



Universiteit
Leiden

Mapping the Modernist Novel: The Circulation of Urban Narratives Between German and Italian Literature of the Early 20th Century

Applicants

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Carmen Van den Bergh c.van.den.bergh@hum.leidenuniv.nl	LUCAS Interdisciplinary studies - Literary Studies (track Italian), Digital Humanities
Dr. Dorine Schellens d.e.a.schellens@hum.leidenuniv.nl	LUCAS Duitse Taal en Cultuur, International Studies: Russia and Eurasia, Network analysis

Project description

A dynamic and transnational phenomenon, literary modernism (ca. 1890-1950) can be seen as a network of authors and literary works spanning several European countries, including Italy, Germany, Russia, France, and the UK.¹ Within this network, we do not only see writers and translations of their work crossing borders. As readers, we also observe the cross-cultural circulation of modernist literary motives, such as the focus on the hectic metropolis, as well as experimental narrative techniques to depict modern society.²

However, many aspects of literary circulation and dynamics of exchange in the network of European modernism remain as yet unexplored. This project aims to expand our knowledge of the canon of literary modernism by mapping the circulation of urban narratives between German and Italian literature.

By combining literary studies with approaches from Digital Humanities, more specifically literary cartography and network analysis, this traineeship will enable two advanced students to close-read and map the connections between two novels from German and Italian modernist literature. The experimental novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) by Alfred Döblin became instantly famous after its publication in 1929, the year of the Wall Street crash which proved the preface to the end of the Weimar Republic. A canonized classic until today, the novel became a huge source of inspiration for European modernist literature focusing on the depiction of the modern metropolis with its overwhelming hustle and bustle of people, traffic, and industry. One example is the Italian novel *Quartiere Vittoria* (1936) by Ugo Dèttore. Drawing inspiration from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Dèttore created his own version of the novel, adapting the characters, plot, setting, and timeframe to an Italian context. Today, however, *Quartiere Vittoria* is hardly known to an international audience and its connections to *Berlin*

¹ Sascha Bru et al. (ed.). *Europa? Europa! The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2009.

² MDRN, *Modern Times. Literary Change*. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.

Alexanderplatz remain largely unexplored, prompting questions about transnational processes of literary canonization.³

This research project sets out the following goals:

1. Study the similar depiction of urban space in both novels (**WP1**) using close reading, focusing on the thematic parallels (characters, plot, depiction of urban space and its peripheries) as well as the style (the ‘sober’ literary language and use of filmic montage and collage techniques)
2. Visualize urban space with literary cartography (**WP2**), representing the flanerries of the main characters in the city on the basis of a dataset (in excel) and a visual tool in GIS (Carto).
3. Use network analysis with the help of the research platform Nodegoat (**WP3**) to demonstrate how German literary motives and narrative techniques ended up in Italy through translations. The importance of cultural mediators and literary debates (via so-called ‘little magazines’) will be better highlighted as a result. Both the database and network will be made open access, so they can be used and expanded by other scholars.

Research Trainee Profile

We invite MA and ResMA students in Literary studies to apply.

Research Trainee 1 has a thorough knowledge of the Italian language for both written and oral skills (level B2/C1) and a strong research interest in modernist literature. Prior knowledge of Digital Humanities is not required, but certainly a plus. The student is responsible for the content and cartographic analysis of the Italian novel throughout the entire project (WP1, 2, 3), and will share knowledge and results with Research Trainee 2, with whom he/she will collaborate closely. A good level of English, for science communication (blog/video clip), writing an academic paper, and following the 1-day training in DH is required.

Research Trainee 2 has a thorough knowledge of the German language for both written and oral skills (level B2/C1) and a strong research interest in modernist literature. Prior knowledge of Digital Humanities is not required, but certainly a plus. The student is responsible for the content and cartographic analysis of the German novel throughout the entire project (WP1, 2, 3), and will share knowledge and results with Research Trainee 1, with whom he/she will collaborate closely. A good level of English knowledge for science communication (blog/video clip), writing an academic paper, and following the 1-day training in DH is required.

Collaboration

Dr. Carmen van den Bergh and Dr. Dorine Schellens both focus on modernist literature in their respective fields. This research project would expand their existing collaboration within the course European Modernism (MA Literary Studies), in which they both teach a block on Italian and German modernism respectively. In this project, they would combine their expertise on modernist literature as well as their theoretical knowledge on processes of canonization, digital humanities, literary cartography, and network analysis. Many processes of literary circulation and cultural transfer between Italy and Germany remain as yet unexplored. This traineeship programme enables advanced students with a strong interest in research to further explore these connections as a team as well as to expand their analytical skills by working with approaches from digital humanities in literary studies. For the latter part, they will receive training from experts in the field of digital humanities. We will invite two experts to Leiden University: Associate professor in Digital Humanities Giovanni Pietro Vitali (Université de Versailles saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines), who will give a workshop on Digital Cartography, as well as Geert Kessels from the network analysis platform Nodegoat. Kessels is already involved in existing research projects using DH at Leiden University, such as “Mapping Visions of Rome”⁴ from Dr. Susanne de Beer. We thus aim to both strengthen and expand the collaboration between the research platform Nodegoat and the Faculty of Humanities at Leiden.

³ Carmen van den Bergh. *Il neorealismo modernista. Tre concetti chiave (1926-1936)*. Firenze: Cesati, 2018; Dorine Schellens. *Kanonbildung im transkulturellen Netzwerk. Die Rezeptionsgeschichte des Moskauer Konzeptualismus aus deutsch-russischer Sicht*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2021.

⁴ “Mapping Visions of Rome”, URL: <https://nodegoat.net/usecase.p/372.m/29/mapping-visions-of-rome>

Deliverables

This research project envisions output in different forms: public, educational, and academic outreach. In the first, exploratory phase of the project, the outreach consists of a **Blog article** on the www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl of the LUCAS Institute, as well as a didactic **video clip** in the ECOLe Studio Leiden for [Blended Learning](#) as part of the course European Modernism (MA Literary Studies). In a second and third phase of the traineeship, **2 datasets** will be created, as well as two **digital applications** (Digital Literary Map in GIS and a Network Analysis in Nodegoat). These results will be archived in the [DANS-KNAW archive](#). The final results of this research will be shared in an **academic article** (published in the open access academic journal for comparative literature *IL/LI*),⁵ as well as **presented orally** (in group) at the annual academic conference for Literary modernism (KU Leuven, MDRN), and the OSL Summer School of Digital Humanities (Leiden, OSL). After completing the traineeship programme, the students are encouraged to continue with a PhD track, in which they can conduct similar research drawing on their experience with DH training and expanded analytical skills, but on a more extensive corpus.

Planning

Date	Work package	Activities	Output
February	Preliminary Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kick-off meeting with the entire team ● Introductory reading seminar on the topic ● Gathering data (primary and secondary sources) 	Team building Extensive bibliography
March-April	WP 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Close-reading of German and Italian novels, following a narratological grid ● Writing first parts (state of the art and results of textual analysis) 	Publication of Blog article and Videoclip
May-June	WP 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workshop in Leiden with Giovanni Pietro Vitali (Cartography, Literary Mapping, GIS). ● Make dataset in Excel ● Create Literary Map in Carto ● Writing second part: method and mapping ● Presentation at the Modernist Conference (KU Leuven, MDRN Research team) 	Dataset Cartography in Carto Presentation Conference paper at MDRN (Leuven)
July-August	WP3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workshop in Leiden with Geert Kessels (Research platform Nodegoat). ● Make dataset in Excel ● Create Literary Network in Nodegoat ● Writing third part: Literary networks ● Presentation at the Summer School for Digital Humanities (Leiden University & OSL - Onderzoekschool Literatuurwetenschap) 	Dataset Network Analysis in Nodegoat Presentation at OSL Summer School (Leiden)
September	Final Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finalizing article by supervisors ● Encouraging Research Assistants to present a Research proposal for MA/Phd Track. 	Submitting collective article to multilingual journal <i>IL/LI - Littéraire Interferenties</i>
October	extra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expanding research corpus and project 	Supervisors will use this

⁵ Academic Journal (OA, double-blind peer review) “Interférences Littéraires/Littéraire interferenties”, URL: <http://www.interferenceslitteraires.be/index.php/illi/about>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing results in the MA course European Modernism, inspiring students of the course to build on this pilot study 	<p>project as a springboard for further research and teaching activities</p>
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Student Application

Students (MA/ResMA) with a strong interest in doing research on literary modernism from a broader European perspective and knowledge of Italian and/or German language and culture are invited to apply for this research traineeship. Previous experience with digital humanities approaches is not required, as students will receive training in working with these techniques. Applications should consist of a CV (which indicates language skills) and a motivation letter (max. 1 page). They should be sent to Dr. Carmen van den Bergh (c.van.den.bergh@hum.leidenuniv.nl) and Dr. Dorine Schellens (d.e.a.schellens@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Dèttore, Ugo. *Quartiere Vittoria*, Milano: Bompiani, 1936.
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Secondary sources:

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