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Documents

of a Literary System as a Subject of Empirical Studies

The paper identifies and discusses the category of “documents of a literary system” as a subject of literary research. Those documents are subject to dispersed description procedures: as elements of research infrastructures of general use (such as catalogues, repositories, databases) and subject infrastructures, for instance literature-specialist documentation, bibliographical or philological research papers (such as bibliographies, critical editions, dictionaries), and then a subject of research into literary systems, based on empirical data (documents and their descriptions).

Modern research into literary systems stresses the role of knowledge mediation of literature by research infrastructures – both general and specialist – which collect, share and describe literary reality, preceding its “modeling”: “models of literary systems are not simply arguments about the existence of and connections between works of literature in the past; they are arguments made with reference to the disciplinary infrastructure– the bibliographies and [data] collections; analog and digital – that transmit evidence of past works and relationships to the present”¹.

The success of empirically-oriented literature studies depends on the descriptions of literary reality provided by the infrastructure: the understanding of the procedures for creating those descriptions is thus crucial for conducting such research.

In the present paper, I propose an analysis of the problem of extending the procedures of describing the documents of a literary system as a challenge – not just for the methodology of conducting empirical research (such as the development of tools for scientific modeling of literary systems based on available data), but also as a challenge for such an application and adjustment of the existing research infrastructures, which will provide long-term development for empirical literary research.

Documents of a literary system | The documents of a literary system include various “records”, pieces of evidence, testaments, and displays of “[t]he complex of activities, or any section thereof, for which systemic relations can be hypothesized to support the option of considering them «literary»”².

¹ Katherine Bode, *A World of Fiction: Digital Collections and the Future of Literary History*, (University of Michigan Press, 2018), p. 43. [translation mine, PZ]

² Itamar Even-Zohar, “The «Literary System»”, *Poetics Today* 11, No 1 (1990): 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772667>.

From the perspective of research into literary systems – rooted in the traditions of bibliography, bibliology, scientific information, and documentation studies – this diverse, elaborate collection of documents is on the one hand subject to cataloging, classification and indexation within the framework of a broadly understood organization of knowledge (for instance, in the form of a bibliographical description, indexation in a printed dictionary or encyclopedic elaboration, or in the form of meta-data for digital items); on the other hand, they play specific functions as elements or subsets of an empirically studied literary system, documenting the creation, reception, and circulation of literary texts.

In practice, studying those functions is predominantly based on re-using the existing descriptions of scientific or cultural-heritage documents, especially with the use of digital methods.

Literary system | The notion of a literary system – in terms of the context that is of interest to us here – is related to historical-literary, bibliographical, bibliological orientations, the history of the book, and their re-interpretations and developments in the spirit of empiricism³, “new empiricism”⁴, “cultural materialism” or cultural analytics, and not with formalist, structuralism, or semiotic (in which a literary system connotes rather with studies of inter- and intra-textual relations) orientations.

This “system” has both social and empirical dimensions; in accordance with the definition by the major representative of *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft*, Siegfried Schmidt, it assumes “the focal shift from isolated literary texts to text-thematizing activities of producers, mediators, recipients, and post-processors of literary phenomena in their respective social context”⁵. Empirical studies should take into consideration the material aspects of production, circulation, and reception of literature, although simultaneously they should also present conclusions which will support and complete interpretative and theoretical studies⁶.

Thus, the category of documents of a literary system does not include only those documents whose contents can be defined as literary criticism or artistically-literary. Those include all writing documenting the activities that create a literary system: they can be its direct expression (like literary texts), intentionally created in order to document a literary system (like literary bibliographies or literature-specialist elaborations), or become a document belonging to a literary system in the eyes of the researcher (like bookselling financial documents, reports of cultural institutions, legal documents regulating cultural policies).

³ See e.g. Siegfried J. Schmidt, “Dlaczego empiryczne badania literackie? Dlaczego nie?”, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 99, vol. 2 (2008): 107-119; Bogdan Balicki, “Empiryczna Nauka o Literaturze – kierunek w badaniach literackich i szkoła naukowa”, *Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* 124, No 4 (2010): 30-50; “The Systemic and Empirical Approach to Literature and Culture as Theory and Application”, ed. S. Tötösy de Zepetnek, I. Sywenky (Edmonton-Siegen 1997).

⁴ Katherine Bode, Robert Dixon, “Resourceful Reading: A New Empiricism in the Digital Age?”, in *Resourceful Reading: The New Empiricism, eResearch and Australian Literary Culture*, ed. K. Bode, R. Dixon (Sydney University Press, Sydney, 2009), 1-27.

⁵ Siegfried J. Schmidt, “Empirical Studies in Literature and the Media Today”, *Poetics* 18 (1989): 2.

⁶ Bode, Dixon, “Resourceful Reading: A New Empiricism in the Digital”, 15.

Theory of documents and literary studies | The definition and scope of a literary system implies that documents forming the basis for its analysis should be broadly defined. Etymologically, a “document” comes from the Latin “doceo” and “mentum”; “doceo” refers to teaching, indicating (in relation to the pedagogical practice), whereas “mentum” is a suffix used in order to transform verbs into nouns⁷. Modern documentation studies/science refer/s to this etymology in order to highlight the relationship between documents and the human activities of “marking” both external and internal reality (physical and intellectual objects), thus signaling the broad semantic spectrum of this term.

This broad definition of a document, widespread in documentation studies, was affected by the 20th-century French documentation and bibliographic tradition. In the 1930s, Paul Otlet, an influential Belgian researcher, used to claim that objects can be documents, providing the example of material culture, natural objects, artifacts, archeological findings, and works of art⁸. In her seminal 1951 work, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation?*, Suzanne Briet defines a document as “any physical or symbolic sign [*indice*], preserved or recorded, intended to represent, to reconstruct, or to demonstrate a physical or conceptual phenomenon”⁹. Briet assumes that documents are characterized by: “materiality” (i.e. they are physical objects and traces); intentionality (an intention for the document to be a broadly understood piece of evidence); processing (they have to be “made documents”); and phenomenology (they are perceived as “documents”)¹⁰. As explained by Michael Buckland, according to Ronald Day, the very placement of a document in an organized relation to other evidence – in its semantic context – provides this object with a document status¹¹.

This tradition influences bibliography, bibliology, and book history¹², which remained under the influence of the heritage of bibliographical-documentation thought by Otlet and Briet in the first half of the 20th century, and later of studies into scientific information and documentation studies. This resulted in the creation of a research stream, which argues that contrary to their etymology, the subject of interest of the present-day bibliography, bibliology and book history is not limited to “books” or written documents. D. F. McKenzie, an influential bibliography theoretician, argued that bibliography should deal “with the facts of transmis-

⁷ Niels W. Lund, “Document, text and medium: concepts, theories and disciplines”, *Journal of Documentation* 66 (2010), No 5; 743. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220411011066817>.

⁸ Michael K. Buckland, “What is a document?”, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 48 (1997); No 9: 805. doi:10.1002/(sici)1097-4571(199709).

⁹ In Buckland, 806.

¹⁰Buckland.

¹¹Buckland.

¹²What I mean by that is a complex of disciplines that deal with describing documents from the perspective of their historical, technical and technological, textological contexts, as well as the issues of creating registers and descriptions of documents. Their mutual relations are complicated, and moreover these notions gain new meanings in different geographical contexts. See e.g. N. Harris, *Analytical bibliography. An alternative prospectus*, <http://ihl.enssib.fr/analytical-bibliography-an-alternative-prospectus>; Niels W. Lund, “Document theory”, *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 43 (2009), No 1, 1–55. doi:10.1002/aris.2009.1440430116; Jack Andersen, “The collection and organization of written knowledge” in *Handbook of research on writing history, society, school, individual, text*, ed. C. Bazerman, (New York: Erlbaum, 2008), 177– 190; Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” *Daedalus* 111 (1982), No 3: 65-83; Joan Shelley Rubin, “What is the History of the History of Books?”, *The Journal of American History* 90 (2003), No 2: 555-75. doi:10.2307/3659444; Robert Darnton, “«What is the history of books?...» revisited”, *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (2007), No 3: 495-508.

sion and the material evidence of reception”, where these texts are “verbal, visual, oral, and numerical data in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films, videos, and any computer-stored information, everything in fact from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography”¹³.

Documentation studies, which constitute a continuation of bibliography and documentation in the spirit of Otlet and Briet, but in the direction of studies into scientific information, established the broad definition of “documents” and permanently related it to a reflection on systems of organizing knowledge, significant to the broadly understood digital humanities.

As pointed out by Niels Lund, the broad definition of documents assumes their relationship with human “actions” or “practices”. It is impossible to isolate documents from their social space, as they are inherently “socialized” and thus should be studied in the context of “documentation” processes: a document is “any results of human effort to tell, instruct, demonstrate, teach or produce a play, in short to document, by using some means in some ways”, i.e. documents. Thus, they highlight the medium of interpersonal communication, its mediation¹⁴.

Studies into literary systems are – as Bode stressed – a somewhat natural consequence of secondary connection¹⁵ of literary studies (especially historical-literary) and bibliography, bibliology and book history, as well as broadly understood studies into organizing knowledge. When this secondary connection was made – through empirical and qualitative literary studies in the 1980s, or at the turn of the 21st century within the framework of “new empiricism” and digital humanities – the dynamic collection of testaments of human practices, going far beyond traditionally understood documents, such as books and periodicals, incorporated into the context of digital systems of organizing knowledge became the subject of research related to the traditions of bibliography, bibliology and book history.

Documents of a literary system used in studying literary systems | According to Katherine Bode, in literary studies “bibliographies and scientific editions are the most obvious and visible forms of empirical research”¹⁶. These are research endeavors based on evidence and facts: “bibliography describes material forms and the publishing histories of works of literature, whereas a scientific edition identifies and compares various forms in which a given literary work is published. Such empirical research provides the necessary infrastructure for modern literary studies”¹⁷. “Histories of books, publishing, print and reading”¹⁸ constitute another group of studies from this field, and finally, there are also studies into the strictly understood empirical literary studies (a tradition established by the already mentioned Siegfried Schmidt). Ultimately, empirical studies are assisted by modern humanities computing (digital humanities), which allows for effective processing of large databases.

¹³Donald F. McKenzie, “Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts”, (London: British Library, 1986), 5.

¹⁴Lund.

¹⁵Bode, Dixon, “Resourceful Reading: A New Empiricism in the Digital”, p. 6ff.

¹⁶Translation mine, PZ.

¹⁷Bode, Dixon, 4. Translation mine, PZ.

¹⁸Bode, Dixon, 6. Translation mine, PZ.

Considering the scientific orientations, resources and studies defined by Bode, and the previously defined scope of activities which constitute a literary system, one may be tempted to formulate a list of documents which allow for studying it empirically.

Types of activities constituting a literary system include the creation, reception and circulation of literary works (the character of these processes can be artistic, academic, or cultural). The basic cognitive categories, thanks to which these activities can be perceived or analyzed, include individuals (such as creators and co-creators of texts, critics, scholars, readers, participants in literary events, publishers, booksellers, journal editors, and employees of various institutions in a literary system), groups of individuals (such as literary associations, research teams), institutions (such as publishing houses, founders, libraries, institutions such as GLAM¹⁹, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations), and events (such as competitions, awards, festivals, meetings, and plays).

Documents describing such a defined literary system include²⁰:

a. textual documents and manuscripts, such as:

- books and journals (together with their segments, which are sometimes extracted for the purpose of documentation, such as chapters, parts, and articles),
- grey literature (such as calls for papers for academic conferences, reports, reports of activities of institutions constituting a literary system, M.A. and PhD dissertations, and library registers),
- documents of social life²¹(such as brochures and bulletins for institutions promoting reading),
- personal documents (such as letters and notes of writers, literature researchers, and publicists),
- archives (national, social and private resources; resources of institutions relevant for a literary system)²²,

¹⁹*Galleries, libraries, archives, museums.*

²⁰The list is a modified version of the typology of resources used in institutions that collect documents of literary systems (Controlled Vocabulary for Research) by Confederation of Open Access Resources [http://vocabularies.coar-repositories.org/documentation/resource_types/] and Resource Type Scheme Library of Congress [<http://id.loc.gov/vocabulary/resourceTypes.html>]). Examples of documents of a literary system from this typology and their functions within literary systems are provided in brackets. Obviously, these are just examples which refer mostly to modern literary systems. Moreover, obviously the document theory or scientific information is full of other typologies and classifications of documents (for instance, there are approaches based on the contents or formal analysis of documents).

²¹See a paper which compares documents of social life and grey literature: Agnieszka Strojek, "Znaczenie terminu szara literatura", *Zagadnienia Informatyki Naukowej* (2000), No 1: 64-76.

²²However, one should also bear in mind that textual documents also include movie and theater scripts, song lyrics, etc. If such textual bases of eventually non-literary documents (i.e. movies, plays, and music compositions) are not printed and subject to bibliographical control, they undergo significant dispersion, although they can be available mostly in archives on a larger scale (national and social, as well as private).

- textual segments of websites (e.g. artistic, journalistic, scientific posts on online literary forums, social media, blogs, and amateur writing),
- b. images:
- moving (such as TV programs, online resources devoted to literature, adapting literature, and created by writers and literature scholars),
 - statistical (e.g. illustrations for works of literature, images inspired by works of literature, drawings or paintings created by writers, posters, and advertisements)
- c. sound (e.g. radio programs, podcasts on literature, literature adaptations, and music related to literature),
- d. databases and data collections²³,
- e. software (e.g. used for processing literature data),
- f. as well as: artifacts, cartographic and multimedia documents, and musical notations.

Documents of a literary system are dispersed – collected and shared by various institutions (mostly academic and GLAM) - via various services, using different means and according to different rules. They are subject to complex cataloguing, classification and indexation processes which provide their multi-level descriptions. Those processes – although based on international standards, formats, glossaries, authoritative indexes, international persistent identifiers, and semantic ontologies – are also directly related to the logics of the functioning of the institutions governing given resources and can never be fully uniformed.

Apart from the cataloguing, classifying and indexing performed by institutions directly governing a given resource, there is also academic research – both into scientific information and related fields, and humanities studies – which provides additional knowledge of the topic and the form of whole document classes or types. On the one hand, the software used for the automatic classification of documents – both born-digital and digitized – is constantly being upgraded²⁴. On the other hand, projects such as Media Monitoring of the Past (IMPRESSO) rely on methods of analyzing textual data (such as text mining) for (among other things) thematic indexing of texts²⁵. This knowledge can be applied in, for instance, creating research datasets or by services

²³Both the broadly understood datasets prepared and shared for scientific purposes (such as various bibliographic datasets shared by national libraries), and the data registered by various “instruments” and “tools” (see the category of meta-documents: S. R. Ranganathan, *Documentation and its Facets: Being a symposium of seventy papers by thirty-two authors*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 39-40), especially digital, i.e. e.g. broadly understood data on the usage metrics, traffic metrics) or digital (e.g. data from e-book readers that monitor the use of online applications).

²⁴Por. Eun Kyung Chung, Shawne Miksa, Samantha K. Hastings, „A Framework of Automatic Subject Term Assignment for Text Categorization: An Indexing Conception-based Approach”, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 61 (2010), No 4: 688–99; Anna Kasprzik, “Putting Research-based Machine Learning Solutions for Subject Indexing into Practice”, w *Proceedings of the Conference on Digital Curation Technologies (Quator 2020)*, ed. A. Paschke et al. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0074-2535-7>

²⁵<https://impresso-project.ch/>

sharing information as supplementing standardized metadata of digital objects (such as supplementing digital resources with links to semantic ontologies, additional subject tags).

Documents of a literary system vs. “scientific edition of a literary system” | An analysis of literary system documents for the purpose of research into literary systems requires an in-depth study into the relationships between various forms of cataloguing, classifying, and indexing documents, versus functionalizing documents within a literary system.

As highlighted by Katherine Bode, “we cannot know the documentary past except through the knowledge infrastructure we create (...) neither the analog nor the digital record offers an unmediated and comprehensive view of the documentary past; both are partial, and not necessarily in complementary ways”²⁶. Thus, the procedure of selecting and functionalizing sources – analog and digital – should include the analysis of the studied literary system and the documentary resources that describe it. Literary empirical studies must be based on “an object capable of representing literary systems (...) while managing the documentary record’s complexity, especially as it is manifested in new digital knowledge infrastructure. The lack of such an object, not the fundamental opposition of data and literature, is the real reason it has proven to be so difficult, in practice if not in theory, to integrate traditional and computational methods for the purposes of historical investigation”²⁷.

One can say that Bode’s research predominantly describes or shapes the studied object in the form a document of a literary system – or a collection of such documents – to subsequently construct research theses on this basis.

Bode calls this form of incorporating a critical analysis of sources into the studied literary system “a scholarly edition of literary system”: “the critical apparatus elaborates the complex relationships between the historical complex explored, the disciplinary infrastructure employed in investigating that context, the decisions and selections implicated in creating and remediating the [data] collection or collections, and the transformations wrought by the editor’s extraction, construction, and analysis of that data”²⁸.

Documents of a literary system and research infrastructures | It should be observed that this tension between the disciplinary expectations and the needs of literary studies, and the infrastructural conditioning is a constitutional characteristic of all empirical studies into a literary system, due to the dispersion and variation of the documents constituting that system.

Bode creates a methodology for conducting research into literary systems in such conditions. However, there remains the question of the opportunity of systematic authorizations in conducting research into literary systems, i.e. adapting the descriptions and organization of documents of a literary system to research requirements, despite their variety and dispersion. It

²⁶Katherine Bode, *A World of Fiction: Digital Collections and the Future of Literary History*, 52.

²⁷Bode, 34-35.

²⁸Bode, 53.

is thus about looking at the issue from the perspective of infrastructures and documentation processes, rather than the research methodology.

This challenge is in fact a question about the extent to which the community involved in conducting research into literary systems is able to create (or develop the existing) sets of meta-data, standards, and the services of connecting and uniforming data, which will be considered in developing major research infrastructures (or using them systematically), such as SSHOC, EOSC, Europeana, or the ecosystem of bibliographic data based on data exchange between libraries.

As evidenced by the experience, recommendations and research currently conducted by major research infrastructures²⁹, the major challenges include: 1) creating controlled dictionaries, thesauruses, and ontologies relevant to the discipline, as well as their implementation in key scientific and cultural services, or creating knowledge aggregation tools based on them, 2) retro-conversion of documentation resources (and not just digital objects), i.e. bibliographies, catalogues, libraries, archives, and museum registers in order to develop digital information resources (which today remains a marginal issue in the digitalization policies), 3) support for services of authoritative control and the development of persistent identifiers both in scientific services, and in services sharing the resources of cultural heritage (extending the scope and quality of control in terms of cultural and artistic events, and textual documents, including literary works).

translated by Paulina Zagórska

²⁹See e.g. Daan Broeder, Thorsten Trippel, Emiliano Degl'Innocenti, Roberta Giacomi, Maurizio Sanesi, Mari Kleemola, Mari, ... Matej Ďurčo, Matej, *SSHOC D3.1 Report on SSHOC (meta)data interoperability problems (Version v1.0)*, (2019). https://zenodo.org/record/3569868#.Xk_BMGhKhPY; Natalie Harrower, Maciej Maryl, Timea Biro, Beat Immenhauser & ALLEA Working Group E-Humanities, *Sustainable and FAIR Data Sharing in the Humanities: Recommendations of the ALLEA Working Group E-Humanities* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.7486/DRI.tq582c863>; *Strategy Report on Research Infrastructures: Roadmap 2018*. <http://roadmap2018.esfri.eu/>

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KEYWORDS

literary system

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ABSTRACT:

The paper identifies the category of “documents of a literary system” as a basis for empirical literary studies research. It presents literature and documentation studies, bibliographical and information-scientific aspects of identifying, processing and using documents in this discipline. Based on the available literature, basic types of such objects and their functions within a literary system are indicated. The paper indicates that the dispersion of descriptive procedures of such objects plays a key role for the success of empirical research in literature studies, and it proposes treating this problem as a challenge in adapting the research infrastructures to the empirical needs of literature analyses.

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