

BOOK REVIEW

Orientalism and the Reception of Powerful Women from the Ancient World. Edited by FILIPPO CARLÀ-UHINK AND ANJA WIEBER. *Imagines: Classical Receptions in the Visual and Performing Arts*, London, UK and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp x + 321. Hardback, £100. ISBN: 978-1-350-05010-5.

This wide-ranging collection of essays brings together discussions of receptions of powerful ancient women in a range of media: opera, prose fiction, poetry graphic novels, film and television through the lens of Orientalism. These receptions are both Western and Eastern, including works by Iranian and Syrian film makers alongside European writers and artists. The writers include new takes on oft-Orientalized subjects, such as Cleopatra seen through the eyes of two English women attempting to elevate themselves in 18th and 19th-century society, while discussing the Roman Fulvia whom we would perhaps not initially see as Orientalized (as in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* we see her described as very much part of the enduring Roman West when Cleopatra, incredulous, asks Antony "Can Fulvia die?"). The chapters are structured according to chronology of female subjects, starting with Semiramis, the mythologised Assyrian queen, through historical women from the Greco-Roman world, and ending with Šīrīn, another mythologised historical figure this time from the 7th century CE.

The introduction proposes the theory of "double estrangement" whereby both the feminine and the Oriental are marked as Others when seen from a masculine, Western perspective. The editors provide examples of how powerful women have been Orientalised from antiquity onwards, with a longer discussion of Cleopatra, where writers and artists from ancient Rome onwards, both male and female, have emphasised her Egyptian rather than Ptolemaic attributes. In the first chapter on the Baroque opera *Semiramide in India* (1648-1649), Kerstin Droß-Krüpe argues that despite many previous negative and sometimes Orientalizing portrayals of the queen, and the opera's setting in India, the opera presents us with Semiramis as a non-Orientalised ruler torn between choosing love or obligations (here martial obligations). In Chapter 2 Irene Berti discusses how Carian queens Artemisia I and Artemisia II have been conflated and used as a positive

role model as widow and mother for Medici queens 16th and early 17th-century France. It is in the medium of film that Berti Artemisia is Orientalized, as *femme fatale* in *The 300 Spartans* (1962) and as vengeful warrior in *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014), in both cases compared unfavourably with the Greek queen Gorgo. However, in the Italian dystopian graphic novel *Eterna Artemisia* the queen is again cast as positive heroine.

In chapter three Ann-Cathrin Harders examines Mary Renault's treatment of the eunuch Bagoas and the Bactrian princess Roxane in her Alexander novels *The Persian Boy* and *Funeral Games*. Both characters are introduced in Orientalized harem-like settings, but the Orient is complicated in *The Persian Boy*, as the Persian narrator Bagoas sets Persia as the center, from where both Bactria and Macedonia become sites of barbarian otherness. In the next chapter, Sabine Müller offers us another example of an Orientalized harem woman in fiction set in the world of Alexander, this time the Persian princess Drypetis in fanfiction. As wife of Hephæstion Müller finds that Drypetis is portrayed by fanfiction writers primarily as a potential but usually ineffectual obstacle to their preferred romantic pairing of Alexander and Hephæstion. Next, Marta Garcia Morcillo surveys depictions of Carthaginian women from the early modern period onwards, with reinventions of Virgil's Dido, Sophonisba, daughter of Hasdrubal and the fictional Salammbô of Flaubert.

Mary Hamer's excellent chapter on the afterlife of Cleopatra focuses on two women claiming the image of Cleopatra for themselves. Emma Hamilton posed as Cleopatra waiting for the return of Antony among other famous women from antiquity in her *Attitudes*, but was satirized as the seducer Cleopatra to a Nelson as Antony. Lady Catherine Stepney's bust, "as Cleopatra" depicts the sitter as a conventional 19th-century woman, but Hamer argues that the subtitle to the work, surely a suggestion of the sitter rather than the artist, links Catherine Stepney, social climber, writer and society beauty, with the power and allure of the queen of Egypt. In Chapter 6 Peter Keegan discusses how Fulvia is portrayed as a woman who transgresses boundaries by her excessive greed and violence, linked with the behaviour of a barbarian rather than a Roman, a view that has continued in modern scholarship and art.

Martijn Icks' chapter focuses on representations of the Severan empresses Julia Domna, Julia Maesa, Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea in opera, drama and novels. Icks concludes that in almost all cases these women are in secondary positions within the texts, often trying to dominate sons and grandsons, with only Soaemias presented as an Orientalized promiscuous and extravagant woman. In

Chapter 9 Anja Wieber demonstrates that while Zenobia might epitomize the Oriental queen to a Western eye, the Queen of Palmyra is made into a civilized and freedom-fighting heroine opposing a feminized and orientalized Roman emperor Aurelian in the Syrian television series from the 1990s *Al A'babid*. Christopher Bishop discusses how Ezra Pound and Carl Jung appropriate the Byzantine Empress Galla Placinda discovered through visits to Italy and linked with their respective lovers Bride Scatton and Toni Wolff. Filippo Carlà-Uhink's chapter on Theodora's reception in drama, opera novels, paintings and illustrations up to the 1940s shows how the empress has been continually Orientalized as a *femme fatale* in a decadent society, whether she is portrayed as an amoral seductress and "insatiable man eater" (171) (as in Felix Dahn's novel *Ein Kampf um Rom*) or the would-be protector of a young lover (in Victorien Sardou's play *Théodora*). In the final chapter Irene Madreiter examines the reception of the Christian Persian queen Šīrīn, concentrating on poems from the 8th to 12th centuries, where the queen features as an ideal woman in a love story. Madreiter provides an in-depth analysis of Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami's film from 2008, *Shirin*, which features a recitation of the story of Šīrīn matched paired with the visuals of a group of women in headscarves watching the performance, challenging Iranian "Self-Orientalization" through marginalization of women.

The volume ends with Beate Wagner-Hasel's discussion of the rule of women, articulated in the changing use of the story of Heracles and Omphale that has over time been a warning against and an affirmation of the rule of women, which we could take forward from Wagner-Hasel's description of the painting of the subject owned by Maria de Medici to the painting that graces the wall of Queen Victoria's beloved Prince Albert's bathroom at Osborne House, and on a 1993 Vivienne Westwood Corset. This interesting addition to the Bloomsbury Imagines series brings ancient women to the fore and shows us that Orientalism need not be a negative lens through which to view them.

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