards. As such, this volume will join Rogers and Stevens' earlier volumes as an essential reference point for anyone working on the reception of the Greek and Roman worlds in any area of Fantastika fiction.

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Juliette Harrisson is Senior Lecturer in Ancient History at Newman University (Birmingham, UK). Her research interests are the reception of ancient Greece and Rome in modern popular culture, especially Fantastika fiction, and comparative ghost folklore. Her most recent publication is the edited collection *Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World* (2018), and she has a forthcoming paper on Classical reception in *The Lord of the Rings in Tolkien and the Classical World*, edited by Hamish Williams.