

Powerful Literary Fiction Texts II (PLit. II)  
A Stylistic, Empirical and Performance-based Approach  
(28-30 October 2020, Paris, France)

[www.p-lit.org](http://www.p-lit.org)

Works of prose fiction include pieces of writing that are prone to provide both emotional and cognitive pleasure because they are made of “language at its most distilled and most powerful” (Rita Dove). Yet these passages too often escape an analysis that combines close reading with, on the one hand, the reading aloud of the text – so that it can be experienced to the full by the audience – and, on the other hand, a study of the text’s potential effects on readers – hereby advancing a hypothesis of readers’ impressions and of the linguistic features responsible for them. This international conference series invites contributors to select and explore prose extracts through such a mixed approach.

Each excerpt – be it a set of phrases or sentences, a paragraph or a longer extract – will thus be orally performed and examined as a textual composition likely to elicit specific responses on the readers’ part. Questions dealt with in the presentations can include:

- How does the text capture the readers’ attention or interest?
- How does it provide aesthetic appeal and trigger powerful positive, negative or mixed emotions?
- Which other effects apart from eliciting strong emotions can render prose fiction powerful? Which role do emotions play in these other kinds of effects (e. g. persuasion, behaviour and personality change)?
- Is the impact closely bound to the time of reading or are some effects created to stick with the reader for longer? And then: How can this be linked to specific stylistic features?

The compelling effects such pieces of text provide are usually due to:

- The relationship between the part and the whole: the way the selected excerpt articulates with the rest of the narrative it is taken from, its specific function and purport within the respective work of fiction.
- The chosen piece of text itself: although the powerful effect produced in a reader is partly due to his or her subjectivity, we assume it also results from

the way the author's language organises and conveys the cognitive realities of real or fictitious experience.

The presentation format thus involves four successive stages:

1. A brief introductory presentation of the story from which the chosen extract is taken, and of the excerpt's function or purport within the rest of the narrative.
2. The reading aloud of the extract: thanks to this oral performance, the text will be experienced by the audience as 'living' material embodied through human voice.
3. A close reading aiming to discover the text's mechanisms. If all linguistic choices are potentially meaningful (Leech & Short 2007: 27), which are the 'powerful' ones, responsible for the audience's reactions? Tools pertaining to the field of literary linguistics may be helpful to identify the effectual stylistic features: lexical choices and coinages; syntactic choices, including tense and aspect; figures of speech and other stylistic devices, such as ellipses, rhythm, sounds, et cetera.
4. The explicit highlighting of the hypothesised connection between the identified linguistic features and the effects they have on readers.

Contributors are especially welcome to present empirical research on reader perception of specific textual phenomena or stylistic features, but testable hypotheses are also suitable.

Any kind of fictional literary prose or drama text may be considered, irrespective of subgenre, literary tradition, or intended audience. However, poetry, historical non-fiction texts, and translation analyses are unfortunately not suitable.

## Note

This conference has been conceived as a convivial event, aiming to foster interaction between attendees: there will be only one talk at a time and lunches will be provided, as well as an opening reception on the first evening of the conference.

## Submission guidelines

Presentation time for each paper will be 20-25 minutes, followed by a 5-10 minutes discussion.

Please submit a short bio (not longer than 50 words) including your name and institutional affiliation, and a completely anonymised file consisting of the abstract (up to 300 words, excluding references; unpublished work) and the literary excerpt(s) under study.

If the selected excerpts are not in English, we kindly ask contributors to base their presentation on an English translation (preferably a professional one) that allows following the argument of the paper.

Please send the two files to the following e-mail address: [plit.conference@gmail.com](mailto:plit.conference@gmail.com)

The deadline for submission is February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

## Keynote speakers

### **Sandrine Sorlin**

Professor of English language and linguistics at University Paul Valéry – Montpellier 3 (France)

### **Raymond A. Mar**

Professor of Psychology at York University (Toronto, Canada)

## Organisers

- Mariane Utudji, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3 (France)
- Victoria Pöhls, Max-Planck-Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (Frankfurt, Germany)
- Dr Craig Jordan-Baker, University of Brighton (United Kingdom)