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Response

It may sound surprising, but I believe the central problem in discussions about *Literaturtheorie* lies in the lack of a standard understanding of the term's semantic scope. The problem can be alleviated somewhat by adopting – as in the title of this journal – the internationally accepted term ›literary theory‹ (also the usual translation of German *Literaturtheorie*): the meaning is then that of theory concerned with literature – theory with ›literature‹ as its object domain, and, in addition, theory for the scholarly study of literature (note that ›methodology‹ suggests itself as a possible alternative when the term is understood in this latter sense).¹ There is no doubt that a particular scholarly understanding of the object ›literature‹ and of specific text-context relations can have implications for the development or selection of a scholarly method. But there are plenty of examples to show that scholars of literature who share a single definition of ›literature‹ can differ with respect to the practical methods they use.

So as to bring the above-mentioned problem closer to a solution, I will now consider how the term ›theory‹ has been used in scholarly engagement with literature in the past fifty years, and list the possible meanings this reveals – the list, of course, makes no claim to completeness.

(1) In the 1960s, ›theory‹ was, in a rather vaguely stated understanding, linked to an academic habitus of literary scholars who, as their discipline was taken in the direction of a science, pressed for it to be given a theoretical foundation (see further points 2 and 3 below) and carried out ›theoretical work‹. This was often criticized with the comment that people who don't know anything about ›literature‹ (the interpretation of literature and the writing of literary history) busy themselves with ›theory‹ instead. Despite such criticism, the expansion of the German university system between 1965 and 1975 created an environment in which ›contributions to theory‹ provided a way of rapidly gaining ›scholarly standing‹ (and in some cases jobs as well).

¹ See Eagleton 1983; the introduction presents both the theory of the object domain and details of various methods. Ansgar Nünning, editor of the *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie* (Nünning 1998), assumes that *Literaturtheorie* has an even wider range of responsibilities (see *ibid.*, v–vi).

(2a) ›Theory‹ means, before anything else, ›theory of the object of the study of literature‹ – for example, issues relating to the definition of literary texts (in the strict sense): ›what is literature/literariness?‹, ›what are the constituent factors that determine the fictional worlds of literary texts?‹ (issues of space, time, character, story, mediating entities, and so on); genre theory should also be considered here, bringing this area of theory into the scope of ›poetics‹ and the ›aesthetics of literary texts‹ (neither being understood in a normative sense) as well.²

(2b) ›Theory‹ can be a theoretical foundation for the activities of literary scholars – such as the production of editions, commentaries, interpretations, literary histories, and literary criticism (›literary evaluation‹) – and a continual revision of key concepts in the study of literature.

(2c) ›Theory‹ can be understood as methodology and the ›discussion of methods‹.

(3a) ›Theory‹ can be reflection on the disciplinary status and development of a field of study (as a context in which to consider that subject's history), including trans- and interdisciplinary issues.

(3b) ›Theory‹ can be reflection on the relationship between scholarship and its ›environment‹ (for example, reflection on the contribution of scholarship to society and on the socially determined expectations placed on scholarship).

I expect that *JLT* will be particularly concerned with the questions I have outlined under (2) above, as well as being open to work on point (3). I also expect that an editorial to the first issue of *JLT* will provide answers to the questions raised here.

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References

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 Ansgar Nünning (ed.), *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie*, Stuttgart/Weimar 1998.
 Jörg Schönert, Normative Vorgaben als ›Theorie der Lyrik?‹ Vorschläge zu einer text-theoretischen Revision, in: Gustav Frank/Wolfgang Lukas (eds.), *Norm – Grenze – Abweichung: Kultursemiotische Studien zu Literatur, Medien und Wirtschaft*, Passau 2004, 303–318.

Translated by Alastair Matthews.

² See in this respect Schönert 2004.

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