Memetic Relationships as Tillet's Shared Characteristics

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Introduction

This paper is based on my Thesis project. As such, it is:

- A work in progress
- Part of a larger whole (I may refer to concepts that are not the focus here)
- Serves as a partial grounding for later concepts
- Attempts to tie together diverse ideas
  - Cataloging
  - Semantic Web
  - Phylogenetics and Evolutionary theory
  - Ontology (Philosophy)

Tillett's Concept of Relationships

A bibliographic relationship is "the association, relation, connection, and interaction between different bibliographic entities, or components of entities." (Arsenault and Noruzi, 2012). Tillett defines seven types of bibliographic relationships:

- Equivalence relationships,
- Derivative relationships,
- Descriptive relationships,
- Whole-part relationships,
- Accompanying relationships,
- Sequential relationships,
- **Shared characteristic relationships.** (e
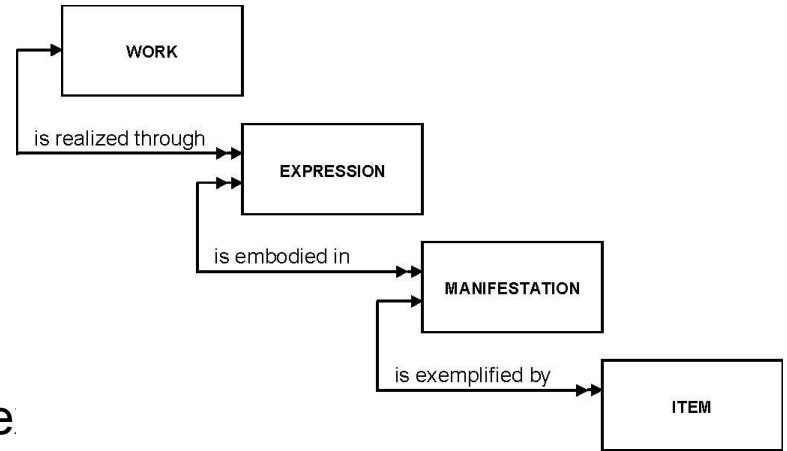
Tillett's Concept of Shared Characteristics

Consider an analogy with personal relationships:

- we could imagine two unrelated people who happen to have the same birth date, belong to the same organization, or have the same eye colour.

To focus on organization membership for a moment,

- both people have a 'membership relation' to the organization, but they also have a 'shared organization membership' relation to each other.

It is 'shared organization membership' that is analogous to "Shared characteristics".

Tillett's Concept of Shared Characteristics

"Shared characteristic" holds between an entity and otherwise unrelated entities sharing some properties or characteristics (Tillett 1991).

In cataloguing these might be elements such as creator responsibility and subject heading access points, or "shared language, date of publication, or country of publication" (Tillett, 2001).

There are more "shared characteristics" that could be of use.

Memes as Shared Characteristics

The idea of the meme was based on an analogy borrowed from biology, genes being the unit of biological inheritance.

- In 1976, Richard Dawkins, the English evolutionary biologist, proposed an idea in his book, The Selfish Gene: What if ideas were like organisms, where they could breed and mutate? These ideas, he claimed, are actually the basis for human culture, and they are born in the brain. (Scarbrough)

GO TO WIKIPEDIA TO CHECK A SINGLE FACT

REALIZE 3 HOURS LATER YOU KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THE SOVIET UNION

(Not exactly what Im talking about)

Memes as Shared Characteristics

A common subtype of the meme is that of the trope, a term common in the field of literary studies.

- A trope is "a figure of speech, especially one that uses words in senses beyond their literal meanings. [...] The most generally agreed distinction in modern theory is that tropes change the meanings of words, by a 'turn' of sense, whereas schemes merely rearrange their normal order. The major figures that are agreed upon as being tropes are metaphor, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, personification, and hyperbole" (Baldick, 264).

Memes as Shared Characteristics

More recently the concept of the trope has broadened somewhat. The website tvtropes.org defines a trope as:

- "a storytelling shorthand for a concept that the audience will recognize and understand instantly. [Recently], "trope" has the even more general meaning of a pattern in storytelling, not only within the media works themselves, but also in related aspects such as the behind-the-scenes aspects of creation, the technical features of a medium, and the fan experience. The idea being that storytelling is not just writing, it is the whole process of creating and telling/showing a story." (tvtropes.org, Trope)

Memes as Shared Characteristics

Argument:

- Memes (and tropes in particular) are a good candidate for Shared Characteristics

Memes:

- Common information that is shared among various bibliographic entities
- Can potentially can be used as an access point (as in tvtropes)
- There exists memetic 'controlled vocabulary'
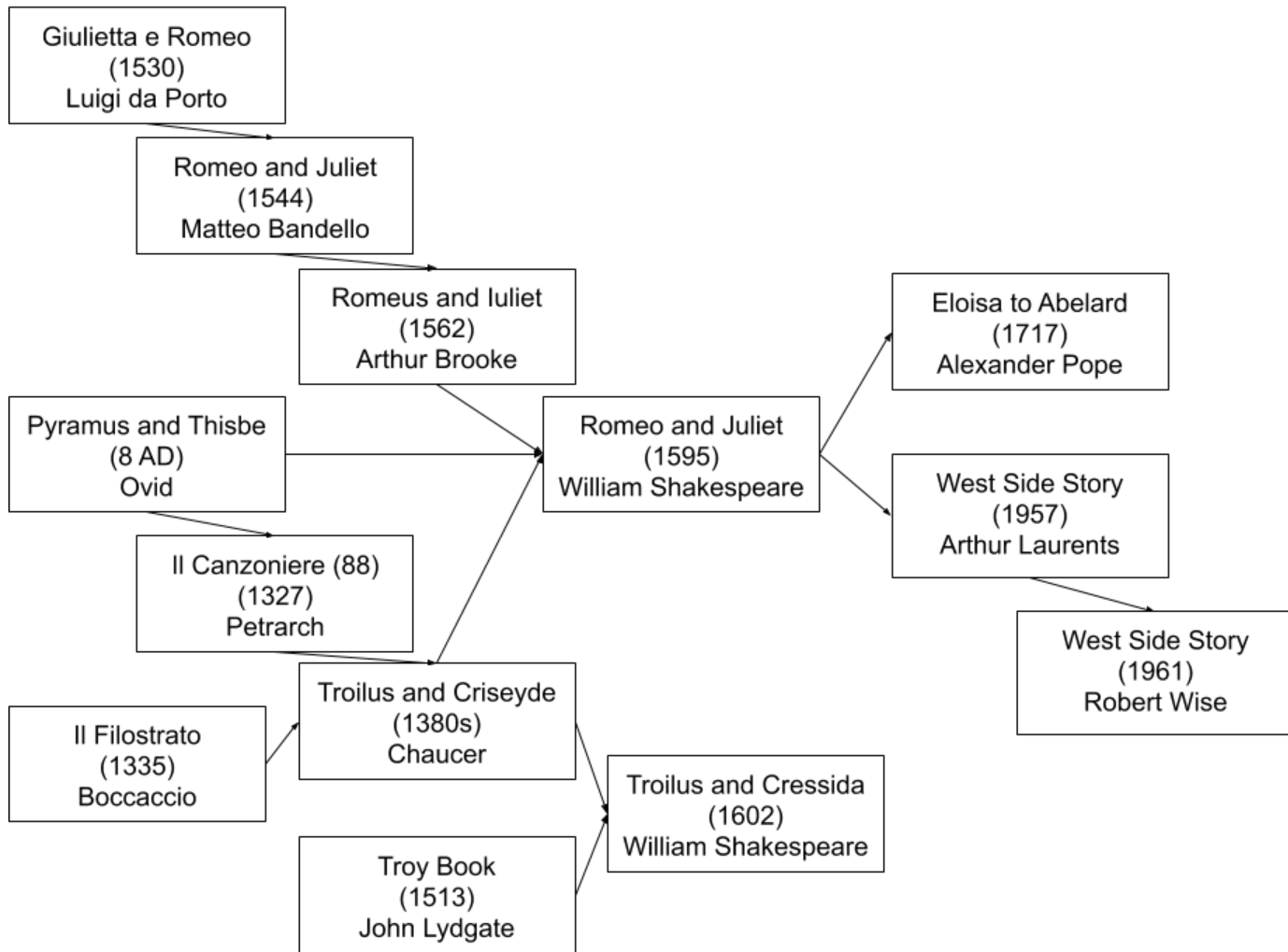- Can collocate otherwise unrelated entities using a common characteristic

The biological analogy suggests another type of collocation: Lines of descent

Memes as Shared Characteristics

In literature a classic example of a meme would be the literature trope of the "star-crossed lovers", two characters who fall in love only for it to end tragically.

For example, according to some scholars (Gibbons, 1980) Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet borrows from Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid's Metamorphoses, specifically tropes that include the "star-crossed lovers."

Taking this idea further, we could imagine entire lines of descent of "star-crossed lovers" meme.

```
Giulietta e Romeo
(1530)
Luigi da Porto
    │
    ▼
Romeo and Juliet
(1544)
Matteo Bandello
    │
    ▼
Romeus and Iuliet
(1562)
Arthur Brooke

Pyramus and Thisbe
(8 AD)
Ovid

Il Canzoniere (88)
(1327)
Petrarch

Il Filostrato
(1335)
Boccaccio

Troilus and Criseyde
(1380s)
Chaucer

Troy Book
(1513)
John Lydgate

Romeo and Juliet
(1595)
William Shakespeare

Troilus and Cressida
(1602)
William Shakespeare

Eloisa to Abelard
(1717)
Alexander Pope

West Side Story
(1957)
Arthur Laurents

West Side Story
(1961)
Robert Wise
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Memes as Shared Characteristics

Tropes are one example of the sorts of memes that are transmitted from one Work to the next. Other examples from fiction might include:

- plot structure, character archetypes, genre conceits, motifs, themes, and other storytelling patterns.

From non-fiction we might look to

- Research methods, analysis tools, philosophical perspectives and assumptions, as well as the author provided keywords and cataloguer provided subject headings. Citation analysis may already reveal some of this information implicitly.

Implications

RDA, offers some limited support through the relationship designators for derivative relationships.

trope and meme relationships can vary widely in authority and utility; some might represent a firm scholarly consensus (we can be sure that West Side Story draws deliberately on Romeo and Juliet), while others might be suspect (describing Troilus and Cressida as a tale of star-crossed lovers is a stretch)

Incorporating shared characteristics at this level of specificity would inevitably require significant changes in the ways catalogues are designed and maintained

Conclusion

As a matter of practicality, the decision to not include " Shared Characteristics Relationships" makes a great deal of sense.

Perhaps what is needed is a model to organize all the possible additions that could find their way into the catalogue.

There exists the future possibility of incorporating greater user participation and possible modifications to the FRBR or LRM model

References

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