

Reception of Literature in Reading Communities. Social Reading face-to face and online.

Klagenfurt University, Austria, 1.-3. March 2017

The Call for Papers is open until December 18th 2016.

Please send your abstract (approx. 200 words) to:

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Conference languages: German and English

Reading is an individual as well as communicative act of acquirement. In analogy to social media the term social reading has emerged to describe readers' communication on books through the use of digital media. Taking social reading in its literal meaning it also includes any form of communication about reading experiences and reading matter. Social reading in its broadest sense is the scope within which the conference "Reception of Literature in Reading Communities" will take place.

Engaging in 'Book Talk' has never before been as easy and accessible as it is nowadays. Readers have access to many ways of exchanging their thoughts and opinions on literature. However, the need to swap ideas on literary texts is not an entirely new phenomenon. It reaches back to the literary salon of the 18th century. Contemporary developments show an increasing popularity of reading groups not just in the English and German speaking countries.

Reading communities engage in face-to-face or online group discussions on books. During these avid talks and debates processes of reading can be observed that are of a self-referential, social and discursive nature. Reading groups select books to be read, their members exchange reading experiences, they do research on authors and books and they aim at a mutually valid interpretation of the book's significance and meaning. What can be observed are the negotiation of literary meaning, the ways, strategies and processes of grouping, of a collectively coordinated acquisition and organization of knowledge, of orientation and meaning-attribution, argumentation, decision-making and judging. This collaborative negotiation of meaning offers clues on processes of reception and reception behavior amongst common readers that otherwise would remain furtive. Therefore, it can be valuable for various scholarly disciplines: literary and communication studies as well as book studies, reception research and social sciences.

Referring to reception of literature in a broad sense, the conference aims to take into consideration the choice of books and their acquirement as well as social and communicative strategies in judging literature. We especially invite papers dealing with following questions:

- What is the additional value in participating in reading groups, online fora or review blogs in comparison to the solitary act of reading? How are the individual's demands on literary texts as well as the group experience articulated and in what ways are they concerted?
- What strategies in the choice of their reading matter do self-organizing reading groups apply? In how far do literary education and the canon influence the readers' behavior? What are the effects of the literary field (literary prizes, commemorations)? How do dissemination strategies of the book trade or of literary criticism manifest themselves in the reception behavior of readers (in general as well as specifically)?
- What kinds of processes of textual acquirement can be identified? How do norms and values show themselves explicitly as well as implicitly? On which aspects can members of reading

communities agree, where do they come into conflict with one another? Is it possible to systematize case-related findings?

- Considering the discussion process, in how far do reading groups and internet fora differ from each other? Is it media-related determination in general or are there differences to be seen in orientation, focus, strategies even when the same book is discussed online and face-to-face?
- How can we interpret the popularity of reading communities in the context of developments in contemporary society in general?

Can it be seen as a sign of the individual's self-empowerment against literary expertocracy? Does the group experience offer a kind of orientation and security which seem to be gradually disappearing in heteronomous and complex societies?

- In which historical context can contemporary reading communities be situated? Are they a truly new phenomenon as is stated by the literary trade? What aspects can be regarded as new, what would have to be considered as universal between the 18th and the 21st century?
- Publishers, booksellers and libraries have recognized reading groups as relevant proponents in the dissemination of literature. They are wooed, motivated, supplied with bonus material or even initiated. What expectations are to be met? Will reading groups be used as marketing instruments while book sales dwindle and the joy of reading is on the wane?
- What insights can the humanities gain when dealing with the various forms of social reading? Will readers who have in general been seen as passive addressees of literary dissemination be attributed a new status? What effects might this have on literary reception studies that have emerged from reception aesthetics (Iser, Jauß) and are trying to go beyond psychological (Holland) or social (Fish) reader response theory?

At the conference, preliminary results of a two-year research project on "Negotiating literary meaning. Communication in reading communities" (funded by the Austrian Science Fund, FWF) will be presented. The conference itself is open to scholars as well as to practitioners within the literary field (publishers, booksellers, critics, librarians etc). If everyday communication on literature is in the focus of your research, if you are working on topics related to the average reader, on reception studies or any of the questions mentioned above, we would like to welcome you at our conference!

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