

Nevertheless, the book offers a convincing exploration of the novel's classical atmosphere and, further, is a valuable addition to the scholarship on Grahame. It also provides an exciting development for classical reception studies in children's literature: namely, a book-length, detailed investigation of classical intertexts in an influential children's novel – a model that we hope will inspire further such endeavours.

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ANTIQUITY IN FILM

MCGEOUGH (K.M.) *Representations of Antiquity in Film. From Griffith to Grindhouse*. Pp. xiv + 378, b/w & colour ills. Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2022. Paper, £45, US\$55 (Cased, £90, US\$110). ISBN: 978-1-78179-981-9 (978-1-78179-980-2 hbk).

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With this book, McG. attempts the ambitious goal of tracing 'how films of various genres have shaped our perceptions of Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Holy Land, Greece, Rome, barbarian Europe, and the Maya' (back cover). Not only is the scope of 'antiquity' large, but so is the range of genres represented: epic, comedy, musical, satire, arthouse, pornography, action and fantasy films as well as television mini-series that fit within these genres. The book aims to answer the question of 'how much ... the presence of competing narratives about the past undermine[s] the enterprise of historical thinking, especially when commodified and entertainment driven versions of antiquity offer more appealing versions of the past than those derived from other work' (p. 43). The answer to this question, McG. proposes, is that 'these films, by representing a pretend version of an authentically real time are hiding their roles in instantiating contemporary values as normative' (p. 42).

In the introduction McG. emphasises that film should be considered seriously by scholars of the ancient world because film is frequently how non-specialists encounter antiquity. Because films claim their depictions of the ancient world are 'true', scholars often have to contend with what audiences have 'learned' from seeing antiquity on screen. Chapter 1 discusses film as history, citing movies such as *JFK* (1991) and *Glory* (1989) to show how screen adaptations of history affect audience thinking about these events. The next three chapters are devoted to 1950s and 60s epic films, depicting biblical or Roman stories. Chapter 2 provides a history of the genre as well as stock characteristics. In Chapter 3 McG. argues that historical films are 'really guarded means of asking questions about the present' (p. 86) and shows that they produce political arguments about the relation of the individual to the state. Chapter 4 builds on this line of thought to show how these films also ensconce heteronormative, conservative ideals as 'eternal'. Chapter 5 looks at parodies and comedies that are clearly based on these films and thus make 'similar presentist arguments like the more serious epics' (p. 150). In Chapter 6 arthouse and pornographic representations of the past are discussed as 'a hellish mirror

of the present' (p. 178). Chapter 7 finally moves away from the biblical/Roman world into 'ancient fantasy and adventure films', usually based on Greek mythology. McG. argues that, despite their differences, these films too provide commentary on the present by offering 'dystopic views of life before the emergence of the legitimate state or in situations where state power has been corrupted by chaotic influence' (p. 207). Chapter 8 moves away from classical antiquity to prehistoric times to discuss caveman films, where yet again heteronormative conservative values are promoted. Finally, in Chapter 9, McG. turns to modern films with a heavy emphasis on the rebirth of the historical/biblical epic. He shows how, like their 1950s and 60s predecessors, these films have messages about the contemporary world, but often the exact message is dependent on the viewers' political positioning.

The thesis of the book is interesting, and McG. makes a convincing argument. It is refreshing to see a work discuss different films from different genres as in conversation with each other. By referencing examples drawn from historical films of other eras, McG. presents excellent precedents for cinema's ability to comment on the contemporary world, and the real-world consequences of this messaging. McG. is clearly very knowledgeable and passionate about depictions of the ancient world on screen as well as film studies. This passion is translated onto the page via engaging prose interspersed with relevant quotations. The inclusion of dialogue for especially important scenes is also appreciated.

As this summary shows, there is a heavy emphasis on biblical stories (parts of Chapter 1, all of Chapters 2–4, parts of Chapters 5 and 6 as well as half of Chapter 9). This emphasis most likely comes from the author's background in divinity studies, but at times the book feels like a monograph on biblical stories on film that was later expanded to include 'antiquity'. Many of the civilisations that it lists on the back cover are mentioned only cursorily; Greece is relegated to one chapter, as is barbarian England. The Maya receives six pages when *Apocalypto* (2006) is discussed. Mesopotamia only appears in discussions of the conglomeration of visual elements that have come to be seen as authentically 'ancient' on screen. In addition, while most chapters explore how heteronormative ideals are espoused by these films, the treatment of implicit homoeroticism and blatant homophobia in some of these films is lacklustre. Even after acknowledging that 'queer coding is associated with negative traits' (p. 141) in many of these films, McG. does not examine the implications of this, but instead focuses more on how homoeroticism (e.g. the display of the male nude body) is acceptable to Hollywood censors and a family audience if it can be shown to promote masculinity. Similarly, race is almost entirely ignored, even when blackface is mentioned. The only extensive discussion of it occurs in reference to 2016's *Gods of Egypt*, which was criticised for casting white actors as Egyptian gods and rulers. Given the thesis of the book, that films set in the ancient world reify normative American values regarding the heteronormative family, a longer discussion of how these films historicise contemporary race, gender and sexuality issues would be welcome.

Content aside, the book is structured excellently. The chapters are roughly chronological but also arranged by theme. While there is no filmography, there are extensive indexes not only of subjects, but also of films, actors and directors. The bibliography and extensive citations throughout the book demonstrate engagement not only with previous works on reception of the ancient world but also with film studies scholars (albeit all in English). The inclusion of scholarly work from other fields, such as the study of fantasy novels and video games, is also refreshing. However, the book could have been better copyedited. The inclusion of colour photographs, where possible, was a welcome change from many similar books.

Despite some flaws, this book deserves recognition for its argument that popular media affects historical thinking. While it may not be the best choice for an introductory ‘Ancient World on Screen’ class, it would be an excellent addition to any course that examines how the ancient world is used in modern political contexts. Given that lack of engagement with film studies scholars has been a critique of many similar books, the book represents a step in the right direction for reception studies in general. I have been an advocate for the inclusion of reception in teaching undergraduate courses because, as McG. states, that is often how students are introduced to the ancient world. It is refreshing to see an academic book acknowledge this.

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WOMEN IN CLASSICAL VIDEO GAMES

DRAYCOTT (J.), COOK (K.) (edd.) *Women in Classical Video Games*. Pp. xii + 271, figs, ills. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £95, US\$130. ISBN: 978-1-350-24191-6.
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This volume comprises fifteen chapters examining the representation of women in video games inspired by classical antiquity. It is a fitting addition to the Bloomsbury *Imagines* series, which explores the reception of ancient subject matter in contemporary visual and performative media. As Draycott and Cook note in their introduction, the video game industry is the fastest growing in the world (p. 1), providing useful material for Classical Reception scholars to examine people’s engagement with the ancient world. As a Classical Reception scholar with a particular interest in women’s history, I was excited to see a volume devoted to ancient women in video games, hoping that it would shed light on their mode of representation and subsequent societal attitudes towards women, both ancient and contemporary. This volume met and exceeded my expectations – I found it cohesive, accessible and informative, illuminating the real-world issue of the video game industry’s hostility towards women, ‘both as individuals playing or working on games, and as characters represented within those games’ (p. 1). While the individual chapters are well written and thoroughly researched, the real strength of the book lies in the thematic interlinking and consistent dialogue between chapters, which provides readers with various perspectives on the key tropes, stereotypes and modes of representation used to portray ancient women.

The introduction clearly sets out the focus of the volume, outlining its overarching premise and how individual chapters work together to create a cohesive, unfolding narrative. Draycott and Cook begin by advocating the importance of Classical Reception, noting that, for many people, popular media can be their first introduction to the ancient world (p. 1). They then focus on the role and representation of women in the video game world, drawing readers’ attention to an underlying hostility towards women. This is sustained through a relevant example: the hostility of male gamers towards the inclusion of the Amazons in *A Total War: Troy*. Draycott and Cook provide extensive examples of gamers denigrating the Amazons and dismissing them as a ‘politically incorrect’ inclusion to appeal to ‘the woke faction’, in spite of the fact that Amazons