Writing the Reader

The history of the English novel is also a history of shifting views about reading practices. In this talk, I argue that novelistic representations of readers – and in particular, the type of the “obsessive reader” – have, through the centuries, been used to reflect on the potential of reading as a cultural practice and, ultimately, to promote the idea of the special value of novel reading in particular. Case studies include Charlotte Lennox` The Female Quixote (1752) and Alan Bennett’s The Uncommon Reader (2007).

Bio

Dorothee Birke is Associate Professor of English Literature at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. She has held fellowships at the University of Freiburg and at the Aarhus Institute for Advanced Studies. Her research interests include studies of narrative and the novel, the history of reading as well as book culture in the digital age. The talk is based on work from her second monograph, Writing the Reader: Configurations of a Cultural Practice in the English Novel.