

Behind the texts #2

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Reading Dante and Proust by Analogy

Wednesday, 6th February 2019

CA201, Caedmon Building (College of St Hild and St Bede), 5:15pm

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for more information about this event.

This lecture will present the approach to comparative literature developed in my doctoral thesis, now a monograph forthcoming with Legenda, that I call ‘reading by analogy’. With few exceptions, comparative critical studies of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* have tended to stay within the constraints of reception studies — Dante has been widely studied in light of his reception of classical and contemporary authors, such as Virgil and Cavalcanti, and his own reception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and periodisation — Proust is most often compared to his contemporaries, in particular fellow bearers of the anglophone label ‘modernist’. Following the process of analogy, which brings into relation two items from different contexts in order to create a change in perspective, my doctoral research took its thrust from the significantly different cultural contexts in which Proust and Dante explored the questions of literary identity and authority. After outlining the theory behind the method, the lecture will turn to the specific issue of Dante and Proust’s uses of first-person narration. Drawing on close readings of the opening pages of the *Divine Comedy* and the *Recherche*, and explaining the different traditions to which these authors were responding when they chose to write ‘I’, I will present an account of their respective treatments of authorship and subjectivity. This will allow me to demonstrate what new conclusions can be reached when we read Dante and Proust by analogy.