

MITE final workshop

From critical analysis to formal representation: literary characters, interpretations, and ontologies

When: 21–23 October 2025

Where: Dipartimento di lettere e filosofia, **aula 001**, via Tommaso Gar, 14, 38122
Trento TN, 21–23 October 2025.

Registration (mandatory!): Online as well as onsite participation is possible. Please let us know through the following page.

Information: miteprinpnrr@gmail.com

The workshop is co-organized by Emilio M. Sanfilippo (CNR ISTC), Gaia Tomazzoli (Sapienza University of Rome), and Federico Laudisa (University of Trento) — see the announcement of the workshop on the website of the University of Trento here.

Program (abstracts below)

**** Slides** of presentations presented during the workshop can be found here.**

DAY 1 (21/10)

9:30–10:15 Federico Laudisa and Emilio Sanfilippo, *Welcome and introduction to the workshop*

(discussant: Roberta Ferrario)

10:15–11:00 Evelyn Gius (Technical University of Darmstadt) *Computational Narratology between Text Surface, Deeper Structure and Readers*

11:00–11:30 BREAK

(discussant: Alessandro Mosca)

11:30 – 12:15 Federico Pianzola (University of Groningen) *The GOLEM Ontology for Narrative and Fiction*

12:15–13:00 Sara Tonelli (Fondazione Bruno Kessler) *Human Label Variation in Linguistic Annotation*

13:30–14:30 Lunch BREAK

(discussant: Gaia Tomazzoli)

14:30–15:15 Stefano Ballerio (University of Milan) *«He was one of us». Sul giudizio morale in Lord Jim di Joseph Conrad*

15:15–16:00 Heloísa Abreu de Lima (Sapienza University of Rome) *Can we trust Fiammetta? Moral judgment and narrative reliability in Boccaccio's "Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta"*

16:00–16:30 BREAK

(discussant: Nicola Guarino)

16:30–17:15 Emanuele Bottazzi (CNR ISTC), *Interpreting is not understanding: how machines get lost in the forest of symbols*

Social dinner at 20:00. Restaurant: I due mori, via S. Marco, 11, 38122 Trento TN

DAY 2 (22/10)

(discussant: Heloísa Abreu de Lima)

9:30–10:15 Elena Porciani (Università della Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli') *L'invenzione delle personagge. Ragioni teoriche e pratica genealogica*

10:15–11:00 Gaia Tomazzoli (Sapienza University of Rome) *Authorial stance in literary criticism: a cross-linguistic and cross-gender analysis*

11:00–11:30 BREAK

(discussant: Jansan Favazzo)

11:30 – 12:15 Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa) *The Experiential Function of Fictional Characters*

12:15–13:00 Francesco Orilia (University of Macerata), *Fiction and reality*

13:30–14:30 Lunch BREAK

(discussant: Marco Buzzoni)

14:30–15:15 Michele Paolini Paoletti (University of Macerata) *Ficta and their Powerful Identity: A Case Study from Paul Auster's 4 3 2 1*

15:15–16:00 Jansan Favazzo (University of Macerata) and Roberto Burro (University of Verona), *Fiction, Identity, and Existence: A Study in Experimental Philosophy*

16:00–16:30 BREAK

(discussant: Iuris Mocchiutti)

16:30–17:15 Emilio M. Sanfilippo (CNR ISTC), *Formal Modeling of Literary Interpretations: Limitations and Possibilities*

Social dinner at 20:00. Restaurant: La Cantinota, via S. Marco, 22–24, 38122 Trento TN

DAY 3 (23/10)

(discussant: Claudio Masolo)

9:30–10:15 Carlo Meghini (CNR ISTI) *Linking Dante*

10:15–11:00 Antonio Rinaldi (University Federico II, Naples), *From Data to Meaning in Digital Cultural Heritage: Bridging Knowledge Representation and Deep Learning with Neuro-Symbolic Architectures*

11:00–11:15 BREAK

(discussant: Rossella Maria Stufano)

11:15 – 12:00 Stefano Borgo (CNR ISTC Lab of Applied Ontology) *An Ontology of Representation*

ABSTRACTS

Heloísa Abreu de Lima, Sapienza University of Rome

Title: *Can we trust Fiammetta? Moral judgment and narrative reliability in Boccaccio's "Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta"*

Fiammetta, the enigmatic woman celebrated in various works by Giovanni Boccaccio, represents one of the most compelling yet contradictory female characters in Trecento literature. Her multifaceted portrayals have sparked critical debates that illuminate key aspects of Boccaccio's oeuvre. In this talk, I intend to examine a long-standing critical debate regarding Fiammetta, analyzing its implications for the interpretation of Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*. First, I will trace Fiammetta's various appearances across Boccaccio's works, highlighting not only the evident inconsistencies between her portrayals, but also the elements that, on the other hand, point to an underlying continuity from one work to another. Then, I will focus specifically on the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, where Fiammetta appears both as protagonist and as first-person narrator. In particular, I will address the critical problems related to the moral judgments that the character may be subject to. As I argue, these moral judgments shape our interpretation of Fiammetta's reliability as the narrator of her own story, thereby determining how we engage with the text's meaning and the author's potential stance toward the character.

Stefano Ballerio, Università degli Studi di Milano

Title: *«He was one of us». Sul giudizio morale in Lord Jim di Joseph Conrad*

La mia relazione verte su *Lord Jim* (1900) di Joseph Conrad e in particolare sul suo protagonista Jim. Vorrei soffermarmi sui diversi giudizi morali dei quali Jim è oggetto, sia nella finzione romanzesca, sia nella ricezione. Per il gesto che determina il suo destino, l'abbandono del Patna e dei suoi passeggeri, Jim è ripetutamente giudicato da numerosi personaggi che incontra nel seguito della sua storia o che di quella storia, anche senza incontrarlo, vengono a sapere, e inoltre dal suo narratore Marlow e da se stesso. Al di là della finzione romanzesca, gli interpreti dell'opera hanno discusso a loro volta la figura morale di Jim. Vorrei osservare questi diversi giudizi e riflettere su come funzioni il giudizio morale nella narrativa romanzesca. Oltre alla letteratura critica sul romanzo e sulla narrativa di Conrad in generale, i riferimenti principali potrebbero essere Michail Bachtin, con le sue considerazioni sul rapporto fra autore ed eroe, per la questione dei giudizi morali all'interno della

finzione, e l'ermeneutica gadameriana, per la questione dei giudizi morali da parte dei lettori.

Stefano Borgo (CNR ISTC Lab of Applied Ontology)

Title: *An Ontology of Representation*

In this presentation I present a recent research carried out with Riichiro Mizoguchi. Representations are largely used in scientific domains and in everyday life alike. When representations are discussed as such, their status is evaluated primarily for the information (correct or incorrect, precise or imprecise, detailed or general) that they provide. In philosophy, information is mainly discussed along with the notion of aboutness, and in application-oriented communities with notions such as data and knowledge. From the ontological viewpoint, representation is investigated theoretically in terms of aboutness, and practically as a companion notion with data and knowledge.

This adds to representation shortcomings from both viewpoints. We argue that representation is an articulated theory and that it is possible to address some aspects, such as the form–content relationship, without taking position on others, such as the aboutness relationship. In this paper, we propose an ontological model of representation, named OREO, that introduces a set of distinctions for identifying the correct answers to questions such as: “Ontologically speaking, what is a novel?” (and similarly for a painting, a piece of music, a map, etc.) In the proposed view, a representation is a complex ontological entity formed by two intertwined elements: a representation form and a representation content. This sets the basis for a theory of representation which also provides a different view on understanding information and related concepts. The broadness and flexibility of the proposed model are tested by discussing a list of different cases: from music to procedures, from novels to paintings, and maps. The status of letters (characters) in natural language expressions, which turns out to be quite complex, is also briefly investigated.

Mizoguchi, R., & Borgo, S. (2025). An Ontology of Representation. *Applied Ontology*, 20(2), 137–152.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/15705838251337943>

Emanuele Bottazzi (CNR ISTC)

Title: *Interpreting is not understanding: how machines get lost in the forest of symbols*

Current computational systems struggle to represent literary interpretive debates reliably, due to fundamental conceptual limitations. Despite impressive recent advances, we point out crucial obstacles that prevent us from simply feeding texts and interpretations into a system and expecting faithful models of interpretive discourse. A first obstacle lies in the relation between understanding and interpretation, which is complex and bidirectional. Sometimes interpretation presupposes understanding: one cannot interpret a novel, or criticism of that novel, without first achieving some degree of textual understanding. At other times, interpretation is the only resource precisely because understanding fails: when a passage seems ambiguous, claiming to have understood it forces us to choose among rival readings—yet often we cannot make that choice decisively. This recalls Wittgenstein’s rule-following problem. Following a rule is, at bottom, a matter of practice, not interpretation, since many interpretations are legitimate and thus leave us unsure how to proceed. This reveals why understanding differs fundamentally from interpreting: understanding is about being properly oriented within a text’s world, not about producing readings of it. This leads us to the second obstacle. We argue that understanding a text, like orienting oneself in space, is a fundamentally *de se* process: it concerns the way we ourselves are situated within the text or the space. In contrast, artificial systems maintain an invariably external perspective, preventing them from navigating the sometimes rigid, sometimes elastic constraints needed to comprehend a text and to sustain dialogue between texts.

Bottazzi Grifoni, E., & Ferrario, R. (2025). The bewitching AI: The Illusion of Communication with Large Language Models. *Philosophy & Technology*, 38(2), 61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-025-00893-6>

Jansan Favazzo (University of Macerata)

Title: *Fiction, Identity, and Existence: A Study in Experimental Philosophy*

The category of fictional entities (*ficta*, in short) is highly controversial and extensively debated in contemporary metaphysics. Within the MITE project, we conducted an empirical study through questionnaire administration aimed at testing the following hypotheses. With respect to the identity of *ficta*, (1a) the construct validity of our theoretical assessment, and (1b) whether it can be

observed a commonsensical response to the identity conundrums raised by *ficta*. With respect to the existence of *ficta*, (2) whether it can be identified a commonsensical opinion about the ontological and metaphysical status of *ficta* (respectively, whether *ficta* are genuine entities and, if so, what kind of entities they are). Moreover, with respect to both, (3) whether there is a significant difference in response between laypeople and people with a strong background either in the philosophical or in the literary field.

Questionnaire: <https://limesurvey.univr.it/index.php/314343>

Evelyn Gius (Technical University of Darmstadt)

Title: *Computational Narratology between Text Surface, Deeper Structure and Readers*

For analyzing plot-related phenomena, we have been working on different levels of granularity with relation to different features of the narrative in the past years. In this talk, I will present this work with a focus on overarching questions of operationalization. Our approach takes into account the narratological modeling of narratives which ranges from analysis of textual representation over the identification of deep structures to questions of reader responses. The idea is that this is also a more successful approach to automated analysis of narratives than approaches relying on textual analysis based on surface features only. We therefore combine textual features with general narrative („deep“) structure as well as, to some extent, reader’s perception.

Gerstorfer, Dominik, and Evelyn Gius. 2025. “Operationalizing Operationalizing.” In DHd2025, 345–48. Bielefeld. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14943080>.

Gius, Evelyn, and Michael Vauth. 2022. “Towards an Event Based Plot Model. A Computational Narratology Approach.” *Journal of Computational Literary Studies* 1 (1). <https://doi.org/10.48694/jcls.110>.

Hatzel, Hans Ole, Haimo Stiemer, Chris Biemann, and Evelyn Gius. 2023. “Machine Learning in Computational Literary Studies.” Edited by Hubert Mara and Ricardo Usbeck. *It – Information Technology*, August. <https://doi.org/10.1515/itit-2023-0041>.

Francesco Orilia (University of Macerata)

Title: *Fiction and Reality*

I shall focus on the issue of whether and in what sense a real and concrete entity, e.g., Napoleon, London, the earth or the sun, can be characters of a fictional story, and conversely whether and in what sense characters of fictional stories such as the Napoleon of *War and Peace* or the London of a *A study in Scarlet* can be identified with the real Napoleon and the real London, respectively. I shall evaluate the contrasting arguments offered by Hector–Neri Castañeda and Andrea Bonomi; according to the former, a fictional character and a real entity can be one and the same, whereas, according to the latter, this can never be the case. This will take me to an exploration of the very notion of what counts as a fictional story and of what it is for something to be a character of a fictional story. On the basis of this exploration, I shall assess the opposed views by Castañeda and Bonomi, and defend a view that occupies some sort of middle ground.

Carlo Meghini (CNR Istituto di Scienza e Tecnologie dell'Informazione)

Title: *Linking Dante*

The talk will review the main aspects of the project that led to the development of a Knowledge Graph embodying the text of the Divina Commedia as well as the knowledge about the morphology, the syntactic structure, the intertextual relations and the metaphors of the Dante's work. The graph is an OWL 2 DL ontology, relying on several (sub)ontologies that formalize the vocabularies used for expressing the various types of knowledge embodied. The talk will briefly present those ontologies and the process followed to produce the graph from existing XML representations.

Bio: Carlo Meghini was born on March 2, 1956, in Macerata (Italy).

He has worked for the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, Istituto di Scienza e Tecnologie dell'Informazione "A.Faedo" as a researcher from February 1, 1984, retiring on April 1st, 2023 when he was Director of Research and head of the Digital Humanities group in the Artificial Intelligence for Multimedia and the Humanities Laboratory. He is currently a Research Associate to Istituto di Scienza e Tecnologie dell'Informazione "A.Faedo".

Home Page: <http://nmis.isti.cnr.it/meghini/>

Michele Paolini Paoletti (University of Macerata)

Title: *Ficta and their Powerful Identity: A Case Study from Paul Auster's 4 3 2 1*

In his novel 4 3 2 1, Paul Auster explores four possible lives of Archie Ferguson, a Jewish guy born in March 1947 and living in New Jersey. The novel aims at showing

how luck and coincidences may shape one's life, leading to radically different outcomes. But – to philosophers – it also presents a dilemma about the identity of fictional characters (or *ficta*) within one and the same work of fiction. Indeed, if Archie Ferguson is numerically the same *fictum* across all of his possible lives, he turns out to have radically different and inconsistent features. On the other hand, if each 'version' of Archie Ferguson actually is a *fictum* in its own right, this is literally at odds with there being multiple 'versions' of the same *fictum*. In this talk, I shall suggest that there is a way to preserve the numerical identity of Archie Ferguson as a *fictum* across all of his possible lives. This consists in allowing that the identity of at least some *ficta* is also or only fixed by the powers they have according to the relevant stories, i.e., by properties of the form: being able to do M/become M (in circumstances C). More precisely, the identity of Archie Ferguson across all of his possible lives is also or only fixed by certain powers that have certain features: first, they have relatively generic manifestations (thus allowing for the realization of distinct subtypes of manifestations falling under the same type); secondly, they are endowed with specific degrees of 'strength', grounding the higher/lesser probabilities that such powers get manifested; thirdly, such degrees of 'strength' (and the corresponding probabilities) may be affected by external circumstances.

Elena Porciani (Università della Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli')

Title: *L'invenzione delle personagge. Ragioni teoriche e pratica genealogica*

Nel mio intervento proporrò una riflessione sul concetto di personaggia, 'inventato' dalla Società Italiana delle Letterate a partire dal 2009, adottato da alcune studiose in una prospettiva letteraria e visuale di genere, ma mai sottoposto a un'effettiva elaborazione teorica. Mi propongo, in particolare, di indagare le ragioni d'essere della personaggia individuandone la specificità in una dimensione genealogico-femminista che costituisce una variante di genere nei fenomeni di costruzione e ricezione dei testi narrativi.

Federico Pianzola (University of Groningen)

Title: *The GOLEM Ontology for Narrative and Fiction*

This talk introduces the GOLEM ontology, a novel framework designed to provide a structured and computationally tractable representation of narrative and fictional elements. Addressing limitations in existing ontologies regarding the integration of fictional entities and diverse narrative theories, our model extends CIDOC CRM and LRMoo, and leverages DOLCE's cognitive foundations to provide a flexible and

interoperable framework. The ontology captures complexities of narrative structure, character dynamics, and fictional worlds, while supporting provenance tracking and pluralistic interpretations. The modular structure facilitates alignment with various literary and narrative theories and integration of external resources. Future work will focus on expanding domain-specific extensions, validating the model through larger-scale case studies, and developing a reader response module to systematically model the reception of narratives. By fostering interoperability between literary theory, fan cultures, and computational analysis, this ontology lays a foundation for interoperable comparative research on narrative and fiction.

Project website: <https://golemlab.eu>

SPARQL endpoint: <http://graph.golemlab.eu:8890/sparql>

Web interface for the knowledge graph: <http://search.golemlab.eu:3006>

Ontology for Narrative and Fiction: <https://github.com/GOLEM-lab/golem-ontology/wiki>

Further references:

– On the concept of Narrative Stoff:

Zgoll, Christian. (2020). Myths as polymorphous and polystratic erzählstoffe. In *Mythische Sphärenwechsel: Methodisch neue Zugänge zu antiken Mythen in Orient und Okzident*. Berlin: De Gruyter Brill, pp. 9–82.

<https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/23223/1/1006931.pdf#page=30>

– On interdisciplinarity:

Collins, H., Evans, R., & Gorman, M. (2007). Trading zones and interactional expertise. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, 38(4), 657–

666. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2007.09.003>

Antonio Maria Rinaldi (University Federico II, Naples)

Title: *From Data to Meaning in Digital Cultural Heritage: Bridging Knowledge Representation and Deep Learning with Neuro-Symbolic Architectures*

The increasing digitization of cultural heritage demands intelligent systems capable of interpreting, organizing, and enhancing complex and multimodal content. In this context, neuro-symbolic architectures offer an innovative paradigm that integrates deep learning with semantic knowledge representation. Advanced technologies as ontologies, knowledge graphs, deep learning, multimodel databases and retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) are key components for the management and enrichment of digital cultural heritage. A conceptual framework is proposed that combines neural modules for content analysis with symbolic components for semantic understanding, supported by retrieval and contextual generation systems. A case study based on these technologies is presented as preliminary proposal of a process for the analysis of scholarly commentaries on Dante Alighieri's *Divina Commedia*.

Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa)

Title: *The Experiential Function of Fictional Characters*

If one assumes both the ontological view according to which fictional characters are abstract artifacts and the metaphysical view according to which artifacts essentially have functions, one should conclude that fictional characters have functions and specify which those are. I will argue that fictional characters have the function of generating peculiar configurations of mental states that involve not only imagination and emotions directed toward the fictional character as an imaginary flesh-and-blood individual but also attention to the structural and genetic features of the fictional character as an artifact.

(2023) "Taking Abstract Artifacts Seriously. The Functioning and Malfunctioning of Fictional Characters", in "Fiction and Metaphysics", eds. Frederick Kroon and Alberto Voltolini, *Philosophies*, 2023, 8, 6, 105, DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies8060105>

(2021) "Twofileness. A Functionalist Approach to Fictional Characters and Mental Files", *Erkenntnis*, 86, pp. 129-147, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10670-018-0097-2>

(2017) "On Fictional Characters as Types", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 57, 2, pp. 161-176.

Gaia Tomazzoli (Sapienza University of Rome)

Title: *Authorial stance in literary criticism: a cross-linguistic and cross-gender analysis*

This paper aims to investigate authorial stance in modern literary criticism. It relies on a small corpus of scholarly essays devoted to selected female characters in Medieval Italian literature: the corpus will include texts written over the past 150 years, evenly distributed across three different linguistic, cultural, and methodological landscapes – Italian, French, and English – and authored by both men and women. Through a manual annotation of this corpus, I will examine how gender and linguistic-cultural background influence the way critics express personal opinions, assert interpretive claims, and negotiate their authorial stance. Specifically, my analysis draws on the stance system developed by Hyland, and thus considers strategies of hedging and boosting employed to qualify statements, as well as explicit self-reference vs the use of impersonal constructions. Through a comparative approach, the paper seeks to uncover systematic patterns that reflect broader cultural and gendered norms governing scholarly authority and the presentation of interpretation as either subjective or objective. By tracing these dimensions across texts written by both male and female authors coming from different linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary backgrounds. The ultimate goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of how critical discourse constructs its claims to legitimacy and how implicit biases may shape the portrayal of Medieval female figures in literary criticism.

Sara Tonelli (Fondazione Bruno Kessler)

Title: *Human Label Variation in Linguistic Annotation*

Human label variation (Plank, 2022) reflects different aspects of linguistic annotation, from annotators' subjectivity to sloppiness or lack of enough context to interpret a text, as well as genuine disagreement due to multiple plausible labels. However, this poses several challenges concerning both the interpretation of the annotated linguistic datasets and the implementation of annotation systems that should be trained on "gold data". In this talk I will present ongoing research in the NLP community around the topic of human label variation, covering new practices for linguistic annotation, shared tasks, evaluation methodologies and classification approaches.

Alan Ramponi, Agnese Daffara, and Sara Tonelli. 2025. Fine-grained Fallacy Detection with Human Label Variation. In Proceedings of the 2025 Conference of the Nations of the Americas Chapter of the Association for Computational

Linguistics: Human Language Technologies (Volume 1: Long Papers), pages 762–784, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Association for Computational Linguistics.

<https://aclanthology.org/2025.naacl-long.34/>

Marta Sandri, Elisa Leonardelli, Sara Tonelli, and Elisabetta Jezek. 2023. Why Don't You Do It Right? Analysing Annotators' Disagreement in Subjective Tasks. In Proceedings of the 17th Conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics, pages 2428–2441, Dubrovnik, Croatia. Association for Computational Linguistics. <https://aclanthology.org/2023.eacl-main.178/>

Elisa Leonardelli, Stefano Menini, Alessio Palmero Aprosio, Marco Guerini, and Sara Tonelli. 2021. Agreeing to Disagree: Annotating Offensive Language Datasets with Annotators' Disagreement. In Proceedings of the 2021 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing, pages 10528–10539, Online and Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Association for Computational Linguistics.

<https://aclanthology.org/2021.emnlp-main.822/>



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