

Rudolf Beck, Hildegard Kuester & Martin Kuester, *Basislexikon anglistische Literaturwissenschaft*. München: Fink, 2007, 402 S., € 17.90.

This dictionary is the revised edition of a handbook which first appeared in 1998 under the title *Terminologie der Literaturwissenschaft* in Hueber's series Forum Sprache. The authors' rationale for revising their "Lernwörterbuch" is that "unter den zahlreichen älteren und neueren deutschsprachigen Literaturlexika nach wie vor keines zu finden ist, das speziell auf die Bedürfnisse von Studierenden der Anglistik, insbesondere von Studienanfängern, zugeschnitten ist." (7) The blurb also recommends the handbook especially for the new BA programmes. Such programmes being increasingly based on immersion in the English language, the need for a German dictionary for students of English might well be questioned. Why not use one of the many English and American dictionaries and encyclopedias, like Abrams' classic *Glossary of Literary Terms*?

The first two chapters of the *Basislexikon* ("Gattungsübergreifende Begriffe" and "Sprache") deal with literary terms not restricted to a particular genre. It is sometimes unclear why certain terms appear in a particular chapter, for example "nonsense" and "allegory" in chapter one, "ambiguity" and "metonymy" in chapter two, but the most important terms are covered here in brief and well-structured entries. The next four chapters deal in turn with poetry, prose, drama and literary theory. There is a bibliography and an extensive index which allows students to find quickly what they are looking for, even if there is no specific entry for the term in question. Each entry consists of a brief definition, a mostly quite helpful explanation with examples and suggested literature. This last item, however, creates more problems than it solves. Usually, the entry consists of only one or two names, selected on the basis that they refer to "grundlegende oder einführende Werke" (8), as the authors explain. The only entry for "Plot" is thus Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* of 1927 – a classic indeed, but especially if students are supposed to use this handbook for independent study, it should not be suggested to them that this is the one book to read for information on plot. For "Hermeneutics", the only entry is Hubert Zapf's *Kurze Geschichte der anglo-amerikanischen Literaturkritik* (1991). These are fairly typical examples, and if there is no space to give more consistent and up-to-date recommendations, they should be omitted altogether. In addition, the bibliography is quite eclectic and often out of date. For example, there is no mention of Ansgar Nünning's work on metafiction or Monika Fludernik's work on narratology, which must surely be included in a German handbook for students of English. Nor is there any reference to Jan and Aleida Assmann's work on canonization and memory. Examples could be multiplied.

Comparing the new edition with the old, very few changes, except for the layout, were actually made. The entries on "American Renaissance" and "Graveyard Poetry", for example, were cut. In the first case, I can see that this helps consistency since periods of literary history are generally omitted, but in the second case the reason is less obvious because the term is quite specific and students might well want a gloss on it. An entry for "Author" was included, but none for "Reader". The modernization is generally eclectic; an entry for "Fantasy Fiction" was added, but none for "Ecocriticism" or "Cognitive Rhetoric". For "Gender Studies", one sentence was added to the entry on "Feminist Criticism" to the effect that there

is now a new approach called *gender studies* which no longer focuses exclusively on images of women (344). Given that Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, not listed in the bibliography, caused quite a stir in the early 1990s, the word "new" might have been used with some justice in the first edition, but hardly in the current one. There is no mention at all of *queer studies*. Obviously, it is always easy to chastise a one-volume dictionary for omitting items the reviewer happens to consider important, but in this case, there is a quite consistent time lag of at least ten years.

Consequently, the handbook is strongest when it deals with technical terms and formal aspects less susceptible to change and controversy. The entry on "Sonnet" with the related one on "Petrarchism" is fine, for instance, and the latter now even includes a sentence about Mary Wroth (74). Entries such as "Allusion", "Ellipsis", "Hyperbole", "Onomatopoeia" or "Pun" are very helpful. As soon as the concepts become more complex, however, the brevity of entries often has a misleading effect. The *gothic novel*, for example, is seen as a literary reaction to enlightenment discourses – a kind of return of the repressed. While this aspect is part of the received wisdom about the genre, it is hardly a fair description. It is customary now, although there is no mention of this, to distinguish between *female* and *male gothic*, since these two segments of the genre have very different concerns. The trajectory of Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* is precisely the move from superstitious terror to enlightened reason and emotional control, while Lewis's *The Monk* amplifies the sado-masochistic subtext of Radcliffe's fiction, though framed by a strongly moralistic discourse. If there is no space to say this, why write about the genre at all?

The question of value judgements in a dictionary like the one under review is another knotty issue. The tone of the entry on Derrida's term "Différance" is rather guarded, the last paragraph stating that because meaning cannot be fixed, the possibilities of textual play are almost unlimited. "Nach Meinung mancher traditioneller Literaturwissenschaftler [*sic*] kann dies zu einer gewissen Beliebigkeit im Umgang mit Texten führen und poststrukturalistische Interpretationen kaum noch als nachvollziehbar erscheinen lassen." (337) I am not sure that this is really fair as a concluding remark to the entry, because it makes Derrida's ideas sound more outlandish than they are generally taken to be by most literary critics, and students are likely to become prejudiced. In practice, many critics treat deconstruction as a theoretically informed continuation of *close reading*. Related to this, there is a slight inconsistency in terminology. It is sometimes hard in introductory courses to make students really understand the difference between theory and method. The *Basislexikon* often uses the word "Ansatz", circumventing the need to distinguish between theory and method, but opts in its definition of "Structuralism" for "Methode der Literaturkritik" (368). So structuralism is a method while "Deconstruction" is an "Ansatz" (333) and "Close Reading" is a "Verfahren" and a "Technik" (331). The use of these terms should be more consistent to help students develop a precise critical language. It would also be good to include a brief gloss on etymology in certain cases. For example, it would be helpful in the very short entry on "Text" (90) to point to the Latin origin in *textura* and the related connotations. Coming back to the issue of value judgements and ideology, I would also quarrel with the sentence "Kulturwissenschaft ist ein wichtiger Teil der fremdsprachlichen Philologien" (332). There are those who believe that the study of language and

literature is an important part of the study of culture, and this should at least be acknowledged.

Some further omissions or infelicities which should be addressed in a future edition are the following: Milton's "justify the ways of God to men" is quoted as an example of how deconstruction permits a reading of this passage against the grain, making it mean that God would have to justify himself. In my opinion, this reading underestimates the complexities and (implied) heresies of the old theodicy debate, which should at least be mentioned at this point. While a short passage on Genette was added to the entry on "Narrator" (220–21), the entry on "Point-of-View" is dated since the sentence "In letzter Zeit werden im Englischen stattdessen auch die Begriffe *perspective*, *vision* oder *focalization* (*Fokalisierung*) verwendet" (232) was just kept in without change. The entry on "Pastoral" (69) contains no reference to Sidney's *Arcadia* and the one on "Absurd, Literature of the" restricts references to Beckett to drama, in contrast to Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms* which appears otherwise to have served as a model, although it is not listed in the bibliography. The entry on "Myth" omits any reference to the influential theories of Lévi-Strauss, Ernst Cassirer and Roland Barthes, although it is asserted that "in der heutigen Umgangssprache", myth is used in a wider sense, as in the "Mythos von Elvis Presley" (58). A reference to Barthes should be inserted at this point. In the entry on "Rhetoric", the three classic types of speech are given in German as "Gerichtsrede", "deliberative Rede" und "epideiktische Rede" (139) when the usual names for the latter two are "politische Rede" und "Lobrede" (with its shadow "Schmähere").

While these may be details, the treatment of such central concepts of literary criticism as allegory, symbol, metaphor and metonymy is more problematic. Although it is conceded that in the English usage, the main meaning of allegory is that of a story from which abstract meanings or morals can be inferred, the text starts out explaining allegory through the figure of Justice – a personification, which is a special case of allegory. It is further stated that the relationship between what is expressed and what is to be inferred is almost as arbitrary ("ähnlich arbiträr", 12) as the relationship between the signifier and the signified in a linguistic sign, a claim which I would dispute. In the entry on "Symbol", literary characters, like Joan in Shaw's *Saint Joan*, are seen as symbols (88), although it would be more helpful for beginners, in order to make the distinction clear, to choose an object like the pear tree in Mansfield's short story "Bliss". It is even stated that while Hester Prynne and her daughter from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* had been seen as allegories in the entry on allegory, they might also be interpreted as symbols (89).

This might well confuse the target audience of this dictionary, and the confusion is continued in the entry on "Metaphor", which states: "Das Wort Metapher kann manchmal selbst im übertragenen Sinn, also metaphorisch, gebraucht werden; es bedeutet dann oft etwa dasselbe wie *Symbol*" (122). Gerhard Kurz wrote an excellent, brief introduction on such matters entitled *Metapher, Allegorie, Symbol*. While this book is mentioned, it does not appear to be thoroughly digested. The same goes for Lakoff and Turner's *More Than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, which argues powerfully for the intellectual necessity of imagery, thus making it clear that it would be reductive to see figurative speech as merely ornamental. Theory has moved beyond the traditional trinity of *tenor*,

*vehicle* and *ground* which is duly rehearsed in the present dictionary without alerting readers to the current terminologies of *mental spaces*, *source* and *target domains* and *blending*. The entry on “Metonymy” omits the usual German keyword “Nähebeziehung” and relies instead on a number of examples: “Am besten lässt sich die Art der Bedeutungsübertragung bei der Metonymie an typischen Fällen erläutern.” (123) Abrams, who has excellent entries on “Allegory”, “Figurative Language” and “Symbol”, explains clearly, before giving examples, that “the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which is is closely associated, because of contiguity in common experience.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite these critical remarks, the Basislexikon is certainly good value and offers much useful information in a very restricted space. In future editions, more of an effort should be made, in a German handbook for students of English, to represent the state of the art of ‘Deutsche Anglistik’, because this would be a genuine addition to what the dictionaries from the anglophone world could supply.

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<sup>1</sup> M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (Forth Worth et al.: Harcourt Brace, 1993) 68–9.