On Literariness: From Post-Structuralism to Systems Theory

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Volume 2 Issue 2 (June 2000) Article 1
Marko Juvan,
"On Literariness: From Post-Structuralism to Systems Theory"
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/1>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2000)
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/>

Abstract: In his article, "On Literariness: From Post-Structuralism to Systems Theory," Marko Juvan argues that the question of literariness concerns the very identity and social existence of not only literature per se but of literary theory as a discipline. A literary theorist is not only an observer of literature; he/she is also a participant who -- at least indirectly, via the a priori systems of science and education -- is engaged in constructing both the notion and the practice of literature as well as the study of literature. Literariness is neither an invariant cluster of "objectively" distinctive properties of all texts that are deemed literary nor is it merely a social, scholarly, and/or educational function. Rather, it can be defined as the effect of a text in the literary system, which is only possible on the basis of paradigms and conventions derived from the literary canon itself.

Marko JUVAN

On Literariness: From Post-Structuralism to Systems Theory

Literariness and the Crisis of *Literary* Theory

When a literary theorist -- in this case someone guided by Jakobson's phenomenological imperative, encoded into the modern, formalist tradition, that the object of literary scholarship be "literariness" and not just anything that is historically, biographically, socially, or psychologically related to literature (Jakobson 1921, 11) -- tries to find out what the "essence" of literature may be, what discriminates texts deemed literary from other forms of communication, or, rather, what exactly changes their status into works of verbal art, he/she does not only ask questions about the object of the inquiry. Despite the apparently dispassionate distance from the reified language which this scholar is trying to isolate from the rest of reality, by asking this question the theoretical observer is also seeking an excuse for limiting the territory in which it is possible to utilize legitimately explanatory concepts, tools, and plans. Therefore, posing the question about literariness is indirectly and implicitly aimed also towards the observer as a representative of the discursive field which has well defined and institutionally inherited cultural functions.

Literary theory developed and institutionalized as late as the twentieth century, originating in the tradition of ancient poetics and rhetoric (see Ocvirk 6-12; Glaser 15-23; Groden and Kreiswirth <http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/>). However, since Aristotle, the two ancient disciplines used to reflect, describe, classify, and normalize the domain of communication that was either narrower or larger than what has been for approximately two hundred years considered *belles-lettres* and written and read for aesthetic purposes: poetics dealt mostly with poetry, which, for instance, did not include prose genres, while rhetoric cultivated and studied the skill (in the sense of *ars*) of any kind of public speaking, not just that inspired by artistic muses. From poetics and rhetoric, literary theory adopted series of issues and notions, e.g., the principles of representation/mimesis, *topoi*, disposition, literary kinds and genres, diction, figures of speech, meter. However, it programmatically freed them from practical-normative aspects and anchored them into a new *épistémè* -- it presupposed the awareness of art as an autonomous system of social communication, i. e., a system governed by its own principles. From the Enlightenment on, these ideas originated in aesthetics: besides Batteux's channeling of all *beaux arts* into a single, imitative principle and Schiller's idea that art "creates rules for itself," Kant's notion of beauty and aesthetic experience as contemplative enjoyment, devoid of practical interests, was of key importance (see Tatarkiewicz 23-30). Aesthetics reflected and with its infiltration into ideology and its state apparatus partially also encouraged one of the two great restructurings of traditional Europe: The transformation from estate system into functional differentiation of modernized bourgeois societies, in which the *beaux arts* assumed the role of the only remaining guardians of the crumbling wholeness of an individual's existential experience. For example, in light of other major process, i. e., the formation of national identities, the arts confirmed the individuality and creative ability of a collective individual, "national spirit" (see Schmidt 1989, 25, 282-83).

The object and the method (literariness and literary scholarship) construct as well as maintain each other's existence, autonomy and function: the question about a particular nature, essence of literature could be posed with real consistency only in the framework of a specialized field, i. e., literary theory, which freed itself from explicit normativity and close entanglement with poetic production, only after literary genres -- at least in their most representative cases -- had been autonomized under the new, uniform understanding of literature as verbal art. The *differentia specifica* of literature was found primarily in its social function: it became *literature* pertaining to the social domain of arts and standing in opposition to "literatures" of other fields of social activity, e.g., religion, politics, science, or education (see Rusch 97-98). Viewed from within literary scholarship, the meaning of literary theory can thus be explained, namely that it helps us understand what we, as "ordinary" readers experience when reading a work of art (this can also be explicated in the spirit of the Emil Staiger's lucid *paronomasia*, namely, "dass wir begreifen, was uns ergreift" (qtd. in Rusterholz 344). However, from the critical perspective of a higher-order

observer, literary theory might lose its apparent distance from the object of study, as well as analytical and descriptive purity. Seen from the outside, it turns to be a discursive practice intertwined with literature, science, and education (e.g., with teaching English or Slovene in elementary and secondary schools). In these domains of social and cultural interaction, literary theory helps to establish interpretative languages and practices among writers, experts, teachers, and students. Such interpretive structures with sets of concepts and mental operations refine the sense that literature as art is a special class of phenomena as well as of extraordinary value (see Eagleton 200-03). By inquiring what gives texts a literary character, literary theory actually participated in the identity construction of its object and with it, theory secured its own existence as well as the relevance of its conceptions and methods.

In the development of literary theory in this century, two opposing lines of thinking followed one another. Modernism in the arts and theory -- with its phenomenological reductionism, elitism, "formalism," "theologico-aesthetics," and "the animus against the everyday, the ordinary, the popular, the wordly, the techno-scientific, and the public" (Leitch 41) -- elevated the idea of the aesthetic autonomy of (verbal) art. A part of Russian Formalism, the Chicago School, New Criticism and *Werkimmanente Interpretation* strove, in a parallel manner to modern artistic currents (e.g., abstract painting), to elaborate the particular ontology, specific structure and/or singular meaning of the literary work of art by concepts such as defamiliarization, iconicity, or ambiguity. On the other hand, for the last thirty years the category "literature" shared the same fate with other totalities. It was exposed to postmodern deconstruction and dehierarchization. As a symptom of that move, there has been growing doubt that it is possible to claim what the essence of all literature is and to recognize and display general literary-artistic structure in every item of this class of objects. Ever since French structuralism and its mutations in post-structuralism in the late 1960s, literature was more and more often studied as a discourse, as one among other discursive practices in society. It became basically equal to, say, myth or TV soap opera. Literary texts were observed as "communal documents" (Leitch ix), their literariness was moving out of focus. Among libertarian or left-wing academics, critical of unreflected elitism hidden behind preceding notions of literariness, literature is no more axiologically privileged over science, religion, politics, popular culture, and new media, including hypertext (see Sanchez-Mesa <http://www.dipoli.hut.fi/org/TechNet/org/humanities/lite/summary.html>[inactive]), nor it is treated as a totality, ontologically different from other genres of communication. As Vincent Leitch puts it, "literature turns in a modulated functionalist notion of 'literatures'"(60), which implies that "there is no ontology of literature; there are only literature functions -- functions in relation to specific languages, intertexts, institutions, regimes of reason" (Leitch 59). Literature as a heteroglot discourse intertextually affiliated to societal and historical *heteroglossia* is obviously the notion that has supplanted once homogeneous category of *belles-lettres.* Gebhard Rusch?s conviction, that modes of literary reception are not uniform, since they differ for different social groups, textual genres as well as "different types and concepts of literature" is (98-99), although based on empirical evidence, no exception within the general trend of pluralizing and opening of the literary canon.

Arguments against aesthetic and a homogeneous notion of literature, as well as questioning the boundaries between art and non-art come from various viewpoints (see García-Berrio 25-27, 39-44). On the one hand, theorists of socio-historical or reader-response orientations point out that literariness is only one of the social conventions or psychic expectations which form the background for understanding of texts, but it is by no means neither their internal essence nor their objective feature, be it structural, stylistic, or semantic. Texts which could have not been written and in their time understood as pure verbal art are nowadays treated as literature. For example, the old Attic comedy, which was a kind of "poetry," but inseparably connected with Dionysian festivities, could therefore not be reduced to the function that is presently called aesthetic. Marxist, psychoanalyst, feminist, and postcolonial scholars/critics are well skilled in reading "against the grain"; they are eager to disclose traces of economic, bodily, social, ideological, political, and other non-aesthetic investments even in the subtlest poetic literature. On the other hand, precisely linguistics, which should, according to Jakobson's "Linguistics and

Poetics" and "Retrospect," as a kind of semiotic meta-theory ensure objective identification of literariness (i.e., the poetic function) in texts themselves (see Jakobson 1981, 18-21, 766), increasingly turns to pragmatics. It agrees to the thesis that all linguo-stylistic features which should objectively distinguish the literary text from a non-literary one are wide-spread in non-artistic communication, too, so that the deciding factor in literariness are the circumstances or the context of a given speech act. No need to mention that post-structuralist "rhetoric," as well, makes out literary features, such as tropes, fiction, and story-telling, in other domains, e.g., in philosophy (Derrida, de Man), law, and history (Hayden White). More, to the dismay of some more traditionalist scholars, instead of observing literature, their colleagues follow the example of Barthes and, rejecting the dichotomy between a language and metalanguage, create an essayist mixture of literature, philosophy, hermeneutics, and semiotic ludism.

The above mentioned groups of theoretical "anti-essentialist" work in the study of literature agree that "literature" "refers to a heterogeneous group of objects between which there is no more than a family resemblance" (Olsen 73-74). Jonathan Culler commented on the logic of anti-essentialist and conventionalist approaches and, quoting John M. Ellis, compared the concept "literature" to the position of the concept "weeds": weeds are plants that do not have some common botanical denominator, structure or essence; the semantic range of this concept depends on the (noxious) *function* of these plants in a particular society or, rather, its (agri-)culture, namely, on the convention governing people's handling of plants or their view of plants (Culler 1982, 32). Similarly, Stein Haugom Olsen spoke in favor of the term "literary work of art" as the name of a class of functions, where the identity of the objects which are members of such a class could be only "defined through the function they serve in a community of practitioners using the objects" (Olsen 74). But if for Olsen defining the literary work in the context of a practice involving it seemed to cause no crucial problems, Culler came to the fatal conclusion that, based on the notion that literariness is only a convention, literary theory would be redundant, since the common features of literature would be better explained by sociology, anthropology, or history (Culler 1982, 32). Beside Olsen and his *The End of Literary Theory* there are in fact some literary theorists who sign their names to the obituary for the attribute "literary." Their reasoning is as follows (particularly provocative is, for instance, Eagleton's): if there are no ontological boundaries between literature and other discourses, if literature is only some kind of ideological fiction, an umbrella term for heterogeneous genres and linguistic registers, historically created constructs with a set date of expiration, then there is no need for the theory to fancy or burden itself with the attribute "literary," since all texts -- from a sonnet to a court document of indictment -- are justified to be explained with the same conceptual tools (Eagleton 194-217). After a period of scrutinizing its own premises and the object of analysis, literary theory is self-obliterating (see Smirnov 6-10) or, rather, flows into the sea of Theory: sociology, semiotics, discourse analysis, cognitive science, cultural or media studies, etc.

It is therefore evident to me that the problem of literariness is related to the question of the existence or dissolution of literary theory as a discipline. It is a symptom of a permanent crisis, which is, according to de Man, immanent to all modern literary scholarship: The succession of various scientific schools since positivism has proved the elusiveness of its object, methods, concepts, and results. The question whether literariness is an "internal" trait of the text or just an "external" convention (Culler 1982, 39-40) is exciting, since it brings up not only far-reaching epistemological dilemmas between realism, nominalism, and constructivism and/or between hermeneutic and psycho-sociological approaches to literature. It can even have considerable implications for policies and the situation concerning the present study of literature, especially as characterized dramatically by Steven Tötösy as a process of a marginalization of the study of literature (1998, 20-23). In sum, the question is, within what institutional framework should literary theory be advanced and taught, if at all.

Literariness as an "Objective" Character of the Text

Jonathan Culler summarized current, post-Jakobsonian definitions of literariness as a set of traits, objectively present in the text itself, into two basic groups of criteria: typical of literary texts are a special use or, rather, arrangements of language on the one hand, and a particular attitude

towards reality on the other (1982, 34, 41). Considering the growing, differing, and heteroglot production of literature, the conception according to which literary/poetic language exists as one of social dialects or, rather, as a separate functional style (see Mukarovsky 45, 80), different from the other varieties of standard language owing to the domination of the aesthetic function can presently hardly hold true. Jan Mukarovsky, who was the first to introduce this kind of theory into modern discussions, was already well aware that the boundaries of poetic language were fuzzy. He found that poetic language is characterized only by a thin layer of "poeticisms" while sharing the rest of linguistic elements with other styles and also benefiting from them (Mukarovsky 82-83). But despite the semiological view that art as well as poetic language are social facts, dependent on norms, conventions, and values, Mukarovsky nevertheless reified poetic language -- he discussed it as a relatively autonomous sub-code, even if it is impossible to prove its autonomy with immanently linguistic criteria and with no reference to statistical data. The thesis of the stylistic peculiarity of literary language could perhaps hold true only for discursive dictionaries and grammars, developed -- by imitation of patterns, recurrence and variance of clichés -- in the traditions of literary genres and kinds in particular periods or currents such for the language of the romantic sonnet or the poetic languages of the nineteenth century, of Decadence, or Expressionism.

Much more convincing than the conceptions of the literary language as a linguistic sub-code seems to be the thesis that in a text that is written with artistic intentions, the author uses and arranges linguistic material differently and with other goals than in standard communication. Hence, the actualization of linguistic levels in the text written for aesthetic purposes differs from conventions of practical, scientific, or any kind of non-artistic communication: Its reader can therefore discover not only deviations from "normal" sociolects and styles, i.e., various kinds of figurativeness, additional or superordinate organization of sound, lexico-syntactic, and semantic material, but most of all their greater density and structural coherence (García-Berrio 39-79; Markiewicz 45-55). This means a higher frequency of uncommon language features in artistic texts as well as a richer network of intra- and intertextual relationships between these elements and their patterns. From such views the "objectivistic" theory of literariness extrapolated two basic tendencies of literary usage of language: The inclination towards the polysemy of words, phrases, and larger units of discourse (this is the opposite of the ideal of the monosemy in non-literary languages) and the tendency towards textual self-reference, i.e., towards the fact that the reader is paying more attention to structural homologies, to playing with recurrent forms, ambivalent meanings, and spatialized patterns of parallelisms and oppositions, so that his/her reading is not limited only to the linear quest for referential information (see Eco 145-67; García-Berrio 52, 61-70).

In a literary text an important peculiarity of every writing is stressed; unlike speech, written word is devoid of the "physical" presence of the author and the original communicative context. Once being recorded, a literary text detaches itself from its contingent circumstances. Its meaning has to be tied more to what is stored in the cultural memory through writing. In a literary text the context of uttering cryptically vanishes. Because of such "depragmatization" of the literary text (Culler 1982, 34) extratextual referentiality and performativity of literary signs are reduced or, rather, mutated. The author, educated in this kind of tradition of writing, makes sure that the depragmatization is counter-balanced by an outburst of semiotic inter-connectivity: This way the ties between linguistic signs in the text strengthen, intertwine, and increase in number, while the meanings also come into being with intertextual reference to the literary tradition and by hypothetical (re)constructions of the author's original socio-cultural milieu through symptomatic textual representations. The literary text, separated from its author and context, must itself receive special receiver's attention and harder interpretive work. Because of the material character of the recording or, rather, the fetishism of the Book as a standard medium of presentation of a literary work of art, many readers are still inclined to experience the text as an organic, complete unit, in which nothing is coincidental and everything is meaningful and/or functional. Hence, its stylistic patterns and even its substance and forms of expression (e.g., the quality and distribution of vowels) can make up parallelisms, isomorphisms, ambiguity, semantic density, and iconic

connotation (see Culler 1982, 34, 37-38; Eco 147-49; García-Berrio 64). But, in fact, many of these traits would hardly be noticed by the same reader in the context of "ordinary language", i.e., if the text were not already treated as a literary work by a prior reading decision/expectation (see Olsen 80).

The depragmatization of utterance in literature means the transition between literariness viewed through a peculiar use of language and literariness as a particular textual relationship towards reality. To Aristotle, already, the stylistic and formal criteria alone were not sufficient for defining poetry. For that reason he introduced criteria of significance concerning content (*mimesis* as the relationship between a poetic work and reality), pragmatics and reception (catharsis as the impact of dramatic act on the reader's psyche). According to Aristotle, unlike the historian's attitude towards reality, the "poet's responsibility is not to tell what in fact happened, but rather what could have happened, i.e., what could have happened according to the laws of probability and necessity" (*Poetics*, Chapter 9); this thought fed not only the notions of aesthetic *vraisemblance*, but also the determinants of literariness concerning the relationship between the textual and extra-textual worlds.

While in the classicist tradition the evidence of poetic art was mostly formal artistry, since pre-Romanticism and Romanticism the criteria of content, such as imagination, fantasy, and in newer theories particularly fictionality, have been more important (Meletinski 13-29). In the literary text, the world represented, the subject expressing this world (narrator?s, poet?s voice), and the author?s speech acts (quasi-judgments, quasi-referential presentation) are all fictional (Culler 1982, 41-43; Markiewicz 99-122). As Dolezel has stressed, Aristotle?s comparison between historiography and poetry was used as a base for a redefinition of the relationship between textual world and reality as early as the eighteenth century when after a period of absolute domination of mimetic-imitative poetics a tendency for aesthetic justification of individual creative imagination emerged. This thought wrests itself from the vulgarized norm of imitating the outside world, since it put the nature and the author or, rather, the actual and poetic reality in an equal position -- in that of a parallel coexistence. J.J. Bodmer, A.G. Baumgarten, and J.J. Breitinger, Swiss aesthetists, relied on logic and ontology by Leibniz and Wolff, and to legitimize the poetic world-building used his notion that fictional stories are "possible worlds," which exist as alternatives to actual reality, having their own logic, chronology, and cosmology. The theory of possible worlds was then forgotten until recently (Dolezel 1990, 67, 39-52, 1998, 231).

The fact that the literary text can be detached from its original context and actualized in different ways, marks its relationship towards reality yet in another way, not just the one discussed in theories of fiction. This relationship implies its referential indeterminacy and polyvalence (García-Berrio 49-52, 66-70). Since the authorial intention no longer controls the signs in the text, and they are not determined by the context of uttering, they can more freely relate to more loosely limited, overlapping cognitive domains and thematic fields. Especially through the history of reading, signs evoke heterogeneous and sometimes even incompatible contexts, while their meanings are intertextually grafted into experientially or socially distinct discursive fields, texts, thematic networks, and contingent horizons of expectations (see Culler 1982, 122-25, 134-35; De Berg 24-27). Such polyvalence and semantic indeterminacy of the artistic text certainly dynamicizes, "condenses" its meaning, yet, it aporetically undermines it.

After the above very brief and compressed summary of the main components of theories of literariness, I present here an example of a post-structuralist interpretation of a text, one that is unquestionably considered literary -- Edvard Kocbek's poem "The Tree": "I hear the tree and I catch sight of it, / I lay down under its shade / or I touch it and tear it down, / I cut it up and put it in the stove / or I build a log-house from it, / whatever I do with it, / it will always remain a tree, / indivisible, indestructible / rustling of the wind day and night, / in the stove, on the bed, in the shade, / between the lines in a newspaper, / and in the smoke between the sky and earth, / the tree as shade and respite / the tree as cradle and coffin, / the tree as center of the paradise, / the tree as noise and hush, / the tree as tree, / and the tree as word" (Kocbek 86; Trans. M. Pirnat-Greenberg). The word "tree" in this poem avoids any specific extra-textual reference, it even eludes the reference derived from the experience (typical of lyrics), which opens the textual

space in the beginning ("I *hear* the tree and I *catch sight* of it, / I lay down under its shade"); "tree" does not indicate the characteristics, story or condition of a concrete, individual tree nor it represents a particular concept "tree" within one of the discursive fields, e.g., botany, fruit-growing, forestry, paper-making, etc. In non-literary communication a word is only as relevant as it can be used for informative regulation of the practice with which one comprehends the living environment or acts within it, e.g., "Look, a tree! There will be some shade" or "A tree is torn down, cut up, and used as a fire-wood."

Kocbek's poetic voice argues against the reduction of the sign, against its stable, definite, and operative reference. By listing alternative possibilities, various ontological modalities of the tree, the poem suggests that the meaning of a poetic sign ("tree") cannot be exhausted by automated views of it, which were shaped by repeating contextual connections of the word in various genres of every-day communication. Kocbek's tree evokes some kind of elusive "tree-ness" which escapes stabilized categorical or pragmatic schemes. This unique, merely poetically contrived meaning emerges only in this literary text, i. e., with the play of alternative possible worlds of the tree (it is shade, a cradle, a coffin, paper, a tree of Eden, a word, a noise, silence), by juxtaposing heterogeneous and even contradictory areas of imagination, and by crossbreeding of the evaluative perspectives that the word had gone through in its cultural context during the course of its historical life. Poetic writing revives the recorded cultural memory instead of relying on the outside reality. Kocbek's "The Tree" evokes the connotations that this word has gained through culture and the poet's personal experience. The poem lists contexts that can be entirely practical (the tree as an object of perception, a place of respite, raw material for a carpenter and a paper maker, etc.) or the contexts which acquired symbolic, archetypal dimensions: existential, religious, poetic (tree of Eden, smoke, sky, earth, cradle, coffin, word). Hence, the literary text takes part in imaginary-symbolic anthropological universals, with which members of a particular culture orient their lives (García-Berrio 86-93); the poem with its unique linguistic-structural fabric gives a special semantic design and evaluative accent to this supra-historical imagery.

The textual world can refer primarily to itself, since it only exists in this text and because of it. Self-referentiality is disclosed on the final margin of the text in a kind of *mise en abyme*; the ending gives a new sense to the previous whole. The point in question is the tautology "the tree as tree," which with the sentence of identity replaces previous predications ("the tree as a/b/c"), and metafictional loop "the tree as word." In fact, the tree constantly appears in Kocbek's text as a word, a signifier, even if its word-only character is disguised by the iconic fictions of the referents. However, precisely as a poetic, literary word the tree is capable of the evasive excess of meaning. Kocbek's poem interpreted in this way, satisfies all the major criteria that provide a text with literary features: The poem is linguistically designed in a special way, semantically dense, highly structured (this way it draws attention and provides the possibility of picturesque image), the poet's fictional substitute (lyrical subject) expresses an imaginary world, amalgamated from possible, alternative stories. Also, the meaning of the poem -- symbolized by "the tree as word" -- is polyvalent and undetermined. All these characteristics seem to be objective properties of the text. Therefore, with respect to Kocbek's poem one could claim that literariness is structural essence, which is realized in every (single) artistic text and is accessible for objective theoretical description.

Literariness as Convention

Opponents of essentialist conceptions of literariness, e.g., Eagleton (1-16), on the contrary, claim that all the aforementioned features are also characteristic of genres that are by no means considered literature. Fictional are, for instance, word math problems ("On the market Johnny bought 3 red apples and 2 pears. How many pieces of fruit did he bring home?"). They usually do not forget to add that Mukarovsky and Jakobson -- as the main proponents of a linguistic circumscription of literariness -- have already detected the poetic function of language in non-literary texts such as political advertisements (e.g., the notorious "I like Ike") as well. Moreover, for Vincent Leitch it is precisely by Jakobson#s notion of the poetic function that "the structuralist concept of literariness … helps us think past literary aestheticism and strict formalism, opening the

whole field of social communication to semiotic analysis attentive to matters beyond, but inclusive of, 'poeticity'" (Leitch 42).

If on the one hand literariness is by no means limited to the works which are deemed literary, on the other hand one can see how a hermeneutic-evaluative presupposition that one is dealing with a literary text changes his/her reading and understanding of a simple newspaper note (see, for example Genette 150): "His Cry": "As he stepped / to the machine / to fix its / sensor, / the machine automatically turned on. / He did jump back, but too late, / since / the moving part / of the machine squeezed / him against the static part." A piece of news from a police and fire report about a work-related accident which I simply rewrote in verse could be read differently as in its original shape. Verse is a standard signal that triggers a reading according to poetic conventions. Therefore, the newspaper news about a work-related accident loses realistic attributes and concrete temporal-spatial determinants. Instead of referring to actual reality in a particular factory, the intra-textual ties between linguistic elements strengthen, and so does the intertextual harmony of the "poem" with codes and works recalled from the literary tradition. For that reason the transformed journalistic text could even be interpreted -- forgive my ludistic exaggeration -- as a minimalist, tragicomic ballad about a fatal conflict between a person and technology. The message would be universalized and deeper, eternal meanings, detached from a concrete situation, would be searched for. A skilled interpreter would not have greater troubles to corroborate this kind of reading by "objective" data found in the text (e.g., the contrast between the moving and static parts of the machine, between the broken sensor and destructive functioning). Here is yet another and different example:

> the newcomer in the second national league belisce / is no doubt a pleasant surprise for / the western group since this team let / everybody and particularly the favorites know that / it is not planning to be satisfied just with average / achievements this is best indicated by the results / and the placement in the ranks since this / team prides itself among other things with / the fact that it is the only undefeated league member among / all national teams therefore it is no surprise / that the belisce players because of this initial / success are confident and that / before the game with aluminum their predictions / are optimistic with the game so far that / we have shown at the championship matches / there is no reason to hide hope / for a complete success in ljudski vrt as well / said one of the best players / who proved himself this past sunday / jozic (Salamun 45; Trans. M. Pirnat-Greenberg)

If someone reads the above text to us, we would say without much hesitation that it belongs to the journalistic genre. It would be regarded as sports commentary. The language seems natural, prosaic, the message is non-ambiguous, and it might have helped the readers with entirely practical interests (e.g., with filling out sports forecasts); the textual world refers to well-known realities from soccer life in Slovenia. But if we know that we have in fact listened to a poem by Tomas Salamun, all these "objective" properties are seen in a completely different light and their function is changed. Unlike Kocbek's "The Tree," in this case the context of the utterance, its medium and presentation, as well as the reading conventions applied are really crucial for establishing literariness. The author's name as a paratextual information already evokes expectations of genre, style, perspective, etc. Following Foucault it can be said that the author functions not only as the owner of the text/the copyright, and the guardian of its proper understanding, but also as a special socio-cultural role, through which people classify, evaluate, and stratify the universe of discourse (see Pease). For reasonably educated Slovene readers the name Salamun functions as a repository of literary-cultural associations, either originating in reading the author's better known texts or derived from journalistic, scholarly, or school metaliterature and from the image created by the public media. The medium or the place of publication of the poem "Belisce" also reset its character: By moving it from the newspaper column to the context of the collection of poems (*Namen pelerine*, 1968) the text becomes fictional, depragmatized, since to a reader it is not important whether the facts in the poem are true or not, once he/she decides to process it according to conventions of poetry. Naturally, the poem "Belisce" is in apparent discrepancy with these conventions. Against the background of the paradigmatic poetic texts and traditional codes it loses any meaning. Its artistic significance can only be legitimized by the reader's reliance on avant-garde aesthetic conventions, on principles of the so-called ready-made. As a member of the neo-avantgarde group OHO, Salamun took a ready-made

newspaper fragment and with some minor changes moved it to the aesthetic context: His collection of poems is a parallel to the gallery where Marcel Duchamp once boldly exhibited a urinal under the title "A Fountain." Under these circumstances one perceives a sports commentary mostly in its aesthetic function. One observes, as Bakhtin would say, the "image of language" shown from a distance. Salamun's manipulation encourages the reader that she/he, as well, looks at the iconized sociolect from a reflexive, and ironic distance. Salamun's "ready-made" verse undermines traditional ideas about poetry. The text is artistically relevant precisely as a means of critical laying bare of such expectations -- by revealing them as conventions, which are institutionalized and socially consecrated. With the provoking absence of the expected, "Belisce" talks about the hidden nature of literariness, yet with relaxing, parodic laughter.

It should be noticed that it is this kind of avant-garde act that prompted the theoretical notion that literariness cannot be an objective property of texts, but rather something "external": Based on the circumstances, the context of the reception or, rather, by conventions, and institutions literariness -- as a special value as well -- is *assigned* to texts. After reader-response theory and post-structuralism had tried to convince us that the essentialist explication of literariness was unjustified, it is nevertheless necessary to pose some trivial questions. Would one be willing, for instance, to satisfy her/his needs for literature (if one has them, of course) by consuming journalistic texts printed as collections of poems, grinding philosophic treatise between the covers of a novel or by watching TV round-tables staged as absurd grotesques? And on the other hand, would one even try to derive anything useful and every-day pragmatic from, for instance, Kocbek's "The Tree" if she/he found it with a signature "E.K." in the column "For Home and Family" in some magazine? If literariness is only a convention, how did it come to be, what is the basis for the consensus that, for instance, *The Divine Comedy*, *Don Quixote*, France Preseren's *The Crown of Sonnets,* or Ivan Cankar's drama *The King of Betajnova* are undoubtedly literary works, pieces of verbal art? I postulate that all these questions are not merely rhetorical. They imply that texts, in order to be read as literature, have to serve a certain social (existential) function that is irreducible to other discourses. From a similar standpoint, Olsen argues that "the term 'literary work of art' is the name of a function-class constituted by an institution of concepts and rules defining a practice" (75). In my view this is not far from a sound answer to the question about literariness, but seeing the literary of the literary text only through the function the text serves in the practices of a given cultural context still fails to explain *how* texts do it and *why*, on what basis such function is at all expected from them.

Literariness as an Effect Based on a Canon
Kocbek's poem -- as all "objective" symptoms of literariness were found in it -- belongs to the opus of a poet who is considered a classic of modern Slovene poetry and is therefore respected among scholarly and lay readers alike and who are favorably disposed towards poetry. With their reading, metatexts, enthusiastic or critical reviews, conflicting interpretations, etc. -- critics, essay writers, literary historians, philosophers, and teachers gradually recognized Kocbek's literature as particularly valuable, culturally representative, exciting, stimulating discussions and proliferation of further literary works. Thus, the author and his work were installed in the core of the Slovene literary canon. Literary canon is a repertoire of works, authors, and norms, principles, conventions, and explanations related to them, which -- owing to the success among readers, recognition among the elites, abundant and diverse metatextual responses by writers and scholars as well as educational or political "applicability" -- in a particular culture become selected as representations of general notions and "supra-historical" values: the canonized works function as paradigms not only of beautiful, correct and eloquent writing, of rules of literary genres, of ethical, cognitive and other values, but also of the concept of "literature" (see Juvan 277-89).

It has certainly been known for a long time that literature in the sense of verbal art has not been around forever; as a conception it is historical (Kos 5-12), not without ideological investments, and it means the outcome of large restructuring of European societies, within which a relatively autonomous domain of communication -- the system of art -- gradually developed. However, there might be too little attention paid to the fact that the notion of literature was established on the basis of concrete, highly valued texts, namely, by their processing leading to

aesthetic generalizations, normative projections, and phantasms as well as classification. This means that literariness as a convention evolved along the canon of representative texts -- along the so-called world literature and classics of national literatures. For these reasons it is not surprising that in Kocbek's poem one can recognize all the characteristics of literariness; the concept of "literature" was created precisely by normalizing canonical works, i.e., the texts that have or used to have the socio-cultural status equal to, for example, "The Tree" in Slovene literature. Literariness can thus be defined as the effect of the text, perceived on a formal, semantic, and value-ideological levels.

A text can have this kind of effect because of several interdependent factors: If it was conceived and written with the purpose of being perceived as literature, if it was thematically and linguistically organized according to some of the conventional clues to literariness, if it was published in media that establish and recall literary milieu, and -- last, but not least -- if the readership (including critics, essay writers, scholars, and other authors of metaliterature) in the course of reception, based on at least one of the aforementioned factors, activated the appropriate expectations, frameworks, and conventions. The effect of literariness originates in a complex (systemic) interaction of mental processes, metatexts, actions, and activities related to the texts: Hence, besides the physiognomy of the text itself, there are other factors determining literariness, namely, who published the text and where, with what intentions, who reads it, with what kind of knowledge and expectations, and how it is subsequently or simultaneously commented on, explained, and classified. Let me rephrase this by a quotation from Rusch: "Literariness appears to be a time-, culture-, and milieu-sensitive variable within the interactional network of authors, texts, publishers, printers, readers, etc. Rather than an immanent feature of texts or the psychological characteristics of an author or the decisions of readers, literariness turns out to be a matter of 'arrangement' and mutual adjustment" (97).

From the overview I presented above we can come to the following conclusions. First, literariness is a flexible, historically, socially and culturally differentiated convention, derived from the immanent characteristics of some literary works (canonized, classic, paradigmatic; see Schmidt 1997, 144). Second, the systemic approach to literature (see, for example, Miall and Kuiken <http://www.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/reading/igel98.htm>; Schmidt 1980, 1989, 1997; Tötösy 1998 <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/pub/totosy98/>) provides in my opinion the most convincing answers to the complexities of literariness. Systems theory in and for the study of literature, such as proposed in Schmidt's *Empirische Literaturwissenschaft* (*Empirical Study of Literature*), neither reduces literariness to a textual property nor it denies the fact, that a text as a material "scheme" and basis for processing has something to do with its own (and other text's) cultural and social effects. Instead, systems theory has elaborated a series of interdisciplinary conceptual tools, which are able to describe the subtlest socio-historical, psychic, linguo-pragmatic and actional (behavioral) ramifications, in which literariness can be intended, planned, textualized, and grasped, i.e, contexts of the construction and functioning of literariness. Third, those who are concerned with explaining the problem of literariness cannot be considered pure observers of literature; instead, they should be aware of their identity as participants who -- at least indirectly, via systems of science and education -- collaborated in constructing the notion and conventions of literature.

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