

POSTGRADUATE STUDENT COLLOQUIUM
of the MASTER OF THE ARTS PROGRAMME in

ENGLISH STUDIES -- LITERATURE AND CULTURE:
“NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY
ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE AND CULTURE”

Friday, October 20, 2023
Museum of the History
of the University of Athens,
Plaka, Athens

Saturday, October 21, 2023
Amphitheatre of the Library
of the School of Philosophy
Zografou University Campus, Athens



Tessa Mars, *Marie-Thérèse et Dieunié*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 50"x 40"

Division of Literature and Culture
Department of English Language and Literature
The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

Colloquium Organizing Committee

Efterpi Mitsi
Angelos Evangelou
Christina Dokou

The Organizers would like to thank the Department of English Language and Literature Faculty and Administrators for their valuable help, as well as the Special Account for Research Grants (ΕΛΚΕ) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (ΕΚΠΑ) for its funding of the event

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PROGRAMME

Friday, October 20

18:30 Welcome

Asimina Karavanta, Director of the Postgraduate MA Programme “English Studies: Literature and Culture”
Kostas Blatanis, Head of the Division of Literature and Culture, Department of English Language and Literature

Poetry Reading by Professor Liana Sakelliou

Drinks reception

Saturday, October 21

9:00-9:30 Welcoming Address

Evi Mitsi, Professor of English Literature and Culture

Asimina Karavanta, Director of the Postgraduate MA Programme “English Studies: Literature and Culture”

9:30-10:20 Session I: “Failure to Succumb” in Avant-Garde and Surrealist Imaginaries

Chair: Mathilde Pyrli

- Elena Georgiou: “[T]he longing and the lack’ of youth: Time, Language and the Self in Mina Loy”
- Charis Mavroulias: “Reclaiming an Un-trans-cendable History through the Surrealist Art of Claude Cahun”

10:20 Coffee break

10:50-12:00 Session II: Decolonial Politics and Poetics

Chair: Georgia Mandelou

- Elena Koumarianou: “Salvaging the Bones, Tracing the ‘Specters of the Undead [That] Make Themselves Present’ in M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!*”
- Myrto Tapeinou: “Riding the Tide Together: Fragments of Relation-Ships in M. Philip NourbeSe’s *Zong!* and Michelle Cliff’s *Into the Interior*”
- Tina Staikou: “Michelle Cliff’s *Into the Interior*: Telling the Tale of Errantry (and Imagination)”

12:00-13:00 Plenary address

Norbert Bugeja, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Malta

“Lorenzetti’s Stranger? Hisham Matar’s Aesthetics of Return and the Margins of Memoir”

Chair: Angelos Evangelou

13:00-14:00 Lunch

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14:00-15:30: Aesthetics and Figurations of Madness

Chair: Despoina Tantsiopoulou

- Panos Orfanos: “Unsettling the Coloniality of Madness in Sylvia Wynter’s *Hills of Hebron*”
- Doria Panai: “(Counter)Poetics of Madness in Caribbean Literature”
- Eirini Bouraki: “Death Becomes the Chicana: The Mythic Lesbian Continuum and the Formation of Transgenerational Communities as Reciprocation of the Gift of Death in Cherríe Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*”
- Dimitris Chantziaras-Martens: “Madness in the ‘Mad Genre’ of Science Fiction”

15:30-16:40: Performing Resistance

Chair: Lina Katsorchi

- Sevi Kriara: “Choreographing Decoloniality: Migrant Subjectivity and Art in J.M. Coetzee’s *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus*”
- Elpida Lourandou: “‘Trust, in no one but us’: Thinking Empowerment from Harlem to Hip-Hop”
- Spyros Papastamos: “Embracing a Jazz Methodology; Performing Decolonial Aesthetics in Fahima Ife’s *maroon choreography*, Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and James Baldwin’s *Sonny’s Blues*”

16:40 Closing remarks: Christina Dokou

ABSTRACTS
(in alphabetical order)

Eirini Bouraki
Death Becomes the Chicana: The Mythic Lesbian Continuum and the Formation of Transgenerational Communities as Reciprocation of the Gift of Death in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*

The popularity of classical myth is incessantly evinced in its retellings and reworkings, such as in the case of Euripides' *Medea* being recast as a metaphor for dispossession and otherness in an American context. This presentation analyzes the contemporary Chicano play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* by playwright Cherríe Moraga in a similar light, as the playwright rewrites the act of Medea's infanticide as sacrifice, to redeem it and make it meaningful for the family and the community. It utilizes the scholarship of poet and essayist Adrienne Rich in relation to Christina Dokou's development of the idea of an "infected lesbian continuum", and explores its mythic dimension and potential for radical female solidarity and resistance in a precarious space such as the exilic community, reading the play as a healing act that counters the catastrophe in the "New World". Political philosopher Avner de-Shalit's concept of transgenerational community and justice, the idea that community "is more than simply an incidental, random aggregation of members, or a passing episode, or a functional gathering for one purpose" and that "although some people die and others are born, the same community remains, and the essence of that community is continuity and succession" (21), will allow me to link the lesbian continuum that extends beyond death with a social cause, an afterlife of a community. The ultimate gift of the sacrifice the characters of the Mexican Medea and her son, Chac-Mool, embody is, I argue, the gift of healing the infected lesbian continuum, as the incorporation of mythic and folkloric elements in its spectrum extends the continuum beyond the afterlife.

Dimitris Chantziaras-Martens:
Madness in the "Mad Genre" of Science Fiction

This paper focuses on the use of the theme of madness within the genre of Science Fiction (henceforth: sci-fi). More specifically, I examine the representation of madness in sci-fi works and the role it plays in relation to thematic aspects of the genre, which render it, I argue, a "mad genre" itself. To carry this investigation out, I first examine the historical development of the genre, which demonstrates its frequent incorporation of the theme of madness in its storytelling from its very origins, as well as reveals several distinct and fundamental characteristics of sci-fi, which provide further ties with madness. As a genre that actively seeks to depict the unknown, sci-fi often uses madness as a means through which to explore the unexplored and think the unthought. Through a close analysis of highly diverse sci-fi works such as Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) and *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), as well as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), I examine, first, how Darko Suvin's notion of the *novum* – the estranging sci-fi element – lends itself as a means for sci-fi writers to explore madness, and, second, how madness offers itself as a useful tool for exploring sci-fi themes in nuanced ways. Madness is examined both in relation to specific characters who experience psychosis, mental breakdown, or are otherwise considered mad, and in relation to other story or narrative elements employed by the authors in order to convey or explore madness.

Elena Georgiou
“[T]he longing
and the lack” of
youth: Time,
Language and
the Self in Mina
Loy

After Carolyn Burke’s publication of *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (1996), the “exemplary avant-gardist” (I) is no longer just a passing presence in modernist memoirs; Burke reclaims Loy’s place as an important modernist figure, while simultaneously underscoring the importance of location and dislocation, belonging and unbelonging. Built upon the foundations of a modernist vision, it proceeds to break it down into fragments and reimagine it in order to “fight the failure of literature to treat life honestly” (Kouidis 170), Loy narrates an odyssey of sorts in poems intrinsically linked to her own path to self-discovery. Her work becomes an assemblage of multiple poetic images that glimpse into the conditions of a gendered experience refusing to conform to modernist conventions, or to a fixed identity. Loy’s choice to disrupt a process of belonging becomes the starting point for a radical female “other” that is nothing and everything at once. Through an emphasis on how Loy explores the limits and potential of language to represent the vulnerability and destitution of those unfortunate enough to succumb to a failed lived experience in the margins of the metropolis, I argue that Loy’s depiction of aging in her later poems has resulted in a failed lived experience of modernity at large; the female subjects she gives voice to in her work and, by extension, Loy herself, textually assert themselves in the urban space and challenge the binary oppositions of an individual’s gender, age and subsequently, external appearance; her poetry expands on the disintegrating reality of youth as an embodiment of old age that is juxtaposed to the capitalist notion of external beauty, filtered through a process of production and fueled by consumption in an urban setting.

Elena Koumarianou
Salvaging the Bones,
Tracing the “Specters
of the Undead [That]
Make Themselves
Present” in M.
NourbeSe Philip’s
Zong!

This presentation will explore the ways in which a paradigmatic text of contemporary diasporic Caribbean writing, namely M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* (2008), engenders an affective counter-memory that challenges the lacunary archives of modernity and enslavement, dispossession and expropriation, by not monumentalizing or ossifying the past into the exemplary myths of the nation, and other exceptionalist constructs, or into the language of fiat and law, but by instead taking up the task of a decolonial literary archaeology that, in Toni Morrison’s words, “journey[s] to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply”. Examining the aesthetic ways in which this counter-memory is materialized, I attend to the bones, the cinders and traces of human beings whose humanity has been brought into question and rejected, yet whose remains resist the colonial and racializing assemblages that threaten them with the powers of erasure and annihilation. I read *Zong!’s* radical inscriptions that scrape the palimpsest of the elliptical colonial archive as a gesture of reinscribing the (supposedly irrevocably effaced) humanity of the enslaved, by heeding the presence of their bones in the depths of the Atlantic, by performing the important work of salvaging them and their dispersed traces through the narration, singing, and breathing of their stories. In doing so, I aim to argue that *Zong!* challenges the coloniality of Being, by extricating and decolonizing the being of being human from Man.

Sevi Kriara
Choreographing
Decoloniality:
Migrant
Subjectivity and
Art in J.M.
Coetzee's *The*
Childhood of
Jesus and The
Schooldays of
Jesus

My presentation investigates the decolonial politics and aesthetics in J.M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* and *The Schooldays of Jesus* and examines how the figure of the migrant – the stateless individual who arrives in the host country without documents and without memory – disrupts the dominant discursive, sociopolitical, and aesthetic regimes of the host country. Drawing on decolonial and human rights thinkers, this presentation aims to show how Novilla – the foreign city in an unidentifiable land where David and Simón arrive as migrants – is essentially a neocolonial state, which is haunted by the remaining traces of colonialism. Although Simón initially attempts to resist the neoliberal politics of Novilla, David is ultimately the only character that truly questions the laws of Novilla. He is the foreigner who does not accept being reduced to the position of the Other as waste; although he is an orphan boy in search of his mother, he still finds the power to challenge the oppressive system of Novilla. His uncompromising nature becomes even more evident in Coetzee's second novel of his trilogy, *The Schooldays of Jesus*, where David becomes a dancer and performs an unorthodox choreography that voices not only his migrant narrative but also the trauma of all the dispossessed peoples. The child decolonizes the contemporary representation of the migrant as a helpless victim in his own artistic way. Ultimately, Coetzee's texts problematize the concept of the migrant as the radical Other, foregrounding the conceptual framework that re-evaluates the idea of social and political equality as essentially problematic and founded upon the highly abstract and constructed concepts of race, nationalism and ethnocentrism.

Elpida
Lourandou
“Trust, in
no one but
us”:
Thinking
Empower
ment from
Harlem to
Hip-Hop

In this presentation, through my analysis of Harlem Renaissance texts – James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* - and contemporary hip-hop songs – Tabib Kweli's and Jean Grae's “Black Girl Pain” and Inspectah Deck's “City High” – I aim to argue that the fact that the black subjects of the Harlem Renaissance are not presented as fully emancipated problematizes their ability to be perceived as radical subjects. On the contrary, hip-hop artists masterfully manage to not only personally embrace their blackness and succeed on an individual level – by leaving the projects and, by extension, their oppressive surroundings – but to also become a source of inspiration for their black listeners that might struggle to transcend their circumstances. In the literature of Harlem Renaissance, traces of empowerment can be seen under multiple layers of self-loathing and internalized racialized thinking. Even though at first glance the black subjects of the Harlem Renaissance appear to have made significant progress regarding their idea of self-worth, they are yet to be fully emancipated; Johnson's Shiny's success is an exception to the rule, whereas Thurman's Emma Lou has an individualistic approach towards what is referred to as a process of “always fighting” (Thurman 217). Even though it is not possible to aim for an unambiguous interpretation of the characters of Harlem Renaissance literature, and their ambivalence points to both the complexity of them as characters and the complexity of black empowerment in general, it is argued that Harlem Renaissance writers eventually fail to create fully emancipated black characters that truly celebrate their blackness and point to a black collectivity rather than to an individualistic approach, whereas their hip-hop counterparts succeed in that regard.

**Charis-
Antonios
Mavroulias
Reclaiming an
Un-trans-
cendable
History through the
Surrealist Art
of Claude
Cahun**

This presentation intersects the Surrealist art of Claude Cahun and decolonial thought, to interrogate trans absence and mis(re)presentation in history, including the literary archive. Due to their preoccupation with the themes of queerness, identity formation and performance, Cahun's works have been the center of attention of several scholars, even a century after their publication. Research has thus solidified the queer artist's presence and unfolded his immense contribution to Surrealism, despite the movement's openly homophobic agenda. However, by classifying Cahun under "Women in Surrealism" and forcefully discussing his "lesbian" identity, a second violence has been done, upon an artist (and a persona) that has clearly stated; "Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me" (Cahun 232). Cahun's gender-non-conformity as well as his multiple allusions to "gender dysphoria" are not merely evidence of a pre-Stonewall trans experience; Both his literary work *Aveux Non Avenus* (1930) and his famous "Self-Portrait" (1927) with the barbell are actively defying the epistemological violence of Western medicine, religion and the law, while exposing the false-archies of sexual and gender difference. This kind of anarchoeology is necessary in the production of counter-discourses that undermine (neo)colonial practices, including transphobia, and which require a decisive step away from gendered language and being.

**Panos
Orfanos
Unsettling the
Coloniality of
Madness in
Sylvia
Wynter's *Hills
of Hebron***

This paper explores how the application of Michel Foucault's theorization of the constructedness of madness in his seminal *History of Madness* (1961) to Sylvia Wynter's only novel, *Hills of Hebron*, creates a dialogue on the unsettling of the coloniality of Being, as proposed in Wynter's article "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation— An Argument" (2003). It also aims to show, through a close reading of the two characters of the novel, Moses and Obadiah, how this dialogue can lead to alternative forms of collective subjectivity through representations of madness. Despite Foucault's detailed analysis and the usefulness of his argument about "madness" being a construct defined by the social value systems of different eras, *History of Madness* has also been heavily criticized. One of the major objections has been that his book was written through a Eurocentric lens and therefore his theorization cannot account for how madness has been perceived in other places of the world – in the case of Wynter's novel, in the Caribbean. I aim to prove that these criticisms do not do justice to Foucault's theory and that his attempt to show the constructedness of madness is a decolonizing rather than a colonizing one. In a similar way that Wynter proposes in her article that we need to deconstruct the idea of the coloniality of Being that was invented with colonialism but transgresses its end historically, Foucault's ideas that madness is defined by power relations can be applied to any temporal and historical context to destabilize such relations. In *Hills of Hebron*, Wynter employs the purported madness of her male protagonists not only to resist colonial rule but also to create a hybrid community that is not governed by colonizer laws. Therefore, I propose that the way she employs the literary trope of "madness" as defined by Foucault can effect an exit from, rather than a resistance to, the idea of colonialism.

**Doria
Panai
(Counter)
Poetics of
Madness
in
Caribbean
Literature**

Within a decolonial theoretical background which heavily draws from Édouard Glissant's geopoetic analysis of the Caribbean, the proposed paper examines the theme of madness as it is textually and symbolically represented in two contemporary texts, namely Kei Miller's *The Last Warner Woman* (2010), and Derek Walcott's play *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967). The fluid and transcultural constitution of the Caribbean brings about the emergence of a poetics that disrupts epistemological and historical rigidity. Through this decolonial prism, the textual representations of madness are explored through their misinterpreted resistive force to colonial apparatuses, but also through their allegorical allusions to a conceptualization of a Creole and rhizomatic Caribbean experience. In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, I read the portrayal of Makak's madness as the symbolic initiator of establishing a Caribbean futurity. In this sense, his journey throughout the play becomes a quest for a self-identity, and not an imposed and rigid representation of human existence. In relation to *The Last Warner Woman*, I explore how Miller's multivocal narrative reconfigures the Western archives of Caribbean historiography, and conceptualizes a rhizomatic historical testimony that transcends the Western-centric colonial and medical discourse on madness. Subsequently, this presentation endeavors to explore how the two West Indian authors engage with the textual representation of madness, while simultaneously addressing and reconceptualizing matters of Caribbean culture, experience, identity and history.

**Spyros
Papastamos
Embracing a
Jazz
Methodology;
Performing
Decolonial
Aesthesis in
Fahima Ife's
maroon
choreography,
Toni
Morrison's
Jazz and
James
Baldwin's
Sonny's Blues**

Based on a decolonial reading of Baldwin's *Sonny's Blues*, Morrison's *Jazz*, and Ife's *maroon choreography*, this paper discusses whether a performative jazz poetics of relation in the three texts provides the framework for an alternative mode of being, and being-with, in the context of neoliberal capitalism. A comparative close reading of *Sonny's Blues* and *Jazz* proposes a reading of jazz as a literary and artistic poetics of relation that seeks to decolonize being from the universal claims and normative hierarchies colonial modernity has imposed and perpetuated in all aspects of social and economic life. The concept of maroonage, which is what *maroon choreography* revolves around but is also present in Baldwin's and Morrison's work, becomes the performative methodological tool that introduces the idea of decolonial aesthesis in an attempt to re-contextualize the present role of jazz. The decolonial potential of the interaction between the maroon experience and literary jazz is further explored through dance and choreography, which become the means through which Ife explores her choreographic and anachoreographic moments. In *Jazz* and *maroon choreography*, dance and choreography ascribe a performative element to the study of literary jazz by embracing an improvisational and communal tone which interacts with maroon poetics and eventually turns jazz into a metonymy for maroonage. The renegade maroon communities have sustained an opaque identity that resists the colonial order's desire to permeate, and thus appropriate, their existence. In the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism, where the unipolar standards of the colonial project of modernity propose individualism to be the norm, the maroon communities of today explore the political potential of a methodology of being by means of opaque decolonial aesthesis that embraces a communal, symbiotic and non-hierarchical mode of living in solidarity with the living and non-living forms of life.

**Tina Staikou
Michelle
Cliff's *Into
the Interior*.
Telling the
Tale of
Errantry
(and
Imagination)**

This presentation aims to communicate some of the main arguments developed in the second chapter of my MA thesis, a project in which I examined three — tightly interwoven, to the extent of forming an unannounced trilogy of sorts — of Michelle Cliff's novels: *Abeng* (1984), *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and *Into the Interior* (2010). Here I will focus on the last of the three novels, which, as I argue, brilliantly showcases Cliff's suspicion, to say the least, of such identitarian constructions as nationality, and follows the narrator's errant quest not for what we conventionally tend to understand by identity, but for what Édouard Glissant conceptualizes as “an identity-rhizome”, that is, an identity that opens up the Relation with the Other. As I will additionally show, through her errantry — a concept I also draw from Glissant — Cliff's autodiegetic narrator heuristically defies what Madina Tlostanova and Walter Dignolo have called the “logic of coloniality”. In its stead, she privileges the redemptive and emancipatory potential of (creative) imagination; or, imagination as decolonization. The specific modality of artistic understanding (and imaginative reconstellation) of the world privileged by this narrator is, as I will argue, none other than the one afforded by the vast immersiveness of language.

**Myrto Tapeinou
Riding the Tide
Together:
Fragments of
Relation-Ships in
M. Philip
NourbeSe's *Zong!*
and Michelle Cliff's
*Into the Interior***

To rethink the sea as the decolonial catalyst of the concept of the human, the vehicle of its migrations and returns, I draw on M. NourbeSe Philip's cycle poem *Zong! As told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng* (2008) and Michelle Cliff's hybrid novel *Into the Interior* (2010). Philip's highly experimental poetic synthesis critically revises a legal document from the Black Atlantic slave trade, namely, the summary of the Gregson vs. Gilbert case about the murder of the Africans on board of the *Zong*, by imaginatively distilling the nuances and aporias that emerge from the narrative of the case. Cliff's narrative symptomatically departs from a colonial past, too, to travel across the Atlantic Ocean to the British metropolis, gradually morphing into a series of fugues that alternately shred apart and bring together relations, historical events, and geographical places. I aim to argue that the textual co-inhabitantries of the two texts, albeit momentary, vulnerable, and diasporic, affirm the right of the concept of the human to engage radically errant community-makings and imaginings, tidally revealing multiple routes towards what Saidiya Hartman refers to as the anticipated “free state”—an unforeseen state that carries within it a future that is always yet to-be imagined.