

Aphrodite: Literary Representations and Transformations

This panel focuses on the figure of Aphrodite as a literary character and seeks to explore new angles in the study of gods as characters in different ancient literary genres and contemporary reception in literature. Aphrodite often has a puzzling, paradoxical and contradictory presence that negotiates ritual and cultural processes in different times. From being the key divinity in Sappho's lyric to a powerful force in early Greek and Hellenistic literature, this panel goes beyond questions of duality already imposed from antiquity (*pandemos* vs. *ourania*, or love vs destructive passion) and delves in the study of ways that the representation of Aphrodite enriches the ancient literary world. As will be argued in all papers, Aphrodite has a complex literary presence that both goes beyond and resists simple oppositions. In this panel we look for new perspectives in understanding how Aphrodite is typically seen as the divinity who makes others suffer but she herself suffers, object and subject of divine agency at the same time. She is consistently enmeshed in human temporality in Homer functioning in both mortal and immortal realms in ways that she both controls and paces time and temporality. Just as she makes people 'fall' in love, she too 'falls' in human time and suffers as a mortal and god, as aggressor and victim, lover and mother. At the same time, she can be presented as someone in close conversation with the poetic persona (as in Sappho) or as a figure distanced from human actions and agency as in Apollonius. It is not by chance that an author like Apollonius does not name Aphrodite but refers to her using her epithets (Cythereia or Cypris). More than any other divinity she is deeply connected with the names of places registered mythically as her origin. The way she is evoked in conjunction with human action can be further revealing. In terms that are not dissimilar, Eros and eros, son and force, are equally complex and can afford the narrative with greater nuance in how human emotion and agency interact. For many of the novels and much of imperial literature Aphrodite is the key

divine figure. She becomes a steering character as impetus for intellectual debate and complexity. Furthermore, by looking how Aphrodite is transformed from ancient tragedy to contemporary fiction we can further highlight the multiplicity inherent in Aphrodite as a forceful character. In this panel we offer a few introductory remarks by the organizer and the papers move from early Greek epic (Homer) to the Hellenistic and Imperial literature (Apollonius, Theocritus and Lucian) with a final stop to reception (from tragedy to contemporary fiction).