



CAHIERS D'ÉCONOMIE POLITIQUE

PAPERS IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Call for papers

Spécial issue of *Cahiers d'économie politique*/ *Papers in political economy*

A selection of papers from the panels on « economics and literature » in the **19th conference of the Charles Gide Society**, that will take place at University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 7th-9th of July 2022, will be published in the issue 83 of the *Cahiers d'économie politique*.

Happiness and Unhappiness of the economic agent What Economists can learn from the Novel and the Theatre

Over the past fifteen years or so, work has been developing at the crossroads of economics and literature. What has economic analysis contributed to –or what can it contribute to – the reading of literary texts on the one hand, and what can literary narratives and analyses bring to the economist on the other? In the wake of McCloskey, researches on the rhetoric of economics that mobilizes the tools of discourse analysis to study the narrative strategies at work in the demonstrations of economic theories, teaches us a great deal about economics – i.e. about the theoretical representations shared and discussed by economists. One question remains however: can literature also teach us about the real economy at work in our societies, in any society, and in the decision making of agents? What can it tell us about the real economy that might have been overlooked by economic theories? Economic thought, like literary discourses, professes to show and explain how the real economy works and its effects on agents. Whether in competition or complementary, blind to each other or informed by each other, the goal of this upcoming panels will be to combine these two types of knowledge, which differ in their objectives as well as in their form. Our hypothesis is twofold: on the one hand, we will assume that literary narratives carry knowledge about the economy that economic theories do not give access to; on the other hand, we will consider that this knowledge is of importance to economists.

Since the 18th century, economic theories, beyond their diversity and the controversies they generate and allow us to express, have sought to unveil the mechanisms that underlie the social world. They build conceptual tools and address the reader's understanding. In a different way, novelists talk about economics by narrating singular lives and addressing the reader's imagination and emotion. What do Defoe, Dickens, Balzac or Duras say and manage to say through their narrative art that Ricardo, Walras, Keynes or Arrow do not and cannot say, because of the form of their science? This question appertains to the limits of economic thought, as a science or as a philosophy – and to the different, and perhaps broader, power of the art of the novel.

This question regarding the knowledge of the writer, explored in philosophy (Bouveresse 2008, Nussbaum 2010, Jullien 2017), can be discussed in economics around the recurring theme of misfortune and failure: how can we explain the persistent failure and unhappiness of agents whose

actions aim at success and happiness? If all economic thought can be read as an effort to establish the conditions for collective happiness – whether it is understood as an increase in wealth, a break from the reign of necessity, the maximization of social welfare, or Pareto efficiency – does economic thought reach its limits in an inability to apprehend unhappiness? Does its propensity to focus on the analysis of the conditions of happiness, make it unable to account for misfortune, whether dreaded or experienced?

The use of literature by economists should not be limited to its use as a source of examples, which illustrate or challenge the ideas, concepts, hypotheses and results of theoretical thinking. Beyond this pedagogical or decorative function, literary narratives also inform us on the ways agents perceive the conditions that influence their choices, the reasons for their failures, and the desires or regrets that drive them. These stories, by moving the sensibility of the reader, lead him or her to perceive what is at stake in the economy – regarding wealth, work, or choices - for each individual and in any society. This is why the economy should not be the business of economists alone, who might be considered at best, as Keynes hoped, the dentists of the social world. Besides, its understanding requires that economists hear the words of those who yearn for happiness and suffer from misfortune. By inventing these words, literature allows for the sharing of singular experiences. This does not mean that economists fail to exert their intellect on economic issues but raises a question: doesn't their intelligence fail to grasp what we desire or fear, in terms of economic happiness or misfortune? Should we, as Proust did, recognize the inferiority of intelligence and consider that "only outside of it can the writer grasp something of our impressions, that is to say, reach something of himself"?

Each contribution to the panel will bring together a text, a concept or an author from the field of economic thought and a literary work – a novel or a play - on the themes of happiness and misfortune, success and failure. Contributors will be expected to discuss evocations and explanations of happiness and misfortune in literary narratives, with economic concepts and reasonings (failures in rationality, incoherent preferences, existence or absence of satiety, economic mechanisms and institutions, etc.) We will show how abstract concepts and the logical knowledge of mechanisms offered by economic thought can inform us on what fictional characters experience, and on how the readers of the narrative feel. Conversely, we will see how the literary treatment of general notions through singular and detailed actions can reveal things that elude the abstract theorization of economists.

Bibliography

- Bouveresse Jacques, *La Connaissance de l'écrivain : sur la littérature, la vérité et la vie*, Agone, 2008.
- Ingrao Bruna, "Destructive Behaviour: Economics and Literature," *History of Economic Ideas*, Fabrizio Serra Editore, Pisa - Roma, 2006, vol. 14(1), p. 73-112.
- Jullien François, *Une seconde vie*, Grasset, 2017.
- McCloskey Deirdre N., *The Rhetoric of Economics*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985 (1998)
- Nussbaum Martha, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Proust Marcel, *By way of Sainte-Beuve*, Chatto & Windus, 1958.

Publication

- Proposals for papers, in French or in English, should not exceed 10,000 words and should be accompanied by an abstract (90 to 100 words), 4 to 6 keywords and 1 to 4 references in the *Journal of Economic Literature* classification. The title, abstract and keywords must appear in French and English.
- Authors should send their proposal, after having made it anonymous, with a separate attachment indicating their name, institution, title and abstract of the article, keywords and JEL classification, to the following two addresses: cahiers_eco_po@laposte.net and claire.pignol@univ-paris1.fr. Authors are invited to follow the guidelines available on the journal's website: <http://www.cahiersdecopo.fr/en/modalites-de-publication/>

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- Important dates

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