

Discussion

Hall Bjørnstad: Many thanks for a rich, thought-provoking talk. I had the advantage to look at this a bit ahead of time and have a few questions now, while others gather their thoughts after your presentation. So, I will ask my question; hopefully we'll get hands; and then when I'm done asking, you can start then.

So, I have three different questions. First, to your very end, this last slide... We spoke earlier about to what extent the century-centric model of literary studies distorts the picture. And your zooming out in the last slide brilliantly illustrates that point. So, you coming from a dual century background...

Paige: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Bjørnstad: ... How does that change... Does that make you able to see other patterns? What does the century model do to us? That's a first question. A second and much larger issue is... The visitors here will not know that in February we engaged (the whole campus engaged) with Franco Moretti because he was here for two endowed lectures and had several events building off them: he attended the Center's reading group and there were many other events. And to me the most interesting part was his first lecture, which was called "Pattern Recognition and Hermeneutics." Maybe I'm the only one to have this takeaway from his visit. But to me, it seemed like for his enterprise the separation of the two elements was crucial: First you have pattern recognition (which is neutral, objective, scientific) and *then* you have hermeneutics. And at several points in that discussion, there was some suspicion, some undermining of that premise taking place. [So, similarly] I think if we look at what you just did, it looks like the pattern recognition is neutral. But in seeing you pointing and gesturing, there is some skill going into identifying the most interesting moments. You will say "this is what comes in, after factoring out..." so there's something...

Paige: [inaudible]

Bjørnstad: So, there's something happening already at the level of pattern recognition. That was the one thing I found most fascinating in the discussion with Moretti. The other one was in the hermeneutics: do you need to be Franco Moretti to make it so brilliant? Do you need to be Nick Paige to make this happen? Or is it the method alone that makes it happen? That's my main question. Then I have a final question. It seems to me that with dividing into decades, there is the underlying assumption that the development you are tracking happens with uniform speed. But of course, all study of the eighteenth century has as a premise (especially in the French context) that there are a few years around the 1790s when more happens. [laughter] So, I wonder, if for all these graphs, you had also made a graph for 1791-1792, 1792-1793... I think that question goes back to the pattern recognition versus hermeneutics....

Paige: Oh yeah, yeah...

Bjørnstad: Okay, so, while Nick answers, I will take hands.

Paige: So... Okay, great questions, thank you. Does one need to be Nick Paige to do this? It's easy to be Nick Paige. This is very low-hanging fruit. To my knowledge... I mean, I don't know how interesting it was to see things like the average length of novels; I think it's a little more interesting when you move into the seventeenth century actually... But we have no statistics except for mine. And I could be wrong; there could be articles out there that I've missed. But, as far as I know, we have no statistics on the length of novels, right? So just kind of coming up with that stuff itself, there's something very... I'm surprised to the extent that before we knew nothing and now there's something there [laughter] and I don't know if it's surprising... We can kind of see what it correlates with, and so on and so forth.

Recognizing patterns? It's not so visible here. It's visible a bit with the statistics on first person [narrator] versus third person [narrator]. Basically, the book is going to start out here, but then it goes into basically trying to kind of isolate formal literary artifacts. So, first-person versus third-person helps, but it might be helpful to know, for example, in third-person novels: do they contain inset narratives? What type of inset narratives do they contain? That's important. Epistolary novels? Okay, but all epistolary novels are not the same. How many people are exchanging letters, right? That's one not-obvious thing, right. What's the subject—generally speaking—what's the subject of those epistolary novels? And one of the... patterns I recognize are basically rises and falls. That is to say, I think I know that I'm onto something with a lot of the stuff I'm doing, precisely because what I'm finding is so damn regular. And what I'm finding is rise and fall, rise and fall, peaks-falls. No "rise, plateau, fall." No, things get popular and then they lose their popularity. So that's a pretty obvious pattern. So that's my answer there.

Key years, that's very interesting. So, what makes for key years, generally, and in my—the French—corpus, there are a few moments that are key, I think. And they are moments when the production [of novels], for one reason or another, crashes. The production crashed during the French Revolution. The production crashed during the anti-monarchical revolt called the Fronde against the young Louis XIV in France. And the production in the early part of the eighteenth century is extremely low; notably the 1710s, 1720s, very low production of novels. And it seems as a rule—but that's a small sample, that's only three periods, that's only three crashes—but it would seem to me that generally after production crashes, the forms that are then adopted afterwards... It frees something up; it frees something up for people to write different types of novels. So, it seems to me that a production crash that has some sort of extra-literary source has the effect of then kind of scrambling the deck and allowing people to give up old ways of doing things.

As for my dual-century background, I don't know, part of it just comes from the fact that since I do *French* novels... If you work on the French novel, there's no temptation to say that the novel is somehow a creature of the eighteenth century; this obviously can't be true. We can go into, you know... I'm happy to discuss the difference between novel and romance? [silence] [laughter] I'm happy to discuss it. I mean, yeah, but I'll leave a lot of time for questions...

Bjørnstad: So, I don't remember exactly who were graduate students [and therefore entitled to jump the queue], but... I have Simon on the top of the list. Okay, Simon, go ahead.

Simon DeDeo: Oh okay. So I'm just thrilled to hear you say this, and I almost want to make sure I heard you correctly because I sometimes have trouble parsing things. But what you seem to be suggesting is that values are shifting potentially continuously: there's this cultural artifact, or this technology of the paratext, and it's not actually keeping up. And then at some point in time, there's this discovery, "Oh, we can do it differently!" right? And so, this plateau then crashes in

the 1780s. So, you're pulling apart the values of the readers and the culture as a whole, which might be shifting. But essentially this technology that is just... You know it's like the fax machine: we can't get out of it, and then at some point in time finally we throw away our fax machine.

Paige: It's the QWERTY keyboard.

DeDeo: Yeah, no, exactly.

Paige: Yeah, I mean, yes... I mean, I haven't attempted to measure values. If I was to attempt to measure values, I think I would just do stupid kind of word histories (which I think is perfectly good). We need more discursive histories of how people talk. For me, sentimentality, in part, it's just a change, a change of fashion (if you like) in the way people talk. So, this is the reason why we have an intellectual fashion for saying, you know: "What does X tell us about Y," right? You know, I think that there's a lot to study about what we generally study as ideas or ideologies but were actually an artifactual history of the way people talk. We say, "The way people thinking is changing"... I don't know how people "think"! But what we can measure is what people are *saying*, right?

DeDeo: Right.

Paige: The other thing, I mean... Yeah, there is this kind of idea here that new inventions free people up to think about things in different ways. Yes. And that there is no perfect way of measuring the interface between these values and the things people invent. Often these things are not coterminous. I mean, I could, you know, put up graphs of the epistolary novel and show you that the epistolary novel, in a way, is invented quite early. But no one picks up on it; it doesn't correspond to anything they want to do. And at a certain point (notably with sentimentality) all of a sudden, the epistolary novel takes off. Without sentimentality, there is essentially no epistolary novel; or there's only one kind of epistolary novel, which is the kind of novel of observation we are familiar with from the *Persian Letters*, for example. But that is an artifact that clusters, it clusters historically. And then there's all this other epistolary stuff, which is the sentimental epistolary novel. And that's kind of... If you take away the sentimental epistolary novel, there's like no epistolary novel. So, that interplay, I don't pretend to tease out those strands. But essentially, I don't think we should talk about the evolution of the novel any differently than we talk about the evolution of the bicycle. Yeah.

DeDeo: Great, thank you.

Bjørnstad: So, Jesse was on top of the list, and Bobby jumped the line...

Robert Wells: Jesse can go, though, since he's immediately...

Jesse Molesworth: I have a big question...

Wells: Okay, okay... I apologize in advance if you addressed this and I didn't hear it while I was trying to formulate this question... [laughter] So, if I'm repeating something here... So, Dror

Wahrman, the gentleman who's kind of responsible for starting this Center in a lot of ways, wrote a book about a decade ago...

Paige: Mmhmm.

Wells: ... Which a lot of us are familiar with, in which he also points to the beginning of the Age of Revolutions (or at least the period immediately after the American Revolution) as a period in which suddenly playing with identity, playing with truth—pseudofactuality, maybe, I don't know—is more dangerous immediately after the American Revolution. Which kind of seems to in some ways to map on (maybe, in some ways) to what you're saying: at least if it's not that they're directly related, at least as a parallel development. I was just wondering if you wanted to say anything about that.

Paige: Yeah, I do want to say something about that: not because of the American Revolution, but because of pattern recognition. So, one of the things I'm trying not to do here (to use one of Jonathan [Elmer]'s terms from the previous discussion) is identify “drivers.” I have a very descriptive account; there's some account of ... I think there's ways in which we should be talking about mechanisms involved. But a *cause* for the decline of pseudofactuality? Aside from saying that it's because peoples' values change, I don't want say anything else than that. And I understand that that is a hermeneutically poor assertion; I vindicate that poverty. I don't want to tell you...

Wells: You've told us lots of other things! It's okay, it's fine. [laughter]

Paige: ... what else it matches up with. I mention pattern recognition because, basically, whatever the blip you see and graph, you're always going to be able to look for proximate events and you're gonna say, “Must be that!”...

Wells: Right.

Paige: ...because humans are really good at recognizing patterns, or *misrecognizing* patterns. But that's the whole correlation-causation problem. So, I don't want to go there. I mean, one of the things when you do this kind of work... You do all this tagging, and you see these kind of trends and these rises and falls, and all of a sudden, there's kind of like... Things are constantly rising and falling, and so there's no sense in kind of trying to motivate each rise and fall. What we do just constantly changes. It's like the hem line—where's Tim [Campbell]? [laughter]—things just go up and down. I mean, I think there's a lot of that. I think we *way* underestimate the importance of novelty for creatives. Why? Because it's meaningless, it has no meaning. It has no meaning. And we are very uncomfortable with that. We want to find deep meaning.

Bjørnstad: Hook?

Nick Valvo: Can I just put a little bit of pressure on—in a kind of slightly obnoxious way, apologies in advance... How do the values you're describing escape from that critique? Like, how is the value of sentimentality different from the American Revolution in narrative-causal terms? I mean, I can imagine ways it might be, but how do you think?

Paige: [long pause] I'm not saying that sentimentality is a cause of the epistolary novel. I'm simply saying that epistolary novels and sentimentality—that epistolary novels that aren't sentimental are very rare. And if you take away sentimentality, there would be no appreciable rise in the epistolary novel. That's all I'm saying.

Valvo: So, is the value like a *niche* that allows the epistolary novel that formed to flourish?

Paige: Yeah...? [laughter] I mean...

Valvo: To use your evolution metaphor...

Paige: Yeah... But I don't want to get biological about my evolution; it's technological. It's technological.

Bjørnstad: Jesse.

Jesse Molesworth: First of all, let me say thank you. This really confirms my sense that Gallagher's postulation of a sort of abrupt shift that takes place in the 1740s—it just doesn't exist; it's an evolution. But, I mean, this is a question I'm sure you get many times. Her story about the novel is specifically tied to the cultural context in Britain. And, you know, more specifically, I think of it as having three dimensions: first is the referentiality, which you talk about quite a bit; second is the rise of sympathy and sentiment, which *might* exist in a similar form in France as well, so there's that; but the third part of it is the rise of a credit economy, which does not exist (at least in the same form) in France. That's crucial to her; she spends twenty-five pages...

Paige: I know.

Molesworth: ... talking about this as an important cultural construct.

Paige: But historicists do that. I mean... Yeah. So, I mean... There are other accounts of fictionality... Jonathan Lamb, for example, you know, has an account *The Things Things Say* (2011) where it has to do with a kind of contractual notion of personhood. John Bender whom I respect a lot—he actually gave me this tie, this is John Bender's tie [laughter] —John Bender, you know, he sees the rise of the novel as correlated with the scientific hypothesis.¹ Michael McKeon seems pretty—it's hard to pin Michael McKeon down—but his telos is Coleridge's suspended disbelief as this kind of way between, you know ... But I don't believe any of this. I think this is magical thinking; I think this is noting resemblance. And, listen, when you're talking about fictionality? Fictionality: it's such a motivatable device, right? It's so easy to say, "Isn't that kind of like fictionality?" So, myself, I have utmost skepticism of this way of doing things. Gallagher couldn't have written that had she been at all interested in the French novel, right? But, I mean, that's not her fault, it's just that... New Historicism especially drives people into that kind of thing: "What

¹ Editor's Note: John Bender, "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998), 1-23.

do we know about X? What do we learn about Y? What do we learn about X when Y...?” [laughter] It’s all about the micro detail; New Historicism is all about this kind of synecdotal relation between this small thing and this big thing, and so the work of the critic is... Prestige accrues to the critic in direct proportion to the thing, the little object you’re using to produce a great narrative: the smaller that object is, the more prestige accrues to the critic, right? So, I think this thing about “credit” is... bogus.

I don’t think it has to do with gender either. Of course, gender is the other portion of her thing, right? Now, it would be very interesting to do analysis in which I kind of figure out, “Okay, do men actually go in for pseudofactuality more or less than women?” That would be interesting. I don’t break out things by gender or by class of writers in the period, or... There’s a whole problem of anonymous writers in the period, which is enormous. For me, these are all kind of anonymous producers and they all count the same way. I’d like to do an analysis more sociologically finer-grained, but I can’t do that. Anyway...

Rebecca Spang: Just to correct the *factual* record: there *was* a credit economy in France in the eighteenth century. [laughter] I have reviewed a book called *Revolution and Commerce* and another one called *Commerce of Revolution*.

Whitney Sperrazza: So, I want to pick up on your critique of New Historicism and also relate it to Nick’s question about value.

Paige: Uh-huh.

Spang: Simon’s question? Oh. No.

Valvo: It was my question.

Spang: Oh, because you both did.

Nick: I guess we both had questions about value. [laughter]

DeDeo: Black hair or brunette? [laughter]

Sperrazza: It doesn’t matter. Anyway, I wonder if your critique of New Historicism might not also be applied to your use of paratext to distinguish pseudofictionality. I really enjoyed the talk... And I’ll explain that a little more.

Paige: Uh-huh, please.

Sperrazza: I really enjoyed the talk and I’m with you: I’m against period; I’m against, you know, canon as the only way of thinking about the progression of literary history. And I also want to push back against this disciplinary division and yet I want to ask you to separate your literary-historical from your book-historical claims. Because these sort of anonymous producers that you mention: if you’re using the paratextual apparatus to distinguish what you’re calling “pseudofictionality,” then you really are kind of losing the author and focusing on the book as a product. And these paratexts are often written by editors or by publishers. And so that kind of

clicked for me in some of the confusion in graph 9, because when you're thinking about narration styles as opposed to whether there's a paratext, then you're really looking at a thing the author is doing and whether or not it lines up with the way the book is being produced, packaged, or marketed. And then you keep talking about novels as having or being technologies, artifacts, objects (akin to the bicycle). So, I'm wondering if you are intervening in discussions about the rise of fictionality or whether you're looking at market trends across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in terms of a really book-historical claim? And this is a kind of... You've abstracted data from a lot of novels... And I come from a New Historicist training, but I think I'm rematerializing what you're doing a little bit and I want to ask you about that distinction.

Paige: Okay, I'm not sure I totally understand the question... So: book-historical, I'm dealing with various types of paratexts...

Sperrazza: Let me sort of make it in a nutshell. Let me see if I can...

Paige: Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm...

Sperrazza: Yeah. So, when you say this novel is "declared as" true, or is "claimed as" true...

Paige: Okay, yeah.

Sperrazza: I know you want to push back against the idea of specific authors. But you don't mean by the author of the novel necessarily, if you're talking about paratext.

Paige: No, but...

Sperrazza: And in many cases you mean by the sort of market structures, by the publisher, by the trend in how...

Paige: Well no, they're not declared as true by trends or market structures; they're declared as true by whomever is writing these paratexts. And yes, they're not... Logically we can't consider them "authors" if they are advertising their book as a *document* they have found in an armoire somewhere, right. So then they can't be the "author," right?

Sperrazza: Right, but that's not what I mean exactly.

Paige: Okay, I'm sorry.

Sperrazza: So, I guess maybe this really leads to a more specific question. When you're tagging things as pseudofictional...

Paige: Factual. Pseudofactual.

Sperrazza: Pseudofactual, sorry.

Paige: That's the truth claim.

Sperrazza: Yeah. It sounded to me like you were not looking at frame narrative (which came up somewhere else) but you're really looking at cover page, introduction...

Paige: Oh yes, right.

Sperrazza: ... So those are things that are *not* being written by the "authors" of the novels in many cases.

Paige: Yeah, they may or may not be, right. Right, right, right. It is about, if you like, an entire literary culture, right, that includes publishers and authors and pseudoeditors and real editors and so on and so forth—so that's absolutely right. I don't measure gestures toward truth within the novel for a couple of reasons. First of all, they would be very difficult to ferret out and, as you can imagine, it's like 900 books and I'm not reading them all. I try and find enough information... I read as much as I need to be able to categorize them in the way that I want to categorize them. And the other reason is that we all know that by the time we get to the nineteenth century (at least), very often authors will kind of say in the body of their texts, "This is a true story," right; so, Balzac might say that. So, I'm not quite sure what to do with that type of embedded truth claim. There is a real problem here about "what is a paratext?" okay? It's all fine and dandy if something is labeled "introduction," right; if it is labeled "preface," that's fine. But, on the other hand, especially in the eighteenth century, for example, there is a kind of authorial voice that often emanates from say the first paragraph of the book and then you feel like you're moving into the narrative proper, right. So, what do we do with that? Is that going to be a paratext or is it not a paratext? All that stuff is actually individually coded and tagged—tagged, rather. So, I can actually pull that apart, and those are interesting questions. By the time you get to the end of the eighteenth century, you get a lot of interesting what I call "embedded truth affirmations" so that the paratext makes it absolutely clear that we are reading is a novel that is the creation of an author. And yet *inside of that* there will be ... protestations of truth. So, you can imagine an epistolary novel: "I've written this epistolary novel to show that virtue always triumphs over vice." And then preceding the first letter is this thing that's going to say, "Avertissement de l'editeur" ("Editor's Preface") that is pretending that these letters were actually found somewhere. So, you get these clear kind of mixed signals, but that's not an equivocal for me, that's an embedded... Anyway, this is just to say that when you climb into the archive, there's a lot of weird stuff there. But you can keep track of it; you can keep track of it. Yes. You have to be confident that what you're keeping track of, some other researcher would also be able to tag and recognize in the same way you are. This would have no sense if what I'm doing was purely an idiosyncratic exercise, which would happen if we tried to say how *believable* these pretenses were and things like that.

But that question of what is a paratext is super important and it would be interesting to put up graphs, for example, of number of novels actually preceded by prefaces, right? And at a certain point there are novelistic subtitles that come in: so, you get "A Historical Novel," for example. In the English domain... English books have a much richer story of novelistic subtitles. French novels don't start to say, for example, "roman" as a subtitle until well into the nineteenth century, whereas in English they start much, much earlier. So, that's kind of interesting. So, there are patterns there one can dissect as well. It's not unrelated to book history.

Bjørnstad: So, that was an interesting question, but I'm not sure it qualified as a hook. [laughter]

Sperrazza: [laughing] That's my two strikes. [laughter]

Bjørnstad: We have four minutes left and ten people on the list. Rebecca, you're at number nine! So should we go five minutes over or should we stop ...?

Spang: We'll see how the questions go. I probably don't have to ask mine.

Bjørnstad: Okay, so those on the list should contemplate whether they really want to ask theirs. But first is Tracey.

Tracey Hutchings-Goetz: So, I have a much smaller-scale question concerning temporal setting and protagonist types [your graphs 4 through 7]. And I was curious, particularly with graph 5, if what the graph shows isn't that pseudofactual nobody novels kind of tend to hew with historicity? So, is this graph kind of also showing... Okay, so you see pseudofactual nobody novels, right, declining as contemporary nobody novels increase.

Paige: Right.

Hutchings-Goetz: So, is part of what's being shown here is that there seems to be an attraction between the pseudofactual nobody novel and *claims* of historicity. So... is it more often that somebody's like, "Oh, this is real because I found it in this trunk," right? Yeah.

Paige: No. No, no, no; not at all. Okay. It depends on what you mean by "historicity," because somebody might take that as being like a reality claim: "It is historical," right? Whereas I'm using here contemporary settings, unspecified settings, and historical settings merely as temporal categories in terms of when the narrative is taking place.

Hutchings-Goetz: Okay good. Yeah.

Paige: There are a small number of pseudofactual novels that are reported to be documents from some other time or place: *Castle of Otranto*, for example. That's not a large percentage of the novels. Generally, when people "find" documents, they're contemporary documents.

Hutchings-Goetz: Okay.

Ryan Sheldon: Okay, great... So, I don't want to return us too much to the book history-literary history question. But you've spoken of the evolution of novels along with the evolution of bicycles, and if I go to my garage and pick up my bicycle of twenty years, it still works; if I pick up a novel from 1710, it still works now. [laughter]

Paige: Well then you haven't read those novels. [laughter]

Richard Nash: It's slower going. [laughter]

Sheldon: They still function. Which is to say, books are objects in the world that stick around, that are printed and reprinted, and your dataset is date of first publication. So that complicates, I think, the evolutionary model some. Because if we have something that is reprinted, goes through five reprintings over a ten-year span... The market might have moved on and yet—or, rather, a subset, some part of the market has moved on—and yet it remains. So, there’s something there about the discrete materiality of these objects, that... Can that be built into the model? I guess is my question.

Paige: Well...

Nash: This question makes my question a hook, by the way.

Paige: Do you want to hook now?

Nash: [to Valvo] I noticed you were doing that [i.e., making the “hook” sign] too, Nick?

Paige: It’s a great question...

Valvo: I just was going to say that I’m working on a novel right now, Defoe’s *Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress*, that has multiple editions that would be in different baskets according to your categories...

Paige: Ah, ah, yes... That’s a different question.

Spang: But it’s never in French. [laughter]

Valvo: That’s true, although she’s French. [laughter]

Paige: That’s a related question but a different one.

Spang: And Richard’s hook?

Paige: Did you want to...?

Nash: Just to catch on to this... Because I was going to ask, what is the status of “evolution” to your claims Especially I’m thinking your last slide: when you scoot back out, you’re not talking about evolution at all, you’re talking about fluctuation. I just wanted to... How important is the meaning of evolution to you?

Paige: It’s really important. Because these graphs of truth posture... It’s a different question. That’s a different question. [laughter]

Sheldon: I think we’re both kind of contesting the term “evolution.”

Paige: So, there are all sorts of ways in which you could kind of envision what is the “production” of novels, right? For me it is the production of new titles, alright. It would be nice to

weight, obviously, for, say, print runs: although we have no data on that, that would be impossible. You could weight it for re-publications: that is somewhat more possible, but it really depends on how good our bibliographies are. In France, we are blessed with much better bibliographies than you guys have (and by “you guys” I assume most of you are English people). That is to say, you have James Raven who goes back to 1750, and then you get two more decades in earlier Raven, and then there’s one more book that will take you back another decade, and then that’s it as far as I know for bibliographies. In France we’re much better... but still, getting accurate counts of reprints is not super easy. Then you’d have to figure out how much you want to weight those reprints, when do you want to count them—do you want to count them in the year they’re reprinted? so on and so forth. I’m not purporting to offer a snapshot of everything that’s being read in those given decades, right. The idea here... That’s why the kind of technological model seems to work for me. So, if you ask “what are people driving today?” well you look out there and you see cars from a lot of different periods: some of them have touchscreens, and others don’t; some of them have back-up cameras, and others don’t. So, that would give you a completely different idea from kind of talking about automobile design from 1950 to 2010, right, where you would probably go through actually different models. And it may be super important to say, “Whoa, the Mustang’s a really important car,” right? And maybe then you can see that the Mustang is introduced and then, all of a sudden, there are these stylistic features of the Mustang that are reproduced and spread to other creations, even creations that aren’t successful on the market. So, that would be a different way... So, *that’s* kind of the way I’m thinking about it. And so, part of that is practical: I think it would be very difficult to really accurately count re-additions, I think that would just be very difficult.

For the question of paratext change—so, *Castle of Otranto*, why not—that’s true. I do my utmost to rate the original paratext and not a second paratext. Because the point isn’t that the novel is or isn’t invented, right; the point is whether it’s pretended to be true or not. I’m sure there would be interesting calculations to make about the number of novels where, in subsequent additions, that pretense of truth is dropped; that would be interesting enough. But the fact that Walpole drops his truth pretense from one edition to another in the span of two years or whatever, I can’t recall... The fact that he drops it *is not a sign* that people are tiring of truth pretense. [laughter] And that’s what everyone says. That’s what people say, it’s like, “Ah, all of a sudden, something just happened... Classic moment in *Otranto* when...” Or Gallagher’s thing where she, on one hand, she gives us... She gives us *Robinson Crusoe* and then she gives us *Joseph Andrews* and says: “It must’ve happened between those two things”... The fact is that people kind of continually reemployed this device; it goes beyond generations. One could also isolate individual authors and show how in some cases they may pretend their novels are true, and in other cases they may admit they aren’t, and then sometimes they may go back from an admission to a pretense of truth.

unidentified: Just a tiny addition to the sales figures and new editions question. The proportion of production that you’re mapping...

Paige: Yeah.

unidentified: ... isn’t really paying attention to “total number of novels produced” that matters so much to Moretti.

Paige: It is.

unidentified: and that the order of magnitude... . Oh, it is? Did I miss... ?

Paige: Of course, these are all percentages.

unidentified: But you're reducing to percentage that takes away from the absolute total of titles produced. ...

Paige: Correct.

unidentified: So, there's a question of scale that might be interesting. Where for Moretti, for instance, there's a quality of change when you get to the 1780s and all that where there's a much greater quantity of production happening. What's interesting to me is that you don't seem to care about that and that it doesn't seem matter for your numbers.

Paige: Well... No, that's interesting. It has a little to do... I mention these moments of production crashes, for example.

unidentified: Right.

Paige: Reflected in these... And then you go through and try and figure out, "Okay, when are the real accelerations?" And it's true that the accelerations in production, they kind of plateau at certain moments, and then go down and then they go up again. I mean, there's no kind of one moment when the novel takes off, at least there's not in France. I mean, it's partially because production of new titles is super healthy in France in the second half of the seventeenth century. And then there's this trough, and then it kind of works its way back, and the 1730s is kind of a big moment. So, I think there are ways in which it does make kind of sense to say that production figures and these individual artifacts are not unrelated. That is to say... One could think of the market as being kind of a finite thing and then people kind of say... The market is finite and then you're measuring, say, the percentage of first-person to third-person works. But you might also be interested in showing, "Well, actually, once this document novel is kind of recognized as this very useful form, actually a lot more people start writing novels because it makes the novel more interesting." And I think that is absolutely true. I think that there is a way in which the pie is not limited, but certain great inventions, you know—and they're not "great" absolutely, they're great with respect to what people want to do—but it makes them want to write more novels. So, I think that actually does correspond very well to an expansion of the production in, say, the 1730s. So, what I'm saying is that the expansion of "document novels" here—roughly that black line on the graph of first-person vs. third-person—that that expansion there corresponds also to an expansion in production and that's probably not an accident. And then you get a similar thing with the third-person novel at the end of the century. So, I think that is correct, yeah, to say.

Bjørnstad: So, we are out of time. I have six questions. I propose...

Paige: Oh my, I'm sorry.

Bjørnstad: ... For those who burn for their question, we go around and collect the six questions, and then you can respond to whatever you feel inspired to.

Paige: Okay, I'll try to answer more quickly.

Bjørnstad: I'll just mention the names I have. You first, then Jonathan, Mary, Michael, Rebecca, Brad.

Justin Roberts: Just a couple of quick questions, and this relates somewhat to what we've discussed... You know, this is not my field, and I'm trying to grasp what you're doing with the quantification. You have a lot of figures—I'm an economic historian of slavery so that really caught my eye. I guess what keeps striking me is the idea of drawing societal and cultural values from this data because I'm so uncomfortable about the fact that the data is just production data and not consumption data. I keep wondering about how many of these individual novels are being produced and whether some of them are more important than others. And if some of them are more important than others, maybe, on some level, that's where we need to move back to this qualitative history, and say, "These are the most important books, this subset; these are the ones we need pay attention to." So, that's one of my concerns. And then the other is that this is a French data set. I guess I was puzzled during your presentation because you keep using these English examples: *Clarissa* and Sir Walter Scott. I sort of wonder what larger claims can you even make about the evolution of the novel from a peculiarly French data set? So, you engage with one scholar towards the end... Cohen, I think, was the scholar's name? Sorry...

Paige: Dorrit Cohn? Dorrit Cohn.

Roberts: And you're critiquing that notion, but I'm wondering if you can do that from this one subset of French data, and I'm wondering if the same sort of data is being produced in for the British context.

Bjørnstad: Okay, so, probably I think Nick could here the whole evening responding to this question. [laughter] But Jonathan....

Jonathan Elmer: Yeah, it's a very large sort of question coming out of left field... I can't tell... Given the thoroughness—and by the way I'm entirely sympathetic to the thoroughness—to which you debunk the historical narratives, it's interesting to me that you're doing a certain kind of change-over-time analysis yourself. If none of the accounts of *why* these changes happen are meaningful to you, why not take this question of fictionality and do a different kind of analysis altogether? You could do an ideal-typical one; you could do a structuralist account; a concept... You could say, "Oh, here's an interesting new mutation of fictionality that happened. I don't really care *why* it arose, I'm not going to come to a very good reason to explain why it arose, but it's a mutation. And I'll do a concept scattersheet, or something like that, and just do that kind of analysis." That seems to me to be as interesting a thing to do with the data that you're getting than to try to go to these long narratives and graphs and then you turn to say: "Actually, they don't really mean anything."

Paige: So that's not really a question.

Elmer: I guess it is a question of: “Why do that?”

Mary Favret: I’m sorry, I’ll try to say this quickly. Reading over these graphs, you make me wonder what the competitors were for the novel. In other words, if there’s a demand for truth or pseudofacts: is the novel the go-to place, or are there other things that are in competition? So, I kind of think that there’s a large—even if we just think about reading, let’s just limit it to reading—what other texts are in competition and how might they impinge on the consumption, production, etc. novels?

Michael Gavin: Yeah, just really quickly... Thanks for the great talk. My question would’ve expressed a little skepticism about the stats and about the graphs. And, in particular, following up on one of the earlier questions about the use of percentages: it seems like 900 books over 150 years, that’s like 6 books a year. And some of the changes you’re looking at, you’re breaking them down even further into categories, and you’re saying, “Well, this went from 10% one year to 20% another year.” That’s really often only the change of a couple books. So, have we really moved beyond the exemplary example if we’re identifying patterns that can be accounted for by only three or four books?

Spang: Mary asked my question.

Bjørnstad: Excellent. Brad?

Brad Pasanek: I think I want to co-sign what Michael was saying, but the question was actually... It’s something like this: so, I love this project; I’m super sympathetic; I’m wondering if there’s a more extreme version of it. So, like, “There are no periods, only rising and falling.” And it could be that some of the rising and falling, because the percentages are going to make things rise and fall and if you take them all together they’re going to rise and fall faster. But like what if there are no features, right? I think I’ve heard you say this—maybe not today but maybe at a different version of this talk—where *this* pseudofactuality is not the same as *that* pseudofactuality, right?

Paige: Yeah.

Pasanek: Yeah... So, like, this is true nominalism. There are no graphs. “This graph is not a graph”; the last one is, I don’t know.... But at some point—I know we have to go to dinner [laughter]—like how much more nominalist can you get before you lose track of formalism? And I’m interested in like the minimum of formalism these days. So, maybe this is just my hobby-horse, but I’m wondering if you get rid of the period... Yeah, I don’t know, when do you say we’re no longer doing this kind of pseudofactuality...? Does that make sense?

[inaudible chatter]

Paige: Ok, Michael’s question about n-values... If I had a subset of four novels, I would not put it up there. That is to say that... So, for one of these graphs, for example, I said, “Don’t pay much attention to this because there are very few third-person novels in that bar.” And so I’ll point out stuff like that. But so generally speaking It’s true, okay, that you did the division

and it's six novels a year, but it's 60 novels per decade. And it's true that for some of these subsets, that's also... I said, for example, you know, "Don't get too hung up on the fact that looks a little messy; there aren't so many nobody novels from there." But generally, if I don't consider my n-values robust, I'm not going to try to draw any conclusions from them. If you do a kind of... You might want to wonder about like the margin of error for these calculations? It would depend on which subset I'm talking about. If you go back to the original graph here, you're dealing with essentially a plus-or-minus ten percent. It's not nothing...

Gavin: But if you go back...

Paige: Yeah...

Gavin: But if you go back to the one you were showing...

Spang: Speaking of measurement, we do need to be attentive to time.

Gavin: Yeah, it's ok. I get it.

Spang: They need to come pick up the harpsichord, among other things. [laughter]

Paige: Mary, what are the novel's competitors? So, I don't know, I wouldn't imagine that lyric poetry would be a very good place to look for things like truth claims, but...

Favret: Epic poetry, though.

Paige: Epic, ah, so epic is interesting... And of course tragedy is super interesting because...

Favret: Drama. Or natural history...

Spang: Natural history; legal factums, which are not censored.

Paige: Well see...

Favret: Right.

Paige: Well see, I'm not interested in... Hold on, I mean... Legal factums... I'm not interested in what truth is and what fictionality is, right. So, what I'm trying to do is say, "Let's approach this question of factuality by seeing it as a problem of the protagonist, of the protagonist's either existence outside of the text or nonexistence outside of the text." And so, for the question of tragedy, it's very interesting. I don't really know what happens on the English stage in the eighteenth century, but what happens on the French stage (for example) is for the first time you start having tragedies with invented characters, okay. So, from that point of view, you could do this type of analysis with the subject matter of plays as well, plays which, you know, sometimes are and sometimes aren't considered part of the domain of fiction, right: I mean, that's always a kind of narratological problem, and so on and so forth. But that's interesting... I think it's really a question of who your heroes are, right, or who your protagonists are: are your protagonists he-

rees? That is to say, people you've heard of, important people: the reason I'm picking up this book is because it's about a hero. Heroes are important, right, and what they've done is important. Between that and picking up a book about someone you've never heard of, right? So, I think that move from somebodies to nobodies is really important. I think you can trace that in the theater as well; comedy is always the domain of nobodies.