

## MPhil in European Literature and Culture

### Myth and history in Modern Greek literature

Lent Term 2010

The seminars will take place on Mondays, from 4.00pm to 6pm, with the exception of the first seminar, which will be on Tuesday, from 10am to 12pm. Venue to be arranged. The programme will be as follows:

#### 26<sup>th</sup> January [Please note that this session is on a Tuesday]

(1) *Introduction* (Dr Teresa Shawcross)

We shall begin by defining ‘history’ and ‘myth’, and attempt a brief overview of how each is used in various genres of Medieval and Modern Greek literature.

(2) *“The Matter of Troy”: Homeric Adaptations in Greek Literature* (Dr Teresa Shawcross)

Byzantines not only read Homer at school as one of their set texts, but had access to a wide range of other narratives that dealt with aspects of the Trojan War and its aftermath. This session will explore two poems that were written in vernacular Greek and date from the late Middle Ages – the *Achilleid* and the *Byzantine Iliad*. We will discuss the poems within the context of developments in romance and romance-epic. A close reading will be undertaken of excerpts circulated in advance.

#### Essential reading:

R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (2nd edition, London 1996), pp. 91-116 and 135-45 [Chapters 6 (“The First ‘Modern Greek’ Literature”), 7 (“The Original Romances: The Texts and their Stories”) and 9 (“Translations and Adaptations of Western Romances”)].

R. Browning, “The Byzantines and Homer”, in: R. Lambertson and J. J. Keaney (ed.), *Homer’s Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutic of Greek Epic’s Earliest Exegetes* (Princeton 1992), pp. 134-48.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> February [This, and all subsequent sessions are on Mondays]

*The Legend of Abgar in Text and Image* (Dr Ida Toth)

According to several extant Syriac, Greek and Latin versions of the story, Abgar was a king of Edessa who turned to Christ for help after he had succumbed to an incurable illness. He wrote begging Christ to come to Edessa in person in order to heal him. Although his request was not granted, the king received a letter from Christ promising him cure and salvation. Other narrative sources report that Abgar obtained instead a portrait of Christ or, perhaps, a towel with an imprint of the face of Christ (mandylion). The seminar will explore the development and transformation of this legend in narrative sources as well as focusing on the function and significance of the ‘authentic relics’ of Christ’s life directly associated with the legend. Set in a broad chronological and geographical framework, the talk will also examine the eastern origin of the relics, surviving inscriptional evidence for the correspondence between Abgar and Christ, the role of the mandylion as a palladium of Constantinople until

its disappearance in 1204 and, finally, the proliferation of the painted copies of the mandylion and the pictorial representations of the Legend of Abgar in the late Middle Ages.

**Essential reading:**

- A. Cameron, "History of the Image of Edessa", in: eadem, *Changing Cultures in early Byzantium*, Chapter IX (Aldershot 1996)
- H. J. W Drijvers, "The Image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition", in: H. L. Kessler, G. Wolf (ed.), *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation* [Villa Spelman Colloquia 6] (1998), pp.13-31
- P. Hetherington, "The Image of Edessa: Some Notes on its Late Fortunes", in: E. Jeffreys (ed.) *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilisation* (Festschrift R. Browning) (Cambridge 2006), pp.192-205

**8<sup>th</sup> February**

(1) *Myth in Cretan Renaissance Literature* (Dr Shawcross)

This session looks at the ways in which Cretan Renaissance literature engages with classical myth. The most famous work produced on the island, the romance 'Erotokritos', contains an extended episode modelled on the story of Cephalus and Procris. The story, however, has been original context and extensively reworked. This approach can be contrasted to the much more overt employment of myth in a body of interludes or *intermedii* which were intended to be performed in between the acts of plays written on Crete. We will undertake a close reading of selected excerpts from the interludes, showing how these mini-dramas were far more than decorative entertainment. Their themes and language often interacted in a significant manner with those of the plays they accompanied. Material will be circulated in advance.

**Essential reading:**

- R. Bancroft-Marcus, "Interludes", in: D. Holton (ed.), *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete* (Cambridge 1991), pp.159-78
- D. Holton, "The Function of Myth in Cretan Renaissance Poetry: the Cases of Achelis and Kornaros", in: Peter Mackridge (ed.), *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek poetry. Essays in Memory of C.A. Trypanis* (London: Frank Cass 1996), pp. 1-12

(2) Pope Joan: *Historical Novel or What?* (Dr Foteini Lika)

After a brief introduction on the "generic" reception that followed the publication of *Pope Joan*, I shall consider those features of the work that encourage its inclusion in either the historiographical or the novelistic canon of the era, drawing examples mostly from the work of Gibbon, Macaulay and Scott. Having established the affinities and dissimilarities between each paradigm and *Pope Joan*, I will then re-pose the question of the title, taking into account the new data that will have arisen through the comparative process.

**Essential reading:**

- E. Roidis, *Η Πάπισσα Ιωάννα*, ed. D. Demeroules (Athens 2005) [translation: *Pope Joan, A Romantic Biography*, trans. L. Durrell (London 1954)]
- R. Macrides, "The Fabrication of the Middle Ages: Roides's *Pope Joan*", *Kambos* 4 (1996), pp. 29-40

R. Macrides, "As Byzantine Then as it is Today: *Pope Joan* and Roidis's Greece", in: D. Ricks and P. Magdalino (eds), *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity* (Aldershot 1998), pp. 73-86

### **15<sup>th</sup> February**

*Cavafy, Poet-Historian* (Dr Shawcross)

This session will examine the treatment of the past in a selection of poems by Constantine Cavafy that are ostensibly set in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. We will look at the extent to which Cavafy engages with what might be described as a "historical method", and consider the way in which his poetry explores the relationship between memory and art. The poems to be discussed will be circulated in advance.

#### **Essential reading:**

R. Beaton, "The History Man", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 10 (1983), pp.23-44.

D. Ricks, "Cavafy the Poet-Historian", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988), pp. 169-183.

### **22<sup>nd</sup> February**

*Student Presentations*

### **1<sup>st</sup> March**

*Myth and History in Modern Poetry on the Parthenon* (Dr Liana Giannakopoulou)

This session will focus on a comparative discussion of poems devoted to the Parthenon. It will begin with an introduction to ephrastic poetry with an emphasis on poetry about monuments more specifically, and particular issues related to it, such as the public character of the monuments and the often political and cultural issues attached to it. Then, with a selection of poems on the Parthenon written by Greek and English/American poets, we shall discuss how ancient Greek myth is used to explore issues of tradition and innovation; and how a poem on a monument so famous allows poets to criticize, satirize and subvert political and cultural aspects of modern Greece. The poems to be discussed will be circulated in advance.

#### **Essential Reading:**

Sikelianos, Ζωφόρος ('Frieze'), 1914

Keats, 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles', 1817

Palamas, extract from *Η φλογέρα του Βασιλιά* (*The King's Flute*), 1910

Kalas, «Ακρόπολη» ('Acropolis'), 1933 Patchen, Saturday Night in the Parthenon, 1942

Frangopoulos, «Το δεύτερο» ('The second'), 1947-8

Durrell, *The Parthenon* (1945-6)

Durrell, *Acropolis* (1966)

Montis, extract from *Στιγμές* (*Moments*), 1970-5