ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

FANTASY

The Heliotropians
Eileen Kramer
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4269-1882-7
Two Stars (out of Five)

With *The Heliotropians*, Australian Eileen Kramer, author of *Party for the Moon Man* and *Basic Shapes*, has written a fever dream of a book that combines the myths, legends, and folklore of several cultures into an unstructured exploration of love, art, and obsession in Paris in the far future.

Eight friends living on a future Earth, which is now called Heliotropia, find themselves growing bored with their lives as advanced spiritual beings. Marius, their leader, who is described as a genius when his actions reveal him to be an old Greek god, becomes obsessed with finding the creator of a mystery house on Heliotropia. He decides to create a time tunnel and travel back to "old earth" of the twentieth century. Traveling with him on the journey are Pavarti, a Hindu goddess; Tiger Hound, another Hindu god; Isis, an Egyptian goddess; Osiris, an Egyptian god; Eva, an earth mother; and Undi, who is Venus in the form of a water nymph/spirit.

Written in vague, confusing prose, Kramer's tale never seems to cohere into a structured plot. Jason, also one of the original eight travelers, is the narrator. Something goes wrong for him on the journey, and his disconnected spirit relates each time traveler's experiences from a distance as he or she attempts to develop a creative life and relationships with the people of old Earth.

Kramer meanders through the lives of the characters, interspersing her often-unfocused narrative with primitive black-and-white drawings of characters or scenes in the novel. Though they serve to illustrate what the travelers look like when in love, for example, they do little to clarify the illogical plot, or make the reader truly care about the characters.

Even Jason finds himself wearying of the continual confusion surrounding his fellow time travelers: "I asked myself whether this was another spiraling dream in which scenes change and spin and illogical things happen." Additionally, earthly characters come and go in seemingly random order, and any kind of creature or inanimate object can communicate with the Heliotropians, including a green velvet fainting couch, a washstand, seagulls, dolphins and

whales, and one grateful codfish who avoids becoming a Parisian dinner, thanks to Undi.

Though Kramer makes creative use of a variety of myths and folklore, she has not created a meaningful context for her characters, who remain one-dimensional and dull as they float through a hallucinogenic plot. In addition, the book has typos and suffers from word repetition.

The Heliotropians might be better served as the subject of a graphic novel for young adults. In its current form, it is too confusing and lacks the depth that would keep adult readers engaged.

DeAnn G. Rossetti