

Time loses nothing. In its infinite memory, all aspects of creation remain. Some slip into obscure corners, others take on new guises, but once something is, it can never not be. The ancient Greek bards never truly vanished, not in essence. The fundamental energies and inspirations that motivated them also appeared in the troubadours of the twelfth century, the playwrights of the sixteenth, and the jazz musicians of the twentieth. The desire to work with enduring images and themes, to express them through compelling verse and images, and to share those sights and sounds with knowledgeable and appreciative audiences, remains a constant of human experience. Matt Fraction attempts to tell the tale of The Odyssey in a new form with his latest book, Ody-C #1. Homer would approve of the idea, after all he was working with preexisting material himself, although few ancient Hellenes would find comfort in all Fraction's decisions. Certainly projecting the story into space would present no problem, for the ancient bards loved singing of celestial matters, even if their conception of the universe ran to solid vaults and living constellations. Nor would they find fault with Fraction embedding his story in a fanciful cycle of epics, for all bards carried awareness of a greater poetic world in every utterance. Where the ancients would pause is in Fraction's manipulations of character and theme. In his previous work, the author has made something of a study of gender and sexuality, with his ongoing Sex Criminals the most obvious example. In Ody-C, Fraction flips the gender of most major characters. Thus the sea-faring kings who sacked the city of Troia become the space-traveling queens who destroy the planet Troia. Great Agamemnon becomes mighty Gamem, fierce Menelaus transforms into determined Ene, and clever Odysseus is represented by shrewd Odysia, the heroine of the book. So far, so interesting. Helen becomes the male He, a name that bespeaks more cleverness than sophistication, even though He is the first male born in ten thousand millennia. The decision to satiate the panels featuring He with leather BDSM imagery likewise indicates moments when restraint would have been the better part of valor. With the conquest of Troia complete, the warrior-queens begin their journey home. Odysia commands the ship Ody-C, bound for the planet Ithaca. Unfortunately the gods, like most of the characters gender swapped or, in the case of Zeus, made hermaphroditic, determine that allowing the queens a peaceful voyage would just be too boring. Thus the stage is set for Odysia's adventures, much as it was set for those of her male prototype 2800 years ago. One of Fraction's greatest challenges comes from his decision to structure his narrative as an epic poem complete with numbered stanzas. The problems of adapting ancient Greek have bedeviled scholars and writers for centuries, and one might expect Fraction to simply follow the pattern of George Chapman or another of the many scholars who have adapted The Odyssey into English verse. Instead, Fraction looks farther north and seizes on the example of Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry with its driving rhythms and strong alliterations. The result is a space-based Greek epic as told by the author of Beowulf. Given that English adapts to alliteration and rhythm more readily than to lyricism and rhyme, and that English, Greek, and Norse poetic traditions all make use of repetitive metaphors and allusions, the outcome proves surprisingly successful. But Fraction's words would undoubtedly fall disastrously flat were it not for Christian Ward's art. Ward, probably influenced by pop-Freudian ideas linking circles and femininity, frames the story using irregular panels constructed largely of rounded lines and asymmetrical proportions. Ward's approach proves especially striking when he combines the wedge-shaped and circular panels into sunburst patterns suggestive of divine glory and exploding narrative energy. The forms of Ward's characters are rounded and lightly feathered, a strong contrast to his angular faces and sometimes-stiff poses, which deliberately echo the figures seen on Greek vases of the classical period. Ward's bright colors, created off Dee

Cunniffe's flats, suggest a dream, an association mirrored in the text as the mental energy of the Ody-C's sleeping crew propels the ship through space. The post Ody-C #1 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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