

Preface

This volume of *Gramma* unites twelve essays, the result of a call for papers aimed at young Greek scholars and graduate students working in the field of English and American Studies at Greek universities or abroad. The occasion for this invitation was the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary since the founding of the School of English at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. This, the second degree-granting program in English Language and Literature in Greece, was founded in 1951, a year after the Faculty of English Studies was independently established within the School of Philosophy of the University of Athens. Together, the two institutions have had a decisive impact on the study of the languages, literatures and cultures of the English-speaking world in Greece. In particular, in recent years Thessaloniki has developed a postgraduate programme, with Master's degrees in linguistics as well as in English and American literature and a number of students continuing as candidates for the PhD.¹

We felt an appropriate way of celebrating the work that has been done in the two institutions would be to take stock of the state of current research in English and American Studies by showcasing the work of its youngest contributors. Have we succeeded in establishing a “tradition” of English studies in Greece? If so, what sort of tradition is it? What kind of work is being done by young scholars working within the field of English and American literary studies in Greece today? What have been their formative influences at this particular moment of globalization and internationalization in literary and cultural studies?

The response we received to our call for papers was generous and positive. We had a large number of excellent papers to choose from, which made the selection process both challenging and rewarding. After much discussion and careful reading, we chose twelve papers that we feel articulate the heterogeneity and polyvocality of subject matter and contemporary critical methodology. We would like to add that there were several excellent papers which, unfortunately, had to be omitted for lack of space.

What can these twelve papers tell us about the state of English and American studies in Greece today? First, we should like to point to the scope of subject matter covered. The essays span a wide chronological range. Half the papers deal with pre-20th-century texts, and three address the period before 1800, a not insignificant achievement for non-native speakers. They also express a wide variety of theoretical approaches – historicist (old and new), Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, and post-colonial, among others.

Second, there is nothing marginal or parochial about these papers. The authors critically engage various contemporary theoretical developments, though they rarely follow any single approach. Instead, they seem highly conscious of the discursive strategies of an international critical idiom that has

recently established itself globally in literary and cultural studies. As a consequence, these young scholars tend to focus on very contemporary issues, joining the debate on conceptual geography, gender and the body, and postmodern narrativity. They move easily between literary texts and other semiotic systems (from medieval theology to advertising and film) and indeed show a certain preoccupation with the insidious role of the image in contemporary popular culture.

In fact, one could argue that many of these young voices are so thoroughly engaged in dialogue with the dominant debates in their field that they do not always take adequate advantage of their specific bilingual, bi-cultural positions. A generation ago, PhD dissertations in Greece tended to deal with traditional aspects of Greek-English or Greek-American interaction: travel writing, immigrant literature, the image of Greece in the literature of the West, for example. Given the current interest in the nature of national identities, there is still work to be done in this area, and it will benefit from today's theoretical sophistication. There is also a wide field of research in comparative literary and cultural studies, not least from the perspective of post-colonialism. In addition, a Greek education still ensures that students in the humanities are given sufficient knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin to have at least rudimentary access to the classical and medieval cultural traditions of both East and West, something particularly useful in the study of the early modern period.

There are papers in this volume which pursue these avenues of research, but we cannot say that it is a perspective which is being widely explored. The nature and structure of higher education in Greece tends to resist the development of approaches that would see different linguistic and literary traditions as interrelated rather than as segregated into separate compartments. However, the theoretical engagement of the young scholars represented in this volume shows how increasingly difficult it has become to study literature in isolation, without situating it within broader international historical and cultural processes. That, in fact, may turn out to be the challenge facing English and American Studies in Greece in the 21st century.

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Note

1. While it has long been technically possible to study for a doctorate in English at a Greek university, the lack of resources, especially of adequate research libraries, made it virtually impossible in practice. Even today, most PhD candidates in English or American literature spend brief periods abroad to complete their research.