



Workshop

Political Novel in Historiographical and Sociological Perspective: Structures and Analogies

Date: 15 – 16 March 2024

Venue: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ivana Lučića 3, 10000 Zagreb

Organized by Dean Duda (University of Zagreb), Zvonimir Glavaš (University of Zagreb), Nenad Ivić (University of Zagreb), Branimir Janković (University of Zagreb)

The workshop will address problematic relations between political novel and its critical, historiographical and sociological counterparts, as sets of complex signifying practices simultaneously forming particular configurations and exhibiting recurring patterns. In a series of mutually dependent theoretical discussions and case studies, discourses, narrative handlings of what is presumed to constitute material, types of representation (reality effect) and modes of veridiction (historical, novelistic, sociological) will be analysed in depth in order to map the competitive field where they contrast, intertwine, overlap, complement and legitimize each other.

Contact: nivic@ffzg.hr, zvglavas@ffzg.hr

Program

Friday, 15 March 2024

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb, **D4**

9.45 **Zrinka Božić** (University of Zagreb): Opening Remarks



10.00-10.30 KEYNOTE

Nenad Ivić (University of Zagreb)

Giving Voice

Chair: Zrinka Božić (University of Zagreb)

10.30-11.00 Discussion

11.00-11.15 Coffee break

11.15-11.35 **Zvonimir Glavaš** (University of Zagreb)

First as a Tragedy, Then as some Other Figure: On Topology of History and (Political) Novel

Chair: Tara Talwar Windsor (University of Cambridge)

11.35-11.50 Discussion

11.50-12.10 **Tomislav Brlek** (University of Zagreb)

The Politics of Form in Historical Novel: Jonathan Littell (online)

Chair: Andrea Milanko (University of Zagreb)

12.10-12.25 Discussion

12.25-12.45 **Rossitsa Terzieva-Artemis** (University of Nicosia)

Narrativity and Politics in History and Literature (online)

Chair: Mirela Dakić (University of Zagreb)

12.45-13.00 Discussion

13.00-13.15 Coffee break

13.15-13.35 **Karlo Držaić** (University of Zagreb)

The Question of the Narrative in Historiography and Point of the Political

Chair: Nenad Ivić (University of Zagreb)

13.35-13.50 Discussion



13.50-14.10 **Milica Resanović** (University of Belgrade)

Disappearance or Transformation of the Committed Novel in the Post-Socialist Literary Field in Serbia (online)

Chair: Marina Protrka Štimec (University of Zagreb)

14.10-14.25 Discussion

14.30 Lunch

Saturday, 16 March 2024

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb, **D4**

10.00-10.30 KEYNOTE

Goran Pavlić (University of Zagreb)

The Sociology of Novel – A Few Notes on Methodology

Chair: Ante Andabak (University of Zagreb)

10.30-11.00 Discussion

11.00-11.15 Coffee break

11.15-11.35 **Mirela Dakić** (University of Zagreb)

Writing Between Genres: Hoggart, Bourdieu, Eribon

Chair: Ana Tomljenović (University of Zagreb)

11.35-11.50 Discussion

11.50-12.10 **Ante Andabak** (University of Zagreb)

The Weber Brothers and Kafka on Bureaucracy – An Attempt at a Broader Marxist Understanding

Chair: Dean Duda (University of Zagreb)



12.10-12.25 Discussion

12.25-12.45 **Branimir Janković** (University of Zagreb)

The Polylogue between History, Literature and Sociology: A Retrospective View

Chair: Karlo Držaić (University of Zagreb)

12.45-13.00 Discussion

13.00-13.15 Coffe break

13.15-13.35 **Dean Duda** (University of Zagreb)

to be confirmed

13.35-13.50 Discussion

13.50 Lunch



ABSTRACTS



Ante Andabak

University of Zagreb

aandabak@m.ffzg.hr

The Weber Brothers and Kafka on Bureaucracy – An Attempt at a Broader Marxist Understanding

The first name that springs to mind at the mention of bureaucracy is inevitably that of Franz Kafka. Not only did his three (unfinished) novels and many short pieces exquisitely and definingly capture what it feels like to be in the throes of a hypertrophied administration, but, famously, Kafka himself toiled as an office worker in the insurance company, a day job which purportedly prevented him from becoming a full-time writer. The second name almost sure to be brought up is that of the great sociologist and Kafka's older contemporary Max Weber whose ideal-type understanding of bureaucracy as the most efficient kind of administration is at the cornerstone of organizational theory. While praising it as a social scientist, in his political writings Weber compared bureaucracy in horror with the living machine and decried how widespread and all-encompassing it became, seeing it as a part of the larger and unfortunate process of the disenchantment of the world, and calling for its undemocratic power to be checked. No surprise, then, that Weber's theory has been fruitfully interfaced with Kafka's work on multiple occasions (among others by Derlien, Heinemann, Warner, González García and Jørgensen). But there is also a strong, albeit indirect real-life connection between the two in the form of Weber's younger brother Alfred who was part of the final tribunal in the last of the three doctoral exams Kafka had to pass to become the Doctor of Laws. As chance would have it, Professor Alfred Weber also acted as Kafka's *Promotor* (a merely formal role) in the degree ceremony reception. But more significantly, Alfred Weber's thoroughgoing admonishment of bureaucratisation in the form of the influential 1910 essay "The Civil Servant" was quite likely, as Astrid Lange-Kirchheim has



meticulously shown, among the main sources of inspiration behind one of Kafka's major short stories "In The Penal Colony" (written in 1914 and published in 1919). Building upon valuable insights already gained by combining the Weber brothers, but especially Max's work with Kafka, this talk will try to go further by introducing Marxist concepts like those of productive and unproductive labour and by showing the rise of bureaucracy to be inextricably linked with the need to combat the ruinous effects of rampant capitalism on society. Additionally, the debate about the organisation of the post-capitalist society and whether it should be a planned or socialist market economy will also be touched upon. Succinctly put, the aim of this contribution could be said to consist in striving to provide a satisfactory exposition of the thought Bertolt Brecht expressed in a talk with Walter Benjamin: 'Kafka had one problem and, one only, and that was the problem of organization.'



Tomislav Brlek

University of Zagreb

tbrlek@ffzg.hr

The Politics of Form in Historical Novel: Jonathan Littell

While it should go without saying that the manner in which a novel engages the reader is where its political import manifests itself most palpably, this is conspicuously obviated in contemporary discussions of the politics of literature, historical novels included. That the latter category is for its part exemplary for any discussion of the political dimension of literary texts is conclusively corroborated by Hayden White's pivotal demonstration that in history writing content and form are indissociable.

Starting from Jacques Rancière's definition of the politics of literature and Ana Kornbluh's contention that aesthetic detachment necessitated by form is decisive for all critical response, the paper will propose Jonathan Littell's *Les Bienveillantes* (2006) is a case in point, arguing that the controversy it occasioned was predicated precisely on the dire misconstrual of these issues.



Mirela Dakić

University of Zagreb

mdakic2@ffzg.hr

Writing Between Genres: Hoggart, Bourdieu, Eribon

For more than half a century, literature has been the subject of various sociological research gathered in the interdisciplinary framework of sociology of literature. However, the seemingly simple fact that literature has become the object of sociological study has led to a variety of discussions about the theoretical and methodological choices with which sociology approaches literature, both within the disciplinary field of sociology of literature and in close encounters with literary studies. Given the dynamics of these debates, we will turn to the question of what sociology of literature is today and what meaning it acquires with the notion of the politics of literature – and particularly the genre of the political novel. To this end, we will look at a hybrid genre that combines sociological insights with specific literary devices, popularised by leading exponents of contemporary social studies of literature and culture, such as *A Local Habitation, Life and Times: 1918–1940* (1988) by Richard Hoggart, *Pascalian Meditations* (*Méditations pascaliennes*, 1997) and *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (*Esquisse pour une auto-analyse*, 2004) by Pierre Bourdieu, and *Returning to Reims* (*Retour à Reims*, 2009) by Didier Eribon. Through the lens of this specific socio-literary hybridization, which has raised many questions in both sociology and literary studies, the presentation will address some of the main points of the above discussions: What is the sociological significance of literature, and the novel in particular, as one of the most “sociable” genres? In what ways does literature reshape and redefine contemporary sociological practise? And what is the impact of the collaboration between sociology and literature – not only in terms of the contamination of genres, but also in terms of the possibilities of sociological thinking with and through literature?



Karlo Držaić

University of Zagreb

karlo.drzaic@gmail.com

The Question of the Narrative in Historiography and Point of the Political

The Annales school of thought, arguably the most influential current in post-World War II historical thinking, introduced and attempted to actualize the concept of non-narrative historiography. This approach sought to break free from traditional literary forms, positioning itself alongside the empirical natural sciences. Fast forward a quarter of a century to 1973, and Hayden White's groundbreaking work, *Metahistory*, emerged. In it, he argued that historical narratives inevitably carry the imprint of the moral and political stance of the historian or author. Since then, the discourse on narrative and narrativity in history has become a focal point of debate within the often overlooked field of the theory of history.

This paper aims to delineate the key facets of this debate, illustrating how, from one perspective, the narrative mode of history struggles to attain the status of "scientific," while from another viewpoint, it is over-saturated with meaning that not only imposes but distorts, veering away from revealing or explaining history. Additionally, I will delve into the assertion of the truthfulness of narrative in historiography, emphasizing its role as a pivotal distinction between historical and literary narratives and highlighting its inherently political nature.



Zvonimir Glavaš

University of Zagreb

zvglavas@ffzg.hr

**First as a Tragedy, Then as some Other Figure: On Tropology of History and (Political)
Novel**

Following on from his assertions in *Metahistory* (1973), Hayden White argues in *The Content of Form* (1987) that, unlike annals and their vertical listing of events, the defining feature of narrative history is the fact that it builds metonymic chains that – through what we are accustomed to understand as realistic representation – transform lists of events into meaningful totalities. Depending on the political undertext, such chains undergo different allegoriseses and form different figures and patterns of meaning, but despite all the differences, one thing remains true: “If there is any logic presiding over the transition from the level of fact or event in the discourse to that of a narrative, it is the logic of figuration itself, which is to say, tropology”. This formulation by White is strikingly similar to another introduction of rhetorical terms on non-literary terrain – that in so-called post-foundational political thought, particularly in the works of Ernesto Laclau. In addition to pointing to a formal kinship between narrative history and literary realism and recognizing the modes of emplotment which govern the historical account, White’s work apparently highlights another dimension of the literariness of historical narrative, similar to the literariness of politics, the very same that is crucial to post-foundational political thought.

This paper will aim not only elaborate this analogy by asking questions about what it means for the politics of historical representation, but will also examine what it can tell us – from this standpoint – about the similarities and differences between narrative history and the (political) novel, which many literary scholars see as a privileged vehicle for constructing, exposing and subverting such tropological systems.



Nenad Ivić,

University of Zagreb

nivic@ffzg.hr

Giving Voice

The expression “giving voice” replaced the expression “making history” to describe what the historian does. What does it mean? Does it imply a paradigm shift? Has anything changed in the way of making history when voice is in question? What is voice and how its’ history can be written? What is the role of fiction (or effet-monde) in coming to terms with this elusive notion? Can it point to certain politics of traces, shared both by historical and literary writing? Starting from the work of Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Alain Corbin and Peter Brown, this paper tries to sketch some tentative answers.



Branimir Janković

University of Zagreb

bjankovi@ffzg.hr

The Polylogue between History, Literature and Sociology: A Retrospective View

While the interconnection between history and literature has a long trajectory, starting from their very beginnings, sociology entered the dialogue, now a polylogue, in the period of modernity. As a newcomer, emerged in the 19th century, sociology has always had an ambiguous position in that constellation. This is the case until today. As regards the peak of mutual interest, the turning point certainly occurred during the second half of the 20th century with structuralism and post-structuralism, especially within the framework of the postmodernism debate. In general, it was not only a period of dialogue, shared interests and structural analogies, but also fierce polemics, in particular between history and literary theory. At the heart of the debate was the narrative nature of history as well as the status of fiction generally. From the perspective of history and sociology, one of the important issues that was discussed was whether literature successfully resists historical and sociological approaches. Looking back in retrospect, what conclusions can we draw from all these debates? Although certain structural analogies, overlapping interests, and entanglements persist further, one may ask whether the dialogue, especially polylogue between history, literature and sociology still exists.



Goran Pavlič,

University of Zagreb

gpavlic@adu.hr

The sociology of novel – a few notes on methodology

In her widely acclaimed book *The Sociology of Literature* (2023 [2014]), Sapiro demonstrates her methodological approach, capable of eschewing usual aporiae in the never-ending battle between internalist and externalist analyses of texts. According to her, there are three axes that shape any serious endeavor in sociology of literature. Research in the field must engage with material conditions of literary production; furthermore, one cannot escape sociology of the works, i.e. representations that literary artworks convey, and finally, conditions of artworks' reception and appropriation are to be studied.

If we accept these guidelines as applicable for the study of novels, political novels in particular, what criteria do we use to distinguish fictional works from political or sociological treatises? And what epistemic value do we hope to discern from such works? Is the historical accuracy of given data about particular political phenomenon sufficient reason to treat such novels as political? What narrative techniques make artwork more politically credible? Starting from Felski's (2008) theses on the uses of literature and drawing on insights from Livingstone (2005) on the nature of narrative, as well on Carroll's (2001) "narrative" definition of art, I'll try to shed some light on mentioned problems.



Milica Resanović,

University of Belgrade

milica.resanovic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs

Disappearance or Transformation of the Committed Novel in the Post-Socialist Literary Field in Serbia

Grounded in Pierre Bourdieu’s literary field theory and incorporating innovative conceptual and methodological approaches from the sociology of valuation and evaluation (SVE), this study investigates how actors in the literary field in Serbia evaluate the ability of contemporary novels to communicate politically potent messages. Based on qualitative data gathered through interviews with writers and publishers, the study examines how these actors, taking into account their position in the literary field, literary prestige, and commercial success, define committed literature. In this context, the study maps out which actors necessarily associate committed literature with the political novel (a novel with a political narrative or one concerned with politics or political themes), and for whom, and based on what criteria, the overlap is not mandatory. Additionally, the study delves into how different, competing determinants of “committed” literature are employed in the symbolic struggles occurring in the literary field. This research contributes to understanding the dynamics of the field of literary production in Serbia, which has undergone radical changes in recent years due to intense commercialization. It also paves the way for further exploration of whether committed literature and political novels, which held a significant place in the literary field in Yugoslavia, still exist today and in what form.



Rossitsa Terzieva-Artemis

University of Nicosia

artemis.r@unic.ac.cy

Narrativity and Politics in History and Literature

In this paper, I would like to explore some poignant links and commonalities between the historical and fictional discourses, especially the discourse of the political novel as a genre, tracing back the issues of narrativity and representation in history to the works of Nietzsche, Simmel, and Benjamin among others. The interpretation of these theoretical issues then is going to be contextualized in the analysis of David Diop's novel *At Night All Blood is Black* (2020) which won the International Booker Prize in 2021. The novel was originally published as *Frère d'âme* (2018) and was nominated for the most prestigious French literary awards; it won the Students Prix Goncourt that year.

To elucidate the shifting boundaries of representation in history and fiction, I will delve in an analysis of the ethical and discursive moves that permit the political novel to voice its take on history understood no longer as the monumental or antiquarian past of peoples (pace Nietzsche). The purpose will be to account for the critical approach to history which seems to coalesce objective past, literary imagination, and individual voice, all perfectly embodied in the unsettling narrative of Diop's novel. Diop, it seems, manages to achieve what Nietzsche argues for in his "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" in *Untimely Meditations*, when discussing the truly valuable in man's inherent entanglement in, and with, history:

If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it; every past, however, is worthy to be condemned — for that is the nature of human things: human violence and weakness have always played a mighty role in them. (Nietzsche 1997: 75-6)