

PHD STUDENT SYMPOSIUM

OF THE DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Department of English Language and Literature
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

*Saturday, 21 September 2024
Amphitheatre of the Library
of the School of Philosophy
Zografou University Campus, Athens*



Marian Maguire, *Herakles Discusses Boundary Issues with the Neighbours, New Zealand*, 2007, Print 570 mm x 765 mm

PROGRAMME

9.15: Welcome

Kostas Blatanis, Head of the Division of Literature and Culture, Department of English Language and Literature

9.30-10.45 Session I: Greek Fantasies

Chair: Evi Mitsi

- Despoina Tantsiopoulou: School Detention: Time Manipulation in the Fantasy Campus Novel
- Mathilde Pyrli: British Adventurers Abroad: Greece as a Stage Backdrop for Brigand Stories in Victorian Boys' Magazines
- Maria Pouliasi: "We Felt We Had Come Home": Gerald Durrell and *The Corfu Trilogy* [online]

10.45 Coffee break

11.15-12.15 Session II: Poetic Experiments

Chair: Mata Dimakopoulou

- Elpida Ziavra: Photo-Poetic Narratives of Survivance in a Trans-Canadian Context
- Caterina Stamou: The Reparative as an Intersectional and Holistic "intense engagement" with the Literary (?)

12.15-13.30 Session III: Spatiotemporal and Dystopian Narratives

Chair: Christina Dokou

- Georgia Mandelou: The Urban/Rural Conjunction in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) and *The Pickup* (2001) and J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K.* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999)
- Stavroula-Anastasia Katsorchi: A Multitude of Drops: Mapping Posthuman Subjectivity and the Malleability of Narrative in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*
- Andriana Tasopoulou: Pandemics and *Maddaddam* Trilogy

13.30 Closing remarks

Mina Karavanta, Director of the Postgraduate MA Programme "English Studies: Literature and Culture"

13:45 Lunch

Many thanks are due to the Department of English Language and Literature Faculty and Administrators for their valuable help, as well as the Special Account for Research Grants (EΛKE) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (ΕΚΠΑ) for its funding of the event. This event would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Angelos Evangelou and Stella Karagianni.

ABSTRACTS

(in alphabetical order)

Stavroula-Anastasia Katsorchi

A Multitude of Drops: Mapping Posthuman Subjectivity and the Malleability of Narrative in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

This presentation reflects the fourth chapter of my doctoral dissertation whose central aim is to pursue a posthuman ethics that defies capitalist exploitation and promotes interdependence and unprivileged multiplicity as the basis for social relations. My dissertation adopts a posthuman feminist perspective in analysing contemporary works of speculative dystopian Anglophone fiction. It pays attention to the development of posthuman subjectivity across mediums and examines the function of narrative as a means of asserting the posthuman self while simultaneously bridging the gap between the self and others. The chapter this presentation is based upon delves into the Matryoshka doll-like narrative of David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas*. Critics claim that all analyses of *Cloud Atlas* are bound to begin with a consideration of the novel's structure. In agreement with this proposition, my chapter maps the multiple levels of interconnectedness present in the narrative, beginning with its structure, its genre, its philosophical premise, its characters, and the plot itself in general. To tie my analysis with the rest of my dissertation, I focus particularly on the narrative of Sonmi-451, who is a genetically modified clone drugged with Soap in order to work 19 hours a day without doing or thinking of anything else; until it all changes. Ultimately, my chapter shows that by weaving together a transversal network of connections, *Cloud Atlas* brings to the fore the complementary relationship between individuality and community, fuelling a better understanding of posthumanism and the power of narrative to radically change the world.

Georgia Mandelou

The Urban/Rural Conjunction in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) and *The Pickup* (2001) and J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K.* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999)

In this presentation my aim is to offer a brief outline of the chapter I am currently working on, which discusses the urban/rural conjunction along the citizen/subject divide in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) and *The Pickup* (2001), and J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K.* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999). The chapter initially offers a brief overview of the gradual development of urban formations in South Africa as well as of the ways in which this informed and braved the urban/rural divide, in order to examine the spatiotemporal particularities of the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town as the two major cities where the four narratives under examination were produced, and which constitute their settings. This brief discussion on the formation of rural/urban connections in South Africa places the four novels chronologically and informs their subsequent textual analysis. The chapter, then, moves on to examine the novels, drawing parallels and discussing distinctions, by focusing on the ways all four not only reveal the expropriation that occurs outside the limits of the urban centers but also tentatively portray transmodern spaces of a social otherwise that exists outside the limits of official structures. In doing so, the chapter is divided in three sections: earth, dwelling, and animal. Each section, focused on one of the overriding themes as these have been exhibited in the novels, discusses the diverse ways the novels portray formal and informal configurations that often transcend the

divisions between rural/urban and citizen/subject, always taking under consideration the distinct approach of the two writers.

Maria Pouliasi

“We Felt We Had Come Home”: Gerald Durrell and *The Corfu Trilogy*

Gerald Durrell's *The Corfu Trilogy*, published in 2006, recounts the years from 1935 to 1939 that he spent on the island of Corfu. Durrell uses Corfu as the backdrop for his narrative, featuring himself, his family, and various friends and relatives who visit the island as the central characters. As a result, the *Trilogy* is not a travelogue but a depiction of Durrell's life in Corfu over several years, fitting into the genre of *foreign residence* books.

Although the *Trilogy* reinforces some of the colonial stereotypes found in earlier writings about Corfu, it also contains moments in which Durrell celebrates the connections that can be made across social boundaries, reflecting his cosmopolitan outlook. This approach allows him to strike a balance in his portrayal of the island's underdevelopment. Durrell presents Corfu as a wonderland, a world where reality seems to blend with fantasy, suggesting that the island is a realm where the commonplace becomes extraordinary. He also touches upon the unaltered ways of peasants, observing the “timelessness” also identified by his elder brother, Lawrence Durrell, in his writings on Corfu.

Finally, Durrell conveys the profound feeling of belonging he and his family experienced on the island by stating that upon seeing their first country house on the island, he felt “as though the villa had been standing there waiting for our arrival. We felt we had come home”, indicating to his readers that Corfu would become his “adopted” birthplace and that the bond that instantly connected him to the island and its residents would be a lifelong one.

Mathilde Pyrli

British Adventurers Abroad: Greece As a Stage Backdrop for Brigand Stories in Victorian Boys' Magazines

My research so far has largely examined the various representations of the Greek brigand in travel memoirs, political essays, and fiction of the Victorian period (1840-1900). From the 1850s on, a growing disillusion with the Greek kingdom and its perceived failed modernity appeared in Greece-related texts. Part of my exploration relates to the ways in which the brigand and his qualities of rapaciousness, mendacity, unruliness, and backwardness became a synecdoche for the country and its people. In other words, how both *Modern Greece* and the *Greek brigand* as stereotypes involving ideas of national character and cultural progress became conflated and one was used as token for the other. At the same time, I explore the function of the Greek brigand stereotype in the text, both within a wider context of British national and imperial self-determination as well as within the narrower one of literary genre, for example, as a narrative convention meant to create sensation. Bearing this in mind, this paper will present an aspect of my research which relates to the Victorian weekly boys' magazines and dime novels and, in particular, the *Jack Harkaway* series. Jack Harkaway, perhaps the most iconic hero of the boys' magazines genre, first appeared in 1871 to immense success. Harkaway's 1870s two-volume adventures in Greece involve his encounters with pirates and brigands. Harkaway's Greece, a stock backdrop for brigand stories utterly destitute of historical associations, showcases the fullest conflation of “Modern Greece” with “Brigand” while leaving ample room for the delineation of late nineteenth-century imperial Britishness.

Caterina Stamou

The Reparative as an Intersectional and Holistic “intense engagement” with the Literary (?)

My presentation will focus on the concept of the reparative as an ontologically obscure concept based on the way it was introduced in literary criticism by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her seminal text “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You”. The concept’s obscurity, I aim to argue, can be read in accordance to its relational and affective position which resists being totalized by epistemic orders. This non-compliant and elusive force of the reparative can resonate with decolonial, abolitionist and poetic approaches to the concept and praxis of repair, as depicted in the texts of contemporary writers, such as Fred Moten who delineates repair to be congruous with refusal, the replication of “a worn-out grammar”, and “a mutual transformation that occurs by way of an intense engagement with the thing, a mutual supplementation, rather than the enactment of a fantasy of repair”. Drawing from such contributions that reconsider repair through the intertwinement between relationality, materiality, poetry and history, I am interested in sharing a) my methodological questions that reconsider the reparative through decolonial and abolitionist lens, and b) reflect upon my choice of experimental poetry texts as instrumental in anticipating an intersectional and holistic “intense engagement” with the literary, and therefore, a repoliticized configuration of the reparative that resists a monistic definition.

Despoina Tantsiopoulou

School Detention: Time Manipulation in the Fantasy Campus Novel

This is an overview of the first chapter of my thesis where I study the way in which time works in academic institutions through the analysis of novels that belong to both the fantasy or science fiction genre and the campus novel. This amalgamation of genres can be called the Fantasy Campus Novel and, as I argue, it aims to uncover the failures of the educational institutions from which it draws. My research is here exemplified through the use of Donna Tartt’s 1992 debut novel *The Secret History*, in which six Classics students are drawn to – and by – an elitist New England Liberal Arts College, Hampden, where they are prompted by the enigmatic (and singular) Classics professor, Julian Morrow, to perform a bacchanal. Following this sacrilegious ceremony, each of them assumes the identity of an Olympian deity, a hubristic event that brings their demise. Tartt’s campus works as a Bakhtinian *chronotope*, a timespace where temporal continuity with the outside world is breached, allowing for the protagonists’ dive into the ancient Greek past as a new Last Frontier, in Richard Slotkin’s term, to be conquered by the U.S. American capitalist elite. Hampden is also presented as a Foucauldian *heterotopia* which mirrors the institutions it draws from and thus, I argue, *The Secret History* comments on the perils of a private educational system capitalizing on unmonetizable concepts through the colonization of foreign pasts, gaining safe distance through the element of the fantastic.

Elpida Ziavra

Photo-Poetic Narratives of *Survivance* in a Trans-Canadian Context

My doctoral thesis “Poetics and Politics of Mourning in Trans-Canadian Literature in the 21st century” examines a series of literary and visual (plastic art and photographic) texts, created by different ethnic communities in Canada, in order to dramatize their politics of survival that stem from an aesthetics of ellipses, lacunae and spectral silences and speak to the disasters of the human and the misrepresentation of the Black and Native others in the colonial archive. For this year’s presentation, I will focus on my third chapter, on which I am currently working, which examines contemporary Trans-Canadian poetic works in apposition with selected photographic portraits of Native and Black subjects, as photo-poetic testimonies of *survivance*. The chapter studies the stereotypical 19th and early 20th century visual representations of BIPOC, in order to read the traces of resistance and resilience they always already revealed, despite the rigid poses, the artificiality of the costumes and props, as well as the racist staging and framing of the pictures. I also look into contemporary poems and visual artworks that rewrite and transform the stereotypical portraits of ethnology and anthropology and represent the photographed subjects as actants of resistance and perseverance. I will center my presentation around three photo-poetic vignettes in order to gesture at otherwise, synesthetic grammars that urge the viewers to read historically, gaze at, touch, and listen to the photographic portraits and the poetic texts as testimonies that speak to otherwise modalities of being human and being-with.

Andriana Tasopoulou

Pandemics and Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* Trilogy

My research project focuses on bioethical issues in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* Trilogy, [*Oryx and Crake* (2003) *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013)], attempting to establish a dialogue between bioethics and literature and showing how speculative fiction can help bioethics to reach a much broader audience. In the first chapter, I tried to rebuild the scientific and bioethical discourse in the years before the publication of the first novel, adopting a New Historicist approach. Consequently, in chapter 2, I discussed the classic bioethical issue of informed consent and how it is presented by Atwood in her trilogy, using the methodology of ethical analysis.

In this presentation, I will discuss the third chapter of my thesis, titled “Pandemics and *MaddAddam* Trilogy”, as well as the problems I faced while I was working on it. More particularly, I will attempt to reveal how Margaret Atwood uses the pandemic trope, its rhetoric and imagery, in order to comment on bioethical and political issues that usually emerge in a pandemic framework. After briefly presenting some facts on pandemics (definition, origin, impact, history), I will reveal how the notion of disease permeates all three novels, attempting to relate the fictional events to their real life equivalents. Then, using the tools of bioethical analysis, I will discuss ethical issues arising before, during and after the JUVE outbreak that almost exterminated the human species in the *MaddAddam* Trilogy. Last, I will comment on how the “new normal” condition created after the recent Covid-19 pandemic led to new perspectives in Bioethics, making my research more challenging.