

Waltraud Wiethölter, Frauke Berndt, Stephan Kammer (Hg.): Vom Weltbuch bis zum World Wide Web – Enzyklopädische Literaturen

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This volume, the near-complete proceedings of the 2003 Frankfurter Stiftungsgastprofessur „Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft“ conference entitled, *Enzyklopädische Weltentwürfe. Von der Alexandrinischen Bibliothek bis zum World Wide Web*, offers a baker's dozen of essays on the sometimes transparent, frequently obscure presence of the encyclopedic in literature. A few definitions are in order, which an extensive introductory essay provides: "Literatur ist in dem Maße Literatur, in dem sie Enzyklopädie ist, und sie ist enzyklopädische Literatur – Literatur, die im Blick auf ihre Fertigungsverfahren und den damit involvierten generativen Index womöglich enzyklopädisch genannt werden muss –, sobald sie diese Enzyklopädie zu thematisieren und auszustellen beginnt" (S.5). This gives the editors enough latitude to select papers on as seemingly disparate – except for their traditional literary canonicity – texts as Dante's *Inferno*, Rabelais's *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Mann's *Der Zauberberg*, and Weiss's *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, as well as on the hypertextual organization of knowledge on the Internet and the connection between a doodle in *Tristram Shandy* and the digressive mediality of hyperlinks. The concern here, however, is centered less upon esthetics than upon the presence of encyclopedic form, function, and order, of "einer systematisch geordneten Geschlossenheit des Wissens" (S.67), within the various texts.

The scholarship supporting the essays is uniformly erudite and polylingual; the arguments, well-developed if at times intricate. Theorists from Aristotle to Foucault make appearances. One example should suffice to give an impression of the whole. In "Das Ganze der Welt: Dante und die Enzyklopädie seines Lehrers Brunetto Latini," Karlheinz Stierle stumbles upon and then tugs at a Barthesian *punctum* in the seventh circle of hell. Dante there meets his one-time, once-revered teacher, Brunetto Latini, suffering eternal torment for his homosexuality. The latter makes a last request of his erstwhile pupil, that he remember his *tesoro*, an encyclopedia Latini had written between 1360 and 1365 while in Parisian exile. Stierle widens the historical perspective by observing that "mit dieser ersten in der Volkssprache [...] verfassten Laienzyklopädie steht Brunetto in der großen enzyklopädischen Bewegung seiner Zeit, die durch das Aufblühen der Universitäten in ganz Europa und ihre neue Wissensproduktion wesentliche Anregungen erhielt" (S.73). Well and good. The author next deepens the perspective by asking why Dante also honors his more ancient instructor, Vergil. The answer: The poet's inclusion of Latini and Vergil within the same text points to "ein besonderes Verhältnis zwischen Epos und Enzyklopädie" (S.74). Specifically, the forerunner of European literary tradition, Homer, constructs a "Bild der Welt

[...], gleichsam eine Enzyklopädie" (S.75) in the form of Achilles's shield (Book XVIII). Through the work of the divine smith, Hephaestus, the blind bard has thus represented heaven, earth, and everything in between on a circle of metal, attaining encyclopedic encapsulation. And like his Greek antecedent, the Roman Aeneas also has a shield, one given to him by Venus in the eighth book of his eponymous epic. Having hobbled together this synchronic-diachronic loom, Stierle weaves the threads of his argument back through Latini's *tesoro*, wherein Dante "sucht im Horizont zweier Anschauungsformen des Ganzen der Welt, der Enzyklopädie und des Epos, nach einer dritten Form, in der beide Darstellungsformen aufgehoben wären" (S.77). From here, the elements of the design quickly manifest themselves: Dante's wandering through the world from hell to heaven, his display of an all-encompassing, Faustian bundle of erudition (the seven liberal arts through theology, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, and beyond), his coeval depiction of historical figures real and mythical, sacred and profane. *La Divina Commedia* as encyclopedia. Quod erat demonstrandum.

The title notwithstanding, the selection of essays is less comprehensive than one might have wished. With the advent of printing, Germany alone produced a number of compendia of world knowledge during the early modern era. Sebastian Franck's *Weltbuch* (1534) coming immediately to mind. These works receive no attention. Furthermore, the texts examined represent only those of the Western tradition (though Michel de Montaigne strangely fails to make an appearance). More than three hundred years before Diderot, three thousand scholars of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) compiled the *Yongle Dadian*, the largest encyclopedia in China, and probably anywhere else for that matter. Though only 400 of the original 11,095 books remain, the rest lost through library fires and foreign invasions, their influence deserves to be traced within Chinese literature (as does that of the *Shilin Guangji*, a thirteenth century encyclopedia intended for a general public that could not afford the time or money to consume the classics...a sort of Asian *Adagia* before Erasmus). Still, the essays in *Vom Weltbuch bis zum World Wide Web* are intellectual nuggets rather in the spirit of Jorge Luis Borges (who also didn't make the cut) and should fascinate and edify even the most bookish of readers.

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