

## Cities and Fantasy: Urban Imaginary Across Cultures, 1830–1930 (Edited Volume)

The long nineteenth century witnessed the rapid expansion and modernization of cities around the globe. It is often also heralded, by critics working with Anglo-American literature, at least, as the starting point for studies of the fantastic. Nonetheless, despite the claims of critics such as Rosemary Jackson and Stephen Prickett that modern fantasy is, in part, a reaction to industrialization,<sup>1</sup> few projects have explored nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fantasies' engagement with the urban, and fewer still have attempted to address the intertwining of fantasy and the city across cultures, a gap this volume seeks to fill.

Studies in literary works that engage with the city during the period tend to focus on how writers represented, captured, negotiated, or, at times, contested the changes brought about by various modernisation and industrialisation projects that were often related to imperial and colonial expansion or trade and economic initiatives. The emphasis has often been on the realistic, the everyday, and the busy metropolitan space. Critics have explored how cities have become real-and-imagined places in literary works that have been conferred with symbolic and structural values (see, for example, Robert Alter's *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*). Works such as Jamieson Ridenhour's *Darkest London: The Gothic Cityscape in Victorian Literature* contribute to a growing body of work that focuses on the urban gothic, both as a sub-genre and a narrative mode in literature dating from the nineteenth century to the contemporary time. The urban gothic is an important piece of any project on fantasy and urban spaces, including this one. We also hope, however, to include contributions addressing how other forms of fantasy or work in the fantastic mode has been used to engage with the city. Even marvelous nineteenth-century idyllic fantasies usually engage with the unescapable city in some way, or even substantially. We especially seek contributions that explore fantasy and the city in different cultural contexts, or that explore the relationship between the city and fantasy *across cultures*, such as how fantastic literature can put cities in conversations—in metaphorical, physical or symbolic terms.

Instead of focusing on one single national context, this edited volume invites contributions from scholars who work with texts that are situated in different cultural contexts and historic moments between 1830 to 1930. The volume seeks to raise new questions surrounding the relationship between the city and fantasy in a period that witnessed an enhanced global connectedness due to wars, advancement in technologies of transportation and communication, and other socio-economic initiatives. The proposed period covers key historic and cultural events that had both local and global significance. These include the Chartist campaign and the women's suffrage movement in Britain, the Sino-British Opium Wars, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the May Fourth Movement in China, the early Republican periods in many Latin America states,<sup>2</sup> the First World War, and the transformation of Hong Kong into a crown colony, and an entrepôt. The period also covers the rise of new academic disciplines in Europe and America, including anthropology and folklore, which led to an increased interest in fantastic and marvelous tales from other cultures. Moreover, rising numbers of translations of this literature, as well as increased reading of works in their original languages (a foreign language for the reader), led to new reading audiences and new reception histories for fantastic texts from other countries of origin.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 4, Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, pp. 12–13. Jack Zipes also discusses, particularly, the nineteenth-century literary fairy tale as a critique of the Industrial Revolution in *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> The actual Latin American wars for independence are outside our time frame (1808–1833), but contributors are welcome to consider literary works that were published later but responded to these events.

In this volume, we especially encourage contributors to consider topics that engage with more than one city or cultural context, or ones that explore different moments of cross-cultural interaction and contacts. Possible cities include (but are not limited to) Paris, Berlin, Cape Town, Istanbul, Beirut, Mumbai, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Seoul, Tokyo, Melbourne, Sydney, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, and London. Contributors might consider how writers make use of the fantastic mode to come to terms with new urban realities, or to negotiate their sense of (cultural) identity in the ever-changing metropolitan spaces. Other questions that they can consider include the following: In what ways does an investigation into the fantastic in different urban settings complicate our understanding of its potential in contesting real-and-fictive boundaries that condition or limit people's ways of life, and their accessibility to different urban spaces because of race, gender and class? How might the fantastic be used as a strategy in literary texts that seek to interrogate or negotiate one's relationship with the others in cities that were increasingly multicultural in outlook in the long nineteenth century? How might the fantastic be used as a form of resistance against colonial rule, or as an act of writing against the Empire? How might writers invoke the mythic and the fantasized characters from their own literary and cultural tradition when representing or negotiating the urban spaces and the underlying ideological assumptions? In what ways can the fantastic and the everyday co-exist and be used to interrogate new social realities?

We note that the terms *fantasy* and the more recently coined *urban fantasy* are anachronistic and highly contested terms—labels used in retrospect, sometimes in narrowly defined and sometimes in broad senses, to describe existing modes and genres. Contributors to this volume are free to draw on the theoretical accounts of the fantastic that best suit their project and the critical tradition from which they write. Contributors, however, should be consistent in their usage and should note, as needed and to avoid confusion, the varying ways in which their terms have been used.

**Topics of interest:**

- Types of fantasy that involve the city
- Imperial and/or colonial cities and fantasy
- Industrialization, urbanization, and fantasy
- Border/Boundary/Liminality: how the fantastic mode is being used to confront, mediate or negotiate liminal spaces, or various forms of “borders” and boundaries in different cultural contexts
- Medievalized cities in nineteenth-century fantasy
- Periodicals and fantasy
- Cities in conversation
- Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century responses to European or American fantasies in areas and regions such as Asia, Africa, Australia, Oceania, and vice versa
- Different fantastic modes and traditions (such as *Zhiguai*), and their usage and adaptations in urban contexts
- Orientalized cities, such as translations of the *Arabian Nights* in the nineteenth century and their impact on subsequent literary productions
- The city as a place of publication for fantasy (in periodicals or books); urban readers of fantasy--the types of fantasy they read.
- Nineteenth-century cities and fantastic Romantic legacies
- The city and the collection of fairy tales and folklore

- The Gothic and the City
- The Everyday and the City: how everyday spaces become sites of fantasy; how the fantastic responds to, or resists against, the everyday
- Nostalgia, fantasy and the city
- Fantastic urban utopias and/or fantasy and urban reform
- Fantasy and cultural identity
- Urban Typologies, architecture and fantasy
- Urban palimpsest and fantasy
- Reading fantastic cities in translation
- The reception history of a city's fantasies either within that city and/or in other cities across the globe

If you are interested in contributing to the edited volume, please send a short bio (100–150 words) and a 400-word abstract outlining the topic and the content, including the key authors and/or texts that will be covered in your essay, to the editors, Dr Klaudia Lee ([hiuylee@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:hiuylee@cityu.edu.hk)) and Dr Sharin Schroeder ([sharinschroeder@mail.ntut.edu.tw](mailto:sharinschroeder@mail.ntut.edu.tw)) by **15 January 2021**.

The deadline for full chapters, 6,000-7,000 words in length (including notes and works cited), will be **30 November 2021, subject to the final decision of the publisher**. We look forward to reading your proposals.