

## Reception and Pastiche in Peter Milligan's *Greek Street*

The tremendous expansion in reception studies in recent decades has occasioned questions about the methodologies appropriate for the subfield. What seems thus far clear is that reception is not meant to be an elitist version of the *Where's Waldo?* children's books, an elaborate game of "spot the allusion" in which s/he with the most obscure references wins. Indeed, reception studies seems explicitly to exhibit anxiety over the privilege of the canon: while many receptions of ancient works seek to make these works accessible to a broader audience, the acts of adaptation and translation themselves reiterate and perpetuate the status of the canon (Lianeri & Zajko 2008).

If, then, we are not merely playing "spot the allusion," what are we to make of omnivoric works of reception that graze widely among classical corpora, referencing now Homer, now Sophocles, now the Roman empire? Are they, as Fredric Jameson has said of the act of pastiche, a "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (Jameson 1991: 18)? Peter Milligan's comic series, *Greek Street* (2009-2011), offers a response to Jameson, that pastiche can be not only meaningful, but also thereby democratizing.

Milligan, known for his writing for Marvel Comics, has steadily and somewhat quietly been reappropriating the canon: Homer, Nietzsche, and Joyce in *Tank Girl: The Odyssey* (1995), and—in the comics canon—the X-Men series in his parodic *X-Statix* series (2002-2004). *Greek Street* is an adaptation of Greek tragedy, transposing the plotlines and characters to the modern day and mashing them together in a suspense-mystery about a serial killer on the seamy streets of London. The characters are gangsters, strippers, and police officers; Milligan selects lower class, ethnic minority, and non-hetero-normative characters as his heroes and heroines. The tale is narrated by an exotic dancer wise beyond her years; meanwhile a wealthy amateur classicist is

the last to solve the mystery, which is based on the *Medea*. Milligan's version, similar to feminist interpretations of *Medea*, underscores the experience of the female other. Further, *Greek Street* espouses and embodies the democratizing impulse of classical reception as it seeks to represent as well as to appeal to a broader demographic of the population.

Milligan's pastiche of Greek tragedy seems thus not to accord with Jameson's analysis, that pastiche disconnects allusions from the social and historical baggage of their intertexts (Jameson 1991: 23). Rather, *Greek Street* resonates with Linda Hutcheon's theories on parody; Hutcheon advocates for a version of allusion which she terms "postmodern parody, ... a kind of contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of the representations of history" (Hutcheon 1989: 91). Milligan adapts ancient texts in the service of questioning the sexual, ethnic, and socio-economic hierarchies implicit in their production; his choice of comics as a medium, moreover, intentionally disseminates these ancient texts among an audience traditionally neglected by classical philology (excepting Kovacs & Marshall 2011). Milligan, via Hutcheon, thus presents classical reception with a methodology through which we may read productively the postmodern tendency toward pastiche.

#### Bibliography

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