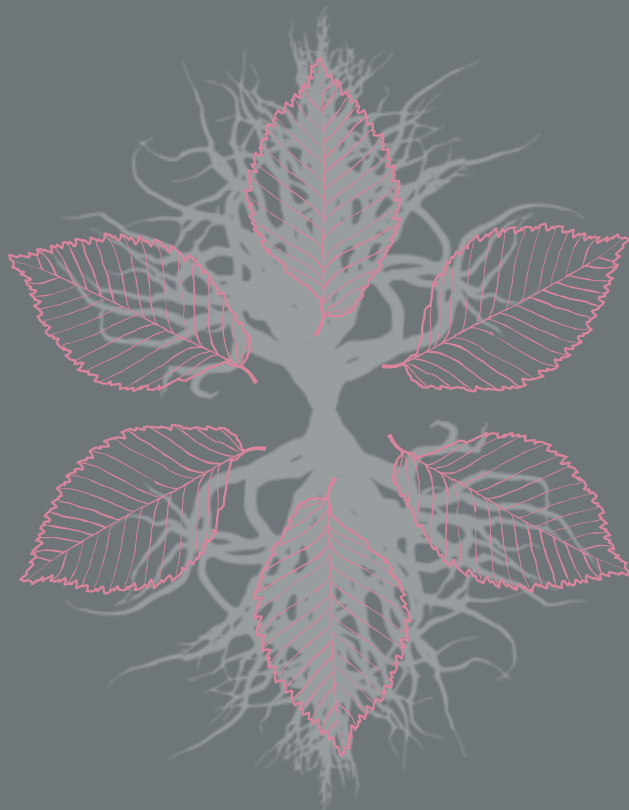


# GENRE AND ...

Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2



Ekbatana

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Ed. Sune Auken,  
Palle Schantz Lauridsen, &  
Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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## Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2

Edited by  
Sune Auken, Palle Schantz Lauridsen,  
& Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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*Genre and ...*

*Copenhagen Studies in Genre 2*

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& Anders Juhl Rasmussen

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# **Copenhagen Studies in Genre**

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# READING GENRE

# GENRE AND THE COLLECTIVE NOVEL

Bo Jørgensen

IN THIS CHAPTER, I draw attention to a single genre—the collective novel—and to the problems that arise when the existing theory of the genre is inconsistent with the ways in which the genre indication actually manifests itself. The collective novel is typically theorized as a genre bound to a particular period, namely, the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Yet there are a number of current-day Danish works that also claim membership in this genre, and in fact have been received as such. The present article has a twofold aim: first, to set forth material that raises certain basic questions about genre *per se*; and second, to initiate a recontextualization of the collective novel genre in particular.

Here is a preliminary definition of the genre at issue. What distinguishes the collective novel is that it deals with a collective, i.e., a group of individuals, which is the collective novel's action-bearing entity—with all the formal and thematic consequences that implies. This definition seems clear enough when, for example, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774/2009), which depicts the protagonist's individual fate, is compared to John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), which follows a wide range of New Yorkers, and so portrays an array of human beings all facing analogous conditions. This distinction, which manifests itself pedagogically in the works' titles, is not only an apt gauge of certain key trends in

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<sup>1</sup> I have specified the 1930s for simplicity's sake. In fact the period in question extends by a few years into both the 1920s and the 1940s.



literary history, but can also be harnessed productively to isolate and characterize a certain set of works.

Nevertheless, the above definition also raises several problems. What must a group be like—what nature must it have—in order for a novel about it to count as a collective novel? Within such a group, how prominent may individual members be? What does it mean to say that an entity is “action-bearing”? Indeed, to what degree can one demand “action” of a novel in the first place? Could one, for example, call Edgar Lee Masters’ *Spoon River Anthology* (1915/1992) a collective novel? *Spoon River Anthology* describes a group of (nonliving) people, and maps out the interaction of individual and collective existence within a particular area. Calling it a collective novel would be controversial, but perhaps fruitful.

The present study does not aim to answer such questions. Instead, it seeks to demarcate certain boundaries within which the central problems raised by the collective novel *qua* genre can be investigated. In what follows, analysis will be focused on Danish works from both the 1930s and the 1990s onwards.

In the Danish literary landscape, the genre indication “collective novel” has demonstrated its viability in two ways. To begin with, it is invariably present in literary-historical discussions of 1930s literature, which at first glance might be called the collective novel’s heyday. As we will see below, it has even been claimed that one cannot speak of the collective novel at all outside the 1930s (Klysner, 1976, p. 10; Foley, 1993, p. 398). Secondly, the genre—or at least the genre indication—has experienced a renaissance in the past few decades. This has naturally served as a corrective to the view of the genre as bound to the 1930s. In his contribution to the present volume, Anders Juhl Rasmussen concludes that “the paratext is a bargaining site where author and/or publisher and reading public meet to negotiate the work’s genre”. In recent years, it has been possible to observe negotiations of precisely this sort, as the genre indication “collective

novel” has been used in the paratext of a wide range of Danish works.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is worth noting that the genre indication played no part in the paratext of collective novels in the 1930s.

The collective novel genre thus raises a problem. Once a genre and a genre indication have been linked to the literature of a certain period, with all of its associated aesthetic and ideological thinking, what happens when new works arise, insisting that the reading public receive them as members of this otherwise vanished genre? What happens then to the genre and genre indication? The study of the collective novel is thus also a reflection on a single genre’s complex epochal and aesthetic character.

One space of resonance for this study is Gérard Genette’s revolt against the naturalization of the three major genres—poetry, epic, and drama—as is developed in his *Introduction à l’architexte* (1979), translated as *The Architext: An Introduction* (1992). Genette’s argument that the [major] genres are always tied to their historical contexts, and hence cannot be characterized exhaustively on the basis of trans-historical and ideal parameters, can be transferred to a discussion of the theory of the collective novel. The genres “always involve a thematic element that eludes purely formal or linguistic description” (Genette, 1992, pp. 64-65). It is precisely the interaction between a completely formal genre characteristic (the multiprotagonistic<sup>3</sup> aspect of the collective novel) and a certain defined theme (i.e., the class struggle of the 1930s and the accompanying Marxist ideology) that makes the genre known as the collective novel so difficult to find application for beyond the 1930s. These are the waters that I will navigate with Genette as pilot. As Genette himself puts it:

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller account of the concept of paratext, see Rasmussen, [this volume](#).

<sup>3</sup> A designation used especially for films with multiple “protagonists” and narrative threads. See Israel (2006). For lack of space, further comparison of the collective novel and the multiprotagonist film is omitted here. Yet there are likely several correlations of interest, tied both to the genre’s 1930s heyday and to its rediscovery (if only in paratexts) in Danish literature of the 1990s.

I deny only that a final generic position, and it alone, can be defined in terms that exclude all historicity. For at whatever level of generality one places oneself, the phenomena of genre inextricably merges the phenomena—among others—of nature and of culture [...] No position is totally the product of nature or mind—as none is totally determined of history. (Genette, 1992, pp. 68-69)

It is characteristic of the present-day theory of the collective novel that while it does regard the genre as tied to a certain period, it does not grant it historicity, viz., a dynamic interaction between the historical and the trans-historical. Paradoxically enough, in other words, a genre that traditionally thematizes historical developments has been theorized ahistorically.

The emergence of the genre indication “collective novel” is closely associated with 1920s and 1930s leftist circles. Historically, the genre indication covers both works written by authorial collectives and works that substitute collectives for individuals as protagonists. The present article is concerned with the latter sense of “collective” novel. But both meanings of the genre indication are still in use; what connects them is a common ideological foundation rooted in resistance to individualism. And it is in light of this shared anti-individualist element that the collective novel’s origin should be understood: the collective, and the obligation toward the collective, are what is valued here. At the same time, we should also attend to the (alleged) erosion of confidence in the unique qualities of the collective during subsequent periods. For it is here that the *development* of the genre can be seen.

In the 1930s, the collective novel was characteristically treated<sup>4</sup> with emphasis on its role in the political struggles of the day. Genre considerations were consistently subordinated to this political perspective. That trend continued through the 1970s, when the genre received renewed atten-

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<sup>4</sup> For a fuller account of the use of the genre in the 1930s, see Foley, 1993, p. 398f.

tion. In the Danish context, the seminal work is *Den danske kollektivroman 1828-1844* [*The Danish Collective Novel, 1828-1844*] (1976), by Finn Klysner. We find the same use of the genre indication—"the Collective Novel"—in Anglo-Saxon literature, e.g., in Scott de Francesco's *Scandinavian Cultural Radicalism* (1990), which devotes a chapter to the Danish collective novel. Yet De Francesco does not provide a genuine discussion of the genre, and adds nothing new to the existing theory. A much weightier treatment of the genre is found in Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (1993). Foley examines the formal characteristics of the collective novel with a discerning eye. Still, this does not lead her to depart substantially from the standard view of the genre.

None of the existing theoretical discussions that define the collective novel have extended it beyond the ideological literature of the 1930s—though, to be fair, this was not their purpose. Given present-day usage of the genre indication, however, we may say that the collective novel remains theoretically underilluminated. It has become a fashionable genre again; many works are now published and read as collective novels. This leaves us with two options. Either we allow the 1930s *qua* period to remain a constituting element of the genre, and so reject more recent uses of the genre indication as disingenuous, or we attempt to recontextualize the genre—i.e., to see what might be constitutive of the collective novel *qua* genre in a new (literary-)historical context. This article will pursue the latter option on the basis of the notion that genres are "formative and dynamic, adaptable for use on various social rhetorical occasions, and historically changing" (Agrell, [this volume](#)).

Let us begin by noting the two explicit locations in which we find the genre indication "collective novel": the paratext (title page, jacket copy, etc.) and the metatext (reviews, theoretical discussions, etc.) (see Rasmussen, [this volume](#)). It is primarily in the last decade—as opposed to the 1930s, where it is conspicuous by its paratextual absence—that the genre

indication has been used paratextually. In an interview, Simon Fruelund calls his novel *Borgerligt tusmørke* [Bourgeois dusk] (2006) “a kind of collective novel taken to the extreme” (Jespersen, 2006); Dennis Gade Kofod’s *Nexø Trawl* (2007) cites several reviews on the jacket of the pocket edition, two of which describe it as a collective novel; and Lone Aburas’s *Den svære toer* [That difficult second novel] (2011) invokes the genre indication in the introduction. Examples are numerous, and the genre indication is both paratextually and metatextually in play. The genre can even be said to be present on a more massive scale than in the 1930s. Part of the reason for this is that, in present-day literature, the genre’s concept has been extended widely, and has been inserted into the paratext intentionally by both publishers and authors.

Generally speaking, if the collective novel is to be defined, there are two strategies one may follow: a negative and a positive. The negative strategy starts with what the collective novel is *not*—namely, a novel with one protagonist. The positive strategy, by contrast, proceeds from what the collective novel *is*, namely, a type of novel that is based on a group of people—a collective—and as such reflects the idea of collectivism.

As mentioned, the most substantial treatment of the genre is found in Barbara Foley’s *Radical Representations—Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (1993). This book’s title aptly captures its goal: to investigate the interaction between literary form and ideology. This is done in four chapters, each of which revolves around a different genre: “The Proletarian Fictional Autobiography,” “The Proletarian Bildungsroman,” “The Proletarian Social Novel,” and “The Collective Novel.” At the same time, the book’s title also indicates its delimitation, and limitations, as a study: the works at issue are examined with a political yardstick and within a specified period. Foley illustrates her arguments richly with examples from American literature. She identifies the collective novel as a genre uniquely associated with the question of class. “Of the four modes of proletarian fiction, the collective novel is the only one that is primarily the

product of the 1930s literary radicalism. The term ‘proletarian collective novel’ would therefore be tautological” (Foley, 1993, p. 398). Here Foley merely builds upon the popular perception of the genre. Where she offers new and interesting analysis is in her study of the genre’s form.

Because Foley is aware of the difficulties attendant on classifications of literary texts—“all generic classifications are arbitrary to some degree” (p. 362)—she lists three criteria for use in characterizing the collective novel, without making any of these explicitly normative:

- (1) The group is a central entity in the narration, an entity that supersedes its individual members: “[That] the Collective novel’s treatment of the group as a phenomenon greater than—and different from—the sum of the individuals who constitute it means that it tends to foreground interconnection as such” (p. 400). However smoothly this definition may appear to function, it is not entirely unproblematic. It encompasses a large array of works, including, for example, every text regarded as a portrait of a national character; and that would extend to *Spoon River Anthology*, if we disregard the fact that it is not a novel. However, Foley makes clear that the unity of the group in question is by no means coincidental; it arises typically through Marxist class analysis.
- (2) The works are often experimental. “Collectivism entails an exercise in formal modernism” (p. 401). But while Foley does invite reflection on a deeper connection between the genre and a modernist tendency, she shuts it down just as quickly: “That does not mean that collective novels are doctrinally more ‘open-ended’ than traditionally realistic texts; collective novels do not hold indeterminacy as a political value or polyphony as a rhetorical strategy” (p. 401). Despite the genre’s experimental nature, this does not entail a real difference from a traditional realistic text.

- (3) The works often use a documentary strategy, adding authentic newspaper clippings, small bits of popular music, or the like. This is a central device, for example, in Dos Passos's *The 42nd Parallel* (1969) and Mogens Klitgaard's *Den guddommelige hverdag* [The divinity of everyday life] (1942).

The characteristics Foley takes to be constitutive of the collective novel are predominantly trans-historical. There is nothing in them that binds them specifically to the 1930s. Nevertheless, Foley directs her gaze exclusively at 1930s literature. Put another way, she evaluates the works in terms of numerous formal categories, but then consigns them (continually) to ideological univocity. Thus the collective novel is about "bosses and workers," with sympathy for the latter, and all of its formal features are subordinate to this. This tendency on Foley's part is, for the most part, typical of the theory of the collective novel in general.

Finn Klysner's *Den danske kollektivroman—1928-1944* has a central place in Danish genre theory's engagement with the collective novel. In its approach to the genre, this book is simultaneously nuanced and narrow. It is nuanced inasmuch as it identifies a number of subgenres,<sup>5</sup> and so sketches a rather complex genre landscape. But it is narrow because it draws the boundary between the collective novel and related genres very sharply—so sharply that Klysner can conclude: "The collective novel thus has no foreign precedents" (Klysner, 1976, p. 135). Indeed Klysner ends up with only a handful of works that can be called authentic collective novels ("collective collective novels [*Kollektive kollektiveromaner*]" (1976, pp. 25). One might say with only a hint of caricature that Klysner believes that the collective novel is like Hans Kirk's *Fiskerne* (1928)—and that there really aren't any books besides *Fiskerne* that are like *Fiskerne*.

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<sup>5</sup> Most significantly, it distinguishes between the complex novel, the collective novel, and the anti-collective novel.

Klysner's definition is essentially thematic: it rests on the class homogeneity of the group at issue. His standards are thus, like Foley's, ideological.

Barbara Foley's definition of the collective novel is broader, and includes works that Klysner would not accept. For example, Klysner explicitly excludes Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1976, pp. 25), while Foley regards Dos Passos as a key contributor to the genre. In Foley's definition, the group can be bound together more loosely: she does not require authentic class membership, i.e., that the group's boundaries be sharply drawn socially. For Foley, the characters might meet by chance, or not at all. Generally speaking, the mode of representation can be much more fragmented for Foley than for Klysner; she grants the formal aspects more attention than he does. Nevertheless, the two agree more than they disagree. There are three key points on which their theories cohere: (1) restriction of the period of the collective novel to the 1930s, as is reflected in the titles of their books—respectively, 1928-1944 for Klysner; 1929-1941 for Foley; (2) characterization of the collective novel as an ideological genre, and specifically as Marxist; and (3) identification of the narrator as a unifying entity. All of these points will be discussed in the present article. But first we will look at one of the more recent works that invokes the genre indication "collective novel," namely, Dennis Gade Kofod's *Nexø Trawl*.

*Nexø Trawl* offers a fitting illustration of some of the new features characteristic of the more recent collective novels. This is not because *Nexø Trawl* is itself typical of the new tendencies, but because it traces itself back to the collective novel of the 1930s—and especially to Hans Kirk's prototypical *Fiskerne*. That *Nexø Trawl* has been received as a collective novel is clear from a glance at the pocket edition. In the three reviews cited on the back cover, the genre indication is used in two of them—and one review reads, in all its brevity: "A stirring and magnificent collective novel—*Dagens Nyheter*." Thus apart from the fact that it was received as a collective novel by segments of the press, one must presume



an intention on the publisher's part to market the book as such. Still, other genre indications could also have been relevant here. The novel has some of the traits of a family saga; alternately, it could have been called a workplace novel.<sup>6</sup> *Nexø Trawl* also contains the story of Thomas and his friend; the narrator and his development are central to the novel; and, finally, there are elements of magical realism toward the end. But typically for its time, as I would put it, it is the genre *collective novel* that is paratextually in play here.

*Nexø Trawl* revolves around the group of people associated with the Nexø Trawl factory and the Nexø fishing industry. "Everyone knows someone who works at sea, everyone knows someone who has worked at sea" (Kofod, 2007, p. 14). Fishing is constitutive of this group; but it is constitutive by means of its absence, since Nexø Trawl is closing: "The sign has been taken down. The company name is written in a kind of negative script, the light concrete under the places where the letters were fastened. Nexø Trawl is finished." (Kofod, 2007, p. 23). Briefly put, *Nexø Trawl* functions as a collective novel by revolving around and investigating the closure of a workplace. By way of anticipation, one could say that the difference between the 1930s collective novel and a novel like *Nexø Trawl* is that work, and the class thinking that follows from it, no longer functions as a stable factor in identity formation. Whereas work, class, ideology, and identity are linked like peas in a pod in a novel like *Fiskerne*, *Nexø Trawl* offers no such cohesion, neither as a book nor in its description of the collective. This is typical for the more recent novels termed collective novels: the close connection between work and identity has disappeared.

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<sup>6</sup> The genre indication *workplace novel* is less common than *collective novel*, and was most visible in the 1970s. The two designations often cover the same books. Interestingly, the workplace novel seems to be experiencing a renaissance on a par with the collective novel, albeit to a slightly smaller degree.

Furthermore, *Nexø Trawl* opposes itself polemically to Kirk's *Fiskerne* with a series of intertextual references. Beyond their shared thematic motif—the fishing industry as a factor in identity formation—a number of additional commonalities indicate that Kofoed is deliberately engaging in dialogue with Kirk. Of these I will mention only one. There are two characters who are central to the novel's investigation of the collapse of the Nexø fishery, namely, the narrator and Thomas Jensen. Thomas Jensen, for whom this collapse is tied to an unrestrained use of drugs, shares his name with one of the characters in *Fiskerne*, namely the starkly evangelical fisherman who has a leading position in the group. Here the two works bear a chiasmic relation to one another: whereas a hypothesis fundamental to Kirk's analysis in *Fiskerne* is that "religion is the opium of the masses," *Nexø Trawl*'s analysis of Thomas Jensen implies that "opium is the religion of the masses." Whereas in *Fiskerne* religion is analyzed as a mode of alienation—an escape from reality—in *Nexø Trawl* it is drugs that offer such escape. Inasmuch as it transforms a number of textual elements from *Fiskerne*, *Nexø Trawl* is an example of a palimpsest, in Genette's terminology.<sup>7</sup> The two works coincide strategically to the extent that they share a social preoccupation with the interaction between group, work, and identity formation, and point in good Marxist fashion to an interaction between base and superstructure. The difference is that *Nexø Trawl* has lost faith in the class struggle as a life-saving response.

To investigate the genre's development further, I will direct attention to the semantic content of collective novels. Here I will focus on the *narrator*, the Archimedean point from which a novel's fictional universe can be brought into a meaningful context. When Klysner, Foley, and others consistently ascribe a revolutionary ideology to the collective novel, they presuppose that there is a narrator who simultaneously unifies and stands in solidarity with the represented collective. The existence of such a narra-

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<sup>7</sup> For a further account of Genette's terminology, see Rasmussen, [this volume](#).

tor is the necessary condition for such an ideological interpretation, and indeed its only possible stable foundation.

Let us briefly follow Klysner's reasoning in his reading of *Fiskerne*. This can be summarized as follows: the work has a social interest, and therefore its "description and report never go beyond the fictional individuals' perspective" (Klysner, 1976, p. 49). Hence its narrative representation is objective. This is extended to the following conclusion: "One may therefore speak of a loyal collective narrator, inasmuch as his viewpoint reveals solidarity with the group's thoughts and feelings. This is emphasized by a tendency toward identification with the group's thinking and its feelings, which are impossible to separate. But to this one must add that another solution to the group's social problems is suggested, a solution that is more adequate in society's larger context [...] The authorial person exhibits this loyalty to the collective because its consciousness can form the basis of a revolutionary potential" (p. 50). Note that a (single) consciousness is attributed to the collective. There is thus a straight line from the narrator in solidarity, who follows the collective *qua* well-defined group, to the novel's ideological conclusion.

We find similar reasoning in Foley. "Only when the text's protagonist is construed as a transindividual entity does the trajectory of the narrative gain coherence." (Foley, 1993, p. 408). Foley's reading of collective novel is interesting here because even as she interprets this "coherence," she is aware of the collective novel's modernist traits: "A [...] distinguishing feature of collective novels is their frequent use of experimental devices that break up the narrative and rupture the illusion of seamless transparency" (p. 401). There thus seem to be two forces at work in the genre, each pulling in a separate direction. In one, the narrator *qua* unifying body forms the basis for an ideological interpretation. In the other, the presence of many people (and so many points of view, motives, etc.) dissolves the central perspective, and manifests itself in a fragmentary form of representation. What is more, it appears that an interpretation of the collective nov-

el as an ideological genre presupposes that the first of the above forces is superior to the other. For example, Klysner draws an unbroken line from “the fictional individuals’ perspective” to “the collective narrator” to “the authorial person,” such that the latter’s ideological orientation becomes determinant for the entire work. This corresponds to Foley’s rejection of polyphony as a rhetorical strategy in the work. The current theory of genre has therefore privileged the unifying narrator precisely for his ability to maintain the work’s ideological univocity.

This narrowing perspective can be corrected by appeal to Mikhail Bakhtin, the theorist of the novel. Bakhtin focuses on language, specifically on language as a locus where ideology is put into play. He characterizes “internally persuasive” discourse, which stands opposed to the “externally authoritative,” as follows:

It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new materials, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 345-346)

This description is linked to the distinction between the monologic and polyphonic. According to Bakhtin, the polyphonic—and specifically, the polyphonic element that cannot be reduced to an ideological univocity—is a hallmark of the novel, and more precisely of the “dialogical” novel. Bakhtin develops his theory of the dialogical in his book on Dostoyevsky:

The idea—as it was seen by Dostoevsky the artist—is not a subjective individual-psychological formation with “permanent resident rights” in a person’s head; no, the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective—the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogical communion between consciousnesses. The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogical meeting between two or several consciousnesses. In this sense the idea is similar to the word, with which it is dialogically united. Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and “answered” by other voices from other positions. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 88)

There is a conspicuous parallel between the collective novel and Bakhtin’s characterization of the novel. Much as Bakhtin does not allow the protagonist’s voice to be subordinated to the author’s, one may say that the collective novel does not allow the voices of the various people it depicts to be subordinated to a single protagonist—for there is none. The collective novel may thus be regarded as a genre that in a sense takes polyphony “literally.”

Here I should caution that collective novels need not be polyphonic in Bakhtin’s sense. To the extent that a given novel closes itself ideologically, it moves away from the polyphonic or dialogical. Thus it would be fruitless to characterize the collective novel as either monologic or polyphonic. It would also be inappropriate: the collective novel has both a monological side, manifested in its link to 1930s ideological literature, and a dialogical tendency, reflected in its collective technique, which allows multiple voices to speak.

The dialogical aspect becomes apparent when we turn to Mary McCarthy’s novel *The Group* (1963/1970). This novel concerns eight women, all 1933 graduates of Vassar College. In other words, *The Group* unfolds in the same ideological climate as do the collective novels treated by Foley and Klysner; but it was written considerably later and without the

same ideological optimism. We follow the eight women's lives and the relatively loose-knit group that they form. Thematically, the novel revolves around these well-educated women's lives and identity struggles in the ideological and male-dominated climate of the 1930s. Themes such as sexuality, work, parent-child relationships, contraception, class, economics, housework, etc., are illuminated from several angles. This allows the novel to connect directly to several of the 1930s collective novel's classic themes.

In terms of narrative technique, we encounter a shifting perspective in *The Group*—a “collective narrative form,” as the Danish translator Hans Hertel calls it. Hertel's reflections on the book (in his “Translator's Foreword” to the Danish edition (1964)) is informative not only about the book's narrative technique, but also about its relation to 1930s literature:

Mary McCarthy's particular variant of the interwar collective narrative form raises certain problems (initially for the translator, but also for the reader). It is important to determine, for example, from whose perspective a given scene is viewed, and whose language colors the direct speech that is depicted. (McCarthy, 1963/1970, p. 5)

The narrator of *The Group*, then, lacks the homologizing trend that is otherwise typical of the collective novel (cf. Foley and Klysner). This is almost certainly what Hertel means by “a particular variant”: we find a shifting inner focalization within the group of characters, whose reflections are colored by the words of others and, to a large extent, of men as well. There is an episode in the novel where Kay, one of the main characters, reads a letter that her husband has written (though not sent) to his father. Among other things, the letter is about Kay; it discusses her judgmentally and unambiguously. The letter is reproduced over the course of 2-3 pages of the novel—and then we learn of Kay's reaction to it: “The letter, Kay thought, was awfully well-written, like everything Harald did, yet reading it had left

her with the queerest, stricken feeling. There was nothing in it that she did not already know in a sense, but to know in a sense, apparently, was not the same as knowing” (McCarthy, 1963/1970, XX). Here, as elsewhere in the book, what is central is the encounter between ideas and linguistically articulated ideas. Not the reproduction or exemplification of some particular ideology, but the tension that exists between the different characters when various ideologies or philosophies of life intersect—here manifested in Kay’s dialogical attitude.

The novel’s overall structure is bounded by a wedding and a funeral—that is, it begins with Kay’s wedding, and ends with her funeral—and the ending underscores the narrative form’s dialogical openness. The cause of Kay’s death remains unclear: whether she fell out of a window by accident, or took her own life. This type of ambiguous ending might be thought typical of a collective technique that is oriented towards the dialogical; whereas the traditional collective novel’s more univocal, monological conclusion tends to point ahead toward continued victories in the class struggle. This will be illustrated later.

I will now focus more closely on semantic content. I will do so by introducing Genette’s concept of focalization, as set forth in *Narrative Discours du Récit* (1983), translated as *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988). Focalization is a matter of information control: “So by focalization I certainly mean a restriction of ‘field’—actually, that is, a selection of narrative information with respect to what was traditionally called omniscience” (Genette, 1988, p. 74). Genette works with three types of focalization: zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization. Zero focalization refers to narration without focalization; internal focalization restricts the viewing angle to a first-person perspective; and external focalization lacks internal access to the characters. Furthermore, Genette distinguishes between a homodiegetic narrator (one who is at the same level as the events taking place) and a heterodiegetic narrator (one who is at a different level than the events he or she describes). Genette’s homodiegetic-

heterodiegetic distinction points squarely to a problem in standard treatments of the collective novel genre. Once a collective is introduced as the protagonist, readings can alternate between a heterodiegetic and a homodiegetic narrator, depending on whether the collective is viewed as at the same level as the novel's events—and, accordingly, treated in a manner parallel to the hero of a *Bildungsroman*—or as above them. This same problem also makes it difficult to discern whether Foley and Klysner consider zero focalization or internal focalization more typical of the collective novel. Recontextualization of the genre will require closer examination of this question. To that end, I will now examine two works, one recent—Kristian Foss Bang's *Stormen i 99* [*The Storm of 99*] (2008)—and one from late in the genre's golden age: Mogens Klitgaard's *Den guddommelige hverdag* (1942).

Kristian Bang Foss's *Stormen i 99* can be regarded as a collective novel in that it revolves around the working community—though “community” is perhaps a misleading word in this context—centered on the warehouse serving InWear's clothing stores. We follow the various characters both on and off the job, and observe their interpersonal interactions in a variety of contexts. One essential narrative track throughout the novel is Anton and Nanna's romantic relationship. Yet this is not enough to disqualify the genre indication “collective novel” as irrelevant, since the novel also points to the genre paratextually—if only via indirect comparison with *Nexø Trawl*—when the jacket copy states: “*Stormen i 99* is about people at InWear's warehouse on Amager,” and a handful of the novel's characters are listed next to this. Thus Anton and Nanna's love story serves as both a guiding thread through the depicted collective and an “interpretation” of it, parallel to the young Tabitha's love story in *Fiskerne*, which lets that work point “toward a new age” marked by greater solidarity and less false consciousness.

The narrator in *Stormen i 99* is simultaneously clear and elusive. First, he or she is in no way in solidarity with his or her characters. “During the



day [Nanna] goes and sucks on her endless water bottles, drips piss constantly, is close to water intoxication” (Foss, 2008, p. 5). The narrator clearly distances him- or herself from the character. Later the heterodiegetic narrator arrives on the scene as an anachronistic<sup>8</sup> narrative authority: “But come, let us [i.e., the narrator and the reader—and just not any fictional characters] take a walk to the next table, where...” (Foss, 2008, p. 60-61). The narrator here takes the reader by the hand and pans over a festive scene. At other times, the narrator is withdrawn, letting the characters’ actions and lines go uncommented; at still other times, we are given insight into the fictional individuals’ emotional lives. Thus we have a narrator who switches between being heterodiegetic and homodiegetic, along with a mix of zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization. The problem becomes evident in the novel’s final scene, which bears the chapter heading “Epilogue.” Here Anton and Nanna have a conversation that hovers somewhere between disillusionment and love. Anton declares his love for Nanna, but the authenticity of his love is open to question: “I love you, he says. He does not know how else to comfort her”. What is more, the novel’s very last sentence is a reply by Anton illuminated neither by his own perspective nor by the narrator’s Olympic gaze: “Yes, it’ll be okay if we just take care of each other” (p. 245). This reply’s final position leaves it with the significance of a finale, but its meaning *qua* finale remains unclear: does the “we” it speaks of refer to the lovers alone, does it include the rest of the group, or does it extend to all of humanity? Moreover, is the sentence an expression of resignation, or of hope? The novel plays visibly on a dialogical, unresolved relationship between zero focalization and internal/external focalization.

If one briefly compares this interpretation of *Stormen i 99*’s epilogue to the overall plot structure, the two will appear to confirm one another,

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<sup>8</sup> This type of narrator, who speaks of himself in the first person without being a member of the fictional universe, is typically found in nineteenth-century novels.

just as was the case with McCarthy's *The Group*. At the beginning of *Stormen i 99* a toilet is smeared with feces, but the culprit is never identified. And the book culminates precisely with the eponymous "storm of 1999," when Denmark was hit by an unusually (by Danish standards) powerful storm. We learn about the characters' comings and goings during the storm. Tragically, one is struck by a roof tile and dies, randomly and pointlessly. Naturally, the storm's fury has no justification in social conditions—and so the title's reference to it indicates that this book is far from a social investigation, unlike such titles as *Fiskerne* ["The Fishermen"] or *Nexø Trawl*, which can easily be linked to a sociological perspective. Instead, *Stormen i 99* ties the book to an existential meaninglessness. We (along with the narrator) follow the storm gathering out over the Atlantic. We are thus far removed from a solidary study of the forces at work in a group of individuals. What is more, the principle of causality—which seems important for any coherent conception of "story," whether it be history on a grand scale or the story of the work's narrative—is here out of play. Finally, in its concluding linkage of the working community that it portrays to the storm as a uncontrollable natural phenomenon, *Stormen i 99* places itself between a sociological study informed by a particular view of history, on the one hand, and on the other hand something else, something uncontrolled.

The two genre indications "collective novel" and "multiprotagonist narrative"—the latter of which is derived especially from recent films—have now come to describe two extremes in a wide landscape. The multiprotagonist narrative focuses on issues of representation, on the network of narrators, and so on the anti-hierarchical element in the form of representation. The collective novel inscribes itself into a different genre history, where the focus has been on thematic content. Against this backdrop, what distinguishes the recent works that identify themselves with the collective novel genre is that they inscribe themselves into a (Danish) literary-historical tradition of collective novels, but orient themselves toward a

more modern form of representation, namely, the multiprotagonist narrative. Now, the anti-hierarchical thrust characteristic of the multiprotagonist narrative was already present *in nuce* in the collective novels of the 1930s, even if it was perhaps drowned out by the ideological element. But the appearance of a new type of collective novel also changes its predecessors.<sup>9</sup> One postulate of the present article is that the corpus of 1930s collective novels should be reread in order to elicit its multiprotagonistic and dialogical character. And one of the works that can most clearly benefit from such a reading is Mogens Klitgaard's *Den guddommelige hverdag*.

With *Den guddommelige hverdag*, Mogens Klitgaard simultaneously wrote himself into the most powerful tendencies of the 1930s—both thematically and ideologically—and wrote his way out of the period itself. With regard to his novel's subject-matter, there can be no doubt where Klitgaard's interest and sympathies lie: with the oppressed. But the narrative conditions of *Den guddommelige hverdag* are complex and interesting, partly as a product of the many types of text that are represented in it. The novel is a montage novel strongly reminiscent of Dos Passos's *The 42nd Parallel*,<sup>10</sup> and it nicely fits Foley's three criteria for the genre. *Den guddommelige hverdag* consists of various types of text: (1) authentic newspaper clippings, often "cut" so that they appear as fragments; (2) a series of short mood pieces with time-stamps that place the book's action in 1942, which was also its year of publication; (3) twenty-one so-called "pictures" [*billeder*], namely, short prose pieces connected by varying degrees to a network of stories.

The "pictures" make up the bulk of the work. They are organized in two continuous sequences, each comprising five to six "pictures": the story

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<sup>9</sup> This is a point in the style of T. S. Eliot, who regarded the history of literature as an organic whole, such that the appearance of new works also changes those that precede them. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood* (1960).

<sup>10</sup> It would be worth investigating the extent to which it can be called a palimpsest. There are numerous formal similarities, and the number 42 is prominent in them both.

of soap-merchant Jørgensen's futile struggle against a company that is using the tools of capitalism to drive him out of business; and a narrative about Agnete, a sensual young girl who becomes pregnant and ultimately has an abortion. Mechanisms of oppression are described, from the indirect, continual oppression of the abortion ban to the direct economic oppression that affects "the little man." The Second World War becomes a backdrop for these abuses of power, though the novel concerns itself more with power as a principle than with the actual Nazi occupation.

I will focus on semantics in the 21 "pictures," which on Genette's terms are homodiegetic. Here we find internal focalization that shifts from "picture" to "picture." Typically, the angle of view lies with the weak: the young Jew Esther, regarded with scorn; soap-merchant Jørgensen, who is economically outmatched; his son; the girl Agnete; the young Mary, etc. All of these stories are told in the third person, but one voice is privileged with the first person singular. This speaker appears in four "pictures," and his first words are: "Incidentally, I will make no secret of the fact that I do not cultivate political opinions. I think it is clear from history that the common man has always been exploited and abused by the ruling class, regardless of which flag or ideology the rulers were rallied around" (Klitgaard, 1942, p. 49). This narrator's analysis is consistent in many ways with a Marxist ideology, though he denies having political opinions. He also expresses sympathy with the workers' movement: "To be quite honest, I have more sympathy for the labor movement that makes no appeal to pity, but works to prevent exploitation using power and the law" (pp. 190-191). On the other hand, he is as far from a workers' ideology as one can imagine: careful reading reveals that he is in fact Department Head Dreyer, who is employed by the firm that is in the process of out-competing Jørgensen the soap-merchant. We are also given a description of this man, confirming his identity with Dreyer, and simultaneously providing an external portrait that leads readers to distance themselves from him. At the same time, he formulates, *qua* first-person narrator, a

personal life strategy that is incompatible with a socialist outlook: “In this world I allow myself to take an interest in myself. To work resolutely and hard to remain one of the rulers. So as not to become one of the ruled.” (p. 51). This narrator thus belongs to Foley’s category of “bosses”—but within his voice there are in fact a number of voices running together. Because the novel time and again takes the side of the weakest, presenting one “picture” after another of the crippling mechanisms of power, it is at first glance difficult to comprehend this choice of a first-person narrator, who at one and the same time is a representative of power and analyzes its oppressive nature. The presence of this narrator complicates any unifying grasp of the narrated material. A preliminary explanation might be that even though *Den guddommelige hverdag* clearly unfolds in the political landscape of the 1930s, it remains a work opposed to any univocal ideological position. Further analysis of the first-person narrator adds an additional dimension to this point. The novel’s seventh “picture” consists of the first-person narrator’s six-page-long reflections on his lunch. These ruminations do not make immediate sense in the larger work’s ideological thematic context, but are of an aesthetic or structural nature:

The content varies, but the framework is the same. One by one, I go through the pieces [of open-faced sandwiches] and plan the order I will eat them in. Some of this is laid down in principle: herring first, cheese last. Second-last is always the piece I choose to be myself. You may perhaps find this odd, and perhaps it is. But in God’s name, then, let it be odd: I choose one of the pieces to symbolize myself, that’s the one I eat just before the cheese, it’s myself I eat, even I myself find it a little odd. [...] Maybe I’m religious in an especially primitive way.” (pp. 90-91)

One can only agree with the “I” that these are, at first glance, odd ruminations. But if one reads them as metacommentary to the work, they do make

sense. The work's next-to-last section ("picture") is in fact a section that features the first-person narrator. And here this narrator reflects on literature, as follows:

And if you thought that a man armed with these vital attributes and experience appropriate for their accommodation to today's demands went and for one or another odd reason wrote such a book, and the book was truthful and true to his heart, people would be horrified by reading it. One can perhaps find books that start along this path, but on the crucial topics the writer ends up masking himself, wrapping things into a pretty philosophy, or it turns into a memoir with all-too-obviously fake motifs. (p. 187)

So there is a mismatch between the true novel and an (ideological) overview: "the more knowledge one acquires about life and humanity, the more attacked one will be in the innermost nerve of his life's strength. Columns of calculated numbers and statistical curves become human destinies; one starts to lose the ability to make decisions; one should be relentless and scientific" (p. 188).

This control—like his control over the pieces of sandwiches—is incomplete. It is more formal than real. The first-person narrator destabilizes the ideological reading, knocking it out of the game by formulating his own fundamental assumptions about the nature of power in the same breath as he assumes the role of oppressor. He is not wholly an advocate of the ideology, but should rather be understood as an expression of a Bakhtinian dialogical principle.

*Den guddommelige hverdag* can thus be regarded as the breaking-point for two otherwise strong unidirectional forces in the genre, namely, the unifying narrative position and the linear plot. Here, at the close of the period analyzed by Klysner, we find a work that bridges the gap between the traditional collective novel of the 1930s and the later, more experi-

mental genre efforts of the 1990s—and which lines up perfectly with Bakhtin's view of the novel. We can develop this parallel further by focusing on the use of space in a few of the works examined here.

*Fiskerne* is set by the Limfjord, and geography plays an essential thematic role. The novel's conflict is tied to a group of fishermen who leave the punishing North Sea for the Limfjord's gentler climate. It is generally characteristic of the collective novel that (to varying degrees) its story arc leaves a trail across the countryside. It is often individual characters who epitomize the essence of this trail—for example in a love story. Overall, one can say that the traditional collective novel orients and interprets a geographic space throughout the course of the novel, linking the geographic space itself to a development in history. And indeed, such interaction is necessary for the novel's universe to be linked to a Marxist ideology. But if that ideology is absent—and so the solution is absent as well—then this interpretive pass is unnecessary; it would merely represent an illusory resolution of the issues at play. *Den guddommelige hverdag* literally has a barren ending, in which Agnete has her abortion—and the narrator rejects that sort of overview as a “pretty philosophy.”

The above indicates that space cannot necessarily be subordinated to the causality of time. The universe represented in the collective novel does not necessarily reflect a progressive history; in fact, we can discern a tendency for space to usurp time's role as the most essential organizing principle. This is clear in Simon Fruelund's *Borgerligt tusmørke* (2006), where the organizing principle that is explicitly most essential is spatial.<sup>11</sup> *Borgerligt tusmørke* is divided into three parts. The first of these, which also constitutes the majority of the work, follows the set of addresses on the avenue Dantes Allé. First we hear about no. 1, then no. 2, and so on. For each address, we find a brief sketch of one or more of the building's resi-

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<sup>11</sup> Another illustrative example could be Peer Hultberg's *Byen og verden* [*The City and the World*] (1992).

dents, so that the narrative perspective continually remains at the level of the individuals—rather than giving us an overview. In this way, we come to learn about a number of interpersonal relationships, about how the avenue's various residents regard one another, and about such themes as intolerance and xenophobia, which are in play without being all-consuming. The novel's second part is a historical outline from ancient times to the present day, while the third part is structured like the first part, except that we now follow the apartment numbers in a building complex. Thus the first and last parts are also opposed to one other like rival social poles—albeit without this being particularly glaring. At the same time, the location's historical development becomes parenthetical in relation to its spatial configuration. The work takes a position. It is opposed to oppression and exclusion of every kind of minority ethnicity, sexuality, etc. The attitude is not expressed ideologically, but can be inferred by the reader from the network of characters portrayed, as well as from the absence of a causal compositional principle that can imply some conclusion about this field.

Here, then, a shift from time to place has taken place. And this shift interfaces with a stance that will open up the work: a more complex narrative position, and a departure from the fixed ideology of the collective novel. One can point to a corresponding shift in the sociological sciences, a shift from ideological explanatory models to more anthropological analyses of the sociological field.

On my interpretation, in sum, the collective novel strikes a balance between the two positions. On the one hand, we have a concrete, if shifting, historical reality: This article has focused attention on two periods, the industrial society of the 1930s with its big-city cacophony, and the information society of the 1990s (and 2000s), with its attendant flood of information. On the other hand, we have considered a number of formal and elemental hallmarks: the multiprotagonistic.



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# RESEARCH GROUP FOR GENRE STUDIES (RGGS)



The Research Group for Genre Studies moves at the forefront of existing genre research, with a wide international network, a developing interdisciplinary research profile in both English and Danish, and extensive teaching activities at all levels, including a strong profile in research education.

RGGS embraces the highly developed research in current Genre Studies. At the core of this research is the advanced, remarkably cohesive, and extensive body of knowledge established in Rhetorical Genre Studies, in English for Specific Purposes, and in Systemic Functional Linguistics. The field now spans important work within Rhetoric, Composition, Linguistics, Sociology, Ethnography, Business Communication, Composition and Information Studies.

RGGS seeks to develop and expand this research by examining and challenging its theoretical underpinnings, by expanding its scholarly reach, and by reintegrating a number of subjects into Genre Studies that have been left behind in the development of current Genre Studies. Specifically, RGGS strives to establish a cohesive connection between aesthetic and functional theories of genre, in order to **reinvigorate** the study of genre in aesthetic research fields, and the inclusion of aesthetic subjects in Genre Studies.