

Book Reviews / Boekresensies

Gids by die Literatuurstudie

Cloete, T.T.; Botha, Elize; Malan, Charles (reds.). 1985
Pretoria: HAUM-Literêr.

Hierdie perfek gedrukte boek is bedoel om 'so nou moontlik by die bestaande praktyke van literatuuronderrig (veral op skoolvlak) aan te sluit' en om die behoefte aan teoretiese begrondings in die onderrig te bevredig. Die *Gids* is 'n meesterstuk van letterkundige administrasie en politiek. 'n Groot getal akademië is uitgenooi om dele uit hulle vakgebiede aan die lesers oor te dra. Die boek lees maklik; die inleidende hoofstuk 'Literatuurwetenskap: aard, terreine en metodes' (deur Charles Malan) is helder geskryf, alhoewel tegniese terme soms sonder voorafgaande verduidelikings gebruik word, bv. *sujet* en *akteur* (p. 25). Ook die taamlik ingewikkelde tabel van literêre kommunikasie, wat op Iser gegrond is (p. 24), kom te vroeg onder die oë van die minder ervare teikenpubliek. Hierdie inleidende hoofstuk neem as uitgangspunt Wilma Stockenström se gedig 'Die eland' en ekstrapoleer daaruit basiese literêr-wetenskaplike kategorieë soos 'medewerking van die leser', 'kuns/werklikheid', 'genre-indeling', ens. Dieselfde gedig word later deur T.T. Cloete in sy geheel geïnterpreteer (hoofstuk 4.12). Die puik oorsig, 'Hoofbenaderings in die literatuurstudie' (deur H. Ohlhoff) wat van die Positivisme oor die New Criticism tot by die hede strek en ook Greimas, Genette, Barthes, die Marxistiese en feministiese benaderings aanstip, stel nietemin die kennismaking met tasbare literêre gegewens vir 'n verdere paar leesure uit.

Die res van die boek volg 'n suiwer genre-geörienteerde koers. Eers kom die prosa (hoofstuk 3, 66 bladsye), dan die poësie (hoofstuk 4, 58 bladsye) en dan die drama (hoofstuk 5, 50 bladsye). Hierdie genre-gebonde aanbieding bring mee dat die konvensionele analisekategorieë soos 'ruimte', 'tyd', 'karakter', 'klank', ens., drie keer, d.w.s. op elke genre, toegepas moet word en dit deur verskillende bydraers, wat natuurlik klemverplasinge en verskille in benadering tot gevolg het. Dit is amper onvermydelik in 'n genre-gebonde handboek – die 'gedigruimte' verskil immers hemelsbreed van die visuele en verhoogtegniese ruimte soos bestudeer in die drama as opvoeringstekst. Nogtans skep die opsplitsing van die leerstof in talryke maar klein dele, waarvan sommige slegs 2-3 bladsye beslaan en bowendien nog met onderhopies in vetdruk opties opgebreek word, 'n indruk van fragmentering en herhaling. Hoe langer die betrokke bydraer aan die woord bly, des te makliker en oortuigender lees sy/haar teks. Dit word besonder duidelik in Ohlhoff se oorsig oor letterkundige benaderings (hoofstuk 2) en in Henriette Roos se modelbespreking van André P. Brink se *Gerugte van Reën*.

Laasgenoemde modelontleding is ook die enigste wat in 'n slotparagrafie

die analise opsom en deure oopmaak vir ander teksstudies. Die vraag ontstaan of die inspanning van 26 medewerkers die idee van spanwerk nie 'n bietjie *ad absurdum* dryf nie, ten minste in 'n boek soos dié.

Die genoemde fragmentering kan omseil word as die leser die dele wat onder soortgelyke opskrifte verskyn, as 'n geheel probeer lees, soos bv. 'Karakter' (pp. 72-75; 174-76; 215-18). Hierdie 'oorkoepelende' leesmetode toon onmiddellik dat die bydraers die konvensionele kategorieë krities beskou en met moderner benaderings in verband bring. Vir die roman word Forster se ou onderskeiding tussen 'plat' en 'ronde' karakters gekonfronteer met aktansiële en semiotiese sienswyses. Die hoofstuk oor poësie vervang die karakterbegrip oortuigend met *figuur* of *gestalte* en sit dan ook die groot moontlikhede vir vergestaltung, wat eie is aan die poësie, op 'n fyn manier uiteen – ook wat betref die narratiewe houding van sekere gedigte. Vir die drama gee P.J. Conradie eers 'n histories gekleurde beskrywing van karakter vanaf Aristoteles oor die Middeleeuse personifikasies van abstrakte begrippe na die ontstaan van tipes, wat in sekere toneelgenres onmisbaar is, maar daarna sak die beskrywende teks op 'n minder gevorderde vlak terug. Ou Griekse funksiebenamings soos *protagonis*, *antagonis* en *tritagonis* (wie het ooit dié term gebruik?) herleef, terwyl Greimas se ses aktante nie eers genoem word nie. Daarbenewens word die karakteriseringsmetodes wat die dramaturg tot sy beskikking het, as 'n groot agterstand in vergelyking met dié (van die) romanskrywer' beskou – 'n sienswyse wat die opvoerings-gerigte natuur van die dramaskripsie ten gunste van 'n suiwer literêre teks bestaan verontagsaam. Twee keer raak die boek die aktansiële funksies aan sonder om genoegsaam die feit te benadruk dat die aktante die dieptestruktuur van die fabel daarstel en dat hulle dus naam- en gesigsloos is en eers deur karakterisering – d.w.s. deur naamgewing, diskoerstoedeling, ouderdom, siviele status en die sogenaamde 'psigologie' – tot die rang van karakters verhef word. Soortgelyke oorkoepelende artikels, soos 'ruimte in die literatuur', 'klank in die literêre teks' of 'handeling in die literatuur', sou die fragmentering teëwerk en sekere literêre universaliala duideliker na vore bring.

Die aaneenskakeling van dié dele met die opskrif 'Semantiek' of 'Semantiese aspekte' wys dat die prosa- en poësie dele aansluit by Juri Lotman se bewering, nl. dat alle elemente van die literêre teks betekenisdraend is (in herinnering geroep op p. 57). Die prosa- en poësie hoofstukke begin direk met 'n inleidende onderhoofstuk 'Semantiek' (3.1 en 4.1). Vir die drama vind die leser geen inleidende genresemantiek nie; hierdie sentrale aspek voer hier die beskeie bestaan van 'n gedeelte binne 'n onderhoofstuk wat later volg en 'n ontledingsmodel.

Hoofstukke 1, 2 en 3 (Prosa) oortuig meer as hoofstuk 4 (Poësie – waarin die maksimum fragmentering voorkom) en hoofstuk 5 (Drama). As dit nie was vir die uiteensetting van ander aspekte van die toneelkommunikasie nie, waar die drama as 'n bondel van verbale en nie-verbale kodes voorgestel word (pp. 219-224), sou die dramadeel beperk gebly het tot 'n klassiek-literêre benadering. Ook die analisevoorbeelde van die dramadeel is minder geslaag as dié van André P. Brink se roman of van 'Die eland'. So word die leser in die ontleding van *Vergelegen* glad nie oor die fabel van hierdie

toneelstuk ingelig nie en vind hy dit moeilik om die ontleder se mening te volg en te aanvaar.

Alles in ag genome, is die *Gids by die Literatuurstudie* 'n hoogs bruikbare handboek, wat weens sy besondere struktuur en danksy die uitgebreide indeks soos 'n glossarium benut kan word, maar wat ook danksy sy leesbaarheid taamlik ingewikkelde besonderhede of teorieë verstaanbaar maak. Benewens die regstelling van 'n paar foute – *klousale* (p. 25); *skrywer* ('*écriture*') – wat sekerlik moet lees *skrywelskryf* ('*écriture*') (p. 48) – *ungrammaticallity* (bl. 160, twee keer) – sal die redakteurs vir die tweede druk miskien die kans waarneem, om nou en dan 'n waarderende adjektief of 'n ander teken van geesdrif in die boek in te bring. Literatuurdosente vervul in hierdie tydperk van elektronika, *Dallas* en winsstrewende ook 'n reklamefunksie vir goeie literatuur.

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Shakespeare and the Question of Theory

Patricia Parker; Geoffrey Hartman (eds.). 1985
New York & London: Methuen.

Sixteen prominent scholars contributed to the publication. The critical range extends over four sections: Language, rhetoric, deconstruction; The woman's part; Politics, economy, history; and The question of *Hamlet*. As would be expected, the categories overlap.

The introduction to the book and many of the essays purport to challenge 'traditional' ways of thinking about Shakespeare, which explains the dismissive references to Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture*. However, Shakespeare's dramaturgy and all the devices of his craft that concerned the 'traditional' critic are yet again addressed in this volume, although a new *focus* is ably and excellently provided by so many contributors. Old wine is still found in new bottles.

The professed movement away from 'traditional criticism' occasionally looks like a move towards elitism. In much of the criticism written by academic critics for other academic critics, we enter a 'higher realm', as Stephen Greenblatt observes, 'in which signs are purified of the slime of history'. Such a 'higher realm' criticism is an unhealthy development when so much emphasis is given to the many forms of literary interaction; the text should never be a pretext for critical pyrotechnics.

Some of the best essays in this collection come from critics who combine a sensitive feel for historical period with an equally sensitive response to Shakespeare's text – what Patricia Parker calls 'word-wariness'. This special combination is achieved by Stephen Greenblatt, who skilfully and brilliantly uses the historical approach. He proves that historical background, which unfortunately has become 'a phrase that reduces history to a decorative setting or a

convenient, well-lighted pigeonhole', is still one of the most useful approaches to the text. Greenblatt's essay 'Shakespeare and the exorcists' is a fine example of the best kind of contemporary criticism, that which is illuminating and exciting, qualities that are becoming increasingly difficult to find in critical writing.

Greenblatt asserts that for him the 'study of the literary is the study of contingent, particular, intended, and historically embedded works'. He addresses the issues of exorcism and its demythification in the 16th and 17th centuries. Greenblatt proceeds to show how Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), which attacked exorcism as practised by Catholics, in particular priests led by Jesuit William Weston, reveals an hostility to alternative sources of authority, sacredness, and legitimacy than those countenanced by the Anglican Church and its Head. (Earlier Harsnett had attacked Puritan exorcism.) Exorcisms were to be regarded as nothing but cunning dramatizations staged by priests.

Shakespeare responded to these issues – witness references to exorcisms in *The Comedy of Errors* – and *Twelfth Night*. However, it was in *King Lear* that Shakespeare used the very demythification of demonic possession to confront his audience with overwhelming suffering and evil: 'In Shakespeare, the realization that demonic possession is a theatrical imposture leads not to a clarification – . . . but to a deeper uncertainty, a loss of moorings, in the face of evil.' Demons are not responsible for evil, it breeds in the human heart. Greenblatt's discussion of *King Lear* as an historically embedded work of art leads to an illumination of many of the issues that make the play relevant to contemporary audiences and readers.

While Greenblatt examines the effects of historical events on Shakespeare, Elaine Showalter, a feminist critic, examines the effects of Shakespeare on the 19th century. 'Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism' is a study of Ophelia as she appeared on the stage, and off the stage in painting, psychiatry, photography, and criticism, all of which were predominantly patriarchal.

The accepted link between female sexuality and female insanity determined many representations of Ophelia. Showalter provides a fascinating survey of the 19th century psychiatric practice of viewing female lunatics as so many Ophelias. Dr. John Charles Bucknill noted in 1859: 'Every mental physician of moderately extensive experience must have seen many Ophelias. It is a copy from nature, after the fashion of the Pre-Raphaelite school.' Female patients were photographed 'decked with Ophelia-like garlands', and Jean-Martin Charcot in La Salpêtrière posed a fifteen year old girl, Augustine, in Ophelia poses for *Iconographies*. Showalter provides two interesting reproductions of such photographs.

This history of Ophelia reveals the many changes in attitude to her. By the 1960s, Ophelia was regarded as schizophrenic: 'The cultural icon of dualistic femininity in the mid-twentieth century.' The mad woman, Showalter shows, is a heroine, the rebel against family and social order.

The merit of this study lies in the way in which Showalter reveals the two-way traffic between life and art. Ophelia was used to endorse attitudes to

female insanity, and, correspondingly, changing attitudes to female sexuality and madness altered representations of her on the stage.

Another excellent example of historical investigation is Patricia Parker's 'Shakespeare and rhetoric: "dilation" and "delation" in *Othello*'. She reveals a pattern of great significance in the play by tracing the intricacies of meaning in 'dilation' and 'delation' – 'close dilations, working from the heart,/That passion cannot rule'. Parker argues that the two words are closely enough related for word play or pun, and that their meanings extend and develop a complexity of ideas in the play.

For example, Parker shows that in Act I 'dilation' means the demand for narrative and 'places that dilation within the context of a 'delation' or accusation'. Brabantio's accusations are met by Othello's narrative of how he and Desdemona came to love each other. 'Dilation' also means delay and putting off, for the business arising out of the Turkish threat must be delayed while Othello defends himself. The accusation and defence also call for 'circumstances' – that which amplifies the narrative, which is discovery and bringing to light. This is word-wariness indeed. And the notes provided offer other scholars the means of further profitable exploration.

Margaret Ferguson's essay '*Hamlet: letters and spirits*' is another excellent study of word-play. This is a much-worked area of analysis, but one of Ferguson's focuses is on the passage about the gentleman from Normandy, Lamord. She argues that his name is a pun on 'La Mort' and 'L'amour'. This double pun was often used by French Renaissance poets. (Ferguson's notes elaborate usefully on this.) It is Ferguson's contention that the double meaning presents a union of life and death – which is a 'significant digression from the world of tragedy itself' – and that the Lamord passage might be seen as a 'prophecy of Shakespeare's later career', where generic boundaries are blurred as in the Romances.

The traditional emphasis on the analysis of rhetoric is found in many of the essays, but now analyses are filtered through the lenses of selected theories. Howard Felperin in "'Tongue-tied our queen?": the deconstruction of presences in *The Winter's Tale*' focuses on the jealousy of Leontes and the 'problem of linguistic indeterminacy'. With critical acumen, Felperin highlights the ambiguities in the behaviour and words of Hermione. Nancy Vickers, a feminist critic, in "'The blazon of sweet beauty's best": Shakespeare's *Lucrece*' looks at the convention of the blazon. This is a meticulous analysis of the rhetoric of such praise, and is an informative discussion on heraldry and the importance of heraldic imagery in the poem.

Geoffrey Hartman contributes a vigorous essay on word-play and punning in 'Shakespeare's poetical character in *Twelfth Night*', in which he reviews former scholarship. For Hartman Shakespeare is verbally a 'graffiti artist' – a thought-provoking description – whose 'poetical genius . . . is inseparable from an ability to trope anything and turn dialogue, like a fluctuating battle, to the worst or best surmise.' Hartman draws attention to the dark side of this happy comedy. Elizabeth Freund in "'Ariachne's broken woof": the rhetoric of citation in *Troilus and Cressida*' argues that earlier critical commentary following T.S. Eliot relied on a methodology which 'compels a heterogeneity

of materials into a unity'. However, recent rhetorical analysis challenges, as does Troilus, such unity 'by examining the operations whereby language resists its own meanings and refuses to be contained in them'. This play, as Freund shows, is a fertile field for intertextuality. And Thomas M. Greene's thorough essay 'Pitiful thrivers: failed husbandry in the Sonnets' has as its focus sonnet 125; Greene discusses 'the friend' and poetry as sources of value.

In 'Shakespearian inscriptions: the voicing of power' Jonathan Goldberg challenges critics like Linda Bamber, who identify genre and gender. Goldberg argues against historical oversimplification from a modern vantage point, and by an analysis of 'voice', 'voicing' and 'silence' in a number of plays, refutes notions that Shakespeare's 'sexism' relegates powerful women to comedy while giving men the dignity of tragedy. Goldberg's argument, which as he himself admits, needs more than an essay, is very convincing. Joel Fineman in 'The turn of the shrew' presents much matter for thought. He uses two pictures by Robert Fludd, a seventeenth century hermeticist to help us 'to understand how it happens that a traditional question about rhetoric amounts to an answer to an equally traditional question about gender'.

Good psychological criticism is represented by Harry Berger, Jr, in 'Psychoanalyzing the Shakespeare text: the first three scenes of the *Henriad*'. He focuses attention on the relationship between Bolingbroke and his father, John of Gaunt. In his 'textual evacuation', Berger reveals the tensions between father and son in a patriarchy, and the replacement or displacement of the father by the son. The struggle between the father and the son is replicated in the political arena, where Bolingbroke uses Mowbray as a reason for conflict with Richard: 'The putative referent of the words – the anticipated fight with Mowbray – is actually the signifier of the present power struggle that goes on, and will continue to go on, within the 'fair designs' of the rhetorical lists'. The value of Berger's study lies in the psychological dynamics that he reveals as he examines these 'rhetorical lists'.

Stanley Cavell's essay "'Who does the wolf love?'" *Coriolanus* and the interpretations of politics' approaches the play from the psychological and religious angles. The psychological approach is not new, but in the case of *Coriolanus* it is particularly fruitful for it yields much about his pride and narcissism. Psychoanalysts have stressed hunger, food, and feeding, and Cavell concludes that 'The circle of cannibalism, of the eater eaten by what he or she eats, keeps being sketched out, from the first to the last. You might call this the identification of narcissism as cannibalism'. From this Cavell proceeds to what he himself calls 'shadowy matters': the connection between *Coriolanus* and Christ. This may be received by a lack of conviction or downright scepticism, which possibilities Cavell courteously recognizes. He nevertheless argues his case as far back as the Book of Revelations.

Terence Hawkes's essay 'Telmah', which is Hamlet spelled backwards, begins by refuting the 'inherited notion' of *Hamlet* as a structure with a 'linear, sequential course' coming to a 'logically determined end'. Hawkes shows that a fundamental mode of the play is an 'opposing current', that is, events are run over and over again, revised and reinterpreted out of time sequence. A good example of revision or replay of events is *The Mousetrap* in

which Claudius's negative response to the dumb-show serves to give his character and motives a greater complexity. He is 'no simple villain'.

Hawkes then places this disruptive counter-current, Telmah, in a wider context: he shows how it disturbed the critic Dover Wilson so profoundly that his own political convictions became an issue in the play's interpretation.

In October 1917, W.W. Greg published an article in the *Modern Language Review*: 'Hamlet's hallucination'. Greg argued that Claudius's failure to respond in a guilty fashion to the dumb-show meant that the ghost had not been as 'objective' as he should have been. This threatens the idea of logical structure in the play and meant to Greg that 'we have to choose between giving up Shakespeare as a rational playwright, and giving up our inherited beliefs regarding the story of *Hamlet*'.

Hawkes shows how Dover Wilson's reaction to Greg's article was 'a sort of insanity' provoked by his response to the Bolshevik revolution. He had argued in 1914 for the Tsar: 'A state whose very existence is perpetually at stake, for whom discipline is the primary need, has really no choice but to place itself in the hands of an emperor, a Caesar, a Tsar'. His eventual reply to Greg and history, *What Happens in HAMLET* (1935) continued to reveal a concern for order. Dover Wilson was responding to a world of frightening chaos in which the literary article by Greg carried a similar threat to order – an attack on the rational playwright Shakespeare, and on the order purported to belong to him. The influence of politics, the historical moment, is as profound an influence on the critic as the artist.

Hamlet is still challenging enough as a play to warrant an entire section in this collection of essays. In 'Mimesis in *Hamlet*', Robert Weiman discusses the multiple functions of mimesis: 'The play contains the most sustained theoretical statement on the subject that we have in Shakespeare's whole oeuvre' – and Weiman's argument is one of great complexity.

René Girard's analysis of 'The politics of desire in *Troilus and Cressida*' is a subjective reading of the text. Here subjectivity has a vitiated meaning. Cressida is a young woman who 'At this time of day . . . does not want to be seen with a young man in her apartment'. Troilus 'probably feels that the girl could not bring herself to betray him even if she tried'. We, the audience, apparently 'are all naturally inclined, romantically inclined to believe the lovers'. Generalizations abound about young men in love, masculine desire – 'A man loses interest in a woman who yields too easily to his desires. Desire, especially masculine desire, has its own implacable laws' – jealousy, etcetera. The formulation of some of Girard's comments is unfortunate: Cressida 'seems as thirsty for gossip as a contemporary television addict'.

Particularly disconcerting in this account of mimetic desire in the play is the occasion it provides for the author's running feud with other unnamed critics – with 'English Departments in prestigious universities', with 'the moralistic attachment of many critics' to the 'positive' hero, with 'traditional critics' (repeatedly), and so on. At the end one is unconvinced that Girard's analysis has replaced what he feels is a long tradition of superficial readings of the play.

In considering a collection of essays which is so self-conscious about calling

into question traditional ways of thinking about and interpreting Shakespeare's texts, the temptation is to quote from one of the greatest traditionalist critics of them all, who wrote in 1956: 'each generation, looking at masterpieces of the past in a different perspective, is affected in its attitude by a greater number of influences than those which bore upon the generation previous' (T.S. Eliot). *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* is testimony to the many influences at work in contemporary criticism, and reminds the reader of the enduring requirements of scholarly excellence.

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