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The system of subjectivity: Societal systems and literary paradigms

Abstract

Patterns aid in deepening humanity's understanding of the world and what is cultivated within it. Patterns emerge in interactive disciplines such as language, literature, science, visual arts, and even mathematics. The existence of patterns assists the human need to understand a complicated world. Beyond simply seeing patterns as they are presented, I am interested in exploring how these patterns manifest into paradigmatic structures that affect the way in which society. Particularly, I am interested in the socialized perceptions of literature, and the role that systems plays in their interaction and development.

This thesis project: 1) introduces the fundamentals of systems theory; 2) explores systems theory as it pertains directly to literary studies; 3) specifies properties of systems theory within literary parameters; 3) and identify how literature operates as an active network of systemic information. This project, in essence, takes sociological aspects of systems theory and demonstrates how those aspects apply to literature as both an art form and as a conduit of active cultural interaction. I hypothesize that literary patterns emerge through such variables as interaction, censorship, circulation, or preservation. A few tertiary influences of literary paradigms are also explored, including the industrialization of publication, civil rights advocacy, and public accessibility to literature.

The fundamental objective is to uncover how societal influences impede or cater to literary formulae by evaluating observations made by systems theorists and applying their methodologies to a literary discussion. My findings show that incongruities within systems of literature are not anomalies disproving the possibility of universalism; rather, they are incongruities that represent fledglings of newly discovered systems which may someday manifest into global schemas after extensive interaction has induced collective familiarity.

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**THE SYSTEM OF SUBJECTIVITY:
SOCIETAL SYSTEMS AND LITERARY PARADIGMS**

By

Alyssa Rittinger

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The System of Subjectivity:
Societal Systems and Literary Paradigms
By Alyssa Rittinger

ABSTRACT

Patterns aid in deepening humanity's understanding of the world and what is cultivated within it. Patterns emerge in interactive disciplines such as language, literature, science, visual arts, and even mathematics. The existence of patterns assists the human need to understand a complicated world. Beyond simply seeing patterns as they are presented, I am interested in exploring *how* these patterns manifest into paradigmatic structures that affect the way in which society. Particularly, I am interested in the socialized perceptions of literature, and the role that systems plays in their interaction and development.

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PART I: DEFINING SYSTEMS THEORY

Systems theory was first introduced by a biologist named Ludwig von Bertalanffy. He sought to universalize the key components of science by recognizing the integral relationship of systems and their environments. Bertalanffy discriminates the abstraction of a system from the observable order of a system in action, stating that the latter is “a fact ... encountered whenever we look at a living organism, a social group, or even an atom” (408). He elaborates that “general systems theory is, as emphasized, a model of certain general aspects of reality. It is also a way of seeing things which were previously overlooked or bypassed, and in this sense [operates as] a methodological maxim” (424). In other words, the very crux of systems theory is to locate new or previously unobserved paradigms that might effectively reconfigure or alter preceding knowledge on a given subject. Bertalanffy cites numerous interdisciplinary fields that all

utilize maxims of systems theory, including mathematical systems, systems technology, and systems philosophy.¹ In simpler terms, Hendrik Van Gorp says that “the central topic or problem of systems theories has to do with the demarcation between system and environment” (4). German writer and scholar Dietrich Schwanitz also examines the experiment of demarcation, a system that “must not be ... a structure that appropriates free-floating elements from the outside” but rather, he explains, “the system and its elements come into being simultaneously via the reproduction of the system's internal differentiations. There is no system without difference” (137). Structures are empirically sound, a basis to help conceptualize systems and system boundaries, as they “[constitute] a reference system, of expectations,” which, according to Schwanitz, “confronts the events with the alternative of conformity or deviation” (145). While structures are arbitrary, they are designed to operate as a guide for empirical and hermeneutic research. Systems and system stratagems are inherently compatible with all disciplines, showing the distinct commonalities that exist between the two forms of study.

Systems are largely accepted to have three central components: hierarchal ordering, interdependence, and permeability (Miller 61). Within these components, there are additional properties that enact a system, such as grouping a collective of people (or resources), having the parts within a collective interact with each other, establishing social hierarchy, imparting central objectives, and optimizing productivity to achieve the objectives decided by respective social systems. All these facets interconnect with each other. To elaborate, complex groupings can be broken down into interactive sub-systems.

¹ Literary and social systems are, generally speaking, categorized within the schema of philosophical research.

These subsystems usually form their own hierarchies. A system must have an objective in order to operate, and acting on the efficiency of a system's objective requires capability—or optimization. These factors apply extensively in a systems approach to societal communication. Note that systems rely on these properties to ensure their existence. If at any point a system has been compromised with a deficiency in any of the system's properties, then conflict and uncertainty obstructs progression, which is why distinguishing clear parameters within systems is paramount for identifying its patterns. Demarcation is an efficient way to identify observable traces of a system's existence.

To assess the plausibility of demarcation as a scientific approach to hermeneutic study, I've included Achim Barsch's proposed hierarchy of interaction, Siegfried J Schmidt's radical constructivism, Matthias Prangel's domino-structure, and Niklas Luhmann's analysis of system differentiation. Each traces important discriminations between societal structures, while also discussing the apparent interactions that occur between them.

Barsch's Hierarchy of Interaction: Domains, Systems, and Subsystems

Barsch provides a template that helps orient a systemic analysis of navigating social systems. Key terms that he addresses are social *domains*, social *systems*, and social *subsystems*. The model operates as a taxonomy of social interaction whereby each term gets progressively more specific as the framework grows more complex and idiosyncratic. Consider the taxonomy in three dimensional terms, such that the smaller components are *contained* by the larger groupings that help define them. (Social domains

are containers for social systems, and those social systems contain respective subsystems.)

For the lack of a better analogy, imagine an assortment of Russian nesting dolls. Social domains would be the largest, most exterior doll in this metaphor. They are “defined on a basis of comparable constructs of reality by individuals, i.e., on partial parallelizations [sic] of their cognitive subsystems” (Barsch 355). Society is inevitably structured by networks of systems. These social domains are multitudinous groups that often provide their own labels and classifications. We have, for instance, systems of economy, policy, education, and theology just to name a few. According to Peter Hejl, cited by Barsch, these societal clusters comprise of “a group of individuals who, first, through social interactions, have generated a common set of reality constructs together with a set of actions and types of behavior deemed adequate to handle the so defined realities; and who, second, interact with respect to these realities by means of socially defined actions and types of behavior” (q’td. in Hejl, Barsch 355).² These social domains are what diversify socialized systems into different manifestations of (dis/similar) structures. Say, for instance, you have both a green nesting doll and a red nesting doll. Both are essentially the same in size and shape—that is to say, as social *domains*—yet the color of one (green) may constitute as a distinct economical social system from the other (red), which may instead constitute a religious social system. In the same way as the nesting dolls, social domains and systems are established collectively to remain independent from each other yet also contain differences within their collectivity to allow

² This quote reinforces the concept of ‘abstract reality,’ whereby reality is formulated based on socially prescribed meanings. Further reading can be found in Peter M Hejl’s 2011 article “The Individual in Radical Constructivism: Some Critical Remarks from an Evolutionary Perspective” (227-234).

differentiation between their various particularities. The depicted boundaries between systems are arbitrary, but their existence permits distinctive and separate interactions to propitiate any social distress or disorder, which occurs when there is a lack of clarity to define a social system. The irony is that these systems develop organically; the process is not automatous, but *autopoietic*. The organic process of system development can problematize observational research; however, systems consistently manifest as culminations of discrete, conditional particles that constitute the illusion of a 'bigger picture' to a supposed global continuity.

While domains and systems are typically treated as equal but distinct, subsystems, are tiered, multifaceted, and hierarchal. However small the component, even more social clusters may be found *within* its boundary. In other words, one bigger nesting doll may house a smaller doll, which then houses a cluster of smaller nesting dolls within a single confine. The key relationship between the clustered dolls is that they are all housed within the parameters dictated by the bigger doll. The smaller dolls operate accordingly as subsystems. Barsch affirms that "the system is functioning because the members of the group stick to the 'rules of the game,' which are produced within the system itself" (358). As an example, marketing biases directly influence why publishing houses promote certain esthetics but deny others. An author wouldn't submit biographical nonfiction to a sci-fi/fantasy market. In fact, as Barsch points out, "one of the intended functions of literary criticism is to help authors find their 'right' way of writing" (359). Multiple interactions of subsystems can take place *within* a larger system. Subsystems, for instance, can comprise of one-on-one literary relationships (e.g.: author to author,

author to publisher, or author to editor). Subsystems can also operate on a small-group basis, such as through reading societies, or literary workshops. The largest tier of subsystem interaction (in a literary context) is what Barsch defines as “*determinate literary subsystems*” that involve “all available ‘action roles’ (production, mediation, reception and post-processing), [refer] to a specific concept ...which must be identical or at least compatible for all literary actions and interactions involved” (359-60). The most important observation that can be made from analyzing subsystems—and their larger counterparts—is that no one group is better or worse than the other. Numbers don’t necessarily indicate popularity because *all* factors interact, and can even have tertiary or indirect influences on each other, depending on what ‘input’ to which the collective decides to adhere. Complicating this phenomenon is the fact that these groups often leave room for interpretation in data, and interpretation, for members within a system, which can risk conflating interpretation into ideological forms. While systems *interact* with interpretative factors such as history or inference, systems still remain discrete unto themselves.

Schmidt’s Radical Constructivism

The best way to compartmentalize boundaries that always seem in a perpetual state of fluctuation is to demarcate them and “[contrast] their identities against all other communication systems” (25)—or, put more simply, to figure out what the boundaries are, one must first determine they are *not*. A quintessential example of this process can be found in the empirical exercise explored by Siegfried J. Schmidt, one of the lead pioneers

in empirical literature studies. His method is to deconstruct the concept of reality through the lens of multiplicity. His findings reveal that humanity is far too dependent on the assumption that reality is an unequivocal certainty, meaning that reality has no basis for comparison or room for debate on its legitimacy. To counter this form of ideology, Schmidt introduced the theory of “radical constructivism,” which helped to validate the observational exploration of subjectivity. Radical constructivism explores the possibility that there is no singular reality, but rather, a “*construction of realities*,” which “takes place in individual cognitive systems according to sociocultural orientations which regulate, reproduce, and evaluate communication and interaction” (qtd. in Ibsch 116). Schmidt elaborates that this construction of realities is “determined by the conditions of the environment, by acting conditions, and by sociocultural limits and capacities of sense production” (129). In other words, reality is not objective but an “objective phenomenon” that is affected by external stimuli (Ibsch 116). In this respect, systems theory takes on a vaguely new-historicist perspective by conceptualizing receptions of text or experience as something in constant fluctuation, as interactors are never holistically uniform in the perception of events, manuscripts, or experiences.³

In “Tautology and Paradox in the Self-Descriptions of Modern Society,” Luhmann rejects Schmidt’s theory of radical constructivism, and posits instead that “organizations, societies, and interaction systems are all emergent, i.e., irreducible forms of social systems” (21). In the introduction to Luhmann’s essay, Stephan Fuchs clarifies: “Social systems draw their boundaries so as to exclude the parts of individuality they attribute to

³ Literary systems apply the same constructs introduced by Schmidt and Luhmann. Part II of this paper will examine these phenomena in greater detail within the constraints of literature.

their environment . . . Understanding communicative suggestions does not imply that one may be 'accepting' of the information that is posited" (21). If anything, according to Fuchs, Luhmann argues that "personal systems are never fully transparent for each other" (22). Luhmann warns that implementing hermeneutic approaches "deprives the concept of value of its practical significance. It symbolizes the autopoiesis of communication—but nothing more" (33). He adds that the hermeneutic approach "does not permit inferring correct behavior since this would require a resolution of value conflicts that always remains contingent and cannot itself be safely grounded in an 'inviolable level' of values" (33). Quantifying these subjective values can be done when we try to articulate the ambiguities of significance and to find core commonalities that can operate as an interactive system. The act of using one discipline to demonstrate the other is encapsulated in the form of paradox, which is a function that, according to Luhmann, *thrives* in systems theory and is "distinguished, . . . only by another operation" (46). He defines paradox as something that

crosses the boundary between the unmarked and the marked space, a boundary that does not exist before and comes into being (if being is the right word) only by crossing it. Or to say it in Derrida's style, the condition of its possibility is its impossibility (46)

Library scholars Robert Labaree and Ross Scimeca maintain that observable reality is inherently different from constructed reality. They define the "objective assessment of reality [as] derived from the natural sciences; a subjective, psychosociological realism based on organic behavior and its consequences; and a

logical, philosophical definition of reality based on a known and verifiable reality and lesser known expressions about that reality” (Labaree and Scimeca 55). They further define *ultimate reality* as a sort of meta-reality, whereby an objective worldview exists, but only in a state devoid of any beliefs or perceptions that may conceptualize independent variations. They explain that “in this framework, ultimate reality is implied to encompass all of human experience; philosophical problems arise when attempting to decipher the differences among what may actually exist, what exists subjectively, and what gives the appearance of existing” (57). The conventional approach to defining realism is profoundly limited, as it can only offer selections of represented reality, as opposed to a fundamental reality that houses all conceptions of what reality might be. This hypothesis renders the binary opposition between empiricism and hermeneutics obsolete, and offers a new perspective on the abstractions of reality and the pragmatics of experimentalism as coexisting on a “continuum” that explores the nuances between “abstraction” and “representation” (Evenson 326). One can even conclude that pragmatic observation directly reflects abstract interpretation.

Matthias Prangel's Domino-Structure

The question remains, however, as to how to observe material that is not only intangible, but also overwhelmingly susceptible to misinterpretation. Prangel employs Schmidt's radical constructivism in the semantics of 'interpretation' in the same way radical constructivism is utilized for Schmidt's basis of 'reality.' Prangel explains that “this plea for interpretation is not equivalent to a plea for the old hermeneutic version of

interpretation” (154). Rather, it’s an attempt to reconstruct a social domain’s colloquialized meaning of interpretation. The result of this act of reconstruction—once referred to as “original meaning”—is instead the “*unique meaning*” texts (155). Unlike “original,” which refers to a starting point, “unique” does not connote any supposed authenticity of ‘canonical’ correctness or an inaugural marker for trends of historical chronology. With interpretation thus defined, variants can now appear as discrete unto themselves rather than signaling as an interpretation of a holistic scale. Text and context (and contexts *of* those contexts, etc.) are all varied, but remain united by the influence of interaction. Prangel references Hans Robert Jauß to explain the “continuous change of the horizon of historical experience,” in which “every particular act of reception can only grasp a partial meaning of the text” (155) Prangel elaborates that “all particular meanings throughout the effective history of a text fuse into one homogeneous *tradition of meaning*. In a systems-theoretical approach this . . . is replaced by the principle of connected selections” (155).

Communicative operations do not imply interpersonal transfusion, which often renders material findings irreconcilable for pragmatic study. Instead, Prangel proposes a “*domino-structure*,” whereby all affiliated contexts of communication and affective influence may create the formula of a “third dimension” (156). There are four important factors to consider pertaining to the domino-structure analogy:

- 1) it asserts that text-communications are not “isolated entities,” but rather, interactive networks;

- 2) it views text-communication as historically unique, separate from the contexts that occur concurrently;
- 3) it uses text-communication as a reference point for further communication;
- 4) it considers connections not as homogeneous, but as heterogeneous, as *self-referential* to the other dominoes arranged within the metaphoric sphere of influence.

The domino analogy provides a concrete illustration of how individual pieces can directly affect each other—colliding with each other, and creating a larger ripple effect—without ever being tethered together inseparably. Interactors may choose how to arrange these proverbial dominoes, and when/where they ‘tumble’ within their intellectual development. This model sustains the validity of empirical study, as the ‘inconsistencies’ of thought are instead looked on as independent factors of a larger phenomenon. For instance, nations require smaller-scale parameters to engage ‘participatory’ communication, just like individual dominoes can become a conglomeration of a larger design (45). In “Paradoxy of Observing Systems,” Luhmann explains that social structures are a mosaic of communication and collective understanding. Configuration does not entail parts equaling the whole; instead, the parts equal other parts that generate a *semblance* of a whole. Through the interaction of analogous parts, structure then becomes apparent.

Luhmann's System Differentiation

Niklas Luhmann warns that imposing a larger design onto a holistic perspective may run the risk of being overgeneralization if no care is taken in identifying how the differentiations affect the composite of systems. He says “the relevance of environments cannot be reduced either to the relevance of one encompassing supersystem or to the relevance of a set of other systems in the environment. Only if the concept of environment itself does not denote a (larger) system or set of systems is it meaningful to say that the concept of system presupposes the concept of environment and vice versa” (31). Luhmann elaborates:

We can conceive of system differentiation as the reduplication of the difference between system and environment within systems. Differentiation, then, is the reflexive form of system building. It repeats the same mechanism, using it for amplifying its own results (31).

In other words, Luhmann believes systems to be self-sustaining and self-creating in an active and reduplicative process. Luhmann has a propensity for attributing boundaries to systems as a way to differentiate the emergent patterns, and in doing so, he postulates a new framework to understand system demarcation. His argument is that systems are set up in three different ways: *segmentation* (equal subsystems), *stratification* (hierarchical/unequal), and *functional differentiation* (unequal subsystems, but with their corresponding environments are treated as equals). These terms all correlate effectively with Barsch’s social domains, systems and subsystems. However, whereas Barsch’s model shows how systems are kept separate, Luhmann’s model explains how their boundaries act as vehicles of cross-communication between systems. Functional

differentiation amplifies this idea, in that it represents two different social roles that fulfill complementary *expectations* around a specific function. It is Environment-centered in a sociological sense (35-36). Fuchs explains that functional differentiation “requires generalization of cultural symbolisms and of societal self-descriptions” (25). At a cultural capacity, Luhmann says that “time conceptions of modern society,” which “changed drastically during the second half of the eighteenth century,” likely in “corellat[ion] with increasing functional differentiation” (37). In the case of literature, writing functions as a representation of social conceptions—that is to say, writing operates as a temporal marker for societal impositions of interactive change.

Synthesis of Social Systems Theory

Drawing from the findings of Barsch, Prangel, Schmidt, and Luhmann, I can conclude with assurance that literature is a socialized environment that stimulates systemic processes, thus providing a basis for scientific analysis of a hermeneutic process. Structures are conceptualized as fixed manifestations between socialized spaces, and those structures can then index commonalities and differences that develop in an ever-changing world. Scholars Dirk de Geest and Hendrik van Gorp state that

Discrepancies or difficulties in generic classifications are no longer simply ignored or neglected; on the contrary: these problematic cases are treated as crucial factors in determining the specific profile and the particular functions literature (or certain segments of literature) tries to obtain/maintain in a culture and in a society (35).

As seen in the following section, divergences invite possibilities for future systemic comparison, providing sufficient groundwork to justify an empirical analysis of literary developments over time.

PART II: EMPLOYING SYSTEMS THEORY TO LITERATURE

Systems theory for literature is still an up-and-coming theoretical approach pioneered by such scholars as Norbert Groeben, Siegfried J. Schmidt, and Niklas Luhmann. In the 1980s, systems theory had begun to gain traction within literary scholarship. Groeben had paved the way for making systems theory applicable to subjective matter such as literature and sociology. According to Elrud Ibsch, “Groeben [tried] to transform hermeneutic problems into empirical ones, to introduce the methods of social sciences into literary studies, and to convince scholars to avoid the confounding of reader and scholar” (115). Groeben worked to bridge the gap between sociology and literature, postulating that subjective material can also be disseminated into something scientific. From there, both Schmidt and Luhmann explored methods of orienting systems theory. Ibsch explains that Schmidt’s method aims for “a complete reorientation of scholarly activities [that] pays special attention to the epistemological presuppositions and the theoretical framework” of literary study (115). While Schmidt sees the sociological systems of literature as something as an assortment of discrete parts, Luhmann sees systems as self-producing and self-sustaining, and searches for systemic boundaries with which to scaffold his argument in the form of comprehensive labels and frameworks. And while Schmidt’s study explores the idea of *multiplicity* in the

interactions of systems and subsystems, Luhmann focuses more on the differentiations of their various autopoietic parts. Any system that uses *meaning* as a medium—which Luhmann defines as a simultaneous presentation of actuality and possibility—enacts autopoiesis by “reactualizing well-tried forms” that are bound by time (“Paradox” 43). Luhmann explains that reactualization occurs when a system “directs its operations from form to form, thereby reproducing the medium. The distinction medium/form serves as a frame without outside, as an internal frame that includes, via re-entry, its own outside” (43). Variants can be newly constructed within the same confines in the same way new melodies can be created through a finite music scale. In the same way, systems are also self-referential and self-sustaining. The key commonality between Luhmann and Schmidt’s outlooks isn’t belief in different systems as independent of each other; rather, their shared pursuit is to identify the varying frameworks social systems and how those systems are imparted in literature.

Matthias Prangel states that systems theory affects the “emancipation of reader and reception from their dependence on their reference-texts. Not that the existence of history as a process is denied, but the existence of history as a continuous process” (156). He notes a possible counterargument, wherein systems theory might “eliminate the reader and the whole process of reception by fixing an unchangeable, *ontological* meaning of texts” (155). In response, Prangel offers clarification on the observational study of readers and systems:

No one denies that readers exist, that these readers usually read texts in a situation different from the one in which they were produced, that these readers take active part in the process of reception, and, therefore, that something like the transfer of culture and tradition exists. So it

cannot be our aim to amputate all these things from the big body of literary communication. What we *are* doing, however, is *redefining* these concepts in order to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding of communication. (155, emphasis original)

The primary objective for employing systems theory to literature is to transmute hermeneutic topics into empirical processes in order to better validate the inherent structures that are often negotiated within discourses of subjectivity. As Prangel explains, “the aim of such study is to solve concrete problems concerning readers’ behavior and the conditions of their constructions of meaning” (153). Much like any other scientific study, constraints and confounding factors must be taken into account when formulating methodologies to pursue conclusions that can be drawn from assorted data. In the case of literature, the constraints would be, broadly speaking, the observation of demarcations exercised in theoretical applications. Extracting structure from literature provides a method to help scaffold presented arguments of literary theory without shrouding evidence through the exclusive use of hermeneutics or confirmation bias. Applying systems theory to literature reveals the exploration of modalities by way of *observation* rather than *inference*. Variances and incongruities in socially-motivated literary paradigms aren’t confounding factors; rather, they are additional data in need of further analysis. Difference doesn’t necessarily reflect inconclusiveness. As discussed earlier, methodical studies are just as susceptible to ambiguity as hermeneutic studies are, and systems theory promotes the ongoing observation of socio-structural modalities.

While delineating subjective matter is both difficult and controversial, it is by no means unfeasible. One may argue that the search for observational patterns, even in

unlikely places, is deeply rooted in human nature. Prangel writes that “the search for a so-called objective meaning is one of the most fundamental needs of human beings” and that even objectivity is “temporally limited” within its own regime (154). Luhmann likewise points out that “when observers (we, at the moment) continue to look for an ultimate reality, a concluding formula, a final identity, they will find the paradox. Such a paradox is not simply a logical contradiction (A is non-A) but a foundational statement: The world is observable because it is unobservable” (46). Edmund Nierlich, hearkening to Francis Bacon’s “discovery of latent process,” notes that empirical findings aren’t often empirical to start. Quite often, the process begins by investigating a series of “quasi-actions,” the conglomeration of which permits observers to discern the data that stems from the information (Nierlich 360). The Empirical Theory of Literature (ETL)⁴ similarly aims to look beyond sociological congruencies and ascertain the constructs that stem from those interactions within schemas of literature and literary development.

A succinct definition of literature is difficult to pin down. Laurent Dubreuil of Cornell University states that it is “impossible to define literature,” remarking that “nobody knows what literature is, except that it is made with language” (43, 48). In a similar vein, Kenneth Rothwell notes that “the awkwardness of expressing an opinion on the meaning of structure in literature rests on the fact that critics can barely agree on the meaning of the term ‘literature’” (602). However, as with Schmidt’s approach to radical constructivism, the way to extract an objective answer from subjective matter is to invert the definition from the subjective *it is*, to conclude what it is *not*. To the masses, an

⁴ For the sake of relevance, all systems that are discussed within the remainder of this section will be contextualized directly to the ETL. In other words, when sociological terms are brought up, they will be constituents of a *literary* framework.

oblique, though intuitive, understanding of literature appears to exist within certain constraints. Else they wouldn't christen the concept in the first place. The label can often be misappropriated when seemingly infinite layers of culture and serve to obscure what qualifies as "literature." Sonia Zyngier and Tania M.G. Shepherd conducted an empirical corpus study asking first-year college students how they would define literature. Using computerized assistance, the multitude of quasi-essay responses were filtered to identify, count, and sort into clusters of lexical similarities. They consolidated the responses into four generalized categories: appreciation, judgment, affect, and unclassified, with appreciation receiving the highest quantity of synonymous input. This data provides an empirical approach to navigate "the social significance of literature as an object" (Zyngier and Shepherd). In this respect, the process of delineation is made easier by discerning literature's fundamental definition through the lens of Schmidt's model of radical constructivism. Dubreuil and Rothwell both explore the demarcation of literature as a means to try defining it. Debreuil asserts that "Literature is not a highway code, not even a sophisticated one. Reading goes through text without stopping there; it then comes back to it; and goes again" (50). Based on these demarcations, Dubreuil says that literature is something that therefore "evokes arts, techniques, and life; it gives them a shape or a pattern; it sometimes renews their disposition or length" (48). Similarly, Kenneth Rothwell explains that literature is "not a duality" but instead on a "continuum" (604). Rothwell's explanation is valid, as readers can isolate an excerpt, hold it up as its own entity and still return to analyze the full manuscript. None of the source material is lost; the schema just becomes reevaluated. By that same token, literature must be

examined as a “complex interconnected web of strata” that encourages extrapolation, sifting through, and identifying different contexts—such as history, socioeconomic conditions, ideology, etc. Literature has to be “mined within the text, layer after layer,” in such a way that the text reflects the context, or, to clarify, that the “context emanates from the text, and not the other way around” (Burwick 34). This agrees with Barsch’s hierarchal structure of socialized systems, in that outcomes of contexts are drawn from what the text, as a larger ‘apparatus,’ provides. In this model, a literary text displays layers of social domains which then uncover nuances of contextual subsystems.

Context becomes another factor necessary to define in order to better understand how literature and socialization go hand in hand. Context is a term that experts have closely tied with nuance of meaning. Recall Prangel’s assessment on *unique meaning*, which depicts reader context as discrete unto itself, united only by the influence of interaction within its respective text. The results of interaction vary, but remain tethered to sociological schemas. In this way, interpretation becomes a reconstruction—a mosaic of historical and sociological markers rather than a haze of hermeneutic variance. Meanings that are construed from texts are largely dependent on what the contexts are for both the readers and the texts, whether it be from the literature extending outward to the reader or the reader projecting inward to the text. Schwantiz explains that “systems of consciousness are black boxes, and as such they are unfathomable to one another” (152). Systems of consciousness suggests discrete context, as Schwantiz continues by saying: “because of this, the systems are unable to predict one another’s behavior.” Schwantiz adds that “anything actual is meaningful only within a context of other possibilities. This

dependence on other possibilities renders all actuality unstable and replaces it by a contiguous possibility” (149). Based on Schwantiz’s suppositions, context draws upon a contained sphere of influence. A broad definition of context implies a bigger picture that is free of constraint; however, when a particular context is extracted for study, the text is what both informs and contains the context. Numerous contexts can imbue from a single text, but a single context has its own systemic barriers. From a cognitive perspective, Eugene Timpe, in “Memory and Literary Structures,” states that “reader comprehension depends on the ability to fill in the framework with the necessary information. The reader is, in effect, attempting to match the events of the narrative to the structure of the work, which in turn corresponds to a prototypal structure” (305). To Timpe, “context is important because it determines the set of patterns to be synthesized” by long-term memory, which recognizes and synthesizes patterns based on rules already retained by properties of associative memory (304).

By that same token, *meaning* may also exist as a system of consciousness. As previously established, no one interpretation is identical to another. This phenomenon has been mapped and remapped throughout time, and manifests in the form of critical theory as grounds for interpreting the multiplicity of meaning. According to Dubreuil, “the aim [of literature as theory] is to follow literature's traces, and to find some new significations for the lacks that scholarship traditionally denies, represses, or stigmatize” (67). Frances Ferguson, in her essay “Ralph Rader on the Literary History of the Novel,” cites Ralph Rader, who used criticism to identify between works of writing deemed *similar* or *dissimilar*; Rader, in essence, “[mapped] the field of literature” to highlight

systemic properties of writing as well as socio-cultural responses, believing that there are ‘directly specifiable local fact[s] of literary response’” (qtd. in Ferguson 92). This localization harkens again to Barsch’s hierarchy of structure in that the containments inform the response. Rader also concludes that literature can be systematically distinguished from “nonliterature.” Ferguson explains that making these distinctions occurs in the same way “that we are able to tell the difference between a joke, even a bad joke, which we count as literature” (98). In other words, conventions of literature become identifiable by the intuitions that gravitate upon a collective. The “family resemblances” that Rader identifies are arranged as what he refers to as “literary problems” that can be resolved “in the context of the internal, more or less contentious evolution of genres” (93). His stance captures the essence of Prangel’s socio-systemic domino-structure, in that all individual factors react and change as a result of interaction. The interaction between culture and literature causes a sort of social refraction, whereby “seemingly spontaneous reactions are shaped by cultural pressures” (Felski 17). Rader opines that “our knowledge of [social and economic] history needs to be bracketed or suspended ... so that we may use literature as a test of the direct statements from historical records” (qtd. in Ferguson 96). This, indeed, reaffirms the need for distinction between aspects of systems. Literature is the most detailed and expansive collection of data that we have reflecting the systemic properties of human nature. Systems theory as we now know it addresses multiplicity, thereby easing the task of identifying key systems that directly affect perceptions of literary paradigms. Barsch says that “[a] literary system, like other social systems, is not a trivial input-output system like machines. Therefore, the

consequences of controlling interventions from outside can hardly be predicted” (356).

It is for this reason that literary systems are put on a lower tier in this stratified model and renamed as literary *subsystems*. In Rothwell’s words, by “analyzing the structural elements of a text, we isolate an image cluster, or an episode, or a character, or a correlating theme in relationship to the universe surrounding it ... we examine the function of the path described by the image cluster or structure through the narrative” (604). Indeed, Rothwell explains that through structure in narrative fiction, as comprised by images, characters and “rhythmical intervals” such as chapters or episodes, serves to define its very framework. For example, he elaborates:

In the very act of describing the structure of a play like *Hamlet* ... using such criteria the essential nature of the text becomes lost, as though beyond paraphrase ... narrative or drama exists in both a spatial and a temporal sense: and in addition to these two qualities is the mysterious force called “tension” which brings the static elements of narrative into a viable relationship. Apparently then a narrative operates not only on laws of structure but also on laws of motion (603-604).

This dynamism can problematize the hypothesis of emergent patterns, as the description of “static elements” alludes to passivity, in which patterns serve as a fixed scaffold for narrative techniques. However, Rothwell points out that the ‘tension’ between spatial and temporal narratives is what stimulates patterns into a “viable relationship” (604). The dynamism of literary interaction is what compels variation in storytelling.

Barsch’s hierarchy of systems is reflected in Rothwell’s categorization of literature’s structural elements. Rothwell defines the literary context as “*layers of*

ascending complexity,” whereby the simpler caste falls into the “molecular” patterns of words and sentences, and becomes more complex as it grows from articulation, to comprehension, to immersion. Rothwell classifies these layers as “realms” that stratify each other. They begin with the “linguist’s realm of expression,” shift to “the philologist’s realm of topoi” and then the “psychologist’s realm of archetype,” and plateau at the “humanist’s realm of content and value” (605). The patterns in Rothwell’s highest caste of complexity befit the theory of “Ultimate Reality” posited by Labaree and Scimeca, which, to reiterate, “encompass[es] all of human experience,” problematizing the attempt to “decipher the differences among what may actually exist, what exists subjectively, and what gives the appearance of existing” (Labaree 57). The humanist tier jumps into a sphere of meta-literary discussion, which deviates from observational properties of literary systems. For the purpose of this essay, further discussion will occur below Rothwell’s superlative tier, and focus on the *observable* distinctions that can be found in literary structures. Frances Ferguson observes that prose, in the incarnation of the novel, specifically “appears as a precipitate of a larger socio-economic transformation” (91).

Literature is abundant with categories and subcategories. So how then, do we discern its classifications? Doing so is arbitrary at best. Indeed, often a single story can be categorized as belonging in multiple (and intersectional) areas. A book, for instance, can simultaneously be young-adult fiction, a graphic novel, historical fiction, *and* a romance all rolled into one apparatus. As Brian Evenson says, “categories for writers—be they defined generically, modally, stylistically, or by something else entirely—are useful

primarily for critics and readers, as a means of figuring ways into the work. It should be understood that these categories are always provisional and that ultimately they limit both the writer and the work” (Evenson 323). Even genre assignments are continually clouded with subjectivity. Labaree observes that “the total collection of books housed in an academic or public library can be understood as various volumes within sets, each representing different coherent theories of truth. When we investigate each set, a different worldview may be revealed to us” (59).

Rothwell’s layers of ascending complexity serve as an adequate blueprint for categorizing of textual/social interactions. However, the model for ascending complexity hardly explains how social systems integrate, propagate, or even reconfigure the categories prescribed, which brings us to Hendrik van Gorp and Dirk de Geest’s exploration on the *prototypal model of systemic interaction*. They state that “it is basically possible to conceive of genres as relatively stable and transparent concepts. “...the close association of the concept of 'genre' with notions like 'repetition,' 'identity' or 'continuity' makes it possible to treat genres as essentially ahistorical and decontextualised, perhaps even universal data” (de Geest and van Gorp 36). Van Gorp holds to the belief that a poly-systematic approach may be a more advantageous way to study literature and culture than “the traditional aesthetic and hermeneutic approach,” *Introducing a prototypal theory for systemic genre studies* (2). De Geest and van Gorp aim to define what the former operation is when defining genre classification. They explore the variation between traditional and prototypal perspectives in order to isolate systemic properties of literature.

Traditional semantic theory attends to “the way in which an item's membership in a category is accounted for...conceiv[ing] of this relation predominantly in a binary and discrete way, in terms of an unambiguous {0,1} choice between either 'is a member of (element 1)' or 'is no member of (element 0)’” (40). Since binary oppositions hardly encompass the plethora of variants that fall outside the parameters of such an analysis, de Geest and van Gorp propose a new theory called ‘prototypal theory,’ which “[takes] into account the basic empirical evidence that not all instances of a particular category are functionally similar or equally representative of their category as a whole” (40). They hypothesize that “some variants of red are somehow 'redder' than others, and some breeds of dog are generally considered to be more representative or typical of the overall concept of 'dog' than others” (40). This, again, refers to Barsch’s social domains, where variants can be dissimilar without being fundamentally separate. De Geest and van Gorp observe:

The 'best' texts are almost by definition exceptional cases which clearly are, at least in some aspects, atypical. So, from a qualitative point of view, the priority of the individual text in its absolute originality has been stressed time and again. As a result, there is a paradoxical relationship between the genre as a nonnative matrix (a set of rules and prescriptions) on the one hand and the individual text as a realisation [*sic*] and often even nothing less than a transcendence of these conventions on the other hand (43).

A good example of prototypal theory applied to literature is the structural distinction between Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets, which despite their differences, are universally recognized as standard forms of sonnets that successfully exert deep influence on generations that follow. The evolution of literary structure and style proves that classification is not and can never be static or stable. Van Gorp and de Geest point out

that it is “commonly assumed that the best authors are those who manage to twist or elude generic constraints and restrictions in a creative manner without however entirely ignoring them” (43).

Take, for instance, Percy Shelley, who is renowned for his creative use of poetic structure. Many of his poems are classified as sonnets, but his work deliberately upends the ‘rules’ of a standard sonnet structure. While Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets both adhere to a 14-line length, have a meter of iambic pentameter, and contain a *volta* (indicating a “turn” in the sonnet’s message), their key structural difference is found in the execution of their respective rhyme schemes. Shakespeare followed the alternating pattern of three quatrains concluded by a couplet {ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG}, while Petrarch’s rhyme scheme uses an {ABBA, ABBA} pattern to begin, yet offers flexibility for the second octave. Shelley was familiar with these models, but his own patterns warped their standards so fundamentally that sometimes there was dispute on what the rhyme schemes were supposed to be. Take, for instance, “Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte”:

*I hated thee, fallen tyrant! I did groan
To think that a most unambitious slave,
Like thou, shouldst dance and revel on the grave
Of Liberty. Thou mightst have built thy throne
Where it had stood even now: thou didst prefer (line 5)
A frail and bloody pomp which Time has swept
In fragments towards Oblivion. Massacre,
For this I prayed, would on thy sleep have crept,
Treason and Slavery, Rapine, Fear, and Lust,
And stifled thee, their minister: I know (line 10)
Too late, since thou and France are in the dust,
That Virtue owns a more eternal foe
Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, legal Crime,*

And bloody Faith the foulest birth of Time.

The rhyme scheme appears to be a hybridization of the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnet, as indicated by the rhyme scheme {ABBA, CDCD, EFEF, GG}. However, due to Shelley's use of enjambment, the scheme doesn't parse into simple quatrains, and the *volta* has been moved to line 10 rather than the conclusion. The poem creates an entirely new subset of sonnet by enmeshing the Shakespearean with the Petrarchan sonnet.

Romantic poets such as Shelley inspired a creative movement away from the master of prescripts that had for so long outweighed literary ingenuity. Shelley exerts authorial daring by radicalizing the text, demonstrating his innovation of poetry and securing his prestige as a writer. Shelley's poem retains the fundamental components of a sonnet, yet deviates in certain respects to singularize his own work. Shelley's work is now included within the 'canon' of literature, even though much of his work deviates from well-established systems of writing that preceded it.

Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet styles are perfect examples of Luhmann's *functional differentiation*, as they operate as unequal subsystems which share an environment that compels them to fill complementary expectations. Shelley's deviation from what society systemically marked as "traditional" then creates a new space—a new subsystem that does not fit squarely within the brackets of one subsystem or another. It rests as an observable outlier until more data can be collected to designate (or create) a new identifier. In this way, Schmidt's theory of multiplicity can then agree with the constraints of Luhmann's model of differentiation.

What we can conclude from this methodology is 1) the prototypical view does not entirely discard the traditional model, but rather, incorporates a binary model in certain cases where it could be helpful. 2) the matrix of features taught in school or found in manuals of literary technique formulates a generic 'prototype' with proven didactic and cognitive usefulness, although in some cases a specimen of that prototype may not be entirely correct. 3) the proposed flexible concept of literary genre opens new perspectives for the study of literary systems.

Psychologist Eugene Timpe approaches literary systems through the lens of a cognitive framework, specifically of Long Term Memory (LTM), which instills “a set of rules for *synthesizing* a prototypal model which will be compared to the stimulus or query item” (304). Timpe talks of how rhetorical devices enable words to become intuitively ‘enhanced’ based on semantic, syntactic, or emphatic placement. His evidence suggests that the arrangement of words affects memory retention. Human Associative Memory (HAM), identified in 1973 by Anderson and Bower, is what Timpe refers to as template theory, by which he means memory input breaks down into components that then branch into networks of thought. Timpe describes LTM as “a network of clusters of information which are becoming irretrievable at varying rates but to more or less constant limits,” to which he conditions that “the rate of decay is less important than the notion of clustered associations” (296). He says that recall aids the reinforcement of LTM through such tools as rhythm, mnemonic interference, etc. Short term memory (STM) operates with these same tools, but to a lesser extent. The repetition of these devices, Timpe says, is what creates room for LTM by “providing a structure or support which is a series of cues

which enhance recall” (296). This recall works at a socialized capacity, that is in collective as opposed to individual consciousness, and can translate into a literary tradition with the same primary functions. The development of LTM demonstrates how schema develops in the first place. For instance, exchanging small talk within certain social frameworks dictates how a conversation is more or less expected to go. When a customer asks “how are you today?” to an employee, the expected answer trends around responses like “I’m doing well, and you?” A socially and culturally developed script has been ingrained to our LTM due to its common usage and corresponding settings. Dubreuil opines that “the interrogative force ... could paradoxically lead us to question the very validity of the category of literature. To my view, it would be pointless to recourse [sic] once again to an ahistorical and conceptual identity or to deny any effect of society on texts” (62).

Literary structures operate in a similar fashion to Timpe’s model of LTM retention. A literary work in rhyme is classified as a poem. When sentences are longer and develop into a complex narrative, a work would be classified as prose. When there is an emphasis on consciousness, it is classified as a novel, and so forth. These cluster subsets are *identifiers*. The rehearsal and exposure to these subsets indicates a developing pattern that proves the existence of systems, and the hybrid forms or unclassified incarnations demonstrate the *extent* by which these systems interact with each other in spite of their arbitrarily confined spaces. Rothwell concludes, eloquently, that “what has been a chaos of particles then emerges into a cosmos of patterns in which neither time nor space, nor matter nor energy, nor noun nor verb, is supreme, but all elements relate in a

magical way to the artistic design” (607). The reader intuitively maps out patterns to discern meaning amid clustered elements—and regardless of whether a pattern was deliberately planted by the author, the visage of a pattern emerges from the mind’s eye and, to a writer, the interpreted pattern is then translated into the form of a narrative. The repetition of these patterns establishes the paradigmatic structures of literature.

PART III: SYNTHESIZING LITERARY AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

This next section will convey a deeper understanding of how systems theory works in correlation with literature and uncover *how* literary functions—as developed by systemic processes—apply to an active network for social systems. The apparent social scaffolding of such paradigms becomes static if the interaction is not demonstrably reciprocal. A confounding factor is that literature, as a non-sentient construct, is unable to produce any form of *active* systemic interaction as its own entity as it can for those that indulge in or expose themselves to it. I postulate that literary patterns affect the cultural milieu through a converse, indirect method. Literature mobilizes and changes its forms due to such variables as circulation, censorship, and preservation. Literature is thus not a direct respondent to societal change insomuch as it operates as a modulating *vehicle* that induces certain societal responses. A few tertiary influences of literary evolution, including the industrialization of publication, civil rights advocacy, and public accessibility, all factor in how literature evolves and propels cultural adaptation. The

fluctuation of literary paradigms at a global scale is documented through extensive cataloging systems. Libraries, as it happens, are the quintessential database for systemic information pertaining to literature. Christine Pawley, Library and Information Science director at the University of Wisconsin, draws attention to the distinct vacancy in any research centered on the functions of libraries:

Despite lifetimes of personal familiarity with libraries, reading researchers, whatever their disciplinary heritage, have also tended to overlook libraries as subjects for study, thereby missing an important context in which reading commonly takes place (381).

The evolution of literature circulated through libraries offers a reflection into cultural history, into trending norms and taboos with which adaptive societies evolve. Literature mediates between the recipient and agent of social change. The following section examines historical, contemporary, and transcendental aspects of socially-structured literary systems. Libraries will be the primary resource for evaluating the systemic correlations between literature and culture.

Historical Impact of Literature in Libraries

Literature is the best archive of historical and social change in uncovering the actions and interactions of systemic production. It bears contextual examples of humor, tragedy, philosophy, passion, absurdity, and reason from throughout the ages. Each piece of literature is distinct unto itself, but its iteration and reiteration of thematic structures provides an illustration of a collective and evolving mindscape. Historian David

McKitterick says: “Books may be the most common artifacts other than coins to have survived from past generations. But they are of little use unless they can be properly interpreted, and their contribution evaluated, generation by generation, not simply with the fallacies of hindsight” (239). Of course, he concedes, “in sheer practical terms, we cannot expect to preserve all books, in all libraries, any more than we do other artifacts or archives. But the potential for destruction that sometimes masquerades as management or even conservation demands to be met with librarians of more, not less, historical and bibliographical awareness” (243). This is made especially true as we reach a global and digital age. Material can be stored far more rapidly and exhaustively with access to metadata and the ever-growing collection documentation about history and history-in-the-making. The absolute enormity of this expansive archive allows for a unique view of systemic properties within narrative structures. While the accessibility of literature accelerated through the global advancements of print capitalism, it is worth noting that “histories of national literatures are not straightforwardly tied to nationalism” (Arac 757). That is to say, literary history is distinct from the literary canon, which is often misleadingly infused with ideological frameworks and, as such, can misrepresent the actual function of sociological systems. McKitterick likewise agrees that “the history of the book in a particular country is not to be equated with the history of printing or publishing in that country. In the history of the book, nationalism can be the enemy of truth” (235). Jonathan Arac writes that “the power of the press, inseparable from the rise of literature, operates in a complex temporality” (756). As literacy rates increased astronomically over the course of the eighteenth century, culture indicated a growing

demand for literature. By that same token, those in positions of authority can use literary output to control vast populations. Obstructive factors such as classism, economy and censorship could easily restrict public accessibility to literature. However, literature continued to thrive despite these inhibitions on its output. Libraries operated as a vehicle for public accessibility to literature. At their core, libraries are social institutions. The foundation of their mission is to serve the public. Alexis McCrossen states that “libraries began as collections of books” and that “for centuries books had been considered the preeminent symbols and signs of ‘Culture’” (170).

Cultural changes dominated by economic factors directly affected libraries in the nineteenth century. Circulating libraries of that time would rent out materials to patrons for the cost of a subscription fee. The material that readers invested in influenced the library’s future investments, thereby instilling a sub-systematic trifecta between circulating libraries, patrons, and publishing houses. Troy Bassett focuses on the dynamic between publication and public access in the late 1800s. He writes that publishers “exercised caution in circulating any novel deemed of questionable morality or poor taste,” preemptively influencing whether a book would or would not be purchased and thus published (73). Bassett notes that because libraries were integral players in the economic health of the publishing business, “authors and publishers acquiesced, sometimes grudgingly, sometimes happily, to the demands of the libraries,” to the point where publishers “hesitated to publish any books that the libraries might refuse to buy, refuse to circulate, or return after complaints. In turn, authors, either by choice or necessity, accommodated their works to their publishers’ and libraries’ requirements”

(73, 78). As the public demand continued to fluctuate, libraries would, in turn, bend in accordance to meet the needs of the people. However, once best-sellers slowed in circulation, inventory became stagnant, forcing circulating libraries to seek more affordable methods for providing accessibility. By the nineteenth century, public libraries began to emerge.

Part of this emergence was due to a change in the building's *visual* aesthetic, which directly influenced societal responses to literature. Andrew Carnegie's advocacy of library construction made him a key historical figure in the development of the modern library. Carnegie's goal, as both an architect and a philanthropist, was to alter the social schema of libraries. Abigail van Slyck details how the architecture of Carnegie's philanthropic endeavor provided public accommodations that encompass what we now perceive as public libraries:

In the ideal library espoused by Carnegie, the librarian no longer had a self-contained office but occupied only an open work area behind the charging desk ... the power to determine the timing and extent of professional consultations now rested in the hands of library patrons, who enjoyed unlimited access to the librarian ... For library patrons, male and female, young and old, the new library offered a pleasant surprise. From the outside, the emphasis on symmetry helped identify the building as a public one; readers could enter freely, safe in the knowledge that they were welcome ... gone were monumental vistas into large public rooms. If the experience was less dramatic, it was also less intimidating (381).

According to Slyck, "Carnegie-financed buildings strove to put greater emphasis on rooms devoted to public service" (375). His architectural designs for early American

public libraries were meant to restructure buildings into locations that could be enjoyed and maintained by the general masses, regardless of social class. Simplifying the overall aesthetic played a key role in changing cultural attitudes toward libraries, as “the architectural forms advocated by the Carnegie Corporation were intended to improve library efficiency. Yet they also meant fundamental changes in the way that people experienced the library” (380). Slyck adds that this experience affected all who walked the library floors, from readers, to visitors, and even librarians. Slyck writes that “most of these changes were the product of developments within the profession itself. Nonetheless, the Carnegie library program was responsible for translating the new realities of a librarian’s life into physical form” (381). Slyck references Arthur E. Bostwick, who explains, by comparison, that the modern public library evolved to its non-elitist state due to the implementation of designs such as “open shelves, work with children, cooperation with schools, branch libraries, traveling libraries, and library advertising” (370). Libraries were, in every way, a sanctuary for free thought and social service. Alexis McCrossen observes the development of “civilized functions” in library architecture, noting that they were “among the few places where men and women without work or homes could pass the time without being susceptible to “vagrant laws” that were enforced in outdoor spaces such as parks (173, 177). Indeed, according to McCrossen, by the twentieth century, the “civilized function” had become “a major theme in the historiography of libraries” (173).

That’s not to say that libraries were without their fair share of tribulations. Censorship was—and continues to be—a significant influence on the cultural response to

and development of literature. The ideal of fully accessible literature can often be interceded by societal motivations to regulate what is “acceptable” to the public. Public libraries work to achieve a democratic solution to meet the needs of many, and in so doing, the differing voices of many contribute to controversy about circulated materials. Cultural responses to literature depend on authorities to dictate what literary concepts inform the ideologies (as defined by Luhmann) that befit a culture’s respective subsystems. Crucial in observational studies is recognizing how biases can strengthen or deter social systems. Labaree advises: “the truth value [of propositions and perspectives in literature] must be suspended so that a complete picture of recorded history is not compromised. If the historical record is compromised, any and all theories of truth would be compromised” (62). The absence of certain literatures can also reveal significant information about cultural adaptation. In this light, censorship isn’t to be regarded strictly as an inhibitor of progress, but rather as a natural byproduct of cultural responses already influenced by previous works. McCrossen explains that “while most public librarians were unable to rebuff the demands for fiction and periodicals or limit their hours of service, they did contribute to the construction of a cultural hierarchy by separating types of readers and collections” (176).

Bassett points out that even unpublished literature had the capacity (that is to say, the *potential*) to impact cultural norms and taboos of the nineteenth century, despite being obstructed as a public commodity. He states that “over the course of the century, the libraries refused a number of novels and quietly shelved many more,” but he concedes that the amount of novels that “died unborn is impossible to determine” (78).

Unpublished literature constitutes lapses in analytic data that can problematize the search for systemic properties binding literature and society. Furthermore, unpublished works demonstrate the argument that economy itself is a systemic domain capable of releasing and censoring literary works—even the act of censorship can enact a proverbial chain reaction for Prangel’s domino-structure.

American culture underwent a paradigmatic shift during the 1970s when civil rights activism uprooted the constraints of society’s past. In particular, Ann MacLeod examines the societal implications of censorship in children’s literature from a historical perspective. She says that “unlike authors in the nineteenth century, who frequently turned their hands to both adult and children’s books, those of the twentieth century usually chose between the two audiences, both reflecting and reinforcing the increasingly firm line drawn between the adult and juvenile fields” (31). Note that in libraries today, these reading audiences rarely share the same floor of the building—making for a spatial disparity in addition to an intellectual one. In the early part of the twentieth century, moral coding was seldom enforced, but instead generally and unofficially agreed upon by a collective *context* of culture and community. Says MacLeod: “Broadly speaking, librarians, teachers, authors and editors of children’s books were the same kind of people, members of a community which shared the general point of view that the code expressed. The rule was one of consensus, rather than coercion” (33). Society drastically interceded that homogeneous status quo by the 1970s. Civil rights activism and dissent surrounding the Vietnamese war spurred “social upheaval” (34). In the mid-1960s, the genre of children’s literature received polarizing attention. Debates arose about what children

should be exposed to, and by the 1970s, children's books became a "battleground for personal, social and political forces of a changing society" (34). Prior to the shift in the sociopolitical climate, difficult topics later deemed controversial were, instead, "given space in children's books: they were peripheral, rather than central, to the narrative; acknowledged, but not dwelt upon" (32). "Violence, for example, was not—as many assumed—entirely absent from children's books before 1965," and MacLeod acknowledges that by the twentieth century, children's literature implicitly wrote adult characters as "reliable sources of wisdom, justice, and caring," with "childhood and children...sheltered under the protection of responsible adults in a responsible society" (32-33). Ironically, both the liberal and conservative arguments about censorship pivoted on the same ulterior goal, to protect the social morality of children. Children were not considered human beings with their own intellectual freedom. Even today, children are seen as psychological phenomena rather than autonomous, albeit younger, human beings. In an adult-dominant world, children are powerless to enact policy changes that serve their own benefit. There is an intrinsic bond between secularized society and its authority, which can mainstream material content into socially confined spaces.

David Stewart, in his essay "The Disorder of Libraries," remarks that "reading had special power based on its authority as reading and its tendency toward 'moral equivocation,' especially recreational reading, which, in seeking mass markets, inevitably tapped the prurient impulses of readers" (404). As discussed throughout this essay, social change is a fundamental component to the nature of systems. Shifts range from minute to

gigantean, and social shifts are dependent on the circumstances, dynamics, and active rate of inclusion to spur any lasting or deeply rooted transformation.

Even with the cultural rifts, libraries continue to operate as a line of defense for those in need of representation and intellectual freedom. Publication had grown to be so prevalent that libraries had a larger audience to satisfy and thus little need to cater to economically dominant groups. Minority groups soon achieved a platform for representation, though the process was a slow one. In 1938 to as far as 2004, the American Library Association focused on their policies of reader inclusion and intellectual freedom. The Library Bill of Rights (the LBR) was established in 1938 and the Office for Intellectual Freedom in 1967—which Eliza Dresang explains were designed to “educate librarians and the general public about the importance of intellectual freedom” (175). Dresang notes that they made “strong statements for intellectual freedom and against censorship” (175). Dresang also details the ALA’s Free Access to Libraries for Minors, which was “a 2004 interpretation of the LBR, maintain[ing] a long-term ALA stance that ‘opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, materials, and facilities based on the age of library users’” (180). Fundamentally, the ALA “believes . . . that teaching young people how to evaluate information . . . offers the best protection for them” (180). Such legislation shaped the modern philosophy of American librarianship that, to this day, features core values of public service that underlie its moral and professional mission.⁵

⁵ For further reading on the long-term social impacts of culture and literature in America, read Carolyn Porter’s 1994 “What We Know That We Don’t Know: Remapping American Literary Studies.”

Modern Impact: Readership, Digitization, and Radical Change

Change in social systems is enacted through the interaction between system and environment, but the changes of said systems are predominantly implicit and indirect, leaving little trace of the intrinsic, temporal components of reading literature. Academia analyzes the literary canon, far more deeply than the material practices and institutions of reading. The reformation in literary access is insufficient to give an uninhibited, holistic scope of literature's effect on readers. Of her Stanford English department, Jennifer Summit observes that "again and again, students asked us plaintively for a big picture that would supply connections between and across their classes: they confirmed what many of us have long perceived and lamented, that they lack a basic grid of historical knowledge that could give broader perspective and unity to their individual classes" (143). Summit proposes that enacting such a reform means demarcating between micro-and macro-histories to "[show] students how they join up with or conflict with one another, what stories they tell about how and why a given literary work—and literature itself—matters on a large scale" (146). Telling the story of stories presents a challenge in that literature exists in a finite amount of time, but one that nonetheless far exceeds the span of a single departmental curriculum. Like social systems, academic systems are also susceptible to change based on the influence of their environment. Another reason for hesitation in reconfiguring literature for academic systems could be that readers find comfort in the familiarity of the curriculum. However, holding fast to what is familiar risks the erasure of originality in literature: "the perception that peripheral cultures have of their own culture [make] them want to emulate the mainstream and undervalue their

own differences for the sake of a more reassuring similarity” (Macedo xxxiii).

McKitterick comes to a similar conclusion:

[First], for organizational, scholarly, and political reasons, we have concentrated much of our corporate attention on national retrospective bibliography, defining our interests by what has been printed in our countries' boundaries or in our national languages. Second, we have followed the general principle, not surprisingly, of thinking of books in terms of authors, titles, and editions, without much regard for further ways in which books are sold, discovered, handled, read, and passed on, all aspects of these activities changing with each generation. Third, we have thought of books principally as new books ... In concentrating on production, on dates of publication, we tend to forget that most books in circulation at any time are secondhand; that books (at least until very recently) may remain in print for many years. In other words, that a generation's reading depends fundamentally and overwhelmingly on old books (234-235).

The biggest constraint in studying history is that interpretative aspects (such as authorial intent or cultural response) fall short of the fullest, or even the truest for of experience the author is trying to transcribe into words. McKitterick explains that “we may write, and speak, of authors' intentions; we may have some idea of how far the reproduction of those intentions in print fell short of what the author envisaged, or how they were thereby developed, nurtured, and reshaped. But the reader, faced with verbal, typographical, and morphological form, is left to interpret by a range of reference that is itself a further winnowing and selection, conscious or unconscious” (242). Due to the schism between the historical experience and the contemporary suppositions *about* that experience, librarians must do more than simply supply books. Labaree says, “the library experience

becomes much more than a place to discover truth embedded in the contents of specific texts. It becomes, as Foucault explains, a ‘fantasy’ of infinite spaces ‘between the books’ where the library can facilitate the creation of possible new knowledge through the labyrinth of connections among texts” (52). McKitterick opines that “more than ever before, the reader and scholar stand in need of librarians who are knowledgeable enough to interpret and evaluate that for which they are responsible to this and to succeeding generations” (240). The discipline of library science has since evolved into “library and *information science*” to better equip the profession with resources that aid readers’ enlightenment in a rapidly changing world.

Literature in the Digital Age

Censorship of printed books dwindled significantly by the time society reached the twenty-first century, but a new subsystem of access to literature soon took over the socio-cultural scene: the internet. This new dimension of cultural interaction catalyzed social systemic change at a rate faster than could previously be imagined. Roswitha Burwick notes that the internet is a “gateway to a wealth of information that can contextualize and animate the literary text” (33). Dresang echoes the same sentiment: “the Internet has been recognized as an important source of information, and gaining access to it has been determined essential in reducing what has become known as the digital divide” (179). However, along with the innovation of digitalization comes a slew of new problems and oppressions that, unsurprisingly, mirror those of previous incarnations of publication. Burwick notes that “while access has become almost

universal in terms of connections in schools and libraries, the equally important free access to ideas has run into trouble” (179). Censorship has found a new domain in which to thrive. In any newly introduced system, adaptation never manifests quickly or flawlessly. Derek Bambauer, in his thesis “Cybersieves,” analyzes the motivations that continue to spur censorship in the digital age, frankly addressing the very real authoritative threats that seek to “shape citizens’ information environments” and “thereby alter behavior” (383). Such coercion evidences a deeply rooted human issue—albeit one reconfigured with new parameters.

The Internet's increasing fragmentation, driven by technological censorship, derives from different value judgments made by countries about the relative importance of free expression, protection of minority interests, concern for societal cohesion, and other goals. The common thread, though, is censorship: most countries use cybersieves to try to filter undesirable content and make it disappear from the Web. Whether it is copyrighted songs in America or political dissent in Iran, the goal is the same; only the targeted material varies (Bambauer 379).

The internet, amazingly, still enables elite groups to manipulate social coding, despite the sheer enormity of material that exists digitally. Bambauer observes that the conflict between a given setting (environment) and its user group (social domain) seems to be the driving cause for most issues surrounding censorship.

Mark Stover, a devil’s advocate for censorship, argues that perhaps “removing individual books from a library through a reasonable review process is not always bad,” on the condition that a democratic methodology provides “checks and balances to the

materials selection process” (916). He points out that “occasionally the rhetoric of resisting censorship becomes just another way to proclaim the inauthenticity of social protest,” which “sometimes . . . can lead to the righting of a wrong; unfortunately, when it involves removing a book” (916). Stover makes the argument that “it is good librarianship to serve the needs of the community” (915). From an observational vantage point, something can be said about how censorship can shape culture. However, Stover overlooks how censorship, whether obliged or denied by culture, oppresses natural systemic development. It starves the social environment and leaves no room for progressive mobility or social adaptation. If anything, it imprisons societal norms into taboos and inhibits additional networking in active and dynamic socialization. The power of digital innovation has sparked the imaginations of people on a global scale—and became implemented as a new manifestation for literary inventory, captivating society with thoughts of fear and amazement. Advanced technology is an inert tool, exercised as both a savior and annihilator. Laurent Dubreuil explains the modern supposition of the “allegory of reading,” whereby reading material presents allegorical properties that allure readers around the world. Allegories *represent* figurative meaning beyond the explicit content of the text. They may not always represent the same things for discrete readers, but an underlying pattern of reader recognition develops into universally consistent phenomenon. Allegorical reading is an hermeneutic practice that matches the linguistic maxim of universal grammar, wherein human languages share deep underlying meanings that only *sound* different in different cultures based on their unique structures of phonology, morphology, or syntax. Burwick notes: “With its own language and

communication systems, the virtual world becomes an instrument to gain access to an infinite storehouse of digitized information that can guide future generations of 'readers' back to the literary work and to its rich palimpsests of meaning" (35). Virtual readership, if anything, demonstrates that reading behaviors remain unaltered even when the stakes of censorship persist. The need for creativity erupts into any channel or crevice that can be found, and internet data, even when wiped, still leaves traces behind for future examination.

Dresang observes that, for a time, "there [was] no systematic, comprehensive research that document[ed] the impact on intellectual freedom of either increased access to the Internet or restrictions on Internet use in libraries" (181). However, she does not dismiss the existence of social paradigms in a digital age. Systemic patterns simply take on a new shape requiring a skillset beyond simple observational capacities (181). With the internet creating a new social space, new parameters are needed to define it, so Dresang introduces a new paradigm called radical-change theory, which approaches the internet as a function of social systems "based on the premise that many, if not most, aspects of contemporary society can be explained by three digital age principles: interactivity, connectivity, and access" (183). Interactivity represents the chaotic dynamism of "complex information behavior," which remains untethered to structured, time-based constraints. Connectivity is the web of connections or "sense of community" that constructs the "social worlds" that emerge from multitudes of differing and expanding perspectives, giving readers the means to express their independent voices among a throng of many within social contexts. Finally, access is "the breaking of

long-standing information barriers, opening the doors of diversity, opinion, and opportunity” (183). Dresang articulates how these constructs culminate in radical change due to the breakdown of “barriers” in the digital realm that “might once have protected an insulated environment,” therefore preserving reader autonomy from obstructions such as censorship. According to Dresang, “radical change theory affirms that stopping a phenomenon such as [censorship] in the digital environment is next to impossible” (185). It is reasonable to conclude that literary and cultural studies are symbiotic, since reformations of one intrinsically affect the other. Evidence of history’s accommodation of new canons and methods, in addition to society’s adaptation to those canons and methods indicates a “process of reinvention” that scaffolds ever-evolving social systems onto new socio-cultural domains (Levander 451).

CONCLUSION

As crucial as it is to preserve the past, the cultivation of the future evidently must be pursued as well. Within the last century technology made its ascension to socio-cultural environments, and contemporaries have largely misconstrued literature, and by extension libraries, as running the risk of obsolescence. Many cultures are rapidly carcening into a digitally obsessed future, igniting further debate about library relevance in a postmodern world. The truth of the matter is that libraries have made great strides to keep up with society. Through the development of what is now a global and digital age, libraries have innovated mechanisms for the rapid and exhaustive storage of material, easing access through the utilization of metadata and the internet.

As Christine Pawley observes, “while commentators have begun to recognize the ability of library circulation and accessions records to bring readers and texts together in a mechanical fashion, they have yet to see libraries as an integral part of many readers’ social context” (386). The inundation of technological resources allows for no shortage of materials, though it has altered the methodologies by which people seek information.

The contemporary debate about libraries’ obsolescence is itself obsolete given that they place information easily within reach of such a large amount of people. A more salient problem, perhaps, is the risk of their becoming subdued or passive in the face of patron autonomy. Libraries are still needed despite how little people realize the resources that they have to offer. Libraries aren’t unimportant, but rather underrated and understated. Carnegie’s architecture for an approachable library unintentionally created a space where patron autonomy can revert all too into passive isolation, rather than public interaction. When patron interaction lessens, other library features can be forgotten along the way. It is crucial for library staff to impress upon patrons that help is always available, and in many forms. Through the cultivation of various ongoing events and services, libraries can adjust comfortably to the next phase of cultural transformation. Libraries continue to help readers discover the existence of social systems in literary contexts. Pawley reinforces the great potential of the library as a “source of primary data about a social institution whose whole rationale is reading ... provid[ing] a window into collective reading practices that may otherwise seem irretrievable” (386). Pawley recognizes “the ability of library circulation and accessions records to bring readers and

texts together in a mechanical fashion” which serves as an “integral part of many readers’ social context” (386).

The findings of this investigation suggest that socially constructed patterns are emergent, oscillating, and interactive. Literature, specifically, is a socially constructed pattern that serves as a vehicle of cross-communication between cultural and societal systems. This conclusion falls in line with the hypotheses made by Bertalanffy, Luhmann, and Prangel. Literature and its corresponding paradigms benefit Schwanz’s theory that structures serve as a basis for conceptualizing systems and their respective boundaries. The evidence shows that literature operates as an environment that systemically influences sociocultural development, as seen through historical and psychosocial constituents. The seemingly infinite manifestations of evolving systems demonstrate a need for constant retrospection. The entire point of systems theory is to identify general aspects of reality, and to use new or previously unobserved paradigms to uncover the existence of additional systems. Applying systems theory to literature provides a concrete means to uncover reading behaviors. The poly-systematic approach to literary-system studies shows how variations encompass a spectrum of interpretation. Each newly identified system presents another tile on the mosaic of constructed ‘truths.’ These constructed realities exist as patterns that have been mapped out intuitively and manifest in multiple forms of meaning. Timpe’s analysis of long term memory proves that systems exist by way of long-term retention schemas. The dissimilarities within those schemas demonstrate the extent to which paradigms have salience. Books reflect the intricate relationship between what is experienced and what is interpreted about those experiences.

The evolution of socialized patterns allows literature to provide creative outlets for members of society to find recognition within themselves and within the world that shapes them.

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