

Introduction: American Fantasies and Dreams

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In many ways, the 36th International ASAT Conference held on 14-16 May, 2014 at Atatürk University in Erzurum was a dream come true. It was the first time we hosted an ASAT conference in eastern Turkey, where the association had never had the opportunity to hold such a large event in its history. Erzurum and Atatürk University not only turned out to be an historically and culturally interesting venue, but it also attracted a whole range of new participants, some of whom came from other eastern Turkish universities and even some from neighboring Iran.

The conference, which focused on the theme of “American Fantasies and Dreams,” included a variety of papers on the classic subject of dreams and fantasies in the American context. The keynote speaker, Lisa Tuttle, the eminent American science-fiction and fantasy writer who resides in Scotland, opened the conference with her speech, “Myths, Dreams and Monsters.” In it, she touched upon crucial issues such as what it means to write science-fiction and fantasy as a woman, while referring to popular contemporary fantasy works. In her talk “How We Dream the World: Monumental Fantasies in American Landscape Art, from the Hudson River School to the Chickens of Capadocia,” the featured artist, Deborah Semel Demirtaş, elaborated on her transnational artistic experiences and explorations. The conference panels spanned a wide array of topics such as African American fantasies and dreams; feminist utopias/dystopias; and panels on H.P. Lovecraft and Ursula LeGuin, illustrating how these two authors have come to dominate contemporary academic fantasy scholarship. Obviously and not unexpectedly, the “nightmares and dystopias” conference subtheme was very popular, possibly marking our ever-growing pes-

simism concerning the human condition—an outlook that has become all the more substantial after 2016 US presidential election. While the conference itself could not have predicted the changes currently taking place in the United States, in its own way it anticipated how the genres of science-fiction and fantasy would continue to shape our perspectives on the future.

The articles in this special section reflect different aspects of the conference. Annessa Ann Babic’s “(Re)Imagining the 1950s: The Crux of Board Games, Wonder Woman, and the American Ideal” elaborates on how popular culture, specifically board games and the comic book character Wonder Woman, created the Cold War paradigm. The article introduces the notion of how seemingly innocent board games constructed a conservative domestic atmosphere where various (re)codings crafted a specific social and political consensus. Within this context, Wonder Woman, the female superhero who protected the United States and saved the world from evil forces (e.g., communism), becomes “a girl looking for a husband.” The article not only presents interesting commentary on the dystopic nature of the American dream, but also suggests that contemporary games and superheroes do the same in a culturally and politically changing United States.

In “Monstrous America: HBO’s *True Blood* as a Gothic/Fantastic Allegory,” Pembe Gözde Erdoğan analyzes the vampire TV series *True Blood*, which marks a sharp diversion from the classic vampire narrative where fanged immortals represent overreaching aspirations of the human mind, with erotic undertones, of course. *True Blood*, Erdoğan argues, offers a very different universe, where a presumably post-racial America suddenly becomes a battlefield of different ethnos, revealing the very sensitive and fragile cultural tectonics of the USA. Give the Trump Administration, where the issue of immigration has quickly become synonymous with “border wars,” the series presages a version of reality that is both imminent and present.

Vahit Yaşayan’s “Dreams Deferred: Exploring the Masculine Mystique in August Wilson’s *Fences*” demonstrates how the concept of masculinity, once a means to attain the American Dream and gain social recognition, turns into a nightmare or a tragic fall for African American males. Wilson’s protagonist Troy is a very solid example of how another form of American cultural ideology works in practice: the idea of potent masculinity as a way to salvation. Troy’s distorted perception and wish for recognition, as Yaşayan argues, is probably what

ails the contemporary African American community; that is, pursuing misguided goals will only lead to the collapse of the dream. For Wilson, the only “American Dream” for African Americans is to search for their own legacy and reestablish themselves in mainstream society.

Finally, Tarık Tansu Yiğit’s “Oriental Fantasies of the American Advertisement Industry during the Late 19th-Early 20th Century: A Reading of the Recurring Images of Cigarette Marketing” engages in a different kind of cross-cultural discussion. The image of the Orient, this time represented by pseudo-Turkish/Ottoman elements on cigarette advertisements, accompanied by an interest in Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyyat*, created a mystic aura in the early 20th century USA. Used mainly for marketing purposes, the Orientalist imagery reflected—and from Yiğit’s account continues to reflect—a vision that romanticizes a geography and its past in order to sell a specific product—cigarettes. Offering interesting insight into the idea that cultural imperialism deploys seemingly docile imagery in its implementation, the article makes the point that the Orient, itself an ideological creation, was subjected to a process of creation and recreation in American tobacco advertisements.

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