

MuseumEdu 7

Τα μουσεία στη λογοτεχνία – Η λογοτεχνία στα μουσεία Museums in Literature – Literature in Museums

INTRODUCTION

The Rationale

While planning the present issue of *MuseumEdu*, dedicated to the twofold theme *Museums in Literature-Literature in Museums*, we invited scholars from different disciplines, such as literary and cultural studies, museology and education, to explore and discuss the multifaceted relationship between literature and museums, as well as other places of cultural reference. The essays that are finally included here examine how the concept and images of the museum function within literary texts and, conversely, how literary texts of fiction, poetry and non-fiction are incorporated, experienced and utilized within museums and in relation to museum exhibits. Some of the articles focus on the relationship between literature, museum and history and, therefore, investigate the role of such concurrences in the formation of collective memory. Most of them encompass research on the educational potential and possibilities of both museum and literature.

Literature and Museums: Mutual Reconfigurations

As narratologist Mieke Bal (1996) first pointed out in her seminal *Double Exposures: the Subject of Cultural Analysis*, an exhibition of objects in the museum can be read, similarly to literature, as “text” (verbal or visual or other), in terms of the science of semiotics, namely, as a narrative that organizes its material of visual, verbal, audible or any other “signs”, so as to systematically address an audience, on which its interpretation and overall appeal depend. Since the publication of Bal’s study, theoretical elaborations of semiotics in the field

of Museum Studies have abounded (see Plokhotnyuk, V & Mitrofanenko, L. 2018), and are also utilized in several of the essays in this issue, since regardless of their special field of research, the authors who have collaborated for this project share an interest in the operation of signs, narrative, multimodality and their effect on the spectator and/or reader. Interestingly, Bal also views the museum project as the paradigm for a desired conjoining of literary and cultural studies. The museum embodies, in her view, the interrelation of the different disciplines of the humanities, the arts, and their respective subjects of study and research, which, traditionally in the academy, have been subjected to a wrongful, artificial, classification and divide, both from each other and from the social sciences. The museum, by definition, “needs interdisciplinary analysis; it has the debate on aesthetics on its agenda; and it is essentially a social institution. The museum appears as a suitable emblem of contemporary humanistic studies” (Bal 1996: 2).

From the perspective of Comparative Literature, and in the spirit of the interdisciplinary approach that Bal advocates, an interest in the interrelations of literature with the other arts has been developing for some time (Aggelatos 2017), together with an interest for the operation of the so-called “transmediality”, namely, “the transcendence of the single medium, the existence of different media in a work, or the coupling of different media to create new hybrid forms of art” (Andonopoulou, Karakassi & Petropoulou 2015: 125; see also Ellestrom 2010). However, the study of literature in the context of the present issue is both broader and more specific. Broader, because it is not limited to the relation of literature with the fine arts, and it assumes that all cultural events and practices are historically and culturally situated (explicitly or covertly); more specific, in so far as it focuses particularly on encounters of active agents with the structured environment of museum exhibitions, and on the rapports that potentially result from such encounters (real or fictional).

From the second half of the 20th century until today, literary studies have been gradually dominated by the so-called “theoretical turn towards reading (and readers)”. This suggests that meaning is not an intrinsic quality of the text, but rather the result of participatory and interactive processes that depend both on the subjectivity of the reader and the cultural context of reading (Iser 1974, Rosenblatt 1978). Similarly, within the research fields of Museum Studies and Museum Education, attention has focused on the visitor’s pole, who is

considered a co-producer of meaning. As Richard Crownshaw (2000) observes, “the meaning of an artefact is not only determined by its placement on a narrative axis, its textuality, but also conferred by its spectators”. Even when artefacts are projected as “the embodiment of history itself”, the viewer’s gaze reinterprets them, thus “loosening artefacts from their exhibitionary anchor and metaphysics of presence” (Cranshaw 2000:19).

Therefore, readers and / or spectators, and their role as active producers of meaning (though always culturally and historically engaged), are justifiably a central locus of interest in the articles presented in this issue, especially those focusing on the museum’s intrinsic connection to education. Today’s teachers systematically work towards the empowerment of their students’ agency, by encouraging their personal and dynamic involvement in the learning process. The essays hosted here show us how different literary or museum (multimodal) texts, themselves engendered from the interaction and association between literary and museum texts, are re-read by readers /spectators in innovative ways, creating new texts each time. In the empirical researches presented here, the creative processes of encounters between high school students and museum exhibitions culminate in the production of original poetry on the part of the students. The articles that were finally selected highlight, precisely, how a rich production of texts, literary / intermedial, museum / multimodal, has been achieved through relationships and interaction, and creative interventions by readers, writers, spectators and curators.

The Volume

The issue includes six essays, which converse with each other, as their concerns intersect to a greater or lesser extent, and are therefore difficult to classify into strictly defined categories. However, the order in which they are presented reflects a shift in the focus of the studies, from the theme of “museums in literature” to “literature in the museums” and concludes with articles exploring the museum as educational venue focusing on the reading of literature and especially poetry, and as a place inspiring the production of new literary and poetic texts by students-museum visitors.

Symeonides Thomas, AESTHETIC AND NARRATIVE APPROACHES OF THE MUSEUM AS TRANSMEDIAL REFERENCE IN *THE COMPASS* BY MATHIAS ÉNARD

Symeonides focuses on two episodes of Mathias Énard's postmodern novel *The Compass*, which account for museum visits in Vienna, by the two main characters of the novel (one of whom is also the narrator). The first museum is the Josephinum Medical Museum (that houses anatomical wax models used in the 18th Century for the training of army surgeons) and the second is the Jewish Museum. Firstly, Symeonides elaborates on the operation of the museum as "intermedial reference" within the novel, namely, the contribution of the museum as a medium with its own semantic and structural features, in the literary text. Subsequently, this assessment is augmented by the use of the concepts of the "aesthetic status of art" and the "distribution of the sensible" that have been suggested by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière.

These two theories are used to interpret the ambiguity in the narration, as, on the one hand, the intentions and ideology of the exhibitions' curators are transposed into the text, and, on the other, these intentions and their effects are questioned and deconstructed. In this way, the use of the subjective perspectives of the two main characters is transformed into an instrument of political and cultural criticism, while the past that is performed through these particular museum exhibitions is linked to other, current issues, such as the relationship between West and East today.

Kanatsouli Meni, A THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS IN THE MUSEUMS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Kanatsouli deals equally with illustrated books for younger children, and examines the relation between the verbal and visual text that defines them, and books for adolescents. Their protagonists experience encounters with museum exhibits, performed either in terms of literary adventure, adventurous quest and discovery, or as complex, fantastical and sometimes frightening but fascinating meetings with exhibits that literally come to life. It is worth mentioning, parenthetically, that in literature, as in comics and films, too, museums

are often the backdrop for mystery and horror stories and are tackled as places that “hide” potentially “dark” secrets from the past.

These books take on the role of a “space”, within which, as Kanatsouli writes, “the material elements of the past constitute a kind of memory, [in the form of] traces ... conveying realities and beliefs of older generations”. Therefore, she studies them, precisely, as a means of shaping the historical memory of the young reader. In this context, she supports her reading of the texts with the related discussion that is taking place in the field of Memory Studies, where memory is perceived as a social construct, fashioned in the context of communication processes.

Pyrpili Spyridoula, LITERARY TESTIMONY AS MUSEUM MATERIAL, IN THE SPHERE OF PUBLIC HISTORY: FROM THE *DIARY* TO THE MUSEUM OF ANNE FRANK

The article explores difficult questions, such as the genre of *Anne Frank's Diary* (a text on the threshold between literature and history), as well as the ways in which the information it contains, as well as Anne's own discourse, have been transformed and incorporated into the multimodal exhibition of the renowned museum. At the same time, it examines whether this museum effectively serves public history, and concludes that it does indeed transmit historical information to a wider public, manages painful historical issues effectively, and highlights the political and symbolic dimension of past events in the present, with faith in the educational power of history. The museum narrative broadens the scope of the reception of the *Anne Frank Diary*, in order to integrate it into the field of public history, thereby contributing to the cultivation of historical empathy and thought and to the historical literacy of the Museum public.

Vlivos Stavros & Papagianni Maria, ICONO-GRAPHEMATA: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

The article presents an alternative teaching plan for the poetry of modernism, and the art of modernism in general, entitled “*Icono-Graphemata*” (writing based on imagery) that was tried with considerable success in the classrooms of the 5th Comprehensive Senior High School

of Corfu and at the local branch of the National Gallery at Lower Korakiana. The museum environment in this case was first used as an educational space that inspires and offers ways for experiential and creative, collaborative group learning, thus freeing students from the traditional classroom and teaching style of the lecture that turns them into passive recipients of knowledge. Moving the literature class to the museum and the gallery broke the artificial boundaries of literature as an autonomous academic subject and highlighted its relation to other arts, such as painting and music, promoting a cross-sectional and interdisciplinary approach. This project thus confirmed the position of Mieke Bal mentioned above, that the museum offers by nature grounds for a critique of the traditional divide between the different arts and humanities disciplines and their objects. Of particular interest in this context is one of the authors' conclusions, drawn from their experience of this research, namely, that the development of the students' long-term relationship with literature, as well as the development of their ability to interact creatively with museum environments, require, among other things, "the cooperation of the Ministries of Education and Culture, with the aim of developing an organized institutional framework for the fruitful interconnection of the museum and the school."

Kalessopoulou Despina & Kouseris Georgia, WRITING OUR OWN "ODYSSIES": A CREATIVE APPROACH OF THE MUSEUM WORLD THROUGH THE WORLD OF LITERATURE

The article presents the successful outcome of the teaching of literature and the production of original literary texts by the students of Varvakio Model High School in Athens, during the school year 2017-18, in the framework of the *Odyssey* periodic exhibition (October 2016-October 2018) at the National Archaeological Museum. Thus, it concurs with the article by Vlivos & Papagianni discussed above, since both present empirical researches based on the innovative program for the teaching of literature in the First Grade of High School, and the curriculum section "Tradition and Modernism in Poetry", in particular. We may conclude that both researches tested the effectiveness of this program and evaluated it positively. The main purpose of Kalessopoulou and Kouseris was to investigate how readings of poetry,

together with “readings” of museum exhibitions that relate to literary texts, help adolescents express personal meanings in a creative way.

In addition, however, this article also includes an extremely useful section, which presents analytically different ways of using and integrating poetry into museum exhibitions today, in Greece: utilizing poetic texts to enrich the contextualization of archaeological exhibits; using museum exhibits as an approach tool to poetry, a means of interpretation of poetic discourse; and the use, by curators, of different poetic texts, thematically organized, as inspiration for the production of a new “text” that exploits the multimodal resources of the museum.

Symeonaki Alikí & Gratiou Vassiliki, MUSEUM AND CREATIVE WRITING: THE CREATION OF LITERARY TEXTS BY HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS, STIMULATED BY THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THESSALONIKI

Drawing on the findings of the academic field of Creative Writing, which proposes a constructionist rationale for literature and literature literacy in general, and firmly believing that adolescent students can produce poetic texts of high acclaim, the authors conducted an experimental educational intervention, the process and results of which are presented in this article. The article examines the process of the creative writing of poetry, both theoretically and practically, based on an analysis and use of the component elements of poetic language and its distinctiveness, while at the same time drawing on contemporary, mainly educational and psychological, studies of creativity, as well as older, philosophical, accounts of creativity. In order to access the right stimuli for the creation of poetic texts, students of the Experimental Comprehensive High School of Thessaloniki *Manolis Andronikos* visited the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (2014-2015). There, through a process of appropriate preparation, they were encouraged and guided regarding: the observation and assimilation of the provided information and images of the artefacts that had been chosen in advance for this purpose; the stimulation of *divergent* thought by means of provided suggestions and creative writing techniques; and, finally, the transformation of their experience as a whole into poetry.

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The *MuseumEdu* 7 Guest Editor

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