descriptive genre profiles (en)

TASK

This task provides the basis for a qualitative evaluation. It will provide a comprehensive, explicit, and descriptive understanding of different fictional subgenres, namely sentimental novels, crime fiction, science fiction, and historical novels, from the perspective of literary studies. This task will be carried out early on in the project, before substantial results from the feature extraction tasks are known. The identification of fine-grained, typical characteristics forming the genre profiles of the subgenres of the novel will rely on a thorough close reading of a considerable amount of relevant research publications describing each subgenre. For this purpose, a systematic inventory of dimensions of the subgenres will be created to allow for explicit characterization and systematic comparison between subgenres. This inventory will include aspects such as recurring themes (e.g. crime, exploration, danger, art, love, family), plot elements (e.g. travel, confrontations, interrogations, misunderstandings), stock characters (e.g. detective, unhappy lover, lone traveler), character functions (e.g. opponent or catalyst), settings (e.g. urban vs. rural, conventional vs. exotic, abstract vs. concrete) and style (e.g. colloquialisms, foreign language elements, neologisms) shared by many novels belonging to a given subgenre. Considering the nuances that exist in the same subgenre of French and English novels, the profiles will also have to be checked or adapted. To validate the subgenre profiles, a group of experts will be invited to a workshop discussing the approach and the results.

PROFILES

Science-Fiction novel

Themes & plot elements

Science-Fiction novels convey the idea that the future will differ significantly - in a scientific, medical, ecological or social way - from the past, emphasizing the impermanence of the human condition. Themes of ascension to the sky or descension under the earth, as well as the exploration of other unknowns are common (D'Arcy, 2022). The influence of the atomic bomb explosion in 1945, the rise of nuclear power, and the nascent space programs of the USA and USSR are evident in the narratives of Science-Fiction as a prediction or as a reflection (Westfahl, 2021). The genre glimpses in humanity's probable futures with themes covering multiplanetary human life, nanotechnology, nuclear power, overpopulation, virtual reality, immortality and life extension or ecology. Typical plot elements are the conquest of outer space, militaristic societies and conflicts, apocalypse, crime and punishment, miniaturization and enlargement or faster than light travels.

Early science-fiction implied a utopian confidence in technological progress, whereas the 1980s and 1990s cyberpunk phase foresees a gloomier world of sinister multinational corporations leading to a dystopian future (Baldick, 1996, p. 77).

The blurring of boundaries between humans and machines raises questions about autonomy and identity (Riley and Pearce, 2022b). Economic structures and their societal impacts are examined through speculative futures. A significant focus in science-fiction novels is placed on the nature of human identity, questioning what it means to be human amidst technological advancements.

Typical main characters

In classic science-fiction, a typical figure is the heroic male protagonist, who employs intelligence and physical courage fighting antagonists like monsters, robots, werewolves or zombies. Martians embody the alien and unknown, while messiahs figures lead transformative quests. In the New Wave of Science-Fiction in the 1960s, new role models concerning gender or race were explored.

Ants or other animals as monsters metaphorically explore societal anxieties. These figures collectively reflect sci-fi's exploration of humanity, ethics and societal concerns. The figure of the mad scientist embodies the concern of technological advancements changing human society to the worse.

Settings

Between 1900 and 1970, English science fiction explored diverse and imaginative settings: Alternative dimensions, parallel universes, and fictional planets allowed writers to explore different physical laws and societal structures. Black holes or wormholes

provided thrilling, perilous gateways to unknown parts of the universe. Expansive galactic empires explored themes of power and colonization. Libraries and museums, whether on Earth or other planets, symbolized knowledge and history. Common celestial settings like the moon, Venus, Mars, and the sun reflected early space exploration ambitions. Earth's polar regions provided isolated and hostile environments, while subterranean and underwater realms housed hidden civilizations and unknown creatures. Massive underground complexes, from hidden cities to secret bases, highlighted themes of secrecy and advanced technology.

Style

The genre often employs thought-experiments, allowing writers to explore hypothetical scenarios and their implications. This led to a style characterized by *estrangement* (Suvin, 2017, p. 15) and dislocation, where familiar elements were placed in unfamiliar contexts to provoke reflection and critique. Science-Fiction often uses neologisms, as authors coin new terms to describe futuristic technologies and societies (Gee, 2023). The genre developed into a scientifically and technically accented form of utopian and futuristic prose, often adopting a critical and warning tone.

Sentimental novel

Themes & plot elements

Between 1900 and 1970, English sentimental novels centered around themes of falling in love, passion and seduction. Despite complications, the plots invariably led to optimistic, "happily-ever-after" endings, such as weddings or engagements. The genre evolved to include inspirational (Christian) themes in the 1930s and 1940s and gothic elements by the 1960s.

In romance novels, moral values are predominant, touching themes like family, fidelity, honor, caring, courage, tolerance or selflessness. Often important life changes and social issues such as aging, pregnancy, abandonement, spousal and child abuse, divorce, death, grief, racism, mental or physical illness may play an additional role, too (Ramsdell, 2012). The romance novel revolves around women's freedom (Regis, 2013) and tropes of duality, conflict or ambivalence (Kamblé, Selinger and Teo, 2020).

Typical main characters

Sentimental narratives often include a set of oppositions such as young/old, male/female,

and low-status/high-status, borrowing motifs from fairy tales, including the transformation of the 'beast' into a 'prince' through the power of love (Lee, 2008).

The hero starts sometimes as emotionally cold and may display 'bad' or even violent behavior (Riley and Pearce, 2022a). He is typically a physically strong alpha male, sometimes depicted as a dark, brooding figure, especially in the gothic romance novels of the 1960s.

The heroine's character evolved over time. Early in the century, she is often portrayed as timid, passive, and virginal. As time progressed, she became a more active subject of desire. Despite various imperfections, the heroine is generally characterized by self-motivation, resilience, honesty, and a highly developed sense of honor.

Supporting characters are also vital to these stories, including typical figures such as the best friend, the other woman, the toxic boss, the jealous lover and the villain. Actions in romance novels, particularly by the heroine, might be morally questionable, but they are usually motivated by selfless reasons, such as protecting or saving others (Ramsdell, **2012)**.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of gay romance novels alongside the modern gay movement, and the 1970s brought the rise of the sensual historical novel. Despite their evolving nature, characters maintained a high degree of likability and moral integrity.

Settings

The contemporary romance novel has a big range of different possible settings ranging from a peaceful Midwestern suburb, busy Texas ranch to a tropical island or isolated mountain retreat. The choices are limited only by the real possibilities of the current time period (Ramsdell, 2012). Typical settings encompass rural or small-town or suburban environments, ranging from domestic and social scenes to local businesses and schools. Urban settings feature workplaces, business districts, apartments/condos, and community organizations, spanning both upscale areas and inner-city locales. Exotic locales are also prevalent, featuring romantic domestic vacations or job placements in foreign lands. In the subgenre of the gothic romance novel, popular in the 1960s, places like brooding castles or windswept cliffs may be typical (Ramsdell, 2012).

Style
Historically, the genre has evolved significantly. The 1920s saw the rise of the sex novel, which introduced more realistic descriptions of women's sexuality. By the 1930s, the

mass market formula romance became prevalent, solidifying the genre's popularity and commercial success.

English romance novels often employ the stream-of-consciousness technique, allowing readers intimate access to characters' thoughts and emotions. Everyday colloquialisms and shorter sentences contribute to a conversational tone (van Dalen-Oskam, 2023), making the narratives more relatable and engaging. Dialogue is a key component, driving interactions and relationships forward. The plots are highly formulaic, which provides a sense of comfort and escapism for readers (Lee, 2008).

The emotional engagement of these novels offers sensual and sexual fantasies (Ramsdell, 2012). The stories are typically told from the heroine's viewpoint, providing a perspective that many readers find empowering and relatable (Kamblé, Selinger and Teo, 2020).

Historical Novel

Themes & plot elements

Historical novels frequently explored themes of transformation and reshaping of lives through significant historical events, as described by Lukács in 1937. These novels make the political personal, weaving real events and people from the past into fictional narratives to convey deeper meanings for the present. They pay attention to the manners, social conditions, and other details of the depicted period, offering a vivid portrayal of past societies. Authors use historical facts, sometimes focusing on a single historical event, to reflect the spirit of the age, and to explore the construction of national identities. Themes range from the American Revolution to the World Wars, the Middle Ages, and Tudor Tales, often reflecting on truth, memory, ethics, and identity (Southgate, 2014). By reflecting the inner lives of historical characters, these novels examine the emotional and political power of history. They often portray transitional moments of history, thus affirming human progress amidst conflict (Lukács, 1965). From the 1960s onward, ideologies dissolved more and more: When protestantism, catholicism, fascism, capitalism, communism lost their power to inspire people to work hard, to live morally, to change the world (Brantly 2017), one could observe a turn toward metanarratives. Later historical novels construct a broader, more inclusive understanding of history, often engaging with contested histories and postcolonial perspectives.

Typical main characters

Typical characters in historical novels often blend real historical figures with fictional

ones. According to Lukács (1937), such novels foreground undistinguished or historically obsolete characters to tell compelling stories that resonate with readers. These characters derive their individuality from the unique historical peculiarities of their age, embodying the spirit, challenges, and social conditions of their time. Historical figures are often depicted with a focus on their inner lives, providing a deeper understanding of their motivations and actions. Heroes in these novels can be portrayed as 'world-historical individuals' in the Hegelian sense, whose actions significantly influence historical events. Alternatively, Lukács (1937) describes the 'middle of the road hero,' an ordinary person whose life is profoundly shaped by historical forces.

Settings

A temporal setting different from the present is *the* defining feature of the historical novel (Stevens, 2010), for example medieval settings or the ancient world. These novels often utilize metaphorical landscapes that symbolize broader themes, such as in Sir Walter Scott's "Waverley" (Bragg, 2016). The settings are typically more colorful and exciting than the everyday lives of readers, adding to their appeal (Brantly, 2017). Typical historical settings span a wide range, including The American West, Ancient Rome, The Middle Ages, The Renaissance, Black History, The Ancient Greeks, Scotland, The American Civil War, Eighteenth Century Adventures, Writer's Lives, Ancient Egypt, and Exploration of the World (Rennison, 2009). These diverse and richly detailed settings offer readers an immersive escape into different times and places.

Style

Historical novels often focus on personal details and use a plethora of realistic details. The model of a historical novel is influenced by Sir Walter Scotts pioneering works, using a mythical tonality and a style of fact and fabulation (Southgate, 2014). Language patterns may involve historical language and prototypical plot structures are the family saga, the quest or the romance (Wallace, 2004, p. 15). Sometimes romanticizing eras of the past, the goal is "making the old lost world live again" (Brayfield and Sprott, 2013). These narratives typically reduce historical data to an ordered, coherent story.

Detective Novel

Themes & plot elements

The crime novel from 1900 to 1970 evolved from the orderly, rational world of Golden Age detective fiction ('Whodunnit'), which cultivated the murder-mystery as a "light-hearted puzzle" (Baldick, 1996, p. 143) to the chaotic, uncertain and morally ambiguous landscape of hard-boiled and psychological crime narratives ('Whydunnit') (Pepper, 2022). Vices like greed, jealousy, resentment, and revenge are central themes, reflecting the darker aspects of human nature and society. Key elements of the crime novel are furthermore acts of violence, murder, social or economic corruption, prostitution or financial fraud.

In classic detective stories, the narrative often culminated in a restoration of order, with the detective hero unraveling the mystery and reaffirming societal norms. In contrast, the hard-boiled genre presents a more cynical view, where any restoration of order is only partial. The resolution of the crime in hard-boiled fiction often leaves society in a violent and fragmented state, shedding a light on the morally impaired undercurrents of its time.

Typical main characters

In classic detective fiction, the detective hero, whether amateur or professional, embodied intelligence, observation skills, and a commitment to rational investigation. The hard-boiled genre introduced the tough-talking, loner, independent private investigator without any pretensions to being intellectual, but with a strict code of honor, navigating a corrupt urban landscape filled with shady businessmen, conniving politicians or gangs. Another typical main character of crime fiction is the femme fatale, a seductive and dangerous woman who manipulates those around her. Further prototypical characters include the suspect, the vulnerable starlet entangled in the criminal underworld and the deputy sheriff representing local law enforcement. In psychological crime narratives, the focus shifts to the psychological investigator, who investigates the motives behind crimes while grappling with their own moral dilemmas, and the victim, whose background and psychological state provided deeper insights into the crime's impact on society.

Settings

In classic detective fiction, closed places like country estates, small villages, isolated islands, trains or ships are common settings for the investigation (Düwell *et al.*, 2018, p.

11). The "locked room" mystery, a staple of classic detective fiction, presented crimes committed in seemingly impossible conditions, emphasizing intellectual challenges. In contrast, the hard-boiled genre thrived in open urban spaces, the literal and metaphorical dirtiness of the city highlighting the moral decay within, reflecting a society hollowed out by crime (Düwell *et al.,* 2018, p. 7). Vertical spatial entities such as swamps, water, cellars, and graves can bring to the light hidden pasts and submerged secrets, underscoring themes of memory and guilt. Furthermore, the crime scene and objects within it are potentially of symbolic nature or represent clues.

Style

Many stories are told through first-person narratives, lending an immediacy and intimacy to the storytelling. The narratives are often formulaic, relying on stereotypical recurring motifs and recognizable signs (Nusser, 2016, p. 97). Yet, there is room for variation inside the formula (Brecht, (1938) 2015). Humour, literary allusions, colloquial language and quotations may enrich the texts (Nusser, 2016, p. 107; Raczkowski, 2017, p. 29). Crime fiction is often characterized by dark romanticism, violence, jokes, extreme psychological states, conspiracy, terror, the unusual and absurd. (Raczkowski, 2017, p. 3) The formula of the classical detective novel concerning the role of the reader is that the author is to the reader as the criminal to the detective (Moretti, 2020).

The hard-boiled genre, in particular, often carries a cynical tone. This subgenre of the crime novel is characterized by linguistic economy, using as few words as possible to convey the gritty realities of urban life (Raczkowski, 2017). It also gravitates towards a rough aesthetic of violence, frequently covering themes within the register of the monstrous and grotesque (Düwell *et al.*, 2018, p. 7).

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