

## Creativity and Contingency

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Writers work with the contingent. What might happen but might just as well not come to pass, namely, the contingent, is integral to the ways in which writers try out elements of narrative, word choices, etc. Contingency in the creative process unfolds at the interface between authors' experimentation, pen and paper, language and the imagination. In this project, I investigate how literary authors work with contingency and what strategies they deploy to shape it. I trace how writers' "contingency plans" do not necessarily aim to minimise the unexpected but to put it to productive use in outlining, drafting and revising a text. The project builds on three sources of evidence: historical representations of creative processes in literature, draft manuscripts and interviews with contemporary authors.

Literary representations of creative processes sketch out multiple aspects of the creative processes: From the ancient novel onwards, we have narrators reflecting on the likelihood of chance encounters, characters feeling that their happy ending has been decreed by the gods when it emerges like a "deus ex machina", and "found manuscripts" generating or re-writing the course of the narrative. Metafictional reflections such as these reveal a dynamics between authors' design for a narrative and their use of constraints, material elements and conventions of the writing process they use to provoke chance. I have pursued a preliminary survey of such creative dynamics in an interdisciplinary collaboration with colleagues from neuroscience, philosophy, art history, theatre studies and literary history, in the ALEA project. In *Creativity and Contingency*, I will investigate more precisely how provoking chance is tied to literary tropes and metafictional reflections in narrative prose fiction.

Link: Blog entry on the ALEA website: <https://hasard.hypotheses.org/3891>

Draft manuscripts carry material traces of the contingent. Authors may doodle on the margins of the text to intuit the structure of its character constellations, as Calvino did for *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (Berkman 2017). They may cut out phrases from earlier manuscript drafts and re-arrange them as mobile snippets in order to configure the dynamics of a dialogue, as Frances Burney did for her plays (Kukkonen 2019). Methods from manuscript genetics and the study of variants, combined with theoretical work on the ways in which authors think through pen and paper and the embodied activity of writing, enable me to analyse authors' use of contingency in the writing process itself. Through manuscript evidence, I will study contingency in word choices, syntactic rhythms but also in how authors shape and revise the link between a novel's conceptual structure and its linguistic realisation.

Interviews with living authors provide the third avenue of investigation. I discuss practices and protocols of writing in interviews with authors writing in English, French, German and Norwegian in order to get a sense of how authors prepare for and manage the contingent moments in the creative process. My previous monograph *Probability Designs* (OUP, 2020) conceptualised the form of literary texts as a design for readers' predictions and probabilistic assessments. In *Creativity and Contingency*, I investigate the models, materials and protocols that bring forth such probability designs. The project takes discussions of creativity in literary studies beyond debates about intentionality and genius, drawing on historically situated case studies and developing a more general theoretical model of creativity for cognitive literary studies.