

Foteini Lika, *Roidis and the Borrowed Muse: British Historiography, Fiction and Satire in Pope Joan*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. Pp. 295. £47.99. ISBN 9781443881135.

Pope Joan (*Ἡ Πάπισσα Ἰωάννα*) (1866) by Emmanuel Roidis (1836–1904) is an iconoclastic and groundbreaking novel from Greece, notorious for scandalizing the Greek Orthodox Church. Lawrence Durrell, who translated it, called it ‘a masterpiece of irreverence’ that sits midway between Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759) and Anatole France’s *Thaïs* (1890). Although a European classic, scholarly interest in *Pope Joan* has been scant. Foteini Lika’s book is the first in-depth study of Roidis’s text, and is timely given a new translation by David Connolly (2019).

Roidis’s novel, facetiously subtitled ‘A Medieval Study’, follows the young English Joan who rises to the papacy in Rome and upon giving birth meets her bitter end. Lika does not focus on matters of psychology and characterization, but her book is ‘a study in poetics’ (10). *Pope Joan* treads on the path of Romantic satire and is engrossed in formal play, intertextuality, and (mock-)genre experimentation; Lika approaches the novel from these perspectives.

In her intellectually rigorous and erudite study, Lika examines how the novel functions as an open system, a ‘mosaic’ (15, 121) made up of oblique echoes, explicit citations, and everything in between. The first chapter, elegantly titled ‘In the “Sourcerer’s” Workshop’, draws our attention to the classification and speciation of Roidis’s intertextual references. Like a manic apothecary who experiments with mixing substances, Roidis blurs the formal boundaries between literary and extra-literary sources. Lika demonstrates these dynamics by showcasing Roidis’s use of *synaxaria* (lives of the saints) and other theological, sociohistorical, and religious sources, such as Franciscus Maurolicus’s *Martyrologium* (1567) and especially Gustave Brunet’s *Curiosités théologiques* (1861). In addition, borrowing from Roidis’s own use of *Rosarium Philosophorum* (sixteenth century), Lika posits that ‘in a truly alchemistic fashion’ Roidis ‘deliberately made his expressions obscure and adopted a figurative discourse in order to convey his ideas’ (42). The chapter deciphers Roidis’s ‘intertextual riddles’ (42) – as if introducing a Joycean flavor – in painstaking detail. Lika’s analysis is valuable in assisting the reader to comprehend the rhetorical strategies of *Pope Joan* and navigate safely through Roidis’s vast depository of citations, references, and echoes.

Chapters two and three discuss how Roidis destabilizes history as a generic category. Chapter two considers the paratextual material of *Pope Joan* by focusing on Roidis’s engagement with Edward Gibbon’s *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788) and the work of historian Thomas Macaulay. In incorporating Gibbon’s satirical footnotes on Byzantine Christianity ‘almost intact’, Lika argues, Roidis ‘colonized his narration with the epistemic discourse Gibbon had assimilated in his own text’ (88). And by tracing the similarities between Roidis and Macaulay, Lika expounds on the role of ‘imagination’ (98) in both fiction and historiography, and on ‘history as a form of fiction/romance’ (102). The creative tension between history and fiction migrates to chapter three, where Lika compares *Pope Joan* with Walter Scott’s Waverley novels, pivoting on the respective authors’ use of prefatory material, footnotes, and affixed commentaries. Roidis’s paratextual material, his ‘authenticating apparatus’ (124), conveys a sense of irony and subversion.

In Chapters four, five, and six, Lika explores the rich tradition of satire in *Pope Joan* by discussing the text alongside Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), and Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819–1824) respectively. Lika is adept at dissecting satirical rhetoric: simile, metaphor, synecdoche. In juxtaposing Roidis with Swift, noticing the reflexive properties of mirrors, spectacles, and clothes in their fiction (167), she argues that ‘metaphor in Swift is literal while in Roidis it is metonymical’ (168). Lika turns

her attention to digressive narrative and the role of the reader in *Pope Joan* and Sterne's novel, highlighting the role of the 'meta-narratee' and the 'characterized reader' (175). The discussion is delicate and perceptive. Within the parameters of satire, the last chapter offers a lively exposition of the means by which Roidis and Byron undermine and even dislocate genre, dwelling on the strategic masking of romance in epic and the reverse, whilst blending in 'Bildungsroman, picaresque novel, sex comedy, historiography' (237). The discussion of distorting epic conventions, polemicist poetics (Byron against the Lakers, and Roidis against Panagiotis Soutsos (221)), the sea voyage and shipwreck motifs, and Byron's 'demystifying trick' (231) and Roidis's 'repetitive patterns' (232) is dexterous and delightful.

Roidis and the Borrowed Muse is a multilayered and coherent study that sequentially addresses the 'intertextuality', 'paratextuality', 'metatextuality', and 'hypertextuality' of *Pope Joan* (238–40). Roidis's novel is deliberately opaque and playfully antiquarian, but Lika dissects it with clarity, frequently recapping, generously providing key quotations, and parsing out subtle differences when comparing texts. Lika's book is a valuable critical guide for both the modern reader who is unfamiliar with the satirical textual games of *Pope Joan* and the student of transnational Romanticism. As such, it is not only a welcome contribution but an indispensable one.

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