Universität Basel

Research Project

High Mountains Low Arousal? Distant Reading Topographies of Sentiment in German Swiss Novels in the early 20th Century

Third-party funded project

Project title High Mountains Low Arousal? Distant Reading Topographies of Sentiment in German Swiss Novels in the early 20th Century

Principal Investigator(s) Herrmann, Berenike ;

Organisation / Research unit
Fakultär assoziierte Institutionen / Digital Humanities Lab

Department

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Status Completed

The project High Mountains Low Arousal? is a contribution to literary studies in terms of digital resource building, literary theory, and methodological development. By means of a distant reading of German-Swiss novels, it aims at pioneering comparative historiographical and systematic research on the German novel of the early 20th Century, using digital methodologies of advanced sentiment analysis (SA). Following the recent examples of theoretically sophisticated distant reading, theă project's focus is on the emotional encoding of fictional space and literary characters.

Sentiment analysis is one of the key methodologies of distant reading, yet its valid domain adaptation to German literary discourse is still pending. As SA is language-specific and highly sensitive to historical and discursive variation, its advanced domain adaptation for literary analysis is costly, but offers a strong gain in lending an unprecedented systematicity to exploration, hypothesis testing and prediction of literary forms and patterns. My approach applies a psychologically validated conceptualization of emotion, combining a dimensional approach to sentiment valence (positive, neutral, or negative sentiment) and arousal (strength of sentiment and emotion), with one to discrete emotions (such as fear, anger, joy).

The project aims at contributing a new data-driven and philologically reflected perspective on the historiography of Swiss novels of the early 20th Century, situated within the transnational continuum of the German-speaking countries. Ită critically examines questions of the specificity of Swiss novels as compared to German and Austrian ones, addressing a putative Swiss marginalization, mediocracy, and predominance of anti-modernist realism surfacing in idyllic landscapes and simple plots. Through thus, it will shed a new view on ideas of Swissness transported by novels during the period, in between educative mediation (Helvetia mediatrix, Lecoultre) and the enactment of a national myth unfolding in spatial topographies that center around the Alps.

Offering the first distant reading of the Swiss novel applying SA, the project is comparative within Swiss literature as well as at a transnational level. The overarching aim is to offer a data-driven exploration of the patterns of specificity of Swiss literature in close collaboration with the CA "Distant Reading the European Novel" – to advance digital resource building, literary theory, and methodological development.

In all this, the project will build on the multi-disciplinary expertise of the COST Action"Distant Reading for European Literary History", but will go beyond its general scope in applying a more fine-grained text analysis.

Keywords Swiss literature, realism, modernism, distant reading, text mining, sentiment analysis, literary characters, gender, digital humanities, literary history, emotion, topographies, digital corpora, cultural

heritage computing, geography of literature

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ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
4529019	Herrmann, Berenike	Jacobs, Arthur, Prof.	Freie Universität Berlin	01.03.2020	28.02.2023

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