Marios Vasiliou (University of Cyprus)

Un-framing the feminine picturesque

In this paper I would like to explore the uncertainty of meaning that is at play in 19th century travel writings by women, often referred to as the "feminine picturesque".  The inscription of the female voice on the male homosociality as it existed in the 19th century, particularly in the new colonies, via the genre of the picturesque, added a new layer of complexity and uncertainty on the conventions and politics of the genre of romance from where the picturesque emerged as a subgenre, while it also exemplified the intrinsic uncertainty of these texts by women, with regards to their own voice in the overall colonial project.  Whereas male travel writers often described the new lands in terms of their pertinence and usefulness to the imperial projects, women travel writers generally were not expected to assume such an 'imperial' voice, and thus, found themselves confined to picturesque descriptions, that, consciously at times, attempted to avoid infringing on the political issues regarding the new colonies.  For example, most women travel writers, as if expected to do so, begin their texts with an apology for assuming the role of the writer, revealing a layer of uncertainty regarding their own voice.   I will focus on two texts: *Our Home in Cyprus* (1880) by Scott-Stevenson and *Through Cyprus* (1887) by Agnes Smith, written at the beginning of British rule in Cyprus. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory of hybridity in the novel, and its attendant uncertainty of meaning, I will explore how their precarious authorial locations, engendered by social, political and generic pressures, are profoundly conducive to the intensification of such uncertainty, because of the space of difference they open up vis-à-vis the discourses of imperialism and the genre of colonial romance. Moreover, as I will argue, the various layers of uncertainty that swathe these texts challenge the established Orientalist framework in which these texts are generally read.