



Ravenstein Seminar

OSL Winter School 2023

New Perspectives on the Novel: Histories, Forms, Representations



Utrecht, 18-20 January 2023

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Karin Kukkonen (University of Oslo)

Caroline Levine (Cornell University)

Richard Jean So (McGill University)

Organized by

Lucas van der Deijl, Roel Smeets, Inge van de Ven



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INTRODUCTION

Although the novel has been declared dead many times (e.g. Gasset (1925), Benjamin (1930) Sukenick (1969)), we have never officially buried it. As a form of narrative prose it continues to engage writers, readers, publishers, and scholars today. Since Miguel de Cervantes' *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605) – often considered the first modern novel – the genre underwent various transformations in terms of genre, character, narration, symbolism, and style. And although digitalisation and datafication irreversibly changed the modern media landscape, new modes of novel writing continue to emerge in the twenty-first century, demonstrating the perpetual value of this 400-years old literary genre. The novel, in other words, seems here to stay.

Literary scholars have repeatedly emphasized the pivotal function of novels in the development of modern societies. Lynn Hunt (2007), for instance, argued that the emergence of human rights in the eighteenth century were partly indebted to the democratic and progressive potential of epistolary novels such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). A recurring argument is that novels provide a platform for readers to be trained in empathy and compassion, which is echoed in Iann Watt's canonical *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) and Martha Nussbaum's famous defense of the humanities in *Not For Profit* (2010). By making us change perspective, novels make the world a better place. Or so it seems.

This winter school will promote new perspectives on the novel by approaching it from three interrelated angles:

- 1) *Histories*. How has the novel transformed in a period of approximately 400 years, and how is that literary history reflected in novels? What do these transformations tell us about the novel's status in society? Is there a categorical difference between Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) and Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This* (2021)?
- 2) *Forms*. How does the formal arrangement of the novel organize other – aesthetic and social – forms? What does it mean to be reading novels in today's attention economy? What is left of the political potential of novels in times of war, economic uncertainty and climate collapse?
- 3) *Representations*. What do novels represent and how do they do so? What are the politics and limits of literary representations of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and other identity categories?



FORMAT

We invite ResMa students and PhD students to participate in this winter school by means of a focused paper and active participation during the three-day gathering (full instructions at end of document). The programme offers keynote lectures, discussion sessions with the keynote speakers, workshops and a roundtable discussion with Dutch novelists and literary scholars. During the workshops the participants will apply and discuss two methodological approaches of the novel: 'Reading novels in the attention economy' and 'Computational approaches to the novel'. We will use Patrica Lockwood's recent novel *No one is talking about this* (2021) as a case study in both workshops. Make sure to read the novel to prepare for the workshops. Other readings and mandatory reading assignments will be provided in advance by the organizers.

WORK LOAD

- Reading and preparation: 40 hours
- Attending the seminar: 20 hours
- Writing the final paper: 80 hours
- Writing the critical review: (28 hours)*

Total: 140 / 168 hours (= 5/6 EC)

* Optional, to obtain one extra credit. For more information see the Course Regulations below.

VENUE

The Ravenstein Seminar 2023 is hosted by Utrecht University.

- Wednesday January 18th: Belle van Zuylenzaal of the Utrecht University Hall (Academiegebouw, Domplein 29, 3512 JE Utrecht)
- Thursday January 19th: Belle van Zuylenzaal of the Utrecht University Hall (Academiegebouw, Domplein 29, 3512 JE Utrecht)
- Friday January 20th: Room JK15A-004, Janskerkhof 15A



SCHEDULE

Wednesday 18 January 2023

HISTORIES

Chair: Inge van de Ven (Tilburg University)

13.00-13.15 Registration & coffee

13.15-15.00 **Introduction meeting: Histories**

Discussion with Karin Kukkonen, organizers and participants, based on assigned readings & preparations for keynote 1

15.00-15.15 Coffee break

15.15-16.15 **Keynote lecture 1: Karin Kukkonen (University of Oslo)**

Thursday 19 January 2023

FORMS

Chair: Lucas van der Deijl (University of Groningen)

10.00-11.30 **Morning workshop: Forms**

Discussion with organizers and participants, based on assigned readings & preparations for keynote 2

11.30-12.30 **Lunch break**

12.30-14.00 **Afternoon workshop: Reading novels in the attention economy**

Patricia Lockwood, *No one is talking about this*



14.00-14.15 Coffee break

14.15-15.45 **Keynote lecture 2: Caroline Levine (Cornell University) [online]**

15.45-16.00 Coffee break

16.00-17.00 **Round table**

Panel discussion between novelists Niña Weijers and Emy Koopman and literary scholars Sander Bax (Tilburg University) and Sven Vitse (Utrecht University)

17.00-18.00 Drinks

Friday 20 January 2023

REPRESENTATIONS

Chair: Roel Smeets (Radboud University)

10.00-10.30 Registration & coffee

10.30-12.00 **Morning workshop: Representations**

Discussion with Richard Jean So, organizers and participants, based on assigned readings & preparations for keynote 3

12.00-13.00 Lunch break

13.00-14.00 **Keynote lecture 3: Richard Jean So (McGill University)**

14.00-14.15 Coffee break

14.15-15.45 **Afternoon workshop: Computational approaches to the novel**

Patricia Lockwood, *No one is talking about this*

15.45-16.00 Coffee break

16.00-17.00 Closing session with student pitches



KEYNOTE LECTURES

| Keynote lecture 1 |

Creative Pas de Deux: Novelists' Engagement with Literary History

Karin Kukkonen (University of Oslo)

How do novelists today engage with literary history? And how does a deep knowledge of the literary works of the past enhance formal innovation in today's writers? In this lecture, I will trace what I term "creative pas de deux" between contemporary novelists and writers from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century. The metaphor is taken from ballet, where two dancers support and balance one another (especially in the "adagio" section) so that one of them can perform feats that a single body cannot achieve. Similarly, I suggest -- on the basis of interviews with contemporary novelists and of cognitive, embodied literary theory -- that in creative writing works from literary history serve as a partner for the cognitive and embodied leaps in new works.

Karin Kukkonen is Professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Oslo (Norway). She is leader of the interdisciplinary hub "Literature, Cognition and Emotions" (LCE) at Oslo. Her main research interests are cognitive literary studies and the history of the novel. Among other monographs, she is the author of *A Prehistory of Cognitive Poetics: Neoclassicism and the Novel* (OUP, 2017), *How the Novel Found its Feet* (OUP, 2019) and *Probability Designs: Literature and Predictive Processing* (OUP, 2020). Currently, she is completing a monograph on creativity in literary writing.

Preparatory reading

Karin Kukkonen, "The Speed of Plot : Narrative Acceleration and Deceleration." *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2020, pp. 73–85., <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12251>.

Karin Kukkonen, "Lennox: Repertoires of Embodiment", in *4e Cognition and Eighteenth-Century Fiction: How the Novel Found Its Feet*. Oxford University Press, 2019.



| Keynote lecture 2 |

Plots of Precarity and Sustainable Endings

Caroline Levine (Cornell University)

Neither critics nor literary novelists have shown much love for happy endings over the past century. Scholars have been especially committed to open-endedness as the only way to point beyond present conditions to a genuinely different world. This talk will make the case that this insistence on openness has reached its limit. We live in an age of acute precarity. As neoliberal economics undoes hopes of secure work, and as fossil fuels radically disrupt longstanding ecosystems, the most urgent threat facing people around the world is not oppressive stasis but radical instability. It is therefore time for novel critics to rethink our relationship to endings. This talk will reconsider the political value of happy endings—including *Pride and Prejudice*, *Esther Waters*, *A Question of Power*, and *Stone Butch Blues*—and will think about how these might refocus our attention on the ongoing, collective labor of sustaining living bodies over time.

Caroline Levine is David and Kathleen Ryan Professor of Humanities at Cornell University. She has spent her career asking how and why the humanities and the arts matter, especially in democratic societies. She argues for the understanding of forms and structures as crucial to understanding links between art and society. She is the author of three books, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (2003, winner of the Perkins Prize for the best book in narrative studies), *Provoking Democracy: Why We Need the Arts* (2007), and *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015, winner of the James Russell Lowell Prize from the MLA, and the Dorothy Lee Award for Outstanding Scholarship in the Ecology of Culture, and named one of Flavorwire's "10 Must-Read Academic Books of 2015"). She is currently the nineteenth-century editor for the Norton Anthology of World Literature and has written on topics ranging from formalist theory to Victorian poetry and from television serials to academic freedom.

Preparatory reading

Caroline Levine, "Introduction", in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 1-23.

Caroline Levine, "Hierarchy", in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 82-111.



| Keynote lecture 3 |

Title: How a Pandemic Becomes a Story: Literature and Social Crisis in the Platform Age

Richard Jean So (McGill University)

As the COVID-19 pandemic winds down, critics and scholars have begun to ask: how will culture (fiction, film, TV) memorialize this social event? What will be the COVID-19 "narrative"? However, since early 2020, thousands of ordinary online users, on popular literature platforms like Wattpad, have been writing about COVID-19 (i.e. #Covid) in real time. This talk combines computational and critical methods, leveraging the affordances of Internet data, to study how individuals internalized COVID-19 by writing stories about it, before anyone knew how the story would end. What kinds of stories did they write? What kinds of social worlds did they imagine? How did those stories develop over time, as the world learned more about the pandemic? More broadly, this talk reflects on the impact of new writing platforms on how we understand the relationship between literature and representation, genre in particular. How are such platforms changing what it means to narrate a social event? Further, this talk offers some broader methodological reflections - how do we study literature in the digital age when so much of it today is born-digital? I make the argument that born digital literature and culture in part requires born digital methods.

Richard Jean So is associate professor of English and data science at McGill University. He specializes in computational and data-driven approaches to contemporary literature and culture, from the novel to television to online platforms. His most recent book is *Redlining Culture: A Data History of Racial Inequality and Postwar Fiction* (Columbia UP 2021). He is currently working on digital culture and online user generated platforms, such as Twitter and Wattpad. He has an article with Hoyt Long, "Stories on Demand: #COVID and Writing Social Crisis in the Platform Age," forthcoming at *Critical Inquiry* and his next book project is *Fast Culture, Slow Justice: Race, Writing and Protest in the Digital Age*.

Preparatory reading

Mark McGurl, *Everything and Less. The Novel in the Age of Amazon*. Verso Books, 2021. "Introduction" and "Chapter One".

Aarthi Vadde, "Platform or Publisher." *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 136, no. 3, 2021, pp. 455–462.

Ted Underwood, "The Life Cycles of Genres." *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.22148/16.005>.



COURSE REGULATIONS & ASSESSMENT

In order to obtain 5 ECs, participants need to:

- be present on all three days of the event
- send a short abstract outlining their general idea for the paper by January 13th (200-250 words), also to be used as a basis for their pitch (below)
- give a pitch on their research project on January 20th
- hand in their final paper by February 10th.

Pitch

Requirements for the pitch on January 20: The pitch, which should be based on your submitted abstract, presents the idea you have in mind for your paper and should not be longer than 90 seconds. Within this very short time, we should know the title, the object or issue, the period and the approach you intend to take. Keep in mind that you are talking to a smart but rather diverse audience. Many things that may seem evident to you may not be evident to everyone.

Final paper

Your paper needs to address an issue related to the main themes and topics of the winter school: histories, forms, and representations, and the study of the novel. You can work with specific concepts and approaches discussed during the winter school, and combine them with other approaches as well as case studies of your own choosing.

The assignment, then, is very open. It encourages you to find interlocutors from the reading list for this winter school while maintaining flexibility with regard to the choice of period, cultural context, theory, approach (quantitative or qualitative), and case study (e.g., a novel, a corpus, an oeuvre, a subgenre of the novel, a genre feature, a form etc.). We do ask you to be specific about, and to reflect on, the approach you take to the issue that is at the center of your paper.

You are also welcome to dedicate your paper to a critical discussion of the two methodological approaches discussed and demonstrated during the two workshops, using Patricia Lockwood's *No one is talking about this* as a case study. If you chose to write about the workshop, please make sure to engage with the additional suggested readings offered during the workshops.



Requirements

- The paper is between 2500 and 3500 words (including footnotes, excluding bibliography) and has a clear research question.
- The paper shows engagement with the literature from the reading list for this winter school (please include at least 3 texts from the reading list among the works cited).
- You are free to use your own reference style, but please indicate which one you use so that we can check it for consistency. The deadline is February 10th, end of day; your submission should be sent to: osl@rug.nl

Following submission of the final paper you will obtain written feedback from the organizers.

Critical review option

NB: If you wish to obtain one (extra) EC from the winter school (so 6 ECs in total), you can submit a critical review of one chosen keynote lecture, including references to one or more sources from the reading list (750 words) (pass/fail). The deadline for submission is the same as for the final paper (February 10th).

Submission of required assignments

You can send your paper abstract (deadline: 13/01) and final paper (deadline: 10/02) to osl@rug.nl. Please specify if you want to obtain 5 or 6 EC when submitting your final paper.



ORGANIZERS

Lucas van der Deijl is Assistant Professor in early modern Dutch literature at the University of Groningen. He recently defended his PhD thesis *A New Language for the Natural Light. Translating the New Philosophy in the Dutch Early Enlightenment (1640-1720)* at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on language philosophy and linguistic politics in Dutch literary history, integrating computational text analysis with methods from cultural history, translation studies, and literary studies.

Roel Smeets is Assistant Professor in modern literature and digital culture at Radboud University Nijmegen. He is the author of *Character Constellations. Representations of Social Groups in Present-Day Dutch Literary Fiction* (2021, Leuven UP) and *Actual Fictions. Literary Representation and Character Network Analysis* (2022, Cambridge UP). Using data science methods his work focuses on intersections of the aesthetic and the social.

Inge van de Ven is Assistant Professor of Culture Studies at Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences, and currently Marie Curie Global fellow (UC Santa Barbara and the University of Stavanger). She is author of *Big Books in times of Big Data* (Leiden University Press, 2019). Her research focuses on literature and reading in attention economies, close and hyperreading and attentional modulations, and trust and reliability in relation to narrative.