

A History of Roget's Thesaurus: Origins, Development, and Design. By Werner Hüllen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. ix, 410. ISBN: 0-19-925472-9. GBP 86.50 (HB).

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Werner Hüllen makes a thoughtful, well-documented, and wide-ranging case for placing Peter Mark Roget's (1779–1869) popular, and by now iconic, *Thesaurus* (1852) at what he claims is an important nexus in the history of linguistics, particularly in the sub-discipline of semantics. He argues that the *Thesaurus* is a "pivotal point" between the pre-theoretical thinking and "practical" work on definition and meaning "during the preceding centuries of European cultural history" (p.324) and the history of semantics post-1852. In order to connect his work on Roget to the discourse of linguistics and the history of linguistics, Hüllen begins with a plain spoken assertion: "Roget's *Thesaurus* is an outstanding work of English lexicography"; he follows quickly by calling the work "a real achievement in linguistics-based lexicography", "a dictionary of synonyms", "a topical dictionary" and "a topical dictionary of synonyms" (1ff.). In order to support his claims, Hüllen sets himself three tasks: (1) "synonymy must be outlined as an experience of everyday linguistic behaviour and in its more recent scientific conceptualizations"; (2) "the historical path of English dictionaries of synonyms must be charted" as well as (3) "the topical tradition of English lexicography" (5ff.).

In order to fulfill his tasks Hüllen draws on his understanding of historical and contemporary linguistic ideas; in this manner, his monograph describes a history of synonymy that also intends to "support an explanation of what synonymy actually is" (p. 5). By taking on tasks of such historical depth and theoretical and analytical breadth, Hüllen writes the history of Roget's *Thesaurus* as a survey of ideas, practice, and theory from Isidore of Seville to cognitive linguistics. As he accumulates and describes linguistic traditions, Hüllen also writes a sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit critique of scholarship in linguistic theory and historiography. Readers with an interest in linguistic semantics, the history of linguistics, as well as the history and practice of lexicography will find much to consider in this monograph.

Perhaps most importantly, we might ask why a popular 'dictionary' written in the 19th century should be of more than passing interest, a curiosity, to linguistic historiographers. After all, as anyone who has followed the academic history of lexicography knows, from the perspective of some contemporary linguists, lexicography is a 'practice' that is somewhat marginal to the

understanding and formation of theories of semantic meaning; furthermore, judging by the topics accepted for the major conferences and publications in lexicography and linguistic historiography, the study of the history of lexicography itself is somewhat displaced both in the academic discipline of lexicography and in the general discourse on the history of linguistics. Therefore, Hüllen must show why Roget's *Thesaurus* belongs in the domain of linguistics and lexicography, as history, theory, or practice. *A History of Roget's Thesaurus* is organized to make this case through an accumulation of textual evidence culled from the 'classical European' traditions of semantics and synonymy and through a discussion of contemporary ideas and practices as they illuminate and are illuminated by the historical narrative. This essay will take up these and other questions after a brief synopsis of the monograph's organization.

Chapter 1, "Introduction" (1–7), introduces many of the ideas discussed above in an 'initial hypothesis' and an overview of the book.

Chapter 2, "Peter Mark Roget" (9–26), provides background on the intellectual and academic life of Roget along with "A skeleton history of the *Thesaurus* from 1852 to 1899" (20–24).

Chapter 3, "Words, Words, Words" (27–71), begins with an elaboration "in a pre-theoretical way on the status of words in any natural language as a system of signs" (p. 28). Then, Hüllen proposes to discuss three recent theories of lexical meaning which he calls "semantic features," "semantic models, and "reverse theories of synonymy". Finally, he concludes the chapter with a discussion of the Saussurean concept of 'value'.

Chapter 4, "Synonymy: Early statements and practices" (73–117), covers 'classical' to modern works, including Prodikos of Keos, Plato, Cicero (among others holding down the classical 'treatments'), Isidore of Seville, Beowulf, Erasmus, Shakespeare, and "Archbishop Trench" (who represents the early 19th century).

Chapter 5, "The Beginnings of Practical Synonymy" (119–197), is devoted to the early history of English lexicography, which includes bilingual and monolingual dictionaries and emphasizes the "Hard-word dictionaries" (119–161), and "Synonymy in philosophy and lexicographical practice" (161–197).

Chapter 6, "The Emergence of the English Synonym Dictionary" (199–276), constitutes a history that starts with Gabriel Girard (1677–1748) and his followers on the Continent and in Britain such as John Trusler (1735–1820), Hester Piozzi (1741–1821), William Taylor (1765–1836), and Hugh Blair (1718–1800). The chapter concludes with a survey and descriptive analysis of works that "demonstrate the growing linguistic awareness of lexis as a preparation for

later semantics" (p. 236), including, among others, James Barclay (*A Complete And Universal English Dictionary on a New Plan*, 1774), Ellin Devis (*Miscellaneous Lessons*, 1782), Benjamin Dawson (*Prolepsis Philologiae Anglicanae*, 1797), William Perry (*The Synonymous, Etymological, and Pronouncing English Dictionary*, 1805), George Crabb (*English Synonyms Explained, In Alphabetical Order*, 1816), and Elizabeth Jane Whately's (1787–1863) *A Selection of English Synonyms* (1851).

Chapter 7, "The Topical Tradition in English Lexicography" (277–321), summarizes Hüllen's hefty monograph on the 'topical tradition' from 800 to 1700 (Hüllen 1999) and discusses the classification of knowledge and three examples of 'onomasiological lexicography' between 1700 and 1852.

Chapter 8, "Roget's *Thesaurus*: A topical dictionary of synonyms" (323–376), is an analytical descriptive account of the *Thesaurus* that includes the semantic ideas of fields, features and frames.

There is an appendix that provides facsimile reproductions of a variety of pages from the *Thesaurus*, which is followed by a bibliography (391–404) and a general index (405–410).

Hüllen must decide how to coordinate the historical narrative of synonymy with the history of the textual precursors of the *Thesaurus*; the historical narrative has the merit of broadening the scope of ideas that are germane to the consideration of the origins and development of Roget's work, while the textual history has the merit of focusing the scope of ideas on the material evidence. Because he decides to emphasize breadth of coverage, the title of the monograph seems too narrowly stated, as the reader can infer from the annotated list of chapters above. Notwithstanding the scope of the history, Hüllen manages to embed the history of synonymy into a history of Roget's *Thesaurus*. He is successful to the extent that his book illuminates an area of linguistic history that has not yet been formally developed. Moreover, by linking the events (books, ideas, authors, etc.) of linguistic history in an explanatory narrative that leads to and from Roget's *Thesaurus*, Hüllen has helped recast some important questions for contemporary linguistics, including contemporary historiographical linguistics.

Hüllen raises and answers questions concerning the validity of making Roget's *Thesaurus* an object of intellectual inquiry; by calling Roget a lexicographer and his *Thesaurus* a dictionary, he lends scholarly legitimacy to his project. These straightforward assertions deftly by-pass a simple question that underlies the claim: why use the word 'dictionary' at all? Dictionaries in the English tradition of lexicography are products of scholarship (or at least thoughtful

book-study and language analysis) and products in the popular marketplace. The *Thesaurus* is one of the most enduring products in the popular printing marketplace, but not commonly considered a product of scholarship. Hüllen's crafting of a history of synonymy and a history of 'practical synonymy' (that is, systematic organizations of language that emphasize use over theory) places the *Thesaurus* in a publishing tradition that he links with long-standing (pre-theoretical) intellectual traditions of classification and epistemology.

Since the *Thesaurus* is a so-called 'practical' work with no explicit theory or method, we cannot be sure if Roget lurched into linguistic insight or through years of private study formed an unspoken method that he applied to the language data he had collected. Whatever the case, Hüllen finds a work that he claims can be best understood by placing it in a historico-intellectual context that describes its reconstructed 'method' with the terminology of present-day linguistics. This is a problem for the study of any 'practical' or 'pre-theoretical' work on language. He correctly notes that we are always limited to the vocabulary of our own time if we are to make sense of older works.

From its original publication, evidently, the book received scant 'professional criticism' upon its publication and a 'general silence' from philologists and others throughout its very successful publishing history (25–26). Hüllen must make his case based on a deeply informed understanding of the textual history of English lexicography, a history of ideas concerning classification, and a linguistically informed analysis of the *Thesaurus* which reconstructs evidence of a systematic and scientific approach to organizing the English vocabulary. In any event, Hüllen does find some interesting Roget 'criticism': a brief article (Ober 1965) in a seemingly out of the way journal calls Roget a utilitarian and a lexicographer who finds his intellectual background in Linnaeus, the French encyclopedists and who is influenced by the "atmosphere of utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill" (Ober 1965: 1806). Other names piled up in this shorthand gesture are Carnap, Korzybski, Odgen and Richards. Hüllen elaborates obliquely upon the utilitarian agenda by commenting upon the ideas of the uses of dictionaries and the users of dictionaries. In this same all too brief section he mentions that Roget was working during the Romantic era in literature and the era of historicism in philology. Perhaps because he finds it necessary to cover so much material in the European linguistic (and pedagogical) traditions, he overlooks what may be an important insight into Roget's contemporary influences (more on this point below).

Anyone who enters the domain of the history of European and American linguistics, perhaps especially those who study major contributions to language

(pre-)theory in the years 1500–1800, is faced with the temptation to cover every pamphlet, monograph, book, or even chapters and paragraphs, that the researcher finds in the richness of the mostly undeveloped analytical bibliography of the area. Hüllen, upon picking up Wilkins, recalls Roget (Hüllen 1986; a citation not found in the bibliography). And now, picking up Roget, he recalls Wilkins and a whole cast of lexicographers, language speculators and theorists from ancient Greece to post-modern Europe. Having faced the same temptation, and having fallen under the hypnotic spell of staking some annotation or note, or summary at least, on all the relevant intellectual and textual links past and present to Wilkins *Essay* (Dolezal 1983), I understand that Hüllen has decided to be inclusive and provide a suggestive and interesting analytical bibliography of possible textual and intellectual histories of synonymy, rather than provide the more narrow focus that ‘monograph’ implies. Clearly, Hüllen’s book offers a challenge to broaden research in the history of linguistics, and offers a reminder that ‘theory’ is not practiced by linguists who have escaped ‘history’. He also makes a case for the systematic study and analysis (even just awareness) of the linguistic ideas found in dictionaries and related texts.

There is so much information packed in each chapter that I will limit comments to two important intellectual and textual links to the *Thesaurus*: a text from the onomasiological tradition (Wilkins’ *Essay* of 1668) and the possible influence of Samuel Coleridge (1772–1834) and other contemporaries on Roget. Because Hüllen chooses a general organization something akin to a succession of topics ordered more or less chronologically, he gains the advantage of treating each topic in a semi-autonomous fashion that allows for some depth of treatment. However, the reader is then left to synthesize the relevant links upon getting to the last chapter in the book which only then directly addresses the *Thesaurus* as text and dictionary. As a result some artificial boundaries are constructed: Wilkins is considered a part of the topical tradition but not really a part of the standard history of English lexicography as a consequence of leaving his and William Lloyd’s (1627–1717) work out of the alphabetical dictionary tradition (Wilkins 1668). Hüllen sees the “the hard-word dictionary as the culture-specific entry to and nucleus of the modern monolingual interpretive dictionary, and [...] as a precursor of Roget’s *Thesaurus*” (150–151). Here we notice a weakness of the organization of the book: by inserting a short history of the Early Modern English dictionary into a subsection of the monograph, we find a suggestive, and insightful, survey of the early English dictionary that cannot deliver a fully informed bibliographic survey; for example, see Zgusta (1983) on the so-called ‘hard-word’ tradition (on p. 155 and in the bibliography

the early lexicographer Edward Phillips (1630–1696) is referred to as Edmund Phillips).

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) is indisputably an important figure in the history of lexicography and the history of practical synonymy who owes a debt to the practical metaphysician Wilkins and the theorist philosopher John Locke (1632–1704). Hüllen writes a well-informed section on Johnson that extends the bibliographic reach of Johnson studies. He shows how Locke developed a ‘doctrine of definition’ which helped inform Johnson’s ‘interpretative lexicography’ (cf. Schreyer 1992, 2000). His chapter on the beginnings of practical synonymy and the following chapter on the English synonym dictionary stand out in their wealth of citational evidence and insightful presentation as he re-considers the early history of English lexicography.

Hüllen does not mention the curious dismissal of “Bishop Wilkins” in the introduction to the *Thesaurus*. Roget writes that a “strictly *Philosophical Language*” depends on the analyses that lead to systematic classification of ideas (and thus words), and that in turn leads to the “establishment of a Universal Language” (Roget 1852: xxiii). Roget then makes this turn, “However utopian such a project may appear to the present generation, and however abortive may have been the former endeavours of Bishop Wilkins and others to realize it†, its accomplishment is surely not beset with greater difficulties [...]” (ibid.). In this way, Roget casts the bishop as a failure in a utopian venture, when the immediate relevance of Wilkins’ *Essay* to the *Thesaurus* is material (a systematically ordered ‘lexicon’), not abstract (a ‘metaphysical’ investigation). In this way, Roget deflects attention away from Wilkins and away from the obvious formal and textual connections between the *Essay* and the *Thesaurus*. In as much as Hüllen shows how the two works are linked, he misses the opportunity to offer an explanation of Roget’s citational sleight of hand.

In the quotation from Roget cited above there is a footnote (marked by the dagger) that directly connects Horne Tooke to Wilkins and thus both to Roget: “‘The Languages’, observes Horne Tooke, ‘which are commonly used throughout the world, are much more simple and easy, convenient and philosophical, than Wilkins’s scheme for a real character; or than any other scheme that has been at any other time imagined or proposed for the purpose.’ Ερεα πτεροεντα, p. 125” (Roget 1852: xxiii). There are compelling reasons to include Tooke in the study of Roget’s *Thesaurus*: Tooke is a contemporary of Roget whose work on language is strongly influenced by Wilkins and Locke. Tooke’s work in turn negatively and positively influences a generation of philologists and intellectuals in Roget’s lifetime (including, among others, Samuel Coleridge and Jeremy

Bentham). Later, in the 20th century, Charles K. Ogden (1889–1957) acknowledges Wilkins' influence on Tooke, Bentham, the utilitarians, and on his and I. A. Richards' *Basic English*. Since Ogden and Richards (1893–1979) are well-known for their landmark book of early 20th-century semantics (Ogden & Richards 1923), their omission becomes a gap in Hüllen's history of synonymy, semantics and Roget's *Thesaurus*.

Hüllen's third chapter, which ranges from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to Saussure to Prototype theory, has much to recommend it, especially since he includes the mostly ignored literary tradition of synonymy. Because of the large number of texts and authors that Hüllen cogently presents with explanatory and historical acumen, it seems like quibbling to put so much emphasis on these sections of his book. However, it is here that the historical gap that omits Tooke, Coleridge and their Romantic era followers most keenly effects the argument. As a result, we do not find any mention of two major works that seem to fit into Hüllen's history of synonymy: "A Preliminary Treatise on Method" (Coleridge 1934 [1818]) and *A New Dictionary of the English Language* (Richardson 1836/37; cf. Zgusta 1986, Fowler 2004, and Dolezal 2000 for lexicographical/literary studies of Richardson). In these two texts¹ there is abundant theoretical and practical material directly relevant to synonymy: Coleridge devoted himself to the consideration of synonyms during his language investigations; he invented the term, 'desynonymisation' — in our terms, he understood the evolution of language on a path from exact synonyms to near- or partial-synonyms (exemplified by ruminations on 'imagination' and 'fancy'). Coleridge also provides retrospective support for Hüllen's addition of literary approaches to the history and understanding of synonymy (as seen in his use of *Hamlet*); in an argument for an appreciation of Shakespeare's "accurate Philosophic Method", Coleridge (1934 [1818]: 31) quotes A. W. Schlegel: "[Shakespeare] gives us the history of minds: *he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions*".

A History of Roget's Thesaurus also offers commentary and analysis of present-day semantics that shows how a critical understanding of linguistic theory requires us to read beyond the issues and arguments that roil today's linguistic discourse. When discussing Locke,² Hüllen points out that "synonymy is an

1. Charles Richardson (1775–1865) takes over Coleridge's obligation/promise to construct a dictionary to supplement the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana*.

2. "This procedure may be questionable if measured by the standards of Lockean exegesis in general [...] and also of semantics today" (p. 163). And, implicitly, Hüllen asks if the 'standards' as handed down deserve their own questioning.

excellent topic for showing that the philosopher of the seventeenth century and the linguists of the twentieth century deal with similar problems, and attempt to find related solutions” (p. 163). As a result, Hüllen chooses some representative linguists and methods from the 20th century, including semantic fields, semantic models and prototypes. Since only the last chapter is devoted to an analysis of the *Thesaurus* itself, the reader is left with a feeling that the project is not yet completed. In order to question whether the *Thesaurus* deserves an important notice in linguistic history and theory, there needs to be a more elaborate explanation regarding the selection of present-day theories and their relevance to the *Thesaurus* and, of course, the relevance of studying the *Thesaurus* to linguistic theory. While the discussions of authors and theories that we find are germane and appropriate, it is difficult to understand the reasons some approaches have been omitted without there being some explanation for selecting or not selecting.

For all of the discussion of synonymy in the context of lexicography as practiced and studied today, I would expect Hüllen to refer to the major work of an author who has combined his research into the theory and practice of lexicography with his research into the history of lexicography and linguistics. For example, in Zgusta’s *Manual of Lexicography* we can find an in-depth discussion of the practical and theoretical problems of defining synonymy (1971: 89–114). One point of interest here is that Zgusta shows how ordinary understanding and scientific inquiry are both factors in devising ‘linear chains of near-synonyms’ (as in the microstructure of the *Thesaurus*) and ‘groups of semantically related words’ presented in an illustrative format (such as a grid, chart, diagram, etc. — as in the “Plan of Classification” of the *Thesaurus*).

Hüllen’s book does accomplish the task he sets for himself, to show how the *Thesaurus* combines two traditions: the ‘theory and use of synonyms’ in European culture and the compiling of topical dictionaries. As he accumulates texts and authors along the way, his book raises important questions for the study of linguistic ideas. He shows how studies in lexicography and of dictionaries can illuminate the sub-disciplines of linguistics and bring fresh insights into the history of ideas. Most intriguingly, Hüllen’s project suggests that a history of linguistics must include a consideration of the mercantile interest behind printing dictionaries and related texts (not the least of the motivations for luminaries such as Johnson and Coleridge), and a study of how the book trade in England and North America created a mass market for linguistic ideas.

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