Narratology and Intertextuality: New Perspectives on Greek Epic from Homer to Tzetzes

International Seminar, University of Oslo, Norway, 3–4 June 2016
Organised by Prof. Anastasia Maravela and Assoc. Prof. Silvio Bär

Call for papers

The history of ancient Greek literature can, to a large extent, be regarded and written as a history of epic poetry. Essentially, Greek literature (at least in its recorded, written form) ‘began’ and ‘ended’ with two heavy epic ‘blows’ that were separated by more than a thousand years: Homer’s *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (8th/7th cent. BC) on the one hand, and Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* (c. 500 AD) on the other. In between, a continuous stream of epic production not only secured the survival of this arguably most persistent literary genre, but also offered multitudinous opportunities for presenting and negotiating new literary aesthetics in dialogue with a century-old tradition (the most eminent examples perhaps being Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* and Quintus of Smyrna’s *Posthomerica*). Beyond Antiquity, the tradition of epic poetry was prominently revived by the Byzantine polymath John Tzetzes (12th cent. AD), who wrote commentaries on Homer and Hesiod as well as a hexametric renarration of the entire Trojan war (*Carmina Iliaca*). While archaic epic poetry (esp. Homer and Hesiod) has always been a key factor in Classical studies (both in literary studies and in linguistics), later (viz. Hellenistic and esp. imperial) epic used to be regarded as ‘second-rate’, imitative, non-original poetry for a long time. However, the past few decades have seen a considerable increase in, and reevaluation of, studies in post-archaic epic. This development can largely be viewed in parallel with an according paradigmatic change in literary theory – a change which, essentially, shifted its focus from unidirectional source criticism (often criticising later epic for not achieving the ‘standards’ of their ‘predecessors’) to more dynamic (and more value-free) intertextual approaches, regarding references and allusions not as incidental ‘soundtracks’, but, as Gian Biagio Conte put it, as an integral part in a system of a “functional rhetorical matrix”. Scholars thus were able, for example, to better understand the specifically Hellenistic aesthetics of Alexandrian epic, or the specific ‘belatedness’ of imperial epic. Inter alia, intertextuality has been proven particularly valuable with respect to understanding parameters such as (formulaic) language, vocabulary, phraseology, style, composition of scenes, etc., in relation to a poem’s ‘epic predecessors’.

In a parallel trajectory, narratology became a useful theoretical tool to analyse fictional (as well as non-fictional, or ‘semi-fictional’) texts. Research on Greek epic poetry has greatly benefited from this trend, too; the most eminent example is, arguably, the introduction of

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1 The surviving epic poetry is, in fact, only a fraction of the actual epic production in Antiquity, most of which is only known through fragments and/or testimonies; cf. e.g. the overview provided by Joachim Latacz, “Zum Funktionswandel des antiken Epos”, in: Boris Dunsch, Arbogast Schmitt and Thomas A. Schmitz (eds.), *Epos, Lyrik, Drama: Genese und Ausformung der literarischen Gattungen*. Heidelberg: Winter, 2013, 55–88, at 82–88. A summit of Greek epic poetry is the Egyptian area of the imperial period; cf. Laura Migueléz Caver, *Poems in Context: Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD*. Berlin and New York: deGruyter, 2009 (esp. at 33–79 for an overview of epic poems that are only known through inscriptions or papyri).

2 Cf. esp. the recent increase in research on imperial epic poetry, as documented e.g. by the research project “Greek Epic of the Roman Empire: A Cultural History”, conducted by Tim Whitmarsh (http://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/greek-epic-of-the-roman-empire—a-cultural-history), or the three international Nonnus conferences in 2011 and 2013 (http://www.oinopa.org/conferences.html) and 2015 (http://www.wnh.uksw.edu.pl/Nonnusincontext_III).

narratology into the study of the Homeric epics by Irene de Jong. However, despite these developments and the significant progress in research, intertextual and narratological approaches are rarely to be found as analytic tools in combination. Basically, it can be stated that intertextuality remains, in most cases, restricted to the level of ‘micro-philology’ (language, vocabulary, etc.; cf. above), while narratology, as a rule, lacks a comparative dimension. To put it simply, intertextuality is diachronic, but remains micro-philological, while narratology is macro-philological, but remains synchronic. The aim of this seminar is to allow new theoretical and methodological perspectives on Greek epic poetry from Homer to Tzetzes by widening the concepts of both intertextuality and narratology to where their respective ‘blind spots’ lie, that is, by bringing them into productive dialogue. It will open the study of Greek epic poetry to what Monika Fludernik called the “diachronization of narratology” in 2003 and what has, most recently in 2014, been applied to the study of the Greek novel by Irene de Jong under the term “diachronic narratology”. Essentially, the principal goal of diachronic narratology is, as de Jong puts it, to analyse the mechanisms that are at work “when we see different authors using the same narrative device across time and space”, and to reflect upon how the analysis of these mechanisms can further our understanding and interpretation of single epic poems as well as the history and genre of Greek epic poetry in general.

The scope of this seminar is meant to be as broad as possible both with regard to the Greek epic texts that can be taken into account (therefore potentially ranging from Homer to Tzetzes) and to the possibilities of the concrete theoretical application of intertextual and narratological questions and approaches. The following is only a list of possible areas that may be covered in your paper. Papers can focus on...

- …a specific epic author and/or work and the way certain narratological parameters (e.g. narrative voice, time, space, character, etc.) are used in relation to other texts (e.g. to its epic ‘predecessors’, to other literary genres dealing with similar narratological parameters, etc.).
- …how epic authors use intertextual narratology to initiate a dialogue with their epic ‘predecessors’ (e.g. by implementing an unreliable narrator).
- …how certain narratological parameters ‘travel’ through the history of Greek epic poetry, how they change and how these changes affect the understanding and interpretation of single epic poems and/or the history of Greek epic poetry.
- …how narratological parameters are linked to generic questions in relation to epic poetry, for example the question of long vs. short epic poetry (epos vs. epyllion).
- …analysis and discussion of ancient literary criticism dealing with epic poetry from a perspective that combines narratological and intertextual approaches (e.g. in the Homeric scholia or in imperial literary criticism).
- …theoretical considerations combining intertextual and narratological approaches and reflecting upon how they can be applied to the study of Greek epic in a productive manner.

We are, of course, happy to consider any further suggestions.

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5 A notable exception is the study by Andrew D. Morrison, The Narrator in Archaic Greek and Hellenistic Poetry. Cambridge: CUP, 2007, who analyses the primary narrative voice in Hellenistic epic poets by explicit reference to their archaic ‘predecessors’, and uses narratological theory to do so.
7 De Jong (as in preceeding note) 120.
Seminar programme

Friday, 3 June 2016

Morning
9.00 – 9.45 1st paper
9.45 – 10.30 2nd paper
10.30 – 11.00 Coffee break
11.00 – 11.45 3rd paper
11.45 – 12.30 4th paper
12.30 – 13.30 Sandwich lunch

Afternoon
13.30 – 14.15 5th paper
14.15 – 15.00 6th paper
15.00 – 15.30 Coffee break
15.30 – 16.15 7th paper
16.15 – 17.00 8th paper
20.00 Conference dinner

Saturday, 4 June 2016

Morning
9.00 – 9.45 9th paper
9.45 – 10.30 10th paper
10.30 – 11.00 Coffee break
11.00 – 11.45 11th paper
11.45 – 12.30 12th paper
12.30 – 13.30 Sandwich lunch

Afternoon
13.30 – 14.15 13th paper
14.15 – 15.00 14th paper
15:00 – 15:15 Discussion (book)

Seminar procedure

Each participant is allotted a time slot of 45 minutes (cf. programme above), which he/she can use freely. Various formats are possible; the following is only a list of suggestions:

- ‘Traditional format’: oral presentation (25–30 minutes) to be followed by discussion/questions (15–20 minutes).
- ‘School format’: mixture of oral presentation and discussion/questions.
- ‘Discussion-only format’: discussion of a previously distributed paper (in that case, it is important that you send the paper to all participants early in advance, at the latest in early May 2016).

The seminar language is English.

Book project

We are planning to publish the results of the seminar in a collected volume. The volume will, however, not be a mere collection of conference presentations (Tagungsband); rather, the seminar is to be regarded as a first step to a common book project, the goal of which is a coherent and interconnected volume (with cross-references etc.) of studies at the interface of narratology and intertextuality in Greek epic poetry. The editors will write an introduction on the intersection of these approaches and its contribution to the interpretation of the Greek epic literary production. The further particulars will be discussed at the seminar. The language of the book will be English.

Deadline for title and abstract

Please send us the title of your paper and an abstract of c. 200–300 words ASAP, but no later than 30 August 2015. We will be sending a document with all titles and abstracts to all participants in the course of September 2015.

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