The Ancient World in Dystopian Fiction: New Directions

It has been six years since the publication of *Mockingjay*, the third volume of the phenomenally successful Hunger Games trilogy. Those six years have seen the publication of two other dystopian trilogies that owe a particularly clear debt to *The Hunger Games*: the Red Rising trilogy by Pierce Brown and the Court of Fives trilogy by Kate Elliott. Like Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*, the protagonists of the Red Rising and Court of Fives trilogies are forced, out of loyalty to their families, to compete against other young people in dangerous, winner-takes-all events sponsored by the authoritarian ruling class, to the delight of spectators; both also go on to play key roles in bringing down the regimes that oppress their people. The key similarity for my purposes, however, is that Brown and Elliott both followed Suzanne Collins in modeling their fictional societies on the ancient world.

In this paper, I will demonstrate that for all the correspondences between their work and Collins's, Brown and Elliott have together taken a starkly different tack with their dystopian receptions of antiquity. In creating the decadent, exploitative society of Panem, Collins relied on an exaggerated pop culture stereotype of the Roman Empire, one bearing little resemblance to the historical relationship between Rome and her territorial possessions. The newer trilogies, on the other hand, not only represent, but thematize the kind of subtle cultural blending and appropriation that took place in antiquity, as when Egyptian and Greek societies (refigured as Elliott's Efeans and Saroese) reshaped one another under the Ptolemies, or when elite Romans ("spiritual ancestors" of the Golds in Red Rising) struggled to come to terms with what place Archaic and Classical Greek idea(l)s could and should have in their own time and place.

[To my knowledge, no scholarship yet exists on Red Rising or Court of Fives; I will be relying primarily on the novels themselves in this presentation. I will, however, refer to scholarship on classical receptions in The Hunger Games, such as: Marian W. Makins, "Refiguring the Roman Empire in *The Hunger Games* Trilogy," in *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction*, ed. Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Stevens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 280–306. I may wish to show PowerPoint slides during the talk.]