1. System and Polysystem in Modern Functionalism: Statics vs. Dynamics

The idea that semiotic phenomena, i.e., sign-governed human patterns of communication (such as culture, language, literature, society), could more adequately be understood and studied if regarded as systems rather than conglomerates of disparate elements has become one of the leading ideas of our time in most sciences of man. Thus, the positivistic collection of data, taken bona fide on empiricist grounds and analyzed on the basis of their material substance, has been replaced by a functional approach based on the analysis of relations. Viewing them as systems made it possible to hypothesize how the various semiotic aggregates operate. The way was subsequently opened for the achievement of what has been regarded throughout the development of modern science as a supreme goal: the detection of the laws governing the diversity and complexity of phenomena rather than the registration and classification of these phenomena. Since


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the pre-functionalist approaches hardly ever attempted to detect such
laws, what had previously been taken as “phenomena” (i.e., the objects
for observation/study) did not actually overlap with the “phenomena”
which could be hypothesized by the functionalistic approach. Thus,
the idea of system has made it possible not only to account adequately
for “known” phenomena, but also to discover altogether “unknown”
ones. In addition, known data which had never been thought of as
correlatable with the data normally connected with a certain “fact”
have now become meaningful for that “fact.” Functionalism has pro-
foundly altered both structures and methods, questions and answers,
of every discipline into which it was introduced.

Nevertheless, in spite of common premises, the functional approach
has never been quite unified. Roughly speaking, two different and
incompatible programs have been circulated. Unfortunately, this has
not always been understood, causing much damage to the develop-
ment of the various semiotic disciplines. The failure to distinguish
between these programs not only gave the wrong idea about their re-
spective contents, but made it difficult to appreciate what each was
fundamentally designed to accomplish. It is lamentable that while this
is recognized as a trivial commonplace in some parts of the modern
semiotic tradition, incorrect presentations of the situation, even by
“professionals,” are still the order of the day.

I will refer to the respective programs as “the theory of static sys-
tems” vs. “the theory of dynamic systems.” The theory of static systems
has wrongly been identified as the exclusive “functional” or “struc-
tural” approach, and is usually referred to as the teachings of Saussure.
In Saussure’s own writings and in subsequent works in his tradition,
the system is conceived of as a static (“synchronic”) net of relations,
in which the value of each item is a function of the specific relation
into which it enters. While the function of elements, as well as the
rules governing them, are thus detected, there is hardly any way to
account for changes and variations. The factor of time-succession (“di-
achrony”) has thus been eliminated from the “system” and ruled to lie
beyond the scope of functional hypotheses. It has therefore been de-
clared to be extra-systemic, and, since it was exclusively identified with
the historical aspect of systems, the latter has been virtually banished
from the realm of linguistics.

The advantages of introducing the concept of system to replace the
mechanistic collection of data are evident. Even the reduction of the
system to an a-historical, extra-temporal aspect, as it were, is not per se
indefensible. The linguistic scene of Saussure’s time, with its heavy
concentration on historical change, conceived of in non-systemic terms
(to put it mildly), clearly constituted an obstacle to discovering not how
language differs in different periods, but how it operates in the first
place. By means of reduction, an adequate level of abstraction could be achieved, and the principal mechanisms of language functioning were thus laid bare. Obviously, from the point of view of such an abstract model, the possible concurrent existence of different options within one system at a given moment need not necessarily be considered if these are, in principle, reducible. As is well known from other fields of inquiry (e.g., thermodynamics), it is more efficient from the methodological point of view to start by developing a theory of closed systems.

Thus understood, the static approach really accomplishes its ultimate design. However, if taken for what it is not, namely, a model which aims at a closer account of the conditions under which a system operates in time, it can disturb scientific inquiry. There is a clear difference between an attempt to account for some major principles which govern a system outside the realm of time, and one which intends to account for how a system operates both “in principle” and “in time.” Once the historical aspect is admitted into the functional approach, several implications must be drawn. First, it must be admitted that both synchrony and diachrony are historical, but the exclusive identification of the latter with history is untenable. As a result, synchrony cannot and should not be equated with statics, since at any given moment, more than one diachronic set is operating on the synchronic axis. Therefore, on the one hand a system consists of both synchrony and diachrony; on the other, each of these separately is obviously also a system. Secondly, if the idea of structuredness and systemicity need no longer be identified with homogeneity, a semiotic system can be conceived of as a heterogeneous, open structure. It is, therefore, very rarely a uni-system but is, necessarily, a polysystem—a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent.

If the static, synchronistic approach\(^1\) emanates from the Geneva School, the dynamic approach has its roots in the works of the Russian Formalists as well as the Czech Structuralists. Their notion of a dynamic system has regrettably been ignored to a large extent in both linguistics and the theory of literature. The synchronistic approach—falsely interpreted—triumphed. For both layman and “professional,” “structuralism” is still, more often than not, equated with statics and synchronism, homogeneous structure and an a-historical approach.

\(^1\) “Synchronistic” seems to be more appropriate than “synchronic” once we accept that “synchronic” need not be equated with “static.”
2. Polysystem: Processes and Procedures

2.1. General Properties of the Polysystem

Seen against such a background, the term “polysystem” is more than just a terminological convention. Its purpose is to make explicit the conception of a system as dynamic and heterogeneous in opposition to the synchronistic approach. It thus emphasizes the multiplicity of intersections and hence the greater complexity of structuredness involved. Also, it stresses that in order for a system to function, uniformity need not be postulated. Once the historical nature of a system is recognized (a great merit from the point of view of constructing models closer to “the real world”), the transformation of historical objects into a series of uncorrelated a-historical occurrences is prevented.

Admittedly, since handling an open system is more difficult than handling a closed one, the level of exhaustive analysis may be more limited. Perhaps more room will be given to “disorders,” and the notion of “the systemic” will no more be erroneously equated with the notion of “the systematic.” These are “disadvantages,” to be sure, from the point of view of the theory of static systems. But from the point of view of dynamic systems theory they are nothing of the sort. Indeed, synchronism can deal with the general idea of function and functioning, but cannot account for the functioning of language, or any other semiotic system, in a specific territory in time. One can of course reduce the heterogeneity of culture in society to the ruling classes only, but this would not hold once the time factor, i.e., the possibility of change and its governing mechanisms, is taken into account. The acuteness of heterogeneity in culture is perhaps most “palpable,” as it were, in such cases as when a certain society is bi- or multilingual (a state that used to be common in most European communities up to recent times). Within the realm of literature, for instance, this is manifested in a situation where a community possesses two (or more) literary systems, two “literatures,” as it were. For students of literature, to overcome such cases by confining themselves to only one of these, ignoring the other, is naturally more “convenient” than dealing with them both. Actually, this is a common practice in literary studies; how inadequate the results are cannot be overstated.

2. However, it cannot be stressed enough that there is no property relatable to the “polysystem” which could not, as such, be related to the “system.” If by “system” one is prepared to understand both the idea of a closed set-of-relations, in which the members receive their values through their respective oppositions, and the idea of an open structure consisting of several such concurrent nets-of-relations, then the term “system” is appropriate and quite adequate. The trouble is that established terms tend to preserve older notions. New terms must therefore be coined to make the concepts behind them conspicuous, even when old terms would in principle suffice.
The polysystem hypothesis, however, is designed precisely to deal with such cases, as well as with the less conspicuous ones. Thus, not only does it make possible the integration into semiotic research of objects (properties, phenomena) previously unnoticed or bluntly rejected; rather, such an integration now becomes a precondition, a sine qua non, for an adequate understanding of any semiotic field. This means that standard language cannot be accounted for without putting it into the context of the non-standard varieties; literature for children would not be considered a phenomenon sui generis, but related to literature for adults; translated literature would not be disconnected from original literature; mass literary production (thrillers, sentimental novels, etc.) would not simply be dismissed as “non-literature” in order to evade the recognition of its mutual dependence with “individual” literature.

Further, it may seem trivial, yet warrants special emphasis, that the polysystem hypothesis involves a rejection of value judgments as criteria for an a priori selection of the objects of study. This must be particularly stressed for literary studies, where confusion between criticism and research still exists. If one accepts the polysystem hypothesis, then one must also accept that the historical study of literary polysystems cannot confine itself to the so-called “masterpieces,” even if some would consider them the only raison d'être of literary studies in the first place. This kind of elitism cannot be compatible with literary historiography just as general history can no longer be the life stories of kings and generals. In other words, as scholars committed to the discovery of the mechanisms of literature, there seems to be no way for us to avoid recognizing that any prevalent value judgments of any period are themselves an integral part of these mechanisms. No field of study, whether mildly or more rigorously “scientific,” can select its objects according to norms of taste.

Excluding the selection of objects to be studied according to taste does not mean that either particular “values” or evaluation in general are excluded by any section of the sciences of man as active factors to be accounted for. Without a study of such evaluative norms, there is no way of understanding the behavior of any human system. I would therefore like to warn at this point against a misinterpretation of my argument; no “objectivist” program, in the naïve sense of the word, is preached here. As will become apparent from the following, the study of cultural norms lies at the very core of any functional stratification theory.

2.2. Dynamic Stratification and Systemic Products

Heterogeneity is reconcilable with functionality if we assume that rather than correlating with each other as individual items (elements or functions), the seemingly non-reconcilable items (elements or functions) constitute partly alternative systems of concurrent options.
These systems are not equal, but hierarchized within the polysystem. It is the permanent struggle between the various strata, Tynjanov has suggested, which constitutes the (dynamic) synchronic state of the system. It is the victory of one stratum over another which constitutes the change on the diachronic axis. In this centrifugal vs. centripetal motion, phenomena are driven from the center to the periphery while, conversely, phenomena may push their way into the center and occupy it. However, with a polysystem one must not think in terms of one center and one periphery, since several such positions are hypothesized. A move may take place, for instance, whereby a certain item (element, function) is transferred from the periphery of one system to the periphery of an adjacent system within the same polysystem, and then may or may not move on to the center of the latter.

Traditionally, we have often been faced with the results of such transfers either without realizing that they have occurred, or ignoring their source. Since in practice, the (uni-) system has been identified with the central stratum exclusively (that is, official culture as manifested inter alia in standard language, canonized literature, patterns of behavior of the dominating classes), peripheries have been conceived of (if at all) as categorically extra-systemic, a view which coincides of course with the “inside view” of the “people-in-the-culture” (cf. Lotman et al. 1975; Voegelin 1960). This attitude has led to a number of developments. First, there was no awareness of the tensions between strata within a system, and therefore the value (function, “meaning”) of a variety of items went undetected; these items stood in clear opposition to other concurrent items, the existence and nature of which were ignored. Secondly, as already stated, the process of change could not be accounted for, and changes had to be explained in terms of the individual inventions of imaginative minds or “influences” from another source, normally on the individual, often isolated level (another writer, a specific work, etc.). Thirdly, the materially manifested changes (as distinct from the process of change) could not be interpreted, since their nature was concealed from the observer’s eye. Consider, for example, the reduction of the writer’s creativity to vague notions such as “imagination” and “inspiration.” Using them in fact is a renouncement of the possibility of disentangling the knotty complex which constitutes the conditions under which a writer works, part of which consists of certain pertinent constraints, while part is a function of the writer’s personal ability to create new conditions not imposed on him but by him.

Why transfers take place in the first place, the reasons for specific transfers, and how they are actualized (performed) are questions with which Polysystem theory has been increasingly occupied in direct proportion to the growing number of instances where it has been put to the test during recent years.
One thing has become clear: the relations which obtain within the polysystem do not account only for polysystem processes, but also for procedures at the level of repertoire. That is to say, the polysystem constraints turn out to be relevant for the procedures of selection, manipulation, amplification, deletion, etc., taking place in actual products (verbal as well as non-verbal) pertaining to the polysystem. Therefore, those interested not in the processes taking place in their specific field, such as language or literature, but in the “actual” constitution of products (e.g., lingual utterances, literary texts), cannot avoid taking into account the state of the particular polysystem with whose products they happen to deal. Naturally, when only official products (standard language utterances, literary “masterpieces”) were treated, the work of the polysystem constraints often could not be detected. As the researchers failed to see the connection between the position of texts and models (properties, features) within the structured whole (to which they belong), on the one hand, and the decisions made while producing them, on the other, local explanations (“mistakes,” “misunderstandings,” “bad imitation,” etc., for instance in the study of translation) became their only possible refuge. (For a more detailed discussion of translated literature see below, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem.”)

2.2.1. Canonized vs. Non-Canonized Strata

It was Shklovskij who seems to have first conceptualized the socio-cultural distinctions of text production in terms of literary stratification. According to him (1921, 1923), in literature certain properties become canonized, while other remain non-canonized. In such a view, by “canonized” one means those literary norms and works (i.e., both models and texts) which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its historical heritage. On the other hand, “non-canonized” means those norms and texts which are rejected by these circles as illegitimate and whose products are often forgotten in the long run by the community (unless they change their status). Canonicity is thus no inherent feature of textual activities on any level: it is no euphemism for “good” versus “bad” literature. The fact that certain features tend, in certain periods, to cluster around certain statuses does not mean that these features are “essentially” pertinent to some status. Obviously, the people-in-the-culture them-

selves may, in one period or another, conceive of these distinctions in such terms, but the historian may use them only as evidence of a period’s set of norms.4

The tensions between canonized and non-canonized culture are universal. They are present in every human culture, because a non-stratified human society simply does not exist, not even in Utopia. There is no un-stratified language upon earth, even if the dominant ideology governing the norms of the system does not allow for an explicit consideration of any other than the canonized strata. The same holds true for the structure of society and everything involved in that complex phenomenon.

The ideology of an official culture as the only acceptable one in a given society has resulted in massive cultural compulsion affecting whole nations through a centralized educational system and making it impossible even for students of culture to observe and appreciate the role of the dynamic tensions which operate within the culture for its efficient maintenance. As with a natural system, which needs, for instance, heat regulation, cultural systems also need a regulating balance in order not to collapse or disappear. This regulating balance is manifested in the stratificational oppositions. The canonized repertoires of any system would very likely stagnate after a certain time if not for competition from non-canonized challengers, which often threaten to replace them. Under the pressures from the latter, the canonized repertoires cannot remain unchanged. This guarantees the evolution of the system, which is the only means of its preservation. On the other hand, when no pressures are allowed release, we often witness either the gradual abandonment of a system and movement to another (e.g., Latin is replaced by its various Romance vernaculars), or its total collapse by means of a revolution (overthrow of a regime or the total disappearance of hitherto preserved models, etc.).

It seems that when there is no “sub-culture” (popular literature, popular art, “low culture” in whatever sense, etc.), or when exerting real pressures on canonized culture is not permitted, there is little

4. Here, as with most other subjects, Shklovskij’s terminological usage is hardly systematic. In Rozanov and other publications he oscillates between “non-canonized” on the one hand and “junior” literature (or “line”; mladshaj literatura [linija]) on the other. Moreover, although “canonized” (kanonizirovannyj) seems to be the most “natural” word in Russian rather than “canonical” (kanonicheskij) for profane matters, this distinction is blurred at least in some other languages, notably English. While “canonical” may suggest (and so it does in the writings of many English- or French-speaking critics) the idea that certain features are inherently “canonical” (French “canonique”), “canonized” (French “canonisé”) clearly emphasizes that such a state is a result of some act(ivity) exercised on certain material, not a primordial nature of this material “itself.” This is why I recommend sticking to Shklovskij’s practice in other European languages as well.
chance of there being a vital canonized culture. Without the stimulation of a strong "sub-culture," any canonized activity tends to gradually become petrified. The first steps towards petrification manifest themselves in a high degree of boundness and growing stereotypization of the various repertoires. For the system, petrification is an operational disturbance: in the long run it does not allow it to cope with the changing needs of the society in which it functions. If one conceives of this incapacity in terms of cultural inadequacy—a concept barely explicated as yet—then there are various possible manifestations of it. In the case of literature, one of the chief organizers of human culture, this does not necessarily mean that immediate disintegration becomes imminent. Literature as a socio-cultural institution may go on existing for good, but the degree of its "adequacy" may very well be judged by its position within culture. (For instance, being pushed into a periphery within culture may be a clear token of such an inadequacy.)

As a rule, the center of the whole polysystem is identical with the most prestigious canonized repertoire. Thus, it is the group which governs the polysystem that ultimately determines the canonicity of a certain repertoire. Once canonicity has been determined, such a group either adheres to the properties canonized by it (which subsequently gives them control of the polysystem) or, if necessary, alters the repertoire of canonized properties in order to maintain control. On the other hand, if unsuccessful in either the first or the second procedure, both the group and its canonized repertoire are pushed aside by some other group, which makes its way to the center by canonizing a different repertoire. Those who still try to adhere to that displaced canonized repertoire can only seldom gain control of the center of the polysystem; as a rule, one finds them on the periphery of the canonized, referred to (by the carriers of official culture) pejoratively as "epigones." Yet, as polysystems may stagnate, "epigones" may perpetuate an established repertoire for a long time, thus eventually becoming identical—from the stratificational point of view—with the original group which initiated that state of affairs.

2.2.2. System vs. Repertoire vs. Texts

In the (poly)system it is in the repertoire that canonicity is most concretely manifested. While repertoire may be either canonized or non-canonized, the system to which a repertoire belongs may be either central or peripheral. Naturally, when a central system is the home of canonized repertoires, one may speak in abbreviated terms of canonized vs. non-canonized systems, in spite of the imprecision thus introduced into our jargon. Repertoire is conceived of here as the aggregate of laws and elements (either single, bound, or total models) that govern the production of texts. While some of these laws and ele-
ments seem to be universally valid since the world's first literatures, clearly a great many laws and elements are subjected to shifting conditions in different periods and cultures. It is this local and temporal sector of the repertoire which is the issue of struggle in the literary (or any other semiotic) system. But there is nothing in the repertoire itself that is capable of determining which section of it can be (or become) canonized or not, just as the distinctions between “standard,” “high,” “vulgar,” or “slang” in language are not determined by the language repertoire itself, but by the language system—i.e., the aggregate of factors operating in society involved with the production and consumption of lingual utterances. It is thus these systemic relations that determine the status of certain items (properties, features) in a certain “language.” The selection of a certain aggregate of features for the consumption of a certain status group is therefore extraneous to that aggregate itself. Similarly, the status of any literary repertoire is determined by the relations that obtain in the (poly)system. Obviously, canonized repertoire is supported by either conservatory or innovatory elites, and therefore is constrained by those cultural patterns which govern the behavior of the latter. If sophistication and eccentricity (or the opposite, i.e., “simple-mindedness” and conformism) are required by the elite to gratify its taste and control the center of the cultural system, then canonized repertoire will adhere to these features as closely as it can.

In this approach, then, “literature” cannot be conceived of as either a set of texts, an aggregate of texts (which seems to be a more advanced approach), or a repertoire. Texts and repertoire are only partial manifestations of literature, manifestations whose behavior cannot be explained by their own structure. It is on the level of the literary (poly)system that their behavior is explicable.

No doubt texts are the most conspicuously visible products of the literary system, at least in many periods of its history. Obviously, for any individual, it is the ultimate product of any activity that matters: for any individual consumer, industrial products normally are the only target of interest rather than the factors which govern the industry.

5. It is hard to dislodge time-honored images and therefore it seems only “natural” that producing and consuming texts must always have been the most important activity in “literature.” Yet in certain periods, the text was rather marginal vis-à-vis other activities in the literary system, such as the writer or some “total event” in the shape of various performances. I would like to suggest that, more often than not, defense of old texts (and models) is not necessarily a sign of excessive interest in them, but rather a sign of partial indifference towards them. When perpetuated long enough, “texts” gradually become marginal factors in “literature.” (Of course, parts of texts, such as lines, stanzas, selected expressions, may be quoted and even revered, but in most such cases they become detached from their original contexts.)
making the products. Yet it is clear that for anybody interested in understanding industry as a complex activity, the latter cannot be exhaustively analyzed by its products, even if products may seem the very raison d'être of its operations. In the literary system, texts, rather than playing a role in the processes of canonization, are the outcome of these processes. It is only in their function as representatives of models that texts constitute an active factor in systemic relations.

2.2.3. Static vs. Dynamic Canonicity

It therefore seems imperative to clearly distinguish between two different uses of the term “canonicity,” one referring to the level of texts, the other to the level of models. For it is one thing to introduce a text into the literary canon, and another to introduce it through its model into some repertoire. In the first case, which may be called static canonicity, a certain text is accepted as a finalized product and inserted into a set of sanctified texts literature (culture) wants to preserve. In the second case, which may be called dynamic canonicity, a certain literary model manages to establish itself as a productive principle in the system through the latter’s repertoire. It is this latter kind of canonization which is the most crucial for the system’s dynamics. Moreover, it is this kind of canonization that actually generates the canon, which may thus be viewed as the group of survivors of canonization struggles, probably the most conspicuous products of certain successfully established models. Naturally, any canonical text can be recycled at any given moment into the repertoire in order to become a canonized model again. But once it is recycled, it is no longer in its capacity of a finalized product that it plays a role, but as a potential set of instructions, i.e., a model. The fact that it had once been canonized and become canonical, i.e., sanctified, may or may not be advantageous for it vis-à-vis non-canonical products that have as yet no position at all.

It has been argued that a system can manage with a canon better than without one. It seems that a static canon is a primary condition for any system to be recognized as a distinct activity in culture. It is also obvious that on a superficial level text producers (writers) struggle for their texts to be recognized and accepted as such. But even for these writers themselves what really matters is that their texts be taken as a manifestation, a successful actualization, of a certain model to be followed. It would be a terrible disappointment for writers to have their particular texts accepted but their literary models rejected. This would mean, from their point of view, the end of their productiveness.

6. This is a current hypothesis in many cultural studies. For some recent discussions see Segal 1982 and Sheffy 1985, where this subject is given a most original and stimulating treatment.
within literature, an indicator of their lack of influence and efficiency. To be recognized as a great writer yet be rejected as a model for living literature is a situation no writer participating in the game can indifferently resign himself to. Writers whose awareness of their position is more acute, and whose maneuvering capacity is more vigorous and flexible, have always tried to alter such a position if they happened to find themselves in it. Boris Eijzenbaum has shown (1927b, 1929, 1928/31 [English Eichenbaum 1971]) how Tolstoj reacted to the rejection of his literary models (while his texts, as well as his personal position in the historical canon, had already been secured) by introducing altogether different literary models several times during his lifetime. A very similar case is the literary career of August Strindberg, who managed several times to remain at the center of the productive canonized repertoire by switching from one set of models to another. Other writers, perhaps the great majority of them, normally stick to one set of models throughout their literary career. Although they may produce more accomplished texts than previously according to the same (previous) models, they may lose their contemporary position (though not necessarily their public, which thus moves with them from the center to a periphery of the literary system). This is clear-cut evidence that it is not through their texts as such that writers acquire positions in the literary system. A new dominant occupant of the center may not deny them their position in the static canon, while at the same time it may reject them as acceptable models for making new texts. At other times, however, this rejection—at least in its initial stages—also involves a rejection of these dethroned writers, that is of their texts, from the canon as well.

2.2.4. Primary vs. Secondary Types
As stated above (2.2), transfers are also necessarily linked to specific procedures imposed on the properties involved with them. Transfer, in other words, is correlated with transformation. These procedures, of various kinds, are sometimes definable as the preconditions for transfers, while at other times they are clearly results of the latter. Whether they are the one or the other depends on the specific state of the polysystem and on our ability to discover some general rules for the correlation between transfer and transformation. Initially, it is not very clear that two separate principles are involved, since these procedures are intimately linked with the process discussed, and since, during some periods in the history of language or literature, procedures tend to operate almost permanently with certain strata. They seem, rather, to be in some way interchangeable. I am afraid this was the way things were described in previous works of mine, but they were already explicitly corrected in my paper “The Polysystem Hypothesis Revisited” (Even-Zohar 1978: 28–35). As the principle governing the
procedures involved in transfer (and stratification of the polysystem in general), I proposed (1974, 1978: 14–20) the opposition between “primary” and “secondary” types. But as in the actual literary corpora I had then analyzed, “primary” types tended to appear exclusively in the canonized repertoire (and “secondary” in the non-canonized), I began using the term “primary system” for a “canonized repertoire possessing primary types.” This was not an adequate practice, as it blurs the issue and is moreover incorrect when periods other than those I then discussed are taken into consideration (cf. Yahalom 1978, 1980; Drory 1988).

The primary vs. secondary opposition is that of innovativeness vs. conservatism in the repertoire. When a repertoire is established and all derivative models pertaining to it are constructed in full accordance with what it allows, we are faced with a conservative repertoire (and system). Every individual product (utterance, text) of it will then be highly predictable, and any deviation will be considered outrageous. Products of such a state I label “secondary.” On the other hand, the augmentation and restructuration of a repertoire by the introduction of new elements, as a result of which each product is less predictable, are expressions of an innovatory repertoire (and system). The models it offers are of the “primary” type: the pre-condition for their functioning is the discontinuity of established models (or elements of them). Of course, this is a purely historical notion. It does not take long for any “primary” model, once it is admitted into the center of the canonized system, to become “secondary,” if perpetuated long enough. The struggle between the primary and secondary options is as decisive for the system’s evolution as the tension (and struggle) between high and low strata within the system. Naturally, change occurs only when a primary model becomes dominant in the repertoire and subsequently in the (poly)system: its perpetuation denotes stabilization and new conservatism. Usually, perpetuation is governed by its own specific rules. Thus, it has not been possible so far to observe the perpetuation of any primary model without concomitant structural modifications that can be termed, in an ad hoc manner, “simplification.” This does not mean that primary models are more sophisticated than secondary ones, but that during the course of their perpetuation, and within the secondary models which ultimately emerge out of them, a process of reduction takes place. For instance, heterogeneous models are transformed into homogeneous models; the number of incompatible patterns (e.g., various kinds of “ambiguity”) within the same structure is reduced; complex relations are gradually replaced by less complex and so on. Naturally, the reverse procedures take place when a secondary model is manipulated in such a way that it is virtually transformed into a primary one.

As I have argued above, canonicity does not necessarily overlap with
primariness, although this may have been the case in more recent times, i.e., since the Romantic Age. It is therefore important to discover the sort of relations which obtain between canonicity and innovation. The more we observe literature with the help of these notions, the more it becomes apparent that we are facing a general semiotic mechanism rather than an exclusively literary one. As systems are governed by those who control them, the tools fought for will depend on their relative efficacy in controlling the system. Thus, when control can be achieved only by “change,” this becomes the leading popular principle. It will not be so, however, as long as perpetuation, rather than innovation, can satisfy those who might lose more by change. Naturally, once there is a takeover, the new repertoire will not admit elements which are likely to endanger its dominance in the system. The process of “secondarization” of the primary thus turns out to be unavoidable. It is further reinforced by a parallel mechanism of “secondarization,” by which a system manages to repress innovation. By such a process, new elements are retranslated, as it were, into the old terms, thus imposing previous functions on new carriers rather than changing the functions. Thus, as in the case of a new regime which carries on the institutions of the old by transferring their functions to new bodies, so a primary literary model, gradually altered, is merged with the stock of secondary models of a previous stage. Semiotically speaking, this is a mechanism by which the less immediately understandable, the less decipherable, becomes more so. The less familiar, and hence more intimidating, demanding, and loaded with information, becomes more familiar, less intimidating, and so on. Empirically, this seems to be what the overwhelming majority of culture consumers really prefer, and when one desires to control them, this preference will be fully met.

2.3. Intra- and Inter-Relations

The principles and properties discussed in the above paragraphs, for the intra-relations of the polysystem, seem to hold true for its inter-relations as well. These inter-relations involve two kinds of adjacent systems: a larger whole belonging to the same community, and a whole, or its parts, which belongs to other communities, either of the same order (sort) or not.

2.3.1. Intra-Relations

In the first case, such a view is based on the assumption that any semiotic (poly)system (such as language or literature) is just a component of a larger (poly)system—that of “culture,” to which it is subjugated and with which it is isomorphic—and therefore correlated with this greater whole and its other components. To the complicated question of how
literature correlates with language, society, economy, politics, ideology, etc., Polysystem theory provides less simplistic and reductionist hypotheses than other proposals. One need no longer assume that social facts, for example, must find an immediate, unidirectional, and univocal expression on the level of the literary repertoire, as primitive sociology or the History of Ideas, (orthodox) Marxism included, would like us to believe. The intricate correlations between these cultural systems, if seen as isomorphic in nature and functional only within a cultural whole, can be observed on the basis of their mutual give-and-take, which often occurs obliquely, i.e., through transmissional devices, and often via peripheries. This has been demonstrated for various strata which function largely at the periphery, such as translated literature. Ample material and detailed analyses of such cases are provided by Toury (1977, 1980), Shavit and Shavit (1974), Shavit (1978, 1980, 1986), Yahalom (1978, 1980), Sheffy (1985), and others.

Moreover, if we assume that the literary system, for instance, is isomorphic with, say, the social system, its hierarchies can only be conceived of as intersecting with those of the latter. The idea of a less stratified literature becoming more stratified, which I suggested as a universal of systems (Even-Zohar 1978: 39), can be thus understood because of the homologous relations between literature and society. The same holds true for other relations hypothesized by Polysystem theory for the literary polysystem. Conceiving of literature as a separate semi-independent socio-cultural institution is therefore tenable only if the literary polysystem, like any other socio-cultural system, is conceived of as simultaneously autonomous and heteronomous with all other co-systems. Thus, facts of “literary life” (byt; Ejxenbaum 1929: esp. 49–86 and 109–114; 1971), that is, the literary institution (constituted by, e.g., literary ideologies, publishing houses, criticism, literary groups, or any other means for dictating taste or norm-giving), while undeniably behaving as a semi-independent socio-cultural system obeying its own laws, must also be recognized as integral factors of the literary system proper. Indeed, this recognition, rather dim even in late Russian Formalism, seems to have become a major issue at least for the later Ejxenbaum, who thus crossed many inviolable boundaries others would not even approach. But even in his case, these issues are implied rather than explicitly stated.

2.3.2. Inter-Relations

As for the second case, i.e., the correlations a system maintains with systems controlled by other communities, the same hypotheses are valid. Just as an aggregate of phenomena operating for a certain community can be conceived of as a system constituting part of a larger polysystem, which, in turn, is just a component within the larger polysystem of the “total culture” of the said community, so can the latter be
conceived of as a component in a “mega-polysystem,” i.e., one which organizes and controls several communities. In history, such “units” are by no means clear-cut or forever finalized. Rather, the opposite holds true, as the borders separating adjacent systems shift all the time, not only within systems, but between them. The very notions of “within” and “between” cannot be taken either statically or for granted.

Let us take a most conspicuous case, that of European communities and their literatures and cultures in general. Clearly, throughout the Middle Ages, Central and Western Europe constituted one polysystem, where the center was controlled by literature written in Latin, while texts in the vernaculars (either written or spoken) were produced concurrently as part of peripheral activities. Following a long process of gradual decrease, this system, with its perpetuated canonized repertoire, finally collapsed in about the middle of the eighteenth century, to be replaced by a series of more or less independent uni-lingual (poly)systems, whose interdependencies with the other (poly)systems became more and more negligible, at least from the point of view of both consumers and the dominating ideologies. However, it is apparent that in order to be able not only to describe the general principles of interference, but also to explain their nature and causes with certain exactitude, a stratification hypothesis must be posited. For when the various European nations gradually emerged and created their own cultures—most explicitly vehicled by their new literatures, languages, and official histories—certain center-and-periphery relations were unavoidably present in the process from the very start. Cultures that developed earlier, and which belonged to nations which influenced, by prestige or direct domination, other nations, were taken as sources for more recent cultures (including more recently reconstructed ones). As a result, there inevitably emerged a discrepancy between the models transferred, which were often of a secondary type (for the obvious reason of easier identification and extraction of constructional principles), and the original ones, as the latter most likely might have been pushed by that time from the center of their own system to the periphery.

A very interesting test case where such relations seem to be rather transparent and may be studied in great detail is the case of texts translated from a more recent target literature into that particular source literature which had functioned for it as a source of repertoire to begin with.7 It is no wonder that in this case texts are often trans-

7. Examples for such cases may be found in many translations into French or German from various literatures which have developed their repertoires on the basis of French or German literatures, for example, Flemish nineteenth-century poetry
lated in accordance with the most secondarized models available in the target literature. They may subsequently make an impression of “epigonic” products on the public at the center of the target literature, if this literature is in a state of dynamic motion. At the same time, however, it may be the only way to please other sectors of the target literature public, since this is the only way they identify any text as properly “literary” and subsequently acceptable. This characteristic feature of such texts naturally has no functional importance for their role (or the role of the models underlying them) in their own literature. It is only when we are interested in discovering the processes and procedures by which a system evolved or maintained itself that such considerations become indispensable.

In short, it is a major goal, and a workable possibility for the Polysystem theory, to deal with the particular conditions under which a certain literature may be interfered with by another literature, as a result of which properties are transferred from one polysystem to another. For instance, if one accepts the hypothesis that peripheral properties are likely to penetrate the center once the capacity of the center (i.e., the repertoire of the center) to fulfill certain functions has been weakened (Shklovskij’s second law), then there is no sense in denying that the very same principle operates on the inter-systemic level as well. Similarly, it is the polysystemic structure of the literatures involved which can account for various intricate processes of interference. For instance, contrary to common belief, interference often takes place via peripheries. When this process is ignored, there is simply no explanation for the appearance and function of new items in the repertoire. Semiliterary texts, translated literature, children’s literature—all those strata neglected in current literary studies—are indispensable objects of study for an adequate understanding of how and why transfers occur, within systems as well as among them. (For a more detailed discussion of interference see “Laws of Literary Interference” below.)

2.4. Stability and Instability; Volume of the System

For a socio-cultural system to be able to operate without needing to depend on extraneous systems (that is, parallel systems of other communities), several conditions must be fulfilled. For instance, there is good reason to believe that heterogeneity is one of these conditions. Here the law of proliferation seems to be universally valid. This law,

translated into French. Another example would be Russian translations of texts written in Hebrew during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which in their turn have been modelled after the Russian repertoire.
which I suggested back in 1975 (Even-Zohar 1978: 43) under a different formulation, simply means that in order to fulfill its needs, a system actually strives to avail itself of a growing inventory of alternative options. When a given system has succeeded in accumulating sufficient stock, the chances are good that the home inventory will suffice for its maintenance and perseverance, unless conditions drastically change. Otherwise, inter-systemic transfers remain the only, or at least the most decisive, solution, and are immediately carried out in spite of resistance. It would naturally be highly desirable, and indeed a great advancement of our theories, to know how large “a sufficient stock” need be in order for a system to function adequately. Such knowledge is not available to us at the moment, although one can speak on a descriptive level of “minimal” repertoires, without which any literary system would not be able to work. Studies of the emergence of (literary) repertoires have shown that from the very first moment, no literature functions with a small repertoire; the same holds true of the literary system as a larger complex. In other words, it seems to be reasonably substantiated that once a system starts, (the law of) proliferation is activated.

This may give the impression that it is the best interest of the system to be permanently unstable; but this is not the case. On the level of the system, instability should not be identified with change, just as stability should not be identified with petrification. In other words, stability or instability of repertoire do not reflect, or necessarily generate, stability or instability of the system. A system which is incapable of maintaining itself over a period of time and is often on the verge of collapse is, from the functional point of view, unstable; while a system undergoing permanent, steady, and well-controlled change may adequately be considered stable simply because it perseveres. It is only such stable systems which manage to survive, while others simply perish. Therefore, “crises” or “catastrophes” in a polysystem (i.e., occurrences which call for radical change, either by internal or external transfer), if they can be controlled by the system, are signs of a vital, rather than a degenerate, system. The system may be endangered only when change becomes uncontrollable and hence unmanageable. Naturally, from the point of view of position holders in the system, on whatever level, any change which they cannot control endangers their positions, but not necessarily the system as such. There are of course cases in history where endangered repertoire puts the whole system in danger, but this is more often than not the result of preceding long stagnation which has not allowed “normal dynamics” in the first place.