

## Editorial

### Towards a critical mass of accumulated knowledge in the field of scientific literary studies

There is a time in a disciplinary field of inquiry when a critical mass of knowledge is created to offer a more solid foundation with which to grow and develop further understanding. This point of critical mass is characterized by several different developments, including the establishment of underpinning theoretical positions, supported by empirical data, enhanced methodological diversity and sophistication, and the presence of dedicated researchers, allocated funding and research institutes. Ultimately, this critical mass is represented in the richness, innovation, inter-disciplinary relevance and efficacy of the research that is published. As I reviewed the collection of papers for the current edition of SSOL 7.1, I was struck by the sense of potential critical mass that these different papers represent. While our field, as represented in the journal, is still very young and not yet at critical mass, the current collection definitely points in that direction. Several of the papers here are important not only in themselves, as providing knowledge about a specific question or issue, but more so in that they suggest a methodological and theoretical way forward.

The first paper in the collection, by Jacobs, Schuster, Xue and Lüdtke, is particularly important in this context. The paper utilizes a quantitative narrative approach and a machine learning algorithm to quantify, characterize and then categorize Shakespearean sonnets in relation to their cognitive, aesthetic, thematic, symbolic and semantic qualities. The analysis, while fascinating in itself, offers an approach that if extended could be used to categorize a wide range of other literary texts. This suggests that a shared platform of literary text measurement may be possible, allowing subsequent comparative hypotheses and investigation to emerge from a range of research endeavors. To date, one of the major problems faced in our field is the difficulty of comparative hypotheses due to the diverse nature of the literary text and its readers. The development of a sophisticated set of analyzable features that differentiate and characterize literary texts would offer one way of addressing this difficulty and lead to stronger and more generalizable hypotheses about literary phenomena in the future.

To an extent, the second paper in our collection, by Siefkes, extends the potential of the first paper in exploring categorization issues of literary forms. In

this paper, the issue of stylistic categorization of novels is addressed through the investigation of perceptual qualities of style. Using semantic scales involving pairs of opposing adjectives, the styles of the modern and postmodern novel are investigated. The results show a degree of promise for this approach and suggest a method that recognizes the role of linguistic and textual aspects of style, but focuses and measures the outcomes of these textual components in the relative perception of style in readers. As such, this second paper is quite cohesive and complementary to the first in this collection and once again offers an extension of ways of categorizing literary texts.

The third paper in this collection by Gavalier and Johnson extends the interest in categorization in this collection by considering literariness, genre and theory of mind explanations in relation to differences between science fiction and narrative realism. Using an experimental design with manipulated same-text variants, the current study interacts with well-known and established positions in literariness and theory of mind. The results are complex, offering further information on the role of intrinsic and extrinsic initiators of literariness and the role in which genre and reader expectation interact with theories of mind.

The fourth paper in this collection by Cohen and Hershman-Shitrit extends issues of identification and interaction with literary characters by exploring the similarity hypothesis that viewers identify with characters who are similar to themselves. The Five Factor Model of personality traits was completed by audience members and actors in role playing 5 different well-known TV characters. Personality traits did not predict identification and hence a more complex view of the similarity hypothesis is required. An interesting aspect of this study was the use of an in-class undergraduate educational-research experience as an underpinning component of data collection. Beyond the other contributions of this study, this model, which is increasingly used in science education, is one that may be particularly suited for the scientific study of literature.

The final paper in this edition of SSOL by De Mulder, Hakemulder, van den Berghe, Klaassen and van Berkum deals with the relationship of literary reading and social-cognitive processing. Specifically, the paper explores the idea that increased exposure to literary narrative fiction enhances theory of mind capabilities. An important aspect of this paper is the use of a confirmatory Bayesian statistical approach to data analysis that allowed a series specific hypotheses to be evaluated in light of generated data and a preferred theoretical position to be established. In this case, short-term exposure to literary reading did not enhance theory of mind capabilities; but lifetime exposure to literary reading was, in one task, related to increased theory of mind capabilities. The analytical method utilized here has many potential uses within the field of literary studies and offers an established approach particularly suited for a field with well-known but competing hypotheses.

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Thus, the research papers in SSOL 7.1 cover many of the basic questions at the center of the scientific study of literature. Categorization, literariness, style, theory of mind and reader responses are all handled in methodologically interesting and innovative ways and with the potential for pushing the field forward. Finally, to end this collection we have Nicholes's review of Sonia Zyngier's edited book dealing with the interface of language and literature in the work of John Sinclair. I hope you, the readers, will benefit from this collection as I have in editing and reviewing these papers.

Before I end this editorial, I did want to personally announce a change in the Associate Editor positions at the journal. Frank Hakemulder, a longtime friend and colleague will with this issue be leaving the Associate Editor's role at SSOL. I would like to personally thank Frank for his supportive contributions to the first years of my editorship, his leadership in the field and his ever wise counsel in relation to the journal, its review process and policies. The journal would not have developed in the way it has without his positive input. It is also with great pleasure that I introduce two new Associate Editors – Art Jacobs and Gerhard Lauer. Both are well-known within our community and need, I think, no introduction in terms of the qualities and values they bring to the journal. We foresee an ever-growing community of readers and researchers in the scientific study of literature, and I have no doubt that the addition of Art and Gerhard will greatly enhance our ability to fulfill the mission of the journal.

**David I. Hanauer**

Editor: *Scientific Study of Literature*.