This seminar will use a range of texts to consider the relationship between motherhood and temporality, of maternal thinking in relation to time. When asked his parentage, the *Odyssey*’s Telemachus insists that “no-one knows his own begetting (*gonon*)” (1.215-216) – a statement that is oddly fitting his mother Penelope’s assurance that he resembles his father. But what is the role of remembering mothers, and how do maternal acts shape and steer the future and the past, including the future and past of poetry and writing?

We will start with matronymics and uses of motherhood in Lucian, one of the most resolutely aware and critically creative Greek writers on temporal relations, before revisiting a range of mothers and their time-self-conscious sons from archaic epic onwards. In Early Greek hexameter poetry we shall explore Hermes and Maia, Thetis and Achilles, and Odysseus and Anticleia. We then pair Herodotus’ anecdote of a Spartan mother’s concealment of her twin son’s relative age with Plutarch’s Sayings of Spartan Mothers to ask about authorising strategies and demanding, authoritarian mothers. Moving into drama, instead of discussing the “maternal hot-spots” of tragedy (Keith, McAuley, and Sharrock 2020), the tragic or murderous mothers like Medea and Hecuba, we want to tease out the realisations and re-descriptions of genealogies for Euripides’ and Sophocles’ Iocastas; and we want to consider comic timing and programmatic statements about comedy with instances of motherhood, in and out of control, in Aristophanes and Menander. We bring the term to a close with a look at Roman mothers and suppressed or open matrilineal stories in Vergil and Statius, and a return to Late Antique Classical and Christian mothers as poetic agents.

This seven-week seminar will start only in week 2. We are hoping for volunteers to present on text passages in weeks 3-8. The seminar qualifies for the presentation requirements for new doctoral students, but we are delighted to have offers from all students (PGT and PGR) and colleagues. Presentations should not be longer than 20 minutes max and we would welcome joint or co-ordinated forms of presenting.

If you are interested to present, please contact the conveners, Constanze Güthenke (constanze.guthenke@classics.ox.ac.uk) and/or Emma Greensmith (emma.greensmith@classics.ox.ac.uk)
Schedule

18 October (Week 2): Matronymics at work & female succession in Lucian
Dr Dawn LaValle Norman, Australian Catholic University

25 October (Week 3): Early Greek Hexameter Mothers

1 November (Week 4): Historiographical Mothers

8 November (Week 5): Comic Mothers

15 November (Week 6): (Not those) Tragic Mothers

22 November (Week 7): Christian Mothers

29 November (Week 8): Roman Mothers

Sample Bibliography

Rachel Bryant Davies, ‘The Figure of Mary the Mother of God in Christus Patiens; Fragmenting Tragic Myth and Passion Narrative in a Byzantine Appropriation of Euripidean Tragedy’, Journal of Hellenic Studies 137 (2017): 188-212


Emma Greensmith, ‘Prodigal Poetics: Filiation and Succession’ in id. The Resurrection of Homer in Imperial Greek Epic (CUP, 2020): 226-252

Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (eds), Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome (Texas UP, 2012)


Andrew Parker, The Theorist’s Mother (Duke UP, 2012)

Alison Sharrock and Alison Keith (eds), *Maternal Conceptions in Classical Literature and Philosophy* (Toronto UP, 2020)