

System and Anti-System: Shaking up the Paradigms

JONATHAN HART

The systemic and field approaches to literature which this special issue of the "Review of Scholarship" explores, reflect the shift over the past twenty years to literary theories that take into account the history, context, and function of literature. Literature as an institution, as Harry Levin once observed, was a method that literary studies needed to investigate. It is the good fortune of the journal to have in this issue so many important essays on "Systems and Fields" which Hendrik Van Gorp, Anneleen Masschelein, Dirk de Geest, and Koenraad Geldorf have brought together. As Professor Van Gorp has noted, the theorists of systemic and field approaches to literature have been welcome at the University of Alberta, so that the *locus* of publication of this issue is particularly fitting. Hendrik Van Gorp has divided the essays into three sections: discussions of the polysystems theory of Itamar Even-Zohar, the field theory of Pierre Bourdieu, and the systems theories of Niklas Luhmann and Siegfried J. Schmidt. A central question that Van Gorp enunciates is the relation between system and environment: he also expresses a significant hope that the essays possess an underlying common ground between the different theories of literature as a system or field.

Rather than duplicate the observations of Hendrik Van Gorp and his contributors, I would like to present a few thoughts about the significance of systemic approaches to literature in English-speaking countries where this kind of methodology, while having important adherents, has not exerted the same influence as in Israel, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, French-speaking Canada, and Germany.

In the English-speaking countries, beginning in the 1930s, a shift occurred in literary studies from intellectual history to new criticism and the great tradition of F.R. Leavis, from a contextual approach to a textual method. The dominance of hermeneutics, although it was still one methodology among many in literary studies, continued even after Jacques Derrida's visit to the United States during the mid-1960s. Instead of teasing out the organic unity of the work, as new criticism did — among other things (hermeneutics or close reading is also a historical act) — the deconstruction of Paul de Man and Derrida uncovered the disunity of the text. Meaning was contingent but textual. In English-speaking countries feminism, cultural studies, new historicism, and

cultural materialism in theorists like Elaine Showalter, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Stephen Greenblatt, Jonathan Dollimore, and others put pressure on the text and reminded hermeneutic acolytes of contextual power. Intellectual historians and "old historians" in the English-speaking world may have been a little outraged by these new theories but some of them were secretly pleased at the return to history. During the 1970s, Marx, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, and Pierre Macherey were especially influential in Britain: Terry Eagleton, Catherine Belsey, and others "translated" these continental influences anew in a British context. Systematic approaches to genre, like Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), were superseded by the deconstructive untying of genre theory in the 1970s by Derrida, de Man, and a younger generation of deconstructionists, like Barbara Johnson. Jonathan Culler and Christopher Norris chronicled this shift from structuralism to post-structuralism, although Frye was neither but had affinities with the structuralists, new critics, biblical hermeneutics and so on.

The move to deconstruction and postmodernism, as well as the deterministic, fragmentary, aphoristic, almost pre-Socratic, probes into the media by Marshall McLuhan created an environment in Britain, the United States, and English-speaking Canada that was hostile to systems as analogues of the political, economic, and military machines that made for Vietnam and for the repression of civil rights and student demonstrations. A kind of romantic people's history, or the study of the everyday life of the common people or scepticism about power underlay the new modes of the academic study of literature. Any move to history, like new historicism or cultural materialism, reflected an unmasking of an establishment machinery, a dogmatic network of enforced meaning. Systems were perceived as power-grids of the dominant group. Any effective study of systems should sceptically seek to know how they operate but not, as Jean-François Lyotard might suggest, set up new systems in their place.

Instead of seeing this scepticism about systems as a problem alone, I think it is an opportunity. In explaining their systems to the English-speaking world in particular, theorists of systemic and field approaches to literature need to address this scepticism while recognizing a residue of textual fetishism or hermeneutic remembrance in literary criticism and theory in English. In fact, deconstruction, postmodernism, and many of the theories I have mentioned share with the systemic and field approaches to literature in this issue, although from different points of view, an unmasking or critique of the ideology of the machinery of producing and receiving literature. Symbolic capital, cultural recognition or reputation is made in society and is not simply something based on genius. A systemic/field view of literature is not necessarily a totalizing system or an acceptance of the social, economic, and ideological powers behind literature.

The neglect of the sociology of literature has not been complete in English. Although few literary theorists writing in English on the history or ideology of the aesthetic have discussed Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, Polity Press in Cambridge produced translations of his work in 1988 and 1996. This issue should help to meet the challenge of helping to make theories of literature as a system or field better understood in English. It should find readers who consider hermeneutics to be important but who recognize that texts without contexts are as incomplete as contexts without texts. These readers will also discover that systemic and field approaches are not univocal and monolithic and often question a romantic essence to literature. In short, from various points of view, it is possible that sceptics of system and field and these theorists of systems are at least talking about many of the same things. As someone who has crossed boundaries, most often between literature and history, for many years and has written on difference in culture, pluralism, possible worlds, and colonialism and post-colonialism, I welcome this issue and thank Hendrik Van Gorp, his editorial crew, and his contributors. Our readers are from across the world, but some of us in English-speaking countries should learn especially from the essays. That they can help to shake up our paradigms makes us fortunate indeed.

University of Alberta

Addresses of Contributors / Les Adresses des collaborateurs

Cattrysse, Patrick Cultuur en Communicatie University of Brussel Vrijheidslaan 17 B-1081 Brussel, Belgium Patrick=Cattrysse@ufsa13.kubrusse.ac.be	Laermans, Rudi Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Van Evenstraat 2b B-3000 Leuven Belgium
De Berg, Henk Department of Germanic Studies The University of Sheffield Arts Tower, Sheffield S10 2UJ United Kingdom H.de.Berg@sheffield.ac.uk	Lambert, José Literatuurwetenschap Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Postbus 33, Blijde-Inkomststraat 21 B-3000 Leuven Belgium jose.lambert@arts.kuleuven.ac.be
De Geest, Dirk Literatuurwetenschap Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Postbus 33, Blijde-Inkomststraat 21 B-3000 Leuven, Belgium dirk.degeest@arts.kuleuven.ac.be	Masschelein, Anneleen Literatuurwetenschap Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Postbus 33, Blijde-Inkomststraat 21 B-3000 Leuven Belgium anneleen.masschelein@arts.kuleuven.ac.be
Even Zohar, Itamar Porter Chair of Semiotics Tel Aviv University 69978 Tel Aviv, Israel itamarez@plato.tau.ac.il	Prangel, Matthias Leiden University Van Wijkplaats 2 Postbus 9515 2300 RA Leiden The Netherlands Prangel@rullet.LeidenUniv.nl
Fokkema, Douwe Literatuurwetenschap Utrecht University Muntstraat 4 3512 EV Utrecht The Netherlands	Schmidt, Siegfried J. Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaften Universität Gesamthochschule Siegen D-57068 Siegen Germany schmidt@lumis.uni-siegen.d400.de
Geldof, Koenraad Literatuurwetenschap Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Postbus 33, Blijde-Inkomststraat 21 B-3000 Leuven Belgium koen.geldof@arts.kuleuven.ac.be	Sheffy, Rakefet Culture Research Group Tel Aviv University 69978 Tel Aviv Israel rakefet@spinoza.tau.ac.il
Ibsch, Elrud Vrije Universiteit De Boelelaan 1105 1081 HV Amsterdam The Netherlands ibsch@jet.let.vu.nl	