Vector
Greek SFF

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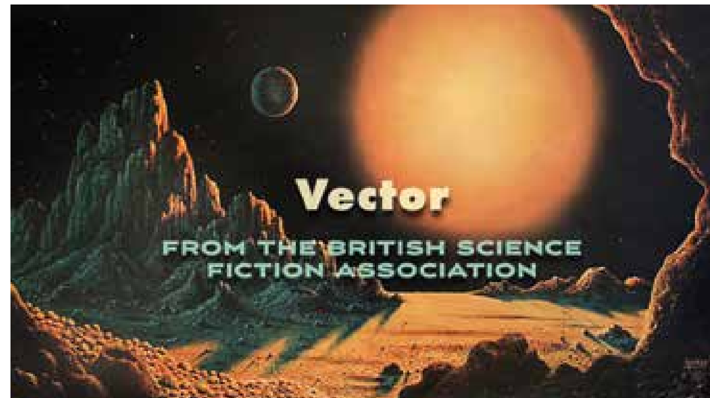

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Chimeriad

Guest Editorial by Phoenix Alexander

You know these stories.

The boy who ran the maze and killed the minotaur; the boy who, wax-wound and feathered, soared too high and fell, hubris' pariah. The demigod who stole fire and became a pariah all on his own. A woman's face of such beauty it fomented war; a man's face of such beauty it fomented absolutely nothing, only a full-eyed and unending stare into cool water.

These are yours, these stories. Encountered in the bright images of Hollywood films and cartoons, the gorgeously illustrated children's books of myths and legends, the beautifully enunciated audio retellings of Stephen Fry and Neil Gaiman and Philip Pullman. You know these stories like you know the way the grey formations of clouds signal rain, or when strawberries are best to pick, or the most picturesque country walks to take.

You know these stories so well that you are now, in fact, tired of them. The stories are *themselves* tired, in your eyes: you, literary taste-maker, consumer and disseminator of parables, gatekeeper of narrative itself.

We don't need any more retellings of Greek myths. They've all been done.

Enough is enough.

You might not know any stories beyond the mists of mythological time, however. Nor be familiar with any authors born after 300 B.C. That's alright; surely not that much has changed? How can perfection be improved upon? These stories have already provided the marmoreal foundations of Western civilization; you ask nothing more from Greece, Ancient or otherwise.

You seek the new.

Sit with us, then: just for a short spell. There is much still to say, and voices enough to say it.

We are still here.

#

The contributors to this special issue offer invaluable insights into the past, present and future of Greek speculative culture (here's another reference for you: the three Fates, of course, who you know so well, Atropos, Clotho and Lachesis, spinners of destiny — do you really need to read this introduction, and is this issue even necessary?). Spanning diverse media and cultural backgrounds, the artists, writers and scholars gathered here interrogate the notion of what it means to embody a 'Greek' identity and how it has been shaped and perceived in the West.

Speaking of speculative *fiction* specifically, it is fair to say that a growing cohort of Greek and Greek-Cypriot writers are enjoying increasing recognition in the field of anglophone SFF (as well as in Grecophone literary scenes). Writers such as Natalia Theodoridou, Eugenia Triantafyllou, Eleanna Castroianni — who appear in conversation in these pages — Avra Margariti, Kat Kourbeti, and Alexandra Manglis, to name a few, are important and visible presences in a genre that has frequently claimed to be oversaturated with 'Greek' stories. That's not to say that their work is or should be exclusively about Greek identity; any marginalized writer can tell you about the pressures of representing, or at least standing in for, an entire culture: the overdetermined nature of how you are 'read' and whether, crucially, you are marketable.

Having tiptoed around the Cerberus of the issue (you like that?) it may be pertinent at this point to admit the uneasiness with which I offer my own position as guest editor of this special issue: my written Greek is very rusty, and I have been out of the country of my birth for so long that I am what they call a 'Charlie,' a Cypriot who left the island and became a poor, farcical thing, growing up in the cold of the UK and forgetting his culture. This is not unique to Cyprus, of course. This is a familiar story to any diasporic writer who has been away from their country of birth for an extended period of time. Hence: my distinction between anglophone and Grecophone literature.

(On the subject of distinctions, here's another story you might not know: Cyprus and Greece are two different countries, and the former is not one of the 'Greek islands' even though it is a partly ethnically Greek island).

I rely upon and am indebted to the contributors of this issue for not only providing a contemporary view of SFF in and from Greece, Cyprus and the diaspora, but for doing the work that keeps our stories — let us take them back and claim them for ourselves, for just this issue at least — alive and evolving. To keep the flame alive as did the Oracle of Del-

Enough of that, now.

Athena Andreadis captures the feeling of being cultural 'common property' in her short, sharp 'Being Part of Everyone's Furniture,' and it is with great relief that we have been given this space. I remain incredibly grateful to *Vector* editors Jo Lindsay Walton and Polina Levontin for the opportunity.

Not just grateful: ecstatic, even, knowing the magnitude of this opportunity and this platform to amplify Greek and Greek-Cypriot voices; I want to continue this editorial introduction by filling it with cultural references to Cyprus, my homeland: to tell you the way to make perfect café kypriaka, to sing to you the ditty of the old woman that ensures an opponent's loss in a game of Tzoker, and more; I want to tell you of the contemporary theatre of Athens, the Junta of the 1960s, the invasion of Cyprus in the following decade, the fact that Nicosia (Lefkosia to locals) remains the only divided capital in Europe…

But our contributors can very much speak for themselves.

#

Alexandra Manglis' 'The Wreck at Goat's Head' (Strange Horizons, 2016) offers a graceful metaphor for the persistence of the mythological familiar: the stories that, submerged, descend and surface according to their viewer, enacting a kind of narratorial observer effect.

These stories change depending on their audience. One kind of reader may enjoy the languid, sensory descriptions of the Mediterranean setting of 'Wreck'; another may feel a complicated but not unpleasant admixture of nostalgia and longing at the provision of un-italicized, un-contextualized romanization of Greek-Cypriot idiom (korou, yiayia, re, raki) within the prose.

But the story is also complicated by Turkish words — "anne" for mother, "çanim" for beloved. Sana is a Turkish name. Yorgos a Greek one. Manglis explains the complex political facets of the story as follows:

"What I wanted most of all in that piece was to imagine, in the realm of sff, a bicommunal community where language and ethnicity wasn't divisive. In many ways, the integrated society I build in that story is more impossible to happen in real life than the ghosts Sana sees in the water, in her unnerving ability to time-travel. It would feel unjust to me to read my story only through the eyes of Greekness when it is deeply, politically Cypriot. I spent much of my youth and twenties working with Turkish Cypriots, advocating for the Annan plan, trying to learn Turkish, and as an adult understanding Cyprus as a place made up of (amongst others) Armenians, Maronites, Muslims, Greek Orthodox Christians, and more recently, Catholics, as the Filipino community becomes larger and yet firmly segregated by our government and a deeply racist majority. Imagining us as fully assimilated, without ethno-nationalisms... well, it's a thing of fiction. And so, I write it."

Manglis sketches the heart of the contemporary Greek mythic: an identity consecrated as a kind of ethnonationalist touchstone, a monolith, but one in fact holding the still-living paradoxes of colonisation and migration and assimilation and cultural melange within it. It is, as Manglis says, perhaps 'impossible' to bring about-but she imagines it, and she writes it. Her story's figure of the 'primal diver,' ostensibly the figure observed by the protagonist, becomes the observer by the narrative's end; Manglis stages a witnessing that itself becomes a kind of atavism-in-reverse. The diver is an ancestor, yes, but also a strange and unfamiliar presence-and one that has perhaps as much to learn from the chimeric present as it can offer guidance from the past. For it is surely not the destiny of Greek creators and those they inspire to stare down at the wreckage of dead things: to peer down into glass-clear ocean that holds treasures as jealously as the *Γλυπτά του Παρθενώνα* are held. Manglis knows this, and shares it with us.

Before Narcissus looked into that pool to become stamped upon the water's skin in perpetuity, he was, after all, a hunter.

~ Phoenix Alexander
26th January, 2022

PHOENIX ALEXANDER IS A QUEER, GREEK-CYPRIOT WRITER AND SCHOLAR OF SFF AND HORROR. HE HOLDS A PH.D. IN ENGLISH AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES FROM YALE UNIVERSITY, AND CURRENTLY CURATES THE SF COLLECTIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL LIBRARY: THE LARGEST CATALOGUED COLLECTION OF SF IN EUROPE. HE IS A FULL MEMBER OF THE SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS OF AMERICA (SFWA), AND IS A JUDGE FOR THE 2022 ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD. HIS STORIES HAVE APPEARED IN 'THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION,' 'THE DARK,' 'BENEATH CEASELESS SKIES', 'AND 'BLACK STATIC,' AMONG OTHERS. MORE INFORMATION AND LINKS TO ALL OF HIS WORK CAN BE FOUND ON HIS WEBSITE: WWW.PHOENIXALEXANDERAUTHOR.COM

"Well, I haven't gotten COVID..."

Jo Lindsay Walton interviews Nick Mamatas

Thanks for chatting! How are you? Are you working on anything at the moment?

Well, I haven't gotten COVID and my son didn't get COVID and my parents didn't get COVID and my sister didn't get COVID. I am purposefully not working on anything at the moment. I'm watching deadlines crumble like empires.

Back in the past, you wrote on Livejournal: "A subculture is not a counterculture. A consumer culture is not a subculture. We are not all in this together." Recently there were ripples in SFF writer communities over the term "squeecore." Raquel S. Benedict and JR talk about it on an episode of Rite Gud. They weren't expecting their words to get fine-toothed, so their description of squeecore is a grab-bag of gripes and jibes, not some kind of elaborate legal case. But the core of squeecore, as I understand it, is something like a "subculture that thinks it's a counterculture." What do you think of the term?

Squeecore seems to be a name for the commercially published writing created by authors who got interested in writing by participating in post-fanfiction.net fan fiction cultures. So, it reads differently from previous writing, including previous fanfic-inflected writing from, say, the K/S photocopy generation. I think the podcasters were essentially right, but made the error of creating a taxonomy in order to dismiss a particular taxon as bad and their own stuff as good.

Yes, there was a *lot* about the episode I liked — and I fully get why they would want to move from critique to pointing out alternatives — but I did find the recommendations list a wee bit less convincing. To their credit, they are upfront about the personal connections.

This is every new writer's impulse. I was teaching at an MFA program a decade ago, and had to sit through a meeting of students pitching their academic theses. They had to write one academic thesis, and one creative thesis. Every thesis was "Why do all these books suck, except for the ones that inspired me?" I once asked Rudy Rucker why he created "transrealism" and he said that it was because he was just starting out and hadn't been published much, so he wanted to get some extra attention. It works every time!

I used to invent a new genre every Wednesday, and none of mine caught on. So not every time. Can squeecore claim any countercultural credentials?

I certainly don't think squeecore, much of which is published by the Big Five, and with large advances, is the counterculture at all. It's geek culture, which is resolutely commercial and has for the moment taken over the world. An aspect of geek culture is the pretense of social victimhood, however, so there you have it — the absurd spectacle of someone with a six-figure advance and all the publicity they can eat denouncing the gatekeepers while clutching a sponsored-by-Raytheon Hugo rocket. That doesn't mean squeecore can't be good or that the rough stuff is any better, it's just a cultural issue. Your quote comes from a post called "An End to Geek Pride," which unfortunately did not lead to an end to geek pride. Then came Gamergate, which the alt.right used to expand its base, and now we all have to explain what a cartoon frog means to our grandparents.

The Raytheon reference, for those who don't know, is because said weapons manufacturer was sponsoring red carpet photos at the Hugo Awards this year. The frog reference — actually never mind. Today we mostly want to talk about your recent book *The Second Shooter*. Readers should be cautioned of some spoilers ahead.

I think this is a great novel. It draws on the conspiracy thriller playbook, but it is filled with things you'd never find in a typical conspiracy thriller. The fantastical elements, of course, but also the style of humour, and the space you allow for some subtly-wrought interpersonal moments. Can I start by asking what the connection is between *The Second Shooter* and your earlier book *Bullettime*?

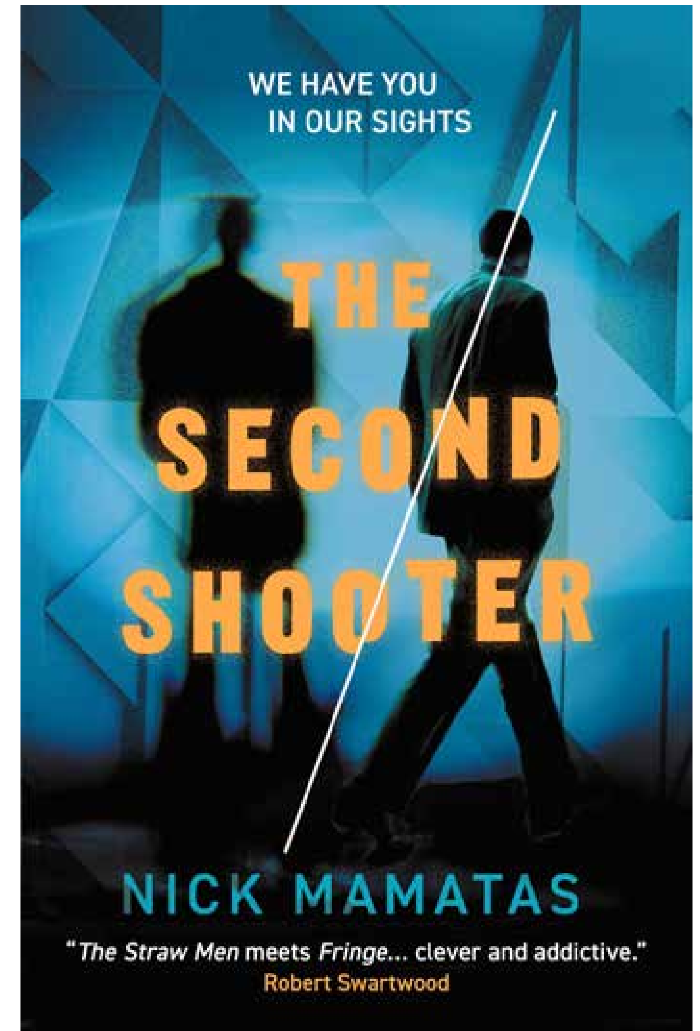
There isn't one, except that I am highly interested in the phenomenon of mass-shooting events, both school shootings and more explicitly political shooting / terror events. *Bullettime* is a story about personal choices — three timelines of the same person — while *The Second Shooter* is about mediated reality.

I suppose one commercial commonality the books have is that the manuscripts were both presented to a publisher's sales meeting by an enthusiastic editor on the day of mass-shooting events, which rather understandably soured the mood.

One of the major characters in *The Second Shooter* is the talk show host Bennett. He functions like an antagonist, but a weird antagonist, since the story kind of kicks off with him saying, "Hey, let me be the antagonist, for likes, shares and follows." Can you tell us about writing right-wing characters? You appear to be good at it. The libertarian economist Bryan Caplan has talked about an "ideological Turing test," which is kind of: Can you write characters who have a very different ideology from you, such that readers who have that ideology will recognise themselves in it? You pass if those readers feel, OK, this author *does* understand my ideology from the inside. How do you approach it? How well do you think you do it?

I'm excellent at it. I've been online since I was seventeen years old, in the days of USENET and TinyMUDs. I've heard it all, seen it all. I know tons of libertarians, "Orthobro" Christians, anarchists of every smelly stripe, technocrats, etc. Recently, a fellow who writes for a right-libertarian magazine reached out to me to tell me that he enjoyed the book, and that he read one scene about the protagonist in the third grade to his kids (!) and that they enjoyed it too. I said that now they'd never grow up to share his politics and he said that if they ended up as left-anarchists, he'd be satisfied.

I am sufficiently excellent at writing right-wing characters, or flawed left-wing ones, that reviewers have occasionally decided that I *am* a right-winger.



When liberals or leftists write various kinds of right-wing character *badly*, what mistakes do they make?

Usually by giving them positions too easy to refute (young-Earth Creationism) and by creating clichés (televangelists, "Lionel Asbo" types) or simply by making their left characters too perfect so that everyone suffers in comparison. Those are the two ways to stack the deck.

Bennett remains an ambiguous character, by the end. Can you imagine a different beginning, middle, or ending for *Second Shooter*?

Sure! *Shooter* even had another ending, at first, when I outlined it back in 2016. There was more of a romantic connection between two of the characters, a perhaps cringe-worthy sacrifice, and the protagonist realizing that he has become a … *dun dun DUN* second shooter himself.

Then, the Trump election, pizzagate, QAnon, and a million other smaller conspiracy theories gained currency, and the entire third act, and much of the second had to be thrown out and reconceptualized. The world got weirder so the book had to get weirder.

Right. I feel like speculative fiction writers have been expressing some exasperation at the world recently. "Stay in your lane! Go back to being a baseline!" But — speaking to your point about mediated reality — it's not *just* that the world has got weirder. It's also that speculative fiction is much more firmly a part of what people consume as news. Conspiracy theory, in the Anglophone world anyway, has grown more integrated into the authoritative discourses that say "this is reality."

We interviewed Juliana Huxtable recently, and she talked about the double-sided nature of conspiracy paranoia, how it plunges you into these counterfactual constructs, but how it is also in some sense necessary to make sense of the complex systems of technology and finance that shape the world around us.

In films, it's a cliché that the conspiracy-minded side character ends up being uncomplicatedly correct about conspiracies. In books, it's often a matter of perception and the true nature of reality, as opposed to mere government / secret society stuff. Fnord, or Rome never fell, or that sort of business.

I saw a tweet some time ago from Charlie Stross that given QAnon etc. speculative fiction writers must not write about conspiracy theories that turn out to be true anymore. (But I can't find the tweet now! They must have gotten to him too!) I disagree with this; we just have to treat conspiracy theories with every ounce of respect the most sophisticated believer in them deserves. There is occasionally a rational kernel somewhere buried in them — are there Satanic pedophiles running the government? No. Did Epstein kill himself? Also no, and he was clearly marketing young people to powerful government and business officials for child sexual abuse purposes.

Journalism is another big theme of *The Second Shooter*. What are your thoughts on newshounds in 2022 and beyond?

Journalism is dead. Now that every human being who wishes to has the ability to issue press releases in the form of social media postings, those postings have become the news. The basics of news reporting — that one only prints what one has heard from two independent sources — has absolutely been flushed down the toilet. And politicians have taken great advantage of this via instant press release. In my own little attempts at reportage recently, I've had more than one person agree to an interview and then object to my questions and insist that I only link to their published statement about the issue posted on Medium or the like.

The other issue is that many journalists are trained only as journalists, and cannot so much as read a graph properly. In the days of the worldwide plague, this is deadly.

My day job is at a university, and some days it feels like Higher Education is dead, because students are such cyborgs, and our pedagogy (least of all our edtech) just doesn't reflect how students are embedded in social media and other networks of data and finance. But I don't know. Can you please underline the thesis sentence in your piece, 'The Term Paper Artist'?

<u>It's because students have never read term papers.</u>

Thank you. It's hard to write things unless you read things. That's topical too.

So, I really loved the black and red magic in *The Second Shooter*. Just to enormously generalise about my own group of friends and acquaintances over the years, my sense is that witchiness tends to *replace*, rather than reorganise, the political activism that people do? Sometimes it's a relief — so-and-so was being chewed raw by reality, but now they're getting into astrology / Wicca / herbalism / X, and you're less worried about them. Like they've found a way to keep themselves a bit safer. But that safety seems to soften political engagement. Does that chime with your analysis or not? Can magic, broadly construed, make a useful contribution?

I don't think magic, by which I mean psychological ritual that pretends more or less effectively that some exterior force is helping us, is avoidable in politics, and that includes even the most material of leftist politics. All those hammers and sickles are clearly sigils summoning something not yet present. Even when they have the numeral 4 somewhere in the middle.

All that said, the goofy bullshit people find in bookstores is generally of no help, even on the individual psychological level. If your magical tome uses the same InDesign page layout template as the publisher's cookbook line, you're doomed.

But if you use "magic" to organize yourself, to create a focused and undivided mind, you can accomplish great things. By great I mean significant, the way the Bush administration explicitly refused to be hemmed in by the reality-based community.

Interesting. Related question. Is chanting in a crowd excruciating, or is that just me? Maybe virality is the antidote to the chant — you get to boost some external thing as though it were your own expression, but you can add your own inflections. But do some people really experience solidarity or exhilaration or something?

Chanting is a *fight* in a proper demonstration! At an anti-war rally, do you chant, "Justice not Vengeance," a duplicitous objectively pro-war chant promulgated by the Democratic Party, or do you chant "No Blood for Oil"? Demonstrations gather people with different opinions, and chanting is a way to see who holds which opinion, and whose minds can be changed.

OK of course. I hadn't thought of it like that. Can you tell us a bit about "Three Word Chant!", which comes up in *The Second Shooter* at a quite crucial moment?

"Three Word Chant!" as a chant during the Battle of Seattle was both an expression of ultra-solidarity (we can agree that we must be here and chant) and of exhaustion (chanting is ridiculous). But also it worked; the Battle did bust that WTO meeting.

Also of interest: during Occupy, where in many places outdoor amplification was barred, the "mic check" became a ritual. Everyone repeated what the speaker said, so that everyone could hear. This was important, as people found themselves speaking as someone else, and then another speaker would use the "mic," and one would chant the opposite. In the end, Occupy was too incoherent to succeed but from its ashes did come a generation of powerful activists, and I think the best of them experienced lending their minds to first one person, then another, and learned something from that.

Nick, thank you so much. Can I ask one final one? Can you talk about the materiality of your writing? You know, tools, places, habits?

Every so often, the idea of taking a photo of one's writing workspace and putting it on social media takes hold. Many people who don't publish very much have very nice desks, and their own room for writing, and lots of FunkoPops and posters and stuff. The people who do publish a lot *and* make some money often have big bay windows and maybe their own little separate building.

I write on a $10 keyboard hooked up to a eight-year-old Mac Mini (so I can keep using a pre-subscription version of MS Word) on a folding desk that is more like an overgrown stepladder than anything else, in the corner of a tiny one-bedroom apartment in which my son sleeps in the living room four inches from the desk. I'm the writerly equivalent of a piecework factory employee, including compensation and squinty, dying eyes.

NICK MAMATAS IS THE AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS NOVELS, INCLUDING THE LAST WEEKEND, LOVE IS THE LAW, THE DAMNED HIGHWAY (WITH BRIAN KEENE), BULLETTIME, SENSATION, UNDER MY ROOF, MOVE UNDER GROUND, I AM PROVIDENCE, SABBATH, AND THE SECOND SHOOTER. HE IS A PROLIFIC WRITER OF SHORT FICTION, AND HIS RECENT COLLECTIONS ARE THE NICKRONOMICON, THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF EVERYTHING, AND THE PLANETBREAKER'S SON. HE IS ALSO AN ANTHOLOGIST, EDITOR, AND ESSAYIST.

JO LINDSAY WALTON IS VECTOR EDITOR-AT-LARGE.

Yanis Varoufakis on his post-capitalist utopia

Interview by Alice Flanagan

If you know of Yanis Varoufakis, you know him as the economist and Greek finance minister whose nuanced analyses of the crisis of 2008 became perhaps the defining voice among left-wing critics of global finance. If you *don't* know who he is, it's never too late to *get* to know him — and conveniently Yanis's most recent works are also his most accessible.

Following 2013's *Talking to My Daughter: A Brief History of Capitalism* is 2020's *Another Now: Dispatches From an Alternative Present*. Where *Talking to My Daughter* was, well, exactly what it says on the tin, *Another Now* is Varoufakis's first adventure in fiction. Future technology causes a rip between universes, giving our heroes Costa, Iris and Eva a glimpse at what their lives could have been, had the crisis of 2008 gone a bit differently.

What prompted you to jump genres in this way?

For decades, I was avoiding writing a book by which to answer the question, 'Well mate, if you don't like capitalism, what's the alternative?' I was avoiding that question like the plague, because it's just so hard to indulge oneself in writing a modern utopia. Yet another utopic book.

But at the same time I felt the need to answer the question, because we *tried* Marx's way. Marx never spoke about communism. He declared himself a communist, and spent all his life describing capitalism, but he never ever, not once did he describe communism. When he was pushed remorselessly, he came up with a nice slogan, which was "from each according to their capacities, to each according to his needs." Ok great, but how does this work?

So he said it's for the revolutionaries to decide what the world will look like. Well, that didn't turn out very well, because you know, Stalin created the gulag and threw communists in it to begin with, before everyone else joined them.

And today, especially with young people who don't give a damn about the left, or about politicians or political parties, trade unions even, if there's any chance we can mobilise them to get involved in planning an alternative to the dystopic present and future ahead of us... Well there isn't, unless we can offer them something worth fighting for, a vision of a society that might take hard work to construct, but will be worthwhile doing.

And then it hit me at some point that the only way I could write it was as a political science fiction novel. Both the novel and the science fiction were important. The science fiction, because I didn't want to write something like, 'In the future, we can do this that and the other.'

The 'other now' comes from my generation's great failure: the response to 2008. That was a dismal moment for capitalism. Capitalism was imploding, far worse than it is today, and we missed our chance. We missed our moment to steer the socio-economic process in a completely different direction. So I thought it was useful to imagine how we would have done that, with the benefit of hindsight.

And then the novel part comes in because of the problem I have, that I disagree with myself on how a democratised socialist world should work. I'm not sure.

So the best way of capturing that uncertainty was to have different characters, each one of them expressing my views. In this way I can relay to the reader that I am in conflict with myself.

The parallel economy you describe takes a form you call 'corpo-syndicalist', one marked by "markets without capitalism" and Universal Basic Income. Is UBI the way forward?

The first ingredient isn't UBI; it's the end of tradable shares. The idea that Rupert Murdoch can buy the shares of any newspaper in the world, and effectively turn them into his own mouthpieces, is absurd.

I mean, if that was not the case, and I came to you and said, 'Look, I have an idea. Let's chop up into tiny little pieces the ownership rights to every company, and then let's trade those freely and allow the very rich to buy all the corporations,' you would think that I am mad. That I am mad and dangerous. Yet this is what we have.

So moving from the oligarchic ownership model, where you buy as many votes... and this is how you should think of shares; shares are votes! And they are the votes in the assemblies where serious decisions are made. The serious decisions are not made in the Houses of Parliament. They are not made in the Congress or the Bundestag. They are made in the boards of directors and the general assemblies of Goldman Sachs, of Volkswagen, of Google, and so on.

This is where the big decisions are being made, the decisions that determine your life, as well as life on the planet. So these are the votes that count. And to say that there is a market for votes and the rich can buy them is the end of democracy. The democracy we have is simply a piece of propaganda. We have an oligarchy with elections and the elections are bought by the oligarchy.

So the first part is 'one person, one share, one vote.' That's a very radical part, but also so simple. That's what attracts me to it, that it is such a simple idea, and it's what we already have in the political sphere. You have one vote; you can't sell it, you can't rent it, you can't buy more. You just exercise it.

Number two is a digital bank account that everybody has with a central bank. Because at the moment you can have a bank account at the Royal Bank of Scotland or Barclays, but you cannot have a bank account with the Bank of England. But the Royal Bank of Scotland and Barclays do have a bank account with the Bank of England, which means that when the central bank is printing money, they can't give it to you, they give it to them. And [the commercial banks] give it to the large corporations, who take that money and go buy shares. This is what we have now!

So the first thing you do is ban the trading of shares and say one share per employee, and the second thing you do is you cut out the middleman. Suddenly everything changes. Everything.

Firstly, you will never have a bank account with Barclays. Why would you want one? Why would you need one? You wouldn't. You would have an account with the state central bank. Digital, with a smartphone app, with a plastic card.

If that happens with everyone in Britain, with everyone in the Eurozone, and so on, everybody has one row of a spreadsheet. That's what the central bank will be. Well, if that is the case, why can't the Bank of England then give you £1,000? To each of you, just add them to every row. *That's* UBI for you!

You see, I was never in favour of UBI when it came out. I'm old enough to have been involved in the debates over UBI in the 1980's and I was not a supporter of the idea. I was not a supporter of it because the idea then was it would be funded by taxation. I don't like this idea. At all.

Because if you go to a hardworking blue-collar person, and you say to them, "I'm going to tax you and give the money to someone who does nothing, or to a rich person," they say, "What? You are going to tax me in order to give money to someone who doesn't need it, or who doesn't deserve it?" Then the whole thing becomes toxic.

[Instead] you say to them, 'Look, everyone takes it, because we are on this spreadsheet, and it's just numbers and we add it on every month.' And to the extent that these numbers facilitate economic activity, you don't have inflation, because there's more stuff that has been produced.

Anyone who says to me that universal basic income means people will not be motivated to work, I say, what?! Zuckerberg has billions! And he works day and night, you know? The rich never say this about their kids. They never say, 'Oh no, he shouldn't have a trust fund. If they aren't starving they won't be motivated.' Only about the poor do they say this.

You say that, in the universe where capitalism survives past 2008, this pandemic only serves to deeper entrench capitalism, the same way the crisis did. Do you see things going that way?

I call it techno-feudalism. I don't call it capitalism anymore. We need to distinguish what was going on before 2008 from what was going on after 2008.

Amazon is not a market; it's a fiefdom. And it's a fiefdom that's connected to other fiefdoms, like Facebook, through the cloud services of Amazon, which are much greater and bigger than Amazon.com. It's like a much more technologically advanced form of feudalism.

And this is completely sustained by central bank money. So you have the combination of the king, the sovereign, the state, the central bank and the feudal lords, the techno-feudal lords.

You can see that this system is constantly doubling-down on our extinction as a species. We had the pandemic and what did they do? More of the same. They give them more money. They give it to the same people.

They gave some money to the people in furlough wages and so on, but that is only temporary. There's been no real investment in human capital; in students, in cancelling debt. They're not doing any of that.

They have no problem plucking the money tree for themselves. Sometimes they spread some of the money they plucked from the money tree to the many, but in a limited and transient manner. And the stagnation of the capitalist system, the techno-feudalist system as I call it, gets more and more entrenched.

How do we get from here to there, 'there' being the 'other now'?

You know, of course, what Bernstein said when he was in New York and someone asked him how to get to Carnegie Hall? 'Practice, practice, practice!'

The equivalent here is 'organise, organise, organise!' We need a political movement. In the chapter 'How Capitalism Died', I'm not saying this is what we need to do, but I give an example of what might work. It's my best attempt to show the enormity of the task, but also the feasibility of it.

As long as we combine traditional forms of action — democratic politics, financial engineering, consumer boycotts using the power of the internet — with having a very clear plan in our heads as to how we want things to work. What do we do with corporate law? I am proposing one share, one vote. What do we do with money? Well, we discussed some of that.

Let's say we were to say on the first of May, let's have a day of action and boycott Amazon just for one day with this demand: a substantial pay rise for workers. And we organise internationally, and we manage to reduce sales on Amazon by 8%. I'm not saying 80% — just *8%*.

Well, Jeff Bezos is going to lose a little bit of money that day, but not much. But if we publicise well and we are so successful as to reduce that amount of sales, the share price is going to go down.

Jeff Bezos is getting rich not because of the profits of Amazon, but because of the increase of the share price. You've heard that he made what, $60 billion since the beginning of the pandemic? That's not because of the profits of Amazon. Amazon is not that profitable. They have huge revenues, but they also have costs. The actual profits are nothing like that. It's maybe one billion altogether, but he made 60! From the share price.

So if we hit the share price, through this kind of international action, you've really hit him.

So the revolution needs a good publicist — is that what you're saying?

I call it propaganda. I hate the word 'publicity', especially the word 'communications'. I'm old fashioned. Call it propaganda! They have propaganda; we need our propaganda.

The powers-that-be present their propaganda as the truth and their opponents' propaganda as propaganda. But it's all propaganda! Progressive propaganda versus regressive propaganda. Propaganda which is good for your mind, which tells the truth.

Anyway, I just can't stand those advertising PR people who constantly talk about 'communication'. You're not interested in communicating anything. You're interested in brainwashing people.

'Communication' is very neutral, like me telling you tomorrow it's going to rain. That's not what their job is. Their job is to turn you against your self interest, and community interest.

In your alternate universe, global capitalism is brought down by a movement with its origins in a utilities strike in Yorkshire. Was there a particular reason you chose us?

Oh yes. Everything I have done in this book is autobiographical. I moved to England in 1978 and the first strike I was involved with was a steel plant in Yorkshire. I was participating in a picket line there. So that's why — it was my first personal involvement in the movement.

I'll admit I was hoping the answer would be, "Ok, I've worked it out, and if we can get just Yorkshire to strike…"

Yes, there is one other reason! The Yorkshire water company was, immediately after privatisation, one of the worst. And I think it would be good to target them.

I find it impossible that a place like Yorkshire, which was drenched in rain, had water shortages. It takes a real cock-up to make that happen.

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Contemporary Greek Speculative Fiction: A Roundtable Discussion with Natalia Theodoridou, Eugenia Triantafyllou, Eleanna Castroianni and George Cotronis

Phoenix Alexander

Hi everyone. Let's start by introducing ourselves to readers / each other!

ET: Hello! I am Eugenia Triantafyllou, a writer and artist currently based in Athens. My fiction has appeared in places like Uncanny, Strange Horizons, Apex and has been nominated for Ignyte and Nebula awards. I am also a Clarion West 2019 alumna. My preferred genres are dark fantasy and horror, although I do like to mix genres and switch it up a lot.

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NT: Hi! I am a speculative fiction writer and game designer. Originally from Thessaloniki, Greece, with roots in Russia, Georgia, and Turkey. I now split my time between Greece and the UK. I've published over 100 short stories in places like Clarkesworld, F&SF, Kenyon Review, Beneath Ceaseless Skies, and Nightmare, among others, and have three games/interactive novels out by Choice of Games. If you want a taste of my work, I'd recommend starting with "Ribbons" in Uncanny Magazine, "The Birding: a Fairy Tale" in Strange Horizons (which won the World Fantasy Award for Short Fiction), or my Nebula-nominated game, Rent-a-Vice. My work is queer and dark, and I tend to overstep genre boundaries.

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EC: Hi, I'm Eleanna, a writer and poet with work in Clarkesworld Magazine, Strange Horizons, Fireside, Beneath Ceaseless Skies and elsewhere. My usual setting is literary science fiction or fantasy where the repercussions of war and oppression feature prominently. I draw a lot from my background as a human geographer and, in particular, from Anthropocene humanities and landscapes of de-industrialization and decay. I am also heavily inspired by contemporary Greek history with its share of complex politics and violence, by the pagan darkness of folk traditions, and by the fragility and cruelty of childhood.

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GC: Hello! I'm George Cotronis and I'm a writer and illustrator from Greece by way of Sweden, where I was born. I've created book covers for authors like Stephen Graham Jones, Livia Llewellyn and Harry Connolly. When I'm not illustrating, I write short stories. I've sold a handful of stories mostly to anthologies like Lost Signals, Robots & Artificial Intelligence and places like Pantheon Magazine and Tales to Terrify.

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How would you say you compare as a writer now, versus when you got started?

ET: Well, besides the subject of improvement (both in prose and structure/ideas), for me the biggest difference is confidence.

I don't mean confidence in the sense of believing I will always produce excellent stories that will sell in their first submission. What I am talking about is the confidence to expand and try out new things. Testing one's limits.

When I started out there were quite a lot of things I didn't know I could do. I didn't even know I could attempt doing them. Like writing fiction in English for example, or submitting stories to Anglophone magazines. I was not confident in writing science fiction at all, and my idea of science fiction involved me reading a lot of scientific

magazines and still feeling inadequate. It was only later that I realised that many times it's just fantasy from a different angle. I mean it is still a tough genre for me to handle but I am much more confident in exploring it.

But the most important thing that the confidence helped me with, was rejecting unhelpful feedback. Both in the form of story critique and in the form of career advice. In the beginning I felt almost obliged to listen to people who were in it longer than I was, even if their opinions were wrong or completely contradictory. In time I learned how to filter such opinions and keep those who will help me improve my writing and myself as an artist.

NT: Everything I do feeds my writing, so I'm inclined to say me-as-a-writer reflects the evolutions me-as-a-person goes through, so: I am a little more disillusioned, a little more cynical, and, absurdly, a little more hopeful these days. I write almost exclusively in English now, though I do have an annoyingly clingy idea for a Greek novel stuck in my head. I write primarily for publication, and have professional standards I didn't know existed before (i.e. writing is breathing but it is also work, so I expect to be compensated for it).

As things get more and more "professional," there's also a difference in how I approach genre. I never had a clear understanding of the divisions between genres or between "speculative" and "realist" fiction, perhaps because I come from a literary tradition that always had a loose attachment to realism at best. But writing and working in English, I find myself trying hard to resist such divisions now, reminding myself it's mostly marketing and therefore not my business or main concern as a writer.

In terms of the actual work, I feel that a comparison between what I wrote when I started and what I'm writing now would need to be either triumphalist (I'm so much better now!) or nostalgic (I've lost something I used to have!), and neither narrative would be entirely true. Each piece of work is different and comes with its own concerns, demands, and methods. I was and remain in flux.

EC: I think I had an odd trajectory, thinking of it as a profession when I started and now considering it more of a mission — as something I need to do anyway, no matter other life circumstances. I used to think I can only be a writer, nothing else, which of course is not true as I'm doing many things. After publishing and getting to meet people, it became less of a profession for me and more of something valuable (as practice and as output) that I need to sustain. Like a garden! This has reduced my output in terms of quantity, but I absolutely write only what speaks strongly to me. My stories are fewer now, so I don't publish as much, but I'm happy with this. If I don't have something to say, I'd rather stay quiet. It also seems I can happily work for decades on a single important thing.

GC: I've been on a rather lengthy sabbatical from writing for the last couple of years and have only recently begun getting back into it. That said, my early writing besides being in Greek was very informed by 70s science fiction short story writers for some reason that I can't really put my finger on. I think while I was trying to find my footing I enjoyed the somewhat simpler, high concept ideas of the era (especially ones involving strange new planets). Now I mostly write what I'd like to say is horror fiction, though it probably isn't; it's either some kind of meta, genre-aware thing or some sad story with vague supernatural elements.

How does your identity as a Greek writer / artist — whatever that means to you — influence your creative practice, if at all?

ET: I feel that for me it is all about the folk culture. I know that Greek mythology is big internationally but especially with the western audience. But for myself seeing all the Greek myths rewritten again and again made me shy away from them and look for something maybe more niche and unexpected.

So I would look for inspiration in the stories my mother told me as a child — it sounds cliche, perhaps, but they did carry a lot of weight in my young mind — and the stories I read both in school books and in anthologies. Greek fairy tales but rooted in the dark folkloric tradition. I wouldn't completely exclude re-writing Greek mythology or just being influenced by it. I did grow up with it as well. I just feel it would be done if I felt I could add something to the discussion surrounding it. Something only I could say.

I feel more comfortable when I am writing about situations, people and places that are close to my experiences. Even if the speculative element is very present and very developed — like for example a far future colony — I still cannot completely shed the references to Greek culture, people, and even geography. It is what makes the story interesting and intimate and what keeps me interested in it. So I would say that my identity makes me a better writer. Or at least a more interesting one.

NT: Like Eugenia, I draw a lot of inspiration from Greek and Balkan folklore, but I also do have a soft spot for Greek myth retellings, probably because of my studies in theatre. My work with classical Greek materials tends to grapple with distinctly performative concerns: bodies and how they come apart and together; gender-bending in front of an audience that is neither exactly participant nor exactly voyeur; how the mythical "then," when put on stage (or maybe that's how it always is), is actually about the personal and political "now."

I think also another way my positioning influences my work is a kind of tension, or the literary equivalent of being very passionate about something while also trying to avoid eye contact: I'm constantly aware of and resistant to centring the US (and to a lesser extent the UK) while writing in English. In a way, what I'm currently interested in doing is centring what it's like to constantly have to consider and resist North America as a centre.

EC: My grandmother used to tell me stories from her childhood during WWII, which I listened to enraptured, pestering her for more. I think this is the one thing in my life that has formed what I like to read and write the most. Other influences are folklore/folk magic and regional beliefs, (things like the evil eye and such) and Greek poetry, which I read in high school. It is full of grief for a contemporary history that includes wars, occupation, migration, exile, and a very bloody civil war whose divisive legacy still lingers today. These things have affected me most. They repeat themselves in my work and I wish others out there learn more about them through what I do. Greek mythology is not major in what I do, except in its capacity as a ghost. Living in a place where ancient ruins are everywhere can shift your perception of past, present, and place.

GC: I have, in all honesty, never written anything that references Greece or is inspired by our folklore and stories. I'm trying to change that, but I'm probably too entrenched in American pop culture for the most part. Does me being Greek inform my writing to some degree? Probably. But I think unless you're willing to do the work to explore your own culture's past, there's a danger you'll always be writing as someone else.

Where would you like the sf genre to be, and what would you like it to look like, in the next ten years?

ET: If we are talking about the range of experiences and people writing sf and getting published, getting their work out there, I feel that there is a need for more. More personal experiences from people in marginalised communities, more international experiences etc.

I would really enjoy seeing the standard to be translations from all over the world into English. It would make me happy if the Western audience could enjoy stories that don't center Western characters or have a traditional structure in the way we see it now. It would broaden my horizons as well because how else are we going to get access to those books if the publishers don't decide it is time to translate them and if the audience doesn't welcome that initiative?

In regards to the variety of themes, ways of storytelling, concepts, worlds etc. I feel we can't know or conceptualise what these will look like in the next ten years. And that is a good thing. I want to not be able to know what the next amazing book/short story I will read will look like. I want to be taken aback. I hope they are as weird and unfamiliar as they can get. I wish no book is like the next one. I hope they take us out of our comfort zones and make us think of the everyday and the ordinary in fiercely new ways. Introducing translations and books from marginalised authors will increase the chances of something like this happening and it will make every reader more empathetic and more intimate with experiences that they couldn't otherwise have.

NT: Decentralized. Plural and multivocal, fostering new regional connections. Anti-capitalist, diverse, queer, playful, antifascist. Free from the narrative concerns and structural formulas that people in a lot of the anglophone world are so used to.

EC: All the above, and more. Environmental catastrophe is what I think about most of the time, and I am starving for more SF that addresses it. It is clearly not enough and we are running out of time! I long for ways to rethink our position in the world, stories about human/nature divides breaking, words that describe more-than-human experiences. Our world has already changed; we are not going back. SF can teach us how to live with these changes, and even how to live well in the post-apocalypse.

GC: Like Eugenia, I'm very interested in reading more fiction from writers with varied backgrounds that might face a language barrier when it comes to getting their work read by English speaking readers. There's a ton of writers all over the world that have stories to share that we need, but are unlikely to get to read if they are never translated.

And I'd like for writers to be fairly compensated.

Thank you all, so much, for your time!

PHOENIX ALEXANDER IS THIS ISSUE'S GUEST EDITOR.

A review of *Nova Hellas: Stories from Future Greece*

Paraskevi Kanari

Nova Hellas: Stories From Future Greece **(2021)**
Luna Press Publishing, 140 pp.

Many of the stories in Nova Hellas first appeared in Greek as part of *a2525: stories from future Athens* (2017), a project by visual artist Lina Theodorou, and part of the 2017 exhibition "Tomorrows". Dimitra Nikolaidou and Victor Pseftakis, writers with many individual publications, have translated these into English for the first time; they are joined by several other stories by Greek SFF authors.

In the original version, all of the stories took place in Athens. The English translation contains new stories, like "Any Old Disease", by Dimitra Nikolaidou, situated in the Alps or "Those We Serve", by Eugenia Triantafyllou, situated in Santo, presenting thus different aspects of Greece, like the touristic resorts ("Those we serve"), or Greek immigrants abroad (Cybele in "Any old disease").

Nova Hellas, written during a harsh economic crisis, depicts a rather dystopian future. Eleven Greek writers, drawing on their current fears, hopes and beliefs, share their own alternative vision of their country, inspired by themes like immigration and racism, social inequalities, public transportation, the impact of new technologies, but also the challenge of new forms of tourism and the link with the past and their ancient roots.

Reconsidering immigration and racism

Greece lies between crossroads and its advantageous geographic place favors the development of commerce, along with the movement of people and ideas. Its capital is a multicultural society, a passage for immigrants to Europe. Therefore, Greek society often shows contradicting attitudes of tolerance and racism.

Nova Hellas shows a multicultural image of Athens, inhabited by different nationalities and races. Therefore, the stories of the anthology highlight the beauty of this variety, the openness and the tolerance that it engenders, but also its dark side, the racism and the fear of the other.

In "Roseweed", by Vasso Christou, Alba is a second generation Albanian with an Ethiopian boyfriend and a Syrian coworker. Through her story, we take a glimpse of her parents' life, who struggled to survive through a crumpling Greek economy and to establish a better future for their child. Alba struggles to survive too, since she has to deal with the environmental disaster and the new social gap it created. Alba's family live under the fear of the Pure Greece movement, a violent racist group, which attacks mostly people of darker colors.

In "The Human(c)ity of Athens", by Ioanna Bourazopoulou, dwellers of cities are not considered citizens anymore, only ''eternal immigrants'', transferred without their consent, from city to city, without roots, disengaged from the city and from the past, in order to maintain a ''homogeneous workforce''. The new stationmaster, posted from Africa, arrives in Athens and receives a lecture from Axiothea, a woman with an ancient Greek name and Asian features. Race and nationality are not important anymore, only personal skills matter.

In "Baghdad Square", the writer, Mihalis Manolios, shares the story of a man and a woman, each one living in a different version of Athens. The first version is similar to real Athens, where the multicultural clientele of Phylis Street's cheap brothels, engender fear and disgust. In the second version, the same street is full of coffee shops, where people from diverse nationalities and races give a new flavor to the city ambiance.

However the most important aspect of this story is the ''coupling of cities''. Thus, in Pedion Areos, a park in downtown Athens, a portal opens up to Baghdad, where Iraqi immigrants meet their peers but also where Greeks get to know people from a very different culture. Every few weeks, a new portal to another city opens, and this abolishment of distance and borders allows people to open up to different nationalities, to enhance their tolerance. However, not everyone is favorable to this openness. Near the portal, a racist group distributes pamphlets favoring the purity of Greeks and seek to incite anti-immigrant sentiment.

In "The Bee Problem", by Yannis Papadopoulos and Stamatis Stamatopoulos, a former cop, currently on the run, lives hidden in the center of Athens, near the church of Saint Lucas, a region full of immigrants and with a high rate of criminality. In this version of future Athens, a collectivity of citizens live and struggle together. The former cop struggles too, but against his own racist mentality. For him, immigrants bring ''crime, unemployment, dirt, even contagious diseases''. Therefore, Greeks who live with them in peace are anarchists, people who defy rules, order and decency. However, the protagonist will have to reconsider his mentality in the end.

In "T2", by Kelly Theodorakopoulou, an affluent couple comes across a "Muslim protest requesting a mosque", and run away frightened. However, a little later, in their doctor's office, their own prejudices lead them into an unbearable dilemma.

The always-existing social gap

Racism is often attendant to poverty. In actual Athens, like in all big cities, there is a gap between rich and poor. There are regions of Athens, mostly downtown, where rents are cheap, but the inhabitants have to deal with smog, criminality, drugs, traffic, chaotic and dirty public transportation. It is in those regions that immigrants, usually in the lowest parts of the financial scale, struggle side by side with the locals. On the other hand, the rich live in the northern suburbs, full of individual houses with gardens, and clean streets with tree lines. Therefore, the place someone lives is revelatory of their social and financial status.

Some *Nova Hellas*' stories depict a cleaner and improved version of the city center, a virtual one.

In "Social Engineering", by Kostas Charitos, Augmented Realities have taken over the city, in order to show a different Athens to its citizens, hiding thus the ugliness and poverty of its center.

In "Baghdad Square", Michalis Manolios proposes a different Athens: one where immigration is not synonymous with fear and poverty, and where tolerance and openness are necessary qualities to the road of progress.

However, there are also stories that depict a different future reality, one where people struggle to make a better Athens, instead of hiding in a virtual world.

"The Bee Problem", by Yannis Papadopoulos and Stamatis Stamatopoulos depicts a center full of gardens and orchards, as people try to feed themselves in a dystopia where environmental problems have disturbed the circle of life. However, it remains a place for the poor and the immigrants, where even the police does not enter.

In "Androids Whores Can't Cry", Natalia Theodoridou creates an alternative image of Athens. Her story depicts the very heart of the city center, a place poor and degraded indeed, but also where, through blood and dirt, new ideas are born.

Therefore, the center of the city, in Nova Hellas, although different and often dystopic, shares the same dynamic with modern Athens. A place of tension and poverty, indeed, but also a source of change, a dynamic of openness and tolerance. Thus, modern Athens follows the lead of its ancient self, a place where new ideas are born.

The legacy of Ancient Greece

Athens is widely considered to be the center of ancient Greek civilization. However, is there a place for those glorious ancestors in the future? The historical center of Athens, the streets around Acropolis Hill, is a familiar landscape for the stories of Nova Hellas.

In "Social Engineering", by Kostas Charitos, Augmented Realities have taken over Athens. Near the Parthenon, an owl, the symbol of the goddess Athena, the protector of the city, is standing on the side of the protagonist, translating its thoughts in Ancient Greek.

In "Human(c) of Athens", the writer, Ioanna Bourazopoulou, invites us to a stroll along Dionisiou Areopagitou, near the Acropolis, at the heart of the historic center. However, this dystopian world considers ancient history as obsolete, even dangerous for the prosperity of the city and the idea of democracy as a hindrance to development. Goddess Athena, the goddess of wisdom, concedes her place to god Hermes, the god of trade, as people sacrifice liberty to the altar of gain.

In "The Bee Problem", co-authored by Yannis Papadopoulos and Stamatis Stamatopoulos, democracy returns to its roots, when a collective of people turn a church into an assembly hall. Besides, the word for *church,* in Modern Greek, is *ecclesia,* a word that used to mean Assembly of citizens in Ancient Greece.

In "Android Whores Can't Cry", by Natalia Theodoridou, downtown Athens becomes once more the center of social changes. Thus, Massacre Market becomes the new "Agora" (Agora means "Market" in Ancient Greek, a place where not only trade, but also ideas were exchanged). This particular story makes references also to the more recent history of Greece, of the military dictatorship, that bathed in blood the movement of students of Polytechnic school (1973), making the center of Athens not only the place of history reminiscence but also of history making.

Using public transportation

Athens' public transport, usually filthy and overcrowded, rarely on schedule, full of beggars and homeless people, is a common subject of discomfort for its citizens. *Nova Hellas* offers an alternative vision of trains, in order to raise dilemmas and new what ifs : is evasion from reality really a blessing or a way to settle for apathy ("Social Engineering")? Will a second train line solve the problem of filthy public transports or create new ones ("T2")? What if future trains were carrying immigrants instead of tourists ("Human(c)ity of Athens")?

The future of tourism

Greece is a well-known tourist destination. Will a dystopian future change that? Not necessarily.

In "Roseweed", by Vasso Christou, in the aftermath of ice melting and of waters rising, the coastal line of the Mediterranean is flooded. However, there are always new ways to make the most of the crisis and therefore, attract rich tourists.

In "Those We Serve", by Eugenia Triantafyllou, the locals of the island of Santo decide to take a long break from their jobs in the tourist industry and are replaced by androids. Tourists barely notice that no local children are visible or that the people that serve them have not a life outside their post.

In "Abacos", by Lina Theodorou, those who wish to enjoy their meal in a traditional Greek tavern do not have to travel to Greece anymore. Can Augmented Reality take the place of the real thing?

Modern Greece, a destination for tourists and immigrants, a crossroad of ideas and mentalities, still struggling in the aftermath of an economic crisis, tries to build its future, standing one foot on a glorious past and another on a multi-cultural present. The writers of *Nova Hellas* speculate over this future, creating thus enchanting new possibilities, without neglecting the current social, environmental and financial reality. In these pages, we do not see only future versions of Athens, but also those of a future European city and, thus, of a future Europe, engaging the reader on a road of deep reflection and questioning of core values and mentalities.

PARASKEVI KANARI HAS A PH.D. IN LITERATURE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS. HER ARTICLES ON SPECULATIVE FICTION HAVE APPEARED IN GREEK MAGAZINES AND WEBSITES. HER WORK ON FRENCH AUTHOR BORIS VIAN IS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ON AMAZON. A MOTHER OF TWO GIRLS, IN HER SCARCE FREE TIME, SHE WRITES SHORT STORIES INSPIRED BY GREEK MYTHOLOGY AND IS WORKING ON HER FIRST NOVEL.

Kincaid in Short

Paul Kincaid

Athos Emfovos in the Temple of Sound

There is an argument – you will find it, for example, in Samuel R. Delany's *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* and echoes of it in my own *What it is We Do When We Read Science Fiction* – that science fiction is a language. It is an easy enough argument to make. In broad terms we can think of the devices of science fiction as the vocabulary and the way these devices are employed as the semantic structure. It is also, of course, nonsense. At least, it is if you try and take the idea literally.

The idea that science fiction is a language is, at best, a metaphor. It helps to explain why some people get science fiction, they "speak the language" as it were, while others don't, "it's all Greek to me" (an unfortunate phrase that starts to nudge us towards the subject of this essay).

It is better to think of science fiction as a collection of images and metaphors that we employ as a particular way of conceiving other times, other places, other beings, other realities, all of which, of course, reflect metaphorically upon our own time and place and being and reality. But in order to present those images and metaphors we need a natural language. There is nothing that can be said in science fiction that can be said without the use of an ordinary, everyday language. Oh, I know, science fiction has got more than its fair share of neologisms, words conjured seemingly out of nothing to stand for something that in our quotidian lives we have no need to name, but these are little more than decorative flourishes, linguistic stage settings to indicate that this scene is played out elsewhere or elsewhen. Yet even these new words need the old words of a natural language in order to explain them, so that a reader here and now can get the necessary idea of what is going on. Any work written entirely in neologisms might be science fiction: it would be impossible to tell for sure because it would simply not be readable.

Pretending that science fiction is a language was relatively easy for an Anglophone readership when almost all science fiction, or at least all the science fiction we were really aware of, was published in English. The odd stranger whose work was known only in translation – Verne or Boulle or Lem or the Strugatsky brothers – still seemed to belong within the American idiom, or at least close enough that any idiosyncrasies could be put down to the fact that they're *foreign, don't you know.* When English and science fiction are inseparable, then you can point to distinctive elements of science fiction and say, well, that's not really English so it must be a language in its own right. And the fact that a writer in Poland or France may have come to the genre through American writers in translation only seemed to emphasize the point. But now we know that science fiction is written in a host of other languages, in Bengali and Chinese and Dutch and … and … and even in languages with only a handful of native speakers such as Orcadian. And many of these would have been more influenced by writers within their own culture than by an Anglo-American notion of what science fiction looks like.

We come, therefore, to the problem of translation. Two languages are not simply two different vocabularies that map neatly one onto the other. Language is a reflection and expression of culture; idioms vary wildly, a simile in one language will be meaningless in another, the very mechanism by which language is used to construct

images and stories will differ. And it is precisely in these cultural aspects of language that the "language" of science fiction (if we may continue to use the term) lies. A story about aliens or the apocalypse or time travellers will have very different resonances from one culture to another, from one language to another.

The task of a translator, therefore, is not just to find the word in language B that most closely matches the word in language A (and even if that were all that was involved, there would never be a perfect match). The translator also has to find a way of translating the culture, so that a story that works in one language will work also in another (although the problems of cultural translation mean that it may not work in exactly the same way). There are pitfalls in this. When Jules Verne was first translated into English it was assumed that his stories were for children, and so the English version employed a simpler language than Verne's originals. The first English translation of *Solaris* by Stanisław Lem was actually taken from the French translation rather than the Polish original, so there were two sets of cultural differences between Lem's work and what English readers were able to read.

We take a lot on trust, therefore, when we read a translation, and we have no real way of knowing whether a work rendered into beautiful English prose reflects either the language or the cultural context of the original. Much may have disappeared, much else may have been added. Samuel Johnson said that "poetry cannot be translated", and, perhaps more provocatively, Roman Jakobson said it was the only untranslatable literary genre, because of the differences between culture of origin and culture of arrival. Maybe, but the cultural problems with translation apply to any literary work, and perhaps particularly to science fiction.

To take one recent example, the difficulty with translation is highlighted in the introduction that James and Kathryn Morrow wrote for the story "Athos Emfovos in the Temple of Sound" by Panagiotis Koustas (first published as " O Athos Emfovos sto Nao toy Ihoy", 2003) when it was republished, in the translation by Mary Mitchell and Gary Mitchell, in their anthology *The SFWA European Hall of Fame* (2007). Writing about the symbolic value of the central character's name, they say:

> 'Athos' is a diminutive of 'Athanasios,' immortal. 'Em' means in. 'Fovos,' a word that SF readers frequently encounter in its variation 'phobos,' means dread or awe. Symbolic, and also untranslatable. (173)

When a science fiction reader encounters the word "phobos" it is usually in connection with Mars; they may pick up on the mythological resonance (Phobos and Deimos were the twin sons of Ares and Aphrodite), but probably not on the meaning of the Greek word (which can also be translated as fear or panic). So, there are complex and varied resonances simply in the name of the character that would, presumably, be transparent to the original audience for the story, but that would be opaque for most of those reading the story in translation. Given that the name is virtually all we know about Athos Emfovos, it is clearly meant to be not just significant but symbolic. And such symbolism, defining the role he is required to play, is culturally specific. Any translation, therefore, must not only explain the name, but lay out the cultural landscape upon which the fable implied by the name must be played out.

Science fiction is one of numerous literatures of the fantastic that make use of fable and symbolism in this way. If a story is to work as science fiction, the cultural context behind all these factors inherent in the nature of the story must be available to the reader. But given that the Morrows find themselves referring to the story in contradictory terms, invoking postmodernism, mythology, and the New Wave, there is a sense of it being unanchored from a straightforward Anglophone conception of science fiction. For myself I find the predominant modes within the story are an uneasy and not always successful mixture of fabulism, satire and surrealism, with a peculiarly imprecise mythology beating underneath as a sort of rhythm track. Certainly I see nothing of the New Wave in the story, and the reference to postmodernism is really just a ritual nod rather than a genuine resonance.

The story is told in a series of short headed sections (we'll come to the headings shortly), and their arrangement is not exactly chronological, but it is not a particularly challenging or even unusual structure. The first section, and every alternate section after that, is set in the present of the story as our protagonist, the immortal in fear, or perhaps immortal dread, has an encounter at the nightclub he calls the Temple of Sound. This part of the story is told straightforwardly, but it is interspersed with slightly longer sections set in the story's past that record, not in chronological order, a series of vignettes of events that led up to the encounter in the nightclub.

Each heading, meanwhile, bears no direct connection with the section that follows. They take the apparent form of a mathematical equation. One section, for instance, is headed: "AND $X^Y>0$ IF $X<0$ AND Y IS EVEN" (179). The equation purports to show the relationship of a human population (X) and its actions (Y), and concludes with "INFINITE AMBIGUITY" (180). I'm not sure how seriously we are meant to take this equation, but there were times as I was re-reading the story when I wondered if this quasi-mathematical stuff wasn't all it took to identify the story as science fiction.

Certainly, there is nothing futuristic about the story which is very determinedly set in the here and now. There is a war about to happen, or maybe it has just happened. It would appear to be happening in contemporary Greece (at one point Athos finds an old coin inscribed "KI GD M OF H LL S" (176), KINGDOM OF HELLAS), but it could as well be Ukraine, whose terrifying experiences are being broadcast to the world even as I write. Except that in some ways it is not even as modern as Ukraine; soldiers use "tanks, helicopters, and Humvees" while the strange pilgrims who are central to the outcome of the story are armed with "CD players, amplifiers, patch cords, coaxial cables, and speakers." (181) No drones, no streaming service, and certainly no sense of a war being fought out on YouTube and TikTok; Koustas was looking no further ahead than the moment in which he wrote. So this is more satire than science fiction? Perhaps, though I think fable might be a better word.

In the background to the story, told seemingly in reverse order, we learn of failed diplomacy, and so "Relentlessly and remorselessly, the military machines started their countdowns." (179) This is war by rote, there even seems to be a set date when "the first shot of the utterly essential war was scheduled to be fired." (181) But then we see Athos digging with his bare hands in the ruins of his bombed house, while more bombs fall all around him. Has the war started, or is this a previous war? We don't know; there is something awry in the chronology of the story here; either that, or there is a shift in time that Koustas never makes plain. Then Athos visits the Bazaar of Hope, an ad hoc market carried out despite the corrupt and brutalizing attentions of the police. It is here that Athos acquires the old coins he has been seeking.

This is the point at which the story pivots, and we are where the story begins, with Athos walking the city streets, the antique coins in his pocket and a razor blade hidden under his tongue. (This may just be me being thick, but after several readings I'm still not sure what purpose this razor actually serves; it is used, but in a way that gives no clear idea of the actual function.) Athos arrives at a nightclub called the Club Berlin, though he refers to it as the Temple of Sound. Inside is "an ancient parking meter rising from a circular dais." (178) By feeding the old coins into the meter, Athos opens up a portal into what he calls the "holy of holies" and "the sound-god's maw." (179)

The sound-god in this telling is Audeus. Just as Athos Emfovos is a name filled with significance, so Audeus, with its echo of audio, feels like we've just encountered one of the Greek gods. In fact, there was no god Audeus; in Greek mythology the god of sound was Echo, or the goddess Aurras. (There was an Audeus who was a fourth century Mesopotamian heretic, but I don't think he is relevant to this story.) In other words, Koustas is playing with mythology, making it seem as if the narrative is following some ordained mythological course, when it is doing nothing of the kind.

But, of course, Audeus does occupy a god-like role, though for all we can tell of him in this story he may simply be a powerful computer. Athos offers up a tune that is in his head, and "Audeus accepts Athos's sacrifice." (179) The tune is embellished, and by some obscure trick with the razor blade Athos is able to circumvent Audeus's controls, "feeding him lyrics that no sound-god would ever utter, so that each refrain now includes, just above the level of audibility, sermons by visionaries, manifestos by radicals, and slogans by charlatans." (180) It's also an old story, one that goes back to the earliest myths, the wily human who gets one over on the gods. There is a cost, of course, Athos is expunged from existence. But his song is instantly unleashed upon the world.

And the story shifts one last time to the scheduled start of the war. Have we gone back in time? Is this before Athos digs in the bombed-out ruins of his home? It is unclear. All we do know is that as the armies begin to mass, so do "secular pilgrims," or "apostate apostles" (180) as they are also known, summoned by the viral power of Athos's song. And as the armies try to prepare their battle, more and more pilgrims arrive from around the world, "singing, dancing, screwing, arguing, breaking up, reconciling, playing games, painting pictures, writing poetry, drinking wine, strumming guitars." (181) Ordinary life gets in the way of warfare, until eventually the war has to be called off, as if Woodstock really had turned the bomber jet planes into butterflies. Athos's song has had its effect, and ends in the silence of peace, not of devastation.

There are problems with this story, though I don't know whether they are inherent in the original or emerge from the translation. There feels to be something missing, as if we are meant to understand the character and his actions on some autonomic level which we don't necessarily reach. Many of the twists and turns seem to be introduced by authorial fiat rather than carefully laid out as the story develops, and the feelgood ending does not convince. The "INFINITE AMBIGUITY" that allows music and revelry to impede war resides in hope not

reality, as if we are to trust our peace to some quasi-god of the clubbing scene. It is a work suffused with cultural references, perhaps mythological, perhaps restricted to club culture from the turn of the century, but they are references to be sensed rather than comprehended. It is a work that feels as if translation has taken it outside of the culture in which it belongs. Is that culture science fiction? Is its language science fiction? Perhaps, but it is a language of science fiction of which most habitual readers of Anglo-American sf are not native speakers.

Can we still say, therefore, that science fiction is a language? If so, it can only be one whose vast array of dialects and accents are only now coming to be widely recognized. And those dialects, and the complex cultures from which they emerge, suggest that when we do speak science fiction one to another it may not actually mean what we have grown used to thinking it means.

Quotations from "Introduction" by James Morrow and Kathryn Morrow and from "Athos Emfovos in the Temple of Sound" by Panagiotis Koustas, translated from the Greek by Mary Mitchell and Gary Mitchell, taken from *The SFWA European Hall of Fame: Sixteen Contemporary Masterpieces of Science Fiction from the Continent* edited by James Morrow and Kathryn Morrow, Tor, 2007. The Samuel Johnson quotation is attributed to him in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

PAUL KINCAID IS A WIDELY PUBLISHED CRITIC, AUTHOR, AND EDITOR. HIS LATEST BOOKS ARE IAIN M. BANKS (UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS, 2017), AND A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS AND REVIEWS, CALL AND RESPONSE (BEACON, 2014).

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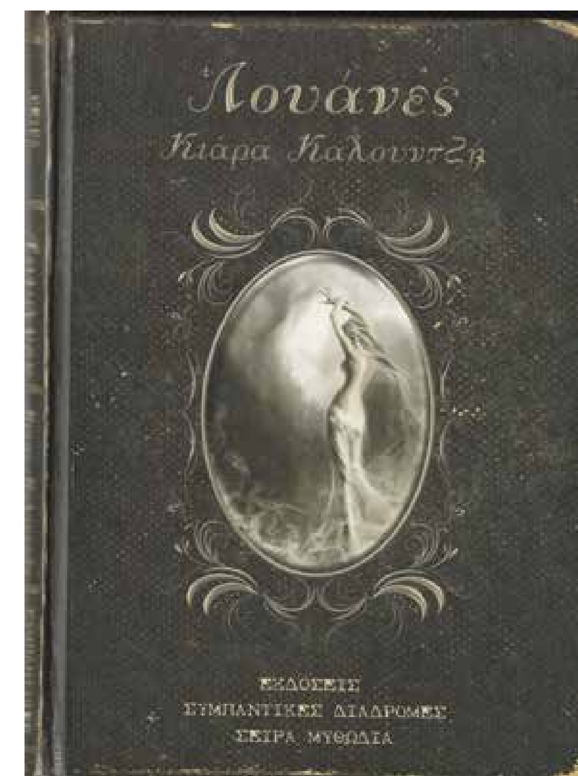
Contemporary Greek Speculative Fiction

Vasso Christou

This is a brief overview of speculative fiction published in Greece between 2012 and 2021, based on a sample of books representing main directions in the genre. Every book's title is followed by a proposed English translation, a short description and a few words about the author. All the authors are Greek, although some have left the country during the recent economic crisis.



Λουάνες **(*Louanes*), 2012, by Kiara Kalountzi.**

A fantasy, short story collection. In a sea world where seven moons roam the night skies, some girls born during the night inherit part of the dominant moon's magic. These women grow into talented witches with powers over different elements. Some of them predict the future, others can heal people or fertilise the land, and many of them travel from one island to another, calming the seas. Although the world is imaginary, Kalountzi's stories have a very strong traditional flavour, one especially familiar to Greek islanders.

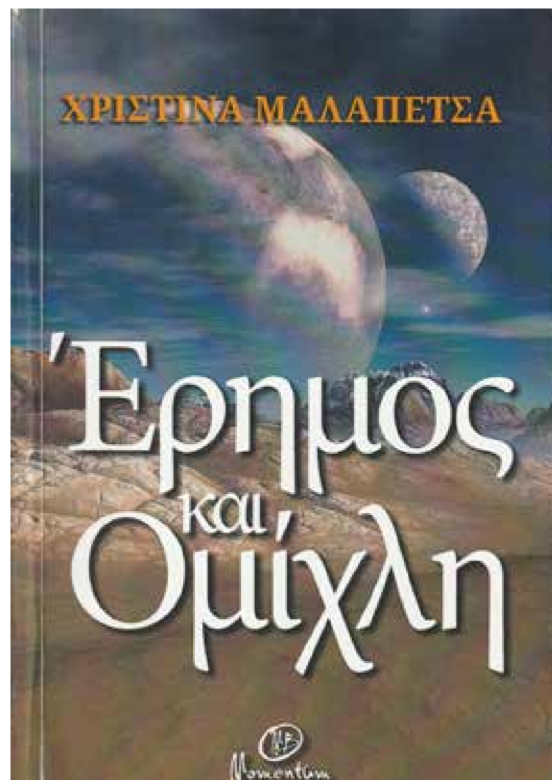
Kiara Kalountzi (she/her) has studied Film and TV direction as well as Product and Systems Design. She currently lives and works in Brussels. She has published several short stories in magazines and anthologies.

Αγέννητοι Αδελφοί **(*Unborn Siblings*), 2014, by Michalis Manolios.**

A science fiction novel with a pinch of horror, set in contemporary Athens. Biotechnology has offered the means to create different personalities that exist within the same person and emerge at the person's will, serving mostly as tools for coping with unpleasant or

dangerous situations. The technology is still experimental and prohibited; things take a bad turn for those involved when a paid assassin appears and blackmails the inventor in order to save her terminally ill son. The story is a swiftly moving thriller; all events take place over the course of a few days.

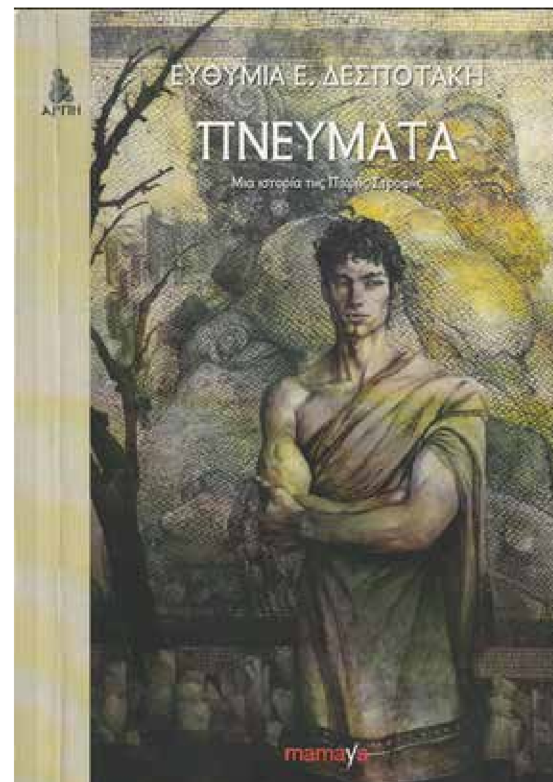
Michalis Manolios (he/him) is a mechanical engineer. He was born in Athens, where he currently lives and works. He has published both short stories and novels. His works have been translated into English, Italian and Chinese, among others.



Έρημος και Ομίχλη (*Desert and Mist*), 2015, by Christina Malapetsa.

This book contains two fantasy novellas, both set in the same alternative world. One story takes place in the desert and has to do with a promise and a debt and the other is set on an island hidden by fog and inhabited by human-like creatures. The connecting element is the female protagonist who moves between space and time. The second novella is of particular interest since it is both a love and a mystery story, based on the idea that a person can be used as a "mnemonic", a living archivist, deprived of his/her personality as a penalty for a crime against the community. The story is narrated by at least two different points of view and the truth is revealed as the narrative pieces fit together one after the other near the very end.

Christina Malapetsa (she/her) was born in Athens. She is a pianist, and currently lives in Sweden, where she is studying neurobiology. Her short stories can be found in several magazines and anthologies.



Πνεύματα (*Spirits*), 2016, by Efthymia Despotaki.

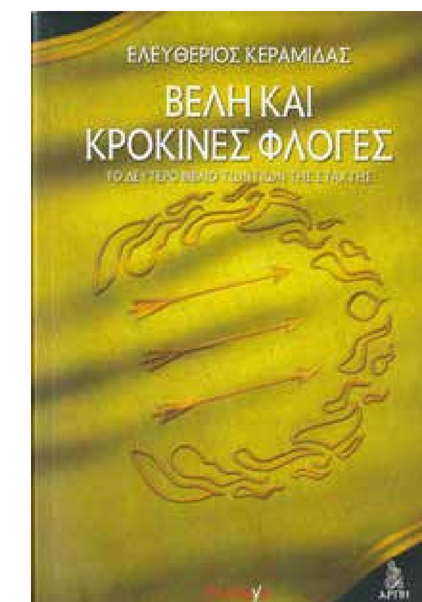
A fantasy novel set in a pseudo-Hellenic world. The story begins in a city named Damasini after the great general Dama. Damasini resembles Alexandria, and the history of the world appears similar to the one we know, but with a few important differences: gods exist and magic is real. The hero is a talented young engineer who soon finds himself drawn into an adventure that will take him to the coast of Asia Minor in real-world geography. The author makes considerable effort to recreate the atmosphere and mood of the era, while expertly integrating the magic of her world and making the presence of several interesting gods known. The story is a pacey adventure, with the evocative style of the author channeling scents, colours and flavours in her prose.

Efthymia Despotaki (she/her) was born in Athens where she currently lives and works. She is a geologist. She has published several short stories in magazines and anthologies as well as a personal short stories collection.

Κενή Διαθήκη (*Void Testament*), 2016, by Hephaestion Christopoulos.

This book is comprised of four short stories and one novella. Although not set in the exact same world, all stories share a post-apocalyptic environment, where nature takes its toll. Special mention is necessary for the titular novella *Κενή Διαθήκη*, which takes place in a dusty, barren world, with a setting bordering on New Weird. Trees grow out of dead people, exposing a salient feature—and sometimes a secret—of the deceased. But the rains have stopped falling and these trees die as well. At the same time, the protagonists, all of them keeping many secrets and carrying a burden of guilt for different reasons, have to make difficult choices. Although dystopian in its environment and dealing with unpleasant situations, the story is a real page turner, expertly written by a very talented author.

Hephaestion Christopoulos (he/him) is a marine engineer and an English language major. He currently lives and works in Athens. His short stories have been published in magazines and anthologies.



Γιοι της Στάχτης (Sons of Ash Trilogy), 2010–2018, by Eleftherios Keramidas.

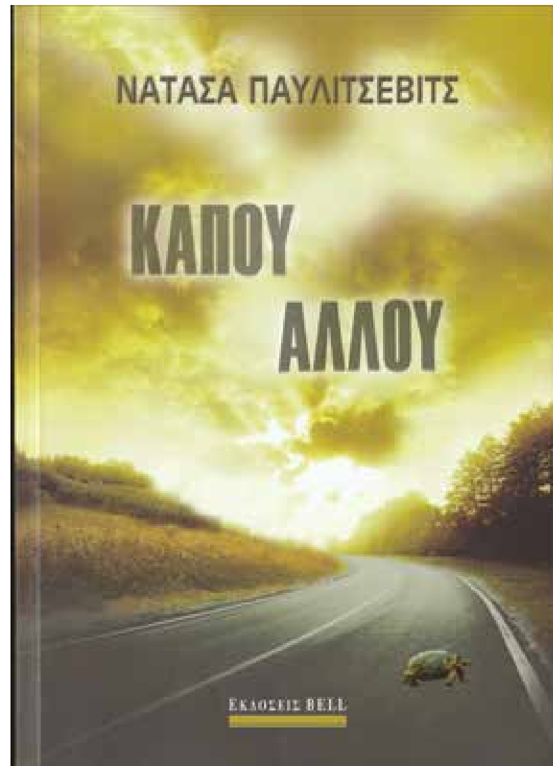
This work is comprised of three books: *Κοράκι σε άλικο φόντο* (*Crow on Scarlet Font*), *Βέλη και κρόκινες φλόγες* (*Arrows and Saffron Flames*), *Δρυς με φύλλα σμαραγδιά* (*Oak with Emerald Leaves*).

This trilogy is set in a pseudo-Byzantine world, where a great empire is torn by the machinations of ambitious nobles, while besieged at the same time by enemies both human and supernatural. The readers follow a multitude of characters through places where different kinds of magic are manifested.

The main subject of the story is the Sons of Ash. These are hybrid creatures, considered abominations, born of a human and a non-human parent, some exposing visible differences from normal humans and others not. They all have talents as varied and interesting as their appearances. Strategy and intrigue are driven by the deep delving into the characters' ambitions. One of the stronger points of the story derives from the expertise of the author with traditional local weapons that translates into realistic battle scenes. A great working knowledge of history and military

strategies make this trilogy plausible to the point where the reader may easily forget that it is set in a secondary world.

Eleftherios Keramidas (he/him) is a computer programmer, living and working in Athens. He has published several short stories in magazines and anthologies in Greek and some of his short stories are translated into English.

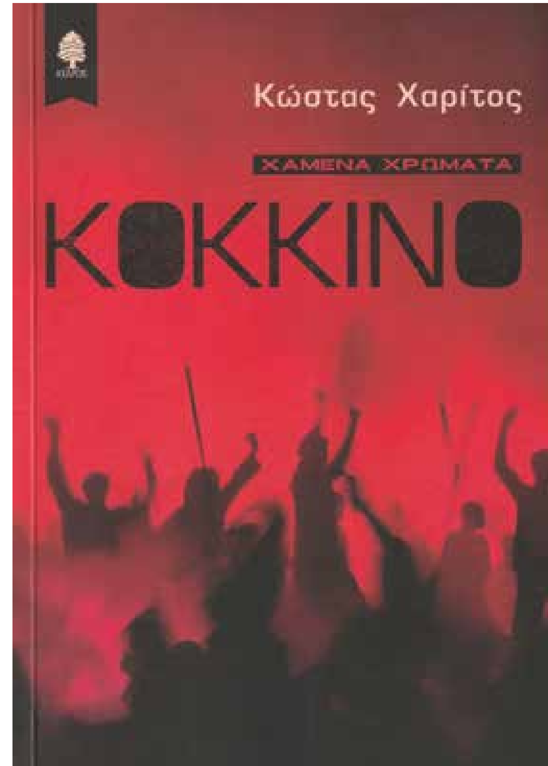


Κάπου Αλλού (*Elsewhere*), 2019, by Natasha Pavlitsevits.

A borderline weird fiction/terror novel. Two women in an intimate relationship are spending their vacation in a country house. But nothing is really the way it appears when they notice that the distance between themselves and the landmarks outside the house is growing. Events are becoming confusing and reality is blurred.

A novel is written in an easy to read style, but it is not a light story. Discussions of non-heternormative relationships take place between the lines of a thrilling adventure moving at a very fast pace.

Natasha Pavlitsevits (she/her) currently lives in Sweden, where she works as a school teacher. Her short stories can be found in several magazines and anthologies.

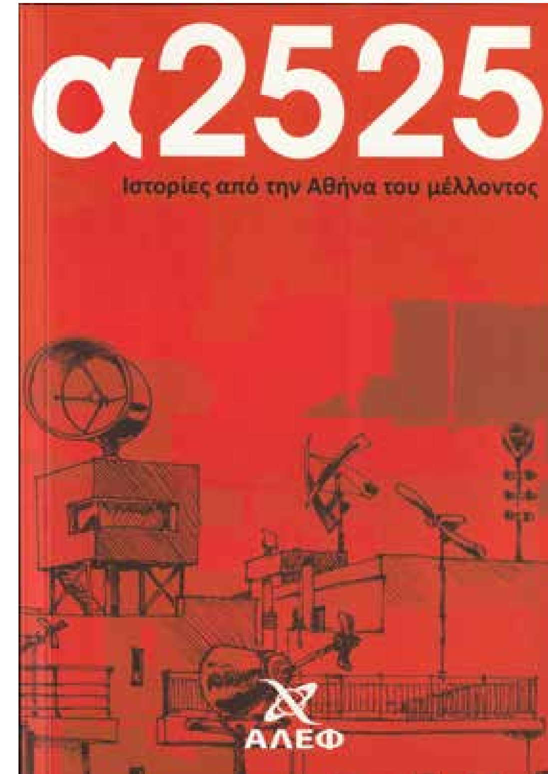


Κόκκινο (*Red*), 2020, by Kostas Charitos.

The first novel of the *Lost Colours* science fiction trilogy. Set in the near future, the story moves, along with its three protagonists, between Paris, Florida and an unnamed isolated island. An artist is obsessed with the idea of creating the perfect red colour, while a group of dissidents want this colour to ignite the passion of the masses. A secret police agent is recruited to counter what appears to be a dangerous group of revolutionaries. At the same time, a programmer reveals how his code slowly turns the world upside down. All three characters have very well written plotlines, developed personalities and motivations. Although the story has elements of adventure and mystery, it is deeply political and addresses issues such as poverty, terrorism and international politics.

Even though the book is the first of a trilogy, it can be read as a standalone novel, as it resolves in a satisfying manner. The following two books are expected soon.

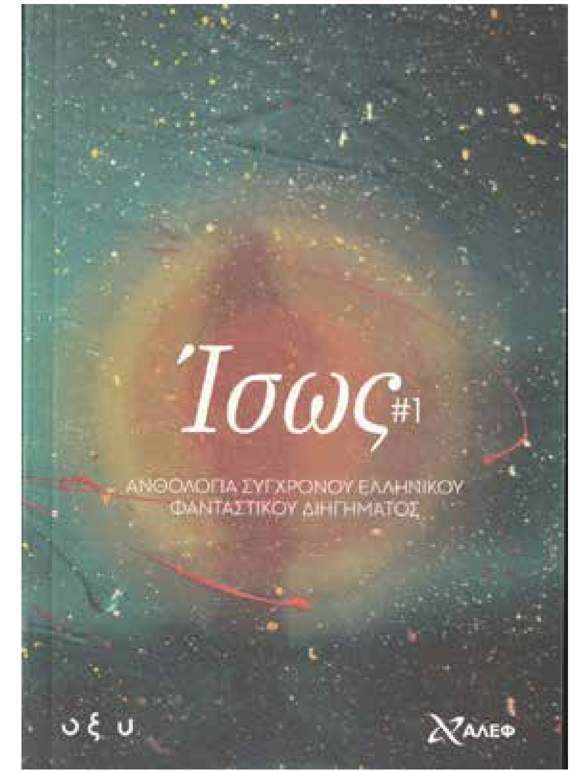
Kostas Charitos (he/him) is a chemist. He lives in Athens, where he currently works as a teacher in Secondary Education. He has published short stories as well as novels and some of his short stories can be found in English and Italian.



α2525 Ιστορίες από την Αθήνα του μέλλοντος (a2525 Stories from Future Athens), 2017, a science fiction anthology.

The stories of this anthology were inspired by a visual artwork event centered on Mediterranean cities in the near future. Thirteen short stories (some of them very short) by eleven (six male/five female) authors address issues in a future Athens. Subjects such as climate change, immigration, social engineering, genetic manipulation, and disease and healthcare are framed in a wildly changing world. An interesting point about the stories is that, although the protagonists are stuck in generally dystopian situations, they stand their ground and improvise, proving capable of not only surviving but thriving as well.

Many of the stories from *a2525* appear in the recently published anthology *Nova Hellas* (in English by Luna Press and in Italian by Future Fiction) and are expected in a Japanese edition in 2022.



Ίσως (What if), 2021, a speculative fiction anthology.

Eleven authors have contributed eleven short stories, representing genres popular with Greek speculative fiction readers (science fiction, fantasy, horror, steampunk, weird). Some of the stories are very easy to read, others are more challenging, but all of them, even those set in a purely fantastic environment, where the main characters are not even human, pose challenging questions about issues such as human nature and human rights, ethical tourism, love, trust, gender, segregation, etc. Some of the stories are translated in English and can be found in magazines and/or anthologies.

VASSO CHRISTOU WAS BORN IN ATHENS. SHE STUDIED INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND WORKS AS A TEACHER IN SECONDARY EDUCATION. SHE IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE SCIENCE FICTION CLUB OF ATHENS (ALEF). HER FANTASY TRILOGY *ΛΑΞΕΥΤΕΣ* AND HER SHORT STORY COLLECTION *ΟΛΕΣ ΟΙ ΓΕΥΣΕΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΦΩΤΟΣ* HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED BY *ΙΑΜΒΟΣ* PUBLICATIONS. HER SHORT STORY "ROSEWEED" IS PUBLISHED IN THE ANTHOLOGY NOVA HELLAS (2021) BOTH IN ENGLISH (LUNA PRESS) AND ITALIAN (FUTURE FICTION), WITH AN UPCOMING PUBLICATION IN JAPANESE (2022). IT IS ALSO INCLUDED IN THE EUROPEAN SCIENCE FICTION #1: KNOWING THE NEIGHBOURS PUBLISHED BY FUTURE FICTION (SUMMER 2021).

Activism and audiotopia

Phoenix Alexander interviews Mikhail Karikis

Please briefly introduce yourself.

I am an Greek-born artist based in London and Lisbon. I work mostly in moving image, sound and performance. I develop projects through collaborations with individuals, collectivities and communities that are often located beyond the circles of contemporary art. In recent years, I have been working extensively with children, teenagers, young adults and people with disabilities.

Since the early stages of my practice, the politics and materiality of the voice have been key concerns, while at the same time engaging with themes that give voice to different ways humans relate to the environment. There has been an instinctive journey that I began with films exploring voicing conditions of labour in the context of extractivist practices. This moved forward by looking at models of sustainability and eco-feminism, and more recently eco-activism and emerging forms of labour that service nature.

I would say that my works prompt an activist imaginary and rouse the potential to imagine possible audiotopias (i.e. speculative places invoked through sound) and desired futures. I employ listening as an artistic strategy to help determine the content of my projects with the aim to highlight alternative modes of human action and solidarity, and to nurture critical attention and tenderness.

To what extent do you consider your work and practice to be 'science fictional,' if at all? Do you actively think about genre in your work, or do the labels come after the fact? (Surrealism, social realism, performance etc.)

I find science fiction and fantasy literature inspiring, but I do not think of my own artistic work through the lens of a specific genre. Perhaps where some science fiction literature and my art practice align is the way I employ my work to imagine and propose different worlds. I often start projects by embedding myself in different community contexts, and as such, social realism is always my starting point. Reflection, imagination and fantasy play an important role as I develop the themes and the projects mature and take shape. A decade ago and after I'd spent several years producing work that was furious and acutely critical, I took the decision to go further and invest my energy and imagination to proposing 'better' alternatives. My use of the word 'better' here implies a world with social and environmental justice, egalitarianism and practices of care.

Sounds plays a central role in much of your work. Can you say a little bit more about how you see the relationship between the sonic and visual aspects of a new project?

I am currently developing a project which explores our relationship to weather phenomena. I am approaching it from three sonic perspectives: folk songs that call out to the elements, capture and transmit traditional knowledge about seasonal change and meteorology; a second angle is that of music instruments that imitate the sounds of weather and bring the environment into the concert hall through sound, like, for example, wind machines and thunder sheets; and a third perspective is the acoustics of resistance generated through eco-activism and protest. I am working with folk singers, professional experimental musicians and young school children on this project to bring together these three different forms of auditory culture that are testimony to our profound connection and entanglement with the weather. As is common in my work, the performance of these different forms of sound will determine the visual dimension of the project. Be it on a macroscopic or microscopic dimension, all my films capture acts of communal sound-making, resonance and vibration, and document the power sound has to set into motion the material universe, activate our sentiments and mobilise political thinking and action.

Are there any works of science or speculative fiction (in any medium!) that have particularly inspired you?

Every child and teenager should read *The Iron Woman* by Ted Hughes for its environmental focus, for empowering children heroes with activist ecological thinking and rebelling against adults, and for the central role listening and noise play in the story as superpowers that activate empathy toward more than human beings. *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin is a book everyone ought to read for its acute reflections on capitalism, gender politics and anarcho-communism.

Images

Mikhail Karikis. *No Ordinary Protest*. Tokyo Photographic Art Museum 2019.

Image opposite: from an installation (photo by Ochima Kenichiro). Above: video still. Front and back covers: production photos. All images are part of *No Ordinary Protest* project and printed with permission from Mikhail Karikis.

PHOENIX ALEXANDER IS THIS ISSUE'S GUEST EDITOR.

G(r)eek Theatre: Reflections on Cyborphic & Greek Science Fiction Theatre

Christos Callow Jr

This article is a brief introduction to science fiction theatre by Greek artists based in Greece and the UK. I'm happy to have been asked to also discuss the theatre company I co-founded, Cyborphic, as the main case study. One would hope that science fiction theatre hardly requires an introduction: the genre has been on stage for at least a hundred and one years, since Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots), which premiered in 1921 in Hradec Králové. However, science fiction theatre has been present as a largely invisible and underexplored category. In the 20th century, it not only included stage adaptations of Mary Shelley's and H.G. Wells's novels, or musicals such as *Little Shop of Horrors* or the *Rocky Horror Show*; it also included plays by Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, George Bernard Shaw, Alan Ayckbourn, and Vladimir Mayakovsky. A foundational text by Ralph Willingham, *Science Fiction and the Theatre* (1993), remains one of the few studies that demonstrate the strength of the science fictional imagination in 20th century theatre.

The genre has proliferated in the 21st century, most notably in experimental and fringe productions. More and more artists and theatre companies appear happy to label their work 'science fiction theatre,' marking a change from the last century, in which dystopian and post-apocalyptic settings such as that of Beckett's *Endgame*, or devices such as time travel or alternate history, could often appear on stage without terms like "sci-fi" appearing anywhere in the accompanying marketing. Notable exceptions to this included the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool (founded in 1976), and Ray Bradbury's theatrical adventures in Los Angeles, where he led the Pandemonium Theatre Company and adapted several of his well-known science fiction stories for the stage.

More recently, Jennifer Haley's *The Nether*, a crime/science fiction thriller set in a virtual realm, had its world premiere in California in 2013. Plays by Alistair McDowall, such as *Pomona* (2014), *X* (2016), and *The Glow* (2022), featured genre elements, from Lovecraftian horror to science fiction and the supernatural, and have been staged in the National Theatre and the Royal Court. Jordan Harrison's *Marjorie Prime* was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in Drama, later adapted into a 2017 film. The first theatre festival to focus on science fiction was Sci-Fest LA in 2014; it included theatrical adaptations of works by Neil Gaiman and Clive Barker. California seems to be particularly friendly to the genre, as does New York, where the Untitled Theater Company #61 has staged new science fiction plays by Edward Einhorn and his adaptations of Ursula K. Le Guin's and Philip K Dick's work. Also in New York, Mac Rogers has presented his *Honeycomb Trilogy* (2012), a trilogy of science fiction plays based on *R.U.R.* Meanwhile, in the UK, science fiction plays and performances have been populating fringe festivals such as the Edinburgh Fringe, Vault Festival and others — including the Talos Science Fiction Theatre Festival since 2015. On that note, and to begin discussing where contemporary Greek theatre-making fits into this world, I will next reflect on a company and a festival dedicated to science fiction on stage.

I. On Cyborphic — or do Orphics dream of Cyber sheep?

Cyborphic is a London-based Greek and Science Fiction theatre company, founded in 2017, producing ancient and contemporary Greek theatre. The company is run by playwright and lecturer Dr Christos Callow Jr. and dramaturg and classicist Dr Andriana Domouzi. Its projects have included a reconstruction of Euripides' fragmentary tragedy *Melanippe Wise*, and the solo performances *Mayuri* and *Posthuman Meditation*. Cyborphic has also run the Talos Science Fiction Theatre Festival of London (which predates the company, being founded in 2015). The festival has featured contemporary science fiction plays, including work by Greek theatremakers, such as *Superhero* by Andreas Flourakis. Cyborphic also organised the *Performing Greece* conferences on contemporary Greek theatre (including papers on Greek science fiction theatre) and the latest *Stage the Future* conference on science fiction theatre. The company runs a small network for science fiction theatre artists and academics, *SF Theatre Network*, and organised a network of Greek artists in London.

Liza Callinicos as Mayuri

Of these projects, the most ambitious is *Melanippe Wise*. The completed text included Domouzi's translation of the play's surviving fragments and is based on Domouzi's doctoral research into Euripides' two lost Melanippe tragedies, *Melanippe Wise* (c.418-411 BC) and *Melanippe Captive* (c. 413-412 BC). It was first presented at the Hope Theatre in London in November 2019, funded by the Institute of Classical Studies and the University of Derby. The process for researching and reconstructing the play was explored in a workshop series titled "Lost Greek Tragedy: Staging the Fragmented and the Fantastic" (Domouzi 2020), and will be further explored in a chapter of Domouzi's forthcoming edited volume *Tragedy Resurrected. Reconstructing, Adapting and Staging Lost Greek Tragedy,* to be published by De Gruyter.

Finally, Cyborphic aims to bring interdisciplinary research to theatre-making. Cyborphic's website features an online database of 21st century science fiction theatre plays and performances, chronicling more than 100 plays with sci-fi elements, including Afrofuturist, contemporary fantasy, horror, and others. Currently, Cyborphic are planning *Talos V*, and a full production of *Melanippe Wise*.

Website (includes Database and Manifesto): www.cyborphic.com
Twitter: @cyborphic / @talosfest
SF Theatre Network: www.facebook.com/groups/349535958901161

II. On Greek Science Fiction Theatre; Live or Leave your Myth in Greece

If we're happy to consider proto-science fiction when discussing the underexplored Greek science fiction theatre, one may start as early as the fragmentary play *Daedalus* by Sophocles (likely a satyr drama) where the

fragments "160 and 161 testify that the play contained something about Talos" (Sophocles, 1996), the artificial man of bronze. If we were to maintain this flexible approach to genre, we could consider several Greek adaptations of classical Greek drama that have used science fictional, futuristic and/or dystopian elements across the 20th century. One of the most interesting such texts is *Medea* by Vasilis Ziogas, written in 1995, which features a chorus of metahumans in addition to three goddesses, and blends ideas from Greek philosophy, Christianity and astronomy along with a posthuman take on Medea. The play is unpublished but there's a copy in the library of the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Athens. The following quote demonstrates well the style and attitude of the play:

> And you Metahumans, that the wisdom you achieved while you were living, rewarded you with the fourth level of galactic life. It is not Jason that elevated himself to the meadow of the fourth dimension, but it was me who descended to meet him. (Ziogas, cited in Domouzi, 2016)

What is of particular interest here — and this is an important theme that science fiction and ancient Greek theatre share — is the struggle of the individual with the cosmos, a struggle which takes mythical proportions. Domouzi argues that at the heart of the play is "the dual substance of Medea," who is presented here as "some kind of human goddess," and that the "meaning of the universe and the purpose of existence are central to the text, positioning the characters and the myth against a cosmic problem" (Domouzi, 2016).

Besides such adaptations of classical Greek plays, there have been in Greece — as is the case everywhere — several theatrical adaptations of science fiction films and novels, including quite a few takes on *Clockwork Orange* as well as *We* ; an adaptation of *The Man from Earth* was at Theatre Alkmini from 2013 to 2014, and theatre director Katerina Evangelatos had presented a new adaptation of *1984* in 2016.

But what of Greek science fiction on stage? The first co-production of the Greek National Theatre with the Greek National Opera, *Galaxy*, also premiered in 2016. The show combined ambitious visual effects, dance and performance, and explored, among other things, cosmic topics from the Big Bang to hopes of alien life elsewhere in the universe. Other examples include another production at Alkmini, Mars 1, by the theatre company "θεατρικό σωματίδιο πΟδήλατρΟν" (which might best be translated to "theatrical particle blcycle") and the dystopian drama *3%* by Vily Sotiropoulou — set in 2040 — which first ran from 2016 -2017, and was presented again in early 2021. Even its pre-pandemic edition featured Skype connections with actors based in other countries. There was also *Mission to Planet Earth* by Sakis Serefas, produced by the National Theatre of Northern Greece in 2010 and concerning two alien beings that visit Earth. *Home Greco* by Vaggelis Alexandris and Odysseas Androutsos, which ran from December 2018 to March 2019 at Theatre Stathmos, was an intergalactic sci-fi comedy exploring the history of Greece through aliens. Another surreal but sf-relevant play is *Blood Enemies* by Arkas, published in 2007 and performed in 2008 at Neos Kosmos Theatre in Athens; the play features anthropomorphised organs in the body of a dying alcoholic shortly after an accident — the dialogue between the Small Intestine and the Colon is meant to be both funny and existential, as they're stuck in a Beckettian scenario, with no luck being transplanted and thus surviving in another body, unlike other organs.

It is safe to assume that if Greek science fiction theatre is influenced by anything, it'd primarily be the Theatre of the Absurd and subsequently Science Fiction Cinema and Literature, rather than the lesser known tradition of science fiction on stage, such as in American or British theatre. I doubt that Alistair McDowall or Anne Washburn are well-known in Greek or Greek-Cypriot theatre; however there was a staging of Caryl Churchill's *A Number* in Athens at 2005 and a staged reading of a Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* directed by Evita Ioannou in October 2020 in Lefkosia, Cyprus.

Many of the performances mentioned above rely more heavily on surreal and absurdist elements than science fiction; what is exciting from an interdisciplinary perspective is how Greek theatre aesthetics can influence the exploration of science fiction in Greece, Cyprus and European theatre more broadly. Some of these plays explore what it means to be Greek, or to exist in modern Greece, from an alien or dystopian perspective. But what of Greeks abroad?

When it comes to thinking about science fiction theatre and performance of the Greek diaspora, especially in the UK, identity issues related to immigration and isolation may be more dominant, alongside general concerns about the state of the world and/or of the planet.

An Ice Thing to Say by London-based Vertebra Theatre and directed by Mayra Stergiou, has involved several Greek artists in its production and has participated at several festivals (in London, Melbourne, Reykjavik, Stockholm and elsewhere), having had both digital versions

for online events (that blended live and recorded performance) and live, in-person shows. The performance, blending elements of physical theatre and ice installation, explores the encounter between a human being and a polar bear, and engages with issues of the Anthropocene Era and anthropocentrism. It also featured in one of the Talos theatre festivals (at the Cockpit Theatre in November 2020) alongside another theatre project by Greek creatives, Genome Theatre's *Genesis 37*, an immersive performance that involved audience participation both in-venue and online (via Zoom and thanks to a projector and live-streaming from a camera-person on stage), in a feminist story exploring the ethics of cloning.

My own science fiction play, *Mayuri; or, The New Human*, was performed as part of the Kensington + Chelsea Festival and online for Edinburgh Fringe in August 2021, and explored issues of robotics, posthumanism and immigration. I'd rather not talk about it in my own words here; but according to Geraint D'Arcy in a lovely review in Foundation 140 (Winter 2021 issue), the play is centred "on the triumph and anguish of abandoning the body in favour of a technological and philosophical unknown."

III. A Conclusion; or, perhaps, a Cliffhanger

One of the challenges of science fiction theatre-making is the creation of work that succeeds both as theatre and as science fiction. Willingham noted that most of the science fiction plays he catalogued in *Science Fiction and the Theatre* "are the work not of science fiction writers, but of independent dramatists schooled in the old playwriting formulas" (Willingham, 1994, 3). The ideal perhaps here is that, as the cultures of science fiction and theatre continue to explore each other, we have in the 21st Century more plays that build on both traditions. My hope for the future of Greek science fiction theatre is that it engages with both the more-developed science fiction theatre traditions beyond Greece, and with contemporary science fiction literature by Greek writers — rather than operating in a vacuum or reacting mainly to classic dystopian texts. Another hope is that it interacts more with the speculative fiction — and proto-sci-fi themes — of Greek myth and classical theatre.

In any case, I hope that this article has demonstrated that — for better or worse — Greek science fiction theatre exists, and that it has a growing (and perhaps a glowing) presence.

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Being Part of Everyone's Furniture

Athena Andreadis

A slight variant of this essay first appeared on the blog of Starship Reckless on March 16, 2010 .

For I come from an ardent race
That has subsisted on defiance and visions.

Two weeks ago, I was too tired to undertake the one-hour drive home after staying late in the lab. I took refuge in a hotel with the proverbial 57 channels. And so it came to pass that I finally saw *300*, purporting to depict the life of Leonidas and the Spartans' stand at Thermopylae. Except that the Spartans wore black naugahyde diapers, Xerxes was an S/M Borg muppet, his Immortals looked like orcs and Leonidas showed his bravery by shoving an unarmed herald down a pit the size of an asteroid crater (in Sparta's central square yet — bad for tots, to say nothing of fast traffic).

As I watched this dumb dull mess, it came home to me that my culture is deemed common property and used accordingly. Yet few people really know anything about it beyond the cartoon version that passes for world history in most US schools.

I was born and raised in Hellas (as Hellenes, a.k.a. Greeks, call their country) and came to the US at 18. Since my transplantation, I haven't seen a single Anglophone film or TV show depicting Hellenic history or myth that has not been cringeworthy. They've been so uniformly dismal that the cheerful hodgepodge of *Xena* was at the top of the pile (no exaggeration). In 2005, everyone I spoke with asked variants of "Are all 'you people' like those in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*?" and I had to restrain myself from wielding a baseball bat — or a spear. There are three Hellene directors of international standing who explore the culture's myth/history (Michalis Kakoyannis, Theodoros Angelopoulos, Pantelis Voulgaris) but their work appears only in art film archives.

I have also read vast numbers of historical and alternate history novels by Anglosaxon authors that take place in Hellas — to name just a few, Mary Renault, Steven Pressfield, Barry Unsworth, Ellen Frye from the literary side; from science fiction/fantasy, Jacqueline Carey, Guy Gavriel Kay, Greg Benford, Jenny Blackford. Many of these books are fine if judged solely on their literary merits, some are best passed over in silence. In most of them, the stray Hellenic phrases (even when uttered by natives) are at the level of tourist pidgin and the Hellene characters are Gunga Din sidekicks. A few of the stories ring "real" enough that I can lower my shield and relax into them: Jim Brown's *Blood Dance*, Roderick Beaton's *Ariathne's Children*, Paul Preuss' *Secret Passages*.

In stark contrast, Hellenes have no literary voice in the west. Although ancient Hellenic literature used to be the province of any well-educated Western European man, the same cannot be said of contemporary Hellenic letters. If asked to name recent Hellene writers, people may manage to dredge up Nikos Kazantzakis, and him only because of the popularity of the movie version of *Zorba the Greek*. If they are intellectuals, they might be able to name the four world-famous poets: Kostantinos Kavafis, Odysseus Elytis, Giorgos Seferis, Yiannis Ritsos. English-speaking readers can browse through translations of just about any national literature you can name. Yet translations of contemporary Hellenic prose are still almost non-existent. Nobody knows that Hellas boasts perhaps the best magic realist in the world, Eugenia Fakinou; at least three living poets of giant stature: Victoria Theodorou, Jenny Mastoraki, Kiki Dimoula; and a veritable galaxy of stellar novelists.

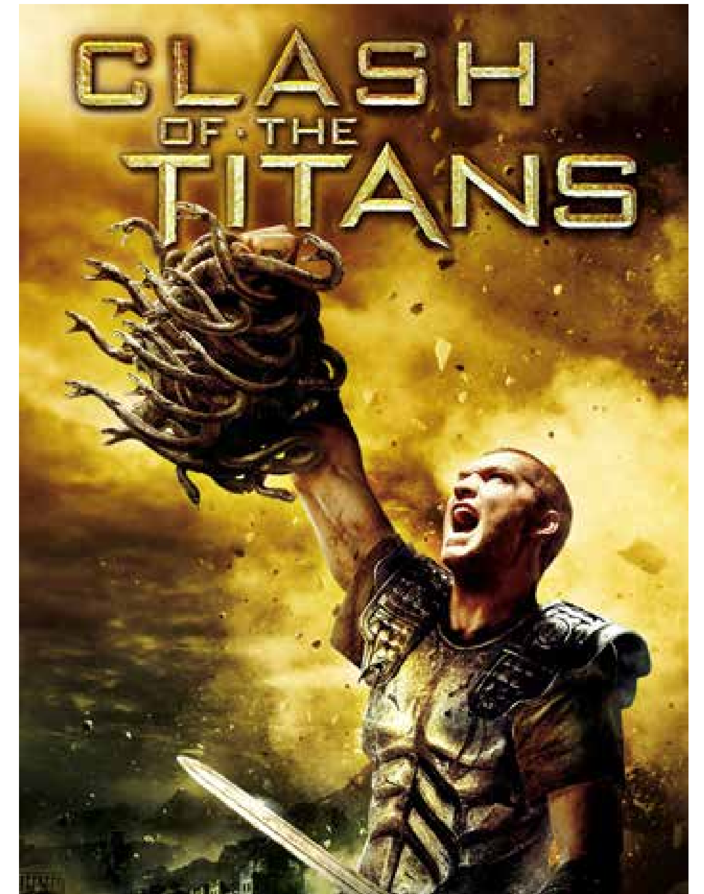
At the same time, Westerners are convinced that they "know" my tradition by general familiarity, as I had the dubious privilege to discover. Everyone mispronounces my name even after repeated corrections. In my chosen research domain of alternative splicing, the established terminology of exons and introns betrays the namer's ignorance of Hellenic: exons stay in, introns are spliced out to form the final RNA. And in a concrete example from another realm, my submission to the Viable Paradise science fiction workshop contained scenes of contemporary young Hellene men teasing each other. The participants who critiqued the work were American or Canadian; none had ever been to Hellas. Yet they took it for granted that they knew better than a native how Cretans behave and that their stereotyped assumptions trumped my first hand experience (so much for diversity and cosmopolitanism in SFF).

There have been impassioned discussions in the speculative fiction community about whether authors can write with authenticity and moral authority about cultures that aren't their own — travelogues aside, which invariably say more about the author than the place they are visiting, P. J. O'Rourke being a poster case. This discussion cannot help but be complex because it's overlaid with issues of race and colonization. Taken to its extreme logical conclusion, the injunction of "Write (only) what you know" would put a fatal crimp on fiction. On the other hand, the prevalence of such trends as Victorian Orientalism in steampunk and mangled cultural mishmashes in much fantasy are serious added annoyances in a genre plagued by parochialism.

Hellenes spent four hundred years under Ottoman occupation as second class citizens, subject to whim death and mob violence (flaying and impalement were among the common punishments), forbidden to learn to read and write their language, forced to supply their overlords with children who became janissaries or odalisques. The Hellenes — small from malnutrition and mostly olive skinned and black-haired — were called "dirty darkies" when they first arrived in Western Europe and the US after the bruising civil war. They were not people of color, but they weren't considered Aryans either, as the Nazis decided during their occupation of Hellas: each German killed by the resistance merited the execution of at least ten Hellenes, or the shooting and razing of the entire nearest village. The Hellas of today is a poor EU cousin that underwent a major economic crisis. Unlike AIG or Bank of America, it's not "too big to fail" even though its debt ratios are lower than those of the US.

Yet the culture had enough élan and vigor to flower four times: Mycenaean, Classical, Alexandrian, Byzantine; the latter, totally ignored even in the anemic world history books, lasted a millennium and acted as a bridge and a buffer between East and West, between the Romans and the Renaissance. Hellas gave the world much of its science, art, politics, philosophy (and before anyone starts emoting, I'm keenly aware of the equally decisive contributions of other cultures). Its people kept their language, identity and spirit intact through all the violations and depredations. Hellenes ace the verbal SAT with little effort, since everything in English longer than two syllables is mostly derived from our language.

So when all is taken into account, I think we are strong enough to survive even the crude cartoonish renditions of Hellas and Hellenes in the media. I'm not sure if we'll weather truly crude, crass contraptions like *The Clash of the Titans*, yet another total chariot wreck. And of course Sam Worthington's buzz cut reduced his hero status to zero. Hellenic heroes had long hair, from Achilles to Leonidas to the untamed outlaws who wrested the country's independence from the Turks. A shaved head was a sign of slavery. Long hair was a signal of freedom.



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From Infamy to National Treasure: An overview of Greek Speculative Fiction

Dimitra Nikolaidou

Both the history and current state of Greek speculative fiction present us with a paradox. It has often been said that Lucian's *True History* and Homer's *Odyssey* were, respectively, the first works of science fiction and epic fantasy. However, a variety of cultural and historical factors, culminating in an outright hostile environment in the 20th century, prevented the development of a strong speculative tradition. And yet, following the reestablishment of democracy in 1974, the increase in the popularity of speculative fiction worldwide and the Greek financial crisis, the landscape began to shift. The country today hosts an expanding, transnational speculative scene.

This article aims to examine this trajectory through a dual framework of historical and cultural studies. It will first focus on how speculative fiction was negatively perceived as both escapism and a tool of Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony, two ascriptions that carried particular weight given the turbulent sociopolitical climate that prevailed until the early eighties. Following that, it will examine through an ethnographic lens the confluence of events which introduced speculative works in Greece, beginning with science fiction, and which eventually allowed authors to develop a unique fantasy tradition. Interestingly, this tradition simultaneously rediscovers and utilizes the abundant fantastic elements of Greek tradition and myth, and aligns itself closely with the Anglophone markets. Charting this course can prove to be illuminating both for the Greek fantastic and for the potential of speculative fiction to accurately reflect as well as transform culture.

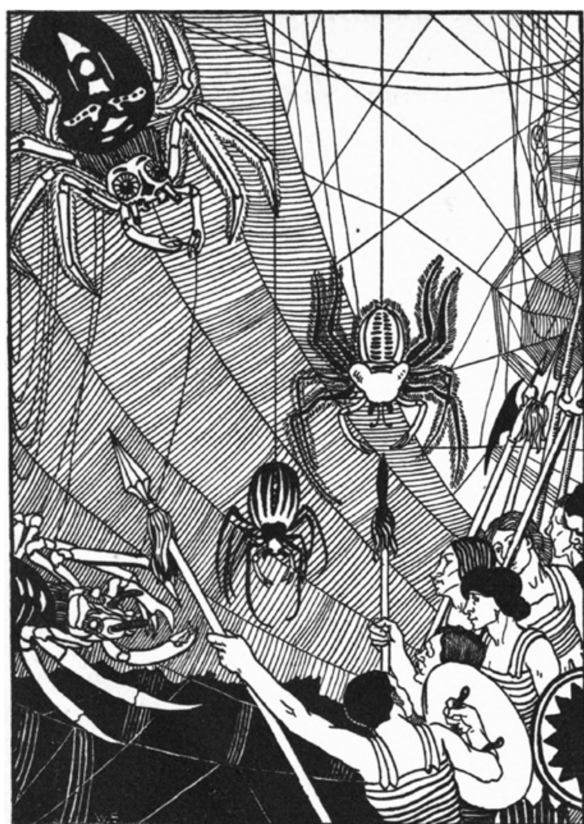


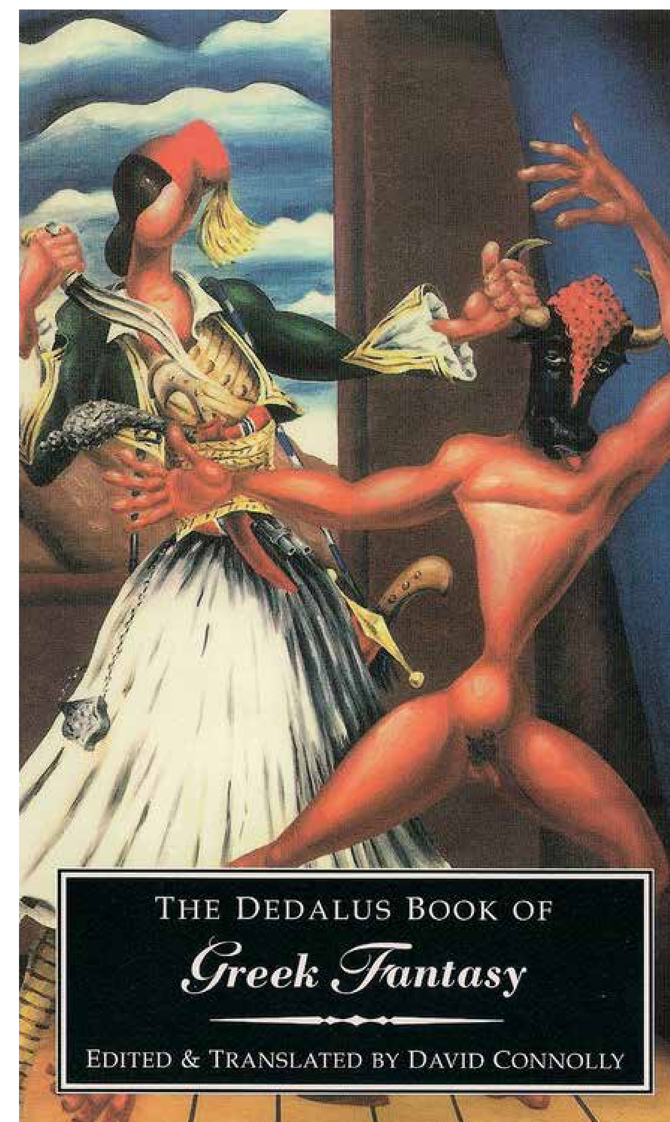
Illustration by William Strang from the 1894 edition of Lucian's *True History*; colossal lunar spiders spin a web in the air between the Moon and the Morning Star.

A Broken Thread

As Makis Panorios notes in the prologue of his seminal six volume anthology *Το Ελληνικό Φανταστικό Διήγημα (The Greek Fantastic Short Story)*, fantastical elements have always been abundant in Greek oral and literary traditions; they can be encountered in mythology but also in folklore, historical narratives, philosophy, medieval romances and epic poems. In addition, Panorios notes, speculative fiction tropes such as quests, secondary worlds, magic, otherworldly creatures and even aliens have been a part of Greek narratives since antiquity. While this might suggest the early creation of a Greek speculative tradition, this was not the case; instead, the genre remained marginalized well until the end of the 20th century.

There have been multiple sociopolitical and cultural reasons for this marginalization of the fantastic. Panorios suggests that the Fall of Constantinople, which led to a four-century long Ottoman occupation during which the Greek Orthodox Church was the only one responsible for Greek literary production, was the main reason the Greek fantastic became dormant. Foreign literature was introduced into the occupied territories a few decades before the Revolution of 1821, however these works presented an idealized image of Greek antiquity which they perceived as the cradle of Reason. In addition, local literary production before and shortly after the establishment of the Greek state in 1830 focused first on Liberation, and subsequently on the discovery and establishment of a Greek identity. Combined with the hegemonic influence of foreign literary trends such as romanticism and naturalism, this meant that the fantastic was marginalized. Panorios' anthology showcases that prominent authors such as the National Poet Dionysios Solomos as well as naturalists such as Fotis Kontoglou, Andreas Karkavitsas and Alexandros Papadiamantis did pen speculative stories at that time, mainly drawing from myth, legend and oral folklore. However, these stories were never perceived as the beginnings of a speculative tradition. David Connolly, editor of *The Dedalus Book of Greek Fantasy,* also observes that the most well-known works of fantasy, horror and science fiction in Greece were penned by authors writing in different genres, while speculative fiction was entirely marginalized and considered para-literature. These views would escalate into open disdain following WWII.

The sociopolitical and cultural situations in Greece following its establishment as an independent state in 1830 were particularly turbulent; literary as well as everyday discourse was highly political and steeped in conflict as a result. The situation was exacerbated following the Allied victory in 1945, since under the Truman Doctrine Greece entered the Western sphere of influence, subsequently becoming symbolic in the Cold War struggle. This led to the Greek Civil War (1945-1949), followed by two politically turbulent decades, the establishment of the junta in 1967 and the invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Zinovia Lialiouti posits that during this period Greece was subjected to a process of Americanisation which did not remain unopposed: the state's official anticommunist



ideology was challenged by direct anti-Americanism which was not limited to the Left but permeated the entire public sphere (45-6). This Anti-American sentiment influenced reactions to products seen as distinctly American; speculative fiction and particularly science fiction fell directly under this category. Pre-existing views of the genre as distraction and as para-literature, the exclusion of the fantastic from attempts to craft a Greek identity, now combined with the fact that the genre was dominated by the Anglo-Saxon canon, resulting in its demonization as yet another tool aiming to distract from pressing struggles and dilute Greek culture.

This distrust has been well-documented. In her survey titled *Bibliography of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror: 1960-1993* Domna Pastourmatzi notes that the first twelve works of science fiction were translated in the 1960s; it could be added the first authors to be translated were Russian (K. Volkov), French (Pierre Benoit), British (James Hilton) and Polish (Stanislaw Lem). In the seventies, a hundred novels and two hundred and thirty

short stories would be translated, while three magazines[1] either dedicated or related to science fiction would make their appearance, suggesting the genre's increased popularity. However, its perception among the general public did not shift. Pastourmatzi observes the disdain towards the genre which was summarily dismissed as "paraliterature"/paraphilology, particularly by those she terms as elite gatekeepers of the *belle-lettres*, adding that this attitude led to a dearth of critical analysis, and noting that none of these critiques offers any solid argument against the fantastic, save the aphoristic characterization of the genre as "a capitalist artifice characterized by mass production, sloppiness and lack of mental stimulation" (15). Her observations were shared by Makis Panorios[2] and Christos Lazos,[3] who also focus on the practice of fierce gatekeeping. Despite the hostile environment, there were some attempts at forming a science fiction scene through short-lived magazines and clubs; translations of science fiction steadily increased.

However, works of Greek speculative fiction remained few and far between; the hostile environment and the lack of publishing platforms was not conducive to a robust literary production. It is notable that when Makis Panorios was compiling the first two volumes of his anthology, he had to gather his material across a variety of sources such as newspapers, fanzines and literary anthologies, since no dedicated publication or database on speculative fiction existed in 1987 or 1993. Still, some observations can be made. Horror and fantasy short stories were mainly drawing inspiration from Greek folklore and oral traditions, interestingly enough excluding Greek mythology which was inspiring authors worldwide; one reason is that myths were perceived as part of the classical canon and thus an object of study instead of a lived experience as was the case with folklore. Science fiction was rooted in urban environments, and, given the limited technological capabilities of the country, did not concern the exploration of the stars but the dystopian possibilities of new technology and earthly encounters with distant civilizations. The limited samples we have suggest that Greek tradition and contemporary events both provided fertile ground for the development of speculative fiction; however, negative critical reception was not the only obstacle.

A Gradual Shift

The reception and perception of speculative fiction would eventually shift with the fall of the junta in 1974, and the stabilization of parliamentary democracy in 1981. After 1976 translations increased significantly. Fantasy, which until then was only very occasionally included in science fiction anthologies, would make its appearance with the translation of the *Hobbit* (1978) and *Lord of the Rings* (1980). Notably, fantasy and horror met with less resistance than science fiction. Political shifts aside, horror was often sold under the general category of "thriller" (*θρίλερ*) which often did not make distinctions between supernatural and non-supernatural horror; fantasy was initially perceived as children's literature. Additionally, its pseudo-medieval themes did not immediately evoke connections with US culture.

Shifts in the publishing landscape also contributed to the dissemination of translated texts. One of the most important developments was the launch of the inexpensive *Ωρορα* (Aurora) paperbacks in 1986. *Ωρόρα* novels and anthologies enjoyed a relatively large print run and were mainly sold at kiosks, thus reaching a large segment of the population (and escaping the notice of the critics), popularizing speculative fiction. Moreover, they provided a platform for three pioneering anthologists, authors and translators: George Balanos, Thomas Mastakouris and Thanasis Vembos. Mastakouris in particular focused on heroic fantasy, while Balanos and Vembos mostly wrote horror and science fiction. Following the success of *Ωρόρα*, other publishing houses began to include speculative fiction titles in their catalogues, while publishing houses dedicated to speculative fiction such as *Αίολος* and *Τρίτων* made their appearance, allowing seminal authors such as Ursula Le Guin and Michael Moorcock to enter Greek bookshops for the first time. Unfortunately, while in previous decades translations were diverse in terms of language (albeit limited to male, Western authors), during the eighties and nineties speculative fiction came to be identified with its Anglo-Saxon manifestations. This shift would influence and even shape Greek speculative fiction for decades.

Before moving on to these shifts, it would be useful to note that a subculture was taking definite shape during the late eighties and early nineties. Two specialized bookshops, "*Άγνωστη Καντάθ*" (Unknown Kadath) in Thessaloniki and "Solaris" in Athens were established and sold exclusively speculative fiction (in the original language or translated). These bookshops, along with gaming shops focused on TRPGs, card games and miniature games would become a gathering point for fans of speculative fiction before the advent of the internet, seeding the beginnings of a subculture. Most clubs at that time consisted of groups of friends occasionally publishing fanzines, having meetings and discussions, organizing movie showings and acting as amateur literary workshops.

As a result of these shifts, cultural attitudes no longer prevented authors from writing speculative fiction; Panorios notes in his 1993 prologue that selecting stories for the second volume had become much easier and that the new generation wrote speculative fiction "consciously" while his third anthology volume, published in 1994, included women writers for the first time. While these were positive shifts, other observations were less encouraging. The Greek speculative scene was by that time becoming colonized by Anglo-Saxon tropes; the genre of fantasy in particular constituted almost exclusively of mimicries of English language pulps. There were several factors contributing to this phenomenon. To begin with, Greeks had encountered exclusively Anglo-Saxon fantasy authors; the genre was identified entirely with its Western manifestation. Additionally, the elements that would have contributed to a Greek fantasy tradition, such as mythology, legends and oral traditions had been in the previous decades appropriated by the junta and elements of the far right. As a result, they now evoked disdain whereas embracing Western fantasy tropes symbolized a break with a past full of ideological dictates and divides. Science fiction and horror fared somehow better; authors had already encountered international translations and traditions, and thus were not limited in their understanding of the genre. Additionally, science fiction is often set in the real world; a Greek setting by necessity suggests different narratives than the technologically advanced, space-faring US. Horror was equally inspired by local legends and folk traditions as well as by the entrenched tropes encountered in the Anglo-Saxon canon. Interestingly, while fantasy authors focused on epic and sword & sorcery type stories, science fiction and horror authors were engaging with the entire spectrum of their respective subgenres.

It should be noted however, that despite the subtle differences in the ways in which authors approached these subgenres, speculative fiction in Greece was generally perceived as a unified field, coming under the umbrella term of *Φανταστικό* (the fantastic). While some individual readers and authors might focus on a single subgenre (with science fiction devotees being more likely to reject other genres) the relatively small population of readers prevented segmentation, leading to a rather unified subculture and nurturing Greek authors' experimentation across genres.

As a final addendum to speculative fiction in Greece in the 20th century, it is important to note that some mainstream Greek authors utilized fantastical elements to directly tackle social issues, such as Zyrana Zateli[4], or Freddy Germanos[5]; these commercially and critically successful authors were never considered speculative, and thus their work was not marginalized. This can be seen as a continuation of previous trends in which authors focusing on socio-political issues and the search of Greek identity occasionally penned speculative stories which were never classified as such. It can be deduced that the fantastic remained a relevant mode of expression in Greece, and a valid tool for dealing with pressing social issues, as long as it was not openly classed as *Φανταστικό*.

The Beginnings of a New Speculative Tradition

At the turn of the century, a number of shifts inside and outside Greece would further introduce and popularize speculative fiction in Greece. *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy was a critical and commercial success; digital gaming and in particular MMORPGs familiarized mainstream audiences with speculative narratives, and the advent of the internet allowed fans of speculative fiction to find one another and create online communities. In Greece, these shifts led to a gradual but quick change in the perception and reception of speculative fiction, as well as to the establishment of an actual writing scene.

One of the landmark changes was the launching of "9" magazine, edited by Angelos Mastorakis. *9* focused on comics, but it also included speculative short stories from international and Greek authors. Unlike previous similar attempts, it was published as a weekly supplement of the major and respected *Eleftherotypia* (*Ελευθεροτυπία*) newspaper. Thus it reached mainstream audiences and bestowed legitimacy upon speculative narratives, launching a public discourse on the shifting perception of fantasy, horror and science fiction and providing a popular platform for new and established authors. At the same time, more small publishing houses

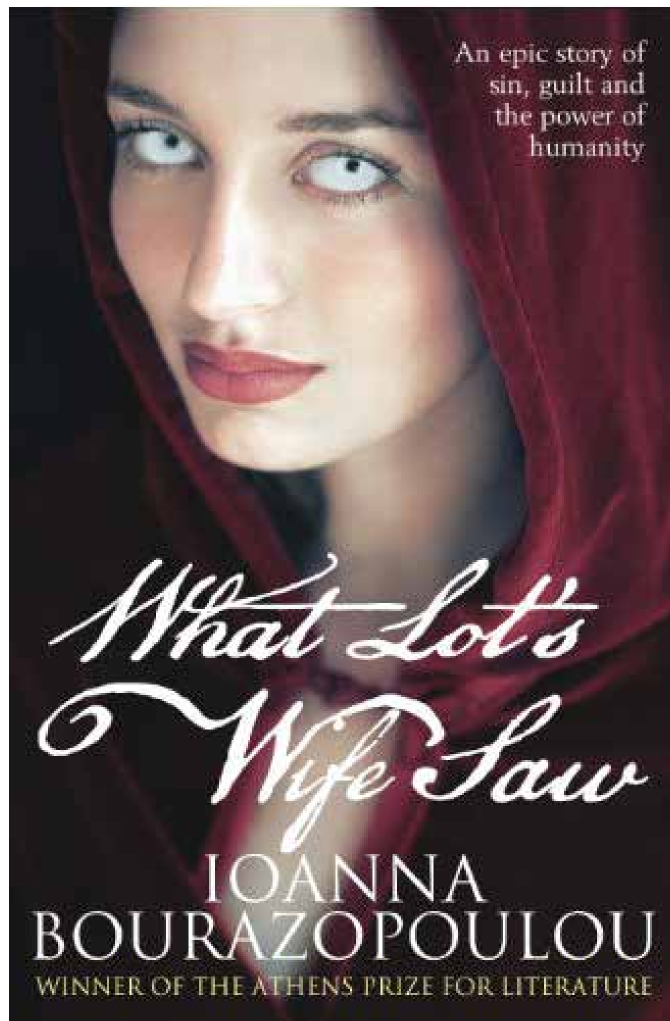
1 *Αναλόγιο* (1976–77) and Α*νδρομέδα* (1977, 1990–1993) were dedicated to science fiction, while the scientific *Αινίγματα του Σύμπαντος* (1975–1981) hosted science fiction short stories.

2 Panorios, Makis. *Το Ελληνικό Φανταστικό Διήγημα*. Αίολος, 1987.

3 Lazos, Christos. «Η Ελληνική Λογοτεχνία της Επιστημονικής Φαντασίας: Μια Σύντομη Επισκόπηση». *Διαβάζω*, no 220, 1989.

4 Zateli's works can be said to be a form of magical realism.

5 Germanos was a highly respected author, satirist, journalist and biographer who penned many humorist works of science fiction.



focusing on speculative fiction were established (such as the particularly active *Συμπαντικές Διαδρομές*) while Archetypo Publications launched Terra Nova, a paperback series similar to *Ωρόρα*.

However, the most important event in terms of the dissemination of speculative fiction would prove to be the establishment of three institutions focused on speculative works and particularly speculative fiction. The first such institution was ALEF, The Athens Club of Science Fiction. Unlike previous attempts at establishing science fiction societies, ALEF was well-organized, quick to engage with the various manifestations of speculative culture (including fiction, movie screenings, literary workshops, conferences etc.), as well as willing to move beyond the confines of the subculture and approach major institutions which would not have been otherwise involved with science fiction. The Greek Tolkien Society "The Prancing Pony" was established in 2002, and like ALEF, focused on well-organized events and nurtured international relationships with organizations of the fantastic abroad. The forum sff.gr was launched in 2003, providing the first online platform for genre authors to congregate, critique each other's work and discuss the publishing landscape. Along with ALEF's literary workshop, it was a crucial factor in the development of a Greek fantasy tradition.

This cultural shift was in part reflected in the publishing world. Despite lingering reluctance to invest in Greek authors, some major speculative fiction works were published between 2000 and 2010. Important works of science fiction include Michalis Manolios' short story collections *…Και το Τέρας* and *Σάρκινο Φρούτο*, Kostas Charitos' *Σχέδιο Fractal*, academic Abraham Kawa's *Το Ασήμι που Ουρλιάζει* and George Balanos' *Οι Ονειρότοποι της Γης*. Various works by Perikles Bozinakis and Konstantinos Missions' *Η Νύχτα της Λευκής Παπαρούνας* were among the most well-received horror works. Vasso Christou's *Λαξευτές* trilogy, Antony Paschos *Πέρα από τη Γη των Θεών*, and Lefteris Keramidas' *Κοράκι σε Άλικο Φόντο* stood out in the fantasy landscape. Notably, while works of science fiction and horror dealt with Greek issues in terms of topography and character, fantasy continued imitating foreign tropes, eschewing Greek elements of folklore and legend. Keramidas' novel was one of the few exceptions, being inspired by the Greek Middle Ages; interestingly, it remains the best-selling work of Greek fantasy. Notably, this decade also saw the publication of Ioanna Bourazopoulou's highly political fantasy work, *What Lot's Wife Saw,* which was one of the first to be translated aboard; however, much as Zateli before her, Bourazopoulou was not included in the fantasy canon until much later.

Despite the ascendancy of speculative fiction in Greece, the catalyst for its mainstream acceptance was still to come, in the form of the Greek financial crisis of 2010.

Self Publishing: a Trojan Horse

Faced with the devastating consequences of the financial crisis, Greek publishing houses were forced to resort to vanity publishing, including self-published works in their selection of titles[6]. Hence, their reluctance to invest in Greek authors was overturned, and Greek speculative titles increased exponentially. However, given that traditional criteria were demolished, the majority of speculative fiction that found its way to the printers in this way was not representative of Greek authors' potential, especially given that most established authors were against self-publishing and thus faced difficulties in presenting their work to the public.

Self-publishing had a multilevel effect on the shape of speculative writing in Greece. The often low quality of many of these works strengthened the perception of openly speculative work as paraliterature, albeit critiques now lacked the political implications and thus the ferocity of previous decades. In terms of general observations, it can be said that the development of a uniquely Greek fantasy tradition which was being built before the crisis was temporarily interrupted, since the majority of the works available in the market were heavily influenced by Anglophone hegemonic narratives[7] which globally dominated not only fiction but also movies, TV series and video games. These influences were often overt: in the case of fantasy many authors persisted in using foreign names for their characters or setting their stories in pseudo-medieval storyworlds, while horror and urban fantasy (and occasionally science fiction) was often set in foreign cities. In other cases the influence was more subtle, and concerned the repetition of tropes, stereotypes and clichés which were unrelated to Greek culture and realities even when the story was supposedly set in Greece. While fantasy had always suffered such, as seen above, horror shifted away from folklore and into the mimicry of cinematic tropes.

However, despite these negative aspects, it is undoubtedly true that the abundance of speculative works further familiarized the public with the genre, incentivized authors and allowed for the publication of many previously neglected subgenres such as urban fantasy, demolishing previously erected barriers. Another positive development though was the exponential increase of women writers. Of particular note are the fantasy authors Kiara Kalountzi, Efthimia Despotaki and Eirini Manta (whose works were not self-published) who were among the few authors inspired by Greek fantastical elements and Greek history. ALEF's science fiction anthologies, the result of its demanding literary workshops[8], were also published during this period; one of those anthologies *Αθήνα 2525* would eventually become the first Greek speculative anthology to be published abroad[9]. While horror was dominated by pulp imitations, Panayiotis Zervos' *Η Εξορία του Προσώπου* and Antonis Krysilas' *Το Στόμα του Διαβόλου* were among the works that stood out. Another such word was V. Pseftaki's new weird *Ενυδρία*, whose non-binary protagonist was among the first queer characters to appear in Greek speculative fiction [10]. At this point, it should be noted that the discourse that was already challenging speculative fictions in terms of inclusivity, diversity and resistance to hegemonic narratives had not yet significantly influenced Greek authors; while far-right speculative authors were quickly isolated due to the sociocultural circumstances outlined above, and while anarchist and leftist voices were prominent in the subculture, the problematic aspects of speculative fiction were not yet openly challenged.

The increased focus on speculative fiction also led to the increase of high profile events and cons; one of these cons was Φantasticon, which first took place in 2014. Though smaller than comic-related Greek cons, Φantasticon acted as a catalyst in the speculative fiction scene as it drew positive press coverage, showcased creative writing workshops focused on the fantastic, increased sales and led to expanded cooperation between groups active in the speculative scene. Along with several shifts in the international speculative scene, it was one of the reasons that led the Greek speculative scene to simultaneously refocus on finding its own voice, as well as to evolve towards the international markets.

Setting the Scene

As seen above, the production of speculative narratives in Greece was often disrupted through its fragmented relations with other countries and powers; however, the modern scene owes in part its shape to positive developments abroad. To begin with, the international successes of Greek speculative authors in the second decade of the 21st century brought Anglophone markets into the forefront. In particular, Natalia Theodoridou, Eugenia Trian-

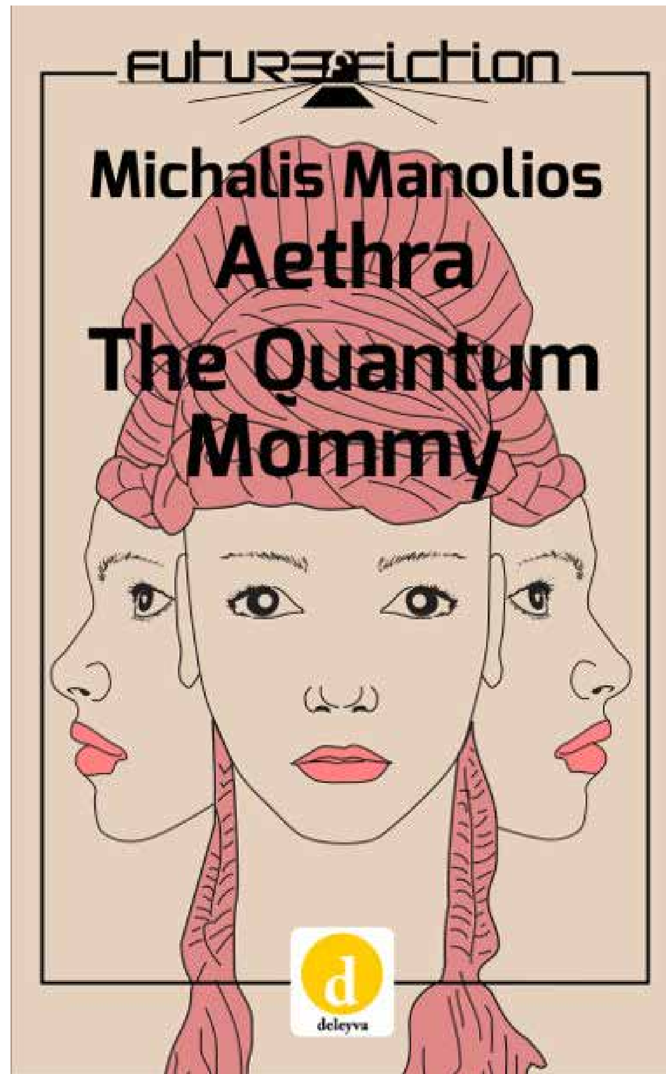
6 The practice of self-publishing in Greece sports some peculiarities. Authors generally "self-publish" by shouldering the cost of their book, while the publishing house edits, sets up, markets and distributes the book as they would do with any other title they publish. While some Vanity Presses do exist (and they do focus on speculative), traditional publishers also include author-financed titles in their lineup. As a result, publishers who would not previously publish speculative fiction either due to the financial risk or due to the publisher's personal preference were now open to the genre.

7 It needs to be noted that by "hegemonic" I don't mean problematic, however even authors such as Le Guin, Butler and Atwood, who had already been published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, tend to approach issues of race, gender and colonialism through their own cultural lens which might not be entirely applicable in other Western cultures.

8 Interestingly, while these workshops initially focused on science fiction they soon expanded their scope encompassing other genres.

9 The anthology titled *Nova Hellas* has so far been translated in English (Luna Press), Italian (Future Fiction) and Japanese.

10 Missios' was probably the first author to include homosexual themes and characters in speculative fiction.



tafyllou, Christine Lucas, Eleanna Castroianni, George Nikolopoulos and Michalis Manolios saw their stories published in Anglophone magazines and/or win international awards; quite importantly, most of these stories were decidedly Greek in tone and inspiration, showcasing the potential of authentic narratives[11]. The effects of these successes were multiple. To begin with, opening up to English-speaking markets incentivized authors who might have been discouraged by the limited publishing opportunities offered in Greece. Secondly, attempting to enter these markets inevitably familiarized authors with the conflicts and negotiations taking place in speculative fiction regarding inclusivity, diversity, the challenging of dominant Anglo-Saxon narratives and a reckoning with the problematic aspects of speculative fiction regarding race, gender etc. While this general discourse was already taking place in Greek society as in most Western countries, it bears mentioning that speculative authors were particularly quick to adapt to these challenges (the relatively younger age of many of these authors might have played a part). Most importantly however, the process of building a speculative tradition was resumed, this time including the genre of fantasy.

In 2021, apart from Triantafyllou, Theodoridou, Castroianni, Keramidas, Manolios and the prolific Lucas, authors who publish both in Greek and English include Antony Paschos, who has published his fantasy both in literary and genre magazines, Ioanna Bourazopoulou, George Nikolopoulos, Victor Pseftakis, Atalanti Evripidou, Elaine Rigas, Angeliki Radou and Dimitra Nikolaidou. A few authors, like Avra Margariti, publish their work exclusively abroad. Successful authors publishing exclusively in Greek (so far) include Efthymia Despotaki, Anna Makri, Konstantinos Kellis, Hephaestion Christopulos, Vasso Christou, Natasha Pavlitsevits, Stelios Anatolitis and Chrystostomos Tsaprailis. Keramidas and Despotaki are two of the authors engaging more deeply with the rediscovery of Hellenistic myth, legend and history, while Tsaprailis' retelling of the folk traditions of Thessaly was particularly acclaimed in literary circles; it is notable that, unlike Bourazopoulou and Zateli in previous decades, his mainstream success did not exclude him from the speculative scene/canon, suggesting that the divide is not as persistent as it used to be. Finally, while some of these authors focus on a single genre, most choose to experiment across sub-genres.

While diverse in tone, style and aim, when studied collectively the work of these authors can provide some general observations. Greek speculative scene appears to have rediscovered the fantastical elements previously abandoned due to sociopolitical circumstances, and readily adapts them in order to negotiate current concerns. In particular, authors' inspiration appears to come mostly from history, oral and rural traditions: a direct reckoning with the previous appropriation of traditions (instead of their outright rejection which dominated previous eras) and of course, current realities, with the financial crisis and social issues emerging as dominant themes particularly in science fiction narratives. Retellings of myths and folklore often focus on previously marginalized protagonists, subverting expectations and showcasing both the patriarchal structures and the political injustices dominant in these narratives. Finally, while on the surface Greek speculative fiction shares, as is to be expected, many themes, tropes and plots with other Western speculative traditions, its culture, history and even geographical position between East and West, inevitably mean that these established elements are almost always seen through a rather different lens. Finally, while authors are very diverse in their style, approach, genre and inspirations, having overcome previous cultural limitations, a common theme running through much of Greek speculative fiction appears to be the inevitability of tragedy, usually emanating from past mistakes, and the value of perseverance as a deep-seated trait which shall always lead survivors through yet another day.

11 Examples include Natalia Theodoridou's "The Birding: A Fairy Tale", which was published in Strange Horizons and received the World Fantasy Award in 2018, Eugenia Triantafyllou's "Cherry Wood Coffin" in Apex Magazine, Michalis Manolios "Aethra" which won the Aeon Award etc.

Conclusions

Currently, Greek speculative fiction is in the process of simultaneously rediscovering its fantastic tradition and aligning itself with the international speculative scene. In doing so, it produces decolonized works which are uniquely positioned to engage with the country's turbulent history as well as its most pressing sociocultural issues. As academic research and literary criticism finally begins to engage seriously with Greek speculative fiction, the genre is likely to illuminate aspects of the country's history and culture which previously remained obscure.

Illustrator Aubrey Beardsley of Lucian's *True History*; Lucian's dream.

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Fantasy is a Greek word: Musings on Fantasy Fandom in Greece

Kaethi Karageorgi

Hi! Ever heard of fantasy fandom in Greece? Do you know about its scene, its communities, its potential? No? Well, let me introduce you to them through my own adventure of discovery and involvement over the past twenty years. Who am I? Call me Circi, just like the Homeric sorceress. It's my nickname in the Greek Tolkien Society, of which I'm a founding member. Through the Society's evolution, I'll try to recount the development of fantasy fandom in my country. But first let's establish the background.

Greeks have always had a special familiarity with Fantasy. Most of us have been brought up on our celebrated mythology. Homer's great epics have served countless generations as bedtime stories. Children are commonly named after ancient gods and heroes. Landmarks still bear their ancient history. Add to this the rich traditional lore of our grandparents, in which ghosts and lamias galavant with imps and mermaids and you have a most fertile soil for the fantasy genre to grow roots in.

I am no exception. As a young child, my favourite books were the illustrated editions of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Later, the complete works of Jules Verne fuelled my love for strange machines and bold adventures. In the late 60's, television finally came to Greece and with it *Star Trek*. I was entranced. I tried to read as many books and to see as many films and TV shows of the genre as I could find. Not an easy task in 1970's Greece. Fortunately, I spoke and read English fluently and was able to obtain material from abroad. The majority was science fiction, and that suited me fine. I loved spaceships, aliens, brave new worlds. But the seed of epic sagas was lying dormant deep inside. And then, at the ripe age of 21, I discovered the source from which all modern epic fantasy springs. My best friend bought me a one-tome, paperback edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, and this changed my life forever!

I searched for more books by this great author but there was only one, a somewhat disappointing (to me at the time) children's story, called *The Hobbit*. I had to wait about a year till *The Silmarillion* was published. In the meantime, I discovered other fantasy writers and lost myself in their beautiful work. All this was known only to my family and some close friends with same literary tastes. We discussed the books we read, recommended new ones to one another, went to movies together. We never thought to search for others, who might have the same love for fantasy. We never dreamed there could be some kind of community someday. The socio-political environment of that period was restrictive and conservative to say the least, and did not allow any "foreign" influences. Plus, I had a carrier to advance and a family to take care of. All my love for fantasy was channeled to my young son. Many years later I found out that there were many others, who went through similar experiences. Each on their own or in tiny private groups, as our society was far from ready to accept the idea of fantasy fandom. So, although, the word "fantasy" originates in the Greek word 'phantasia,' which literally means "to make visible", it was a long and very slow process till the Greek fans found each other, organized into groups and finally became "visible".

It was late 1999, when rumors began to circulate about an upcoming film based on the *Lord of the Rings*. I was immediately curious, excited and very much worried about such a presumptuous undertaking. Who dared touch my favorite story, the one I kept reading each and every year? Information was very hard to come by. Fortunately, my now teenaged son was already an ardent gamer and had a primitive PC with a very slow and untrustworthy dial-up LAN connection. In the stolen half hour between work and his return from school, it gave me access to the mysterious, all-knowing Internet. Oh, the joy of discovering such a wealth of information on the film production! Oh, the amazement of discovering many international communities that discussed the film and all things Tolkien!

I started looking for European sites, as I believed they would be more focused on the literature. In those I found all the information I needed, good discussions, and interesting opinions. I also found other Greeks with the same thirst for information and contact as myself. Could there be a Greek online community? On a hunch I searched and … there it was, *www.lordoftherings.gr*—under construction. I dared contact the owner. He was a fellow Tolkien enthusiast, who happened to be a web designer and this was his pet project. All help would be appreciated. I offered to search for appropriate content, write articles, and moderate the discussion forum. The work was slow and tedious. We went online in the fall of 2000 and were happily surprised to see hundreds of Tolkien fans joining. That was the push that started the boulder of my involvement rolling. It was so powerful that it is still rolling twenty years later.

During that time, board games, D&D and LARP were becoming very popular and played a major role in spreading the love for fantasy. Many of the people who had joined our discussion forum already knew each other through gaming. They had started gathering at a few select gaming houses, thus forming informal but dynamic communities. Others, older and more literary inclined, belonged to the already well established and flourishing Athens Science Fiction Club or other smaller and less organized groups, like medieval reenacting communities, student reading clubs or Star Wars and Harry Potter fan clubs.

After exchanging views and personal stories in the forum, some of us decided to meet. The meetings became regular. We arranged to watch films together. Through members studying in the UK, we discovered the Tolkien Society and travelled to Oxford for their annual meeting. There we met people from all over Europe, who had formed proper Societies. In the summer of 2002, we made our first group excursion, so people from all over Greece could meet up close. All this required organization and legal validity. The Greek Tolkien Society—The Prancing Pony was officially founded on October 5th, 2002. I was named chairperson and continued to hold this or other positions in the steering committee for most of our 19 years. We were now established and slowly we became well known and accepted in the budding fantasy circles. Yet, we remained intentionally unknown to the general public. Greek society was not yet ready and so we kept a low profile.

ΦantastiCon logo

That lasted for about ten years, in which we quietly built up our position, mainly in the European Tolkien scene. We tried to attend almost every major event happening. We produced academic papers, theatrical plays, took part in cosplay and quizzes, became the heart of the party in every event we visited. At home, we organized small events for members and friends, participated in events of other groups, carefully opened up to genre-friendly publicity, strengthened our unity, gathered knowledge and momentum. Our membership numbers were never big, oscillating around 100, but our fame as a well-organized and close-knit community grew steadily and gained us many friends. All this required total commitment, strong leadership and a lot of people-skills on the part of the steering committee. Being the oldest and most experienced, I voluntarily took on the load, gave it my best and was taught a great deal in the process.

All the while, the long-awaited change in society's acceptance of Fantasy and its fans was happening unobtrusively. The younger generations that had grown up on gaming and fantasy literature, were now as adults influenced by common opinion. Films, books and TV-shows of the genre became mainstream, nobody cared anymore about the odd t-shirt seen in the subway

The logo of the Greek Tolkien Society

or even the cloak and elven ears worn at a café. Conventions and fairs started to happen. Comicdom Con, (2004-2019) dedicated to the art of comics, was being held annually at the prominent Hellenic American Union. The Science Fiction Fair took place each spring on the beautiful island of Syros (2004-2009), the "SFF-rated" International Sci-Fi Film Festival was held in Athens for 10 years (2006-2016). In 2006 the enlightened leader of the Athens Science Fiction Club thought it might be time for the various communities to form a united front. They invited every known entity to participate in a Union. The Greek Tolkien Society responded positively to this great idea but unfortunately only a few others did. The Union was never realized. The time was not yet ripe.

The Prancing Pony kept its course, The hope of a big public event was always on our minds and we knew the time for it was approaching. It finally arrived in the winter of 2014, in the form of a mini festival proposed by a friend and held in his publishing house/bookshop. It was called "Three days to bring them all" and it gathered many of the most prominent and involved members of the Greek fantasy community. It gave us the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a big festival and it resulted in the forming of the non-profit organization "Greek Fantasy Society". Representing the Prancing Pony and ready to share my experience, I joined its steering committee and started working towards the first ever public, admission free, Greek Fantasy Festival. "ΦantastiCon" would be dedicated solely to the fantasy genre in all its aspects and art forms and promote the work of Greek authors and artists. It would be a fun-filled festival for fans, gamers, authors, artists, collectors and communities. Later that year two small events tested the waters of fandom response with very encouraging results. A "Tolkien Day" was organized by The Prancing Pony in October and a weekend pre-festival event, "The Way to ΦantastiCon", was held in November, both with encouraging results. The planning went ahead, duties were allotted and people worked voluntarily on their own free time compensating inexperience with passion, overcoming obstacles with ingenuity, realizing the Dream.

The first ΦantastiCon took place in October 2015 to the general acceptance of the public and an unprecedented success. Exhibitors arrived from all over Greece, guest speakers covered a variety of academic fields, visitors came in the thousands, praise was high, complaints low, everyone left with a smiling "See you next year"! No amount of tiredness, frustration or non-existent funding could stop us now. Learning from problems and mishaps, we continued for four more years (2015-2019) to hope and dream, striving to provide a better, richer in content, more diverse festival for our visitors. Our reward was the continuing support of the thousands of fans as expressed in various circles and social media, as well as that of our guest speakers, publishers and exhibitors, who praised our organization and friendliness. Encouraged by our success, the demand of the local public and the support of a publishing house, friends in Thessaloniki organized a "sister" festival called "Fantasmagoria" (2017-2019). Our support was immediate and gladly provided. Then

another friend, an exceptional illustrator and fantasy blogger, organized a special children's fantasy festival called "Fairytale Garden" (2018-2019). What better theme for children than the Hobbit? Work a plenty for us, who wanted to support this unique effort.

Parallel to these quixotic endeavors there was another festival, commercial and on a much larger scale, the AthensCon (2015-2019). It was based on a more general view of the fantasy genre including pop-culture themes and thus attracted a more diverse and larger public, having a big success despite its somewhat steep entrance fee. Still, the positive talk of the fans was about the smaller, more intimate and cool festivals, where people gathered to meet friends and have a good time. The internet provided space for further fantasy content. Blogs and podcasts, special pages and discussion groups, sites for every fantasy subgenre, special online magazines. A huge variety of information and opinion to please even the most discerning geek. Fantasy had concurred!

Then Covid-19 happened… And all was put on hold… Including me, finally!

For the past seven years I had been the proverbial "servant of two masters" dividing my efforts between the Prancing Pony and ΦantastiCon. After the success of our first "Tolkien Day" in 2014, we proceeded to hold annual public events as well as having a vital presence in the various festivals. Our members from Northern Greece were becoming numerous, so an annual visit to Thessaloniki plus a public Tolkien event there became mandatory. Then, in 2017, we held the first "Athens Tolkien Symposium" in honor of our 15th anniversary. The two-day affair, with internationally acclaimed Tolkien scholars and Greek academics, spiced by musical performances, was held at a well-known Athens literary café and was attended by over 300 guests. Additionally, there was a special "retreat" excursion for our members, called "Mordor Bootcamp" (let your imagination run wild…). Add to this the administration of our online fanzine, our Facebook page and public group, our members' private group etc. Then the trips abroad, representing two well respected groups, the invitations to various events that had to be accepted, the constant contact with the people I had met.

Tired yet? Well, I was. By the time the pandemic hit, I was so tired that I was ready to quit from every official position. I have had enormous help and support from the other members, especially in the Prancing Pony, where we are practically a family. I was very happy and very proud of what I had helped accomplish, but I felt burned out. I had done all I could. Fantasy was now a recognized, accepted, even promoted part of our culture. Greek genre writers found publishers more easily, their books were included in the best seller lists, their stories were translated and published abroad, they won prestigious awards. There are PhD theses on fantasy from the University of Thessaloniki English Lit department. Greek scholars were invited to present papers at international conferences, authors were interviewed by prestigious magazines, painters had their art recognized and sold internationally. But most satisfying of all was the fact that our children will never know the hardships and restrictions we have had to face. That they can take fantasy culture for granted. The future of Greek fandom has been secured and I have played my small part. The obligatory rest of the last two years helped recharge my fan-batteries, rekindle my aspirations and refocus my dreams. I am ready again to start working for the glory of fandom!

KAETHI KARAGEORGI IS AN ARDENT FOLLOWER OF ALL ASPECTS OF THE FANTASY GENRE BE THEY LITERATURE, FILM, MUSIC OR ART.

Living the Life Fantastic in Greece: Speculative Fiction as a Vehicle for Social Change

Dimitra Nikolaidou and Victor Pseftakis

Despite being accused of relying on regressive and problematic tropes and politics, it is also recognized that speculative fiction can be a well-suited tool to promote progressive ideas, imagine alternative futures and prompt change. In Greece, this process takes some interesting twists and turns.

In the last few years, an increasing number of Greek authors have published or are attempting to publish their work in English-speaking publications for a variety of reasons. However, the current focus on the treatment of social issues in speculative fiction (especially issues of race, gender and LGBTQ representation) presents these authors with additional challenges as well as opportunities to explore and engage with such issues in ways yet untouched by Greek mainstream fiction.

As scholars and professionals who, for the best part of twenty years, have participated in the Greek speculative scene in a multiplicity of roles, we have had the opportunity to observe this struggle in various levels: in creative writing workshops, in conventions focused on speculative fiction, in publishing houses struggling to balance new and classic narratives, and finally, in our direct engagement with authors eager to enter the Anglophone market, working as their editors and translators. In all these fields, we have observed speculative fiction functioning as a vehicle for the further promotion of social causes and the normalization of previously marginalized narratives. This is particularly interesting considering the problematic narratives that first introduced the genre to Greece, and which still dominate the market.

First Contact

Due to unique circumstances examined elsewhere in this issue, the majority of Greek authors first came into contact with speculative fiction in the 1980s through classic works which are currently under intense scrutiny as far as it concerns their problematic attitudes on race, gender, sexuality and the perception of foreignness. In particular, while very few works by Octavia Butler, Ursula Le Guin and Toni Morrison were translated relatively early — along with political science fiction written by Russian and European authors — the Greek public became familiar with speculative fiction mostly through the early pulp works of Michael Moorcock, Franz Leiber, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Howard etc. Despite the existence of small, sociopolitically aware groups of speculative fiction fans, pulp was dominating the market due to the vastly popular Ω anthologies, which were sold cheaply at the country's numerous kiosks. It should be noted that these anthologies are still particularly popular and sought after by genre fans.

Given the small size of the Greek market, even respectable publishing houses investing in speculative fiction tended to avoid risks when it came to choosing which works to translate: until at least 2010. Classic pulp authors (whose work was notably in the public domain) as well as a few popular contemporary authors were dominating both the bookshop shelves and the kiosks. As a result, while exceptions did exist, the public's perception of speculative fiction was shaped by works rooted in the early 20th century or, at its best, the 1960s and 1970s, thereby connecting speculative fiction with regressive or, at best, uncritical perceptions of race, gender and sexuality.

The perception of speculative fiction as an apolitical, escapist genre further complicated the issue. As seen elsewhere in this issue, speculative fiction in Greece was derided as an attempt to divert attention from serious matters and as such, it was not perceived as a field in which to negotiate issues of import. While some science fiction aficionados might have argued this perception (Dr. Domna Pastourmatzi, Christos Lazos etc.), the majority of readers turned to speculative fiction mainly for entertainment purposes. Consequently, the many problematic aspects of the dominant pulp titles which comprised the bulk of speculative translations in Greece remained unchallenged; neither academics nor independent scholars and commentators dissected them, preferring instead to critique established literary genres. Given that the Greek public was essentially playing catch-up, consuming mainly authors who had published their work decades before, and given that no serious critiques were offered on these works, it became accepted for speculative fiction to present a regressive vision of the world. Though the readers themselves might not be regressive or unaware of the problematic elements, they still accepted those as emblematic of the genre. The subgenre of science fiction was the sole exception to the rule, since translations of literary, respected authors co-existed with pulp fare; indeed, the anti-capitalist, anti-colonial critique of many such works offered an argument for the few voices defending the genre as worth publishing.

The stark divide that placed "literary" fiction on one side and speculative fiction on the other also produced another obstacle: the consumers of speculative fiction earned the status of outsiders as far as it concerned their reading habits, and became weary of any type of sociopolitical-based critique, viewing any attempt to introduce change as potentially hostile. While this is a common phenomenon in subcultures worldwide, the Greek timeline is very particular: the introduction of speculative fiction and fantasy (in the 1960s and 1980s respectively) happened very close to the intensification of calls for its socio-political re-evaluation. While labelling speculative fiction as paraliterature differs from calling out its problematic elements and suggesting it become more diverse and inclusive, for fans who had just discovered Lovecraft and Moorcock the discourse could easily be perceived as a continuous attack on what they loved.

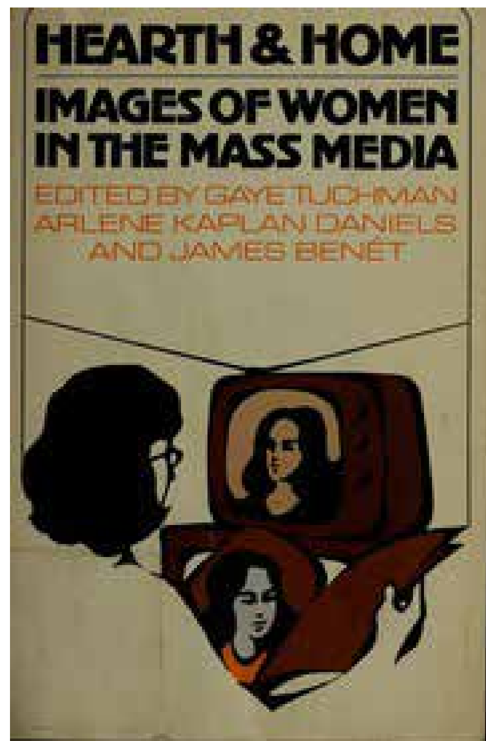
A Multilevel Shift

However, this was about to change. In the last years of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, the fantastic in all its permutations exploded in popularity across the West, including, of course, Greece. Along with the *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy, computer gaming, as well as shifting perceptions concerning the value of popular culture, the internet proved to be one of the most important facilitators of this shift. However, the internet also facilitated an extremely intense discourse over one fundamental issue: who was speculative fiction for? The racism, sexism, homophobia and colonial undertones of both pulp works and contemporary classics were highlighted; interestingly, issues previously discussed mostly in academic papers, along with the corresponding terminology, now became a lens through which all speculative works were critiqued. Transmedial works, fan works and shared universes, which tend to spring around speculative works more often than in other genres[1], finally allowed for the expression of a multiplicity of voices. Soon, major speculative magazines were including in their "submission guidelines" section prompts for previously marginalized groups, minorities and women to submit their stories, while simultaneously declaring that racism, sexism, homophobia etc were unwelcome in their pages.

This shift prompted interesting reactions in Greece. With the exception of its particularly progressive family laws, the country is neither in the forefront of social change, nor is it particularly resistant to it. Due to sociopolitical circumstances, however, intensely regressive elements had been purged early in the community of the fantastic: works or groups with far right connotations and connections were actively marginalized if not completely expelled both from the subculture, and the publishing world[2]. While apolitical, most organizations and groups did not and do not tolerate the expression of far-right ideology. The gaming community, which tends to be interconnected with the fantastic, was not as intense in its views since it had been formed after the reestablishment of democracy in 1974 and includes mostly younger people, who did not experience the polarization of Greek society during the Civil War or the 1967 Junta; however, participants are still influenced by the general disdain of the community for what is summarily called "the fascists."

1 See Jenkins, 2019.

2 Interestingly, most participants in the scene do not wish to accuse these groups "on the record"; however their absence from events, publications and open internet fora speaks for itself.



While this clear-cut distinction might suggest that the communities centered around the fantastic in Greece might be fertile ground for social change, we should not forget that regressive views are rarely expressed as outright hostility towards women, minorities or immigrants; despite what the "culture war" raging on the internet proclaims, in most instances we have encountered in Greek communities of the fantastic, homophobia, sexism etc. persist not as the result of conscious choice, but because they have been interwoven within the types of narratives we have consumed, becoming indistinguishable from them. Our students, publishers and fellow writers do not purposefully choose to write or circulate stories that exclude women or include harmful stereotypes concerning race; instead, they repeat entrenched tropes and clichés uncritically, or they participate in the symbolic annihilation[3] of entire groups because they have never encountered these groups in the narratives they consumed themselves. As Ricoeur has written, "we are not born into a world of children ... as unspeaking children, we come into a world already full of our predecessor's narratives" (qtd in Cobley 19).

Unfortunately, Greek consumers have until very recently encountered the most problematic of narratives before coming into contact with contemporary speculative narratives. Even then, these contemporary narratives are not necessarily socially aware: many authors come into contact with the fantastic through gaming and the many fantasy, horror and science fiction TV series and movies, as well as popular young adult series including *Harry Potter* and *Twilight* which are less intensely curated and still perpetuate harmful tropes. Finally, many speculative narratives crafted to avoid problematic elements often come to Greece already enshrined in polarizing controversy, which hinders their acceptance and prohibits their normalization.

3 See Tuchman, 1978.

Another obstacle comes in the form of cultural hegemony. While sexism and homophobia are unfortunately universal, they manifest differently in different countries; racism, religious intolerance and hostility towards immigrants and cultural appropriation take entirely different form in Greece than they do in the US or Britain. However, the discourse on these issues is often directly imported from the Anglophone countries. This both ill-equips proponents of progressive ideas to argue against societal ills, and alienates neutrally disposed Greeks who are presented with arguments which do not resonate with their daily experience.

Wrestling with Progress

Ironically, it's this dependence on Anglophone discourse which propelled speculative fiction to become a vehicle for social change in Greece. Since the market is small, and given that for many authors who wrote speculative fiction there existed no publishing avenues save self-publishing and vanity presses, many Greek authors turned an eye towards the Anglophone market where they quickly discovered that the standards of magazines, anthologies and other publishing venues had shifted to prioritize social awareness. At the same time, the majority of Greek authors achieving wide success abroad were aware of socio-political issues, and dealt with it in their work. Examples include Eleanna Castroianni, Natalia Theodoridou, Eugenia Triantafyllou and Christine Lucas (some of whom are interviewed in this issue). Finally, Greek authors who attempted to network abroad via social media, writing workshops and live events quickly came into contact with the discourse on the inclusivity and diversity of speculative fiction.

In summation, in attempting to reach a worldwide audience by participating in the English-language speculative canon, authors quickly discover that their work needs to engage with cultural conflicts only recently addressed in Greek culture and Greek mainstream fiction. As professionals who teach creative writing, and as translators who edit and translate from Greek to English for those authors interested in reaching the international market, we have seen authors react in a number

of ways to this realization. A few are already cognizant of the ongoing global discourse; among those, some complain about censorship and "agendas" while others are rather militant in their defense of inclusivity and diversity. Notably, the intensity of the arguments does not always correspond to the work of these authors. That is to say, those on the defensive do not necessarily produce racist or sexist work. Rather, they react to what they perceive as pressure to politicize their writing, conform to the demands of an Anglophone market and, most importantly, resist the idea that the genre they love will become unrecognizable. Equally interesting is the fact that those who view the demand for inclusivity favourably do not necessarily avoid the pitfalls of sexism, racism or homophobia in their own work, having internalized many of the old, problematic tropes.

However, the vast majority of authors we encounter are open to the idea of recognizing problematic elements in their work and removing them, particularly when these elements are recognized as hindrances to entering the Anglophone market. In many ways, the market's demand acts as motivation for a quicker-than-expected shift towards socially aware narratives, in a way that would not have been possible if authors only targeted local audiences. This is not meant to underestimate the willingness of Greek authors to actually engage with these issues; given that the relevant discourse is prominent, there's a genuine interest in avoiding mistakes and clichés, which we personally witnessed in workshops, seminars and classrooms[4]. However, it is also evident that, in part, the phenomenon is strengthened by the still-dominant perception of fantasy and science fiction as imported genres. Authors are less resistant to changing elements in speculative narratives in order to conform to the Anglophone market's demands, since the Anglophone market is the origin of speculative fiction and thus considered authorized to dictate its shape and form.

At the same time, it should be noted that these demands do create unique problems for Greek authors. References, language and customs that might be considered problematic in the US do not have the same connotations in Greece, but authors are often pressured to make changes to "Americanize" a story. An easily accessible example would be the genre of folk horror, in which many tropes could be perceived as racist by a non-Greek who is not aware of the particular

4 Notably, our short seminars on gender and LGBTQ characters tends to be among the most popular we offer; equally notably perhaps, a common question we receive is "am I allowed to insert homosexual characters in speculative fiction?"

conditions and history of the country[5]; Greek authors are often baffled when told that a certain monster or historical reference could be misunderstood and thus become an obstacle in placing the story in a market abroad. In such cases, authors often opt to abandon these elements, myths, or historical events altogether. In other cases, authors (especially younger authors who are less familiar with the country's history and more aware of the online discourse[6]) choose to address issues such as slavery or gender relationships from a US viewpoint from the beginning. As a result, the demands of the Anglophone market end up in many cases colonizing Greek horror or fantasy, superseding authentic narratives, imposing foreign norms and possibly interfering with Greek authors' relationship with their own myths, legends and culture.

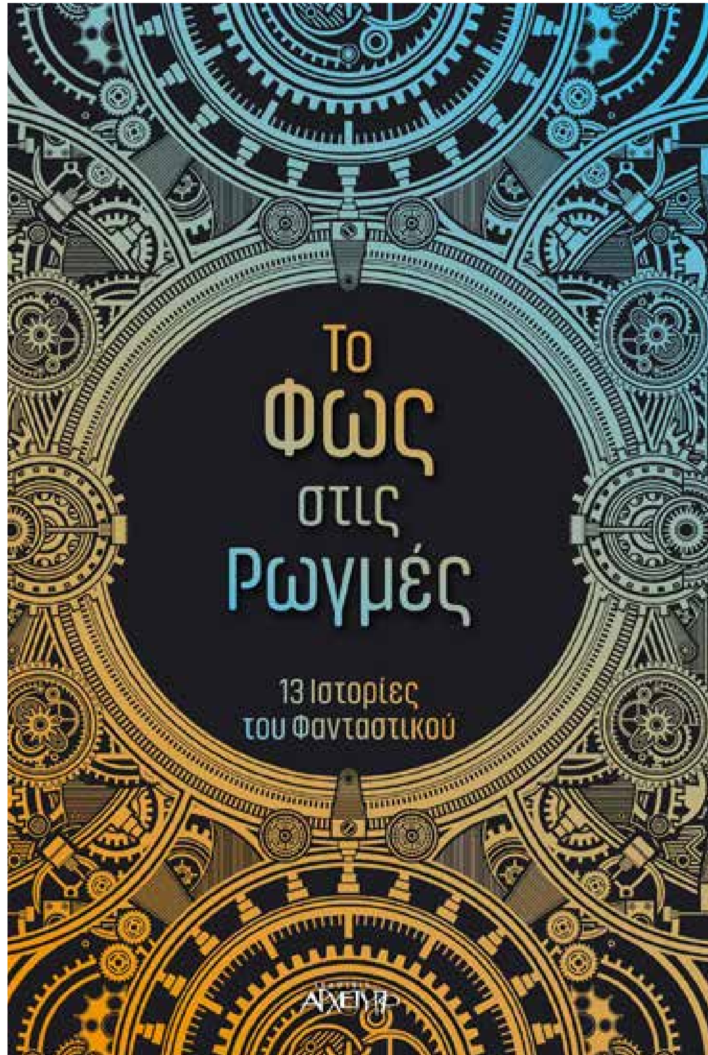
Interconnecting Spheres

It should be noted that the majority of Greek authors do not write solely for an international audience; with few exceptions, they target both the Greek and the Anglophone market instead. While most critically and financially successful authors will eventually gravitate towards attempting publication abroad, they still write short stories for Greek anthologies and publish novels with Greek publishing houses. However, their work is now influenced by the international discourse on inclusivity and by the renewed awareness of and focus on social issues. This has caused a shift noticeable even by audiences who do not come into direct contact with the Anglophone speculative production and the related discourse on inclusivity.

Previous to 2010, few Greek speculative works could be termed inclusive. However, this has changed in recent years. A survey of the most commercially and

5 Examples include the description of certain monsters such as Arapis, the depiction of Roma and the historical conditions in the Balkans.

6 At this point we feel compelled to mention an established author who complained that younger speculative authors "live in the internet" and demand the language change in ways which would facilitate progress in the US but would not make any sense in Greece, where language is gendered.



critically successful speculative works in recent years[7] reveals that best-selling Greek speculative fiction can now claim to be inclusive, as immigrant and LGBTQ protagonists appear often in their pages. Chronis Missios' *Ο Λέκγουελ και οι Ξεχασμένοι Θεοί* includes one of the very few LGBTQ characters in sword and sorcery, while Michalis Manolios' *Αγέννητοι Αδελφοί* does the same for science fiction (2013). *Ενυδρία* by Victor Pseftakis (2011) toyed with the gendered nature of the Greek language by having a non-binary protagonist who is split in two in the second part of the novel. Eirini Manta's *Το Δάσος με τα Πέπλα* (2015) included a differently abled protagonist, while *Το Δαιμόνιο της Γραφής* (2012) by the same author dissected Lovecraft's misogyny. The vast majority of stories in *Αθήνα 2525*, the science fiction anthology edited by the Athens Club of Science Fiction (later translated in English, Italian and Japanese as *Nova Hellas*) include immigrants as protagonists. Konstantinos Kellis' *Η Σκιά στο Σπίτι* included a gay character, and was the only author on the list who received a reader's complaint, possibly because his best-selling horror story reached a much wider audience than other works on the list. The protagonists of Natasha Pavlitsevits' *Κάπου Αλλού* weird novel are a lesbian couple, while Stelios Anatolitis' *Τερμίτες* includes a transgender character. Finally, LGBTQ, differently abled and immigrant characters were prominent in the two most high-profile speculative anthologies of 2021, which were both published by large publishing houses, *Ίσως* (edited by ALEF) and *Φως στις Ρωγμές* (edited by us, as *Tales of the Wyrd*). It is worth noting that, when it came to all three anthologies in the list, the editors did not specifically request inclusive stories as Anglophone anthologies and magazines often do; yet it became evident that most prominent Greek authors have widened their perception of what constitutes a speculative protagonist.

7 These works are all traditionally published, well-received and entered the best-selling lists in the speculative fiction genre; almost all of them sold out at least their first edition. However, other inclusive works were also published during these last few years incuding Kelly Theodorakopoulou's *Η Φυλακή στο Κεφάλι σου* (2017), Dinos Hadjiyorgis *Στάχτη στα Μάρμαρα* (2019) Argyro Charitou's *Πλανευτές* (2019), and Ersi Lavari's *Witchmark* (2021). Finally, major authors such as Antony Paschos and Hephaestion Christopoulos' upcoming anthologies, which are to be published by mainstream publishing houses in 2022, do include LGBTQ protagonists. In another note, comic books by Steve Stivaktis, Angeliki Salamaliki, Dennis Yatras, Avgo Kanaki and Yannis Rubulias also present us with socially aware, inclusive narratives.

Issues of inclusivity aside, speculative fiction is still at a crossroads when it comes to the role it can play in the negotiation of social issues. Themes of colonialism and hegemony as well as class struggle have routinely featured in Greek speculative fiction given the country's turbulent history; the trend is much stronger in science fiction, while fantasy and horror tend to engage with different themes. Unfortunately, a study of female characters in Greek speculative fiction and their evolution would constitute an entirely different chapter; while the increased visibility of marginalized characters can be quantified, problematic representations of women and the gradual development of a feminist perspective requires a separate analysis.

Finally, while the observations above suggest that the consumers of speculative fiction in Greece do reward and enjoy inclusive stories, it should be noted that publishers remain risk-averse; while Greek authors might publish inclusive stories unhindered, when it comes to translations publishers are still skeptical of elements that they fear might limit their audience. However, given the success of the above examples, and the increased visibility of inclusive works in awards and press coverage (which brings them to the attention of Greek publishers), socially progressive narratives are obviously considered less of a risk and are picked up for translation more often than they used to be.

Conclusions

It is by now well-established that speculative fiction is often rooted in problematic tropes and clichés, but also has the capacity to act as a vehicle for social conflict and negotiation often resulting in social change. In the case of Greece, the specific demographics and history of the subculture centered around speculative fiction resulted in it becoming a fertile field for subtle cultural conflict and negotiation in which issues of cultural hegemony, representation and visibility play a major part. The advent of the internet and the prominence of social media have only accelerated the process, which is not limited to Greece but mirrors a worldwide phenomenon. However, our observations as professionals suggest that the speculative scene is particularly open to gradual but steady progress which, unlike what currently manifests in the Anglophone scene as a 'culture war,' has not invited backlash. Additionally, as inclusive works earn awards and become best-sellers abroad, publishers are more likely to translate these works for the Greek market, thus restoring balance in a market still dominated by pulp fare, and accelerating social change: a role which speculative fiction is uniquely suited to play.

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Tales of Kalikantzari

Phoenix Alexander interviews Polis Loizou

Please introduce yourself and say a little about how you started writing.

I'm a Cypriot storyteller working across various disciplines. I started writing from a young age, mostly ghost stories with twist endings. I wrote my first 'novel' when I was 15 — a darkly comic psychological thriller that I've been trying to rewrite ever since.

Your forthcoming novella 'A Good Year' draws on the Cypriot folkloric figures of the kallikantzaroi. Could you introduce these to non-Cypriot readers, and explain what drew you to write about them?

The kallikantzaroi (or 'kalikantzari' as I spell it in the book) are goblins that come up from underground during the twelve days of Christmas, when the waters are 'unbaptised', to mess with humans. They're dark and hairy, with either one or two of their legs being donkey or goat, and they stink of sweat and urine. They like to party, gleefully dancing to the music of fiddles. On the day of Epiphany, they go back underground where they resume their task of sawing away at the tree of life, to wear down humanity. I'd had it in my mind for a while to write a novella, or short novel, set over the twelve days of Christmas. I liked the idea of using that as a structure. A few years ago, I got accepted onto a development programme called TellYours, in which I got to hone my skills at oral storytelling. Delving into folklore made me dig into my own roots, and when an old friend came back from the motherland with a book of tales about the kalikantzari, something ignited within me. How had I not put together in my mind the kalikantzari with this idea for a book set over the twelve days of Christmas? It was perfect.

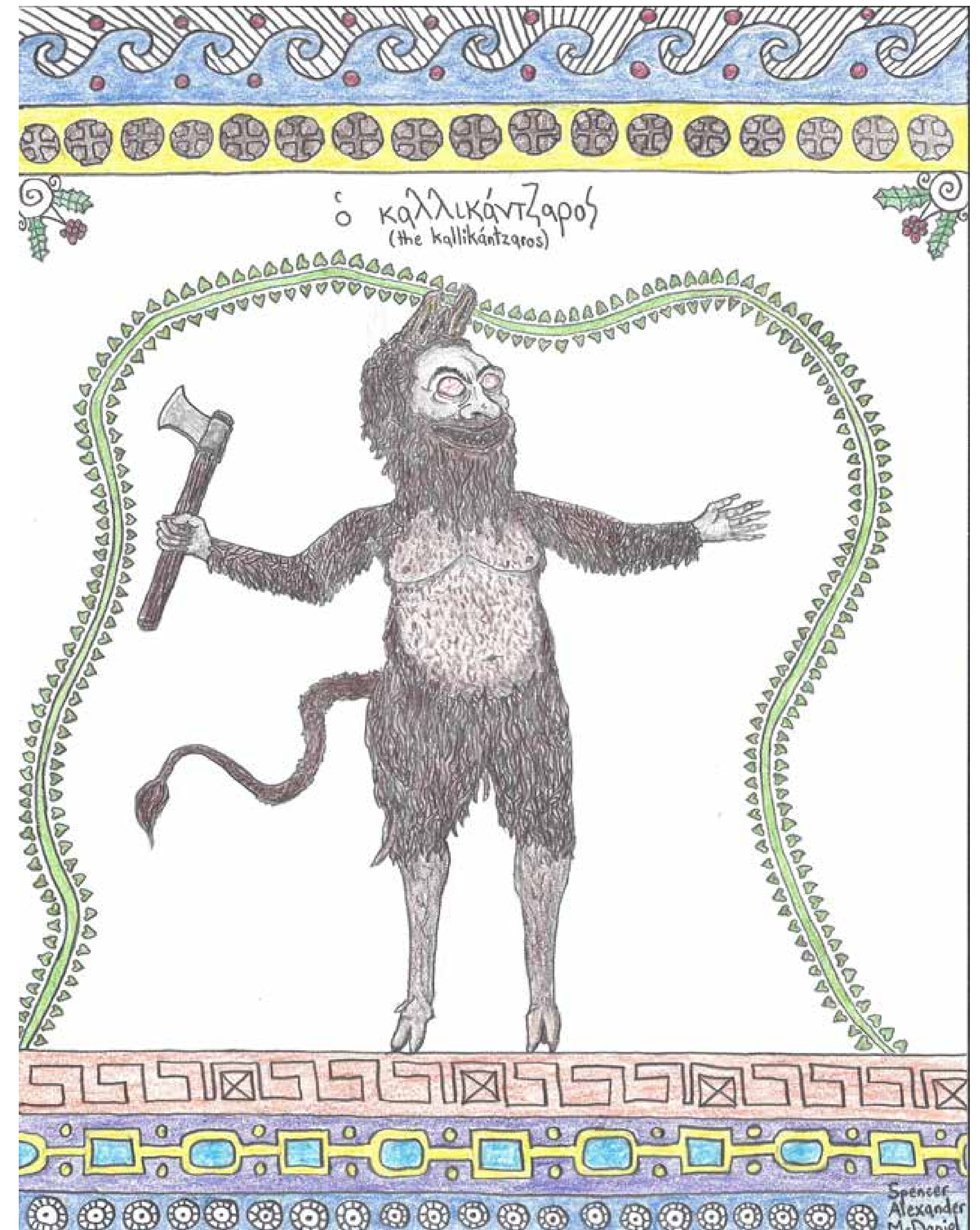
Did your creative process change at all when writing a more 'speculative' text?

I don't think my creative process changed at all, as I tried to write the story simply as a psychological drama, set in the past, with folk customs and superstitions at the forefront. It was always a book about fear rather than a horror story. What was strange, however, was that I ended up writing the novella on my four weeks of furlough during the first lockdown. So much of the story was about illness, darkness, isolation, fear of infection, uncertainty about the future. That came from writing about Cyprus' troubled history, and the disease-ridden poverty of rural communities at the time, but of course I couldn't help wondering if Covid was seeping into my writing. A thing that definitely changed while writing this speculative text was my perception of these folkloric figures. Suddenly, they were more than the nasty beings from my childhood; they were an allegory for depression, or any period of darkness awaiting light, which always comes back but always goes away again. They became my own 'queer fear' demons, growing up as a bisexual man in a religious country. It even occurred to me that tales of kalikantzari might be rooted in racism, possibly against Romany people — communities passing through villages, playing their music.

How does your Cypriot identity inform your writing?

Even though I grew up in Cyprus, I encountered almost no Cypriot literature. At school, it was either writers from Greece or English and American works. My fiction was always to be in English, targeted at English-speaking readers and set in their culture(s). My debut, *Disbanded Kingdom*, was exactly that. It was only while I was on holiday in Cyprus back in 2017, when I suddenly had the epiphany of setting my second novel (*The Way It Breaks*) in my hometown of Limassol instead of my then home of London, that something shifted. That book *needed* my Cypriotness. I couldn't explain why. But I'm glad I listened to myself - the 'Cypriotness' gave that story layers I had never considered before. It made me look at myself and the country I grew up in, the state of unease defined by our precarious political situation, the sense that nothing is certain and that 'freedom' is never a given. By pushing further into my background, I feel I've become more sensitive to the complexities of both individuals and their cultures. Strangely, it made me feel freer as a writer. I realised I could comfortably write about things and people I know well, and not care if non-Cypriots missed the subtext. In 'The Way It Breaks', I used the Greek rather than colonial names of towns, and insisted on not italicising Greek words — in this world, English was the foreign tongue. It felt revelatory to me. While writing 'A Good Year', I thought of it as a folktale told by a Cypriot, even though I was writing in English. I don't know where I'll be a few books from now, but for the time being I'm very much embracing my East-Med heritage in my work.

PHOENIX ALEXANDER IS THIS ISSUE'S GUEST EDITOR.



"Part of the attraction was fear..."

Phoenix and Jo interview Alexis Panayiotou

Hi Alexis. Could you introduce yourself and say a little bit about your background?

Hello, my name is Alexis Panayiotou. I'm a fine artist and a drawing tutor on the BA: Fashion course at Central St. Martins.

As you know, this is a special issue of *Vector* focused on Greek SFF. So our first question is: do you consider yourself a Greek artist?

I think of my identity as mixed or somewhere between cultures. I was born and raised in London. My parents are both Greek, from Cyprus, both came to London very young, my mum nine and dad fourteen. They have lived here ever since. I have never been to Cyprus so I only have a vicarious idea of the place, through my parents and other relatives, and a bit from TV and radio.

I grew up in a Greek household, eating Greek food, hearing Greek music every day. Greek was my first language until I started school, although now I only have a rudimentary grasp. At home I was steeped in Greek culture and as a young man I would have described myself as solely Greek, and I remember feeling very lucky and proud to be so.

As for 'artist,' I've only recently started being comfortable using the term — it comes with lots of lofty aspirations! When I was young I drew a lot, like most kids, so there were always parents or teachers telling me I was an artist, or that I would be one.

Were you into science fiction back then?

As a little kid, I loved science fiction and fantasy imagery. I think it came from an interest in mythological monsters, which sprouted from an obsession with dinosaurs. Like a lot of kids. I loved the Ray Harryhausen films. They had it all: dinosaurs, classic mythology. I loved his Sinbad films, and *Jason and the Argonauts.* My dad took me to see *Clash of the Titans*, and my one enduring memory is that when the boatman Charon opened his hand for payment to ferry Perseus across the Styx, everyone in the cinema erupted into laughter. Including my dad.

I remember pestering my dad to take me to see *The Black Hole* as well, when I was about six. I drew endless pictures of the robot Vincent, and even more of the black hole itself. I was fascinated by it. It was depicted as a giant swirling mass in the film. The movement was captivating, something about the vastness. Kind of sublime, I guess.

And that interest stayed with you, right?

Definitely. Part of the attraction was fear, I think. I remember watching an episode of *Space 1999* but I wouldn't come into the room — I would only glimpse through the gap in the door as this monster rampaged through MoonBase Alpha, throttling everyone in its path.

I enjoyed watching *Doctor Who.* I have often thought of the Doctor as a mixture of Gandalf, Sherlock Holmes and Bugs Bunny, a kind of wise-cracking space wizard / detective with an eccentric dress sense, who always wins. Then there were the wobbly, rubbery monster outfits. In a way, they were absurd, but I think this gave them a tangible, visceral, nightmarish quality that you maybe don't get with modern CGI, although years later when I was 19, I was completely bowled over by the effects in Jurassic Park. I went to see it 3 times, It's the first time I remember seeing CGI on that level. I was astounded and It fulfilled a childhood fantasy to see living breathing dinosaurs. It's not an experience that can be recaptured and watching those films now wouldn't have the same impact I imagine for a modern audience, CGI is everywhere now, but Jurassic Park was a game changer, I think, and I still remember the thrill of seeing it the first time, it brought the impossible to life. It was the perfect story really, to introduce this new level of realism, it was about bringing dinosaurs back from the dead and the technology did this for the viewer. Still, I have a nostalgia for those old Doctor Who episodes, and as a 6 year old I found those wobbly alien effects equally arresting, and even more horrifying.

Mother pinching her baby affectionately while breastfeeding

What is it that's so compelling, do you think?

I don't know, but it's those moments of terror that have stuck in the memory. Tom Baker's horrified expressions, his crazed wide eyes when confronted with danger, Romana backed against a wall by the Daleks in 'Destiny of the Daleks', or Scaroth peeling back his face to reveal himself as a cabbage-faced cyclops in 'City of Death.' Peri having her brain removed in the 'Trial of a Time Lord' was particularly disturbing. Fortunately by the end of the season, she's been saved by Brian Blessed.

Undead painting

Thank you, Brian Blessed.

Also thank you to the viewers — I believe they tacked that on, after there were so many complaints! Incidentally, Brian Blessed as the leader of the Hawkmen in Flash Gordon was my first crush. At least that's the only way I can explain it. I didn't realise it was a crush at the time, but looking back, I guess that's what it was. I remember thinking about him all the time and really wanting to be his friend.

Everyone remembers their first crush, but can you remember your *second* crush?

Michael J. Fox in *Back to the Future*. In *Space 1999*, the main attraction for me was Maya, the shape shifting alien with bobbly eyebrows. She was the most exciting character for me, though I hear some aficionados prefer pre-Maya Season One. I was often more interested in, or identified more, with the girls in the stories: Romana in *Doctor Who*, Sapphire in *Sapphire and Steele*. I loved Wonder Woman, I preferred the Bionic Woman to the Six Million Dollar Man. I think it's probably still the case now.

Did you read SFF as well?

I was really into the Fighting Fantasy gamebooks, although that was partly about the imagery too. They also introduced me to wonderful illustrators: Iain McCaig, John Blanche, Ian Miller, Russ Nicholson. I would spend hours copying their illustrations. I began collecting comics when I was about thirteen. I started with *The New Teen Titans*, attracted by the incredible artwork by George Perez. He would do these amazingly detailed crowd scenes with loads of characters, and I was always so impressed with his attention to detail, the creases in fabric, the curls in the hair. I remember reading *The Hobbit* at school, but I found *Lord of the Rings* too heavy-going. I read it later, when I was about twenty-two.

I also enjoyed John Christopher's books: *The Tripods, Empty World, A Wrinkle in the Skin, The Death of Grass*. They were often set in a post-apocalyptic world, and the imagery appealed to me. There was a kind of futuristic nostalgia. Much more recently I went through a John Wyndham phase too.

Do you have a favourite character from mythology: one who particularly inspired you?

I have rarely consciously referred to Greek culture to make work, but once again it's the female characters I seem to be most drawn to, Medusa, Penelope, Medea. The character Circe from the Odyssey has always been intriguing, and has at times prompted ideas for imagery, although I have never actually made any of them! At least, not beyond initial thumbnails or preliminary work which were later abandoned.

But the ideas linger and I am always drawn to the character, not just her appearance in *The Odyssey*, but also when she surfaces in the work of others: Waterhouse paintings, or her appearance in *Ulysses 31*, or George Perez' iteration of Wonder Woman. I haven't read the Madeline Miller novel yet, but it's on the list.

What is it about Circe that draws you?

I'm not sure. Perhaps making a piece will shed some light on that. If I hazard a guess, it's something to do with the idea of a woman with power and an interest in witchcraft. My most recent idea for a piece would involve taking painted images of people and cutting and re-collaging them into pigs or other animals. I like puzzles, and I think part of the appeal of this exercise is starting out with a restricted set of ingredients, being restricted to the parts available in the original image to carry out the transformation. I'd like to explore how far brush marks and areas of colour may or may not lose their original meaning when taken out of context, how to reconstitute them into the new shape, and how these marks can communicate differently in their new position. The creative process as an act of magic: "How do you turn a human into a pig?"

That sounds fascinating.

I did once partially try the idea using a photograph and I liked the result. I remember reading in an essay on Seurat, by John Russell I think, about the universality of the dot. A dot could be part of the ear of a monkey as easily as part of a tree or the surface of the water. It's also a daft fun exercise but that's also part of the appeal. I want the work to have humour if possible, although it could just as easily turn out pretty gruesome.

I might try this one in a small way as a sketchbook exercise. During the lockdown I did a lot more sketchbook work and smaller things on paper out of necessity. I was reminded of the value of working through ideas in a more economical way.

Action Figure

What about other mythological figures? Earlier you mentioned Medusa.

The traditional idea of Medusa is of an apparition so hideous that one look will turn to stone. I don't really like many depictions of her. Ray Harryhausen is immune to this assessment, obviously. I do like Cellini's sculpture. Much as I love Caravaggio's painting, I'm not that keen on his interpretation. Although I do like the idea that his Medusa is a self-portrait: it puts a whole other spin on the image and retains your gaze as you search the face for a likeness, effectively fixing you and turning you to stone. Perhaps I do like that picture after all.

In a similar way I like the idea of the character retaining her great beauty and the idea of a woman so beautiful that the temptation to look is irresistible, yet to look would

Inside Out Portrait

mean death. I think this is a much more interesting idea for a painting and perhaps would also hold your attention in a similar way to the Caravaggio.

And Penelope?

With Penelope, it's the idea of stoicism, patience and cunning in the face of mounting pressure. One image comes to mind as a possible candidate for development, of Penelope shining her husband's bow, preparing it for the suitors to try and have a twang. It's a bit mixed up in my mind with the image of Kate Bush and her Cello in the Baboushka video, almost comically sexual, but also I see it as a bit Burne Jones or Waterhouse in appearance.

Let's not forget Medea.

I saw a great program late one night about twenty years ago now, about staging a production of *Medea* with a group of students. I remember in the scene where Medea is deliberating whether she can kill her children, the director bound the actor with rope to give a visual for the internal struggle. I was very struck by that, the actor would struggle against the ties which held her in a very awkward position, while asking herself if she could really carry out such an act, and this infused the delivery of the lines. It was a simple, obvious but very effective device, and made for a very striking image. I'd like to use that somehow. It would be more of an abstract piece I think, working with the materials that make up a painting, canvas, stretcher as well as the paint, and exploring the idea of tension.

But in the past, you haven't thought that much about your Greek cultural identity when you create art?

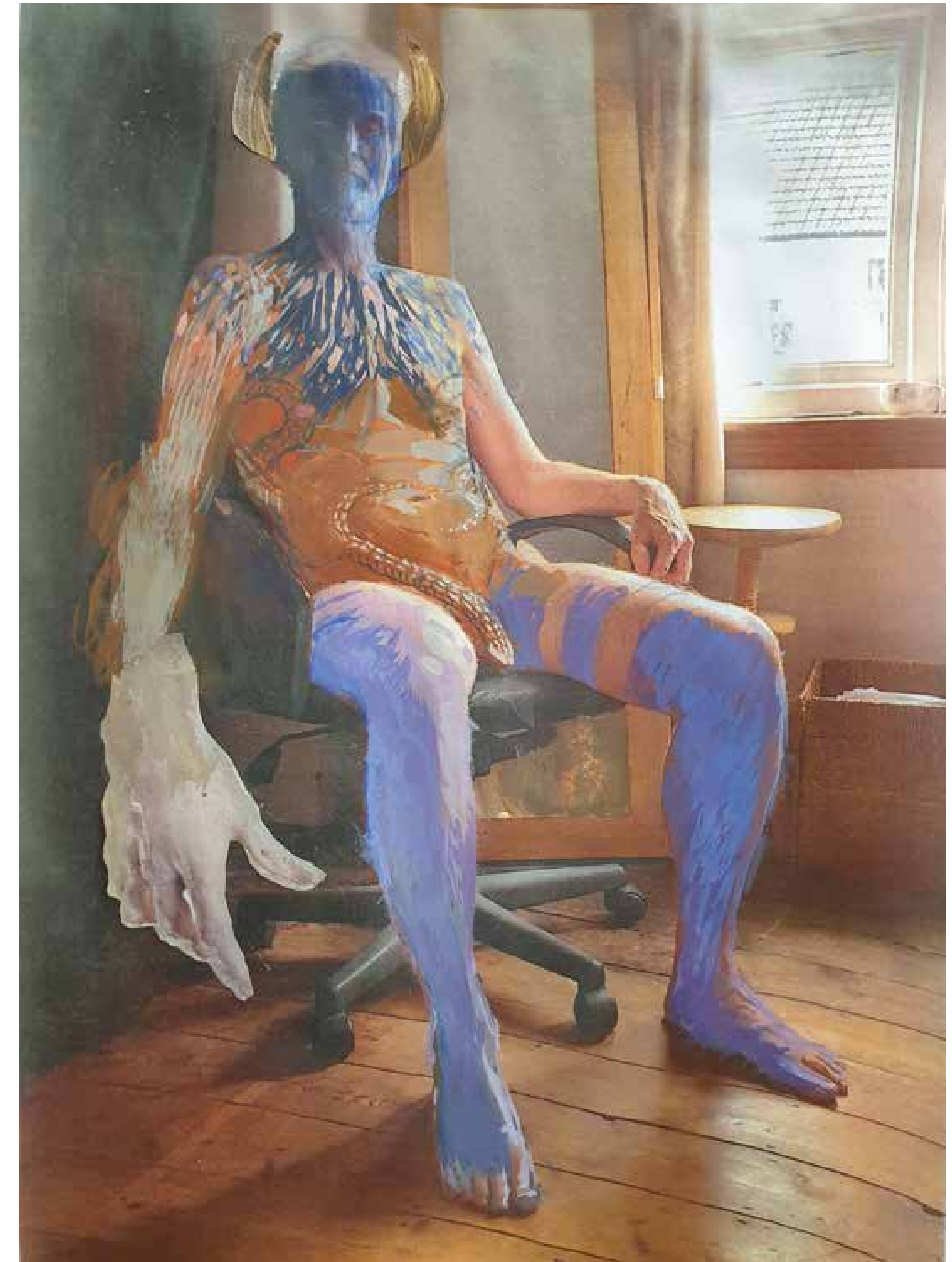
I haven't consciously drawn on it, although I guess it's inevitable that it has influenced me in some ways. And recently, in the last couple of years, I have thought more about my background and its relation to my work. There is more awareness of cultural appropriation today. My students are much more conscious of this than I was when I was a student. So yes, I have found myself thinking much more about my own cultural background, what it is and how it could or does influence the work I make.

The issue for me is working out exactly what I can legitimately refer to as my cultural background. I was born and brought up in London, and while I identified as wholly Greek as a young man, I have never been to Cyprus or Greece, so I have no direct experience. I loved Greek mythology from a very young age, I guess that's the most obvious reference. I could put a lot of that down to those Ray Harryhausen films, as well as being taught all that stuff at school. There was Greek mythology, but I don't remember there being much emphasis on other mythologies. At least, not until secondary school at least when we had Religious Studies.

So how do you navigate those intersections of a Greek/English identity?

It's strange making a distinction between Greek and English, because I was born here and I am British, and my parents have lived here pretty much all their lives so they too are British. But the family home was in many ways a different country to what lay beyond the front door.

I was very aware of that, and I imagine it must have been even more so for my parents and their families when they arrived in the 50s. The inside and outside coexisted harmoniously for the most part, for me at least, and walking through the front door was a seamless transition, although there is a tiny sense of separation which I have never completely shaken. I have never been completely comfortable describing myself as British even though I know this is accurate. It's the Greek identity that remains dominant in my mind, even though I don't feel I can legitimately or completely describe myself as Greek either.



Adam

So that Greek identity is very much mediated by your parents and other relatives.

Insofar as my parents' professions might fall within the remit of cultural background, my dad was in the rag trade, working as a pattern cutter. He ran a little production factory with his sister. This was in the 70s and 80s, and I think for a lot of Greek Cypriots a common profession was either to work in a fish and chip shop or in the rag trade. I loved going to the factory when I was very young; I loved all the giant rolls of fabric, the huge cutting table, and all the noises from the machines and irons, the different coloured rolls of cotton thread — it was visually very stimulating. And of course seeing my cousins. However, as soon as I was old enough and my dad got me in to help out, I wasn't so keen. I would mark garments for

***Hades* (detail)**

buttonholing and I would man the button machine which sewed the buttons on. I would also sort out sizes and do the general cleaning up of the garments, which involved cutting all the loose cotton ends left by the machinist, attaching the tickets and then bagging the garment to make it ready to be shipped out. I would also go in and help him lay up the fabric so he could cut the markers (the marker is the arrangement of pattern pieces for the garment). That bit was much more interesting to me: layering the fabric on the pattern cutting table, around 100-130 layers, eight metres long, and then watching my dad cut out the shapes. He'd use an upright electric saw and manoeuvre it around the pattern pieces, which he had arranged as economically as possible and drawn out on a long piece of spot-and-cross paper, which was then laid on top of the fabric. The stack of layered-up fabric was around 30 to 40 cm high, sometimes higher depending on the thickness. There was something very satisfying about watching the pieces being cut and as they were pulled away from the bulk of cloth like little islands, you could see through all the layers of different coloured fabric. It looked very beautiful. I'm very glad of the experience now when I look back on it, although at the time I often resented it and wanted to be hanging out with my friends instead. There have been ideas for work which have come from those experiences, although as of yet they are only ideas. But I think I will try them out at some point. I would love to make a joint piece with my dad. It would take space and money, though, to produce a piece of work like that.

Do you ever think about visiting Cyprus?

The idea of a visit to Cyprus is becoming more pressing as I get older. I want to try and have a more direct experience of Greek culture: something I feel I am missing. A close relative told me once that I need to go to 'understand my roots' and this idea has become exaggerated in my mind. I imagine daft things, like that the moment my feet make contact with the ground I will feel some kind of strength or invigoration, or perhaps eating the food grown there or being exposed to the stronger sun will activate dormant genes and complete me somehow. During a visit to the hospital recently my dad was tended by a nurse who asked him if he was from Crete. His great-grandfather came from there, and she named the village and said she had been there and that everyone looked like my dad. This is a bizarre and wonderful image; I love the idea of a hidden village somewhere in Crete where everyone looks like my dad, like something out of a Chris Cunningham video. I don't really expect such a dramatic result from a visit but I still wonder what it might reveal or awaken.

Alexis, thank you so much!

Mother