

EAAS Transatlantic Travel Grant Report (2024)

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Titled 'Catastrofemales of the New Millennium,' my current PhD project examines the literary representation of contemporary antiheroines in 2010s and 2020s American novels, situating them within a continuum of literary representation of female madness. This project emerges at the intersection of contemporary women's literature, Gender Studies, Media Studies, and Feminist criticism, with a particular focus on Posthuman Feminist approaches. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how the archetypal figure of the 'madwoman' within American literature has evolved and transformed throughout the centuries and to articulate the distinct aesthetic position that has emerged over the past decade.

During my two-and-a-half-month stay at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts—from October 1st to December 11th—I was able to use the university's resources and expertise available to further advance my research. Specifically, I was able to draft the first chapter of my dissertation, which not only attempts to define the recently-emerged character of the catastrofemale, taking into account the state of the art of literary studies and media studies on antiheroines, but also intends to address and resolve one of the central research questions this dissertation seeks to answer to, namely how should 21st century "mad" antiheroines be read, when traditional interpretative frameworks prove insufficient.

During my stay at Brandeis, essential were the weekly encounters with Professor Caren Irr, a faculty member of the English department and Head of the Humanities Division, who helped me refine the theoretical framework of my project, gave me constant feedback on the composition of the chapter, and assisted me, through illuminating brainstorming sessions, in enhancing the complexity and coherence of my dissertation's outline. Likewise, immensely helpful was the guidance of Prof. Thomas King, whose expertise in Queer studies and Gender studies provided some extremely valuable critical insights that enriched my project.

Day-to-day activities at Brandeis revolved around drafting my chapter and extensively consulting the university library's resources, which were indispensable to my work. I also benefited from attending a seminar led by Prof. David Sherman, titled 'Novels on the Verge of Breakdown: Fiction as a Psychological Inquiry,' as well as a symposium for second-year PhD students, conferences and events organized both by the English Department and the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department. Each of these engagements significantly enriched my knowledge and the scope of my research.

Besides offering me bibliographic resources and expert guidance, Brandeis University and, more broadly, Boston provided me with a vibrant academic community that has been integral to the successful completion of the first chapter of my dissertation. I am extremely grateful to Brandeis University, Sapienza University of Rome, and especially the EAAS foundation for facilitating this enriching experience, which has profoundly shaped my scholarly work and personal development.