Session III:

SCIENCE AS A SOURCE OF FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

What does contemporary literary fiction have to say about the human dimension of science? Are its practitioners villains or heroes, stereotypes or multidimensional characters? Has the growing popularity of literary narratives portraying developments in the life sciences and biologists as dramatis personae lead to new creative forms? What could be their role in science communication?

In recent times, a new distinction between ‘science fiction’ and ‘science in fiction’ has seen the light of day. The main difference between the two genres seems to lie in their different narrative portrayal of the scientific enterprise: the first, and to date more popular genre, depends more often on fantasy and implausibility to satisfy its huge following; the second makes more demands on accuracy and plausibility. The science portrayed in science fiction is sometimes an extrapolation of existing technology, sometimes it is a physically realistic portrayal of a far-out technology, and sometimes it is simply a plot device that looks scientific, but has no basis in science. Science in fiction, on the other hand, is more likely to explore the rules, mores and ethics of the scientific community. These new kinds of stories about science not only explore its practices, concepts, people, institutions, products and societal fallout, but also its mentor-disciple relationships, its self-interested concerns with publication, patents, its Nobel
lust, its collegiality masking brutal competition and its glass ceiling for women.