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Submitting to Limina

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Grand-Clément, Adeline and Ribeyrol, Charlotte (eds), *The Smells and Senses of Antiquity in the Modern Imagination, Imagines – Classical Receptions in the Visual and Performing Arts 3*; London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023; paperback, pp.xiv + 274; 14 colour and 18 b/w illustrations; RRP \$59.99 AUD; ISBN: 9781350251632.

The Smells and Senses of Antiquity is the third addition to the ongoing *Imagines* series in classical reception published by Bloomsbury, now available as of 2023 in paperback. For this volume, editors Adeline Grand-Clément and Charlotte Ribeyrol bring together twelve contributions, plus their own introduction and a guest *envoi*, on the theme of the modern reception of the senses in antiquity, with particular focus on the sense of smell. The choice to focus on the olfactory sense is itself significant. As the editors and many contributors note, smells are inherently elusive, intangible, and difficult to describe, and how they affect us can be intensely personal and emotional, and therefore highly subjective. Smell has therefore only rarely been the topic of scholarly works in Classics. This volume is thus a welcome contribution to scholarly discussions for that reason alone.

This volume presents works in classical reception, a sub-field of Classics that, as the editors put it in their introduction, is 'less about Antiquity itself than about the societies which have decided to take up and own, or on the contrary reject, part of the ancient past' (5). Classical reception is thus an increasingly important field for Classics as a whole, as it tackles head-on the critical question that the modern discipline faces of why the study of the ancient world, and particularly ancient Greece and Rome, still matters today. *The Smells and Senses of Antiquity* addresses such a question by demonstrating that our modern world and its visual and performance media are still captivated by the imaginative power of ancient smells and sensory experiences, even though the living peoples and cultures of antiquity have long disappeared.

As is the case with the other editions in the *Imagines* series, the chapters of this volume are largely derived from papers given at an international conference on classical reception, in this instance one held in October 2018 at the Université Jean Jaurès in Toulouse. Readers will observe that as a result, contributors' chapters take a wide variety of different approaches and media formats – a welcome diversity that makes the volume of potential interest to a broad audience, including classicists but also art historians, ancient historians, archaeologists, and students and researchers in literature, media studies, and the performing arts.

Grand-Clément and Ribeyrol's introduction briefly outlines what classical reception is and proceeds to discuss some of the recurrent challenges, themes, and observations that often characterise scholarly approaches to smell and the senses. This does a fine job of preparing the reader for the rest of the volume, especially given the diversity of its chapters, by priming us with the recurring thematic threads that run throughout.

Part one of the volume explores modern imaginations and representations of the smells and sensorial experience of ancient religious ritual, first through Arthur Machen's 1907 novel *Hill of Dreams* as investigated by Catherine Maxwell, and then in

Anna Guédon's analysis of film adaptations of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* and their use of visual cues to imply odour.

Part two investigates the persistent connections between smell, gender, and the human body in ancient and modern times. It begins with Margaret Day Elsner's unpacking of New Age alternative women's health treatments and their connections to ancient misogynistic ideas about monstrosity and women's bodies, followed by an exploration by Tiphaine-Annabelle Besnard and Fabien Bièvre-Perrin of smell and the ancient aesthetics of the human body and how these influence aesthetic values in twenty-first century visual media.

Part three groups together two chapters that explore the relationship of smell to 'otherness' between the ancient and modern worlds, first through Giacomo Savani's analysis of nineteenth-century paintings of bathing scenes as 'sensory palimpsests', before moving to television with Kim Beerden, where we see the impact of smell in HBO's *Rome* using the concept of historical empathy.

Part four investigates modern recreations of ancient scents, beginning with an investigation by Cecilia Bembibre of recreated ancient perfumes kept at France's Osmothèque, followed by Giulia Corrente's discussion of the persistence of the ancient rose of Paestum in later imaginations and a recent attempt at grafting a modern version of this iconic plant. To finish off, the reader is treated to an interview with Amandine Leclercq regarding an experimental workshop that reproduced pellets of *kyphi*, a kind of ancient incense.

Part five presents three chapters that bring ancient smells directly to modern live audiences, starting with Raffaella Viccei on the Multimedia and Sensory Museum of the Milan Roman Theatre and visitor responses to its aromatic diffusers. Next is Martina Treu's investigation of smell in theatrical productions, focusing especially on a 1999 staging of *Libation Bearers*. Finally, Martin Lindner entertains an exploration of the role of smell in the world of historical reenactors.

To finish off, Mark Bradley provides a conclusion, using children's 'scratch and sniff' books as a launchpad towards wrapping up the overarching themes present throughout the book's chapters, effectively providing a neat summary of the important conclusions that this volume contributes as a whole to classical reception scholarship. Ancient smells and sensory experiences, as this volume makes evident, are still potent in the modern imagination. Smells foul and fragrant continue to conjure in our minds, as in ancient ones, distinctions between 'us' and 'them,' rich and poor, illness and health, masculinity and femininity. In expounding the imaginative power of olfaction through its various case studies, this volume demonstrates the rich potential that smell and the senses, though often overlooked, have as a way to further investigate the impact of the ancient world in modern societies.

Though the chapters in *The Smells and Senses of Antiquity* are generally ordered logically within the book, in some parts there is slight dissonance between the stated theme of a section and the content of the chapters within it. In part one, for example, the reader anticipates a focus on smell and ancient ritual, yet this is really only a minor aspect of the section's first chapter. The same can be said for the second chapter of part four, which addresses the recreation of an ancient perfume only briefly in the final few paragraphs. However, such concerns are relatively minor and are generally par for the course when it comes to editing a volume based on a collection of diverse essays that largely began as conference papers.

The print quality of the illustrations in this paperback edition leaves a little to be desired, as the images are somewhat grainy. This is generally at its worst in the darker black and white illustrations. The book is otherwise cleanly presented, with each chapter followed by its own endnotes and bibliography. Typos are minimal and cause no major confusion to the reader. Aside from classical reception in isolation, *The Smells and Senses of Antiquity* makes an important contribution to Classics as a whole, a discipline which has seen its relevance increasingly come under question in our post-colonial world. Such questioning is wholly understandable: a whitewashed, idealised, ideological fantasy of Graeco-Roman antiquity was once used to argue for European cultural and racial supremacy and to justify modern imperialism and colonisation. Part of moving the discipline of Classics beyond this sombre history consists, in my opinion, of dismantling narratives of European exceptionalism, which this volume does by making ancient Greece and Rome smell – and not always in a fragrant way, at that. As the editors point out, making antiquity smell again has a similar effect to our discovery and acceptance of the polychromy of ancient statues (5-6). It allows us to view Graeco-Roman antiquity, once presented in terms of the sobriety and idealism of odourless white marble, as a colourful world filled with smells and other sensory stimuli.

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